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UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER

*Æthelinghood, Succession and Kingship in Late Anglo-Saxon England,*

With Specific Reference to Edmund II Ironside

David McDermott

ORCID 0000-00018994-7038

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This Thesis has been completed as a requirement  
for a postgraduate research degree of the University of Winchester.

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## **Abstract**

This Thesis is an examination of the career and kingship of Edmund II Ironside. In making Edmund the focus, it is possible to re-examine Æthelinghood, succession and kingship, from an alternative perspective. The primary sources consulted are chronicles, histories, diplomas and legislation. Central to the investigation of Edmund's life and career is the degree to which the pre- and post-conquest primary sources have been scrutinised in order to identify that which is most factual, from those which have been borrowed from other writers, instances of the author's personal opinion, and folkloric elements. It is argued that previous studies of Edmund have been advanced by investigating the households of late Anglo-Saxon Æthelings and establishing their similarities to the entourages of kings. Previous examinations of the legal sources have also been extended to partially recreate Edmund's network of associates. It is also suggested that members of Edmund's retinue may have transferred their allegiance to Cnut. The re-investigation of Edmund's marriage and appropriation of property indicates that Edmund's actions were actually criminal. An appreciation of the mechanics of power in the early middle ages, and thereby an estimation of the limitations under which Edmund operated is demonstrated by similarities between his marriage, rebellion and alliance with Uhtred, to comparable actions committed by young aristocrats in pre- and post-conquest England, Carolingian France and Ottonian Germany. It is further argued that Edmund Ironside prevented a second Danish conquest in his lifetime, establishing himself as warrior-king. A biographical treatment of Edmund II Ironside provides new perspectives on the seminal issues and key personalities of late Anglo-Saxon England.

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### Abbreviations

- ACASD J. R. Clark Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Toronto, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., 1960)
- ALI *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England*, ed. B. Thorpe (London, 1848)
- ANS *Anglo-Norman Studies*
- ASC The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, general eds. D. N. Dumville and S. D. Keynes (Woodbridge, 9 vols. published, 1983-present); cited by MS and, unless otherwise noted, corrected annal year; ed. and trans. M. Swanton (London, 2000)
- AS&OEV *Anglo-Saxon and Old English Vocabularies*, ed. T. Wright and R. P. Wülcker, 2 Vols. (London, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1884)
- Chronicon, Thietmar* Thietmar of Merseburg, *The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg*, ed. D. A. Warner (Manchester, 2001)
- Corpus *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, eds. G. Vigfusson and F. Y. Powell, Vol.2 (Oxford, 1883)
- EE Geoffrey Gaimar, *Estoire des Engles/History of the English*, ed. and trans. I. Short (Oxford, 2009)
- Encomium *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, ed. and trans. A. Campbell, Camden Third Series, Vol. LXXII (London, 1949)
- EHD *English Historical Documents, c. 500-1042*, ed. D. Whitelock, Vol.1 (London, 1955)
- HAHB Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen* trans. F. J. Tschan (New York, 2002)
- GRA, WM William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ed. and trans. R.A.B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom (Oxford, 1998)
- HA Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, ed. and trans. D. Greenway

(Oxford, 1996)

- JW* *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, Vol. II, eds. R. R. Darlington and P. McGurk, trans. J. Bray and P. McGurk (Oxford, 1995); Vol.III, ed. and trans. P. McGurk (Oxford, 1998)
- ODNB* *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), electronic version website [www.oxforddnb.com](http://www.oxforddnb.com)
- Orderic* *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, Vol. IV, ed. and trans. M. Chibnall
- S* Charter catalogued in *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Biography*, ed. P. H. Sawyer, Royal Historical Society Guides and Handbook 8 (London, 1968), revised version ed. S. E. Kelly, R. Rushforth *et al*, for the *Electronic Sawyer: Online Catalogue of Anglo-Saxon Charters* website, King's College London, [www.esawyer.org.uk](http://www.esawyer.org.uk)
- Vita Ædwardi* *The Life of King Edward who Rests at Westminster; Attributed to a Monk of St-Bertin*, ed. and trans. F. Barlow (Oxford, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1984)



## Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to produce a study of King Edmund II Ironside as a means of examining several issues in late Anglo-Saxon England, namely the nature of Æthelinghood, succession and kingship. By focusing on Edmund Ironside it is intended to create a biography of this neglected historical figure.

This thesis has several primary aims. One is to assess and reconcile the historical sources concerning Edmund Ironside. Another is to examine Edmund's succession in the context of lordship and familial obligations, which will facilitate the discussion of the relationship between conflict within the royal family and its effects on national politics. A third objective is to explore the problems related to the writing of historical biography. Edmund will also be assessed as a military leader and his performance in that capacity will be compared to contemporary European leaders.

A variety of approaches are identifiable in the works of historians who have discussed Edmund from the nineteenth century to the present. The majority of the nineteenth-century perspectives regarding Edmund Ironside incline towards eulogy but from the beginning of the twentieth century a transformation occurred in the work of historians, and scholarly investigations of the Anglo-Saxon period can be characterised by their greater objectivity and critical analysis of primary sources, which contain authorial bias and show evidence of contemporary literary influences. More modern historians have also attempted to elucidate the character of Edmund Ironside by ignoring the demands of historiography, adopting instead a more anthropological and sociological approach, examining Edmund as an individual operating within the social structures of his time.

Included in this chapter is a section on the problems of writing early historical biography which considers the appropriateness of biography for studying history, and also examines the various ways in which material for the life-history of an individual can be constructed. Consideration is given to the narrative being constructed around the life-cycle of the subject; the discussion of the individual

within social structures; the reciprocal relationship that can exist between the subject and social structures, which allows for the discussion of agency; and the form of biography that places the individual temporally and spatially, examining the different roles they performed within the cycle of their lifetime. Writing the biography of an early medieval king presents a particular problem for the biographer, as kings are often presented in the narratives as types, rather than real individuals. The methodology chosen for the life-history of Edmund Ironside is the temporal-spatial model, being the model most appropriate for a biography of an early medieval individual about whom personal information is frequently absent.

The second chapter is a consideration of the contemporary sources and twelfth-century narratives. The section on the primary sources examines the contemporary Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian and Continental sources, in addition to what may be considered the late contemporary sources and the narratives of the Anglo-Norman historians. Discrepancies between the sources are discussed, and an attempt is made to reconcile the narratives where they differ.

Having assessed the secondary and contemporary sources, and considered the Anglo-Norman narratives, it has proved possible to write the third chapter in accord with the methodology adopted for this study. The third chapter explores the first social environment inhabited by Edmund Ironside, his family, and then examines *æthelinghood*. The section on his family considers Edmund's birth; the significance of his name; his immediate paternal and maternal antecedents; his brothers and sisters from *Æthelred's* first marriage, and his step-mother and step-siblings.

In keeping with the temporal-spatial model adopted for the biography of Edmund, the discussion of his family is followed by that of his education, the next important social environment he inhabited. The section on Edmund's *æthelinghood* explores the etymology of '*ætheling*' and considers other titles used to confer Edmund's status as a prince. Developments in the legal status of *æthelings* are examined, as is their ability to possess estates. The entourages of *æthelings*, particularly those of Edmund and his older brother Athelstan, are discussed and comparisons are

made between their households and those of the king. The possibility that an ætheling could have their own household during their minority is also considered. The third chapter will then attempt to reconstruct the ætheling Edmund's social and political connections beyond his immediate entourage, seeking to identify those who formed part of Edmund's inner circle and those who occupied places on the periphery of his associations.

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The fourth chapter will examine Edmund's marriage and rebellion. Explanations for Edmund's marriage shall be provided by comparing it with arguably illicit liaisons formed by early medieval English and Continental princes. Similarly, Edmund's rebellion shall be compared with those of young Anglo-Saxon, Carolingian and Ottonian nobles to suggest motives for Edmund rebelling, and establish that his rebellion conforms to a pattern of royal behaviour.

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The final chapter will consider the latter part of his æthelinghood and his kingship. The possibility that Edmund participated in military matters prior to 1015 will be considered, as will the circumstances under which he is known to have raised armies when an ætheling. Edmund's campaign with Uhtred will also be explored and will be shown to have similarities with alliances formed by other rebellious noblemen in the early medieval period, suggesting reasons for Edmund's coalition. Edmund's accession will be discussed, as will the possibility that his kingship did not have universal support. Edmund's performance as a warrior-king will be evaluated when discussing the campaign he fought against Cnut, as will the sometimes inconsistent accounts of each battle, in order to determine their credibility.

The fifth chapter will also consider the various elements of the peace treaty agreed between Edmund and Cnut. Conflicting stories regarding how and where Edmund died will be examined, and their credibility evaluated. Edmund's burial will be discussed, and the possibility that his remains were translated will also be addressed. The chapter will conclude with a reflection on the themes explored in the thesis and the problems that were encountered. Potential further research to be done will be indicated, and Edmund's posthumous reputation will be considered.

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## Chapter One

### Literature Review and The Aims and Approaches Adopted

#### 1:1 The Nineteenth-Century Sources

The treatment received by Edmund Ironside, from those nineteenth-century historians who considered him, reveals many of the attitudes and limitations that typified the period. Edmund was not investigated in his own right but cited as an illustration of historical processes. Few aspects of Edmund's career were considered and only as part of a broader narrative which attempted to explain larger issues, such as the conquest of England by Cnut, and the events which led to the Norman Conquest. Despite their expansive perspective, some nineteenth-century historians consulted primary sources. This characteristic is illustrated in the work of John Lingard,<sup>1</sup> credited with creating the discipline of 'source criticism', whereby the credibility of a primary source could be calculated and its reliability assessed.<sup>2</sup> Despite his professed concern for accuracy, Lingard's reliability is compromised by an uncritical appreciation of primary sources, such as his reiteration that Edmund fought Cnut on horseback.<sup>3</sup> Lingard also committed factual errors, such as his erroneous report that the 1016 battle allegedly fought by Edmund at Otford occurred at Oxford.<sup>4</sup>

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1 J. Lingard, *A History of England from the First Invasion by the Romans*, 3 Vols., Vol.1 (London, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1823).

2 E. Jones, *John Lingard and the Pursuit of Historical Truth* (Brighton, 2001), p.xii; xvii. Lingard's work has been criticised for not appreciating the extent to which an historian can interfere with the reliability of their narrative; see J. Vidmar, 'John Lingard's History of the English Reformation: History or Apologetics?', *The Catholic Historical Review*, 85, No.3 (Jul., 1999), pp.383-419., at p.419.

3 Lingard, *A History of England*, p.366; for the original story of Edmund fighting on horseback, see 'Knytlingasaga', in *Danakonunga Sögur*, ed. B. Guðnason (Reykjavik, 1982), pp.100-120., at p.108; and trans. H. Palsson and P. Edwards, *The History of the Kings of Denmark* (Odense, 1986), pp.27-39., at p.31.

4 Lingard, *A History of England*, p.367.

In his exegesis of the Norman Conquest, Auguste Thierry viewed Edmund's reign occurring in a period of antagonism between racial groups, which Thierry believed was the key to understanding English history for centuries after Hastings.<sup>5</sup> Thierry's contribution to the study of Edmund was to credit him with anonymous but laudable military exploits that are un-corroborated in the primary sources.<sup>6</sup> These unidentified engagements are probably the product of Thierry's imagination but the possibility that the ætheling Edmund participated in military engagements prior to 1015 will be considered in Chapter Five.<sup>7</sup>

In his *History of England*, Francis Palgrave concentrated on constitutional matters, particularly the organisation of Anglo-Saxon England after the supremacy of Wessex.<sup>8</sup> Palgrave's focus on institutions is evident in his argument that significant constitutional innovation was achieved when the Anglo-Saxon establishment, at Southampton, disinherited Edmund Ironside and all the descendants of Æthelred II.<sup>9</sup> Palgrave's interpretation of the supposed submission to Cnut also indicates his uncritical acceptance of John of Worcester's unique account that Edmund was repudiated.<sup>10</sup> Palgrave was probably correct to surmise that Edmund's appropriation of Sigeferth's

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5 A. Thierry, *History of the Conquest of England by the Normans: Its Causes, and its Consequences, in England, Scotland, Ireland & On the Continent*, trans. W. Hazlitt, 2 Vols. (London, 1847). For criticism of Thierry, see G. P. Gooch, *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1913, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1952), p.164. Also, J. W. Burrow, *A Liberal Descent: Victorian Historians and the English Past* (Cambridge, 1981), p.161, and R. N. Smithson, *Augustin Thierry: Social and Political Consciousness in the Evolution of Historical Method* (Geneva, 1972), p.9.

6 Thierry, *History of the Conquest of England*, p.106.

7 For the effect of imagination on Thierry's work, see Gooch, *History and Historians*, p.164.

8 F. Palgrave, *History of England: Anglo-Saxon Period*, Vol.1 (London, 1831).

9 Palgrave, *History of England*, p.307.

10 For criticism of Palgrave's concern with institutions and uncritical acceptance of his sources, see Gooch, *History and Historians*, p.271.

lordship secured the ætheling a power base in Mercia.<sup>11</sup> This idea was developed by Edward Freeman, who conferred upon the territory the status of a self-governing region where Edmund exercised absolute power.<sup>12</sup>

Freeman's monumental exegesis of the Norman Conquest has been criticised for emphasising the importance of race to the historical process.<sup>13</sup> His work has also been accused, with some justification, for its focus on political events, particularly war,<sup>14</sup> and its glorification of the Anglo-Saxon past.<sup>15</sup> The latter two features are evident in the promotion of Edmund as an heroic figure, whose vigorous opposition to the Danes was acclaimed as 'seven months of almost superhuman activity', in contrast to Æthelred's rule which Freeman dismissed as 'twenty-eight years of unutterable weakness and degradation'.<sup>16</sup> Freeman may have been unduly influenced by the posthumous development of Æthelred's reputation for ineffectiveness, and his denigration of Æthelred is perhaps excessive.

An uncritical acceptance of primary sources also characterised the work of Johann Lappenberg's *Geschichte von England*, the first complete German history of England, and one which stressed the

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11 Palgrave, *History of England*, p.304.

12 E. A. Freeman, *The History of the Norman Conquest of England, its Causes and its Results*, 6 Vols. (Oxford, 1867-76), Vol.1, p.142.

13 For a detailed consideration of Freeman's ideas on race, see C. J. W. Parker, 'The Failure of Liberal Racialism: The Racial Ideas of E. A. Freeman', *The Historical Journal*, 24, No.4 (1981), pp.825-46; T. Arnold, *Introductory Lectures on Modern History with the Inaugural Lecture* (London, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1848), pp.23-30; J. W. Burrow, 'Introduction' in Freeman, *The History of the Norman Conquest*, abridged (Chicago and London, 1974), pp.xiv-xv.

14 J. Bryce, 'Edward Augustus Freeman', *The English Historical Review*, 7, No.27 (1892), pp.497-509., at p.449.

15 Parker, 'The Failure of Liberal Racialism', p.825.

16 Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest*, p.419.

connections between Germanic peoples.<sup>17</sup> Lappenberg's belief that William of Malmesbury correctly recorded that Cnut bestowed a gift at Edmund's grave and sought forgiveness for his sins, led Lappenberg to conclude, perhaps contentiously, that Cnut may have colluded in Edmund's death.<sup>18</sup>

A unique contribution to the topic of Edmund's æthelinghood, and his relations with Æthelred, is Lappenberg's claim that Edmund was called to defend London after Uhtred returned to Northumbria, but this uncorroborated allegation is probably pure speculation.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to exhibiting a preference for Anglo-Norman narratives without subjecting them to sufficient scrutiny, nineteenth-century historians focused their attention on extraordinary individuals. Two late nineteenth-century historians who contributed to the study of Edmund Ironside, but whose work exhibits the Victorians' fascination with the concept of 'great men'<sup>20</sup> were T. Morgan Owen and J. H. Ramsay. Owen can be criticised for depicting Edmund as a totemic figure, symbolizing the English nation, and is unique in describing Edmund contentiously as the

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17 J. M. Lappenberg, *Geschichte von England*, 2 Vols. (Hamburg, 1834-7), published in English as *A History of England Under the Anglo-Saxon Kings*, trans. B. Thorpe, 2 Vols. (London, 1845) and *A History of England Under the Norman Kings* (Oxford, 1857). For criticism of Lappenberg's pro-Germanic approach, see C. E. McClelland, *The German Historians and England: A Study in Nineteenth Century Views* (Cambridge, 1971), pp.102-03.

18 Lappenberg, *Geschichte von England*, Vol.2, p.459.

19 Lappenberg, *Geschichte von England*, Vol.2, p.452.

20 See T. Carlyle, 'Thoughts on History', *Fraser's Magazine*, 2, No.10 (1830), pp.413-18., at p.414, and *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and The Heroic in History* (London, 1841), p.1; F. Nietzsche, *Unfashionable Observations*, trans. R. T. Grey (Stanford, 1995); and S. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy), trans. S. Walsh, ed. C. S. Evans (Cambridge, 2006). For criticism of focusing on individuals, see H. Spencer, *The Study of Sociology* (London, 1874); W. James, 'Great Men, Great Thoughts, and the Environment', *Atlantic Monthly*, 46, No.276 (1880), pp.441-59; S. Hook, *The Hero in History: A Study in Limitation and Possibility* (Boston, 1943), and L. Grinin, 'The Role of an Individual in History: A Reconsideration', *Social Evolution and History*, 9, No.2 (2010), pp.95-136.

'last Saxon king before the Norman Conquest'.<sup>21</sup> Ramsay's originality lies in his analysis of Edmund's treaty with Cnut but the significance attached to Edmund setting a payment to Cnut and allowing the Danes to retain their plunder, which Ramsay condemned the treaty as 'capitulation, thinly veiled', may be exaggerated.<sup>22</sup>

Overall, the nineteenth-century historians demonstrate a marked preference for the fuller but later Anglo-Norman narratives, rather than the earlier but less detailed Anglo-Saxon, Continental and Scandinavian sources. In prioritising accounts written several generations after the events they purport to describe, and accepting them without being subjected to scrutiny, the credibility of the nineteenth-century historians can be weakened. The emphasis given to the exploits of individuals, at the expense of considering the effect of institutions, also requires that caution be exercised when consulting these works. Nineteenth-century narratives will therefore be considered if it is thought they provide a useful perspective on the contemporary accounts.

### **1:2 The Early Twentieth-Century Sources**

Historians of the early twentieth century continued the nineteenth-century practice of consulting primary sources but were more critical in their analysis of them. Neither did they hold the same belief in the continuity of history, nor argue for the significance of race, but they did share the nineteenth-century historians' interest in analysing the deeds of individuals and stressing the importance of politics. Early twentieth-century historians made minor advances in the study of Edmund Ironside but as with their nineteenth-century predecessors, the investigation of Edmund continued to be subsumed in broader analyses. Nor did these historians demonstrate an

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21 T. M. Owen, *A History of England and Wales from the Roman to the Norman Conquest* (London, 1882), pp.iv; 110.

22 J. H. Ramsay, *The Foundations of England or Twelve Centuries of British History (B. C. 55 – A. D. 1154)*, 2 Vols. (London, 1898), Vol.1, p.389.



understanding of how Anglo-Saxon society functioned, a feature of later twentieth and early twenty-first century narratives.

Greater critical analysis is evident in the work of Thomas Hodgkin, whose comprehensive knowledge of narrative and literary sources made him a professional at a time of 'nascent professionalism'.<sup>23</sup> Hodgkin's study of Edmund Ironside is distinguished by its psychological approach, such as the suggestion that Edmund may have inherited Æthelred's supposed 'incapacity' to assess character accurately. Edmund's supposed weakness, argued Hodgkin, caused him to raise an army with the Ealdorman Eadric *Streona*, who proved to be treacherous.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, Hodgkin argued that Edmund's failure to procure the support of the London garrison, which the Mercian fyrd regarded as 'the only irrefragable sign and seal of lordship' made them reluctant to join with Edmund.<sup>25</sup>

L. M. Larson's assessment of Edmund Ironside is biased in favour of Scandinavia. Larson was Norwegian born but American educated, and pride in his Scandinavian ancestry was said by T. C. Pease to have remained with him 'to the end of his life'.<sup>26</sup> Larson's Scandinavian prejudice is most evident in his definition of Edmund as 'an English viking', a description which combines Edmund's perceived English virtues of bravery and impulsiveness with his alleged Viking defects of being 'unruly and uncontrollable'.<sup>27</sup> Larson's preference for Scandinavia is further illustrated in his

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23 G. H. Martin, 'Hodgkin, Thomas', in *ODNB*, 27 (Oxford, 2004), p.477.

24 T. Hodgkin, *The History of England, Vol. 1, From the Earliest Times to the Norman Conquest*, ed. W. Hunt and R. L. Poole (London, 1906). p.395

25 Hodgkin, *The History of England*, p.395.

26 T. C. Pease, 'Laurence Marcellus Larson', *Journal of the Illinois Historical Society*, 31, No.3 (1938), p.249.

27 L. M. Larson, *Canute the Great 995 (circ)-1035 And the Rise of Danish Imperialism in the Viking Age* (New York and London, 1912), p.102.

criticism of Edmund for having a dual nature but his admiration for Cnut possessing these same characteristics which, Larson claimed, transformed Cnut from pirate to statesman.<sup>28</sup>

Military history was a particular interest of Charles Oman,<sup>29</sup> for which he was characterised as an historian of “kings and battles” but one who was supreme'.<sup>30</sup> Oman's interest in military matters is demonstrated by him having Edmund involved in action against Swein Forkbeard.<sup>31</sup> Oman did not specify any military engagements in which Edmund may have assisted but it is conceivable that Edmund was old enough to have participated.<sup>32</sup> Oman also augmented Edmund's inclusion in national affairs by providing evidence for Edmund's possible role as interlocutor in the negotiations for Æthelred's return to England.<sup>33</sup> Edmund's relationships with Æthelred and Eadric *Streona* were also analysed by Oman, who made the reasonable assertion that Edmund hated Eadric<sup>34</sup> which was the reason for Edmund's expedition with Uhtred to Eadric's lands in Mercia.<sup>35</sup>

In his comprehensive study of Anglo-Saxon history, Sir Frank Stenton brought together diverse types of evidence, for which he was regarded by J. C. Holt as having provided the 'first scientific history' of the Anglo-Saxon period.<sup>36</sup> Stenton's treatment of Edmund was exegetical and critical in

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28 Larson, *Canute the Great*, p.vii.

29 C. W. C. Oman, *A History of the Art of War in the Middle Ages* (London, 1898); also, *A History of the Peninsular War*; 7 Vols. (Oxford, 1902-22).

30 P. Griffith, 'Oman, Sir Charles William', in *ODNB*, 41 (Oxford, 2004), p.801.

31 Oman, *England Before the Norman Conquest: Being a History of the Celtic, Roman, and Anglo-Saxon Periods Down to the Year A.D. 1066* (London, 1910), p.576.

32 The date of Edmund's birth and involvement in military action during his æthelinghood, will be discussed in Chapters Three and Five, respectively.

33 Oman, *England Before the Norman Conquest*, p.575, n.1.

34 Oman, *England Before the Norman Conquest*, p.576.

35 Oman, *England Before the Norman Conquest*, p.577.

36 J. C. Holt, 'Stenton, Sir Frank Merry' in *ODNB*, Vol.52 (Oxford, 2004), p.405.

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equal measure. Stenton was the first to argue that Æthelred's devastation of much of the Midlands may have led to the Five Boroughs accepting Edmund as their lord.<sup>37</sup> Stenton also credited Edmund with pragmatism for making himself 'master of Wessex' at his accession and continuing to control the region against Cnut.<sup>38</sup> Stenton also advanced the neglected topic of Edmund's logistics by demonstrating that on his return from Wessex to liberate London, Edmund eschewed the regular routes by approaching London from the north, achieving the element of surprise by emerging from woods behind Tottenham.<sup>39</sup>

The suggestion by Hodgkin that Edmund's alliance with Eadric may have been influenced by poor judgement can also be explained by the demands of pragmatism, and the status Hodgkin attributed to the London garrison is perhaps overstated. Larson's admiration for Cnut may be explained by his predisposition towards Scandinavia, which also accounts for Larson praising Cnut but condemning Edmund for sharing the same attributes. In doubting that the ætheling Edward negotiated for Æthelred, Oman was perhaps correct but he is probably mistaken in giving that responsibility to Edmund. The suggestion that Edmund saw military action before 1015 may have some foundation, as does the possibility that Edmund raided parts of Mercia to punish Eadric. Stenton's suggestion that punitive action by Æthelred contributed to Edmund's acceptance in the Five Boroughs was innovative, but Stenton may have overstated the extent and degree of Æthelred's retribution. The description of Edmund as the master of Wessex after the battle of Sherston is probably correct, and Stenton made a singular contribution by indicating the direction from which Edmund approached London to relieve the siege.

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37F. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 1943), pp.388-9; also ASC, MS. E, p.145.

38 Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p.390.

39 Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p.391.

### **1:3 The Late Twentieth and Early Twenty-First Century Sources**

Since the latter half of the twentieth century the writing of medieval history has undergone several significant developments. A greater priority is given to the evaluation of primary sources than was afforded by previous generations of historians. There has also been an increase in the attention paid to establishing authorship, and the consideration of audience. The influence of the social sciences can also be detected in the work of some modern historians, who can be seen to have adopted an anthropological approach in their examination of issues such as family and marriage. As a consequence of the innovative application of these methodologies to the study of Edmund Ironside, new insights about him have been produced but it remains a constant of modern historical investigation that Edmund is treated as part of a wider themes. He is discussed for what he can contribute to the greater understanding of a topic, not for what can be discovered about him as the chief subject of an academic enquiry.

The majority of late twentieth - and early twenty-first-century studies that include some consideration of Edmund Ironside follow their nineteenth-century predecessors in discussing the political aspects of Edmund's marriage, his rebellion and kingship. They are also characterised by an increasing tendency to address relations within the royal family, with differing opinions about Edmund's relationship with Æthelred. In her reading of the lease granted to Edmund by the community of Sherborne, Ann Williams sees Æthelred's involvement as evidence that he was 'not best pleased' with his son.<sup>40</sup> Nicholas Higham also perceives discord in the relationship between Edmund and Æthelred, doubting the king's intention to support Edmund's candidacy for the throne against Cnut.<sup>41</sup> Pauline Stafford has an alternative perspective and is unique in her belief that Edmund's relations with Æthelred were good enough for him to have been designated the king's

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40 A. Williams, *Æthelred the Unready: The Ill-Counselled King* (London, 2003), p.114. Edmund's relationship with Æthelred will be discussed more fully in Chapters Three and Four.

41 N. J. Higham, *The Death of Anglo-Saxon England* (Stroud, 1997), p.75.

heir.<sup>42</sup> In the first of two articles published in the same year, Stafford makes the reasonable suggestion that Edmund regarded Emma with fear and suspicion because of her enhanced prestige and ambitions for her children.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, Ian Howard believes there was tension in Edmund's relations with his half-sibling Edward and plausibly suggests that Edmund feared political assassination.<sup>44</sup> It is also Howard's uncorroborated contention that during Æthelred's self-imposed exile in Normandy, Edmund was in Flanders raising an army to re-take the English throne.<sup>45</sup>

A variety of explanations and interpretations are given for Edmund's marriage. A credible analysis is offered by Stafford who regards Edmund's marriage as tantamount to rebellion<sup>46</sup> but Higham interprets Edmund's marriage as an attempt to prevent Cnut receiving assistance from the family of Ealdorman Ælfhelm, into which Cnut had also married.<sup>47</sup> An original contribution to the examination of Edmund's rebellion is made by Simon Keynes, who reasonably suggests that the assassinations of Sigferth and Morcar provoked Edmund to challenge Eadric's influence over

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42 P. Stafford, 'The King's Wife in Wessex 800-1066', *Past and Present*, 91 (1981), pp.3-27, at pp.19-20 and n.55.

Edmund's accession will be discussed more fully in Chapter Five.

43 P. Stafford, 'Sons and Mothers: Family Politics in the Early Middle Ages', in *Medieval Women: Essays Dedicated and Presented to Professor Rosalind M. T. Hill*, ed. D. Baker, *Studies in Church History: Subsidia 1* (Oxford, 1978), pp.79-100, at p.84.

44 I. Howard, *Swein Forkbeard's Invasions and the Danish Conquest of England, 991-1016*, *Warfare in History* (Woodbridge, 2003), p.138.

45 I. Howard, *The Reign of Æthelred II, King of the English, Emperor of all the Peoples of Britain, 978-1016*, *BAR British Series 522* (Oxford, 2010), p.64.

46 Stafford, 'Sons and Mothers', p.95.

47 Higham, *Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, p.62. Edmund's marriage will be discussed more fully in Chapter Four.

Æthelred.<sup>48</sup> The significance of Sigeferth and Morcar for Edmund has been further explored by Charles Insley, who has persuasively argued that their deaths, and Edmund's response, had 'national significance'.<sup>49</sup> Opinion is divided regarding Edmund's dynastic ambitions. Stafford argues that Edmund affirmed not only his claim to kingship, but asserted his children's right to kingship in the next generation by selecting the two most popular male names amongst the Wessex royal family, Edmund and Edward, for his sons.<sup>50</sup> Higham disagrees, holding the contentious belief that the names were chosen to reconcile Edmund's subjects to his kingship by avoiding reference to Æthelred, presumably because the late king was supposedly unpopular.<sup>51</sup>

Several modern historians use the narrative of John of Worcester to argue that Edmund was not universally recognised as king. Williams refers to the election of Cnut at Southampton to demonstrate that not all southern and western thegns accepted Edmund's kingship,<sup>52</sup> and Howard employs the same reference to argue that Edmund's brief rule was only a postscript to the exceptionally long reign of Æthelred.<sup>53</sup> Recourse by some modern historians to John of Worcester may suggest that his account of Cnut's election is accorded some credibility but it is unique amongst the Anglo-Norman historians. Arguments based upon it therefore are perhaps best treated with a

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48 S. Keynes, 'A Tale of Two Kings: Alfred the Great and Æthelred the Unready, in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series, 36 (1980), pp.195-217, at p.215. Edmund's rebellion will be discussed more fully in Chapter Four.

49C. Insley, 'Politics, Conflict and Kinship in Early Eleventh-Century Mercia', *Midland History*, 25 (2000), pp.28-42, at p.29.

50P. Stafford, *Queen Emma & Queen Edith: Queenship and Women's Power in Eleventh Century England* (Oxford, 1997), p.91.

51 Higham, *Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, p.78.

52Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.143.

53Howard, *Swein Forkbeard's Invasions*, p6.

degree of caution.<sup>54</sup> A different passage from John of Worcester, concerning English defections at Sherston, and one that may be more reliable for being corroborated by the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*,<sup>55</sup> is cited by Timothy Bolton as evidence of English resistance to Edmund's rule.<sup>56</sup>

One of the strengths of modern studies that have investigated topics relating to Edmund Ironside is their multi-disciplinary approach, drawing upon such fields as anthropology, sociology and numismatics. The discipline of psychology has also been employed to examine the dynamics within the royal family, such as Edmund's relationship with Æthelred, and the ramifications of having an ambitious step-mother. Edmund's marriage and his rebellion have also benefited from the psychology-based scrutiny of modern historians, who have attempted to account for Edmund's motives in defying his father. However, discussions concerning the popularity of Edmund's kingship have been ancillary to the consideration of broader issues, and Edmund has not been the focus of interest. Recent academic studies relating to Edmund Ironside will contribute to later chapters where other aspects of his life, that have been relatively neglected, will be addressed. These will include the nature of Edmund's Æthelinghood; his social and political connections; and his performance as a military leader. Before these investigations can be undertaken, it is necessary to examine some of the issues related to the writing of a biography of a medieval character, and what model of biography would be most suitable for a study of Edmund Ironside.

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<sup>54</sup>The question of Cnut's election at Southampton will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

<sup>55</sup>*The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, Vol. II, eds. R. R. Darlington and P. McGurk, trans. J. Bray and P. McGurk (Oxford, 1998), p.487; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* ed. and trans. M. Swanton (London, 2000), MSS. D and E, pp.150-51.

<sup>56</sup>T. Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great: Conquest and the Consolidation of Power in Northern Europe in the Early Eleventh Century* (Leiden, Boston, 2009), p.38. The Battle of Sherston will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

#### **1:4 The Problems of Writing Medieval Biography**

Towards the end of the 1920s, K. B. McFarlane expressed the opinion that biography was an inappropriate medium for an historical subject, arguing that the legitimate areas of enquiry for the historian were 'the growth of social organisations, of civilisation, of ideas'.<sup>57</sup> Despite his protest against historical biography, McFarlane's objection did not secure sufficient acceptance amongst the academic community to prevent the publication in the late twentieth century of several significant biographies of historical subjects, particularly by Frank Barlow, which received critical acclaim. Barlow's *Edward the Confessor*<sup>58</sup> was regarded by Michael Altschul as 'a distinguished and valuable' work.<sup>59</sup> Barlow's *William Rufus*<sup>60</sup> was predicted by C. Warren Hollister to become the 'standard study'<sup>61</sup> of the subject, and J. O. Prestwich considered Barlow's biography of Rufus to be 'a work of fine and exhaustive scholarship'.<sup>62</sup> Barlow's later biography of Thomas Becket<sup>63</sup> was praised by Richard Pfaff as 'masterly' and 'definitive'.<sup>64</sup>

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57 K. B. McFarlane, quoted by E. Homberger, *Times Higher Educational Supplement*, 9 October, 1987, p.11.

58 F. Barlow, *Edward the Confessor* (London, 1970).

59 M. Altschul, 'Review', *Speculum*, 47, No.3 (1972), pp.508-09, at p.508.

60 Barlow, *William Rufus* (London, 1983).

61 C. Warren Hollister, 'Review', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 16, No.4 (1984), pp.405-07, at p.407.

62 J. O. Prestwich, 'Review', *The English Historical Review*, 99, No. 393 (1984), pp.813-16, at p.815. Also, C. T. Wood, 'Review', *The American Historical Review*, 89, No.5 (1984), pp.1319-20 and W. W. Scott, 'Review', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 64, No.177 (1985), p.85.

63 Barlow, *Thomas Becket* (London, 1986).

64 R. W. Pfaff, 'Review', *Church History*, 56, No.2 (1987), pp.245-46, at p.245. Also, W. T. Foley, 'Review', *The Journal of Religion*, 68, No.1 (1988), p.180.



Alongside the plaudits awarded to Barlow's endeavours in historical biography, there was also a notable amount of criticism, confined not to Barlow's work but applied to the genre in general. Critics of Barlow's *Edward* concentrated their attack on the scarcity of sources available to the biographer of a medieval subject. The value of medieval royal biographies was questioned by Bruce Lyon, who suggested that medievalists focus their energies on topics for which there was sufficient documentation to give them 'a fighting chance to practice their profession of historian'.<sup>65</sup>

In the same vein, William Chaney believed that it was often difficult to apply the biographical approach to history and argued that the scarcity of medieval sources prevented the historian from answering 'essential and analytical questions'.<sup>66</sup> The apparent change of direction away from historical biography taken by an appreciable portion of the academic community was articulated clearly by Richard Fraher. In reviewing Barlow's *Thomas Becket*, Fraher acknowledged that the subject's career had been narrated in 'unprecedented detail' but believed that Barlow was 'toiling uphill' at a time when 'scholarly fashion favours studies of economic development or shifting *mentalité*'.<sup>67</sup> In the same decade E. Homberger polarised the debate by writing that biography was generally 'despised by the hard and practised by the the soft' across various disciplines.<sup>68</sup> The practice of historical biography was further criticised by P. K. Wilson for what he perceived to be its preference for narrative over analysis.<sup>69</sup>

By the beginning of the twenty-first century some members of the academic community were looking more favourably at biography and in more recent years there has been a resurgence of

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65 B. Lyon, 'Review', *The American Historical Review*, 76, No.4 (1971), pp.1143-4.

66 W. A. Chaney, 'Review', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 43 (1972), pp.185-6, at p.186. Also: B. W. Scholz, *The Catholic Historical Review*, 59, No.3 (1973), pp.536-7.

67 R. Fraher, 'Review', *Speculum*, 63, No.3 (1988), pp.618-20, at p.619.

68 E. Homberger, *Times Higher Educational Supplement*, 9 October, 1987, p.11.

69 P. K. Wilson, *Surgery, Skin and Syphilis: Daniel Turner's London, (1667-1741)* (Amsterdam, 1999), p.5.

biographies of medieval rulers, including those of the Anglo-Saxon period.<sup>70</sup> The efficacy of biography was recognised at a conference of medievalists held at the University of Exeter in 2003. The keynote speaker, Pauline Stafford, argued that not only was biography one way of studying history but it may be the most important approach to history, for 'only through biography could one argue why this...or that had happened'.<sup>71</sup> Ian Mortimer, in support of Stafford's defence of biography, argued that the prejudice against the genre rested upon two assumptions. The first of these is that biography had a fixed form from which a writer could not deviate, and that the form demanded certain kinds of primary sources. The supposed insistence that biographers adhere to a particular structure and consult only specific types of evidence, while experimentation was apparently encouraged in other types of literature, struck Mortimer as 'surprising'.

The second alleged assumption about biography was that it could only be written about a subject living after 1500, for whom a sufficiently large quantity of personal correspondence would survive and provide evidence of the subject's inner life.<sup>72</sup> Mortimer challenged the seemingly uncritical acceptance of letters as a reliable source, cautioning that people, intentionally or not, may misrepresent themselves and a biography based on misinformation would itself be unreliable.<sup>73</sup> The value of historical biography was articulated further by R. I. Rotberg. An historical biography, he argued, can locate the subject within their political, social and economic situation. Furthermore, it

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<sup>70</sup>Some of the more notable examples of the genre are the Yale English Monarchs series, and the biographies of medieval monarchs published by Penguin.

<sup>71</sup> Stafford, in I. Mortimer, *The Fears of Henry IV: The Life of England's Self-made King* (London, 2007), pp.11; 389, n.21.

<sup>72</sup> Mortimer, *The Fears of Henry IV*, p.10.

<sup>73</sup> Mortimer, *The Fears of Henry IV*, p.11.

was argued that the genre is also capable of affirming the significance of individual action in relation to historical forces.<sup>74</sup>

When approaching the topic of writing biography, the historian may consider constructing their narrative around the key moments of their subject's life: birth, youth, marriage (or celibacy), old age and death. These are events which occur in most lives and provide what Sarah Foot has described as 'the co-ordinates around which the biographer crafts a more sophisticated narrative of the individual'.<sup>75</sup> Biography need not be determined by chronology but most life-narratives have some temporal framework. The biography of a medieval person cannot always follow the biological model because some information, particularly regarding birth and childhood, is often absent. It would be inappropriate therefore to use the life-cycle model for a biography of Edmund Ironside, whose childhood is mostly unknown and who did not have an old age.

Scarcity of information might be thought to inhibit the biographer's ability to treat their subject as a fully developed personality, but paucity of information about a subject's interior life is not, according to Judith Green, a problem peculiar to medieval historians: 'All biographers face the challenge of portraying character and personality'. The task of the medievalist, advised Green, is to exercise greater rigour when consulting what sources are available to them.<sup>76</sup> Mindful of the sparse resources available to the medieval biographer, Richard Abels likened the task to reconstructing a mosaic from 'shattered and scattered fragments'.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, Stafford argued that the lack of sources

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74 R. I. Rotberg, 'Biography and Historiography: Mutual Evidentiary and Interdisciplinary Considerations', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XL, No.3 (2010), pp.305-23, at p.324.

75 S. Foot, *Æthelstan: The First King of England* (London, 2011), p.3.

76 J. A. Green, 'Review of *Writing Medieval Biography, 750-1250: Essays in Honour of Professor Frank Barlow*', <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/591>.

77 R. Abels, *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1998), p.9.

exaggerated the problems that confront all biographers.<sup>78</sup> The absence of basic, biographical information is not, argued M. T. Clanchy, the result of secrecy, censorship or accident but deliberate. Medieval authors, argues Clanchy, associated writing with Scripture which prevented them from recording personal details. The scarcity of such information, he maintains, is 'a characteristic of medieval culture'.<sup>79</sup> Clanchy's assertion may be true in some cases, but the life-stories of certain early medieval rulers, such as Alfred and Charlemagne, do contain biographical information. It could also be argued that such details become more prevalent from the twelfth century when writers borrowed from Classical authors to supplement the character of their subject.

When there is little biographical material, a medieval biography may marginalise the individual and focus on social structures. Such was the case in Stafford's *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*.<sup>80</sup> Stafford described the work as 'biographie modale', wherein the individual was seen as representing a group, and social structures were regarded as determining the individual. Stafford's selection of this methodology was influenced by the extent to which the life of each woman was restricted by what she described as the 'social scripts' imposed upon them.<sup>81</sup> The inherent weakness of this approach is to regard the individual as mostly determined by social structures, the subject having minimal influence on history. When the significance of structures is exaggerated the individual

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78 P. Stafford, 'Writing the Biography of Eleventh-Century Queens', in *Writing Medieval Biography, 750-1250: Essays in Honour of Frank Barlow*, ed. D. Bates, J. Crick and S. Hamilton (Woodbridge, 2006), pp.99-100, at p.102.

79 M. T. Clanchy, *Abelard: A Medieval Life* (Oxford, 1997), p.21. Also, J. C. Russell, 'An introduction to the Study of Medieval Biography', *Modern Language Review*, 4, No.4 (1943), pp.437-53, at pp.447-48.

80 P. Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages* (Athens, GA, 1983, rep. with new Preface, 1998).

81 Stafford, 'Writing the Biography of Eleventh-Century Queens', p.100 and n.5.

becomes what Stafford described as 'little more than epiphenomena',<sup>82</sup> an accusation she levelled at F. Braudel for his allegedly strict deterministic approach to Charles V of France.<sup>83</sup>

The polarisation of individual and society, created by inflexible structuralism, has been criticised by Pierre Bourdieu. He perceived the individual existing within a web of social relations, allowing for a degree of 'play', conscious or otherwise.<sup>84</sup> Within this paradigm, it is argued, individuals make choices based on experience but there is sufficient elasticity in the web of relations to permit unpredictable behaviour.<sup>85</sup> This perspective is shared by Stafford, who argues that the 'challenge, the opportunity and the necessity' for the biographer is to examine the significance of social scripts and structures, but also to recognise the opportunities they provide for agency.<sup>86</sup>

Without the kind of information more readily available for a modern biography the medieval biographer, often working with conventional and impersonal material needs, according to Foot, to organize their evidence into categories that may be more artificial than those used for a modern subject.<sup>87</sup> The inventiveness of organization advocated by Foot is evident in Stafford's biography of Queens Emma and Edith, where she discussed the social scripts of the two women within broader social structures, thereby using the structures to reconstruct the women's lives.<sup>88</sup>

The lives of medieval kings, according to Foot, present particular problems for medieval biography. While sources about royalty are more prevalent than for commoners, male monarchs are

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82 Stafford, 'Writing the Biography of Eleventh-Century Queens', p.106.

83 Stafford, 'Writing the Biography of Eleventh-Century Queens', p.105 and n.20; Also: F. Braudel, *La Méditerranée et Le Monde Méditerranéen à L'Epoque de Philippe II* (Paris, 1949), p.519.

84 P. Bourdieu, 'Fieldwork in Philosophy', in *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, trans. M. A. Adamson (Oxford, 1990), pp.3-33.

85 Bourdieu, 'Fieldwork in Philosophy', pp.9-10.

86 Stafford, 'Writing the Biography of Eleventh-Century Queens', p.107.

87 Foot, *Æthelstan*, pp.3-4.

88 Stafford, 'Writing the Biography of Eleventh-Century Queens', p.101.

frequently portrayed as 'kings' instead of as men. One of the consequences of such representation is that kingship becomes more intelligible than the mind of the person who was king.<sup>89</sup> In this regard, Sarah Hamilton criticised Roger Collins for his alleged inability to reveal the inner life of his subject, Charlemagne. Whilst recognising that Collins had provided a study of the key events in Charlemagne's life, Hamilton believed that the king remained 'a shadow puppet rather than an active presence'.<sup>90</sup> In like manner Janet Nelson, perhaps punning on Marshal Bosquet's verdict on the charge of the Light Brigade, regarded Jean Favier's work on Charlemagne as 'magnificent...but not biography', believing it to be a series of studies on 'a reign, on war, government, diplomatic relations, patronage of the Church and of learning'.<sup>91</sup> In recognition of the criticism directed at his work, Favier himself acknowledged that the word 'biography' was not appropriate for his book on Charlemagne.<sup>92</sup> Similarly, Gerd Althoff admitted that in selecting a subject for whom there was insufficient evidence to discuss their personality, he had written a biography without a subject.<sup>93</sup>

Despite the weakness of the genre, the value of royal medieval biography was defended by Nelson for having two advantages: firstly, she claimed that individual kings were able to influence events, and therefore the study of personality and relationships 'goes with the grain of early medieval politics'. Secondly, a life-narrative is inherently interesting, attracting 'more readers to history than any other genre'.<sup>94</sup> Stafford also championed the value of biography, claiming it to be

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89 Foot, *Aethelstan*, p.4.

90 S. Hamilton, 'Review Article: Early Medieval Rulers and Their Modern Biographers', *Early Medieval Europe*, 9, No.2 (2000), pp.247-60, at pp.251-52; R. Collins, *Charlemagne* (Basingstoke, 1998).

91 J. L. Nelson, 'Writing Early Medieval Biography', *History Workshop Journal*, 50 (Autumn, 2000), pp.129-36, at p.130.

92 J. Favier, *Charlemagne* (Paris, 1999), p.8.

93 G. Althoff, *Otto III*, trans. P. G. Jestic (University Park, PA, 2003), pxii; also, Hamilton, 'Review Article', pp.256-57.

94 J. L. Nelson, *Charles the Bald* (Harlow, 1992), pp.11-12.

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'one of the most important historical genres' for its ability to assert the importance of agency which, however limited, is 'a motor for historical change'.<sup>95</sup>

One approach to biography which allows for an examination of agency, is the structuration model of Anthony Giddens, which sees the individual as formed by social structures but who then shapes those structures.<sup>96</sup> This model, as demonstrated by Ian Kershaw, can be applied successfully<sup>97</sup> but not enough is known about the degree to which Edmund was formed by the structures of late tenth /early eleventh-century England, nor the extent to which those structures were altered by Edmund, nor how he perceived himself, for the structuration model to be appropriate for a biography of Edmund.

A more effective methodology for the biography of a medieval subject, according to Foot, places the subject temporally and spatially. In this way, the individual is discussed in relation to the 'different environments and spheres' they inhabited in the course of their life.<sup>98</sup> This approach was successfully employed by Clanchy for his biography of Peter Abelard. Acknowledging the rarity of personal information about his subject, Clanchy arranged the available material into a discussion of Abelard's roles which corresponded approximately with his life-cycle.<sup>99</sup> This method of locating the individual chronologically and thematically also influenced the structure of Foot's biography of

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95 Stafford, 'Writing the Biography of Eleventh Century Queens', p.109; also Foot, *Æthelstan*, p.6.

96 A. Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Berkeley, 1984); also, 'Structuration Theory: Past, Present and Future', in *Giddens Theory of Structuration: A Critical Appreciation*, ed. C. G. A. Bryant and D. Jary (London, 1991), pp.201-21.

97 I. Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889-1936: Hubris* (London, 1998); *Hitler, 1936-1945: Nemesis* (London, 2000).

98 Foot, *Æthelstan*, pp.7-8.

99 Clanchy, *Abelard*, pp.19-20.

*Æthelstan*, which in turn has been instrumental in providing a methodology for writing a life study of Edmund Ironside.<sup>100</sup>

A study of Edmund that investigates his life temporally and spatially allows for his actions to be located in time and discussed thematically. The sources produced within his lifetime, and those of later generations, also raise the possibility of constructing Edmund's personality. The temporal-spatial model also makes possible the employment of knowledge unavailable to Edmund or his contemporaries. Beginning with the most intimate social structure, his family, and progressing outward to critique his household, his performance as a military leader and king and concluding with his death, it is possible to produce a multi-layered image of Edmund as a person.

Edmund Ironside deserves to be studied because his position as the eldest surviving ætheling allows for the topic of succession to be re-visited from a new perspective. To secure his accession Edmund had to surmount the obstacles presented by his step-mother's ambitions for her children by *Æthelred*. In unlawfully marrying the widow of *Sigferth* to establish himself as a credible candidate for the throne, Edmund also allows for royal rebellion to be re-examined. The transformation of Edmund from oldest ætheling to king also facilitates a new focus for the study of *Æthelred* and *Cnut*, and the investigation of some of the major issues of the late tenth and early eleventh centuries: the individual interests of the different regions of Anglo-Saxon England, and their relationship to each other; factionalism among the English nobility at the local and national level; the practicalities of defeating the Danes and the provision of effective English leadership.

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Edmund Ironside also deserves to be studied for the important position he occupied during a significant point in Anglo-Saxon history: he was an ætheling when England was subject to Viking attacks on a scale unprecedented since the time of *Alfred*. Edmund's father was driven into exile and the country was temporarily conquered. When Edmund acceded his rule was challenged by a

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<sup>100</sup> Foot, *Æthelstan*, p.8, n.9.



determined foreign pretender who considered the English throne to be rightfully his. The English nobility suffered immense losses at a battle comparable to that of 1066 and Edmund's early death facilitated a dynastic change.

There has never been an academic study with Edmund Ironside as the central subject. When Edmund is referred to in academic monographs his achievements are often overshadowed by broader studies of Æthelred or Cnut. Such relative neglect is unwarranted. For preventing a second Danish conquest in his lifetime Edmund deserves to be placed alongside Anglo-Saxon England's warrior kings: Alfred, Edmund I and Æthelstan. Edmund also merits biographical treatment for what can be revealed about the seminal issues and key personalities of late Anglo-Saxon England. The topics and individuals encountered may be familiar from previous scholarly investigations but revisiting them from Edmund's perspective allows for fresh insights. A biographical study of Edmund II Ironside is not only possible but necessary.

## Chapter Two

### Edmund in the Primary Sources.

Edmund II Ironside ruled for a mere 222 days, the shortest reign of any Anglo-Saxon king of England. The earliest sources relating to Edmund are those produced in his lifetime and shortly after his death: the diplomas of King Æthelred II and Edmund himself; the will of Edmund's elder brother, Athelstan; Edmund's lease for Holcombe; and *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (ASC)*. They represent an English perspective and from them the sparse details of Edmund's life and brief career can be re-constructed. The contemporary Scandinavian sources, *Liðsmannaflokkur* and the *Knútsdrápa*, provide a Danish outlook on affairs concerning Edmund. They complement the English sources but by concentrating on Cnut and favouring Ulfcytel of East Anglia, Edmund's involvement in events is marginalised.

One of the near-contemporary sources (written after Edmund's death by those who had been alive in his lifetime), the *Chronicon* of Thietmar of Merseburg, gives some indication of how events in England were perceived on the Continent. The other significant near-contemporary source, the *Encomium Emma Reginae*, provides an insight into how Edmund's kingship was viewed by the regime which succeeded him. In the Anglo-Norman narratives Edmund is generally considered in the broad context of explaining the Norman invasion. The twelfth-century narratives show considerable consistency in presenting Edmund in a variety of roles unseen in earlier sources, which may be a result of their predilection for literary invention.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The topic of literary invention will be discussed in Section 2:5.

## 2:1 Contemporary Anglo-Saxon Sources

### The Diplomas of King Æthelred and Edmund

It is appropriate to begin a review of the Anglo-Saxon sources with the appearance of Edmund in Æthelred's and his own diplomas. These administrative materials have value as objective sources for Edmund's participation in royal business but also as evidence for Edmund's associations, some of whom played a pivotal role in the key moments of his career. When treating diplomas as historical evidence, several factors must be considered that could affect their usefulness. As Charles Insley has indicated, the Anglo-Saxon practice of producing single-sheet diplomas put constraints on recording the names of all those who attended an assembly in the presence of the king, and therefore surviving witness lists represent only a selection of those who were present.<sup>2</sup> The unreliability of witness lists, particularly those of diplomas produced in the ninth and tenth-centuries, has also been remarked upon by Simon Keynes<sup>3</sup> but he argues persuasively that in the reign of Æthelred the reliability of diplomas as historical evidence improved as they were produced regularly by a central agency present at royal assemblies, or an agency with due authorisation.<sup>4</sup>

The existence of a central agency has generally been accepted but Susan Kelly and Charles Insley suggest, independently, that the production of diplomas may have had more flexibility than

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2 C. Insley, 'Assemblies and Charters in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in P. S. Barnwell and Marco Mostert, (ed.), *Political Assemblies in the Earlier Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2003), pp.45-59, at pp.51-2.

3 S. Keynes, 'Church Councils, Royal Assemblies and Anglo-Saxon Royal Diplomas', in G. R. Owen-Crocker and B. W. Schneider, (ed.), *Kingship, Legislation and Power in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2013), pp.17-182, at pp.46-7.

4 Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp.95-120; 'Church Councils', pp.102-3.

Keynes's work might indicate. Kelly and Insley argue that only the witness lists were produced at an assembly, the remainder of the document being created later, occasionally by the beneficiary of the diploma.<sup>5</sup> One of the possible consequences of producing the constituent parts of a diploma separately, as indicated by Levi Roach, is that a witness list might be produced locally, resulting in a bogus witness list being attached to an otherwise authentic document. The occasional local production of a witness list does not, maintains Roach, invalidate the existence of a diplomatic mainstream, but it does allow for the operation of provincial influences, as argued by Kelly and Insley.<sup>6</sup>

Æthelred's diplomas will be discussed more fully in Chapter Three but with regard to their usefulness as historical evidence, in twenty-three of Æthelred's extant diplomas, whose authenticity is generally accepted, Edmund appears as a witness. In his own diplomas, Edmund is depicted as a benefactor. The diplomas of king and ætheling also indicate that a variety of diplomatic language was employed when referring to Edmund. When fulfilling either function Edmund bears a variety of titles which fall into one of four types. In the first category, he is interchangeably described as '*regis filius*' or '*filius regis*'.<sup>7</sup> Alternatively, Edmund is sometimes referred to as '*clito*', a synonym for '*ætheling*'.<sup>8</sup> In a number of diplomas Edmund is entitled '*frater*', witnessing as the brother of

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5 S. Kelly, (ed.), *Charters of Abingdon Abbey*, 2 parts, Anglo-Saxon Charters 7-8 (Oxford, 2000-1), pp.lxxix-lxxxiv; C. Insley, 'Charters and Episcopal Scriptoria in the Anglo-Saxon South-West', *Early Medieval Europe* 7 (1998), pp.173-97.

6 L. Roach, *Kingship and Consent in Anglo-Saxon England, 871-978: Assemblies and the State in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2013), p.79.

7 S 876; S 878; S 891; S 899; S 900-01; S 904; S 906; S 915 and S 920.

8 S 893; S 910-11; S 921; S 923; S 931 and S 934. For a discussion of the etymology and significance of the title 'clito' see D. Dumville, 'The Ætheling: A Study in Anglo-Saxon Constitutional History', *Anglo-Saxon England* 8 (1979), pp. 1-33.

Athelstan.<sup>9</sup> In the fourth group of attestations, the title given to Edmund is unique to the individual diploma. In one diploma, Edmund is designated '*regie indolis soboles*',<sup>10</sup> which may be read as 'innately royal offspring'. Edmund's own diplomas also confer different titles upon him; in the first he is styled '*ætheling rex*',<sup>11</sup> and in the second: '*altithroni adminiculante gratia Anglorum...basilei filius*,' essentially describing Edmund as the son of the king.<sup>12</sup> The significance of Edmund's diplomas will be considered more fully in Chapter Four and will be discussed in relation to his rebellion.

#### The will of ætheling Athelstan, and Edmund's lease for Holcombe

In the will of his older brother, Athelstan, Edmund is portrayed as an executor, charged with ensuring that endowments are properly discharged.<sup>13</sup> Edmund is also the recipient of his brother's generosity, receiving weapons and lands second only to those bequeathed to Æthelred, and the preferment Edmund enjoyed may also be inferred from his name appearing before that of a bishop and abbot.<sup>14</sup> Athelstan's will indicates that he and Edmund had a good relationship, and the document shall be discussed further in Chapter Three in relation to the entourage of an ætheling and Edmund's wider associations. Similarly, Edmund's lease for Holcombe is an invaluable source for partially reconstructing his household and establishing his connection to local, regional and national figures, both lay and ecclesiastical.

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9 S 922; S 924 and S 929.

10 S 934. Æthelred's diplomas will be discussed more fully in Chapter 4:3.

11 S 947.

12 S 948. Edmund's diplomas will be discussed more fully in Chapter Four, when his rebellion is discussed.

13 'Will of the Atheling Athelstan', in *English Historical Documents, c. 500-1042*, ed. and trans. D. Whitelock (London, 1955), pp. 593-6.

14 'Will of the Atheling Athelstan', p.595.

### The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (ASC) is not a single chronicle but a set of seven vernacular chronicles and one fragment. The collective title of the ASC has rightly been described, by Pauline Stafford, as misleading.<sup>15</sup> The seven surviving manuscripts are referred to alphabetically as A, B, C, D, E, F and G. Historians generally agree that the ASC was first compiled in the court of King Alfred and then disseminated to certain religious centres around England.<sup>16</sup> The ASC is the fullest contemporary account concerning Edmund, allowing for the reconstruction of the last two years of his life.

Neither the A or B recensions of the Chronicle mention Edmund Ironside.<sup>17</sup> However, one of the continuations of the ASC which allows for a partial reconstruction of Edmund Ironside's career is the set of annals in MSS C, D, and E, for the years 983 to 1022. This collection shares a common text and encompasses most of the reign of Æthelred the Unready (978-1016), the reign of Edmund (1016) and the early years of the reign of Cnut (1017-1035). Keynes argues persuasively that this *Æthelredian Chronicle* (sometimes called the *Chronicle of Æthelred and Cnut*) was written by a single anonymous author writing in or shortly after 1022, perhaps in

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15 P. Stafford, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, Identity and the Making of England', *Haskins Society Journal*, 19 (London, 2007), pp.28-50, at p.30.

16 For a discussion of the Alfredian origin of the ASC see Abels, *Alfred the Great*, pp.14-18; Keynes, 'Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', in *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. M. Lapidge, J. Blair, S. Keynes and D. Scragg (Oxford, 1999), pp.35-6; A. Scharer, 'The Writing of History at King Alfred's Court', *Early Medieval Europe* 5 (1996), pp.176-206, at pp.178-85. For a discussion of the Alfredian origin of the Chronicles and the possibility of their continued courtly production, see N. Brooks, 'Why is the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* about kings?', in *Anglo-Saxon England* 39 (2011), pp.53-62.

17 After 1006 there is no entry in MS. A until 1017, and MS. B ends in 977.

London.<sup>18</sup> Agreeing with Keynes that the Chronicler had access to an annual record of events, Nicholas Brooks conjectured that the putative record was kept by 'the priests of the king's household and *'haligdom'* (relic collection).'<sup>19</sup>

The *Æthelredian Chronicles* mostly present Edmund as vigorous and opposing Cnut effectively. Contrastingly, according to Brooks, they are 'consistently hostile to the policies of [King Æthelred] and...certain of his nobles.'<sup>20</sup> The different depictions of Æthelred and Edmund, suggested Brooks, was the result of the original annals for 983-1016 being suppressed and the history of the reigns of Æthelred and Edmund rewritten to accommodate the new Danish regime.<sup>21</sup> The portrayal of Edmund as an indomitable and indefatigable warrior king may have served Cnut's interests by presenting his ultimately successful attempt to conquer the country as achieved against an exemplary opponent, thereby magnifying Cnut's accomplishment. The possibility that the Chronicler recast history raises serious questions about the reliability of the *ASC* which earlier historians had accepted with little or no criticism. It must be asked therefore, how much of Edmund's original exploits remain in the extant manuscripts, and to what degree was the extant narrative rewritten?

Historians interested in what Brooks called 'debates on the construction of national and ethnic identity and the origins of the nation-state'<sup>22</sup> have analysed the *ASC* for evidence of English identity. Referring to the *Æthelredian Chronicles*, Stafford argued that they are 'more explicitly a

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18 S. Keynes, 'The Declining Reputation of King Æthelred the Unready', in *Æthelred the Unready: Papers from the Millenary Conference*, ed. D. H. Hill, BAR British Series 59 (Oxford, 1978), pp.227-53, at pp.229-32; and Stafford,

'The Reign of Æthelred II', p.16 and nn.6 and 7.

19 Brooks, 'Why is the *ASC* about kings?', p.52; and Keynes, 'Declining Reputation', p.233.

20 Brooks, 'Why is the *ASC* about kings?', p.52.

21 Brooks, 'Why is the *ASC* about kings?', p.52.

22 Brooks, 'Why is the *ASC* about kings?', p.61.

history of the English than any previous continuation'.<sup>23</sup> In support of her argument, Stafford noted how the Chronicler refers to the English a number of times in the annal for 1016, moving between the terms '*englisc folc*'; '*Engla þeode*' and '*Angelcynnes*'. These references, believes Stafford, make explicit that the fate of the English as a nation was the focus of the Chronicler who 'strongly identified himself as English'.<sup>24</sup>

The theme of partisan authorship was developed by Alice Jorgensen who alleges that the Æthelredian Chronicler identified himself profoundly 'with the triumphs, sufferings and failures' of the English.<sup>25</sup> It is further argued that English identity in the *ASC* is sometimes presented as a 'prickly interaction of multiple groups', reflecting the political disunity which Jorgensen believes to have been prevalent in Æthelred's reign.<sup>26</sup> Mindful of these analyses, the account of Edmund in the *Æthelredian Chronicles* sometimes portrays incidents of dissent, shows evidence of patriotism and provides a favourable depiction of Edmund.

The individual versions of the *Æthelredian Chronicles* have been published as scholarly editions in the collaborative series initiated under the general editorship of David Dumville and Simon Keynes.<sup>27</sup> As indicated previously, they share a common stock of information but occasionally one recension will contain a detail that is unique. *MS. C* has been associated with Abingdon since the Renaissance but the editor of the collaborative edition, K. O'Brien O'Keefe,

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23 Stafford, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles', p.32; also, S. Foot, 'The Making of *Angelcynn*: English Identity Before the Norman Conquest', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6th ser., 6 (1996), pp.25-49; and Scharer, 'The Writing of History at Alfred's Court', pp.177-206.

24 Stafford, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles', pp.34-5.

25 A. Jorgensen, 'Rewriting the Æthelredian Chronicle: Narrative Style and Identity in Anglo-Saxon Chronicle MS F', in *Reading the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. A. Jorgensen (Turnhout, 2010), pp.113-38, at p.118.

26 Jorgensen, 'Rewriting the Æthelredian Chronicle', p.115.

27 *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle Vol. 5, MS. C*, ed. K. O'Brien O'Keefe (Cambridge, 2001); *ASC Vol. 6, MS. D*, ed. G. P. Cubbin (Cambridge, 1996); *ASC Vol. 7, MS. E*, ed. S. Irvine (Cambridge, 2004).



found no evidence in *MS. C* itself for such an attribution.<sup>28</sup> Stephen Baxter argues that from the mid 1040s, when he believes the extant manuscript to have been compiled, *C* was composed somewhere in the Midlands supportive of the earls of Mercia.<sup>29</sup>

G. P. Cubbin, the editor of *MS. D*, argues that the surviving manuscript was first compiled in the 1050s in the entourage of Archbishop Ealdred of Worcester and York. *MS. D* is considered to be a conflation of two versions of the *ASC* similar to *C* and *E*. From the 1050s *MS. D* remained a near contemporary record.<sup>30</sup> It is unclear where *MS. D* was compiled but if one accepts Cubbin's suggestion that it was written by Ealdred's entourage, the *ASC* would have followed him and could therefore have been written in the West Midlands and the North.<sup>31</sup> More specific locations suggested for the later composition and compilation of *MS. D* include Evesham, Worcester, Canterbury and York.<sup>32</sup>

The medieval origin of *MS. E* was located by Susan Irvine, editor of the collaborative edition of the manuscript, at Peterborough.<sup>33</sup> The text of *MS. E* is a compilation of several sources and it is acknowledged that 'the first identifiable source is a collection of annals for 983-1022'.<sup>34</sup> The present manuscript is a copy of a mid-eleventh-century chronicle thought to have been written at

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28 *ASC Vol. 5, MS. C*, p.xv.

29 For the argument for the possible mid-eleventh century composition of *MS. C* in Mercia, see S. Baxter, 'MS. C of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the Politics of Mid-Eleventh Century England', *English Historical Review* 192 No. 499 (2007), pp.1184-1227.

30 *ASC Vol. 6, MS. D*, pp.liii-lv; lxxix.

31 *ASC Vol. 6, MS. D*, pp.lxxviii-lxxx.

32 For a summary of the rival theories concerning the location of the compilation of *MS. D* see Baxter, 'MS. C', p.1192 n.18.

33 *ASC Vol. 7, MS. E*, p.xiii.

34 *ASC Vol.7, MS. E*, p.liv.

St. Augustine's, Canterbury, but sent to Peterborough for copying circa 1121, where it continued as a contemporary chronicle until its final entry in 1154.<sup>35</sup>

To the *Æthelredian Chronicles* must be added *MS. F*, a bi-lingual Latin and vernacular text, that is an abbreviation and translation of the vernacular chronicle which lies behind the surviving *MS. E*.<sup>36</sup> P. S. Baker, the editor of the collaborative edition of *F*, assigned the composition of the text to Christ Church, Canterbury, somewhere between the late 1080s and the early 1110s.<sup>37</sup> The provision of Latin in *MS. F* was explained by Dumville as an attempt to facilitate the reading of English history by members of the Christ Church community, be they French or English.<sup>38</sup>

*MS. F* does not provide as complete a narrative for Edmund as do *MSS. C, D* and *E*. It does not refer to the Battles of Pensewood and Sherston, or Edmund's relief of London and nor does it refer to Edmund's first crossing of the Thames at Brentford. Some omissions however have been interpreted as serving to portray Edmund's career more positively. Alice Jorgensen argued that by deleting references to Edmund's failed attempts to raise the fyrd and his harrying with Uhtred, *MS. F* depicts Edmund's campaign up to the defection of Eadric at *Assandun*, as 'promising', instead of being 'a precarious and sometimes savage attempt to regain control of the country'.<sup>39</sup>

Furthermore, the English and Latin texts in *F* do not match exactly. There are several places where the Latin is more elaborate than in the *Æthelredian Chronicles*, providing details which are absent in the English version, and sometimes the Latin makes plain what was alluded to in the

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35 Baxter, 'MS. C', p.1190.

36 Stafford, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles', p.40.

37 *ASC Vol. 8, MS. F*, ed. P. S. Baker (Cambridge, 2000), pp.ix; lxxvi.

38 D. Dumville, 'Some Aspects of Annalistic Writing at Canterbury in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries', *Peritia II* (1983), pp.23-57, at p.45.

39 Jorgensen, 'Rewriting the Æthelredian Chronicle', p.130.

vernacular.<sup>40</sup> In effect, the elaborations and explications of *MS. F* supplement the *Æthelredian Chronicles'* account of Edmund Ironside. *MS. F* has a more objective perspective than is found in the *Æthelredian Chronicles*. The narrative is relatively free of evaluative comments and therefore its account of the years 1015-16 does not, in the opinion of Jorgensen, 'convey how urgently [those] events spoke to English character, pride, and suffering at the time'.<sup>41</sup> *MS. F* also differs from the *Æthelredian Chronicles* by concentrating less on depicting the strain between the English as a single entity and their constituent parts, but emphasising the theme of traitors.<sup>42</sup>

#### The Presentation of Edmund Ironside in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*

*MSS. C, D, E, and F* retrospectively tell of Edmund's victories, single defeat, compromise, his premature death and ultimate victory for Cnut. For the year 1015 the ætheling Edmund is presented as a rebel when he took the widow of Sigeferth for his wife against the wishes of Æthelred.<sup>43</sup> By seizing the territory of Sigeferth and Morcar and having the area submit to him,<sup>44</sup> Edmund created a power-base in the Midlands. This effectively positioned him as a candidate for the throne and put Edmund in opposition to Emma's probable ambitions for her son Edward.<sup>45</sup>

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40 For a summary of the techniques of abbreviation used in the Latin text of *MS. F* see Jorgensen, 'Rewriting the *Æthelredian Chronicle*' pp.121-2.

41 Jorgensen., 'Rewriting the *Æthelredian Chronicle*', p.123.

42 Jorgensen., 'Rewriting the *Æthelredian Chronicle*', pp.129-30.

43 'ofer þes cynges willan', in *ASC Vol. 7, MS. E*, p.72.

44 'Sigeferthes are7 Morcares 7 þaet folc eal him to beah', in *ASC Vol. 7, MS. E*, p.72. Edmund's marriage and seizure of estates will be discussed more fully in Chapter Four, when his rebellion is considered.

45 Edmund's relations with Emma will be discussed more fully in Chapters Three and Four.

Edmund is also depicted as an intended victim: the Chronicle records that when he joined his forces with those of Eadric the ealdorman meant to betray him.<sup>46</sup> For the year 1016 the *ASC* repeatedly casts Edmund in the role of a resistance leader, continually raising troops against Cnut. Although successful in assembling armies, the ætheling Edmund was unable to deploy them, with one army disbanding when Æthelred failed to join them.<sup>47</sup> Edmund's ability to fulfil successfully the role of warrior-king is illustrated by his fighting at Penselwood, Sherston, Brentford and in Kent.<sup>48</sup> Edmund is also portrayed as a liberator when he freed London from siege.<sup>49</sup>

The Chronicle supports the legitimacy of Edmund's accession, recording that he was chosen by those members of the witan who were in London and the citizens of the city.<sup>50</sup> Edmund's right to rule is emphasised by *MS. F*, which alleges that he was chosen by the entire witan but the late composition of this version makes its claim questionable.<sup>51</sup> As the rightful successor to Æthelred, Edmund is portrayed in *MS. C* asserting his authority in his ancestral heartland by taking Wessex and receiving the submission of the region (possibly at Gillingham) but evidence of English opposition to Edmund, from other sources, suggests the Chronicle may have exaggerated Edmund's popularity.<sup>52</sup>

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46 'beswican þone ætheling', in *ASC Vol. 5, MS. C*, p.100.

47 'burhware fultum of Lundene', in *ASC Vol. 7, MS. E*, p.72. Edmund's involvement in military campaigns will be discussed more fully in Chapter Five.

48 *ASC, MS. D and E*, pp.149-51.

49 *ASC, MSS. D and E*, pp.150-51. Edmund's military campaigns will be considered more fully in Chapter Five.

50 'gecuron Eadmund to cyninge', in *ASC Vol. 5 MS. C*, p.101.

51 'ealle Angelcynnes witan', in *ASC Vol. 8 MS. F*, p.108.

52 'gerad þa Westseaxon, 7 him beah eall þaet folc to', in *ASC Vol. 5, MS. C*, p.101. Edmund's accession will be discussed more fully in Chapter Five.

Several personal qualities are also assigned to Edmund in the Chronicle, but one should be wary of accepting these portrayals uncritically. A retrospective summation of his reign depicts Edmund resolutely defending his kingdom.<sup>53</sup> Edmund's determination and martial temperament may be inferred from the Chronicle's account of him summoning the fyrd three times, waging a private war alongside Uhtred and fighting five battles in the space of one year. The Chronicle also stresses Edmund's kingly status by referring to him as *cynhlaforde*, acknowledging his right to rule.<sup>54</sup> Edmund's legitimacy is more explicit in the Latin version of MS. F, where he is described as *naturalem dominum* – natural lord.<sup>55</sup> The favourable depiction of Edmund as a legitimate and tireless warrior king is tempered by the Chronicle's criticism of him accepting Eadric's submission at Aylesford. The versions of the ASC are unanimous in their verdict that Edmund's decision was foolish.<sup>56</sup>

In contrast to the image of Edmund as a warrior-king, the penultimate depiction of him in the Chronicle is as a peace-maker. He and Cnut met on the island of Alney where they exchanged hostages and confirmed their friendship with pledges and oaths. Perhaps more significant than Edmund playing the part of peace-maker is his inclination to compromise. In order to obtain peace, Edmund would accept partitioning the country.<sup>57</sup> The partition proved to be ephemeral, with Cnut taking possession of the entire kingdom after Edmund's death.

Commented [David McD29]: 'is' deleted.

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53 ASC Vol. 5, MS. C, p.101.

54 ASC Vol. 5, MS. C, p.102.

55 ASC Vol. 8, MS. F, p.110. Edmund's right to rule will be discussed more fully in Chapter Four.

56 'naes nan mare unræd geraed þonne se wæs', in ASC Vol. 5, MS. C, p.102.

57 ASC, MSS. D, E and F, pp.152-53. Edmund's peace settlement with Cnut will be discussed more fully in Chapter 5:7.

Edmund died on 30 November, 1016, and was buried beside his grandfather, King Edgar, at Glastonbury.<sup>58</sup> The reference to Edgar, who presided over a comparatively peaceful period of Anglo-Saxon history, enabled the Chronicler(s) to honour Edmund by associating him with the achievements of his grandfather, who is recalled in the *ASC* as 'Ruler of the English, Friend of the West Saxons, and protector of the Mercians'.<sup>59</sup> By connecting Edmund with Edgar, who was remembered as a king for all the English peoples, the *ASC* may have sought to allude to the Englishness of Edmund, contrasting with the alienism of Cnut.

Commented [David McD30]: Full stop replaced with comma.

After Edmund's death there are no further references to him in the Chronicle until 1057 when, in recording the death in England of Edward the Exile, Edmund is given the cognomen 'Ironside', which he gained because of his alleged boldness.<sup>60</sup> This is the earliest known written evidence of the appellation but it was probably current prior to 1057 and established enough for the Chronicler to be aware of it. The obituary of Edward the Exile also marks the beginning of the *ASC's* interest in the descendants of Edmund, and his portrayal as the progenitor of a Scots royal line.<sup>61</sup>

Commented [David McD31]: Lower case 'and'.

The *ASC* depicts Edmund as an ætheling; rebel; contender for the throne; resistance leader; liberator and warrior king. He is also presented as resolute but occasionally a poor judge of character; a peace-maker and progenitor of kings of Scots. Subsequent presentations of Edmund in the Scandinavian, Continental and Anglo-Norman sources allow for points of comparison to be made with the Chronicles' initial images of Edmund, for their similarities to be noted and their differences discussed.

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58 *ASC*, MSS. D and E, pp.152-53. The circumstances surrounding Edmund's death will be discussed more fully in Chapter 5:8.

59 *ASC*, MS. D, 975, p.121.

60 'snellscipe', in *ASC Vol. 6. MS. D*, p.75.

61 *ASC*, MS. D, pp.201-02; 209, and MS. E, pp.227-28; 234; 236.

## 2:2 Contemporary Scandinavian Sources

### *Liðsmannaflokkr*

References to Edmund in contemporary Scandinavian sources are few. In the earliest relevant text, *Liðsmannaflokkr*, which Russell Poole dates to 1017,<sup>62</sup> Edmund is absent. This may be expected in a text whose purpose is the celebration of Cnut's achievements, but *Liðsmannaflokkr* also gives recognition to Cnut's compatriot, Thorkell. *Liðsmannaflokkr* does mention one English leader, Ulfcytel, reported fighting Cnut fiercely in an anonymous battle beside the Thames.<sup>63</sup> Ulfcytel's presence at this battle is not corroborated by the *ASC*, which reports that the only engagements by the English at the Thames were led by Edmund. Ulfcytel's activities in the London area, during Edmund's reign, are recorded in the *Eiriksdrápa*.<sup>64</sup> It is possible that the poet of *Liðsmannaflokkr* may have known of an encounter between Ulfcytel and Cnut that was unknown to the compiler of the *ASC*. This does not itself provide evidence of Ulfcytel's involvement in the defence of England, but his participation in the events of 1015-16 may not have been recorded in the *ASC* to give prominence to Edmund.<sup>65</sup> It is also possible that Ulfcytel's unnamed engagement might be the Battle of Brentford.<sup>66</sup> If this identification is correct, *Liðsmannaflokkr* may have transferred Edmund's exploits to Ulfcytel.

### *Knútsdrápa*

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62 For a discussion of the dating of *Liðsmannaflokkr* see R. Poole, 'Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History:

Some Aspects of the Period 1009-1016', *Speculum*, 62. No. 2 (1987), pp.265-98, at pp. 280-86.

63 Poole, 'Skaldic Verse', verses 5-6, p.282.

64 Poole, 'Skaldic Verse', p.289.

65 Poole, 'Skaldic Verse', p.289.

66 G. Vigfusson and F. Y. Powell, (ed.), *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, 2 (Oxford, 1883), p.107.

Several praise-poems bearing the title *Knútsdrápa* were composed during Cnut's reign, but the one created by the skald Ottar Svarti,<sup>67</sup> is described by Matthew Townend as 'perhaps the most militant of all the praise poems for Cnut'.<sup>68</sup> Ottar's poem is a rich Scandinavian source for the events of 1015-16, but one must read carefully between the lines for material relating to Edmund, for Ottar's *Knútsdrápa* is an expedited version of history that omits several key events involving Edmund: his election as king; his possession of Wessex; and the battle at Penselwood. The skald also omitted the outcome of Sherston, which the *ASC* reports ended when the armies mutually broke off the fight.<sup>69</sup> It is probable that *Knútsdrápa* is tacit about Sherston to spare the reputation of its patron. The skald is also silent regarding Edmund relieving London and his routing of the Danes from the city's walls.<sup>70</sup>

When dealing with the battle of Brentford, the skald refers to a certain '*Játmundar*' but the identification with Edmund is problematic. Guðbrand Vigfusson interpreted the reference to mean 'Edmund the noble king's son', meaning Edmund Ironside.<sup>71</sup> Margaret Ashdown, however, read *Játmundar* to mean 'Edmund's noble offspring', meaning King Edmund I.<sup>72</sup> Edmund Ironside, as a direct descendent of Edmund I, could therefore be included in the reference to *Játmundar*. The identification of *Játmundar* with Edmund Ironside may be clarified by the skald's description of

Commented [David McD32]: Ottar Svarti originally conflated with Sigvatr.

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67 M. Townend, 'Contextualizing the *Knútsdrápur*: Skaldic praise-poetry at the court of Cnut', *Anglo-Saxon England* 30 (2001), pp.145-79, at p.145.

68 Townend, 'Contextualizing the *Knútsdrápur*', p.162.

69 'þa heres him sylfe toeodon', in *ASC Vol. 6, MS. D*, p.61.

70 *ASC*, MSS. D and E, pp.150-51.

71 'Játmundar...átt-niðr gofugr', in Vigfusson and Powell, *Corpus*, verse 10, p.156.

72 M. Ashdown, 'Knútsdrápa', in *English and Norse Documents Relating to the Reign of Æthelred the Unready* (Cambridge, 1930), pp.136-9; verse 7, p.138.



the fleeing English as *drótt*,<sup>73</sup> a plural noun that can be translated as either 'people' or 'host of the king's men'.<sup>74</sup> The second reading allows for the possibility that *Jatmundar* is King Edmund II Ironside, who led the English at Brentford.

Unique to the *Knútsdrápa* is the suggestion that Edmund employed foreign mercenaries. At Brentford, Cnut is described as taking 'Frisian's lives',<sup>75</sup> suggesting there may have been a contingent of Frisians in the English army. The poet's reference to Frisians at Brentford lacks corroboration but it is not unknown for late Anglo-Saxon armies to have had foreign mercenaries. The late Anglo-Saxon state, according to Ryan Lavelle, was dependent on 'paid mercenary service' during the Viking wars of Æthelred II.<sup>76</sup> Contrary to the ASC, *Knútsdrápa* has Edmund defeated at Brentford, the English put to flight and pursued.<sup>77</sup> From the Battle of Brentford, the *Knútsdrápa* proceeds directly to '*Assatúnnum*' (*Assandun*),<sup>78</sup> deleting a number of events in the process: Cnut abandoning his third siege of London; his pursuit by Edmund into Kent, and Edmund overtaking Cnut at *Assandun*. At *Assatúnnum* Edmund is portrayed as defeated, Cnut having performed 'a mighty work of war'<sup>79</sup> but unlike his account of Brentford, the skald's version of events can be corroborated by independent evidence.<sup>80</sup>

Commented [David McD34]: Reference given to Lavelle's work, as a direct quote.

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73 Vigfusson and Powell, *Corpus*, verse 10, p.156; Ashdown, 'Knútsdrápa', verse 7, p.138.

74 G. T. Zoega, *A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic* (Oxford, 1926), p.96.

75 Ashdown, 'Knutsdrapa', verse 7, p.138.

76 R. Lavelle, *Alfred's Wars: Sources and Interpretations of Anglo-Saxon Warfare in the Viking Age* (Woodbridge, 2010), p.105. Also, R. P. Abels, 'Household Men, Mercenaries and Vikings in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Mercenaries and Paid Men: The Mercenary Identity in the Middle Ages: Proceedings of a Conference held at University of Wales, Swansea, 7th-9th July 2005*, ed. J. France, *History of Warfare* 47 (Leiden, 2008), pp.143-66. The possibility of foreign troops in Edmund's army will be discussed in Chapter Five.

77 Ashdown, 'Knutsdrapa', verse 7, p.138.

78 Ashdown, 'Knutsdrapa', verse 8, p.138.

79 Vigfusson and Powell., *Corpus*, verse 11, p.156.

## 2:3 Contemporary Continental Sources

### The *Chronicon* of Thietmar of Merseburg

The *Chronicon* of the German bishop and chronicler, Thietmar of Merseburg, is dated to circa 1018 and therefore closely contemporary with the *ASC* and *Liðsmannaflokkr*.<sup>81</sup> As a source of Continental origin, it might be thought that the *Chronicon* would not exhibit the biases of the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian sources. The *Chronicon* establishes Edmund's family connections but imperfectly. In the account for the year 1016, Thietmar refers to Edmund as a son of Emma, when he was in fact her step-son. The distinction may have been unimportant to Thietmar but it was significant for the issue of succession. Thietmar is also mistaken in mentioning Athelstan as alive in 1016; Simon Keynes has made a convincing argument that the date of 1015 recorded on Athelstan's will is a late amendment and the ætheling died on 25 June, 1014.<sup>82</sup>

Thietmar's account of Edmund's alleged sequestration in London, and subsequent escape, reflects upon the reliability of the narrative. The presentation of the besieged Edmund as the victim of Cnut's stratagem contradicts the *ASC*, which has Edmund leave the city before Cnut's arrival.<sup>83</sup> Thietmar is also unique in having Edmund betrayed by Emma: exhausted by the constant fighting, she is reported entering into negotiations with Cnut, agreeing to kill Edmund

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80 *ASC*, MSS. D, E, and F, pp.152-153.

81 For the date of the composition of the *Chronicon* see R. Holtzmann, (ed.), *Thietmari Merseburgensis episcopi chronicon/ Die Chronik des Bischofs Thietmar von Merseburg und ihre Korvier Überarbeitung*, MGH, SRG 9 (Berlin, 1935), pp.xxviii-xxxi.

82 S. Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred 'The Unready', 978-1016: A Study in Their Use as Historical Evidence*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 3<sup>rd</sup> series 13 (Cambridge, 1980), p.276.

83 *ASC*, MSS. D and E, 1016, p.149.

(and Athelstan) in return for 'peace and life for herself and her companions'.<sup>84</sup> The treacherous behaviour attributed to Emma is explained, by Ian Howard, as stemming from her ambitions for herself and her son Edward, and to her perception that Cnut was less threatening to her than 'her enemy the ætheling Edmund'.<sup>85</sup>

Thietmar has Edmund and Athelstan escape from London and gather a force, partly to 'rescue their mother', thereby depicting Edmund as a devoted son.<sup>86</sup> Perhaps a more realistic explanation of Edmund's departure is that he feared being trapped between the forces of Cnut outside the city, and those of Emma within.<sup>87</sup> Thietmar conforms with the ASC's presentation of Edmund as a resistance leader and patriot. The prime objective of the force raised by Edmund and Athelstan, according to Thietmar, was to 'defend the homeland'.<sup>88</sup> Another indication of Thietmar's unreliability is his account of a battle near London, where Edmund and an unknown Dane, Thurgat, are killed but Athelstan survived.<sup>89</sup> This anomaly might be resolved if the death of Edmund had been confused with that of Athelstan. The error of misreporting Edmund's death is compounded by Thietmar attributing the relief of London to Athelstan.<sup>90</sup>

Similar to *Knútsdrápa*, Thietmar's account implies the presence of foreign troops but is unique in recording that the taking of London was accomplished with the assistance of the Welsh.

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84 Thietmar, *The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg*, ed. D. A. Warner (Manchester, 2001), p.336.

85 Howard, *The Reign of Æthelred II*, p.68.

86 Thietmar, *Chronicon*, p.336.

87 Howard, *The Reign of Æthelred II*, pp.68; 70.

88 Thietmar, *Chronicon*, p.336; also, the reference to Edmund defending the kingdom valiantly during his lifetime in ASC, MSS. D, E and F, 1016, pp.148-9. Athelstan's supposed involvement in this campaign is discussed in Chapter Three.

89 Thietmar, *Chronicon*, p.336

90 Thietmar, *Chronicon*, p.336. The relationship between Edmund and Athelstan will be discussed more fully in Chapter Three, and their military engagements in Chapter Five.

Thietmar's single use of the word *Britanni* (the British) is unlikely to be a substitute for 'Angli' (the English), which he uses five times.<sup>91</sup> The *ASC* does not corroborate Thietmar's reference to the Welsh, and the Welsh sources are equally taciturn on the matter.<sup>92</sup> Only some of Thietmar's portrayals of Edmund agree with those in the *ASC*: as ætheling; patriot; and resistance leader. More significantly, Edmund's image is augmented by Thietmar's depiction of him as Emma's devoted son but also the target of her treachery. Thietmar is also unique in having Edmund die before the liberation of London. On some issues Thietmar's narrative is demonstrably unreliable but his account of English affairs should not be dismissed. Certain Scandinavian and Anglo-Norman sources contain potentially corroborative material to support Thietmar's contention of British participation in the relief of London.<sup>93</sup>

#### **2:4 Late Contemporary Sources**

##### *Encomium Emmae Reginae*

The corpus of closely contemporary sources concerning Edmund is supplemented by two later eleventh-century narratives. They make a valuable contribution by increasing the ways in which Edmund is presented. The first of these narratives is Book II of the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*. From the Prologue of the *Encomium* it is evident that it was commissioned by Queen Emma and written by a monk (or former monk) of St Bertin, in St Omer, Flanders, between the return of Edward (later the Confessor) to England but before the death of Harthacnut in June 1042.<sup>94</sup> The

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91 Poole, *Skaldic Verse*, p.294.

92 Edmund's possible association with the Welsh will be discussed in Chapter 5:6.

93 This will be discussed more fully in Chapter 5:6.

94 For authorship and dating, see *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, ed. and trans. A. Campbell, Camden Third Series,

possibility that it may have been written in Flanders is acknowledged by Keynes but he advises against dismissing the possibility that it was written in England by 'a Flemish monk who had entered into Queen Emma's service'.<sup>95</sup>

The 'Argument' of the *Encomium* is devoted 'entirely to the praise of the Queen'.<sup>96</sup> Taking this declaration at face value, Alistair Campbell concluded that the work was commissioned 'purely for the personal gratification of Emma and her relatives'.<sup>97</sup> Keynes disagrees, doubting that Emma would have allowed the Encomiast to 'pander to her own sense of vanity and self esteem', believing instead that the work was created to 'serve a particular political or polemical purpose'.<sup>98</sup> In the opinion of Stafford, Emma, to secure her 'precarious, threatened and difficult'<sup>99</sup> position, commissioned the *Encomium* to provide 'a specific justification and explanation of her actions geared to circumstances'.<sup>100</sup> A similar evaluation of the *Encomium* was given by Keynes, arguing that it was written as much for Emma's benefit as it was to remind those in power of the circumstances under which Danish rule had been established, and to announce that Emma 'stood for the furtherance of Cnut's political intentions' which she had also demonstrated by supporting the succession of her son Harthacnut.<sup>101</sup>

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Vol. LXXII (London, 1949), pp.xx-xxi.

95 S. Keynes., 'Introduction to the 1998 Reprint' in *Encomium*, ed. A. Campbell (Cambridge, 1998), pp.xi-lxxxvii, at p.lxix.

96 *Encomium*, p.7.

97 Campbell, *Encomium*, p.xxi.

98 Keynes, 'Introduction', p.lxix.

99 Stafford, *Queen Emma*, p.29.

100 Stafford, *Queen Emma*, p.39 .

101 Keynes, 'Introduction', p.lxxi; for a review of the various arguments relating to the purpose of the *Encomium* see pp.lxvii-lxviii.

Because of the highly politicised nature of the work, suggests Keynes, one could easily dismiss the *Encomium* as 'a thoroughly unreliable and tendentious piece of work'. To do so however, advises Keynes, would deprive oneself of its merits.<sup>102</sup> The *Encomium* is independent of, and complementary to, the *ASC* and although its account of the campaigns of 1016 is thought to be disappointing in detail,<sup>103</sup> the *Encomium* does provide a 'contemporary impression of Cnut's rule, and an inside view of English politics in the immediate aftermath of Cnut's death'.<sup>104</sup> Unlike other contemporary sources for Edmund Ironside, the *Encomium* is distinctive for being in Latin and containing classical allusions drawn from a wide range of Latin authors, in order to moralise.

Most prevalent are references to Vergil's *Aeneid* which, in the opinion of Elizabeth Tyler, was favoured by the Encomiast to draw parallels between Cnut and Æneas, as founders of dynasties on foreign soil.<sup>105</sup> The *Encomium* is also significant for its writer initiating a discussion concerning the relationship between those parts of the work that are admittedly fictional and those that are historically accurate. In the twelfth-century, suggests Tyler, the Encomiast's incipient debate became 'powerful conceptual arguments' for the validity of literary invention.<sup>106</sup> When reading the *Encomium*, and the Anglo-Norman narratives, the possibility that fiction might be represented as fact must be considered, and efforts made to distinguish one from the other.

The treatment of Edmund in the *Encomium* is complimentary almost as much as it is critical. The near balance is evident in the account of the Battle of Sherston. Although he is not named, the initiative of selecting the battle site can be attributed to Edmund who commanded the English

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102 Keynes, 'Introduction', p.lxvi.

103 Keynes, 'Introduction', p.lvi.

104 Keynes, 'Introduction', p.lxvi.

105 E. Tyler, 'Talking about history in eleventh-century England: the *Encomium Emmae Reginae* and the court of Harthacnut', *Early Medieval Europe*, 13, No.4 (2000), pp.359-83, at p.362.

106 Tyler, 'Talking about history', p.363.

army already assembled at Sherston.<sup>107</sup> Edmund's foresight is countered however by reporting him defeated. Contrary to the *ASC*, the faltering Danes renewed their attack and ultimately gained the victory.<sup>108</sup> This alternative, and unique, account is exceeded by the *Encomiast's* mistake of placing the battle (fought after midsummer) before Cnut's arrival at London, which the *ASC* dates to the beginning of May, 1016. The *Encomiast* continues to omit Edmund's name from his narrative when he records that after the Battle of Sherston, England's chief men and a large part of the English army are said to have fled to London. As with Ottar's *Knútsdrápa*, the *Encomium* must be scrutinised closely for what it discloses about Edmund.

Anonymity is also bestowed upon Edmund in the *Encomiast's* account of how he left London. One must infer that Edmund is the 'son of the deceased prince' who leaves the city by night with part of the city's garrison.<sup>109</sup> Uniquely, Edmund's escape made Cnut fear that the city would be besieged and his enemies within would deliver him to those without.<sup>110</sup> In leaving London to assemble a large army to expel Cnut,<sup>111</sup> Edmund is simultaneously depicted as a military leader and patriot. The strength of Edmund's resistance is also indicated by the *Encomiast's* report of his unceasing efforts to win the support of nearly all those who had not inclined to Cnut.<sup>112</sup>

Edmund's ability as a military leader is enhanced when the *Encomiast* speaks of the English army he raised to relieve London as 'not inconsiderable but immense'.<sup>113</sup> So great is the Londoners' adulation for Edmund, claims the *Encomiast*, they declare him their choice for leader,

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107 *Encomium*, p.21.

108 *Encomium*, p.21.

109 *Encomium*, p.23.

110 *Encomium*, p.23.

111 *Encomium*, p.22. This account of Edmund's escape has strong parallels to that by Thietmar, above.

112 *Encomium*, p.23.

113 *Encomium*, p.20.

rather than Cnut.<sup>114</sup> The exhortation by the Londoners for Edmund to be a 'bold man' (*virum fortem*)<sup>115</sup> is perhaps an early reference to the characteristic for which Edmund later received his sobriquet 'Ironsides'. The *Encomium* is the earliest primary source to have Edmund challenge Cnut to single combat, putatively issued as Edmund re-occupied London. Rebuked by Cnut for wanting to fight in winter, Edmund is made to look foolish.<sup>116</sup>

The *Encomium*, like the *ASC*, is critical of Edmund's behaviour towards Eadric *Streona*. Although described as a deceitful double-dealer,<sup>117</sup> Eadric is also Edmund's foremost advisor whom he allegedly valued hearing in all business.<sup>118</sup> In reporting his attentiveness to Eadric, the *Encomiast* implies that Edmund was unwise to give preference to a duplicitous counsellor. The *Encomiast* is selective and does not record Edmund accepting the submission of Eadric at Aylesford, for which Edmund was criticised in the *ASC*. Edmund's achievement in gathering a great army to defeat Cnut by means of a surprise attack<sup>119</sup> is diminished by the *Encomiast* who has the Danes learn of his plans and intercept the English at *Assandun*.<sup>120</sup> The competence of Edmund as a military leader is also made questionable by the *Encomiast* recording that the English lost, despite retaining numerical superiority after the desertion of Eadric and his

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114 *Encomium*, p.25.

115 *Encomium*, p.24.

116 For a discussion of the likelihood of single combat in the *Encomium* see C. E. Wright, *The Cultivation of Saga in Anglo-Saxon England* (Edinburgh, 1939), pp.178-212. Edmund's challenge to single combat will be discussed in Chapter Five.

117 *Encomium*, p.24.

118 *Encomium*, p.24.

119 *Encomium*, p.25.

120 *Encomium*, p.25.



followers.<sup>121</sup> Further calumny may be said to befall Edmund when the English flee the battlefield and Edmund is stigmatised as 'the fugitive prince'.<sup>122</sup>

A new attribute is acquired by Edmund at the hands of the Encomiast who presents him as an orator, and instances of Edmund's personal bravery at *Assandun* are provided. Edmund is recorded exhorting the fyrd to fight for their freedom and their country and, advancing upon the middle of the enemy, Edmund is described felling the Danes on every side.<sup>123</sup> Edmund's tenacious opposition to the Danes is exemplified when, although retiring from the field, he intends to assemble a 'powerful multitude' should chance give him 'the advantage to succeed'.<sup>124</sup> One might also detect an element of despair amongst the English who, according to the Encomiast, consulted amongst themselves and sought the assistance of God<sup>125</sup> to put an end to their many defeats; an assertion not corroborated by the *ASC*.

The apparent reluctance of the Encomiast to credit Edmund with the status of a king is exemplified in the opening of the peace negotiations. The English messengers salute Cnut as 'king' but refer to Edmund as their 'prince' (*princeps*).<sup>126</sup> Uniquely, Edmund is portrayed possessing the advantages of time and resources. The Encomiast has Cnut admit to himself that he has suffered heavy casualties and cannot replace the losses. Cnut also confesses that the English, despite their heavy losses, were better able to replace their numbers.<sup>127</sup> Confronted by the possibility that Edmund could win the war by attrition, Cnut consents to Edmund's peace

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121 *Encomium*, p.27.

122 *Encomium*, p.26.

123 *Encomium*, p.24.

124 *Encomium*, p.27.

125 *Encomium*, p.28; also, *ASC*, MS. D, p.152.

126 *Encomium*, pp.28-9.

127 *Encomium*, p.31.

proposals. Nevertheless, an attempt is made to show Edmund inferior to Cnut, by having him pay Cnut's army for his half of the kingdom.<sup>128</sup>

In his account of Edmund's death, the *Encomiast* asserts that God, mindful that a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand long, took Edmund to prevent the possibility that if he and Cnut lived neither would rule securely, the country being continually wasted by conflict.<sup>129</sup> Edmund is depicted as a sacrificial lamb but the *Encomiast* does not explain why Edmund was chosen to forfeit his life for the benefit of the country. Honour is given to Edmund in being buried in a 'royal tomb'<sup>130</sup> and his immense popularity is evident in the degree, and the duration in which he was mourned, the English 'weeping bitterly for a long time'.<sup>131</sup>

The *Encomiast* presents Edmund as an *ætheling*, a warrior and a patriot but Edmund is also shown betrayed and to be a poor judge of Eadric's character. There are also new portrayals of Edmund: his initiative and popularity are emphasised; he is an orator; he displays bravery and is religious. The latter quality may reflect the inclinations of the monastically trained *Encomiast*. Other innovative depictions are unflattering: Edmund appears foolish in issuing single combat; on occasion he is a fugitive; references to his kingly status are suppressed; he suffers serial defeats; his ability as a commander is traduced and he loses God's favour. On the few occasions when the *Encomiast* refers to an incident also recorded in the *ASC*, such as the battle of Sherston, or the siege of London, it is to the discredit of Edmund. This conforms to the *Encomiast's* intention of glorifying the Danes but so too does the acknowledgement of Edmund's martial prowess and respect shown to him in death, which demonstrate Cnut's magnanimity in victory and arguably his intention to rule English and Dane impartially.

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128 *Encomium*, p.31; also *ASC*, MSS. D, E and F, pp.152-3

129 *Encomium*, p.31.

130 *Encomium*, p.30.

131 *Encomium*, p.31.

The History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen of Adam of Bremen

The second of the later eleventh-century sources is Book II of the *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen (HAHB)* by the German canon, Adam of Bremen. Internal evidence from the *History* allows for it to be dated approximately: Chapter xxvi records that Swein Estrithson is alive<sup>132</sup> but in Chapter xliii Swein is referred to as 'long-to-be remembered',<sup>133</sup> suggesting that Adam learned of Swein's death on 28 April, 1074 and must therefore have been writing Book II the same year.<sup>134</sup> If this estimation is correct, enough time had elapsed between the events of 1015-16, and Adam's account of them, for facts to be distorted and fictions created.

As the author of one of the oldest sources for early Scandinavian history, Adam was accorded a central position by Timothy Reuter<sup>135</sup> but *HAHB* must not be read uncritically. Although Adam was exceptionally well informed about Scandinavian history and contemporary Scandinavian politics,<sup>136</sup> his laconic account of Edmund is mostly inaccurate and unreliable. Adam's succinct account of events in 1016 begins unreliably with Æthelred dying while London was besieged<sup>137</sup> and Edmund's election as king is not reported. Adam's reliability is further undermined by him identifying Edmund incorrectly as Æthelred's brother.<sup>138</sup> The mistake is most probably the result

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132 Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, trans. F. J. Tschan (New York, 2002), p.72.

133 *HAHB*, p.84.

134 F. J. Tschan, 'Introduction', in *HAHB*, p.xxvii.

135 T. Reuter, 'Introduction to the 2002 Edition', in *HAHB*, p.xi.

136 Reuter, 'Introduction', in *HAHB*, p.xi.

137 *HAHB*, p.91.

138 *HAHB*, p.92.

of Adam confusing Edmund Ironside with Æthelred's deceased older brother, also called Edmund.<sup>139</sup>

Adam of Bremen contributes to the study of Edmund by being the first to present his death as the result of unnatural causes, recording that Edmund was removed by poison to favour the victor.<sup>140</sup> In doing so, Adam indirectly portrays Edmund as an unsuccessful military leader and vanquished enemy. Edmund's alleged poisoning further suggests that he was perceived as a threat to Cnut and was accordingly eliminated. This account of Edmund's demise is contentious.<sup>141</sup> Despite doubts about Adam's treatment of English affairs in 1016, when he describes Edmund as 'the war-like man' Adam is in agreement with earlier commentators that Edmund was pugnacious.<sup>142</sup> From this concise description one can infer several representations of Edmund found in earlier sources: the patriot and resistance fighter, but viewed collectively, the highly selective, and erroneous, account of Edmund makes Adam of Bremen's version of English events fundamentally unreliable.

Commented [David McD36]: 'dubeity' changed to 'doubts about'.

## **2:5 Anglo-Norman Narratives**

Written after the social and political upheaval of 1066, the histories produced in the twelfth century have been characterized by Stafford as an attempt to 'preserve, celebrate and explain' the English past 'which was more than a prelude to 1066'.<sup>143</sup> The twelfth-century historians inevitably

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139 For this Edmund's brief life see ASC, MSS. A and E, pp.118-9; R. Lavelle, *Æthelred II: King of the English 978-1016* (Stroud, 2002), pp.30; 34; 36; and Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, pp.1-2; 8.

140 *HAB*, p.92.

141 The various reports of Edmund's death will be discussed in Chapter 5:8.

142 *HAB*, p.92.

143 P. Stafford, *Unification and Conquest: A Political and Social History of England in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries* (London, 1989), p.20.

repeat some of what appears in the earlier sources but they occasionally provide further detail concerning a particular incident, or fresh information concerning Edmund's actions and attitudes. The extent to which these innovations can be relied upon is a central issue that will be explored throughout the treatment of the twelfth-century sources. The Anglo-Norman narratives are also characterised by a tendency to fictionalise their accounts. This can make the reliability of these sources questionable but the twelfth-century historians' employment of literary techniques and tropes is considered by Nancy Partner to have been 'a beneficent and welcome mediator between boredom and historical narrative'.<sup>144</sup> The Anglo-Norman historians' tendency to ornament their narratives is also explained by Luke Reinsma as the writers' response to the expectations of patrons and readers; the ability of an author to 'embellish, amplify and digress in illuminating and amusing ways' was held to be more valuable than focusing on the truth.<sup>145</sup> Partner and Reinsma may be correct in their assessment of the temperament and concerns of twelfth-century writers and audiences, but the fictions of the Anglo-Normans are a problem for determining the truth about Edmund Ironside.

Commented [David McD37]: 'but' deleted.

#### The *De Gesta Regum Anglorum* of William of Malmesbury

The earliest complete twelfth-century narrative to mention Edmund Ironside is Book II of *De Gesta Regum Anglorum* (*GRA*) by the Anglo-Norman monk William of Malmesbury, written circa 1125.<sup>146</sup> One of the sources used by William was identified by W. Stubbs as the

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144 N. F. Partner, *Serious Entertainments: The Writing of History in Twelfth-Century England* (Chicago and London, 1977), p.3.

145 L. Reinsma, 'Review of *Serious Entertainments*', *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 11, No.3 (1981), pp.155-60., at p.157.

146 For an account of William's lineage see R. M. Thomson, *William of Malmesbury* (Woodbridge, 2003), p.4; for the dating of the narrative, see pp.6-7.

*Peterborough Chronicle* (MS. E),<sup>147</sup> and he conjectured that William may have had access to 'other editions and continuations' of the *ASC* that are no longer extant.<sup>148</sup> Some references to Edmund, unique to the *GRA*, may be the product of those lost recensions or they might derive from what Keynes believes to have exerted the greatest influence on William: 'his own fertile imagination'.<sup>149</sup> William's erudition<sup>150</sup> and awareness of the contradictions and inconsistencies of his sources<sup>151</sup> have earned him plaudits from modern historians; Stafford describes him as 'the greatest of the twelfth century historians'.<sup>152</sup> Despite the scope of his reading and alleged critical approach to his sources, William is fallible. Antonia Gransden argues that 'he made mistakes and...was sometimes excessively biased'.<sup>153</sup> One of those mistakes is illustrated by his citation of a diploma of Æthelred dated to 1004.<sup>154</sup> According to Keynes, it 'clearly refers to the massacre of St. Brice's Day in 1002'<sup>155</sup> when the Danes of Oxford were burnt alive inside St. Frideswide's church. William mistakenly believed that the diploma referred to the burning of Sigeferth and

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147 For a comprehensive identification of William's sources see W. Stubbs, 'Preface', in *Willelmi Malmesbiriensis Monachi: De Gestis Regum Anglorum*, Rolls Series 90, Vol. 1, ed. W. Stubbs (London, 1887), pp.xx-xxi.

148 Stubbs, 'Preface', in *Willelmi Malmesbiriensis Monachi*, Rolls Series 91, Vol. 2, ed. W. Stubbs (London, 1889), p.cxxviii.

149 Keynes, 'Declining Reputation', p.288.

150 On the extent of William's reading see Thomson, *William*, pp.40-75.

151 Stafford, *Unification*, p.21.

152 Stafford, *Unification*, p.20.

153 A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c. 550 to 1307* (London, 1974), p.176.

154 P. H. Sawyer., *Anglo-Saxon Charters. An Annotated List and Bibliography*; Royal Society Guides and Handbooks 8 (London, 1968), no.909; also, Whitelock, *EHD*, pp.545-7.

155 Keynes, 'Declining Reputation', p238.

Morcar's followers in 1015.<sup>156</sup> Keynes also defined the depths to which William employed his imagination to criticise Æthelred, the man, by fabricating vices including 'lethargy, wilful violence...loose living, and...arrogance'.<sup>157</sup> William of Malmesbury's character assassination of Æthelred may be said to have influenced generations of historians who accepted William's opinions uncritically.

If William's errors and fabrications were confined to his accounts of the early eleventh century, his reliability as an historian might remain intact but there is evidence that his treatment of later events in Anglo-Saxon history is also blighted by subjectivity. William understood the political significance of Emma's marriage to Cnut, intended to pacify the English who, already accustomed to submitting their obedience to Emma, might better accept Danish rule.<sup>158</sup> Stafford argued however that 'the Emma who predominates in Malmesbury's judgements was never truly English'<sup>159</sup> before or after her marriage to Cnut. This is demonstrated by William having Æthelred reject Emma,<sup>160</sup> scarcely allowing her to visit the royal bedroom,<sup>161</sup> the king preferring the company of a mistress. Emma is also criticised by William as a 'disgrace' for marrying Cnut, who had 'harassed her husband and exiled her sons.'<sup>162</sup>

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156 *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, Vol. 1, ed. and trans. R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom (Oxford, 1998), p.311.

157 Keynes, 'Declining Reputation', p.288.

158 *GRA*, p.322.

159 Stafford, *Queen Emma*, p.17.

160 Stafford, *Queen Emma*, p.17.

161 *GRA*, p.277.

162 *GRA*, p.319.

Furthermore, it is maintained by Stafford, William depicted Emma as 'a clear partisan of Harthacnut and her Danish family in 1035'.<sup>163</sup> Stafford does not accuse William of fabricating details to divorce Emma from her English identity<sup>164</sup> but his presentation of her might reflect wider criticism current among early twelfth-century historians struggling to account for the regime change in 1066, and for whom Emma was 'firmly linked with the Normans and the Conquest'.<sup>165</sup> It would be prudent, therefore, to consider the possibility that William forged a particular identity for Edmund, influenced perhaps by Henry II's marriage to Matilda, a great grand daughter of Edmund. This treatment, in turn, may have affected the presentation of Cnut's succession.

#### The Chronicle of John of Worcester

Completed approximately fifteen years after *GRA*, the *Chronicle of John of Worcester (JW)* is described by R. R. Darlington as 'a world history extending from the beginning of mankind to 1140' when the main manuscript ends imperfectly.<sup>166</sup> *JW* is a continuation of the world chronicle of the Irish anchorite Marianus, completed in 1076.<sup>167</sup> John might have begun his chronicle on the instruction of Bishop Wulfstan of Worcester, who ordered the transcription of the Marianus chronicle and, according to Orderic Vitalis, the grafting on of an English chronicle.<sup>168</sup> The inclusion of material that is unique to John of Worcester raises the possibility that he may have had access to additional, reliable information unavailable to other writers. Michael Lapidge

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<sup>163</sup> Stafford, *Queen Emma*, p.17.

<sup>164</sup> Stafford, *Queen Emma*, p.17.

<sup>165</sup> Stafford, *Queen Emma*, p.16.

<sup>166</sup> *JW*, p.xvii.

<sup>167</sup> *JW*, p.xviii.

<sup>168</sup> *JW*, p.xix.



surmises that one of John of Worcester's sources was a now-lost Latin chronicle, itself based on a lost version of the *ASC*, which contained information relevant to a Worcester audience.<sup>169</sup>

*JW* portrays Edmund in the recurring roles of indomitable military leader, fugitive, liberator and the victim of betrayal. These images are augmented by John's emphasis of Edmund's right to rule and the portrayal of Edmund as a skilled military tactician and inspiring orator when addressing his armies. Edmund's alleged accomplishments in the art of rhetoric may be the product of literary invention and borrowing, as might be the detailed descriptions of Edmund's battles.<sup>170</sup> John of Worcester's narrative is also valuable for its unique accounts of a double election in 1016, which may be explained as the duplication of material but might also have a basis in fact.<sup>171</sup> Credence might also be attached to reports of English opposition to Edmund's kingship resulting in armed conflict, indicating divisions amongst the Anglo-Saxon nobility.<sup>172</sup> John of Worcester's narrative must be examined in the context of the literary tradition in which it was written and subjected to careful scrutiny in order to determine its credibility.

#### The *Historia Anglorum* of Henry of Huntingdon<sup>173</sup>

Gransden believed that the *Historia Anglorum* (*HA*), of the Archdeacon Henry of Huntingdon, to be 'the most ambitious [historical] work' of the early twelfth century.<sup>174</sup> It has been calculated that

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169 M. Lapidge, 'Byrhtferth and Oswald', in *St Oswald of Worcester: Life and Influence*, ed. N. Brooks and C. Cubitt (London, 1996), pp.64-83, at p.78. Also, C. Hart, 'The Early Section of the Worcester Chronicle', *Journal of Medieval History*, 19, No.4 (1983), pp.251-315.

170 John of Worcester's treatment of Edmund's battles will be discussed in Chapter 5:6.

171 The double election of 1016 will be discussed in Chapter 5:5.

172 The value of *JW* regarding English dissent will be discussed in Chapter 5:6.

173 The 'Historia Regem Anglorum', in *Simeonis Monachi Opera Omnia*, Vol. I, ed. T. Stubbs (London, 1885), pp.146-55, has not been included as its presentation of Edmund Ironside is an almost verbatim copy of *JW*.

the commencement of the *HA* postdates Bishop Alexander's appointment to Lincoln in 1123.<sup>175</sup>

Several versions of the *HA* were written by Henry, the first concluding with the year 1129. Henry continued to write at various times between 1129 to 1154, but died before he could write about the reign of Henry II.<sup>176</sup>

Commented [David McD38]: 'Henry' capitalised.

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Henry of Huntingdon, like his contemporary William of Malmesbury, was affected in general by romance literature, which exercised an increasing influence on historical writing in this period.<sup>177</sup> Henry of Huntingdon's literary embellishments were also the result, argues Partner, of the demands of Henry's sophisticated patron Bishop Alexander who, it is argued, believed that 'literary ornaments in an amplified, dignified style built over a basic, plausible narrative' would be more appropriate to a man of his status and cultivation.<sup>178</sup> The effect of romance literature on the *HA*, according to Gransden, is less pervasive than in some narratives of the period<sup>179</sup> but perhaps the most prevalent influence of romance literature on Henry's narrative, for the purpose of this study, is the emphasis on Edmund's personal qualities and the attention given to the dramatic depiction of warfare.

#### The *Estoire des Engles* of Geoffrei Gaimar

Another Anglo-Norman narrative influenced by Romance literature is the French vernacular narrative *Estoire des Engles (EE)* by Geoffrei Gaimar. This is a problematic source for discovering the truth about Edmund Ironside because it contains uncorroborated and, some have

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174 Gransden, *Historical Writing*, p.193.

175 *Historia Anglorum*, ed. and trans. D. Greenway (Oxford, 1996), p.lxvii.

176 For a detailed chronology of its composition, see *HA*, pp. lxvi–lxxvii.

177 Gransden, *Historical Writing*, p.186.

178 Partner, *Serious Entertainments*, p.16.

179 Gransden, *Historical Writing*, p.187.

argued, fanciful details. Commissioned by the fitzGilberts of Lincolnshire, Gaimar's narrative has been dated by Ian Short to circa 1136-37.<sup>180</sup> The extant version of the text begins in the year 495 and ends with the death of William II in 1100. The major source of Gaimar's narrative is generally considered to be a recension of the *ASC* different from the surviving manuscripts.<sup>181</sup> The *EE* does not identify the *Chronicle* as one of its sources, but C. T. Martin conjectured that the *History of Winchester*, mentioned by Gaimar, was a copy of the *ASC* kept at Winchester.<sup>182</sup> Martin speculated further that Gaimar's reference to the *English book of Washingborough* may have been a copy of the *ASC* kept at Peterborough.<sup>183</sup> Short identified the version of the *ASC* used by Gaimar as the 'Northern Recension',<sup>184</sup> elements of which can be found in MSS. D and E. Parallels can be established between Gaimar's work and that of contemporary historians but it cannot be demonstrated that Gaimar borrowed directly from them.<sup>185</sup>

The reliability of Gaimar's narrative has divided modern historians. C. E. Wright argued that Gaimar's narrative exhibited instances of fiction,<sup>186</sup> and Martin believed that Gaimar was 'strongly' tempted to elaborate, which necessarily makes suspect 'all the additions to...the *Chronicle*.'<sup>187</sup> Short also adds the caveat that one must assume that Gaimar incorporated 'popular,

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180 I. Short, 'Introduction', in *Geoffrei Gaimar: Estoire des Engles/History of the English* (Oxford, 2009), p.xxvii.

181 For a comparison of how the *EE* differs from the *ASC* see the 'Preface' in *Lestoire des Engles solum la translacion Maistre Geoffrei Gaimar*, Vol. II, ed. T. D. Hardy and C. T. Martin (London, 1889), p.xxiii.

182 Martin, 'Preface', p.xvii.

183 Martin, 'Preface', p.xix.

184 Short, 'Introduction', p.ix. For a consideration of the origins and purpose of the Northern Recension, see Stafford, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles', pp.43-50.

185 Short, 'Introduction', p.xxxix.

186 Wright, *Cultivation of Saga*, pp.193; 203-5.

187 Martin, 'Preface', p.xxiv.

probably saga traditions<sup>188</sup> in his accounts of the reigns of Æthelred and Cnut, which includes the reign of Edmund Ironside. C. W. Hollister was more vociferous in his criticism, castigating Gaimar's narrative as 'altogether unreliable'.<sup>189</sup> More generously, Gransden commented that Gaimar was 'an inaccurate writer'<sup>190</sup> but acknowledged that some of his claims, such as that William II was murdered, is given credence by some historians.<sup>191</sup> When considering Gaimar's account of Edmund, it may be prudent therefore not to dismiss the narrative entirely.

In defence of Gaimar, Short dismissed modern criticism as irrelevant, founded upon the erroneous assumption that 'accuracy and reliability...were...Gaimar's aims'.<sup>192</sup> Even with its mistakes in chronology, factual errors and literary fictions, argues Short, the *EE* is 'in general a conscientious historical narrative'.<sup>193</sup> When reading Gaimar's account of Edmund Ironside one should strive to separate historical fact from literary fancy.

### **2:6 An Assessment of Edmund in the Anglo-Norman Narratives**

When assessing the portrayal of Edmund Ironside in the Anglo-Norman narratives it is essential to estimate the influence romance literature may have exercised on the imagination of the

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188 Short, 'Introduction', p.xxix.

189 C. W. Hollister, *Henry I* (New Haven and London, 2001), p.103.

190 Gransden, *Historical Writing*, p.212.

191 Gransden, *Historical Writing*, p.212. Also, A. L. Poole, *From Domesday Book to Magna Carta* (Oxford, 1951), pp.113-14.

192 Short, 'Introduction'. p.xiv.

193 Short, 'Introduction', p.ix. For others who value the work of Gaimar, see J. Gillingham, 'Gaimar, the Prose *Brut* and the Making of English History', in *The English in the Twelfth Century: Imperialism, National Identity and Political Values* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp.113-22; also, E. Mason, *William II Rufus, the Red King* (Strood, 2005) and R. Field, 'Romance as History, History as Romance' in *Romance in Medieval England*, ed. M. Mills *et al* (Cambridge, 1991), pp.164-73.

twelfth-century writers, leading them to incorporate in their texts elements of fiction, which need to be disentangled from fact. In addition to the possibility of fabrication, it is also important to consider that details unique to a particular narrative might be the result of the writer having access to a source that was unavailable to their contemporaries. The evaluation of Edmund in the Anglo-Norman narratives is complicated further by the existence of contradictory accounts, requiring rigorous scrutiny of each version to establish its credibility.

Some of the clearest examples of literary invention may be found in the work of Geoffrey Gaimar, who implausibly has Edmund conduct a campaign in alliance with his dead uncle against Cnut, and has Edmund married to Welsh princess.<sup>194</sup> References to single combat between Edmund and Cnut, which are made by several of the twelfth-century historians, are also probably without foundation, but may have been included to satisfy audiences' expectations of dramatic and entertaining conflict between the main characters.<sup>195</sup>

Accounts of Edmund's death also indicate the creativity of the Anglo-Norman historians. The several versions of Edmund's demise share the elements of Eadric, privies and sharp implements, suggesting a common source and with each retelling Edmund's death becomes more gruesome.<sup>196</sup> In addition to borrowing from folkloric sources, some twelfth-century historians also included in their work allusions to Latin authors. This is particularly evident in John of Worcester, who gives Edmund the attributes of a good general, and an orator at the battles of Sherston and *Asandun*, but these accounts are virtually verbatim reproductions of passages from Sallust, which may diminish their reliability.<sup>197</sup>

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194 *EE*, p.231, Ll. 4212 and 4222.

195 *GRA*, p.317; *HA*, p.361; *EE*, p.233, Ll. 4265-9.

196 *GRA*, p.319; *H*, p.361; *EE*, p.241, Ll. 4410-4223.

197 *JW*, p.487. John of Worcester's borrowing from classical authors will be discussed more fully in Chapter 5:6.

Details that are unique to a particular narrative may be the result of a writer consulting a sources not available to others, or genuine error. Unique to John of Worcester is his report of a double election at Southampton, where Edmund was repudiated. This may be fabrication but indications in other sources of English resistance to Edmund's rule suggest that John of Worcester had access to an unknown source.<sup>198</sup> Less reliable perhaps is his uncorroborated account of a battle at Otford.<sup>199</sup> William of Malmesbury, who visited Glastonbury and consulted its archives, may be more reliable for his singular report that Cnut visited Edmund's tomb and expressed fraternal affection for his erstwhile enemy.<sup>200</sup> There may also be an element of truth in Henry of Huntingdon's distinctive assertion that the liberation of London was achieved with the assistance of an elite troop.<sup>201</sup> References in other primary sources to a special contingent of warriors helping free London suggest that Henry employed a source not utilised by his contemporaries.<sup>202</sup>

Instances of contradiction are particularly problematic. Conflicting explanations of Edmund's motives for campaigning with Uhtred are provided by William of Malmesbury and John of Worcester. William has Edmund punishing rebellious towns but John reports Edmund's army was unwilling to engage the Danes.<sup>203</sup> Each must be carefully examined to determine its reliability. There is also dissent amongst those twelfth-century historians who record the place of Edmund death. John of Worcester has Edmund die in London but this may be a reiteration of an earlier

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198 *JW*, 484.

199 *JW*, p.490. The possibility of a battle at Otford will be discussed in Chapter Five.

200 *GRA*, p.331; *The Early History of Glastonbury: An Edition, translation and Study of William of Malmesbury's 'de Antiquitate Glastonie Ecclesie'* by John Scott (Woodbridge, 1981), pp. 132-3.

201 *HA*, p.356.

202 The siege and liberation of London will be discussed fully in Chapter 5:6.

203 *GRA*, p.313; *JW*, p.483. Edmund's campaign with Uhtred will be discussed in Chapter 5:4.

account by Herman the Archdeacon in his *De Miraculis S. Eadmundi*.<sup>204</sup> Herman finished his work in the early 1090s but the section containing the reference to the death of Edmund Ironside, according to Tom Licence, could have been written c.1070.<sup>205</sup> In contrast, Henry of Huntingdon records that Edmund was murdered in Oxford.<sup>206</sup> It is unlikely however that Edmund was in either city.<sup>207</sup> Differences between the texts such as these, and the task of resolving them, are a significant concern of this thesis.

King Æthelred's diplomas will prove valuable in discussing the nature of Æthelinghood, and Edmund's participation in royal business, in Chapter Three. The examination of Æthelinghood, and Edmund's relationship with his elder brother Athelstan, will be further elucidated by the discussion of the latter's will and Edmund's lease for Holcombe. The same documents will also facilitate the reconstruction, in Chapter Four, of the closest and more distant members of Edmund's social and political networks. In the same chapter, Edmund's diplomas will contribute to the consideration of Edmund's rebellion, and the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman narratives will be consulted when discussing Edmund's marriage. In Chapter Five, a full range of primary sources: English, Continental and Scandinavian, contemporary and Anglo-Norman, will be used to consider the latter phase of Edmund's Æthelinghood and his kingship. The consultation of diverse sources will allow for the investigation of Edmund accession, military campaigns, and the problems relating to his death and burial, to be investigated from multiple perspectives. Each will be scrutinised for bias, invention and credibility, to determine the truth as clearly as possible.

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204 Herman the Archdeacon and Goscelin of Saint-Bertin, *Miracles of St Edmund*, ed. Tom Licence, trans. Tom Licence with the assistance of Lynda Lockyer (Oxford, 2014), pp.26-9; *JW*, p.493;

205 *Miracles of St Edmund*, pp.lvii-lix.

206 *HA*, p.361.

207 Edmund's death will be discussed more fully in Chapter 5:8.

## Chapter Three

### Æthelinghood I: Family and Networks

Commented [David McD41]: Chapter re-titled to reflect incorporation of material from Ch.4

#### 3:1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold: firstly, to examine the family of Edmund Ironside and secondly, to consider those aspects of æthelinghood which have specific relevance for Edmund. To begin a biographical study of Edmund Ironside with the examination of his family is a decision determined partly by the paucity of sources available. In order to produce an image of Edmund that has less to do with him as a stereotype, but gives a better understanding of him as an individual, it has proven necessary to adopt a thematic approach, similar to that used by Sarah Foot in her biography of King Æthelstan. Edmund has been placed within the different structures of his life, and environments inhabited by others, whose actions and thoughts facilitate the construction of a more complete picture of Edmund's character, thereby making it possible to better address the issue of agency.

The first structure into which Edmund can be placed is that of his family; this is an environment where influences likely to have a significant effect on an individual most often occur. The examination of Edmund's life begins chronologically with his birth, then establishes the identity of his parents and Edmund's position in the family in relation to his brothers. The significance of Edmund's name is also considered. Thereafter the chapter opens out to consider Edmund's paternal family. To provide a rounded picture of Edmund's antecedents consideration will be given to Edmund's mother, and his maternal grand-father will also be discussed. The possible role played by Queen Ælfthryth in raising Edmund is investigated and Edmund's relationships with his siblings are discussed.



Beyond the structure of Edmund's family, the chapter examines his education and aspects of Æthelinghood with specific reference to Edmund. This includes the diplomatic language unique to the Æthelinghood of Edmund. The legal status of Æthelings and their acquisition of new legal rights in Edmund's generation are also considered. The possibility that some estates were transferred to successive generations of Æthelings is examined, as is the ability of Edmund and his brothers to hold land in common. The composition of an Ætheling's household, with specific reference to Edmund, is examined and compared to that of the king. The possibility that an Ætheling could possess a private household in their minority is also discussed. Consideration is also given to the Ætheling Edmund's associations beyond his household, and the significance of those connections will be assessed. Investigation of these topics is made possible primarily by consulting administrative documents, particularly diplomas and wills. The narrative sources already discussed are more concerned with the activities of the adult Edmund, and therefore make less of a contribution to the consideration of his early years.

### **3:2 Family**

#### **Edmund's Birth**

King Edmund II Ironside was the third known son of King Æthelred Unræd and his first wife, the daughter of Earl Thored of Northumbria. The earliest surviving document in which Edmund's name appears is a diploma of King Æthelred dated 993 but this may not necessarily be the year of his birth. Edmund's name appears after those of his brothers Athelstan and Ecgbert, but before his brother Eadred, whose names also appear for the first time.<sup>1</sup> The appearance of Eadred's name after that of Edmund's is an indication that he may have been the youngest of Æthelred's sons to attest in 993; this possibility, coupled with the fact that the name of a new Ætheling, Eadwig, does not appear

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<sup>1</sup> S 876.

Commented [David McD42]: New sentence added to indicate amended structure of Ch. 3.

in one of Æthelred's diplomas until 997,<sup>2</sup> suggests that the diploma of 993 may be a better indicator for dating the birth of Eadred than for Edmund.

Although the earliest extant evidence for Edmund's existence may not be a reliable source for determining the year of his birth, an approximate date, with a narrow range of variation, may be obtained. Simon Keynes estimates that for Æthelred to have four sons, and possibly some daughters by 993, he must have begun to have his family quite young.<sup>3</sup> Taking into consideration the deaths of influential men such as Bishop Æthelwold and Ealdorman Ælfhere, the disappearance of Queen Ælfthryth from the witness lists and Æthelred attaining his majority, Keynes calculates Æthelred's marriage to circa 985.<sup>4</sup> If correct, the æthelings Athelstan, Ecgbert, Edmund and Eadred were born within a period of eight years. Assuming that the children were born an equal amount of time apart, Edmund could have been born in 991; allowing for uneven dates between pregnancies, the most probable dates for Edmund's birth are 990x992. However, until the discovery of conclusive evidence, the year of Edmund's birth remains a matter of conjecture.

#### The Significance of Edmund's Name

The names given to the sons of Æthelred prior to him marrying Emma can, according to Pauline Stafford, be divided into two groups. The first group appears to be non-chronological, the names Athelstan and Ecgbert. The second group consists of the names of the four kings who ruled England consecutively from 940 until Æthelred's accession in 978: Edmund, Eadred, Eadwig and Edgar.<sup>5</sup>

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2 S 891.

3 Keynes, *Diplomas*, p.187, n. 116.

4 Keynes, 'Æthelred II (966x968- 1016)', in ODNB, [accessed 9<sup>th</sup> April, 2013]; also Lavelle, *Æthelred II*, p.45.

5 Stafford, *Queen Emma*, p.85; also Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*, p.28. Based on inconsistencies in the narratives of John of Worcester and Ailred of Reivaulx, Stafford argues that the non-sequential names of Æthelred's first two sons suggest the existence of an unknown first marriage, making them half-brothers to Edmund Ironside; *Queen Emma*,

The pattern can be seen to continue in the name given to Æthelred's first son by his second wife Emma: his seventh son, Edward, shared the same name as Æthelred's elder half-brother Edward the Martyr. A similar pattern is discernible in the names given to the first four children of Edmund Ironside's grand-daughter Queen Margaret and King Malcolm III of Scotland.<sup>6</sup>

Æthelred may have named his first two sons after kings who were significant for the success of the Wessex dynasty. Athelstan shared his name with the eldest son of King Æthelwulf; and the eldest son of Edward the Elder, King Æthelstan, the first West Saxon king to become king of all England. Æthelred's second son shares his name with King Ecgbert, the founder of the dynasty of West Saxon kings from which Æthelred was descended. For achieving the subjugation of Northumbria the ASC accorded to Ecgbert the title *Bretwalda* (wide ruler of Britain).<sup>7</sup> The ætheling Ecgbert, suggests Keynes, may have been named after his heroic ancestor because King Ecgbert 'destroyed the formidable Norse-Celtic alliance' at the battle of *Ellendun*.<sup>8</sup>

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p.66, n.3 and pp.72. Stafford acknowledges however that the royal burial given to the ætheling Athelstan argues for him being a full brother to Edmund. p.91 and n.116.

6 Their first son, Edward, shared his name with Margaret's father Edward the Exile; the second son, Edmund, shared his name her grandfather Edmund Ironside; the third son, Ethelred, had the same name as Margaret's great-grandfather Æthelred II, and the fourth son, Edgar, had the same name as Margaret's great-great-grandfather. A significant difference from the pattern of names given to Æthelred's children is that Queen Margaret's first four children were named in reverse chronological order; see also Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*, p.28, n.3. For the naming of Margaret's other two sons, Alexander and David, see S. P. Marrit, 'The Coincidences of Names, Anglo-Scottish Connections and Anglo-Saxon Society', *Scottish Historical Review*, 83, (2004), pp.150-70, at pp.167-70.

7 See ASC, MS. A. p.60. Heather Edwards believes the title of *Bretwalda* to be an exaggeration, as is the Chronicle's claim that Ecgbert controlled England south of the Humber; 'Ecgbert', in ODNB [accessed 24<sup>th</sup> April, 2013].

8 S. Keynes, 'Introduction', in *Alfred the Great: Asser's 'Life of King Alfred' and Other Contemporary Sources* (Harmondsworth, 1983), p.46; see also ASC, MSS. A and E, pp. 60-1.

Edmund Ironside shares his name with his uncle who died in infancy and his great-grandfather Edmund I.<sup>9</sup> King Æthelred may have named his third son in memory of his dead brother but it is also possible that Edmund Ironside was named after King Edmund I who fought at the battle of *Brunanburh*<sup>10</sup> and is remembered for several law codes concerned mainly with ecclesiastical reform and public order.<sup>11</sup> Despite conceding the East Midlands to Olaf Guthfrithson within a year of his accession, Edmund I regained the lost territories and two years later, in 944, he invaded Northumbria and removed the joint rulers of York from power.<sup>12</sup> In so doing, Edmund I reasserted the dominance of Wessex established by King Æthelstan. If Æthelred named his third son after Edmund I it may have been for his ancestor's military achievements rather than his contribution to the development of Anglo-Saxon law.

Stafford suggests that in naming his third son Edmund and his later sons after kings directly descended from King Edmund I, Æthelred was demonstrating a clear but narrow perception of the royal family's history, with Edmund I recognised as its significant progenitor.<sup>13</sup> Ryan Lavelle, in what may be considered a development of this idea, suggests that in naming his children after successive kings Æthelred may have been attempting to emphasise the legitimacy of his family.<sup>14</sup>

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9 In a private correspondence Lavelle suggests that Edward the Elder may have named Edmund I after St Edmund, King of East Anglia, whose territory Edward reclaimed from the Danelaw.

10 ASC, MS. A, pp.106-10.

11 Williams, 'Edmund I', in ODNB [accessed 23 April, 2013]. Edmund I is assigned a significant role in the accomplishments of the tenth-century Anglo-Saxon state by Alaric Trousdale: 'An Investigation of the Anglo-Saxon Political Situation during the Reign of King Edmund, 939-46 AD' (PhD thesis, Edinburgh University, 2007).

12 ASC, MSS. A and E, pp.110-1.

13 Stafford, *Queen Emma*, p.85.

14 Lavelle, *Æthelred II*, p.82.

### Edmund's Paternal Family

Edmund was the third known son of Æthelred, who was himself a third son of King Edgar. The lack of contemporary evidence makes the marital history of Edmund Ironside's grandfather problematic and there is some debate as to whether King Edgar had one or two relationships that produced children prior to his marriage to Ælfthryth in 964.<sup>15</sup> The eldest son known to have been born to Edgar was Edward, recognised as a saint within the lifetime of Æthelred and Edmund Ironside.<sup>16</sup> Ann Williams calculates the year of Edward's birth to be 962 or 963.<sup>17</sup> King Edgar's second child, and probably his only daughter,<sup>18</sup> was Eadgyth (Edith). She became a nun at Wilton and in death was the community's principal saint.<sup>19</sup>

The exact nature of King Edgar's conjugal relationships prior to marriage with Ælfthryth may not be transparent but they did produce a half-uncle for Edmund Ironside in Edward the Martyr and a half-aunt in St Eadgyth. The birth of Edmund Ironside's full uncle, also called Edmund, and the

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15 Ælfthryth is referred to as Edgar's queen in S 725; the marriage is recorded in the annal for 965 in *ASC*, MS. D, p.119.

16 Edward is first referred to as a saint in S 899 (AD 1001); also, S. Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults* (Cambridge, 1988), pp.44-50 and 154-75.

17 Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, pp.5-6. The approximate date of Edward's birth may be deduced from the contemporary description of him as an 'ungrown child' when King Edgar died on July 8, 975; *ASC*, MS. A, p.120.

18 For a discussion of the daughters who have been falsely attributed to King Edgar, see Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.185, n.24.

19 For contrasting opinions on the creation of St Edith's cult, see Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, pp.154-71; and S. Hollis, 'St Edith and the Wilton Community', in *Writing the Wilton Women: Goscelin's Legend of Edith and Liber Confortatorius*, ed. S. Hollis (Turnhout, 2004), pp. 245-80, at p.247 and n.9. While there is consensus that Eadgyth died aged twenty-three on 16 September, there is disagreement about the year of her death. Susan Ridyard's estimation that Eadgyth died between 984 and 987, placing her birth between 961 and 964, is supported by Williams; Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, pp.40-1 and n.125; and Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.4.

third child of King Edgar, may be deduced from his attestation of a diploma dated to 966, which suggests that Edmund may have been born that year.<sup>20</sup> Edmund Ironside's putative namesake did not live long but died in childhood, the *ASC* recording his death in 971 and his burial at Romsey Abbey.<sup>21</sup>

Only a couple of years may have separated the births of the short-lived Edmund and his younger sibling Æthelred: their names, and that of the elder half-brother Edward, are referred to in a genealogical tract dated to 969, which suggests that Æthelred was born between 966 and 969; Williams prefers the date of 968.<sup>22</sup> Æthelred himself became king when he was approximately ten years old, after the violent deposition of his half-brother Edward on 18 March, 978.<sup>23</sup>

A detailed examination of the reign of King Æthelred II is beyond the scope of this study but an indication of the social and political conditions which prevailed in Anglo-Saxon England in the period when Edmund Ironside was born, can be deduced from the laconic epitaph in the *ASC* for his father. Written with the benefit of hindsight and, as indicated previously, composed by a single author around the year 1022,<sup>24</sup> Æthelred's thirty-eight years on the throne are compressed into a

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20 S 745. Williams suggests that the grant of land to Ælfthryth in S 742 may mark the occasion of Edmund's birth;

*Æthelred the Unready*, p.156, n.2.

21 *ASC*, MS. A, p.118, and A. Williams, 'The speaking cross, the persecuted princess and the murdered earl: the early history of Romsey Abbey', *Anglo-Saxon* 1(2007), pp.221-38, at pp.3-6.

22 For the date and provenance of the genealogical tract see D. Dumville, 'The Anglian Collection of Royal Genealogies and Regnal Lists', *Anglo-Saxon England* 5 (1978), pp.23-50, at p.43; and Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.2.

23 *ASC*, MS. E, p.123. For a detailed discussion of the succession crisis of 975 which led to the election of Edward, the events surrounding his murder in 978, and the accession of Æthelred see Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, pp.6-14 and Lavelle, *Æthelred II*, pp.33-44.

24 See Chapter 2:1 above.

single sentence: 'He passed away on St George's day, after great toil and difficulties in his life'.<sup>25</sup> Whilst saying little, the epitaph alludes to much. The 'toil and difficulties' to which the chronicler refers are most probably a combined euphemism for the series of Viking raids which began in 980 at Southampton and, perhaps from the chronicler's perspective, culminated in the accession of Cnut and his displacement of the Cerdic dynasty in 1017. If Keynes is correct in his assertion that the record of Æthelred's reign was written with the knowledge that the West Saxon line of kings had been replaced by a foreign invader, the chronicler's perspective of events may have given emphasis to Viking activity 'to an artificial extent'.<sup>26</sup>

#### Edmund's Mother: Ælfgifu

Sources for the identification of Edmund Ironside's paternal antecedents are relatively plentiful and the reign of Æthelred II is one of the best documented of any Anglo-Saxon king, but sources for identifying Edmund's mother and her antecedents are comparatively few and disparate. Edmund's mother is not identified in any contemporary sources and most of the primary source materials relating to her are post-1066. The relative rarity of sources that refer to her caused Edward Freeman to remark that Æthelred's first marriage is 'shrouded in some obscurity'.<sup>27</sup> The earliest extant source to provide any indication of the origins of Edmund Ironside's mother is the *Prologus de Construccione Westmonasterii* of Sulcard of Westminster. Written circa 1080<sup>28</sup> the *Prologus*

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25 ASC, MSS. D and E, pp.148-9.

26 Keynes, 'Declining Reputation', p.223.

27 Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest*, Appendix, Note SS, p.673.

28 F. Barlow, *The Life of King Edward who Rests at Westminster Attributed to a Monk of St-Bertin* (Oxford, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1992), p.xxxvi and n.100.

describes Æthelred's first wife as having come from very noble stock (*ex nobilioribus Anglis*)<sup>29</sup> but he does not name her. The name of Edmund's mother was also unknown to William of Malmesbury who borrowed from Virgil's *Aeneid* to express his belief that her origins were hidden.<sup>30</sup> The name of Edmund's mother appears in a genealogical appendix, forming part of a nineteenth century edition of John of Worcester, wherein she is named 'Ælfgifu' and referred to as the mother of Athelstan, Eadwig, Eadgyth and Edmund, but its reliability should be questioned.<sup>31</sup>

Further information for the identification of Edmund's mother is furnished by the Benedictine monk Ailred of Rievaulx, writing in the mid twelfth-century. In his *Genealogia Regum Anglorum*, Ailred does not name Edmund's mother but identifies her as the daughter of Earl Thored (*filia Torethi nobilissimi comitis*).<sup>32</sup> There are persuasive reasons for accepting Ailred as a credible source: in his youth Ailred served as seneschal in the household of King David I of Scotland,<sup>33</sup> who

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29 Sulcard of Westminster, 'Prologus de Construccione Westmonasterii', ed. B. H. Scholz, *Traditio*, 20 (1984), pp.59-91, at p.89.

30 *GRA*, p.313 and n.1.

31 *The Chronicle of Florence of Worcester*, trans. T. Forester (London, 1854), p.442. In a private communication, Prof. Yorke has suggested that Æthelred's first wife may retrospectively have been given the English name of his Norman wife, Emma.

32 Ailred of Rievaulx, 'Genealogia Regum Anglorum', in *Historia Anglicanae Scriptores X*, ed. R. Twysden (London, 1652), Col.336, p.730. John of Worcester identified Edmund's mother as the daughter of Æthelberht *comes*, but no nobleman by that name is known; see John of Worcester, 'Genealogical Appendix', in *Florentii Wigornensis Chronicon ex Chronicis*, 2 Vols., ed. B. Thorpe (London, 1848-9), Vol.1 p.275. An *Æthelbirht dux* attests S 838, but Keynes believes this diploma to be spurious; *Diplomas*, pp.97, n.43; 101, n.53; 180, n.101 and p.239. Williams argues that the attestation is a mis-copying of Ealdorman Æthelweard; *Æthelred the Unready*, p.169, n.29.

33 D. N. Bell, 'Ailred of Rievaulx', in ODNB [accessed 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2013].



was a great-great-grandson of Æthelred II and his first wife.<sup>34</sup> Ailred was therefore in an advantageous position to receive reliable information regarding King David's maternal forebears. When the snippets of information about the identity of Edmund's mother contained in the narratives of John of Worcester and Ailred of Rievaulx are combined, as Keynes believes they should be, Æthelred's first wife, and the mother of Edmund Ironside, can be identified with some confidence as Ælfgifu, daughter of Earl Thored of Northumbria.<sup>35</sup>

In common with many king's wives in the Anglo-Saxon period, particularly first wives, the life of Ælfgifu is poorly documented.<sup>36</sup> The possibility that she may not have been consecrated, as suggested by Frank Barlow,<sup>37</sup> may also explain her absence from the attestations of Æthelred's diplomas; unlike King Edgar's wife Ælfthryth and Æthelred's second wife Emma, who were anointed queens, the status of Ælfgifu never exceeded that of being the wife of the king. It may also be the case, as suggested by Stafford and Keynes, that Ælfgifu's relative obscurity was the result of her being overshadowed by her formidable mother-in-law, and consecrated queen, Ælfthryth.<sup>38</sup>

Despite the paucity of documentation and her lack of queenly status, some impression of Ælfgifu may have been left in the contemporary record. Ælfgifu may be the Lady (*hlafdige*) referred to in the will of Brihtric and his wife Ælswith, to whom a bracelet worth thirty mancuses of gold and a stallion were bequeathed. The combination of the dating of the will to 975x987, and the imprecation that 'the Lady' exercise her authority to oversee the implementation of the arrangements of the will,

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34 King David's mother, Queen Margaret, was a grand daughter of Edmund Ironside and had married Malcolm III in 1067 after she, her siblings and her mother accepted Malcolm's offer of protection in Scotland; *ASC*, MS. D, p.201.

35 Keynes, *Diplomas*, p.187, n.118.

36 Lavelle, *Æthelred II*, p.82.

37 Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*; p.29.

38 Stafford, *Queen Emma*, p.216; and Keynes, 'Introduction' to *Encomium*, p.xvii, n.6.

make it probable that Ælfgifu is the Lady to whom the request is made.<sup>39</sup> In a later will, dated to 990x1001, Æthelgifu promised her Lady (*Hlafdian*) a bequest of thirty mancuses of gold.<sup>40</sup> Without a reference to her name the identity of the Lady mentioned in each will remains uncertain, but the dating of the wills and the high quality of the gifts make Ælfgifu a credible candidate to be that Lady, but one cannot rule out the possibility that in both cases the wills might be alluding to Ælfthryth.

Ælfgifu's marriage to Æthelred ended sometime around the turn of the millennium. She may have been Æthelred's wife when her youngest son Edgar attested a diploma in 1001 but in the following year Æthelred married Emma. Stafford's suggestion that Ælfgifu may have been repudiated to facilitate a political marriage of mutual benefit to England and Normandy has merit:<sup>41</sup> Viking fleets which attacked England in the 980s and 990s found refuge in Norman harbours; by marrying the sister of Duke Richard II of Normandy, Æthelred may have hoped that his brother-in-law would temper the favouritism he appeared to show towards Danish raiders.<sup>42</sup> Although a political marriage to the Duke of Normandy's sister would theoretically be advantageous to Æthelred, it is doubtful that Ælfgifu was repudiated in order to obtain it. Lavelle argues convincingly that had Ælfgifu been put aside, some disapproving account would have survived to tell of it. It is more probable, suggests Lavelle, that having given birth to at least nine children, Ælfgifu died from medical issues related to

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39 S 1511. As indicated by Lavelle, the references made by many testators to their 'lord', usually meaning the king, strongly suggests that testator was seeking the king's approval. A case in point is S 1487 where Ælfhelm Polga expresses his confidence in the king permitting his will to be fulfilled; *Alfred's Wars*, pp.115; 122, n.361.

40 S 1497.

41 Stafford, *Queen Emma*, pp.215-6.

42 The peace concluded between Æthelred and Duke Richard in 991 may have facilitated an eventual political marriage but presumably Emma would have been too young at the time to marry.

childbirth.<sup>43</sup> If Ælfgifu's disappearance from the public record is evidence of her death, Edmund would have been approximately ten years old when he lost his mother.

Whether Ælfgifu was repudiated, or more likely died, her name survived into Æthelred's next marriage: MS. F of the ASC regularly refers to Emma by the French and Old English forms of her name: *Ymma Ælfgiva*<sup>44</sup> and she attested diplomas with her English name.<sup>45</sup> The name Ælfgifu was prominent in the Wessex royal family, shared by Æthelred's grandmother St Ælfgifu, the wife of Edmund I, and it was also the name of King Eadwig's wife.<sup>46</sup> Emma may therefore have been re-named Ælfgifu because of the name's genealogical associations. It is also possible that Emma was given an English name to make her more acceptable to the Anglo-Saxon court and nobility. M. J. Trow provides the alternative suggestion that in re-naming Emma, Æthelred was possibly honouring the memory of his first wife.<sup>47</sup>

#### Edmund's Maternal Grandfather: Earl Thored

Earl Thored's name and title strongly indicate that he was of Scandinavian extraction but his paternity is disputed. Dorothy Whitelock made Thored the son of Oslac, Ealdorman of southern Northumbria, who held office from 966<sup>48</sup> until his exile in 975. Whitelock's identification of Earl Thored as the son of Oslac rests on her suggestion that the 'Thorth' referred to in the *Liber Eliensis*

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43 Lavelle, *Æthelred II*, p.82.

44 ASC, p.134, n.2, and p.155, n.20. Stafford observes that references in the ASC and Domesday Book to *Ymma* are post-1066 interpolations and are to be regarded as evidence of an attempt to redefine Emma's ethnicity, stressing her Norman origins; *Queen Emma*, p.12 and n.19.

45 Campbell, 'Introduction', in *Encomium*, p.xli.

46 For St Ælfgifu see ASC, MS. D, p.113; and Æthelweard, *Chronicle*, ed. A. Campbell (London, 1962), p.54; for Eadwig's wife see ASC, MS. D, p.113.

47 M. J. Trow, *Cnut, Emperor of the North* (Stroud, 2005), p.54.

48 ASC, MS. E, p.119.

as the son of Earl Oslac, could be read as 'Thored'. This reference is unique to the *Liber Eliensis* however, and Whitelock acknowledged that the identification of Thored with Thorth may be inaccurate.<sup>49</sup> Richard Fletcher doubts the identification of Oslac as Thored's father, arguing that Oslac's exile would have made the succession of his son to the earldom improbable.<sup>50</sup>

Whitelock's alternative explanation for the origins of Earl Thored, and one that is supported by the *ASC*, is that he was the son of the Earl Gunnar who attested diplomas from 950 until 963. Earl Gunnar may have been a subordinate earl and he may also have been a native of the area under his jurisdiction.<sup>51</sup> Frank Stenton shared the belief that Earl Thored was the son of Gunnar and gave Thored being out of favour by the early 960s as the reason for him not being appointed Gunnar's successor.<sup>52</sup> The actual year of Earl Gunnar's death is unknown but his disappearance from the witness list in 963, argued Stenton, may indicate Gunnar's death soon afterwards.

Oslac's promotion to the earldom of Northumbria in 966 coincides with the earliest positive identification of Thored as the son of Earl Gunnar, the *ASC* recording: 'Thored, son of Gunnar, ravaged Westmorland'.<sup>53</sup> The Chronicle does not explain Thored's expedition, inviting the

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49 *Liber Eliensis: A History of the Isle of Ely From the Seventh Century to the Twelfth*, trans. J. Fairweather (Woodbridge, 2005), Bk.2, Ch.32, p.129; and D. Whitelock, 'The Dealings of the Kings of England with Northumbria', in *The Anglo-Saxons: Studies in Some Aspects of Their History and Culture, Presented to Bruce Dickens*, ed. P. Clemoes (London, 1959) pp.77-88, at p.79.

50 R. Fletcher, *Bloodfeud: Murder and Revenge in Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 2002), p.71.

51 Whitelock, 'The Dealings of the Kings' pp.78-9. For Gunnar's attestations see S 552a, S 659, S 674, S 679, S 712, S 712a and S 716.

52 F. Stenton, 'Pre-Conquest Westmorland', in *Preparatory to Anglo-Saxon England, Being the Collected Papers of Frank Merry Stenton*, ed. D. M. Stenton (Oxford, 1970), pp.214-33, at p.218.

53 *ASC*, MS. E, p.119. The identification of 'Thored, son of Gunner' as Earl Thored is disputed by Gaimar, who records that Thored's raid into Westmorland cost him his life; *EE*, L.3587. Whitelock suggested however that Gaimar may have invented the death of Thored; 'The Dealings of the Kings', p.79, n.5. A discussion of the identities of the

supposition that Thored acted on behalf of King Edgar, who sought to punish the *Westmoringas* for their disaffection. Stenton disputed this possibility, remarking that the *ASC* invariably makes the king responsible for devastation committed on his orders. The absence of any responsibility for the devastation of Westmorland being attached to King Edgar, Stenton suggests, indicates that Thored's expedition was an act of 'private violence'.<sup>54</sup>

Thored may have become the Earl of Northumbria immediately after the banishment of Oslac in 975 and, Whitelock suggested, he might have participated in his predecessor's downfall.<sup>55</sup> On the evidence provided by Earl Thored's attestations however, the beginning of his ealdormanry cannot be dated any earlier than 979.<sup>56</sup> Referring to the difficulties that could be experienced by an Anglo-Saxon king attempting to rule Northumbria, Stafford suggests that Thored's position as earl may not have enjoyed royal sanction and might serve to illustrate the limitations of the king's power north of the Humber. Æthelred's marriage to Ælfgifu can be explained therefore as an attempt to establish good relations with the self-appointed Earl Thored and improve his position in the North.<sup>57</sup>

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various Thored's alive in this period can be found in P. Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century, 1: Legislation and its Limits* (Oxford, 1999), pp.192-94.

54 Stenton, 'Pre-Conquest Westmorland', pp.218-9 and p.218, n.2. For Thored raiding in retaliation against the appointment of Oslac, see Fletcher, *Bloodfeud*, p.71.

55 Whitelock, 'The Dealings of the Kings', p.79. Although no contemporary source gives provides a reason for Oslac's exile, Stafford suggests that his geographical remoteness from court may have caused him to fall under suspicion, or he was the victim of local accusations; *Unification*, p.57. Fletcher suggests that the earl may have been banished for opposing the succession of Edward the Martyr; *Bloodfeud*, p.45.

56 S 834; Earl Thored also attested five diplomas in 983: S 848, S 844, S 851, S 843 and S 845; one diploma in 984: S 855; three diplomas in 985: S 856; S 858 and S 860; one diploma in 988: S 872 and one diploma in 988x90: S 877; also Keynes, *Diplomas*, TABLE 6.

57 Stafford, *Unification*, pp.57-8.

The disappearance of Earl Thored from the contemporary record after 992 is contentious. Whitelock believed that his disappearance may be connected to the naval 'fiasco' of that year, when a Viking raiding-army escaped a fleet led by Earl Thored along with Ealdorman Ælfric, Bishop Alfstan and Bishop Æscwig, because Ealdorman Ælfric alerted the raiding-army of the impending battle.<sup>58</sup> Whitelock's explanation of Thored's apparent downfall is questionable, however; Williams rightly remarks that there is nothing in the contemporary record to suggest that Thored was dismissed for incompetence. Williams draws attention, however, to the fact that Thored's disappearance coincides with the return to court of the formidable Queen Ælfthryth.<sup>59</sup> In some way she may have contributed to Thored being removed from the royal court.

A simpler explanation for Earl Thored's disappearance is that he was on board one of the ships that eventually engaged with the raiding-army and died in the fighting that took place. Whatever the truth may be, his successor, Ælfhelm, was attesting diplomas the following year.<sup>60</sup> If Earl Thored's disappearance from the historical record was the result of royal sanction it seems not to have affected the status of his daughter or her children by Æthelred; Thored's grandchildren attest as æthelings the following year and one may infer from their status that their mother's position was also unaffected.

The possibility that Earl Thored had a son, and therefore Edmund Ironside had a maternal uncle, is raised by the account in the *ASC* of the Battle of Ringmere in 1010, where it is recorded that the king's *aðum*, Athelstan, was killed.<sup>61</sup> The ambiguity of 'aðum', meaning both 'son-in-law' and

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58 Whitelock, 'The Dealings of the Kings', p.80; *ASC*, MS. E, p.127. William Kapelle offers the alternative explanation that Thored was dismissed because his Scandinavian origins made him sympathetic to the enemy; *The Norman Conquest of the North* (London, 1979), pp.14-5.

59 Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.28.

60 S 876.

61 *ASC*, M. E, p.140.

'brother-in-law' makes interpretation of the word problematic<sup>62</sup> but Williams makes a persuasive argument that the Athelstan who died at Ringmere was not Æthelred's son-in-law, on the basis that he is not recorded as anything other than a thegn, and Æthelred's known sons-in-law were either earls or ealdormen.<sup>63</sup> If Williams is correct, the Athelstan who died at Ringmere was the son of Earl Thored, brother-in-law to King Æthelred, brother to Ælfifu, and maternal uncle to Edmund.

#### Edmund's Paternal Grandmother: Queen Ælfthryth

Queen Ælfthryth is an historical subject who deserves to be studied in her own right. Such endeavour is beyond the the scope of this study but some aspects of Ælfthryth must be considered for their relevance to Edmund Ironside. The will of the ætheling Athelstan indicates that he was raised by Ælfthryth and it is possible that his brothers, including Edmund, were also brought up by the queen.<sup>64</sup> This placed her in a significant position to influence the æthelings, informing their opinions and shaping their attitudes at an impressionable age. With particular regard to Edmund, Ælfthryth may have provided him with an example of the politically ambitious and ruthless queen, another example of which he would encounter in adult life.

Contrary to the testimony of the *ASC*, which gives the year of Ælfthryth's marriage to King Edgar as 965,<sup>65</sup> Stafford calculates the marriage to have occurred the previous year, based on

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62 J. R. Clark Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Toronto, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., 1960), p.29

63 Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.24 and p.169, n.32. Freeman however believed that Athelstan belonged to the family of Athelstan half-king; *History of the Norman Conquest*, p.378, n.2. An Athelstan *minister* attests diplomas in 1002, (S 902) and 1005, (S 911); his position in the lower half of the attestations of the thegns suggests that he was unexceptional.

64 'Will of Athelstan', p.596.

65 *ASC*, MS. D, p.119.

diploma evidence.<sup>66</sup> King Edgar, argues Stafford, may also have married Ælfthryth in order to attract allies in south-west England. A few years before his marriage to Ælfthryth, and up to a decade later, Edgar granted land in Cornwall and Devon which may, according to Stafford, have been overtures to the magnates of south-west England that were consolidated by marriage to Ælfthryth, who came from a powerful family in the West Country.<sup>67</sup> Her father, Ordgar, was Ealdorman of south-west England and, suggests Stafford, Ordgar's position as ealdorman may have been connected to King Edgar's marriage to Ælfthryth.<sup>68</sup> Her brother, Ordwulf, did not inherit the office of ealdorman of Devon from Ordgar<sup>69</sup> but John of Worcester describes him as *Domnanie primas* (first amongst the men of Devon),<sup>70</sup> a position which Williams suggests is synonymous with 'high-reeve of Devon'.<sup>71</sup>

Stafford summarises Ælfthryth as the 'dominant female' at Æthelred's court<sup>72</sup> and likens her monopoly of female influence to that of Edward the Elder's third wife, Queen Eadgifu.<sup>73</sup> Ælfthryth's name appears prominently in the diplomas of Kings Edgar and Æthelred; she established a nunnery

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66 Stafford, *Unification*, p.52; and S 724.

67 Stafford, *Unification*, p.52-3; and S 684 (AD 960), S 810 (AD 961x3), S 704 (AD 962), S 721 (AD 963), S 755 (AD 967), S 770 (AD 969) and S 795 (AD 974).

68 Stafford, *Unification*, p.53. For the family of Ordgar see H. P. R. Finberg, 'The House of Ordgar and the Foundation of Tavistock Abbey', *English Historical Review*, 53 (1943), pp.190-201.

69 Ordgar last attested in 970 (S 781); John of Worcester is the only primary source to record Ordgar's death, placing it in 971 and recording that he was buried in Exeter; *JW*, p.421.

70 *JW*, p.447.

71 Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.29; H. P. R. Finberg, 'Childe's Tomb', *Report and Transactions of the Devonshire Association*, 78 (1946), pp.265-80, at p.193.

72 Stafford, 'Sons and Mothers', p.91.

73 Stafford, 'Sons and Mothers', pp.92-3.



at Wherwell and another at Amesbury;<sup>74</sup> she played a part in the monastic reforms of the late tenth-century<sup>75</sup> and she helped to settle land disputes.<sup>76</sup> Perhaps the most important factor that enabled Ælfthryth to establish a political role for herself was her position as a consecrated queen.

Consecration gave her a status greater than simply being the king's wife, conferring what Stafford describes as the benefits of additional security and more formal powers at court. The position of queen could not be duplicated during her lifetime,<sup>77</sup> which may have affected the status of the shadowy Ælfgifu, who was not consecrated. The status of Edmund and his brothers, all recognised as æthelings, seems not to have been affected by their mother's lack of consecration. Edmund's status as an ætheling also seems to have been unaffected by the queenly status of Emma, he and his brothers appearing before her sons in the attestations.

Ælfthryth's consecration and her close involvement with the Church have been eclipsed by the rumours and accusations that she connived or participated in the murder of Edward the Martyr.<sup>78</sup> Many of these accusations can be dismissed as fabrications but Stafford speculates that the

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74 For Wherwell see S 904; for Amesbury see M. A. Meyer, 'The Queen's "demesne" in later Anglo-Saxon England', in M. A. Meyer, ed., *The Culture of Christendom: Essays in Medieval History in Memory of Denis L. T. Bethell* (London and Rio Grande, 1993), pp.75-113.

75 L. Honeycutt, *Matilda of Scotland: a Study in Medieval Queenship* (Woodbridge, 2003), pp.36-7; for Ælfthryth's role in the monastic reform movement see P. Stafford, 'Queens, Nunneries and Reforming Churchmen: Gender, Religious Status and Reform in Tenth- and Eleventh-Century England', *Past and Present*, 163 (1999), pp.3-35.

76 Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, nos. 45 and 66; and A. Rabin, 'Female Advocacy and Royal Protection in Tenth-Century England: The Legal Career of Queen Ælfthryth', *Speculum* 84, No.2 (2009), pp.261-88.

77 One of the arguments made in 975 for the election of Æthelred was Ælfthryth's consecration; Stafford, 'The King's Wife', p.18 and n.45.

78 Accounts of Ælfthryth's participation in Edward the Martyr's murder are to be found in the *Passio Sancti Edwardi*, ed. C. Fell (Leeds, 1971); and the *Life of St Oswald, Historians of the Church of York and its Archbishops*, ed. J. Raine, RS 71 (London, 1879-94), Vol.1 (1879), pp. 443-5; 448-51.

restricted channels available to women to exercise political power may have made the assassination of her stepson Edward a viable means of securing the succession for Æthelred. It is impossible to determine if Ælfthryth was involved in the assassination of Edward, and if she was, what her degree of complicity may have been; but regardless of her innocence or guilt, Ælfthryth benefited politically from Edward's death.<sup>79</sup> Uncertainty surrounds the year of Ælfthryth's death. Her last attestation is in 999 and by 1002 lands she once owned were granted to others, implying that she had died sometime in the interval.<sup>80</sup>

As indicated earlier, Queen Ælfthryth is identified in the will of the ætheling Athelstan as having brought him up (*afedda*).<sup>81</sup> The verb '*afedan*' has several meanings including 'feed' and 'maintain' but 'brought up' is perhaps the more appropriate interpretation.<sup>82</sup> It was the habit of kings, Stafford maintains, to have their sons raised away from court to isolate them from the intrigue of palace life<sup>83</sup> and it may have been for this reason that Ælfthryth was given responsibility for raising

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79 Stafford, 'Sons and Mothers', p.59. The succession crisis of 975 is dealt with by Stafford in 'The Reign of Æthelred II', A Study in Limitations of Royal: Policy and Action' in *Ethelred the Unready*, pp.15-46, at pp.21-3; Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, pp.12-3, and Lavelle, *Æthelred II*, pp.43-4; 83.

80 S 896 and S 904.

81 'Will of Athelstan', p.596.

82 Clark Hall, *ACASD*, p14. Athelstan's reference to Ælfthryth is also used to describe Edith's care for the grandchildren of Edmund Ironside at Edward the Confessor's court; Barlow, *The Life of King Edward*, pp.24-5; also R. Lavelle, *Royal Estates in Anglo-Saxon Wessex: Land, Politics and Family Strategies*, BAR Series 439 (Oxford, 2007), p.91.

83 Stafford, 'Sons and Mothers', p.95. On the practice of fostering see J. Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (London, 1989), pp.206-9; J. Lynch, *Christianizing Kinship: Ritual Sponsorship in Anglo-Saxon England* (Ithaca, New York and London, 1998), pp.222-4.

Athelstan. If the æthelings were raised by Ælfthryth away from the royal court, they would have been more under her control than that of Æthelred.

Ælfthryth may have raised Æthelred's other sons, suggested by the first attestations of the æthelings coinciding with Ælfthryth's name reappearing in the witness lists, after an absence from court following the death of the monastic reformer Æthelwold, Bishop of Winchester, in 984.<sup>84</sup> Barbara Yorke has commented that the association between Ælfthryth and Bishop Æthelwold was mutually advantageous. The degree to which Æthelwold supported Ælfthryth is perhaps exemplified by his denigration of Edward in the succession crisis of 975.<sup>85</sup> Æthelwold's questioning of Edward's legitimacy contrasts strongly with his reputation as a disciplinarian in ecclesiastical matters indicating, suggests Yorke, that Bishop Æthelwold was prepared to be less scrupulous in secular politics.<sup>86</sup>

Bishop Æthelwold had been dead five years before Edmund Ironside was born but it is possible that his educational principles, via Ælfthryth, may have had an effect on Edmund. Michael Lapidge summarises the bishop as a scholar of 'considerable learning' and a teacher of 'exacting standards'.<sup>87</sup>

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84 Stafford, 'Sons and Mothers', p.95 and n.56; and S 876, S 878, S 891 and S 896. The exception to this sequence is S 893 where the æthelings attest but Ælfthryth does not. Keynes associates Ælfthryth's absence from court with the death of Bishop Æthelwold with whom he suggests she was closely connected, but is unclear whether she fell from favour or chose to withdraw from court; *Diplomas*, p.181.

85 In the grant of privileges Æthelwold obtained for the New Minster, Winchester, Edward is given the inferior appellation *eadem rege clito procreatus* whereas Edmund enjoys preferment as *clito legitimus*. Ælfthryth's superiority is also suggested by her description as *legitimus prefati regis coniunx*; B. Yorke, 'Æthelwold and the Politics of the Tenth Century', in *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, ed. B. Yorke (Woodbridge, 1988), pp.65-88, at pp.81-3; also S 745 (AD 966).

86 Yorke, 'Æthelwold', p.86.

87 Lapidge, 'Æthelwold as Scholar and Teacher', in *Bishop Æthelwold*, pp.89-118, at p.89. Bishop Æthelwold also tutored the young King Edgar at Abingdon; see Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*, p.33.

The latter characteristic is attested by two of the bishop's former pupils, Wulfric of Winchester and Ælfric of Eynsham, who allege he was a strict disciplinarian.<sup>88</sup> Ælfthryth may have emulated Æthelwold's insistence on obedience; it may also be the case that Ælfthryth independently believed in the virtue of obedience and imposed a strict regime when raising the æthelings. Alternatively, if Æthelred's 'period of youthful indiscretions'<sup>89</sup> following the death of Bishop Æthelwold and during Ælfthryth's absence from court, was in protest against the regime in which he had been reared, Ælfthryth may have tried to raise the æthelings differently to avoid them repeating their father's behaviour. However the æthelings may have been raised by their grandmother, the households of Athelstan and Edmund suggest they were more engaged with military matters than their father.<sup>90</sup>

If Edmund Ironside was raised by Ælfthryth he would have been able to see in his grandmother a living example of an ambitious mother who used her consecration to put the interests of her sons before those of her step-children. Ælfthryth's promotion of her own children may have given Edmund cause to reflect on his status if Æthelred were to remarry. When Æthelred married Emma in 1002, putting Edmund in a position similar to that of Edward the Martyr when King Edgar married Ælfthryth, Edmund's concern for his position within the royal family may have increased.

Although there is no doubt that Ælfthryth raised the ætheling Athelstan and may have reared the majority of Æthelred's other sons, Athelstan's official foster-mother, and possibly his wet-nurse, was Ælfswith, referred to by Athelstan as his *ealdormodor* and to whom the ætheling bequeathed the estate of 'Weston'.<sup>91</sup> The testimony provided by Ælfthryth sometime between 995 and 1002 to help a certain Ælfswith's brother secure land in Somerset; and a reference to Ælfswith's sister-in law,

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88 Wulfstan of Winchester, *The Life of St Æthelwold*, ed. M. Lapidge and M. Winterbottom (Oxford, 1991), Ch. 28, p.45 and ch.19, p.77.

89 Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp.176-86.

90 The households of Athelstan and Edmund are discussed in Chapter Three.

91 'Will of Athelstan', p.595. The place-name 'Weston' is too common for identification.

Wulfgyth, as Ælfthryth's kinswoman, (*gesith*), leads Williams to speculate that the Ælfswith whose brother benefited from the testimony of Ælfthryth was the same person as Athelstan's foster-mother and was appointed by Ælfthryth.<sup>92</sup> It is reasonable to surmise that if Ælfthryth appointed Athelstan's foster-mother she would have chosen someone known to her, especially if she were part of her extended family. The identification of Ælfswith as Athelstan's foster-mother indicates that the ætheling was raised by two significant women, who may have divided the duties of rearing Athelstan between them. There is, however, insufficient evidence to determine how this may have been done. The sharing of responsibility for rearing Athelstan raises the possibility that Edmund also had a foster-mother.

The return of Ælfthryth to court after a period of retirement at Wherwell, and the first attestations of Æthelred's four oldest sons, suggests that the ætheling Athelstan, and probably Edmund, were raised in the nunnery which the queen had founded. Ælfthryth is known to have possessed several estates, which Stafford cites to support the argument that the dowager queen raised the sons of Æthelred's first marriage.<sup>93</sup> Both Keynes and Williams nominate *Æthelingadene* (Singleton, Sussex) as a probable location for their upbringing.<sup>94</sup> It is not known when Ælfthryth received this estate but her possession of it is derived from Æthelred granting sixty hides at *Æthelingadene*, which previously belonged to Queen Ælfthryth, to Abbess Heanflæd and Wherwell Abbey.<sup>95</sup>

*Æthelingadene* might have been significant for Edmund Ironside because it was the target of a Viking attack in 1001.<sup>96</sup> The single account of the raid is a good example of the regional interest

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92 Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.28 and S 1242.

93 Stafford, 'Sons and Mothers', p.92.

94 Keynes, *Diplomas*, p.187, n.117; Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, pp. 28; 162, n.55.

95 S 904.

96 ASC, MS. A, p.126.

Commented [David McD43]: Apostrophe removed.

often demonstrated in the *ASC*. The reason for the attack is unknown but Lavelle remarks that not all Viking raids were motivated by the desire for loot. *Æthelingadene* may have been targeted because its attackers understood the political significance of assaulting an important royal estate.<sup>97</sup> It is not known if the young Edmund was present during the attack but the raid demonstrates that estates associated with æthelings were not regarded as sacrosanct by the Vikings; and the association of the estate with æthelings may have increased the possibility of attack.

The higher strata of Anglo-Saxon nobility had a peripatetic lifestyle and Ælfthryth possessed other estates where the young Edmund Ironside may have been raised. In the year of her marriage King Edgar granted her ten hides at Aston Upthorpe, (Berks.) and shortly thereafter fifteen hides at Buckland, (Dorset). In addition to *Æthelingadene*, King Æthelred also granted her sixteen sulunga divided between six estates in Kent; and Ælfthryth surrendered land at Cholsey, (Berks.) in return for other properties.<sup>98</sup> References to estates for which there are no extant diplomas such as *Æthelingadene* and Cholsey demonstrate that the documentary record for Ælfthryth's properties is incomplete and suggests she may have possessed estates whose name, number, size and location are unknown.<sup>99</sup>

#### Edmund Ironside and his Brothers

The dates of birth of Edmund's older brothers Athelstan and Ecgbert are unknown but if Williams is correct in her estimation that Æthelred's marriage occurred in the mid 980s<sup>100</sup> Edmund's older brothers were probably born before the end of the decade. This assumption may be supported by the

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97 Lavelle, *Æthelred II*, p.85. Williams suggests that Ælfthryth may have been alive in 1001 and therefore still owned *Æthelingadene*; *Æthelred the Unready*, p.50, n.42.

98 S 725, S 742 and S 877.

99 For a scholarly consideration of lands held by Ælfthryth see Lavelle, *Royal Estates*, pp.11;84-9.

100 Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.24.

letter written by Pope John XV to King Æthelred, dated to March 991, in which the pope refers to Æthelred summoning his sons to witness the peace agreement between himself and Duke Richard II of Normandy.<sup>101</sup>

With the exception of Edmund Ironside, the most documented and arguably significant of Æthelred's children is the ætheling Athelstan. Stafford and Williams have both remarked upon Athelstan retaining his seniority in the attestations of the æthelings after the birth of Edward circa 1004.<sup>102</sup> Athelstan's continued seniority, argues Stafford, may have been Æthelred demonstrating that his oldest son had the strongest claim to the throne,<sup>103</sup> in an attempt to avert a succession crisis of the kind that occurred when he was a child. Alternatively, suggests Stafford, the prominence given to Athelstan may indicate that Æthelred supported the ætheling's claim to the throne in return for Athelstan giving military support against the Danes.<sup>104</sup> Athelstan's interment in the Old Minster at Winchester, argues Stafford, was recognition by Æthelred of Athelstan's claim to the throne; by extension, the claim of his oldest surviving brother Edmund, was also acknowledged.<sup>105</sup>

An indication of Edmund's relationship with Athelstan may be found in a diploma attested by them and their younger brother Eadred; only Edmund is referred to as brother to the aforementioned

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101 'Letter of Pope John XV to all the faithful concerning the reconciliation of Ethelred, king of England, and Richard, duke of Normandy', in *EHD*, p.894.

102 Stafford, *Queen Emma*, p.86; Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.114. Edward's name first appears in the witness-lists of S 910 (AD 1005). In S 907 and S 909 (AD 1004) and S 916 (AD 1007) Athelstan is the only ætheling to be named. Keynes doubts the credibility of S 907, believing it not to be authentic in its current form but partly based on a contemporary diploma, *Diplomas*, p.114, n.100; p.260. In S 909 Athelstan is also referred to as the first-born (*primogenitus*).

103 Stafford, *Queen Emma*, p.86.

104 Stafford, *Queen Emma*, p.86.

105 Stafford, *Queen Emma*, pp.90-1; 223-4.

Athelstan (*frater predicti*), indicating that the relationship between them was close.<sup>106</sup> This impression is also conveyed by the cost and craftsmanship of the gifts bequeathed and the responsibilities assigned to Edmund in Athelstan's will.<sup>107</sup> In addition to a silver plated horn; several edged weapons; lands in East Anglia and an estate in the Peak District, Edmund received a sword reputedly owned by King Offa of Mercia.<sup>108</sup> Athelstan's motive for giving Offa's sword to Edmund is unknown but in gifting the precious sword Athelstan was clearly distinguishing Edmund. Regardless of whether the sword had belonged to the Mercian king, the symbolic meaning of transferring it from Athelstan to Edmund is seen by Nicholas Higham as signifying the designation of Edmund as leader of the English against the Danes.<sup>109</sup>

Athelstan's regard for Edmund is also reflected in him being the executor of Athelstan's will.<sup>110</sup> Edmund was given the responsibility of sending food rents and a gift of 100d. every year to Ely, and had instructions for the disbursement of £6 to 'Holy Cross and St Edward'. Edmund also had the responsibility of paying two members of Athelstan's household.<sup>111</sup> With Athelstan's death Edmund

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106 S 929 (AD 1012).

107 Also Ch. 2:1.

108 Williams comments on the possible connection between this sword and that given to Offa by Charlemagne but cautions that it is impossible to verify the link as Offa probably owned several swords; *The World Before Domesday: The English Aristocracy 871-1066* (London, 2008), p.107; also, H. A. Davidson, *The Sword in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, corrected reprint, 1994), p.109. Williams also draws a parallel between the sword with a 'pitted hilt' bequeathed to Edmund, and several Scandinavian swords; *World Before Domesday*, p.108; also, I. Peirce, *Swords of the Viking Age* (Woodbridge, 2002), p.108 and plate viii and pp.116-17.

109 Higham, *Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, p.43. Edmund's military exploits when an ætheling will be considered in Chapter Five.

110 Æthelred's second son, Ecgbert, last attested in 1005 (S 912), presumably having died.

111 'Will of Atheling Athelstan', p.595; Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.115.



Ironside had one remaining brother from Æthelred's first marriage, the fifth son Eadwig,<sup>112</sup> who may have been about seventeen years of age at this time.<sup>113</sup> Eadwig is the only other brother of Athelstan to be mentioned in his will and was bequeathed a single sword. Its value contrasts starkly with the generosity shown towards Edmund but the fact that Eadwig was included in Athelstan's will indicates that some fraternal feeling existed between the brothers. A relationship between Edmund and Eadwig beyond consanguinity may be indicated in the chronicle of Thietmar. Commenting on the general unreliability of Thietmar's account of events in England 1015-16, Higham argues that references to the ætheling Athelstan should be read as references to Eadwig. If correct, Eadwig escaped from London with Edmund before the city was besieged by Cnut, and fought alongside Edmund on campaign.<sup>114</sup>

One of the few certainties regarding Eadwig is that in 1017 Cnut declared him outlaw.<sup>115</sup> The record in the *ASC* of Eadwig's outlawry immediately follows the account of the deaths of several English nobles; the successive nature of these references, suggests Higham, indicates they are causally connected.<sup>116</sup> The political killings of 1017 and the ætheling's banishment may be related

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112 The fourth son, Eadred, first attested in 993 but ceased to attest in 1012 (S 925). Edmund's youngest brother, Edgar, first attested in 1001 (S 899) but ceased to attest in 1008 (S 920). It is presumed that the year of their last attestation indicated the approximate year of their death

113 Eadwig's name first appears in the witness-lists in S 891 (AD 997).

114 Higham, *Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp.78 and 84.

115 *ASC*, MSS. D and E, pp.154-5. MS C adds 'and had him killed', p.154, n.5. In *JW* there is a unique account of how Cnut arranged for Eadwig to be murdered prior to having him outlawed, Vol.2, p.495; this account is dismissed by Whitelock as 'saga'; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Revised Translation*, ed. D. Whitelock, D. C. Douglas and S. Cooper (London, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1965), p.97, n.3.

116 Their deaths, argues Higham, may have been connected to a retaliatory act by Cnut against an attempted coup plotted by nobles supporting Eadwig; *Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, p.85; for the individual motives of the nobles executed in 1017 see pp.85-9.

to the same event but Eadwig's membership of the English royal family may have determined the difference in punishment meted out to the conspirators. Cnut may have wished to avoid the opprobrium that might have attached to him had he ordered the ætheling to be killed; but if Eadwig were to be outlawed Cnut could have him killed with relative impunity.

The manner and date of Eadwig's death are contentious. William of Malmesbury has Eadwig return surreptitiously to England and killed by friends acting on the orders of Cnut, but this may be an example of William's alleged fertile imagination.<sup>117</sup> Although it is commonly assumed that Eadwig was killed in the same year he was banished,<sup>118</sup> there is some circumstantial evidence to indicate that he may have survived as late as 1020. Higham suggests that the banishment in 1020 of the enigmatic Eadwig 'the ceorl's king' at Cirencester<sup>119</sup> may have resulted from another attempt to place Eadwig the ætheling on the throne during Cnut's temporary absence from England; the presence of the 'ceorls' king' at Cirencester possibly indicating that the ætheling Eadwig was still alive.<sup>120</sup> Whenever and however the ætheling Eadwig may have died, he was the last of Edmund's brothers from Æthelred's first marriage and he produced no known children around whom further resistance to Danish rule could be focused. With his death the possibility of successful English insurrection against Cnut's rule effectively ceased.

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117 *GRA*, p.319; *JW*, p.503. Eadwig's brother-in-law Eadric Streona provides multiple examples of someone who betrayed those who trusted him. For William's tendency to fabricate, see Chs. 2:5 and 5:5.

118 *MSS*. D and E put his banishment in 1017; *ASC*, pp.154-5. The assumption that Eadwig was killed in 1017 may arise from the account of his exile and report of his death being in the same annal of the *ASC*, the two events conflated to have taken place in the same year; *ASC*, p.154, n.5.

119 *ASC*, p.154, n.6.

120 Higham, *Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp.89-90

### The Sisters of Edmund Ironside

It is much easier to know the number and names of Edmund Ironside's brothers than it is to establish the same facts regarding his sisters. Their names are absent from the witness-lists but there are some references that make it possible to identify at least two, possibly four, of Edmund's sisters. Based on references in Anglo-Norman narratives for the probable dates of their marriages, Williams estimates that at least two of Edmund's sisters, Ælfgifu and Eadgyth, must have been born before the early 990s.<sup>121</sup>

The æthelings' attestations also suggest possible dates for the births of Æthelred's daughters. The years between Æthelred's first marriage in the mid-980s and the appearance in the witness-list of four sons in 993 leave some room for the birth of other children, and some daughters could have been born in the four years that elapsed between 993 and the first appearance of Æthelred's fifth son, Eadwig, in 997. Edmund's oldest sister may have been Ælfgifu who, according to Simeon of Durham, married Uhtred of Northumbria after his liberation of Durham from the Scots.<sup>122</sup> A date is not assigned to the marriage but it may be deduced from the year in which Uhtred's name first appears in the witness-lists; on this basis Williams suggests that Ælfgifu may have married in, or soon after, 1009.<sup>123</sup> An English princess had not married an English nobleman since Æthelflaed married Ealdorman Æthelred, suggesting extraordinary circumstances prevailed. King Æthelred may have married his daughter to Uhtred to secure support against the intensification of Viking

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121 Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.24. Also the letter of Pope John XV to Æthelred which refers to the king's daughters; *EHD*, p.894.

122 Simeon of Durham, 'De Obsessione Dunelmi', in *Symeonis Monachis Opera Omnia*, Vol.1, pp.215-20, at p.216.

123 Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.75; Uhtred's first attestation is in S 921 (AD 1009). Richard Fletcher dates the marriage to 1006, a calculation derived from Simeon's account that Uhtred, having supposedly died in 1016, had arranged the betrothal of his daughter by Ælfgifu; *Bloodfeud*, pp.75-7.

activity heralded by the arrival of Thorkell's fleet in 1009.<sup>124</sup> Ælfgifu's marriage to Uhtred was also significant for Edmund, providing him a powerful brother-in-law and potential ally in the north of England.

Another sister of Edmund Ironside for whom we have a name is Eadgyth. Her date of birth is also unknown but from the account of John of Worcester she was old enough to marry Eadric *Streona* circa 1009.<sup>125</sup> Williams suggests however that the marriage occurred close to 1012 when Eadric became the premier ealdorman.<sup>126</sup> Having broken convention by marrying one daughter to an English nobleman, Æthelred may have been reluctant to marry another to the less well-born Eadric until he had attained a position of seniority amongst his fellow ealdormen.<sup>127</sup> It may be prudent to assign Eadgyth's marriage to the latter date as two royal marriages in the same year would be unusual, but the danger posed by the presence of Thorkell's fleet may have persuaded Æthelred to secure two alliances by marriage in the same year. In marrying Eadgyth to Eadric, Æthelred may have thought he was retaining the support of a man who had proved himself useful and would continue to give his benefactor good service.<sup>128</sup> Eadgyth's marriage to Eadric also provided Edmund Ironside with another potential ally but the Mercian ealdorman would prove to be an untrustworthy brother-in-law.

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124 *ASC*, MS. E, p.139.

125 *JW*, pp. 462-4.

126 Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.75. Eadric first appears in the attestations of the ealdorman in S 915 (AD 1007), where his position is second; in S 926 (AD 1012) and thereafter his name appears first.

127 If Eadgyth's marriage to Eadric did not take place until 1012 she may have been born circa 998, at the beginning of the three year gap between the births of the æthelings Eadwig and Edgar. She would only have been fourteen years old when she married however, and alternatively may have been born earlier, sometime between the births of Eadred and Eadwig.

128 Eadric has acquired the posthumous reputation of Æthelred's henchman and is implicated in a number of political killings; see Keynes 'Tale of Two Kings', pp.213-17.

The execution of Eadric in 1017 left Eadgyth a widow but she may have remarried. Commenting on the unique account in John of Worcester that Thorkell was accompanied by his wife *Edgitha* when the earl was banished from England in 1021, Edward Freeman suggested that Thorkell had married the widow of Eadric.<sup>129</sup> The royalty of his wife, argued Freeman, would have been sufficient to arouse Cnut's jealousy and banish the earl.<sup>130</sup> Freeman's reference to John of Worcester also illustrates the preference of nineteenth-century historians for the more detailed Anglo-Norman narratives. The absence of evidence to corroborate Freeman's theory that Thorkell was outlawed because of his wife's supposedly exalted ancestry, leaves the issue of Eadgyth's putative re-marriage unresolved but the suggestion that Thorkell's exile was related to him marrying a daughter of Æthelred is supported by Timothy Bolton.<sup>131</sup>

Eadgyth's life, or that of Ælfgifu, may have taken another direction post 1017. The unnamed Abbess of Wherwell and sister of Edward the Confessor, to whose care the Lady Edith was committed after the expulsion of Earl Godwine and his family, has been tentatively identified by Williams as either an unnamed third daughter of Æthelred and his first wife, or Eadgyth or Ælfgifu in widowhood.<sup>132</sup> Either possibility is plausible: according to Stafford, a nunnery was the preferred location to deposit supernumerary royal daughters<sup>133</sup> and her name may not have survived the centuries. It is also the case that some noble women became abbesses in widowhood.<sup>134</sup> Wherwell

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129 JW, p.507; Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest*, p.458; also, *Encomium*, p.89.

130 ASC, MSS. D and E, pp.154-5; Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest*, pp.473-4.

131 Bolton, *Empire of Cnut the Great*, p.61; 212.

132 ASC, MSS. D and E, p.176; Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.196, n.55.

133 Stafford, 'Sons and Mothers', p.97; it is also speculated that Wherwell admitted the unnamed princess sometime between the death of Queen Ælfthryth and Æthelred's marriage to Emma, as a means of protecting its interests after the death of its patroness; *Queen Emma*, p.219.

134 R. H. Bremner, 'Widows in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Between Poverty and the Pyre: Moments in the History of*

would also be a suitable community for a daughter of Æthelred who may have had a proprietary interest in the nunnery founded by her grandmother Queen Ælfthryth. The anonymous abbess of Wherwell may therefore have been a sister of Edmund Ironside.

A putative fourth sister of Edmund Ironside may appear in the supplementary verses of a version of the 'Jomsvikinga Saga' found in the fourteenth-century *Flateyjarbok*. Several references mention Ulfcytel of East Anglia marrying Wulfhild, daughter of King Æthelred (*Ulfkell...gekk at eiga Ulfhildi, dottur Adalrads konungs*).<sup>135</sup> Bolton acknowledges the probability that Ulfcytel married a daughter of Æthelred but draws attention to the inconsistency between the account in the supplement which has Wulfhild marry Thorkell after Ulfcytel's death at *Assandun*,<sup>136</sup> and John of Worcester's report that at the time of his banishment Thorkell's wife was '*Edgitha*'. The conflicting accounts may be resolved if one allows for the possibility that Thorkell was married for a short time to Wulfhild, who died or was repudiated, allowing Thorkell to marry Eadgyth.

Alternatively, Thorkell may still have been married to Wulfhild when he married Eadgyth, just as Cnut had a *more Danico* relationship with Ælfgifu of Northampton but later married Emma. Perhaps a more plausible explanation for Wulfhild in 'Jomsvikinga Saga' is that her presence helps to explain why Cnut banished Thorkell; but the story of the Danish king sending his earl into exile because he desired Wulfhild, as noted by Alistair Campbell, strongly resembles the literary motif of

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*Widowhood*, ed. J. Bremmer and L. van den Bosch (London, 1995), pp.58-88, at 76-81; S. Foot, *Veiled Women: the Disappearance of Nuns from Anglo-Saxon England*, 2 Vols. (Aldershot, 2000).

<sup>135</sup> 'Appendix IV: Text of the Supplement to Jomsvikinga Saga', in *Encomium*, pp.92-3, at p.93.

<sup>136</sup> 'Appendix IV', *Encomium*, p.93.

a king in dispute with a subject over a woman.<sup>137</sup> Edmund Ironside's putative sister, Wulfhild, might therefore be a literary invention.<sup>138</sup>

A possible solution to the enigma of Wulfhild's existence is offered by Timothy Bolton, who suggests that Eadgyth and Wulfhild are the same person. Suspicious that the first element in *Ulfhildr's* name is identical to Ulfcytel's, and commenting that the second element is characteristically Continental Germanic, Bolton argued that the name of Thorkell's wife was unknown to the writer of the Jomsvikinga supplement. In common with the authors of other Icelandic sagas, who distort or invent the names of lesser figures in Anglo-Saxon history, the writer fabricated the name 'Wulfhild'.<sup>139</sup>

Commented [David McD44]: 'Bolton' spelt correctly.

#### Edmund's Step-Mother and Half Siblings

In 1002 Edmund acquired a step-mother when Æthelred married Emma of Normandy.<sup>140</sup> The timing of the marriage, suggests Stafford, may have been facilitated by the deaths of Æthelred's first wife Ælfifu and that of the formidable dowager Queen Ælfthryth, enabling negotiations for a politically significant marriage.<sup>141</sup> Æthelred's choice of a foreign bride was not unprecedented but it

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137 Campbell, *Encomium*, p.90 and n.3; A. Williams, 'Thorkell the Tall and the Bubble Reputation: The Vicissitudes of Fame', in *Danes in Wessex: The Scandinavian Impact on Southern England, c. 800-c. 1100*, ed. R. Lavelle and S. Roffey (Oxford, 2016), pp.144-57, at p.152 and n.83.

138 The only other woman named Wulfhild known to be connected to the Wessex royal family is saint Wulfhild, one time nun at Wilton and abbess of Barking who, according to tradition, was unsuccessfully wooed by King Edgar; see Goscelin of Saint-Bertin, *Vita S. Ulfhildae abbatissae, auctore Goscelino*, ed. M. Esposito, *Analecta Bollandiana*, 32 (1913), pp.10-36, at p.17; also, Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p.43 and n.136.

139 Bolton, *Empire of Cnut*, p.212 and n.31.

140 For Emma's antecedents see Stafford, *Queen Emma*, pp.209-10.

141 Stafford, *Queen Emma*, p.216.

was unusual.<sup>142</sup> Æthelred may have hoped that the marriage would stop Normandy giving refuge to Vikings raiding England and providing markets for their booty but Emma's brother, Duke Richard, continued to give succour to Viking raiders after 1002.<sup>143</sup>

Dates for the births of Edmund's half-siblings may be inferred, suggests Stafford, from the concentrations of Emma's attestations. Thus a series of attestations in 1004-5 may be related to the birth of Edward; another set in 1007-8 may indicate the birth of Edmund Ironside's half-sister Godgifu, and his youngest half-brother Alfred may have been born 1011-12.<sup>144</sup> The consecration of Emma may have made the birth of step-brothers disturbing for Edmund.<sup>145</sup> Consecration potentially gave Emma's sons greater status than Edmund, whose mother had not been anointed,<sup>146</sup> but the diploma evidence indicates that Edmund and his full brothers consistently attest before Edward and Alfred, suggesting that the sons of Æthelred's second marriage were not given preference.<sup>147</sup> In a demonstration of the tendency amongst modern historians to consider relations within the Anglo-Saxon royal family, Stafford suggests that threats to Edmund's chances of succession may

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142 An Anglo-Saxon king had not taken a foreign bride since King Æthelwulf of Wessex married Judith, daughter of Charles the Bald; *ASC*, MS. A. p.66

143 Stafford, *Queen Emma*, p.216.

144 Stafford, *Queen Emma*, p.221 and n.57.

145 Recording Æthelred's marriage the *ASC* refers to Emma as *Hlæfdige*, which according to Stafford was the title normally used for consecrated queens from the time of Ælfthryth; *ASC*, MS. E, p.134; 'The King's Wife', p.17.

Emma also witness S 909 (AD 1004) as '*regina*'.

146 Eadmar notes that objections to the accession of Edward the Martyr were raised on the grounds that neither his mother nor father were consecrated at the time of his conception; 'Life of St Dunstan', in *Memorials of St Dunstan, Archbishop of Westminster*, ed. W. Stubbs, RS (London, 1874), pp.162-249, at p.214. Abbot Ælfric's definition of an *ætheling* also connected his eligibility for the throne to the consecration of his mother; *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, ed. B. Thorpe, 2 Vols. (London, 1844-6), Vol.1, p.110.

147 Stafford, *Queen Emma*, pp.221-2; Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.135.



not necessarily have come from the births of his half-brothers but from the ambitions of his step-mother. Emma, it is argued, was anxious to promote the interests of her sons over those of Æthelred's first marriage.<sup>148</sup> This is a reasonable inference, supported by Ælfthryth opposing the succession of her step-son Edward, and Emma promoted the interests of her son by Cnut over those she had by Æthelred.<sup>149</sup> Edmund and his brothers may have suspected their step-mother would one day conspire against them and taken pre-emptive action to protect their interests.<sup>150</sup> Regardless of Emma's ambitions, she may have had responsibility for her younger step-children. Stafford suggests that Emma's appearance in the attestations alongside those of Eadwig and Edgar may indicate that they remained with her and were brought up by foster parents attached to the royal household.<sup>151</sup>

#### The Education of Edmund Ironside

Immediately beyond the initial environment of Edmund's life, his family, is the sphere of his education and training. The education of some of Edmund's predecessors is referred to in contemporary documents and Anglo-Norman narratives but the primary sources have nothing to say

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148 Stafford, 'Sons and Mothers', pp.81 and 84; *Queen Emma*, p.222. Emma's political ambitions will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

149 *Encomium*, pp.50-1.

150 The late story of Edward spending time at Ely, suggests Stafford, may be a corrupt account of Æthelred's older sons attempting to steer their step-brother into the cloister; *Queen Emma*, p.222.

151 Stafford, *Queen Emma*, pp.120; 223 and n.67. The younger æthelings appear with Emma in S 923 but without her in S 920, S 931, S 933 and S 934. Diplomas S 933-34 date from AD 1014-15 when Emma's presence in England is uncertain. The suggestion that the younger æthelings had a foster-mother is based on an alleged writ of King Edward, dated 1058-66, in which he refers to Leofrun, the wife of Earl Tostig, as his foster-mother; the document is regarded by Harmer as 'spurious'; *Anglo-Saxon Writs*, ed. F. Harmer (Manchester, 1952), No.93, pp.358-9. Although the writ is incorrect in identifying Leofrun as Earl Tostig's wife it may not be inaccurate in ascribing a foster-mother to the ætheling Edward.

about the education of Edmund Ironside. Whatever can be said about his education is therefore conjectural and constructed from the fragmentary evidence for the education of æthelings and noble boys in previous generations, and at the end of the Anglo-Saxon period.<sup>152</sup>

Asser reports that King Alfred was raised exclusively at the royal court but because of the 'shameful negligence of his parents and tutors', Alfred remained illiterate until the age of twelve. He did, however, memorise 'English poems' recited to him and when he learned to read Alfred also memorised a book of English poetry owned by his mother. In addition, Alfred learnt the services of the hours and certain psalms and prayers.<sup>153</sup> From the references provided by Asser, it would seem that Alfred was taught a restricted curriculum of English poetry and Biblical texts, delivered in the vernacular. Edward the Elder and his Alfred's daughter, Ælfhryth, were also educated at the royal court with other noble children, under the instruction of male and female tutors.<sup>154</sup> In the following generation the significance attached to educating royal children at court seems to have diminished slightly. William of Malmesbury has King Æthelstan educated at the court of his aunt Æthelflæd and uncle Ealdorman Æthelred.<sup>155</sup> Evidence that Æthelstan's successor King Edgar also received some of his education away from the royal court is to be found in the *Chronicle of Ramsay* (*Chronicon Abbatiae Rameseiensis*).<sup>156</sup>

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152 For an academic consideration of education in Anglo-Saxon England see D. Bullough, 'The Educational Tradition in England from Alfred to Ælfric: Teaching *Utriusque Lingae*', in *Carolingian Renewal: Sources and Heritage* (Manchester and New York, 1991), pp.297-334.

153 Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, pp.74-5.

154 Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, p.90; B. Yorke, 'Edward as Ætheling', in *Edward the Elder 899-924*, eds. N. J. Higham and D. H. Hill (London, 2001), pp.25-39, at pp.27-9; and Foot, *Æthelstan*, p.35.

155 William of Malmesbury contradicts himself, asserting that Edward had Æthelstan educated in a school (*in documenta scholarum*); *GRA*, pp.210-13, and Foot, *Æthelstan*, p.35.

156 *Chronicon Abbatiae Rameseiensis*, ed. W. D. Macray, RS 83 (London, 1886), p.53.

King Æthelred might also have had part of his education away from the royal court. According to the *Life of St Oswald*, King Edward the Martyr was assassinated while approaching the house at Corfe where his brother Æthelred dwelt with the queen (*mansit cum regina*),<sup>157</sup> suggesting that Æthelred may have been educated in his mother's household. The tensions and antagonisms generated by the succession crisis of 975 may lend credence to the possibility that the unsuccessful challenger was raised away from the royal court. The attestations of Edmund Ironside's half-brothers, Edward and Alfred, suggest however that the children of Æthelred's second marriage spent their childhoods at the royal court; and if John of Worcester can be believed, the æthelings Edward and Alfred may have been educated by Bishop Ælfhun<sup>158</sup> either at the court, or perhaps at St Paul's, London.

The importance that was given at the time of King Alfred's childhood to educating an ætheling at the royal court contrasts strongly with the experience of Edmund Ironside's elder brother Athelstan, who was probably raised away from the royal court by Queen Ælfthryth; his seniority amongst the æthelings of Æthelred's first and second marriages indicates that his absence from court did not diminish his throne-worthiness. The experience of the ætheling Athelstan suggests that Edmund may also have been educated away from the royal court and perhaps, like Edward the Elder, in the company of noble children from the surrounding district. If Edmund was raised by his grandmother she may have arranged for him to be educated either within her own household; the nunnery at Wherwell; or entrusted Edmund's education to an episcopal or monastic school near to one of her estates.<sup>159</sup>

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157 Byrhtferth of Ramsay, *The Lives of St Oswald and St Ecgbine*, ed. and trans. M. Lapidge (Oxford, 2009), pp.138-9; Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.11.

158 *JW*, pp.474-5.

159 Ælfthryth's estate at Sturminster Newton, Dorset, is a few miles south-west of Shaftesbury Abbey. Her estates at Brabourne and Evergate, Kent, are close to Lyminge Abbey and her estates at Nackington and *Wirigem* (Perry?) are

Edmund's grandfather, King Edgar, was instructed in religion by Bishop Æthelwold at Abingdon and Edmund's half-uncle Edward the Martyr was educated by Bishop Sideman of Crediton.<sup>160</sup> It would seem that by the late tenth century æthelings were being instructed away from court and taught the moral responsibilities of kingship by leading churchmen. It is therefore probable that Edmund Ironside and his brothers attended an episcopal or monastic school where they were taught Carolingian ideals of Christian kingship.<sup>161</sup> The influence of such teaching on Edmund's father, Keynes suggests, may be inferred from Æthelred recanting his abuse of ecclesiastical privileges and estates following the death of Bishop Æthelwold, and pledging his support for the Church.<sup>162</sup>

An indication of the curriculum which may have been taught to Edmund is provided by Asser, who records that King Alfred's children learned the Psalms and from books written in English, some of which may have been translated from Latin at the instigation of the king. The value of the vernacular for educational purposes was also recognised by Bishop Æthelwold.<sup>163</sup> Ælfthryth may have shared the bishop's belief and if Edmund was educated at one of her estates Ælfthryth may have had the ætheling instructed using English texts.

The royal children, Asser relates, learned how to behave with 'humility, friendliness and gentleness to all compatriots and foreigners, and with great obedience to their father'.<sup>164</sup> Asser's

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close to Canterbury Cathedral and St Augustine's Abbey. Edmund may also have received some of his education at Chichester Priory close to *Æthelingadene*.

160 Byrhtferth of Ramsay, *The Lives of St Oswald*, pp.73, n.100; 139 and n.172 .

161 For Carolingian kingship see: W. Ullman, *The Carolingian Renaissance and the Idea of Kingship* (London, 1969).

162 Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp.176-7; 181; also S 876.

163 Yorke suggests that the school of Old English studies at Winchester contributed significantly to the development of Standard Anglo-Saxon; 'Introduction', in *Bishop Æthelwold*, pp.1-12, at p.9. Also, H. Gneuss, 'The Origin of Standard Old English and Æthelwold's school at Winchester', *ASE* 1 (1972), pp.63-84; and Lapidge, 'Æthelwold as Scholar and Teacher' in *Bishop Æthelwold*, pp.89-117.

164 Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, pp.90-91; also, Yorke, 'Edward as Ætheling', pp.27-9, and Foot, *Æthelstan*, p.35.

reference to the courtly virtues may be an idealised account of their education rather than a realistic representation of their curriculum. Asser also refers to the royal boys engaging in 'skills appropriate to noblemen' (*artibus, quae nobilis conveniunt*) which included hunting.<sup>165</sup> These skills are expanded in the narrative of William of Malmesbury, who records that as a youth, King Æthelstan was given training in arms and the rules of war but this may be an illustration of William's assigned gift for invention.<sup>166</sup> The martial spirit of Anglo-Saxon kings, however, appears to have diminished by the reign of Æthelred. At a time, according to Keynes, when the English army attached 'great importance' to the king leading his troops, Æthelred often delegated leadership of the fyrd to his ealdormen.<sup>167</sup> In seeming to frustrate the expectations of his armies, Æthelred may have been putting into practise the policy proposed by Abbot Ælfric in his short text *Wyrdwriteras*.<sup>168</sup> Clare Lees summarises the text as advocating 'that a king should not lead his army into battle, but rely...on his military subordinates'.<sup>169</sup> That Ælfric defended the policy of delegation, argues Keynes, suggests that Ælfric's opinion on the management of warfare was not widely held; and Lees believes them to have been 'largely unique'.<sup>170</sup>

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165 Asser, *De Rebus Gestis Ælfredi*, ed. S. Winchester [online database], Cap.75, accessed 29 April. 2014.

166 *GRA*, pp.210-11; also, Foot, *Æthelstan*, p.35.

167 Keynes, *Diplomas*, p.208; also, C. W. Hollister, *Anglo-Saxon Military Institutions on the Eve of the Norman Conquest* (Oxford, 1962), pp.89-91.

168 Ælfric, 'Wyrdwriteras', in *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, ed. J.C. Pope, 2 Vols. (London, 1967-8), Vol.II, pp.728-33, at Ll.4-5, p.728; Ll.56-50, p.729 and Ll.85-6, p.731.

169 C. A. Lees, *Tradition and Belief: Religious Writing in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Minneapolis, 1999), p.100.

M. Godden suggests that in making the case that a king should delegate the command of his armies to his ealdormen, Ælfric may have been influenced by Ealdorman Æthelweard, who was partly responsible for founding Ælfric's monasteries of Cerne and Eynsham, and had responsibility for defending the south-west of England from Viking attack; 'Money, Morality and Power in Late Anglo-Saxon England', *ASE* 19 (1990), pp.41-65, at pp.64-5.

170 Keynes, *Diplomas*, p.208; Lees, *Tradition*, p.101.

Despite the stance taken by Ælfric, the sons of Æthelred seem not to have adopted the abbot's advice that a king should exempt himself from military activities. The numerous bequests of weapons and armour in the will of the ætheling Athelstan to his brothers and friends, and Edmund Ironside's ability to raise armies and fight in battle, strongly suggests that Athelstan, Edmund and Eadwig received instruction in arms from a young age. Born at a time of renewed Viking attacks, Æthelred's sons may have received their training in arms on the orders of the king, rather than through their initiative. On occasion Æthelred himself could be a military leader, thereby satisfying the expectations of those who fought in his name and providing his sons with an example of warrior kingship, and ignoring the teachings of writers such as Ælfric.<sup>171</sup>

The practical demands of a warrior king able to lead his armies into battle may, at first glance, be thought to clash with Carolingian ideals of Christian kingship. Charlemagne and his sons however, appear to have conducted their military campaigns without compromising their Christianity.<sup>172</sup> Similarly, Kings Alfred and Æthelstan were also able to combine military endeavour with the promotion of Christianity. The military campaigns of Edmund Ironside, when an ætheling and later as king, suggest that when confronted with the same apparent conflict he was able to reconcile the contrasting demands of kingship.

### **3:3 Edmund Ironside and Æthelinghood**

The etymology of 'ætheling' deriving from the elements *æthele* (noble) and *ing* ('son of' or 'originating from') and the existence of cognate forms of the word in other Germanic languages,<sup>173</sup>

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171 Æthelred's military exploits will be discussed in Chapter Five.

172 Einhard and Notker the Stammerer, *Two Lives of Charlemagne*, trans. L. Thorpe (Harmondsworth, 1969); P. Riché, *The Carolingians: A Family Who Forged Europe* (Philadelphia, 1993), and R. McKitterick, *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity* (Cambridge, 2008).

173 Nithard, *Historiarum Libri Quattor* (iv.2), ed. E. Muller (Hanover, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 1907), p.41.

created unanimity amongst Anglo-Saxon scholars that to be an *ætheling* was to be 'a prince of the royal house'.<sup>174</sup> That consensus is challenged by D. A. Binchy. Referring to the adoption of *ætheling* by the Welsh to describe the heir to the Welsh throne, Binchy argues that an Anglo-Saxon *ætheling* was 'the heir designated by the king..., usually though not necessarily his son'.<sup>175</sup> Binchy's theory is convincingly refuted by David Dumville, whose examination of the primary sources reveals contemporary references to simultaneous *æthelings*, not all of whom could have been designated to accede. Dumville's assertion of 'a multiplicity of *æthelings*'<sup>176</sup> in Anglo-Saxon England is amply illustrated by the genealogical document in which King Edgar's sons, Edward, Edmund and *Æthelred* are all referred to as '*æthelings*'.<sup>177</sup> It is improbable that Edgar nominated all his sons to succeed him, particularly *Æthelred*, who was probably no more than three years old.<sup>178</sup>

Membership of the Wessex royal family could confer the title of *ætheling* to collateral branches of the dynasty. *Æthelwold*, first cousin to King Edward the Elder, is referred to several times in the *ASC* as an *ætheling*. *Æthelwold*'s status as an *ætheling* is also significant for it being recognised

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174 T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Supplement* (Oxford, 1921), p.22; also, Clark Hall, *ACASD*, p.13.

175 D. A. Binchy, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship* (Oxford, 1970), p.29.

176 Dumville, 'The *ætheling*', p.3.

177 Dumville, 'The *ætheling*', p.5. The genealogical document is discussed by Dumville in 'The Anglian Collection of Royal Genealogies', p.43.

178 Dumville, 'The *ætheling*', p.5. When fleeing to Normandy *Æthelred*'s II's sons Edward and Alfred, are also referred to as *æthelings*; *ASC*, MS. E, p.144. Alfred continued to be called an *ætheling* during the reign of Harold Harefoot perhaps because despite the displacement of the Wessex dynasty, he retained his princely status; *ASC*, MS. C, p.158. Edward the Exile, the son of Edmund Ironside, was referred to as an *ætheling* upon his return from Hungary, and when cited as an antecedent of Queen Margaret; *ASC*, MS. D, pp.187-8; 202; MS. E, p.187. Edgar, the grandson of Edmund Ironside, is repeatedly referred to as an *ætheling*, in acknowledgement of his claim to the throne; *ASC*, MS. D, p.203; 210; MS. E, pp.199-202; 209; 217; 226-7; 234 and 241.

despite him being in revolt against his cousin.<sup>179</sup> Æthelwold is not the only rebellious royal to have retained his ætheling status; when Edmund Ironside rebelled by marrying contrary to Æthelred's wishes, the ASC continued to refer to him as an ætheling.<sup>180</sup> Edmund's retention of his title is recognition that he remained eligible for the throne.<sup>181</sup>

The plurality of eligible candidates for the throne in Edmund's generation is evident from Æthelred's diplomas. With only two exceptions, Edmund's name appears third among the æthelings from 993 until 1005.<sup>182</sup> As the third of Æthelred's six sons by his first wife, Edmund may have been regarded for most of his childhood and youth as a supernumerary ætheling, a potential replacement should anything prevent either of his older brothers from acceding to the throne. From 1007 until 1014 Edmund's name appears second, which may be explained by the death of his immediately elder brother Ecgbert sometime between 1005 and 1007.<sup>183</sup> Edmund's position as second in line to

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179 ASC, MSS. A and D, pp.93-4. The argument that an ætheling is equivalent to a prince is also supported by the reference to Brightsige, son of the ætheling Beomoth, ASC, MSS. A and D, pp.94-5. For a scholarly appraisal of Æthelwold's revolt see R. Lavelle, 'The Politics of Rebellion: The Ætheling Æthelwold and West Saxon Royal Succession, 899-902', in *Challenging the Boundaries of Medieval History: The Legacy of Timothy Reuter*, ed. P. Skinner, 22 (Turnhout, 2009), pp.51-80.

180 ASC, MS. E, p.146.

181 Dumville, 'The ætheling', p.2.

182 The two exceptions are S 897 (AD 1000) and S 898 (AD 1001); Edmund's temporary position as second amongst the attestations of the æthelings may be explained by the absence of Ecgbert from the witnessing ceremony. For the details of Edmund's attestations see Keynes, 'TABLE 1, Subscriptions of the Athelings, 993-1015' in *Diplomas*.

183 Ecgbert's last attestation appears in S 912 (AD 1005) where his name is second in the attestations of the æthelings, and Edmund's name appears third; when Edmund next attests, his name is second in the attestations of the æthelings; S 915 (AD 1007).



the throne continued until Athelstan's premature death in 1014.<sup>184</sup> The significance of him being buried in the Old Minster, Winchester, is unlikely to have been lost on Edmund who may already have seen himself as Athelstan's successor.

Edmund is most frequently described in Æthelred's diplomas as *filius regis* or *regis filius*<sup>185</sup> a Latin equivalent of 'ætheling', which Dumville dates to the reign of Æthelwulf, suggesting that it may indicate an attempt to restrict eligibility for the throne to those whose immediate predecessors were themselves a king.<sup>186</sup> The term originally identified the bearer of the title as 'a king's son'<sup>187</sup> but when *regis filius* is used in the diplomas of Æthelred II it is restricted to those who are 'the [current] king's son'. Æthelred's older brothers had died without issue, as had his great-uncle King Eadwig (c. 940-959)<sup>188</sup> and great-great-uncle King Eadred (d. 955),<sup>189</sup> making a male child of Æthelred II the only royal offspring for several generations who could be called 'the king's son'. Although the meaning of *filius regis* had narrowed, there remained a multiplicity of æthelings to

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184 For the calculation of Athelstan's death see Keynes, 'Æthelstan Ætheling', in *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, p.17.

185 S 876, S 878, S 891, S 899, S 900, S 901, S 904, S 906, S 915 and S 920.

186 Dumville, 'The ætheling', p.11.

187 In the diplomas of King Æthelberht his brothers Æthelred and Alfred regularly attest as *filius regis*; S 327, S 329 and S 331-3. S 325 may be another example, but its authenticity and ascription are uncertain; see Dumville, 'The ætheling', p.11, n.4. King Æthelred I continued the practice, giving the title to Alfred; S 340. King Alfred gave the title to his nephew Æthelwold; S 356. For the first five years of his reign Edward the Elder referred to close male relatives, whose father had been a king, as *filius regis*; S 359, S 360, S 362, S 365, S 366, S 368, S 370, S 373 and S 374. Dumville cautions however that many of these diplomas are 'dubious' or 'spurious'; 'The ætheling', p.11, n.8.

188 Keynes, 'Eadwig', in ODNB [accessed 14th July, 2013].

189 Williams, 'Eadred', in ODNB [accessed 14<sup>th</sup> July, 2013].

whom the term could be applied.<sup>190</sup> When Edmund Ironside is referred to as *filius regis* in the diplomas of Æthelred, the phrase may be exclusive but it is not unique.

A significant number of Æthelred's diplomas refer to Edmund as *clito*.<sup>191</sup> The etymology of the word may derive from the Greek *klitos*, meaning 'renowned' or 'distinguished'. Dumville surmises that *clito* is an Anglo-Latin neologism created as a synonym for 'ætheling'.<sup>192</sup> The earliest reliable appearance of *clito* is in a diploma of the New Minster, Winchester, where Edwin, King Æthelstan's brother, witnessed the lease of land to a thegn of the king.<sup>193</sup> The interchangeability of *clito* and 'ætheling' is illustrated by a diploma of King Eadred whose nephews attest as 'Eadwig cliton. Eadgar Ætheling'.<sup>194</sup> *Clito* can also be found in two diplomas of King Edgar<sup>195</sup> but seems to disappear from diplomas after the reign of Æthelred.<sup>196</sup>

When Edmund Ironside is referred to as *clito* in the diplomas of Æthelred he is accorded the same status as an ætheling. On several occasions Edmund's status as a prince is communicated with

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190 In S 910-12, as many as seven æthelings attest.

191 S 893, S 910, S 911, S 921, S 923, S 931 and S 934.

192 Dumville, 'The ætheling', p.7. The correlation between *clito* and 'ætheling' is explicit in Ælfric's *Glossary*, where it reads: *Ætheling .i. Clito*; the same correspondence can be found in other Anglo-Saxon glossaries. For a collection of Anglo-Latin glossaries, see *Anglo-Saxon and Old English Vocabularies*, ed. T. Wright and R. P. Wülcker, 2 Vols. (London, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1884). Ælfric's correspondence is at 1, col. 155, line 21; col. 309, line 28, and col. 538, line 22.

193 S 1417 (AD 925x933). A possible earlier example of *clito* is to be found in the poem discussed by W. H. Stevenson, which he dates 936x934, 'A Latin Poem Addressed to King Athelstan', *English Historical Review* (1911), pp.482-7.

194 S 569. Another diploma, dated to the same year, further illustrates that *clito* is synonymous with 'ætheling' by having the king's sons attest as 'Adwi clinton...Adgar clinton'; S 570.

195 S 739 and S 745; also Dumville, 'The ætheling', p.8, n.7.

196 S 936 is attested by *Hardecnut clyto* but Dumville believes it to be spurious; 'The ætheling', p.8, n.8. The terms 'ætheling' and 'clito' survived into the post-Conquest period, with William Adelin (ætheling), the only legitimate son of Henry I, and William Clito, the only legitimate son of Robert Curthose.

the word *frater*, signifying Edmund to be the brother of the previous signatory, his elder brother Athelstan.<sup>197</sup> These diplomas demonstrate Edmund's inferior status relative to Athelstan but, according to Williams, they may also suggest that Edmund was especially close to Athelstan as only Edmund is referred to as the senior ætheling's brother.<sup>198</sup> It may also be the case that identifying Edmund as the brother of the eldest ætheling may indicate the operation of a system for ranking æthelings more nuanced than simple name order.

In the brief reign of King Eadwig, the diplomatic term *indoles* (or *indolis*), referring to an innate quality, was introduced to describe the ætheling Edgar and was sometimes used in combination with *clito*.<sup>199</sup> Dumville considers the new term as indicative of a transition in diplomatic usage, being 'a brief deviation from, or variation' on the increasing use of *clito*.<sup>200</sup> A possible indication that Edmund's status increased after the death of Athelstan may be found in his acquisition of a new diplomatic title. After Athelstan's death Edmund became *indolis subolis*, a designation that had lain dormant since it was given to Edgar. At that time, according to Stafford, Edgar was prominent in court politics.<sup>201</sup> Edmund, according to Higham, may also have gained the support of those 'regionally powerful kindreds' who had previously supported Athelstan after being excluded from court by Æthelred.<sup>202</sup> On the singular occasion when the ætheling Edmund is referred to as *indolis* it is part of the formula 'regia indolis soboles' suggesting that Edmund, as the offspring of the king,

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197 S 922, S 924 and S 929.

198 Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, pp.114-5.

199 For Edgar's attestations as *indolis*, or *indolis clito*, see S 589, S 591, S 593, S 594, S 608, S 616, S 630 and S 637.

For Edgar's attestations simply as *indoles* see S 614, S 623, S 629 and S 661; Dumville dismisses the last diploma as a forgery, 'The ætheling', p.9, n.2.

200 Dumville, 'The ætheling', p.9 and n.3.

201 S 934 (AD1015); Stafford, *Queen Emma*, p.86 n.94. Dumville however believes Edgar's unusual designation to have been 'a brief deviation'; 'The ætheling', pp.8-9.

202 Higham, *Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, p.57.

had an innate regal quality. In this sense *indoles* can be regarded as another synonym for 'ætheling'.<sup>203</sup>

A unique description of Edmund occurs in one of the two diplomas he issued during his æthelinghood where he refers to himself as 'King Edmund Ætheling' (*Eadmundus ætheling rex*).<sup>204</sup> Williams makes a persuasive argument that Edmund's employment of 'quasi-regal terminology' may have exacerbated an already fraught political situation.<sup>205</sup> In combining the titles of 'King' and 'Ætheling', Edmund may have thought his situation to be similar to that of the ætheling Æthelbald during King Aethelwulf's absence in Rome.<sup>206</sup>

At a time when the definition of an ætheling was narrowing to mean the son of a ruling king, several law codes of the early eleventh century suggest that æthelings acquired a legal status not previously enjoyed. The North People's Law (*Northleoda Laga*)<sup>207</sup> is the earliest English law code to refer to the wergild of an ætheling, defining it as half that of the king but equivalent to that of an archbishop. The ætheling's high legal standing is also reflected in his wergild being almost twice that of a bishop or ealdorman.<sup>208</sup> The ætheling's exalted legal status is also indicated in the law code *VII Æthelred*. The fine for breaching the protection (*mund*) given by an ætheling or archbishop is less than breaching the king's protection but greater than the fine imposed for breaching the

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203 S 934.

204 S 947. In Edmund's other diploma he describes himself less contentiously as *Anglorum ceterarumque gentium in circuitu triviatim persistentium basilei filius* ('son of the King of the English and other nations round about'); S 948.

205 Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.134. Edmund's diplomas will be discussed further in Chapter 4:6, in relation to his rebellion.

206 Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, p.70. Asser also refers to Alfred as the 'heir apparent' (*secundarius*) of his brother King Æthelred I; pp.77; 79 and 80.

207 D. Bethurum has produced good reasons for assigning this collection of laws to Archbishop Wulfstan; 'Six Anonymous Old English Codes', *The Journal of English and German Philology*, 49, No.4 (1950), pp.449-63.

208 'The North People's Law', in *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England*, ed. B. Thorpe (London, 1848), p.187.

protection given by a bishop or ealdorman.<sup>209</sup> The provision made for breaching an ætheling's protection may, according to Dumville, be innovative as might be the offence of fighting in the presence of an ætheling.<sup>210</sup> *VII Æthelred* establishes some parity with the king in setting the period of sanctuary that the king, an ætheling or an archbishop could grant at nine days but only the king could extend the period of sanctuary.<sup>211</sup> The status of the ætheling as second only to that of the king continued after the death of Edmund Ironside. In *II Cnut*, dated to 1027, the fine for breaking an ætheling's pledge is set at three pounds, compared to five pounds if the king's pledge were broken.

The provisions made for æthelings in *Northleoda Laga*, *VII Æthelred* and *II Cnut* are not found in earlier English law codes. The absence of references to æthelings in these law codes may be explained, Dumville suggests, by the status of æthelings being equated with that of other noblemen and therefore they were not identified as a distinct group. Their appearance in early eleventh century law codes may also indicate increases in the wealth and/or prestige enjoyed by æthelings. This in turn might be related to the number of sons Æthelred had by c.1000, several of whom had reached their legal majority. Alternatively, the provisions regarding æthelings in the law codes of the early eleventh century may have been in existence for some time but gone unrecorded. Their appearance in *Northleoda Laga*, *VII Æthelred* and *I Cnut*, suggests Dumville, may result from a greater concern for detail and precision by those who framed the laws.<sup>212</sup> However long the legal rights of æthelings contained in these law codes had been in effect, it is from the reign of Æthelred II that the legal position of the ætheling may be seen more clearly.

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209 'VII Æthelred', in *Ancient Laws and Institutes*, p.331. A. J. Robertson dates *VII Æthelred* to circa 1009; *The Laws of England from Edmund to Henry I* (Cambridge, 1925), p.49.

210 Dumville, 'The ætheling', p.32, n.7; 'VII Æthelred', in Robertson, *Ancient Laws and Institutes*, p.331.

211 'VII Æthelred', in *Ancient Laws and Institutes*, p.331.

212 Dumville, 'The ætheling', p.32.

Information regarding æthelings possessing estates is also available from the reign of Æthelred. In a diploma dated 990x1006, possibly 999, Æthelred gave to his children estates at Hurstbourne (Hants.), Bedwyn (Wilts.) and Burbage (Wilts.)<sup>213</sup> Two of these estates, Hurstbourne and Burbage, were bequeathed by King Alfred to Edward the Elder.<sup>214</sup> Æthelred received these lands, described as 'the lands belonging to the king's sons', when his elder half-brother Edward acceded. Ann Williams believes Æthelred's acquisition of these lands is evidence of a deal struck between the supporters of Edward and those of Æthelred: the elder brother received the kingship and the younger 'the lands belonging to the king's sons'. Æthelred's acquisition of the estates under these circumstances also implies that he was recognised as his half-brother's heir.<sup>215</sup> Æthelred's donation of the same lands to his sons raises a question about the constitutional position of æthelings at the turn of the tenth and eleventh centuries. If Williams is correct in her belief that Æthelred's possession of 'the lands belonging to the king's sons' signified that he was Edward's heir, Æthelred's donation of them to his sons would indicate that all the æthelings were considered eligible for kingship.

The recognition that each ætheling had a right to the throne, argues Stafford, 'opened the possibility of argument for designation and for...claims by younger sons over older'<sup>216</sup> but in transferring the estates to his sons Æthelred may have been attempting to appear impartial and

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213 S 937, and 'No.123', in *EHD*, pp.582-4.

214 'Old English will of King Alfred (probably 879-888)', in *EHD*, p.535. The paucity of wills for Anglo-Saxon kings makes it impossible to determine if these estates were regularly transferred to æthelings of the next generation.

Other estates which may have had a connection with æthelings might be indicated in the place-names *Æthelingadene* (Sussex) and *Æthelinga* (Somerset). For a scholarly consideration of whether these lands were personal or institutional, see Lavelle, *Royal Estates*, pp.90-1.

215 Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.10.

216 Stafford, *Queen Emma*, p.85.

discourage dissent between them. The broad dating for the diploma makes it uncertain who of Æthelred's sons benefited from the transfer of the estates. If the diploma was issued in 990 Athelstan, Ecgbert and possibly Edmund would have received the estates. If the diploma was issued in 1006, the æthelings Eadred, Eadwig, Edgar, and Edward would also have received the estates and some would have been minors.

Although the estates granted by Æthelred to his sons were few in number an ætheling could privately hold extensive estates covering a broad geographical area. Æthelweard, youngest son of King Alfred, inherited seventeen estates while still a minor.<sup>217</sup> The practice of bequeathing an estate to an ætheling in his minority continued in the reign of King Edgar, with the infant Æthelred II inheriting an estate from Ealdorman Ælfheah.<sup>218</sup> An ætheling's ability to hold estates in several shires continued in the reign of Æthelred. The will of the ætheling Athelstan refers to his nineteen estates across nine counties, stretching from Wiltshire to Kent, and from Hampshire to Cambridgeshire. Only twelve estates can be identified unequivocally; the majority of these, one quarter, are located in Oxfordshire.<sup>219</sup> It is not known for how long Athelstan possessed these estates, or whether he held any of them in his minority.

Athelstan bequeathed an unidentified estate, *Peacesdele*, and an unspecified number of estates in East Anglia to Edmund.<sup>220</sup> Edmund probably already owned the estate of Holcombe Rogus in Devon, acquired from the community of Sherborne.<sup>221</sup> With the addition of the bequests from Athelstan's will, the locations of Edmund's known properties appear to be polarised but the paucity

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217 These estates were in seven shires but more than half were in Devon. Æthelweard also received an unspecified number of properties in Cornwall; 'Old English will of King Alfred', in *EHD*, p.535.

218 S 1485; and Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.2.

219 'Will of the Atheling Athelstan' pp.593-6.

220 'Will of the Atheling Athelstan', p.595.

221 S 1422 (AD 1007x1014).

of the evidence may create a distorted image of the extent and location of his estates. The apparently fragmentary distribution of Edmund's properties decreased when he seized Sigeferth and Morcar's estates during his rebellion.<sup>222</sup> As a consequence of his revolt, the ætheling Edmund possessed more estates than are known to have been owned by his brother Athelstan and they were concentrated in fewer shires.<sup>223</sup>

The will of the ætheling Athelstan, described by Williams as 'particularly revealing',<sup>224</sup> contains information about the personnel of an ætheling's household. Amongst the beneficiaries were his seneschal (*discþene*) Ælfmaer; his retainers (*cnihthe*) Ælfmaer and Æthelwine; his chaplain (*mæssepreoste*) Ælfwine;<sup>225</sup> his sword-polisher (*swurdhwitan*) Ælfnoth and an unnamed stag huntman (*headeorhunton*). Several references to Wulfric, who made a sword; a gold-belt (*gyldenen fetels*); and an armlet (*beh*) may indicate that Athelstan retained a smith capable of manufacturing weapons and jewellery. Wulfric is not specifically mentioned as a member of the ætheling's household, making his status as a permanent employee uncertain.<sup>226</sup> Athelstan also owned an unspecified number of penally enslaved (*witefæstne*) men.

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222 Charles Insley draws attention to the fact that the estates granted by Æthelred were all in north Derbyshire and close to those bequeathed by Wulfric Spott; 'The Family of Wulfric Spott: an Anglo-Saxon Mercian Marcher Dynasty?', in *The English and Their Legacy 900-1200: Essays in Honour of Ann Williams*, ed. D. Roffe (Woodbridge, 2012), pp.115-28, at p.126.

223 Edmund's rebellion and his seizure of estates will be considered more fully in a Chapter Four.

224 Williams, *World Before Domesday*, p.64; also 'Will of the Atheling Athelstan', pp.594-6.

225 'Will of the Atheling Athelstan', p.595. Williams contrasts the bequest of a sword to Athelstan's chaplain with Archbishop Wulfstan's stricture against priests bearing arms; *World Before Domesday*, p.64; also R. Fowler, *Wulfstan's Canons of Edgar* (Oxford, 1972), pp.10-11; 36.

226 Williams suggests that Wulfric may have been a monk of the Old Minster, Winchester; *World Before Domesday*, p.199, n.30; also, S. Keynes, (ed.), *The Liber Vitae of the New Minster and Hyde Abbey, Winchester*, Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile, 26 (Copenhagen, 1996), p.88 and fo.18v.



From the variety of offices performed by those he retained, it appears that Athelstan provided for his personal and spiritual needs, and that his interests included hunting.<sup>227</sup> A further reference to hunting may be inferred from the silver-coated blast-horn (*blædhorn*) bequeathed to Edmund, and Athelstan's reference to a drinking-horn (*drenchorn*) purchased from the community of the Old Minster, Winchester, may be evidence of feasting.<sup>228</sup> The possibility that the ætheling Athelstan had a military household, as Stafford and Williams independently suggest,<sup>229</sup> is strongly indicated by the several references he made in his will to weaponry: Athelstan bequeathed eleven swords and one blade; two shields and one ring-shirt (*byrnan*). It is unknown how many of the five horses bequeathed by Athelstan were used for hunting or battle, but the singular reference to a stallion (*stedan*) may indicate that it was used exclusively for war.<sup>230</sup>

Paucity of evidence makes it difficult to determine if Athelstan's household was typical of an ætheling, or whether it reflected his seniority amongst the æthelings. There are however some similarities between the households of Athelstan and Edmund, as revealed by the lease for Holcombe Rogus. Information establishing the relationship between parties, according to Williams, is 'rarely so explicit'<sup>231</sup> but the witnesses to the lease of Holcombe Rogus include Leofwine, described as the 'Ætheling's seneschal' (*Æthelinges discþegn*), and Edmund's *cnihtas* Ælfgeat and Ælfweard. The general reference to other members of Edmund's household (*geopre hiredmen*) may

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227 For a consideration of hunting amongst the Anglo-Saxon nobility see Williams, *World Before Domesday*, pp.123-30.

228 'Will of the Atheling Athelstan', pp.594-5.

229 Stafford, 'The Reign of Æthelred II', p.35; Williams, *World Before Domesday*, p.110.

230 'Will of the Atheling Athelstan', pp.594-6. Williams argues that the colour of the three bequeathed horses: white, pied and black, indicates that they were Arab stallions from Spain or bred from such horses; *World Before Domesday*, p.111.

231 Williams, *World Before Domesday*, p.64.

include the priests Ealdwine and Wulfric, but they are not specifically identified as belonging to Edmund's retinue and their status as members of his household remains uncertain.<sup>232</sup> The evidence for Edmund's entourage is meagre but the lease for Holcombe does establish that he had a private household, that is consisted of retainers who had specific and general duties and, like Athelstan, Edmund may have had his own spiritual advisers. The reference to other members of Edmund's household gives no indication of their number but their existence does suggest that his retinue was larger than can be re-constructed from the available evidence.

The known composition of Æthelred II's household allows for some parallels to be made between the household of the king and those of the æthelings Athelstan and Edmund. Æthelred's diplomas refer to Wulfric his *sacerdos*<sup>233</sup> and Leofwine his *venator*.<sup>234</sup> These offices seem to equate to the positions of chaplain and stag huntsman mentioned in the will of Athelstan. The diploma which refers to Æthelred's *scriptor* Ælfwine, includes four unidentified *disciferi* and four unidentified *pincernae*, some of whom may have belonged to the king's household.<sup>235</sup> The position of *discifer* appears to be a late Old English and Latin neologism for the office of *discpegn*,<sup>236</sup> a position in the households of Athelstan and Edmund. The offices of *pincerna* (cup-bearer)<sup>237</sup> and *discpegn* may reflect the greater size of Æthelred's household. In the retinues of the æthelings,

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232 S 1422.

233 S 859. For an Old English translation of this term see Wright and Wülcker, *AS&OEV*, Vol. 1, 4, Col.155.

234 S 867.

235 S 853.

236 Wright and Wülcker, *AS&OEV*, Vol. 1, 10, Col.328.

237 Wright and Wülcker, *AS&OEV*, Vol. 1, 5, Col.189; and 'byrele', in Clark Hall, *CASD*, p.62.

which were probably smaller than that of the king, the duties of *discifer* and *pincerna* may have been combined.<sup>238</sup>

There is no evidence for a *scriptor*, or secretary,<sup>239</sup> in the æthelings' households but persuasive evidence comes from a comparison with the household of a lay lord. Williams suggests that household chaplains (*hirdprests*) in the household of Thurstan Lustwine's son (a great-grandson of Ealdorman Byrhtnoth) raises the question of whether lay lords made provision for making and/or keeping written documents.<sup>240</sup> This argument can be extended to include the household of Athelstan whose exalted status, the demands of administering his numerous estates, and the presence of his chaplain Ælfwine, allow for the inference that at least one member of Athelstan's household could have fulfilled the office of *scriptor* in practice if not in name. Several of Æthelred's diplomas contain the formula *meo homini* (to my man) but the exact duties of these individuals are not given.<sup>241</sup> This makes it difficult to correlate their office to one performed in the æthelings' entourage but the Latin formula may be a variation in diplomatic language for a retainer who had general but not specific duties. If this is the case, the phrase *meo homini* may allude to the position of *cnicht* found in the households of Athelstan and Edmund.

While there is good evidence for an ætheling possessing estates during his minority, it is less certain that they had private households during their minority. The possibility that they did is suggested by the will of Æthelgifu, who petitioned the queen for her legatee Leofsige to be allowed to serve 'the ætheling'.<sup>242</sup> The request, argued Whitelock, points to the ætheling having followers of

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238 The reference in S 897 to Wulfgar, *pincerna* to Æthelred, is thought by Keynes to be spurious; *Diplomas*, pp.114, n.99; 161, n.29 and 257.

239 Wright and Wülcker, *AS&OEV*, Vol. 1, 10, Col.314; and 'writere', in Clark Hall, *CASD*, p.422.

240 Williams, *World Before Domesday*, p.66.

241 S 851, S 905 and S 929.

242 S 1497.

his own.<sup>243</sup> Neither the queen nor the ætheling are identified but Whitelock made a persuasive case that they are Queen Ælfthryth and the ætheling Athelstan. The identification of Athelstan rests on the geographical proximity between some of his known estates and those of Æthelgifu mentioned in the will. Athelstan, Whitelock argued, was an important landowner in Æthelgifu's neighbourhood, which explains why she would want her legatee to be employed in his service. Athelstan's minority is inferred from the fact that it is to 'the queen' and not the ætheling to whom the request is made. The termini ante and post quem of the will, 990x1001, strongly suggest that the identity of the unnamed queen is Ælfthryth.<sup>244</sup> If Whitelock's speculations are correct it allows for the possibility that the ætheling Athelstan may have had a household but Æthelgifu's petition to 'the queen' also suggests that the household was not independent of Ælfthryth, who was responsible for the ætheling.

It is possible therefore that Edmund Ironside may have had a household when still a minor but as such his ability to run the household independently was limited and he remained the responsibility of his grandmother. It is probable that when Æthelgifu's will was written both of Edmund's older brothers were alive and his position as third ætheling, a potential replacement for either of the others, may have mitigated against him having his own household, however restricted his control of it may have been.

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243 'Will of Atheling Athelstan', pp.593-4.

244 *The Will of Æthelgifu: A Tenth Century Anglo-Saxon Manuscript*, trans. and examined by D. Whitelock, with a note on the document by Neil Ker, and analysis of the properties, livestock and chattels by Lord Rennel (Oxford, 1968), pp.22-5. Williams agrees with identification of the anonymous ætheling as Athelstan; *World Before Domesday*, p.63.

### **3:4 Edmund's Associations in the Lease for Holcombe: Household**

Commented [David McD45]: 4.2 'Edmund's Associations in the Lease for Holcombe' has become 3:4.

The witness-list for Edmund's lease of Holcombe Rogus firmly establishes that the ætheling had a seneschal, two *cnihtas* and an unspecified number of other household members whose names are unknown.<sup>245</sup> Unfortunately the lease for Holcombe is the only extant reference for Edmund's personal entourage but other sources may provide clues as to their status and the type of relationship they might have had with their lord. Ann Williams suggests that the household officers of 'greater lords' were close to their patron in terms of confidence, friendship and rank.<sup>246</sup> Her suggestion would appear to be supported by the will of the ætheling Athelstan; his seneschal, Ælfmær, received 'eight hides of land.., and a pied stallion...[Athelstan's] round shield and the notched [?]sword.' The bequest is comparable to that made to Sigferth, a leading thegn of the Five Boroughs.<sup>247</sup> It is probable therefore that Edmund's seneschal, Leofwine, also had thegnly status.

Edmund's retainers (*cnihtas*) Ælfgeat and Ælfweard, may also have had thegnly status; Athelstan's retainers Ælfmær and Æthelwine received, respectively, land and a sword.<sup>248</sup> Grants of land to the *cnihtas* of Ælfhelm Polga, the Lady Wulfwaru, and the Mercian magnate Wulfric Spott, also suggest that the beneficiaries were thegns; particularly the *cniht* of Wulfric, who is mentioned before Morcar, another leading thegn of the Five Boroughs.<sup>249</sup> Edmund's *cnihtas* may therefore have had thegnly status and, according to Williams, would have served to enhance Edmund's

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245 S 1422.

246 Williams, *World Before Domesday*, p.67.

247 Sigferth received one ploughland, an estate, a sword, a horse and a curved shield; 'Will of the Atheling Athelstan', p.595.

248 S 1503.

249 S 1487; S 1538 (AD 984x1016) and S 1536 (AD 1002x1004) respectively.

prestige. Similarly, in reference to comital households, Stephen Baxter has remarked how a personal entourage was kept for practical purposes, but was also 'a matter of status display and prestige'.<sup>250</sup>

The anonymous members of Edmund's household, referred to collectively as *geopre hiredmen*, help to illustrate the observation made by Williams that unless their name appears amongst the witnesses to a transaction, the majority of a noble's followers are invisible. The *geopre hiredmen* of the Holcombe lease retained sufficient significance however to have their collective existence recorded. The majority of those who worked in a royal household remain unknown to history, acknowledged neither by name or function. These people have been described by Sarah Foot as an 'invisible machine'.<sup>251</sup> These anonymous retainers, male and female,<sup>252</sup> would have performed the offices and duties necessary for organizing and maintaining Edmund's public and private life: keeping his financial records, guarding his treasures, caring for his clothes, cooking and baking, and ensuring that he and his entourage were mounted. Despite the absence of evidence that these and other responsibilities were fulfilled in Edmund's retinue, the fact that they were performed in the households of wealthy thegns, and were necessary for the maintenance of the entourage, strongly suggests that they also occurred in Edmund's household.<sup>253</sup>

Only the more important of Edmund's retainers, according to Williams, would have attested by name.<sup>254</sup> The naming of Edmund's seneschal and two *cnihitas* may therefore indicate that they were

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250 Williams, *World Before Domesday*, pp.67 and 182, n.35; S. Baxter, 'The Earls of Mercia and Their Commended Men in the Mid Eleventh Century', in *ANS* 23 (2000), pp.23-47, at p.30

251 Williams, *World Before Domesday*, p.63; Foot, *Æthelstan*, p.64.

252 See S 1538 for evidence of women retainers in the household of a wealthy thegn.

253 For the possibility that Edmund had a secretary, see p.96 above. For a cook in the household of a wealthy thegn, see the will of Wynnflæd, S 1539; and for riding companions in the retinue of a wealthy thegn, see the will of Ælfhelm Polga, S 1487.

254 Williams, *World Before Domesday*, p.64.

part of his inner-circle of associates. Within this close group one might expect to find evidence of personal clergy, such as a chaplain, referred to interchangeably, in the entourages of Athelstan and King Æthelred, as *mæssepreoste*, *sacerdos* and *presbyter*.<sup>255</sup> The absence of any record for a chaplain in Edmund's retinue does not necessarily indicate that clergy were less important to him than they seem to have been for his brother and father. One might infer that Edmund, in fulfilment of the Christian responsibilities expected of royalty, participated in the days of prayer and penance, and observed the festivals of the Christian calendar. The lack of documentation for clergy in Edmund's entourage may better demonstrate the fragmentary nature of the primary sources.

There is sufficient evidence to establish firmly that a priest could be part of a wealthy thegn's household,<sup>256</sup> and two priests, Ealdwine and Wulfric, witness Edmund's lease for Holcombe. Their names appear immediately before witnesses who are identified as members of Edmund's entourage, but the priests are not so designated. The proximity of their names to those who are known to have served in Edmund's household may indicate they also served in his entourage. Alternatively, the lack of an explicit reference to the priest Ealdwine as a member of Edmund's retinue, and the absence of any other contemporary record to him, suggest that Ealdwine may have been a local cleric, perhaps connected to the community of Sherborne or to one of the several senior ecclesiastics who witnessed the lease. The same explanations may also apply to Wulfric. He has been tentatively identified as the *sacerdos* who received a grant of land from Æthelred II.<sup>257</sup> If they

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255 For Athelstan's chaplain, see above. For Æthelred's *sacerdos*, Wulfric, S859 (AD 985); for his *presbyter*, Wulfstan, see S940 (AD 1006x1011).

256 For priests in the household of a wealthy thegn, see S 1494 (AD 962x991); S 1487 and S 1497.

257 The tentative identification is made in PASE, pase.ac.uk [electronic database, accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 2014]; S 859.

were the same person, the presence of Æthelred's *sacerdos* at Holcombe may be explained by the king, who determined the conditions of the lease, sending Wulfric to act as his representative.<sup>258</sup>

### 3:5 West Country Connections

Commented [David McD46]: 4:3 'West Country Connections' has become 3:5.

The priest Ealdwine, and possibly the priest Wulfric, are not the only witnesses to the lease for whom there are no other references in the historical record; several others are also known only by their attestation in the lease for Holcombe: Abbot Leofsunu of Cerne; Æthelfand, the son of Æthelmær, Ealdorman of the Western Provinces; Ælfgeat, son of Hength; and Siweard.<sup>259</sup> The presence of Abbot Leofsunu can be explained by his status as a senior ecclesiastic in Dorset. The attendance of Æthelfand may be connected to that of his father, who might have been present because of his status as a senior ealdorman in the West Country. Æthelfand's attestation, and that of Ealdorman Æthelmær, are described by Williams as 'the most interesting lay signatures'. Part of the interest generated by Æthelfand's attestation might lie in the Holcombe lease being the only source for his existence. The mystery of Æthelfand may however be more apparent than real. Based on the Holcombe lease surviving only as a cartulary copy, Williams makes a convincing case that this

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258 Another possibility, albeit slim, is that the Wulfric at Holcombe is the same priest who witnessed a grant from Æthelred to St Paul's, London. The late date of the diploma makes it difficult to accept this identification as correct. More significantly, doubts have been cast on the diploma's authenticity; Simon Keynes has described the document as 'spurious' and dismissed the witness-list as 'imaginary'. These remarks do not necessarily deprive the document of all usefulness. The diploma may be a forgery but it reasonable to assume that the names of real people were chosen to give the bogus witness-list credibility. The diploma may not be real but Wulfric probably was; S 908 (AD 1004x1014); Keynes; *Diplomas*, p.268.

259 A 'Siweard *minister*' attested diplomas for a decade between AD 995-1005, but the significant majority of these concern lands in Kent, making it improbable that the Siweard in the Holcombe lease is the same person; S 885 (AD 995); S878; S 893; S 899; S 904; S907; S 910 and S 911.



otherwise unknown son of Æthelmær may be a scribal error for the ealdorman's known son, Æthelweard.<sup>260</sup> The attestations of Ælfgeat and Siward, appearing just before a reference to 'all the chief thegns of Dorset' (*ealle þa ildostan ðægnas on Dorsæton*), suggests that they were indigenous aristocracy and may have held a senior position amongst the chief thegns. The absence of other contemporary references connecting Abbot Leofsunu, Æthelfand (Æthelweard ?), Ælfgeat and Siward to Edmund also suggests that their relationship to him may have been limited to witnessing the lease, and therefore they were on the periphery of Edmund's social and political networks.

In addition to those with a connection to the West Country but whose only relationship with Edmund appears to have been their witnessing of the lease, several others, ecclesiastical and lay, were associated with Edmund in other contexts. Lyfing, when he was Bishop of Wells, attested diplomas with Edmund before he obtained Holcombe.<sup>261</sup> Bishop Lyfing continued to witness diplomas with Edmund within the *termini ante* and *post quem* of the lease<sup>262</sup> and attested another diploma with Edmund after becoming Archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>263</sup> As the leader of the community leasing the estate to Edmund, the appearance in the witness-list of Æthelric, Bishop of Sherborne, is to be expected but the bishop's contact with Edmund extended beyond the lease. With one exception, all of the diplomas attested by Edmund and Bishop Lyfing were also witnessed by

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260 Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.114 and n.23. The death of Æthelweard, son of Æthelmær Stout (*þæs græta*), is recorded in the *ASC*; John of Worcester identified Æthelmær Stout with Ealdorman Æthelmær, an identification accepted by Keynes; MSS. D and E, pp.154-5; *JW*, pp. 504-5; 'Cnut's Earls' in Rumble (ed.), *The Reign of Cnut*, pp.43-88, at p.68, n.141.

261 S 989-901 (AD 1001-1002); S 904 (AD 1002); S 906 (AD1004); S 910-912 (AD 1005). Keynes regards S 897 (AD c.1000), to be spurious; *Diplomas*, p.114, n.99; p.161, n.29; p.257.

262 S 915 (AD 1007); S 920-923 (AD 1008-1011); S 929 (AD 1012); S 931 (AD 1013) and S 933 (AD 1014). S 918 (AD 1007) is regarded by Keynes as spurious; *Diplomas*, p.11, n.16; p.27, n.40; p.183 and n.110; p.263. S 927 (AD 1012), is also thought to be spurious; *Diplomas*, p.97; p.115, n.106; p.130, n.158; p.201, n. 178; p.265.

263 S 934 (AD 1015).

Bishop Æthelric.<sup>264</sup> Over the period of twelve to fourteen years during which Edmund had contact with these two senior West Country ecclesiastics, they may have exercised some influence on Edmund. Considerably less contact seems to have occurred between Edmund and the third West Country religious whose name appears in the witness-list. Only two diplomas, both within the *termini ante* and *post quem* of the lease, are known to have been attested by Edmund and Æthelsige, Bishop of Cornwall, indicating that the bishop was infrequently associated with the ætheling and probably not someone with whom Edmund was closely connected.<sup>265</sup>

Before obtaining Holcombe, Edmund's connections with the nobility of the West of England already included his grandmother, Queen Ælfhryth, and great uncle, Ordwulf.<sup>266</sup> This small group of powerful lay figures was increased with the addition of Æthelmær, Ealdorman of the Western Provinces. Æthelmær's designation as 'ealdorman' in the lease for Holcombe may, according to Williams, be a late addition. Æthelmær only attests as *dux* in a diploma of 1014 but an entry for the previous year, in the *ASC*, refers to Æthelmær as an ealdorman when he and the western thegns submitted to Swein Forkbeard at Bath. It might therefore be the case, argues Williams, that the locally produced Holcombe lease reflects the high standing enjoyed by Æthelmær in the western shires.<sup>267</sup>

Diploma evidence suggests that Edmund and Æthelmær may have met prior to the Holcombe lease. An Æthelmær, *minister*, sometimes with Bishops Lyfing and Æthelric, witnessed diplomas with Edmund before the earliest date of the lease for Holcombe.<sup>268</sup> The candidacy of this Æthelmær being the later ealdorman is strengthened perhaps by his attestation of diplomas concerning grants

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264 S 900-01; S 904; S 906; S 910-12; S 915; S 920-24 and S 933.

265 S 922 and S 924.

266 See Ch. 3:2.

267 Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.114; S 933 (AD 1014); *ASC*, MS. E, p.144.

268 S 876 (AD 993); S 878 (AD 996); S 891 (AD 997); S 893 (AD 998); S 898-901; S 904; S 906 and S 910.

of land in the West Country.<sup>269</sup> If the Æthelmær who attested as a *minister* became the Ealdorman of the Western Provinces, he did not witness another diploma with Edmund until the grant from the community of Sherborne, almost a decade after they last attested a diploma together. This identification of Æthelmær, if correct, also indicates that his association with Edmund occurred mostly during his youth, a time when the ætheling was perhaps most impressionable and when Æthelmær may have influenced him. Thereafter, Æthelmær had no known contact with Edmund for almost ten years.

The identification of Æthelmær before he became Ealdorman of the Western Provinces is complicated slightly by the existence of another Æthelmær who attested diplomas with his namesake, and Edmund, before he acquired Holcombe.<sup>270</sup> Unlike his namesake, however, the second Æthelmær continued to witness diplomas with the ætheling after the *terminus ante quem* of the lease.<sup>271</sup> The West Country connections of this second Æthelmær may also be indicated by him attesting diplomas with Bishops Lyfing and Æthelric, and witnessing two diplomas concerned with grants of land in the west of England.<sup>272</sup> This alternative Æthelmær, according to the evidence provided by Æthelred's diplomas, knew Edmund for approximately the same length of time as the first Æthelmær, but their association continued later into the early years of Edmund's manhood when he had his own household and could perhaps act more independently.

Like Ealdorman Æthelmær, and the priest Wulfric, one other witness may have had an association with Edmund that was independent of the lease. Immediately before the reference to 'the other chief thegns of Dorset' is the only known attestation of Brihtric the Red (*reada*). Despite the

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269 S 899; a grant of land in Wiltshire to Shaftsbury Abbey; and S 910; a grant of land in Devon to Æthelred's *minister* Eadsige.

270 S 878; S 893; S 901; S 906 and S 910-12

271 S 915 and S 921-22.

272 S 910 and S 921; a grant of land in Somerset to Athelney Abbey.

single appearance of the name, there is evidence to suggest that the same Brihtric, attesting as a *minister* and minus the cognomen 'Red', witnessed diplomas with the ætheling Edmund.<sup>273</sup>

Approximately half of these diplomas concerned grants of land in the West of England, which may indicate that Brihtric was a West Country thegn.<sup>274</sup> Brihtric's affiliation with the West of England may also be inferred from his attestation of two diplomas, without Edmund, also concerning grants of land in the West Country.<sup>275</sup>

If the witness of Holcombe and Æthelred's diplomas are the same man, Edmund and Brihtric met over a period of a dozen years, covering Edmund's boyhood and manhood. It is possible that as a *minister*, with connections to the West of England, Brihtric may have been another representative of the king at the lease-giving. The presence however of more senior secular figures, probably acting as Æthelred's representatives, makes Brihtric's status as the king's appointed proxy unlikely.

Brihtric's appearance in the witness-list may result more from a combination of his West Country affiliations and possibly his coincidental presence in the district.

### **3:6 Broader Associations**

Two, possibly three, names in the Holcombe witness-list indicate that Edmund's network of associates extended beyond his household and the South-West of England. Amongst those who attested the lease were Wulfstan, Archbishop of York and Edmund's future brother-in-law, Ealdorman Eadric of Mercia. A senior ecclesiastic and a chief advisor to King Æthelred, Archbishop

Commented [David McD47]: 4:4 'Broader Associations' has become 3:6.

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273 S 891; S 901; S 904; S 910-12 and S 921.

274 S 904; S 910 and S 921.

275 S 890 (AD 997); a grant of land at Sandford, Devon; and S 895 (AD 998); a confirmation of land to Sherborne Abbey. Brihtric's appellation 'the Red', if a reference to his colouring, may also indicate his connection to the predominantly Celtic population of the West Country. A less probable identification of Brihtric the Red is a different Brihtric who witnessed S855 (AD 984); and, with Edmund, S 910-11.

Wulfstan appears to have acted as interlocutor in the negotiations for Holcombe, communicating Æthelred's decision about the lease to Edmund and the community of Sherborne.<sup>276</sup> At the lease-giving, Wulfstan may have represented the king, but the Archbishop's contact with Edmund was not confined to witnessing the lease. The diploma evidence indicates that during his occupancy of the bishopric of London, Wulfstan attended the same meetings of the witan as Edmund<sup>277</sup> and they continued to attend the same meetings after Wulfstan was appointed to the see of York.<sup>278</sup> These attestations cover a period of twenty years, ranging from Edmund's early childhood to early manhood, and represent one of the longest associations Edmund is known to have had.

Æthelred's diplomas indicate that Edmund had a less lengthy connection with Ealdorman Eadric but they also reveal that before he acquired Holcombe, Edmund knew Eadric when the latter was a *minister*. They continued to witness diplomas together after Eadric became an ealdorman and Edmund's brother-in-law.<sup>279</sup> Eadric's appearance in the witness-list for Holcombe may be explained by his dominant position in the attestations of the ealdorman from 1012. As the king's most senior lay advisor the Mercian ealdorman, like Archbishop Wulfstan, may have been overseeing the granting of the lease on behalf of the king.<sup>280</sup> Edmund was in his early manhood during the *termini ante* and *post quem* of the lease and it is unlikely that the slightly older ealdorman exerted any significant influence on the ðtheling.

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276 Archbishop Wulfstan's participation is described as that of a spokesman (*arende abead*); S 1422.

277 S 878; S 891; S893; S 989-901 and S 904.

278 S 906; S 910-12; S 915; S 920-24; S 927-9; S 931; S 933 and S 934 (AD 1015).

279 As *minister* Eadric attested, with Edmund, S 898-9; S 901; S 904; S 906 and S 910-12; as *dux* Eadric witnessed, with Edmund, S 922; S 931; S 933 and S 934.

280 Eadric's status as an important landholder in the area also explains his attestation. The restitution of an estate formerly held by Eadric at Corscombe, to the community of Sherborne, indicates that he had some property interests in the region; S 933. It should be noted however that Keynes has expressed uncertainty as to the authenticity of the aforementioned diploma; *Diplomas*, pp.89, n.23; 97; 115 and 267.

The witness-list of Edmund's lease for Holcombe indicates that the named members of Edmund's entourage may have constituted his inner-circle of associates and they may have had the only status; the anonymity of the majority of his retinue is typical of a royal household. One, perhaps both, of the priests in the witness-list may have been part of Edmund's entourage. The majority of the witnesses to the lease, most of whom were affiliated to the West of England, have left no other impression in the historical record and their association with Edmund was probably limited, placing them on the fringe of his social and political network. Several other witnesses were associated with Edmund prior to, and after, his acquisition of Holcombe. Some of these associations stretched across decades, providing opportunities to influence the developing Edmund.

### **3:7 Edmund's Associations in the Will of Athelstan**

The will of the Ætheling Athelstan is a rich source of information about the associations formed by the adult Edmund. Many of these connections are known only from Athelstan's will and some of them may only have been formed because of Edmund's responsibilities as an executor of the will.<sup>281</sup> Others named in Athelstan's will may have met Edmund more often. It is probable that Edmund had a close relationship with his brother, which may have brought him into regular contact with certain members of the Ætheling's household. If Athelstan's mass-priest, seneschal and named *cnihhtas* belonged to his inner-circle, they may have met Edmund frequently. This association may have continued after Athelstan's death. It is not unknown for a king to have had multiple mass-priests or seneschals, and Edmund, either on becoming the senior Ætheling or upon his accession, may have admitted some of Athelstan's retinue to his entourage.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> See Ch. 2:1 above.

<sup>282</sup> The will of King Eadred refers to all his mass-priests (*ælcan minan mæssepreosta*); S 1515 (AD 951x955). King Edgar had four seneschals at one time: S 768 (AD 968) and S 792 (AD 973); as did Æthelred: S 853 (AD 984). There is no record of a *cnihht* in the household of an Anglo-Saxon king but in a royal entourage the position may

Commented [David McD48]: 4:5 'Edmund's Associations in the Will of Athelstan' has become 3:7.

Beyond the intimate circle of Athelstan's personal retainers, the ætheling may have had a military network, at least some of whom might have formed around Athelstan in anticipation of benefiting from his expected accession.<sup>283</sup> These military personnel may be identified by the martial nature of the bequest they received, indicating membership to an inner-circle. With the exception of King Æthelred, the largest bequest of military equipment was made to Edmund, followed by the leading Mercian thegn Sigeferth.<sup>284</sup> Edmund's younger brother Eadwig; and Eadric, Wynflæd's son, each received a sword.

Others mentioned in the will may have been on the periphery of the ætheling's military network; they are recorded making a gift of a military nature to Athelstan, perhaps in reciprocation, but they did not receive a bequest of any kind. Also indicative that these men may have been on the fringe of the ætheling's military network is the disposition of their gifts by Athelstan. Swords once owned by Ulfcytel and a certain Wither (*Wiðer*) were given, respectively, to King Æthelred and Athelstan's mass-priest, Ælfwine. Similarly, the horses given to Athelstan by Thurbrand and Leofwine were both bequeathed to Æthelred as part of the ætheling's heriot. Somewhat uncertain is the status of the byrnie that had been with Morcar (*byrnan þe mid Morkære*), which was given to the king.<sup>285</sup>

A literal interpretation of the reference to the byrnie allows for the possibility that Morcar possessed it but did not actually own it; the byrnie may have been 'with him' (*mid*) because it was on loan from Athelstan, who reclaimed it to help pay his heriot to Æthelred. If this interpretation is correct, it suggests that Morcar was not as favoured as his brother Sigeferth. Alternatively, Nicholas

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have been referred to as *vassalus*; S 479 (AD 941); S 559 (AD 952); S 666 (AD 956); S 755 (AD 967) and S 830 (AD 976).

<sup>283</sup> Higham, *The Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, p.43. Edmund's military affairs will be discussed more fully in Chapter Five.

<sup>284</sup> 'Will of the Atheling Athelstan', p.595.

<sup>285</sup> 'Will of the Atheling Athelstan', pp.594-6.

Higham interprets the passage to mean that Morcar had donated the shirt to Athelstan.<sup>286</sup> If this was the case, Morcar's position as a gift-giver, not a recipient, still indicates he occupied the fringe of Athelstan's associations.

There is evidence that Edmund had contact with some of those who may have formed part of Athelstan's military network. In addition to Edmund witnessing diplomas with his younger brother Eadwig, he participated in royal business with Morcar and Sigeferth. At the time of Athelstan's death, Edmund had known the brothers for almost a decade, with evidence that Edmund had slightly more contact with Morcar.<sup>287</sup> Edmund may also have had previous contact with two other beneficiaries. Eadric, Wynnflæd's son, shares his name with a *minister* who attested two diplomas, one with Edmund.<sup>288</sup> This may be the same Eadric who attested two leases granted by Archbishop Wulfstan.<sup>289</sup>

The will of Athelstan also makes an intriguing reference to Godwine, who received the estate at Compton formerly owned by his father Wulfnoth.<sup>290</sup> This may be the same Godwine, *minister*, who witnessed a single diploma with Edmund<sup>291</sup> but a more tantalising possibility is that the recipient of Compton was the same Godwine who rose to prominence under Cnut and whose father, Wulfnoth,

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286 Higham, *Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, p.43.

287 With Eadwig, Edmund attested S 899; S 904; S 900-01; S 906; 910-12; 915; S 923; S 931 and S 933. With Morcar, Edmund attested S 890; S 906; S 911; S 922; S 924; S 928 and S 931. With Sigeferth, Edmund attested S911; S 922; S 931 and S 933.

288 S 902 (AD 1002) and S 915.

289 S 1385 (AD 1003x1016) and S 1384 (AD 1017). Eadric may also have been the son of the Wynnflæd who contested a land dispute; S 1454 (AD 990 x 992).

290 'The will of Athelstan', p.595.

291 S 922.



was accused by Beorhtric, brother of Ealdorman Eadric.<sup>292</sup> The presumed banishment of Wulfnoth and the confiscation of his property, according to Peter Rex, compelled the disinherited Godwine to enter the service of the ætheling Athelstan, resulting in him being rewarded with the restitution of Compton.<sup>293</sup> Frank Barlow thought it an exaggeration to claim that land was returned to Godwine in recognition of his service but Barlow did acknowledge that the bequest indicated Godwine was in Athelstan's 'good books'. Edward Freeman contended that Cnut promoted Godwine to the position of earl partly because the latter had distinguished himself fighting for Edmund.<sup>294</sup> In making this argument, Freeman may have had in mind the reference in the *Encomium* to Cnut's love for those 'whom he had heard to have fought previously for Edmund faithfully without deceit.'<sup>295</sup> If Higham is correct in suggesting that Athelstan wished for Edmund to assume leadership of his military network, Godwine may not have been the only associate of Athelstan to transfer their loyalty to Edmund on the elder ætheling's death.

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Further evidence of Edmund's associates finding a place in the administration of Cnut may be found in a study of Cnut's thegns, by Katherine Mack. It is enormously difficult, according to Mack, to identify positively the thegns who witnessed Æthelred's diplomas with men of the same name who attest at the beginning of Cnut's reign. This difficulty, it is argued, increases when one examines the interval between a subscription last appearing in a diploma of Æthelred and it first

Commented [David McD50]: 'Katherine'.

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292 ASC, MS. E, p.138 and n.7. Another, less likely, candidate for the Godwin mentioned in Athelstan's will is the *minister* who attested alongside Edmund at the turn of the tenth and eleventh-centuries, but the dates suggest that he was not of Edmund's generation; S 878; S 898; S 906; S 911-12; S 922 and S 933.

293 P. Rex, *Harold II: The Doomed Saxon King* (Stroud, 2002), pp.22-3.

294 Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest*, pp.450-51. Also, Barlow, *The Godwins*, p.20.

295 *Encomium*, p.31. Katherin Mack cites the same passage to support the argument that Cnut may have taken into his service men who had served Edmund; 'Changing Thegns: Cnut's Conquest and the English Aristocracy', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 16 (1984), pp.375-98, at p.377. n.12 and p.380. Rex argues this passage is a coded reference to Godwine, among unnamed others; *Harold II*, p.24.

appearing in a diploma of Cnut.<sup>296</sup> The Leofwine *minister* who last attested for Æthelred in 1015 is unlikely therefore to be the man who first witnessed for Cnut in 1019.<sup>297</sup> The Leowfine who attested Cnut's first diploma may therefore have been a former associate of Edmund who found favour with Cnut. Two candidates suggest themselves: he may be the Leofwine who donated a horse to Athelstan, or he may have been Edmund's seneschal.

It may be possible to establish that Edmund had contact with some of those who did not receive a bequest from Athelstan. The Ulfcytel who gave a sword to Athelstan shared his name with a *minister* who attested diplomas with Edmund; it may be significant that the attestations of this Ulfcytel ceased with the accession of Cnut.<sup>298</sup> Another Ulfcytel is recorded amongst the fallen ealdormen at *Assundun* as 'Ulfcytel of East Anglia'.<sup>299</sup> The Ulfcytel named in Athelstan's will may be one of these men. Edmund might also have had earlier contact with Thurbrand whose name is shared by a *minister* who attested a grant of lands to Morcar.<sup>300</sup>

The Thurbrand of Athelstan's will has been tentatively identified by Higham as Thurbrand the 'Hold', the Yorkshire magnate who may have ruled Holderness, and who killed Edmund's brother-in-law, Earl Uhtred. The Thurbrand who gave a horse to Athelstan may therefore be one, or both, or neither of the other two Thurbrands.<sup>301</sup> The uncommonly named Wither may be easier to identify. Only a handful of men are known to have had this name in the Anglo-Saxon period and Wither

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296 Mack, 'Changing Thegns', p.385 and n. 73; p.386 and n.74.

297 S 934 and S 956, respectively. The second Leofwine had the cognomen *Bondansunu*, and also witnessed S 960 (AD 1023); S 961 (AD 1024) and S 964 (AD 1032)

298 With Edmund, an Ulfcytel *minister* attested: S 900; S 906; S 910-12; S 915; S 922; S 931 and S 933.

299 ASC, MSS. D, E and F, pp.152-3.

300 S 922.

301 Higham, *The Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, p.43; also, Rex, *Harold II*, p.24. For Thurbrand ruling Holderness: A. Williams, *The English and the Norman Conquest* (Woodbridge, 1995), pp.30-31; Fletcher, *Bloodfeud*, p.51. For Thurbrand's appellation 'Hold', and the killing of Uhtred: Simeon of Durham, 'De Obsessione Dunelmi', p.218.

may therefore be the *minister* who witnessed two diplomas with Edmund, late in Æthelred's reign.<sup>302</sup> Several persons who witnessed diplomas with Edmund share their name with Leofwine, who gave a white horse to Athelstan. Two of these men were *ministri* who ceased to attest after the accession of Cnut.<sup>303</sup> Another possibility, according to Higham, is that the Leofwine mentioned in Athelstan's will was the ealdorman of the Hwicce, who rose to political prominence in the western Midlands after the demise of Eadric *Streona*.<sup>304</sup>

As a consequence of his responsibilities as an executor of Athelstan's will, one may infer that Edmund had some contact with the religious communities who received a bequest. It cannot be established, however, if Edmund had a pre-existing relationship with those communities. Of the two senior ecclesiastics who witnessed Athelstan's will only Bishop Ælfsige of the Old Minster, Winchester, had other contact with Edmund, when they both attested diplomas late in Æthelred's reign.<sup>305</sup> The will also refers to Bishop Ælfsige in the context of Æthelwold's widow, to whose income Athelstan had been contributing. Several diplomas witnessed by Athelstan and Edmund were also attested by two *ministri* both named Æthelwold, either of whom could have predeceased Athelstan. One of them, the father of Æthelmær, ceased to attest in 1007; the second, who sometimes witnessed the same diploma as his namesake, continued to attest until 1012.<sup>306</sup>

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302 S 911 and S 922.

303 With Edmund, a Leofwine *minister* witnessed S 878; S 891; S 893, S 904; S 906; S 910-11 and S 915; a different Leofwine *minister* attested S 911.

304 Higham, *Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, p.42.

305 S 931; S 933-34. The other senior ecclesiastic was Abbot Brihtmær of the New Minster, Winchester.

306 Æthelwold, father of Æthelmær, attested with Edmund: S 901; S 906; S 910-11 and S 915. The other Æthelwold attested, with Edmund, S 911 and S 922. The will of Æthelwold, S 1505, may be that of either *minister*. It is dated post 987, and unfortunately does not name his wife or son. The will does however make a tantalising reference to a Leofwine, who received a robe of skins (*crusnan*), perhaps a fur coat. The Leofwine named in Athelstan's will might be the same man.

Edmund may have had frequent contact with Athelstan's inner-circle of retainers, some of whom may have become part of Edmund's household after Athelstan's death. It can be established that Edmund had contact, of varying degrees, with some of those who may have formed part of what may be called the inner and outer circles of Athelstan's military network. It is also possible, with varying degrees, that Edmund had contact with those inhabiting the fringe of Athelstan's military associates. It is likely that the ætheling Edmund had his own coterie of warriors, which may have been augmented by men transferring their allegiance to him when Athelstan died. Some of Edmund's military network may in turn have offered their loyalty to Cnut and flourished under the Danish regime. Edmund also had contact with certain religious communities; in some cases this may have been limited to his responsibilities as an executor, but in others his contact with them was independent of Athelstan's will.

### **Conclusions**

From the handful of extant primary sources it is possible to provide Edmund Ironside with a framework around which the structures of his family and æthelinghood can be explored. It is uncertain when Edmund was born but he was the third known son of King Æthelred II and his first wife Ælfgifu, daughter of Earl Thored of Northumbria. His mother was probably unconsecrated but it did not affect his status as an ætheling, which remained unchanged by the consecration of his step-mother Emma. Edmund may have been named after his paternal great-grandfather, which established the pattern of naming his younger brothers after kings in chronological order.

Edmund may have been raised away from court by his grand-mother Queen Ælfthryth, who would have been in a position to influence Edmund at an impressionable age; proximity to her would have provided Edmund with the opportunity to witness a politically ambitious queen. The responsibility for raising Edmund may have been shared between his grand-mother and a foster-

mother, who may have reared him differently from Æthelred to avoid Edmund rebelling like his father.

Edmund originally had five brothers but at the time of his older brother Athelstan's death, only Edmund and his younger brother Eadwig remained. Edmund appears to have had a close relationship with Athelstan, who may have recognised Edmund as his successor and whose political allies might have transferred their loyalty to Edmund. In addition to his five brothers, Edmund had at least two sisters and possibly two more. The marriages of two sisters to northern magnates were potentially advantageous to Edmund but alliances with them proved to be ephemeral. The birth of Edmund's half-brothers were less of a threat to his chances of succession than the ambitions of his step-mother Emma.

Edmund's education may have been arranged by Queen Ælfthryth, who might have had him educated at an episcopal or monastic school. It is probable that he received some instruction in Carolingian notions of kingship, and Edmund's military exploits suggest that he was trained in the use of arms. This may have contrasted with the education of Æthelred who, as king, rarely participated in military engagements.

In contrast to the uncertainties regarding the details of Edmund's family, conclusions can be reached with greater confidence concerning his status as an ætheling. To be an ætheling was to be an Anglo-Saxon prince; the title conferred eligibility for succession but succession was not guaranteed and rebellious æthelings retained their princely status. The status of 'ætheling' was originally held by collateral branches of the Wessex dynasty, creating a plurality of æthelings. This plurality continued in Æthelred's reign but the title was restricted to his sons and thereafter to the descendants of Edmund Ironside. There was a hierarchy amongst æthelings, indicated by the order of their names in attestations. For most of his æthelinghood Edmund was the third ætheling and he may have been considered a replacement for either of his older brothers. Their deaths however elevated Edmund to the position of senior ætheling. Following the death of Athelstan, Edmund

acquired a diplomatic title dormant since the æthelinghood of King Edgar, which may have signified Edmund's seniority.

The language of Æthelred's diplomas suggests that Edmund was close to Athelstan and was shown preference when his elder brother died, effectively making Edmund the senior heir. The bequests received by Edmund from Athelstan also suggest that a deep relationship existed between the brothers, and may also indicate Athelstan's recognition of Edmund as the senior ætheling and heir apparent. Edmund's expectation that he would succeed Æthelred may be reflected in him issuing diplomas in his own name. His use of pseudo-regal nomenclature when referring to himself may suggest the appropriation of royal prerogatives and indicate his independence from Æthelred. Æthelings of Edmund's generation appear to have acquired new legal rights, elevating them to second in status only to that of the king. These provisions may however have been in effect for some time but gone unrecorded. There is evidence that æthelings of Edmund's generation held lands in common during their minority. They could also hold lands privately and across several counties; Edmund's private estates were eventually greater in number than those possessed by his brother Athelstan but geographically more concentrated.

It is also evident that similarities existed in the offices performed in the entourages of Edmund and Athelstan, and they may each have had a military household. Certain parallels can also be drawn between their retinues and that of Æthelred, which was probably larger. The sources for making these comparisons are scarce and only scant correlations can be made. The composition of the æthelings' households also have similarities with those of richer thegns. On becoming the senior ætheling, Edmund may have acquired the resources to expand his household. Edmund's older brother Athelstan may have had a private household during his minority but not administered it with autonomy. Edmund's ability to have a private household during his minority may have been limited by his position, for much of his æthelinghood, as a supernumerary.

The witness-list of the Holcombe lease identifies some who may be regarded as belonging to Edmund's inner-circle but most of his household is anonymous. Most witnesses to the lease are unknown elsewhere but some had connections to Edmund spanning decades. Edmund also had varying degrees of contact with the associates of his brother Athelstan, some of whom may have become part of Edmund's entourage. It is difficult to establish the extent of his relationship with the Church but the diplomatic evidence indicates that Edmund repeated contact with senior ecclesiastics.

What has been established about Edmund Ironside has yet to be put into a broader context. The possibility that tension developed in the royal family when Edmund became the premier ætheling remains to be discussed. Also to be explored are Edmund's marriage, the effect of the extension of his landholdings, his rebellion against Æthelred and the motives for Edmund's revolt. These will be discussed in Chapter Four. Consideration must also be given to Edmund's military exploits when an ætheling, addressing such issues as the possibility that he fought the Vikings, as did Kings Alfred, Edward the Elder and Edmund I when they were æthelings. These will be examined in Chapter Five, as will Edmund's role as a military leader when he became king; and his effectiveness as such shall be compared to contemporary leaders of royal status. When these topics have been examined not merely his actions, but the character of Edmund Ironside, may become clearer.

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## Chapter Four

### Æthelings II: Marriage and Rebellion

Commented [David McD52]: Chapter re-titled to reflect material transferred to Ch. 3.

#### 4:1 Introduction

The previous chapter established Edmund's paternal and maternal antecedents and discussed his relations with his siblings, particularly his elder brother Athelstan. Reference was made to the significance of his sisters' marriages for Edmund's social and political networks, and the implications for Edmund of Æthelred's re-marriage were considered. Edmund's private household and the associations he created for himself beyond his immediate family, were also examined.

In keeping with the methodology adopted for this biographical study of Edmund Ironside, the purpose of Chapter Four is to discuss the remaining aspects of Edmund's life prior to his accession: his marriage and rebellion. These topics will be also considered in the wider context of similar behaviour by those of princely status in Anglo-Saxon England, late Carolingian and early Capetian France, and Ottonian Germany. The primary sources that make this possible are the ASC and the Anglo-Norman narratives.

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The events leading to Edmund's marriage, and immediately subsequent actions, were causally related and arguably rebellious. They were also inextricably connected to two of Edmund's associates, men with whom he had attested diplomas since the beginning of the eleventh century and may have known in other contexts: Sigferth and Morcar. The Æthelredian Chronicles are unanimous in recording that in 1015, at a great council in Oxford, the thegns Sigferth and Morcar were killed in the chamber of Ealdorman Eadric and the king seized their possessions. Æthelred had Sigferth's widow taken to Malmesbury but Edmund married her against his father's wishes and took control of the dead thegns' territories.<sup>1</sup> The killings of Sigferth and Morcar, and the series of

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<sup>1</sup> ASC, MS. E, pp.145-6.



events their deaths engendered, require individual study if the entire sequence is to be understood fully.

#### 4:2 The Deaths of Sigferth and Morcar

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The laconic record of the killings in the *ASC* makes discovering the reason for the deaths of Sigferth and Morcar problematic. The few details that are available clearly implicate Eadric, who deceived (*beswac*) Sigferth and Morcar by inviting them to his chamber where they were killed dishonourably (*ofsloh ungerisenlice*), but the motive for their deaths is not revealed.<sup>2</sup> The absence of such a vital piece of evidence makes it difficult, according to Ann Williams, 'to discern precisely what lies behind the brief account'. This situation, argues Simon Keynes, puts a responsibility upon historians 'to debate its likely origins'.<sup>3</sup> The earliest source to provide a reason for the deaths of Sigferth and Morcar is the twelfth-century narrative of William of Malmesbury, which cites treachery (*perfidia*), based on information supplied by Eadric. The narrative's reference to Eadric as a traitor (*proditor*) weakens the reliability of Eadric's testimony, suggesting that the accusation of treason was a pretext for removing the thegns. Eadric, according to William of Malmesbury, was simply providing Æthelred with an excuse to have Sigferth and Morcar killed. The king's motive, according to William, was his greed (*inhiatus*) for the thegns' property.<sup>4</sup> One should perhaps exercise caution in accepting the identification of Æthelred as the instigator of the double homicide, and his supposed motive. It is consistent with William of Malmesbury's disparagement of the king's reputation and may be another manifestation of William's fertile imagination and his prejudice

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2 Also *JW*, pp.479-81, and *HA*, p.35.

3 A. Williams, 'Cockles Amongst the Wheat': Danes and English in the Western Midlands in the First Half of the Eleventh Century', *Midland History*, XI (1986), pp.1-22, at p.5; Keynes, 'A Tale of Two Kings', p.214.

4 *GRA*, pp.310-11.

against Æthelred.<sup>5</sup>

A more plausible explanation for the deaths of Sigferth and Morcar is provided by Pauline Stafford, who suggests that the thegns were accused of collaborating in Swein Forkbeard's invasion two years previously.<sup>6</sup> Sigferth and Morcar may well have capitulated to Swein, for the ASC records that in 1013 the Five Boroughs submitted to him.<sup>7</sup> Sigferth and Morcar are not mentioned by name in 1013 but the description of them two years later as the most eminent thegns of the Seven Boroughs (*yldestan bægenas into Seofonburgum*), which probably included the aforementioned Five Boroughs, makes their participation in the surrender of the region implicit.<sup>8</sup> Familial connections may also have contributed to the killing of Sigferth and Morcar. At some point between 1013 and 1016, according to Stafford, Cnut married Ælfgifu of Northampton, daughter of Ealdorman Ælfhelm, murdered on Æthelred's orders in 1006.<sup>9</sup> Ælfgifu was therefore cousin to Morcar's wife, Aldgyth, identified in the will of Wulfric Spott. Aldgyth, according to Williams, was probably the daughter of Ælfthryth, the only sister of Ælfhelm and Wulfric.<sup>10</sup> Through Morcar's marriage to Aldgyth, he and Sigferth had become part of an extended family network that included the Danish prince whose father had wrested Æthelred's kingdom from him and compelled the king to flee the country.

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5 See Ch. 2:5 above.

6 Stafford, *Unification and Conquest*, p.68.

7 ASC, MS. E, p.143.

8 ASC, Vol.5, MS. C, p.99. The identification of the Five Boroughs and the Seven Boroughs is discussed on pp.129-31.

9 Stafford, 'The Reign of Æthelred II', pp.30-1. Williams puts the date of Cnut's first marriage to about 1013; *Æthelred the Unready*, p.120.

10 S 1536 (AD 1002x1004); Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.74. The extended kinship connection shared by Morcar and Cnut may, according to Williams, have influenced the route taken by Swein's army. The lands known to have been possessed by Sigferth and Morcar seem to have been spared by Swein's army when crossing territories to the north east of Watling Street in 1013; *Æthelred the Unready*, p.120.

As an alternative to her explanation that Sigferth and Morcar were killed because of their connivance at Swein's conquest, Stafford suggests that Edmund, suspicious that his prospects of inheriting the throne had been compromised by his father's second marriage, and frustrated by Æthelred's inability to stem Danish incursions, sought the assistance of Sigferth and Morcar to strengthen his chances of succession during Æthelred's absence in Normandy.<sup>11</sup> Participation in such a scheme would implicate the thegns in a plot against the king. Commenting on the possibility that Sigferth and Morcar were accused of treason in 1015, Simon Keynes argues that Eadric's denunciation of the two thegns casts him in the role of the 'honourable retainer' who rightly revealed a conspiracy against Æthelred.<sup>12</sup> If guilty of treason, either by submitting to Swein or conspiring with Edmund, the deaths of Sigferth and Morcar, and Æthelred's seizure of their property, becomes comprehensible as legally sanctioned executions and forfeiture. The punishment for plotting against the king, in *VI Æthelred*, is given as death for the conspirator and loss of all his possessions.<sup>13</sup>

The killing of the pre-eminent thegns may have seemed to Æthelred as the most efficacious method of preserving his position. Æthelred, according to Charles Insley, might also have sought to curb Edmund's ambitions for the throne by arranging the deaths of two of his son's closest

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11 Stafford, 'The Reign of Æthelred II', pp.35-7; *Unification and Conquest*, p.68.

12 An alternative explanation for the killing of Sigferth and Morcar, unconnected to Edmund, is suggested by Keynes, who argues that Eadric feared the increasing influence at court of the two thegns, and organized the murders to preserve his dominant position; Keynes, 'Tale of Two Kings', p.215. The increasing influence of Sigferth and Morcar may be inferred from their names appearing increasingly earlier in the attestations of the *ministri* from 1005 until their last attestations in 1013/14. The position of other *ministri*, such as Godwine, rose in line with Sigferth and Morcar in the same period, but he was not assassinated; the deaths of the two thegns may be connected to their influence at court but it is not a complete answer.

13 'Gyf hwa ymbe cyninges feorh syrwe, sy he his feores scyldig 7 ealles þæs þe he age', *VI Æthelred*, in Robertson, *Laws of the Kings of England*, p.103.

associates.<sup>14</sup> Whether Sigferth and Morcar were killed in retaliation for submitting to Swein, or colluding with Edmund to depose Æthelred, the interval between the king returning to England and punishing the two thegns may be explained by the time required to assemble, or fabricate, evidence against Sigferth and Morcar and arrange the meeting in Oxford, and possibly Æthelred not feeling himself to be in a strong enough position to take retribution until 1015.

The forfeiture of Sigferth's and Morcar's lands, by reason of their real or alleged treachery, may have deprived Sigferth's widow of any inheritance from her husband's property.<sup>15</sup> Interpretations of Anglo-Saxon law, made independently by T. J. Rivers and Christine Fell, indicate that the confiscation of the thegns' possessions would not have extended to the personal property given to Sigferth's wife during her marriage.<sup>16</sup> Of particular interest to the personal property which Sigferth's widow may have possessed is the 'morning-gift' (*morgengifu*) given by the groom to the bride in return for accepting him.<sup>17</sup> The bride had autonomy in how she disposed of the gift which, as Fell has remarked, could be considerable amounts of land and money.<sup>18</sup> An indication of the magnitude of the morning-gift, and other endowments, which Sigferth's widow may have

Commented [David McD55]: 'and' replaced with 'which'.

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14 Insley, 'Politics, Conflict and Kinship', pp.31; 34-5.

15 Some details of the formalities relating to betrothal and marriage in the late Anglo-Saxon period are preserved in *Be Wifmannes Beweddunge* (Concerning the Marriage of a Woman). The document does not have the status of law, but has been described by Anne Klinck as 'an account of a procedure which the author considers desirable'. Clause Four of *Wifmannes Beweddunge* records that a wife should have half her husband's goods, and all his estate if there is a child (*heo sy healfes yrfes wyrðe – 7 ealles, gif hy cild gemænne habban*): F. Liebermann, (ed.), *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 3 Vols. (Halle, 1903-1916), Vol.1, pp.442-44, at p.442; A. L. Klinck, 'Anglo-Saxon Women and the Law', *Journal of Medieval History*, 8, No. 2 (1982), pp.107-21, at p.113.

16 T. J. Rivers, 'Widows' Rights in Anglo-Saxon Law', *The American Journal of Legal History*, 19 (1975), pp.208-15, at p.213; C. Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*, (Cambridge, 1984), p.61.

17 'Be Wifmannes Beweddung', (*se brydgyma, hwæs he hire geunge, wið þæm ðet heo his willan geceose*), p.442.

18 Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp.56-7.

received is provided by the closely contemporary marriage contract between the sister of Archbishop Wulfstan and a certain Wulfric. Dated 1014-16, the contract refers to several estates, in addition to fifty mancuses of gold, thirty men and as many horses.<sup>19</sup>

#### **4:3 Sigeferth's Widow**

The fate of widows in late Anglo-Saxon England has received attention from several modern historians; widowhood, according to Fell, could bring a woman greater independence but it could also make wealthy widows vulnerable to exploitation by rapacious family members. Similarly, according to Rivers, rich widows could attract the unwanted attention of covetous suitors. Sarah Foot encapsulates the exploitation of wealthy widows in describing their position as 'peculiarly vulnerable to...the assaults of the secular world'.<sup>20</sup> The terse prose of the *ASC* gives little reason for Sigeferth's widow being taken to Malmesbury, recording simply that she was brought within the town (*gebringan hi binnan Ealdelmesbyrig*),<sup>21</sup> but if she possessed estates and goods comparable to those gifted to Archbishop Wulfstan's sister, Æthelred may have exercised his prerogative in *V Æthelred*, dated to 1008, to place the widow under his protection (*mund*). Under the provision, all widows who led a respectable life, would enjoy 'the protection of God and the king' (*Godes griðe 7*

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19 'A Worcestershire marriage Agreement', in Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, p.149; the dating of the contact is at p.396.

20 Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*, p.61; T. J. Rivers, 'The Legal Status of Widows in Late Anglo-Saxon England', *Medievalia et Humanistica*, 24 (1997), pp.1-16, at p.1; S. Foot, *Veiled Women*, 2 Vols. (Aldershot, 2000), Vol.1, p.121.

21 *ASC*, Vol.5, MS C, p.99 and Vol.6, MS D, p.60. It may be significant that MSS C and D refer to Malmesbury as the town of Ealdhelm, the first abbot of Malmesbury, perhaps indicating that Sigeferth's widow was confined in the abbey. To this possibility, S. E. Kelly has suggested that Sigeferth's widow may have been placed in the minster, or possibly a royal residence in the town; *Charters of Malmesbury Abbey*, (Oxford, 2005), p.26.

on *ðæs Cynges*).<sup>22</sup> Only a year before the deaths of Sigeferth and Morcar, Archbishop Wulfstan, in his 'Sermon of the Wolf to the English' (*Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*), had protested against the mistreatment of widows, who were being forced to marry, reduced to poverty, or humiliated.<sup>23</sup> In the context of the abuse of widows, which the Archbishop cited as one of the factors contributing to Viking attacks, placing Sigeferth's widow in Malmesbury could be interpreted as an attempt to put her beyond the reach of unscrupulous fortune-hunters.

It is possible that Æthelred may not have acted altruistically. When referring to the manner in which the widow was taken to Malmesbury, the Latin version of MS F of the ASC uses the verb *accepit*, which can be interpreted to mean 'took', but can also mean 'grasped'.<sup>24</sup> One should be wary perhaps of accepting this account uncritically. The probable late date of the composition of the Latin recension of MS F, sometime between the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, constrains its credibility and may also reflect monastic concerns about the treatment of women.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the potential unreliability of MS F, the possibility that Sigeferth's widow was coerced into Malmesbury is also contained in the Anglo-Norman narratives. William of Malmesbury

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22 V Æthelred is the first English law code to formally place a duty of care regarding widows upon the Church and the State; Robertson, *The Laws of the Kings of England*, p.85; also, Rivers, 'Widows' Rights', p.211; Foot, *Veiled Women*, p.122. However, the earliest known English legislation for the protection of widows dates to the laws of King Æthelbert (560-616); Attenborough, *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, p.95.

23 '...7 wydewan syndan fornydde on unriht to ceorle 7 to mænege foryrmde 7 gehynede swybe'; Archbishop Wulfstan, *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, <http://english3.fsu.edu/~wulfstan/> [electronic database, accessed 26th Oct., 2014].

24 The Latin text also refers to Sigeferth's widow as *relictam*. In classical Latin this can convey the sense of 'forsaken' or 'abandoned', but it may be prudent to give this adjective its meaning in medieval Latin: 'widow'; ASC, Vol.8, MS. F, p.107.

25 For the dating of MS F see Ch. 2:1, above.

recorded that Sigeferth's widow was a prisoner, who had been 'led away to captivity' (*captionem est abducta*).<sup>26</sup> William may have had access to local knowledge which preserved a memory of the widow being imprisoned, but it may also be the case that the depiction of the king as a gaoler of women is another example of William denigrating Æthelred's reputation. John of Worcester is more circumspect in his account of the widow's time at Malmesbury. John uses the ambiguous verb *custodiretur*, which can be interpreted to mean 'guarded' or 'protected', suggesting that the widow's welfare was the motive for her being in the town. The Latin verb also has the ominous connotation of 'restrained', implying that she was kept against her will.<sup>27</sup> If the intimations that Sigeferth's widow was a reluctant resident at Malmesbury are to be relied upon, Æthelred's motive may have been to prevent the exploitation of her wealth and status by those whom he regarded as enemies. In particular, Æthelred may have sought to prevent Edmund from marrying her to further his claims to the throne.

#### 4:4 Marriage

Whatever reason he may have had in putting Sigeferth's widow in Malmesbury, Æthelred's intention was soon thwarted by Edmund. Shortly after the widow's incarceration, according to the *ASC*, Edmund removed the widow from Malmesbury and married her (*Eadmund genam þæt wyf...7*

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<sup>26</sup> *GRA*, p.310.

<sup>27</sup> *JW*, p.480. The chronicle of John of Worcester is the only Anglo-Norman narrative to name Sigeferth's widow as Aldgyth (*Aldgitha*). The same name is given to the wife of Sigeferth's brother, Morcar, in the will of Wulfric Spot, leading Insley to suggest that the Chronicle may be in error. The suggestion that Sigeferth was unmarried, and his estates passed to Morcar's widow is contradicted by the *ASC*, which records that Sigeferth did have a wife. It is also unlikely that Sigeferth's estates, which were confiscated by Æthelred, passed to Morcar's widow; 'Politics, Conflict and Kinship', p.40, n.41.

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*hæfde him to wif*).<sup>28</sup> These were the first in a series of acts which can be considered rebellious and were certainly illegal. In taking the widow, Edmund acted contrary to his father's intention that she be sequestered, but his behaviour was also probably criminal. If Æthelred had ostensibly placed the widow under his protection, removing her from Malmesbury constituted a breach of the king's *mund*.<sup>29</sup> In marrying, Edmund also acted in defiance of Æthelred's wishes (*ofer ðæs cynges gewil*).<sup>30</sup> Æthelred's reason for objecting to Edmund's marriage is not to be found in the *ASC* but one does not have to look far to find an explanation. Immediately following the law in *V Æthelred*, which afforded the king's protection to widows, a related law required a widow to remain without a husband for a year (*XII monað werleas*). After such time, she could re-marry if she wished.<sup>31</sup> When Edmund married Sigeferth's widow, the stipulated period of time had not elapsed and his behaviour was therefore illegal.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to the legal proscription intended to postpone remarriage, other explanations for Æthelred's resistance to Edmund's marriage have been considered by Stafford. It is argued that a married prince, supported by his wife's kin, is likely to expect more power while his father is alive. This possibility may explain why, with the exception of Edward the Elder, Edmund was the only Anglo-Saxon king, after the unification of the kingdoms, to have married before his accession. If Æthelred had forbidden Edmund to marry on the grounds that he feared Edmund would demand

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28 *ASC, Vol.5, MS C*, p.99.

29 See p.119 above. The penalty for breaching the king's *mund*, according to *VII Æthelred*, was a fine of £5; Robertson, *The Laws of the Kings of England*, p.102.

30 *ASC, Vol.5, MS. C*, p.99; also, *JW*, p.481.

31 'V Æthelred', in Robertson, *The Laws of the Kings of England*, p.85.

32 None of Æthelred's extant law codes specify what punishment could have been imposed if a widow re-married within a year but, perhaps in response to Edmund's marriage, severe sanctions were introduced by Cnut. In *II Cnut*, the woman was deprived of her morning gift, and her personal and inherited property; the man forfeited his *wergeld*; Robertson, *The Laws of the Kings of England*, p.211.



greater authority, his marriage may have constituted an act of rebellion.<sup>33</sup> It is also possible that Æthelred objected to Edmund marrying the widow on the grounds that Sigefeth's brother had married the cousin of Cnut's wife, Ælfgifu of Northampton.<sup>34</sup> It may have occurred to Æthelred that if Edmund married Sigefeth's widow, he would become part of the extended family network that included Cnut, with whom Edmund might enter into an alliance in order to gain the throne. This possibility must be tempered however by the suggestion made by Nicholas Higham that by marrying into the same extended family as had Cnut, Edmund destroyed any chance of Cnut receiving support from Ealdorman Ælfhelm's kin.<sup>35</sup> If Higham's explanation of Edmund's marriage is correct, it is extremely unlikely that Edmund would seek the assistance of Cnut who sought the crown for himself.

The primary sources are mostly silent concerning Edmund's reason for taking Sigefeth's widow and marrying her<sup>36</sup> but an understanding of his motive may be obtained by briefly comparing his actions to similar incidents in Anglo-Saxon England and contemporary examples on the Continent. A case of royal rebellion that has some similarities to that of Edmund's revolt is the succession dispute which occurred following the death of King Alfred in 899.<sup>37</sup> Alfred was succeeded by his son Edward but Æthelwold, the son of Alfred's older brother, King Æthelred, believed his claim to be equal if not superior to that of Edward and rebelled. Æthelwold's revolt cannot be fully

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33 Stafford, 'Sons and Mothers', p.95 and n.59.

34 See Ch. 4:2, above.

35 Higham, *Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, p.62.

36 An isolated indication of Edmund's motive is contained in the narrative of William of Malmesbury, where Edmund is said to have 'desired' the widow upon seeing her (*visam concupiuit*). The credibility of this unique explanation is weakened further, perhaps, by William's following comment that Edmund concealed his actions from his father because Æthelred was regarded by family and outsiders as foolish (*qui domesticis ut alienis esset ridiculo*); *GRA*, pp.312-13.

37 The *ASC* records that Alfred died 'six days before the Feast of All Hallows' [October 26th]; *MS. A*, p.91.

considered within the scope of this study but a particular aspect of his rebellion is pertinent to the discussion of Edmund's marriage.<sup>38</sup> The *ASC* records that after Æthelwold fled the estate at Wimborne, Edward rode after the consecrated nun (*nunnan gehalgod*) whom Æthelwold had taken, presumably from the nunnery at Wimborne Minster.<sup>39</sup> The *ASC* makes it clear that she was taken without the permission of the king or the bishop (*butan cynges leafe 7 ofer þara biscopa gebod*).<sup>40</sup> Æthelwold's purpose in taking the nun is unknown but Margaret Clunies Ross speculates that if Wimborne was a possession of Æthelwold's branch of the royal family, he may have taken the nun to demonstrate his authority and strengthen the legitimacy of his claim to the throne.<sup>41</sup>

Tales about the abduction of high-status women and marrying them are not restricted to members of a collateral branch of the Wessex royal family. In the early twelfth century, stories were circulating that Wulfthryth, the second wife of Edmund's grandfather, King Edgar, had been a nun at

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38 For Æthelwold's rebellion, see Lavelle, 'The Politics of Rebellion'.

39 *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle Vol.3, MS. A*, ed. J. M. Bately (Cambridge, 1986), pp.61-2. The reference to the abduction (*genuman*) of the nun calls into question the assumption of certain Anglo-Norman commentators that Æthelwold married her; *JW*, pp.356-67, *HA*, pp.298-99. The assumption that the nun was from Wimborne first appears in John of Worcester, *JW*, pp.356-57. The identity of the nun is not known, but Lavelle suggests that she may have been a member of a branch of the royal family; 'The Politics of Rebellion', p.62; also B. Yorke, *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses* (London, 2003), pp.74-5. A tentative identification of the nun as Abbess Ælfgifu of Shaftesbury, King Alfred's daughter, has been made by A. Woolf, 'View from the West: An Irish Perspective on West Saxon Dynastic Practice', in *Edward the Elder*, ed. Higham and Hill, pp.89-101, at pp.98-99.

40 A clause in the law code of King Alfred prohibited removal a nun from a nunnery without the permission of the king or the bishop. Half of the fine of 120 shillings was to be paid to the king, and the remainder paid to the bishop and the lord under whose charge the nun was in; 'The Laws of Alfred', in Attenborough, *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, p.69.

41 M. C. Ross, 'Concubinage in Anglo-Saxon England', *Past and Present*, 18 (1985), pp.3-34, at p.31.

Wilton. Rumours that Wulfthryth had taken the veil may have arisen, suggests Barbara Yorke, from the ambiguity of Wulfthryth's status to writers post-1066. The distinction made by William of Malmesbury between lay girls being educated in nunneries, such as Wulfthryth, and those who were intended for the religious life, may not have been as evident in the Anglo-Saxon period when noble women could be raised in a nunnery but removed in order to marry, even if they were originally intended for the Church.<sup>42</sup> Prior to Edgar becoming king there had been some opposition to the marriage of his brother King Eadwig and his wife, Ælfgifu, on the grounds of them being closely related.<sup>43</sup> Edgar, perhaps seeking to avoid similar objections to his rule, may have considered Wulfthryth a less politically contentious choice for a wife. The *Vita* of her cousin, Wulfhild, indicates that the two women were related to a noble family with connections to the ealdormanry of Wiltshire and the nunnery at which Wulfthryth and Wulfhild were educated.<sup>44</sup>

Æthelings and kings were not the only prominent men in Anglo-Saxon England to display a predilection for women in closed communities. On his return from a successful campaign in Wales in 1046, Earl Swein Godwineson ordered Eadgifu, the Abbess of Leominster, to be brought to him. After keeping the abbess for as long as he pleased, the earl released her.<sup>45</sup> Yorke provides a practical explanation for Swein's behaviour, suggesting that he may have intended to marry the

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42 *GRA*, pp.159; 260-61; Yorke, 'The Legitimacy of St Edith', pp.101-02; also, Stafford, *Queen Emma*, pp.258-9.

43 Eadwig and Ælfgifu had a common ancestor in King Æthelred I. Opposition to the marriage also came from those who felt their position threatened by Eadwig promoting the relatives of Ælfgifu; Yorke, 'Æthelwold and the Politics of the Tenth Century', pp.76-77. Those who had lost family fighting Ælfgifu's relative, the rebel Æthelwold, also opposed the marriage; Lavelle, 'The Politics of Rebellion', p.71 and n.89. The threat of a royal nephew to Edgar's accession was removed when Archbishop Oda dissolved Eadwig's marriage in 958 because he and Ælfgifu were too closely related; *ASC*, MS. D, p.113; Stafford, 'The King's Wife', p.15.

44 *Vita S. Wilfhildae abbatissae, auctore Goscelin*, p.14. Also, B. Yorke, 'The Women in Edgar's Life', in *Edgar, King of the English 959-975: New Interpretations*, ed. D. Scragg (Woodbridge, 2008), pp.143-57, at p.145.

45 *ASC*, MS. C, p.164. The abbess is named in *JW*, pp.548-49.

abbess in order to assert regalian rights in his earldom which included Herefordshire.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Emma Mason suggests that a union with the abbess, who was probably a member of the local aristocracy, may have been regarded by Swein as a means of strengthening his position in the region; particularly if the abbess were related to the earl who governed the area before Swein.<sup>47</sup>

A dissenting opinion is that of Margaret Ross, who interprets Swein's conduct as an illustration of the principle that powerful men sometimes consider themselves entitled to the sexual favours of consecrated women for whom they were responsible. In taking the abbess, according to Ross, Swein committed an act of sexual domination intended to demonstrate his absolute authority of the entire area. Ross also adds that such abductions occur within conquered territory, but Swein's abduction of the abbess from within his earldom appears to be an exception to her general rule.<sup>48</sup>

Accounts that lay and noble woman may have welcomed the opportunity to leave their community, should also be considered. An alternative interpretation of these alleged kidnappings, one that is applicable to the ostensible seizures committed by Swein and Æthelwold, is provided by Stafford. Placing a high-born girl in a nunnery, it is argued, was the preferred method of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy for disposing of unwanted daughters. Confined against their will, such women

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46 Yorke, *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses*, p.156.

47 E. Mason, *The House of Godwin: The History of a Dynasty* (London, 2004), p.54. The area comprising Herefordshire was previously governed by Earl Leofric. He is first recorded as an earl in 1036; ASC, MS E, p.159. An earlier diploma which names Leofric an earl, dated 1033x1035, is thought to be of doubtful authenticity; S 992 and M. K. Lawson, *Cnut: the Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century* (London, 1993), pp.66, n. 29; 155; 163, n.10.

48 Ross, 'Concubinage in Anglo-Saxon England', pp.31-2. It is extremely unlikely that Swein took the abbess in celebration of acquiring his earldom, as he had been appointed an earl three years prior to the abduction; S 1391 (1043x1044). For the extent of Swein's earldom, see *Vita Edwardi*, pp.7-8.

may have welcomed the opportunity to escape their cloisters, and in the case of a pretender, add some legitimacy to his claim.<sup>49</sup>

The suggestion that some noble women may have colluded in their ostensible abduction is further illustrated by the liaison between Count Alan the Red of Richmond, and Gunhilda, a daughter of King Harold Godwinson. The taking of Gunhilda from Wilton by Count Alan is accounted for by Richard Southern as a case of infatuation, the middle-aged count preferring to marry Gunhilda, rather than Edith, the daughter of King Malcolm of Scots, to whom he was betrothed.<sup>50</sup> In an innovative interpretation, Eleanor Searle refutes Southern, suggesting that Count Alan's actions were the result of territorial considerations. An unusually large number of Anglo-Danish tenants, from before 1066, continued to hold land in the Breton count's Yorkshire honour of Richmond.<sup>51</sup> An appreciable portion of Count Alan's holdings were also in the eastern part of what had been the Danelaw, where Gunhilda's mother, Edith Swan-neck, had been a considerable power.<sup>52</sup> The Count may therefore have seen Gunhilda as a means of reinforcing the loyalty of his Anglo-Danish tenants.<sup>53</sup> Gunhilda's willingness to go with Count Alan may be inferred from her correspondence with Archbishop Anselm of Canterbury. In the first of two letters, written shortly after his consecration at the end of 1093, the archbishop exhorts Gunhilda to 'return to the habit and

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49 Stafford, 'Sons and Mothers', p.97; Ross, 'Concubinage in Anglo-Saxon England', p.31.

50 R. W. Southern, *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape* (Cambridge, 1990), p.185, n.1.

51 E. Searle, 'Women and the Legitimization of Succession at the Norman Conquest', *ANS* III (1980), pp159-70, at pp.169 and 229, n.42.

52 Searle, 'Women and the Legitimization of Succession', pp.168 and 229, n.41.

53 Searle, 'Women and the Legitimization of Succession', p.168; also Mason, *The House of Godwin*, pp.199 and 255, n.124.

vowed life which [she] rejected'.<sup>54</sup> A further indication that Gunhilda preferred the secular life to that of the cloister is contained in Anselm's second letter, which refers to Gunhilda's intention to remain with Count Alan's brother, Alan the Black, following the death of Alan the Red.<sup>55</sup>

England, in the Anglo-Saxon and early Anglo-Norman periods, was not the only country where wealthy and well-connected women were taken, sometimes against their will. Ottonian Saxony provides a case of abduction that is similar, and closely contemporary, to the one committed by Edmund. Only a year before Edmund took Sigeferth's wife, Margrave Werner of the Nordmark, a cousin of Thietmar of Merseburg, abducted the heiress Reinhild from her burg at Beichlingen. Thietmar's account that Reinhild had promised the emperor she would not marry without his 'knowledge and advice' is interpreted by Karl Leyser as indicating that Reinhild was under the emperor's *mund*.<sup>56</sup> If this interpretation is correct, her abduction was as illegal as that of Sigeferth's wife.<sup>57</sup>

These instances of abduction, perpetrated by Anglo-Saxon aristocrat, Breton magnate or Ottonian noble, which sometimes resulted in marriage, each serve to provide an explanation for the illegal seizure and unlawful marriage committed by Edmund. In removing Sigeferth's widow from the confines into which she had probably been forcibly placed, Edmund, like Æthelwold taking the nun from Wimborne, can be seen to be demonstrating his authority and independence. Furthermore,

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54 In the same passage, Archbishop Anselm also dismisses as a technicality the fact that Gunhilda did not take vows before a bishop and therefore was never an actual nun; *The Letters of Saint Anselm*, trans. and annotated, Walter Fröhlich, 3 Vols. (Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1990-94), Vol. II, p.66.

55 *The Letters of Saint Anselm*, Vol. II, p.71. For the dating of Alan the Red's death, see F. Barlow, *William Rufus* (London, 1983), p.314.

56 Thietmar, *Chronicon*, p.310; Leyser, *Rule and Conflict*, p.62.

57 Cf. Werner's previous abduction of Liudgard, to whom he had been formally betrothed; Thietmar, *Chronicon*, pp.180-81; W. C. Brown, *Violence in Medieval Europe* (Harlow, 2011), pp.143-45.

one of the effects of Edmund's marriage would be to connect him, as did the marriage of Edgar, to an influential family. Marrying Sigeferth's widow, according to Stafford, would make Edmund the focal point of the powerful family group formerly led by Sigeferth and Morcar. As leader of the dead thegns' retainers and associates, Edmund would obtain a power base from which to press his claims to the throne.<sup>58</sup>

Also, by marrying the widow of one of the two men whose properties he acquired, Edmund, anticipating perhaps the action of Count Alan the Red, may have sought to facilitate his acceptance by the population of his new territories. Earl Swein's abduction of the Abbess of Leominster, and Margrave Werner's abduction of Reinhild, also illustrate that creating and extending advantageous connections, and obtaining the acquiescence of a region, may not have been Edmund's only reasons for marrying Sigeferth's widow. The actions of Earl Swein and Margrave Werner suggest that Edmund may have married in order to obtain the estates to which Sigeferth's widow may have been entitled, and perhaps those of her dead husband. Further insight into Edmund's motives for marrying might be gained if the family connections of Sigeferth's widow were known, but unfortunately her antecedents remain obscure.

#### **4:5 The Five Boroughs**

Having secured a propitious marriage that may have facilitated Edmund being accepted by his prospective tenants, and potentially extended the range of his associations, Edmund's next objective appears to have been territorial acquisition. The *ASC* and the narrative of John of Worcester continue their accounts of Edmund's rebellion with him taking land formerly owned by Sigeferth and Morcar by going to the 'Five Boroughs'. These sources are also valuable in providing an

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58 Stafford, 'Sons and Mothers', p.62.

indication of when the events occurred. The *ASC* has Edmund travel to Sigeferth and Morcar's territories before the Nativity of St Mary (*toforan Nativitas Sancte Marie*), which is celebrated on 8 September. The chronicle of John of Worcester is more specific, narrowing Edmund's window of activity to sometime between the Assumption, celebrated on 15 August, and the Nativity of St Mary (*inter Assumptionem et Nativitatem sancte Marie*).<sup>59</sup> It should not come as a surprise that an ecclesiastic such as John of Worcester would place Edmund's actions within *termini ante* and *post quem* that have religious significance but these festivals, particularly that of St Mary, may have been observed by Edmund and influenced the timetable of his actions.

Unique to the *ASC* is the intriguing account that Edmund travelled from the West to reach the Five Boroughs, situated in the North (*Westan norð into Fifburgum*).<sup>60</sup> The reference to 'the West' may reflect the geographical location of where the Chronicle's recensions were produced, each of them being written to the east of Edmund's last known location, Malmesbury. If this is the correct interpretation of the Chronicle's reference to 'the West', it raises the possibilities that Edmund married Sigeferth's widow in Malmesbury and from there began his journey to the Five Boroughs. If Edmund were to have left the town from the West Gate, close to the monastery, he would have quickly reached the Fosse Way, approximately two and one-half miles (seven kilometres) away. Connecting Exeter to Lincoln, this Roman road would have enabled Edmund to travel to the territories previously held by Sigeferth and Morcar. Guilty of breaking the king's *mund* and marrying a widow within the prohibited time, Edmund may also have used Malmesbury as a temporary base, sending messengers along the Fosse Way into the West of England, particularly

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59 *ASC*, MS E, p.146; *JW*, pp.480-01.

60 *ASC*, Vol. 5, MS. C, p.99.



Devon, where he had an estate, possible associates<sup>61</sup> and probable family connections in the area.<sup>62</sup> From there, Edmund could have summoned supporters to join him in Malmesbury to assist him assert his lordship in the dead thegns' territories.

The Five Boroughs visited by Edmund Ironside may be the same five towns mentioned collectively in a poem celebrating the victories of King Edmund I<sup>63</sup> but Gareth Williams, in a study of the several references to 'Five Boroughs' in the *ASC*, suggests that the towns named in connection with Edmund I: Leicester, Lincoln, Nottingham, Stamford and Derby, may have been selected for their alliteration in the original Old English, rather than them being a political entity or because they were the most important towns recovered by Edmund I.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, David Roffe and George Molyneaux independently suggest that the aforementioned *burhs* may not have had any 'corporate existence' in the tenth-century, and points to the absence of any evidence of them constituting a bloc prior to the reign of Æthelred.<sup>65</sup>

In the absence of references to specific towns, it is argued, there is nothing to indicate that the Five Boroughs referred to in connection with Edmund Ironside are the same towns identified in the poem about Edmund I. Gareth Williams does suggest however, that the context of the eleventh century references to Five Boroughs and Seven Boroughs, indicate that the two groups overlapped

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61 See Chs. 3:4 and 3:5above.

62 See Ch.3:2 above.

63 *ASC*, MS A, p.110.

64 G. Williams, 'Towns and Identities in Viking England', in *Everyday Life in Viking Towns: Social Approaches to Viking Age Towns in Ireland and England c. 850 – 1100*, ed. D. M. Hadley and Letty Ten Herkel (Oxford, 2013), pp.11-34, at p.28.

65 D. Roffe, 'Nottingham and the Five Boroughs' in *History in the Making, 1986*, ed. S. N. Mastoris (Nottingham, 1987), pp.7-11; G. Molyneaux, *The Formation of the English Kingdom in the Tenth Century* (Oxford, 2015), p.22, n.27.

or were in the same region.<sup>66</sup> References to the 'Five Boroughs' in connection with Edmund Ironside may also be explained as an attempt by the writer of the Æthelredian chronicle to establish a parallel between the re-taking of towns by Edmund I and the subjugation of those same territories by his eleventh-century namesake.

The scribe of the *ASC*, John of Worcester, and William of Malmesbury are unanimous that Edmund took possession of the dead thegns' lands and property. The account in the *ASC*, which records that Edmund 'seized' all of Sigferth's property, and that of Morcar (*gerad...ealle Sigferðes are 7 Morcares*),<sup>67</sup> indicates that Edmund may have used force to secure his lordship.<sup>68</sup> The narrative of William of Malmesbury is unique in having Edmund initially ask Æthelred for Sigferth's lands but when his request was refused, the ætheling 'claimed' the territory by his own efforts (*suapte industria vendicavit*). The account does not disclose the details of how this was achieved.<sup>69</sup> Some areas formerly held by Sigferth and Morcar may have initially resisted Edmund but his marriage to Sigferth's widow, and association with the two thegns, may have facilitated him being accepted. However Edmund's lordship was recognised, the primary sources agree that he was accepted by the local population.<sup>70</sup>

The scarcity of sources makes the identification of the estates taken by Edmund in the Five Boroughs problematical, particularly those supposedly owned by Sigferth. In the will of the ætheling Athelstan, Sigferth received an estate in Bedfordshire. Some of the properties possessed by Edmund are also indicated in the two diplomas issued in his own name. These documents,

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66 Williams, 'Towns and Identities in Viking England', pp.29-30.

67 *ASC, Vol. 5, MS. C*, pp.99-100.

68 The adjective '*invasit*', used by John of Worcester to describe Edmund's journey, can also be translated as 'invaded' or 'attacked'; *JW*, pp.480-01.

69 *GRA*, pp.312-13.

70 *ASC, Vol. 5, MS. C*, p.100; *GRA*, pp.312-13; *JW*, pp.480-81.

suggests Ann Williams, 'come very close to rebellion' as their production was the prerogative of the king.<sup>71</sup> In the first diploma, preserved in a cartulary at Peterborough, Edmund granted two estates in Northamptonshire: Peakirk and Walton, which Sigferth possessed in life (*Siuerðes habebat in vita*).<sup>72</sup> The second diploma, preserved in the archives of Thorney, refers to the Suffolk estate of Lakenheath. It does not mention Sigferth but Ann Williams argues that stylistic similarities between the diplomas suggest that Lakenheath had once belonged to the thegn.<sup>73</sup> None of these estates are in any of the named Five Boroughs but they may assist identifying one of the unnamed Seven Boroughs. Sir Frank Stenton tentatively identified the aforementioned collection of towns as the named Five Boroughs, plus Torksey and York.<sup>74</sup> Cyril Hart, commenting on the content of Edmund's two diplomas, and the proximity of the two religious houses, disagreed with Stenton's identification and suggested that one of the seven boroughs may have been Peterborough.<sup>75</sup> The few references to Sigferth's estates do not support the contemporary contention that he was a 'leading thegn' in his region, but his apparent lack of property may simply be the impression created by deficits in the historical record.

Evidence for the properties of Morcar creates a clearer picture of him as a powerful Midlands thegn. Morcar is known to have received land from Æthelred on several occasions over a three-year period, perhaps indicating his popularity with the king. The total number of estates Morcar is

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71 Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.134.

72 S 947 (AD 1016).

73 S 948 (AD 1015x1016); Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.134.

74 Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p.388, n.2.

75 C. R. Hart, *The Early Charters of Eastern England* (Leicester, 1966), p.201 and n.1.

known to have been given by the king amounts to eight, but unlike his brother's known properties, the estates Morcar received from Æthelred appear to have been in a single county: Derbyshire.<sup>76</sup>

The number of estates Morcar had from Æthelred can be supplemented significantly by the bequest he received from Wulfric Spot. In his will, Wulfric granted Morcar a total of eleven estates. All but three can be identified positively and eight of them are in Derbyshire. The bequest of at least one estate in Doncaster (Yorks.), may lend support to Stenton's suggestion that one of the Seven Boroughs was York.<sup>77</sup> The combined total of Morcar's estates, in two positively identified counties, help to explain the Chronicle's description of him as a 'leading thegn' of the 'Seven Boroughs'. The evidence also suggests that one of the Five Boroughs visited by Edmund was Derby, and one of the Seven Boroughs was possibly York.

#### **4:6 Edmund's Diplomas**

Wherever the Five Boroughs may have been, Edmund's possession of them was a criminal act. In making himself the lord of Sigeferth and Morcar's properties, which had been forfeited to Æthelred, Edmund committed numerous acts of theft against the king. The titles given to Edmund also, according to Williams, 'sail very close to the wind' in their quasi-regal terminology: in the first diploma, to the New Minster, Edmund is described as 'King Edmund ætheling' (*Eadmundus æðelingus rex*).<sup>78</sup> Edmund may have felt justified in usurping a royal prerogative and giving himself the title of 'king'. Higham has suggested that with Æthelred laying sick at Cosham, perhaps on his

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<sup>76</sup> In S 922 (AD 1009) Morcar received land at Weston upon Trent, Marley, Smalley, Kidsley, Crich and Ingleby; in S 924 (AD 1011) he received land at *Vjfre*, possibly Mickleover, and in S 928 (AD 1012) Morcar received land at *Ecgingtune*, probably Eckington.

<sup>77</sup> Another unknown estate, *Walesho*, may have been in Yorkshire or Staffordshire; S 1536.

<sup>78</sup> S 947; Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.134.

deathbed, Edmund may have believed the king's rule to be negligible.<sup>79</sup> Alternatively, with Cnut raiding along the south-west coast,<sup>80</sup> Edmund may have assumed the title of 'king' in order to rally resistance against the Danish threat. However, the perception of the rebellious nature of Edmund's diplomas may be exaggerated. Edmund was clearly in revolt against Æthelred by taking properties forfeited to the king and issuing his own diplomas but Cyril Hart made the plausible suggestion that the appellation '*rex*' may have been inserted by a late copyist.<sup>81</sup> This suggestion would appear to be supported by Edmund's second diploma, where he is described as 'son of the king of the English' (*Anglorum...basilei filius*).<sup>82</sup> The use of the Grecism '*basileus*' may have been an attempt by the anonymous scribe to confer a quasi imperial status upon Edmund.

Edmund's rebellion, although short-lived, could be considered a success. He had made a propitious marriage which arguably brought him new territories and supporters, and facilitated his acceptance by the population of the new areas he controlled. It is unknown if Edmund intended to commit further acts of insurrection but it appears that his revolt was brought to a peremptory halt by the depredations of Cnut. In what may have been the early part of September 1015, Edmund returned to the south with an army, presumably raised in his new territories, with the intention of joining forces with Ealdorman Eadric to resist Cnut who was raiding in Wessex.<sup>83</sup> While some of the mechanics of Edmund's rebellion can be reconstructed, and motives for aspects of his rebellion can be suggested with some confidence, it is more difficult to discern with certainty what provoked Edmund to rebel.

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79 Higham, *The Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, p.62.

80 ASC, MS. E, p.146.

81 C. Hart, *Early Charters of Eastern England*, p.200, n.2.

82 S 948.

83 Edmund's military campaigns will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.

#### **4:7 Reasons for Edmund's Rebellion**

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It would be a simple matter, but probably erroneous, to restrict the reasons for Edmund's rebellion to the increasing infirmity of Æthelred and the supposed general deterioration of his rule. These cannot be dismissed as contributing factors but Stafford has suggested that the king's apparent inability to deal effectively with the Danish menace was exploited by Edmund to express long suppressed animosity towards his step-mother whom he suspected of supporting her own sons for the succession.<sup>84</sup> There is little to support the contention that the sons of Æthelred's first marriage were marginalised but the circumstantial evidence is suggestive.<sup>85</sup>

Stafford makes a persuasive case that Emma, rather than languishing in the politically impotent position of dowager-queen, may have wished to enjoy the benefits that being mother to the king would bring her and would therefore seek to ensure the succession for her sons.<sup>86</sup> In addition to the support which one might expect Emma to give her own children, Edmund may have felt his chances of acceding to the throne threatened by the implications of Emma's constitutional status. Unlike Edmund's mother, who appears to have been simply the king's wife, Æthelred's second wife was accorded titles which demonstrated she was a consecrated queen.<sup>87</sup>

Emma's consecration affected not only her status but as Stafford and Higham have indicated, had ramifications for the status of her sons and any claims they might make for the throne.<sup>88</sup> The pronouncement by Abbot Ælfric that 'the queen gives birth and the ætheling by his birth strives to the throne' suggests that the son of a consecrated queen had a better right to accede than an ætheling whose mother was not consecrated.<sup>89</sup> Edmund may have taken seriously the possibility of

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84 Stafford, 'The Reign of Æthelred II', p.36.

85 See Ch. 3:2 above.

86 Stafford, 'The Reign of Æthelred II', p.21.

87 In S 909 Emma is referred to as '*consecrata regio*' and in S 910-11 she is 'Regina'.

88 Stafford, 'The King's Wife', p.24; Higham, *Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, p.45.

Emma using her consecration to advance her sons' claims to the throne. In the succession dispute of 975 Edmund's grandmother and her supporters objected to the accession of Edward the Martyr on the grounds that at the time of his conception, neither of his parents had been consecrated.<sup>90</sup>

Æthelred's minority counted against him however and Edward was chosen king, which may have given Edmund the reasonable expectation that if there were a contest between himself and his half-brothers for the throne he, the elder ætheling, would be successful. The accession of Edward the Martyr may have encouraged Edmund's ambitions for the crown but the assassination of his half-uncle, in which his grandmother was implicated, was proof that defeated rivals could not be relied upon to abide by the verdict of the witan, and their supporters would commit regicide to put their favourite on the throne.<sup>91</sup>

If Edmund's revolt was partly influenced by the consecration of Emma, his rebellion bears some comparison to that of King Alfred's older brother, the ætheling Æthelbald, in the mid ninth-century. When King Æthelwulf of Wessex returned from his pilgrimage to Rome in 856, he brought with him his new bride Judith, daughter of the West Frankish king, Charles the Bald. At her marriage to Æthelwulf, Judith had been consecrated by Bishop Hincmar of Rheims, and Æthelwulf, contrary to West Saxon tradition, conferred upon Judith the title of 'queen'.<sup>92</sup> If news of Judith's consecration reached the ætheling Æthelbald before the king's return, fear that her children with Æthelwulf might

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89 *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, p.110; also Ch. 3:2 above.

90 Eadmer, 'Life of St Dunstan', p.214; also Ch. 3:2 above.

91 See Ch. 3:2 above.

92 *The Annals of St. Bertin*, ed. and trans. J. L. Nelson, *Manchester Medieval Sources Ninth-Century Histories 1* (Manchester, 1991). p.83. For the West Saxon practice of not consecrating the king's wife, see Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, p.71 and n.28, pp.235-4.

have an enhanced claim to the throne may, according to Stafford, have provoked Æthelbald to rebel during the king's absence.<sup>93</sup>

Just as Æthelbald's revolt can partly be explained by his fear that sons from his father's second marriage might receive preferment, so the election of Æthelstan as king in Mercia, can be understood as an act of rebellion.<sup>94</sup> Æthelstan was the first-born son of Edward the Elder and Ecgwynn, the first of Edward's three wives, but there is evidence to suggest that Edward favoured Ælfweard, his son by his second wife, to succeed him. In two of Edward's diplomas, Ælfweard's name appears before that of his elder brother Æthelstan.<sup>95</sup> There is also the suggestion that Ælfweard may have been chosen as king in Winchester. A regnal list in the twelfth century *Textus Roffensis*, accords a reign of four weeks to Ælfweard.<sup>96</sup> The late date of this source may lead one to question its reliability, but a more closely contemporary text indicates the regality of Ælfweard. The *Liber Vitae* of the New Minster, Winchester, records the burial of two of Edward's sons, Æthelweard and Ælfweard. In the description of their burial, one is referred to as an ætheling (*clito*), while the other is recorded as having been 'crowned with kingly badges' (*regalibus infuli redimitus*).<sup>97</sup> Æthelweard was in fact Edward the Elder's brother, and was never king, making it probable that Ælfweard wore the regalia. In her analysis of the events immediately following the death of Edward in 924, Sarah Foot makes a convincing argument that Æthelstan, who may have accompanied his father to suppress a rebellion in Chester, took advantage of the presence of the army and that of

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93 Stafford, 'Sons and Mothers', p.89; 'The King's Wife', pp.16-17.

94 ASC, MSS. C and D, p.105.

95 S 365 and S 366 (AD 901).

96 D. Dumville, 'The West Saxon Genealogical Regnal List: Manuscripts and Texts', *Anglia*, civ (1986), pp.1-32, at p.29.

97 *Liber Vitae: Register and Martyrology of New Minster and Hyde Abbey, Winchester*, ed. W. de Gray Birch (London and Winchester, 1892), p.113.



some magnates, to secure his succession.<sup>98</sup> If this plausible explanation of events is correct, Æthelstan's election as king in Mercia can be viewed as the reaction of a first-born son, been passed over for a son of his father's second marriage, asserting his authority and right to rule.

Edmund may have felt his accession to be threatened not only by the implications of Emma's consecration, and the possibility of political assassination but he may have perceived Æthelred to be acting against him. In the negotiations for Æthelred's return from exile in Normandy, Edmund's half-brother, Edward, had represented the king.<sup>99</sup> Edward was probably only ten years old and it is unlikely that he participated fully in negotiating the king's return but Æthelred's decision to send the eldest son from his second family as his representative may, as suggested by Stafford and Higham, have given Edmund reason to suspect that Æthelred was considering Edward to succeed him.<sup>100</sup>

The extent to which the threat of preferment can motivate a prince to revolt is also well illustrated by the rebellions of the sons of the Carolingian Emperor, Louis the Pious, particularly Lothar, his eldest son by his first marriage. The prelude to Lothar's first rebellion, it could be argued, was the award of territory in 829 to his half-brother, the future Emperor Charles the Bald.<sup>101</sup>

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98 Foot, *Æthelstan*, pp.38-9.

99 ASC, MS. E, p.145. Despite the clear testimony of the Chronicle, Francis Palgrave and J.R. Green both assert that it was Edmund who represented Æthelred at the negotiations; *History of England*, p.302; *The Conquest of England* (New York, 1884), p.396, respectively.

100 Stafford, 'The Reign of Æthelred II', p.36; Higham, *Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, p.45. A piece of late eleventh-century evidence for the promotion of Æthelred's second family relates that when Emma was pregnant with Edward, the male population swore that if she produced a boy 'they would await in him their lord and king' (*in eo se dominum expectare et regem*); *The Life of King Edward*, pp.12-13. The credibility of this source must be weighed against the probable bias of Edward's wife, Edith, who commissioned the work but it may reflect Æthelred's wish to be succeeded by Emma's sons.

101 *Annales Regni Francorum*, ed. F. Kurze, MGH, SRG (Hanover, 1895), p.177.

Of itself, this did not threaten Lothar's position as Louis's nominated successor<sup>102</sup> but, according to Louis Halphen, the seemingly innocuous award to Charles was accompanied by two events that may have given Lothar reason to believe that his father was attempting to remove him from the succession surreptitiously. Lothar was sent from the royal court to govern Italy, with the corollary that his name no longer appeared alongside those of Louis on royal charters. At the same time Lothar's uncle, Bernard, who had been governing Italy, was recalled to occupy the important office of chamberlain.<sup>103</sup> Suspecting that Louis intended Charles to succeed, Lothar revolted the following year and succeeded in having his powers as associate emperor restored and his name re-appear beside that of Louis on royal charters.<sup>104</sup>

Examples of ambitious and rebellious princes, whose reasons to revolt may have included those which provoked Edmund to rebel, can also be found in Ottonian Saxony. The rebellion of Liudolf, eldest son of Otto I by his first wife, has been described by John Gillingham as the reaction of a young man 'very much afraid that he was going to be disinherited'.<sup>105</sup> According to the Saxon chronicler Widukind of Corvey, Liudolf had been nominated Otto's heir<sup>106</sup> but the prince may have suspected Otto intended to change his mind concerning the accession.<sup>107</sup> The source of Liudolf's

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102 The *Annales Regni Francorum* record that in 817, during the reign of Louis, Lothar was crowned and named co-emperor (*Hlotharium coronavit et nominis atque imperii*), p.146.

103 *Annales Regni Francorum*, p.177.

104 L. Halphen, *Charlemagne and the Carolingian Empire*, trans. Giselle de Nie (Amsterdam, 1977), pp.187-90. A discussion of subsequent revolts by Lothar and his brothers can be found on pp.190-208.

105 J. B. Gillingham, *The Kingdom of Germany in the High Middle Ages* (London, 1971), p.15. Liudolf's mother was Eadgyth, daughter of Edward the Elder.

106 On the death of Edith, Otto made Liudolf his heir (*factque testamento creavit eum [Liudolf] regem post se*); Widukind, *Rerum Gestarum Saxoniarum*, ed. K. A. Kehr, MGH, SRG (Hanover, 1904), p.88.

107 In 951 Otto transferred three marches originally given to Liudolf, to Margrave Gero; *Diplomata Ottonis I*, MGH, SRG (Hanover 1879-84), p.134.

anxiety, as identified by Widukind, was Otto's second marriage to Adelheid, daughter of King Rudolf of Burgundy. Liudolf withdrew to Saxony which Widukind described as the place of 'murderous discussions' (*in loco consiliis funesto*).<sup>108</sup> Matters were probably exacerbated in 952 by the birth of Otto's first son by Adelheid, which was accompanied by rumours that Otto was going to propose the new-born as his heir.<sup>109</sup> Liudolf rebelled the following year. According to Widukind, Liudolf justified himself by explaining that he was driven to take action by the 'greatest necessity' (*ultima neccesitate*), by which he presumably meant his desire to secure the crown he regarded as rightfully his.<sup>110</sup> Liudolf was not as successful as Lothar in securing what he believed to be his patrimony. Defeated by the armies of his father and uncle, Liudolf was reconciled with Otto but deprived permanently of his duchy.<sup>111</sup>

The acts of insurgency committed by Æthelbald and his counterparts in Carolingian France and Ottonian Saxony, indicate that Edmund had compelling reasons to revolt. His motive may have been, like that of his distant relative Æthelbald, concern over the implications of his step-mother's coronation. The suspicion that a half-brother might inherit the kingdom may also have provoked Edmund to rebel, as seems to have been the case with Lothar and Liudolf. Edmund's immediate family history also demonstrated that even when the son of a first-marriage did succeed to the throne, he could be bloodily removed.

It is also plausible, as suggested by Stafford, that the practices of limiting eligibility to the throne to the sons of kings who had ruled, and conferring equal eligibility to all æthelings, may have partly influenced Edmund's decision to revolt. In reducing the numbers of those eligible for succession, it

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108 Widukind, *Rerum Gestarum Saxonicarum*, p.92.

109 H. Keller and G. Althoff, *Die Zeit der Späten Karolinger und der Ottonen 888-1024* (Stuttgart, 2008), p.193.

110 Widukind, *Rerum Gestarum Saxonicarum*, p.101.

111 Widukind, *Rerum Gestarum Saxonicarum*, pp.103-4; also Leyser, *Rule and Conflict*, pp.20 and 105.

is argued, the probability of rebellion by those who were eligible was increased. Edmund may have feared that if he did not become king, his sons would be considered ineligible for the throne. His revolt can therefore be seen as an attempt to secure the throne not only for himself but to transfer the right of succession to his sons.<sup>112</sup>

The rebellions of Æthelbald, Lothar and Liudolf, each of which were assisted by those with grievances against the crown, call into question the extent to which Edmund's revolt was his independent decision, or whether he was encouraged to rebel by those antipathetic to Æthelred. Æthelbald's co-conspirators, according to Asser, were Bishop Eahlstan of Sherborne and Ealdorman Eanwulf of Somerset.<sup>113</sup> The revolt usually attributed to Lothar, according to the *Annales Bertiniani*, was instigated by a group of magnates opposed to Louis's proposed campaign in Brittany. Having gathered popular support for their opposition, the magnates then 'compelled' (*compulerunt*) Lothar and his brother Pippin to attack Louis.<sup>114</sup> The revolt was initially led by Pippin until Lothar arrived from Italy, whereupon the conspirators took him as their leader.<sup>115</sup> So common was the practice of disaffected nobles taking advantage of disputes within the royal house, it is cited by Karl Leyser as the chief characteristic of all the major rebellions in Saxony between 938 and 1002, 'the feuds of the royal family [serving] to channel those of the nobles'. Leyser is

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112 Stafford, 'The King's Wife', p.10. Edmund's choice of names for his two sons may also be seen as an assertion of his children's right to kingship; see Ch. 1:3 above.

113 Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, p.70.

114 *Annales Bertiniani*, ed. G. Waitz, MGH, SRG (Hanover, 1883), p.2. The ring-leader of the revolt are identified by Thegan to have included Louis's chief magnates Archchaplain Hilduin, Bishop Jesse of Amiens, Lothar's father-in-law Count Hugh of Tours, Count Manfred of Orléons, and Abbot Helisachar; *Gesta Hludowici Imperatoris*, ed. E. Tremp, MGH, SRG (Hanover, 1995), p.222.

115 *Ad quem venetiam tota se illa contulit factio imperatoris*; The Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici Imperatoris*, ed. E. Tremp, MGH, SRG (Hanover, 1995), p.460.

unsurprised, therefore, that Liudolf's revolt was joined by his brother-in-law, Duke Conrad. Both of these young men felt they had been slighted by Otto and they had a common enemy in Duke Henry, Otto's brother, who supported the king's new wife.<sup>116</sup>

The only contemporary source for Edmund's rebellion, the ASC, is silent concerning the aid which he must have received in order to stage his revolt successfully. It is therefore impossible to declare definitively if the decision to rebel was Edmund's own, and equally insuperable to identify unequivocally who assisted him. It is possible however to make reasonable speculations concerning these issues. While it cannot be discounted that some of Edmund's associates may have advised him to revolt, it is arguably the case that circumstances made a compelling argument for rebellion. The constitutional ramifications of Emma's consecration, a perception that his younger half-brother was favoured for the accession, and the possibility of becoming the victim of political assassination, were sufficient and justifiable reasons for Edmund to revolt without exhortation from advisers.

The identities of those who joined Edmund in his rebellion are unknown but several individuals can be nominated. From his own household, Edmund may have been accompanied by his seneschal Leofwine and his retainers Ælfgeat and Ælfweard. Edmund may also have had a chaplain, possibly the Ælfwine who had served in his brother Athelstan's household.<sup>117</sup> If he travelled to Malmesbury with Edmund, the chaplain would have had the right to officiate at the marriage.<sup>118</sup> Other former members of Athelstan's household, who might have become part of Edmund's retinue, may also

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116 Leyser, *Rule and Conflict*, pp.20 and 29.

117 See Ch. 3:7 above.

118 A post-conquest example of a nobleman being accompanied by his priest who officiated at events is that of Ælfric *parvus*, who went to the hundred court with his priest, Æthelwig; J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005), pp.384; 493.

have participated in his revolt. These most prominent among these men could have included Athelstan's seneschal, Ælfmær, and his retainers, Æthelwine and Ælfmær.<sup>119</sup>

The strong probability that Cnut accepted into his service men who had been loyal to Edmund, allows for the possibility that Edmund's expedition to Malmesbury and the Five Boroughs included the Godwine who later became an earl, and the Leofwine who served Cnut as a *minister*.<sup>120</sup> It is also plausible that Edmund may have sought to augment his retinue by recruiting supporters from the west of England before embarking for the Five Boroughs. If Edmund acquired additional assistance, he may have been joined by the West Country thegns Æthelmær and Brihtric the Red, who attested the lease for Holcombe.<sup>121</sup>

Beyond those supporters who could have been drawn from the circle of associates identified in the lease for Holcombe and the will of the ætheling Athelstan, it is possible Edmund may also have received support from the family and entourages of Sigeferth and Morcar. The personnel of Sigeferth and Morcar's retinues is unknown and, with the exception of John of Worcester's enigmatic reference that they were the sons of one Earngrim, nothing is known about the antecedents of the two thegns.<sup>122</sup> Edmund may however have found support for his rebellion in the family into which Morcar had married. If Morcar's wife, a niece of Wulfric Spot, had siblings these powerfully placed individuals may have been willing to support a revolt against the man responsible not only for their brother-in-law's death, but that of their uncle Ealdorman Ælfhelm and

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119 See Ch. 3:7 above.

120 See Ch. 3:7 above.

121 See Ch. 3:7 above.

122 *JW*, pp.467-9. To date, no contemporary record of this name has been found. Nine examples of a possible variation of the names' spelling, 'Arngrim' are recorded for the Anglo-Saxon period, but even the earliest reference is several decades too late for the individual to be Sigeferth and Morcar's father; see PASE, [online database, accessed 16<sup>th</sup> February, 2015].

the blinding of their cousins, Wulfheah and Ufegeat.<sup>123</sup> Similarly, if the father of Morcar's wife was alive, he may have supported Edmund to avenge the death of his son-in-law.<sup>124</sup>

Morcar's daughter, who is mentioned in Wulfric's will, might also have been married at the time of Edmund's revolt, and her husband may have supported Edmund to avenge the murder of his father-in-law.<sup>125</sup> The immediate family of Edmund's new wife, whose antecedents are also unknown, may also have perceived in Edmund's rebellion an opportunity to deliver a blow against Æthelred for having ordered the death of their brother-in-law and son-in-law, Sigeferth. Although they are mostly anonymous, the thegns' immediate family and followers, and extended family, may have had a vested interest in supporting Edmund's revolt. In exchange for their assistance, Edmund may have agreed that in the event of his accession, he would reverse the confiscation of the lands and properties seized by Æthelred. One should also consider the possibility that these family members, wishing to have the lands restored, may have encouraged Edmund to rebel.

It is extremely unlikely that Edmund was able to accomplish his rebellion with the handful of individuals cited above, assuming they were part of the contingent that accompanied him, and he would have required far greater assistance than the historical record allows us to quantify. It is probable however that those who participated in Edmund's revolt, however great their number, were members of his household, former associates of Athelstan, thegns from the West Country, and members of Sigeferth and Morcar's immediate and extended families.

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123 ASC, MS. E, p.136. For a scholarly discussion of the reasons for the deaths of these three men, see Insley, 'Politics, Conflict and Kinship', pp.31-2.

124 Ann Williams suggests that Morcar's wife, Ealdgyth was probably the daughter of Wulfric's only known sister, Ælfhryth. She predeceased her brothers but Ealdgyth's father, whose identity is unknown, may have been alive in 1015; *Æthelred the Unready*, p.74 and n.45, p.195; also, S 1380 (AD 996).

125 The will refers to his god-daughter, the child of Morcar and his niece, but does not name her (*minre goddehter Morkares 7 Aldgyðe*); S 1536.

#### 4:8 Possible Rebellion in 1014

Commented [David McD61]: Sub-heading now becomes 4:8.

There were several valid reasons for Edmund to revolt in 1015 and any combination of them may have been operating simultaneously. Edmund may also have had an opportunity, according to Stafford, to stage a rebellion the previous year between the death of Swein Forkbeard at the beginning of February and the return of Æthelred to England in the spring.<sup>126</sup> Edmund, whose situation bore some resemblance to that of the ætheling Æthelbald, could have taken advantage of Æthelred's absence to seize the throne.<sup>127</sup> Æthelbald was not entirely successful in his attempt to exclude Æthelwulf from Wessex, with the kingdom being divided between father and son.<sup>128</sup> In using his father's sojourn overseas to press his claims for the crown, Æthelbald's actions may have shown Edmund what could be achieved by an ambitious ætheling and some well placed supporters. Æthelred's flight to Normandy provided Edmund not only with the opportunity to rebel, it may also have given him a motive. Æthelred's self-imposed exile, according to Richard Fletcher, could be considered an abdication; Edmund therefore was no longer an ætheling with a claim to the crown but had become the rightful king.<sup>129</sup> If Edmund regarded Æthelred's forced departure as evidence of his father relinquishing the throne, he may have considered the crown to be his and tried to take it.

If Edmund did revolt in 1014, it was either not recorded in a contemporary document or the

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126 The ASC, gives the death of Forkbeard occurring on 2 February; MS. E, p.144. Simeon of Durham and Gaimar add that Swein died at Gainsborough and was buried at York: 'Historia Regem', in *Symeonis Monachis Opera Omnia*, Vol. II, p.146; *EE*, pp. 226-7, Ll.4161-2.

127 Stafford, 'The Reign of Æthelred', p.36.

128 Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, p.70 and p.235, n.27.

129 Fletcher, *Bloodfeud*, p.83.



record of his rebellion has not survived. Despite the absence of evidence, an attempt by Edmund to take the crown while Æthelred was abroad remains an attractive possibility for Pauline Stafford. In another explanation for the deaths of Sigeferth and Morcar it is suggested that the charge of treason, which may have been brought against them by Eadric *Streona*, was not related to their participation in the capitulation of the Five Boroughs to Swein but was connected to the assistance they had given to Edmund's gambit for the throne.<sup>130</sup>

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130 Stafford, 'The Reign of Æthelred II', p.36. For Stafford's alternative explanations for the deaths of Sigeferth and Morcar, see Ch. 4:2 above.

## Chapter Five

### Kingliness and Kingship

#### 5:1 Introduction

In accordance with the methodology of this biographical study, the purpose of Chapter Five is to investigate the later æthelinghood, succession and untimely death of Edmund Ironside. It is usual for the study of an early medieval king's reign to include a consideration of his political achievements, social and legal reforms, and his relationship with religious institutions but the brevity of Edmund's reign makes it virtually impossible to conduct that kind of comprehensive assessment of his kingship. Rather, the primary sources of the *ASC* and the Anglo-Norman narratives overwhelmingly present Edmund trying to prevent the Danish conquest of England. Consequently, Chapter Five will employ a three-fold approach in discussing Edmund's kingliness (*cynelicnes*) and kingship (*cyneric*): as a demonstration of his suitability to rule, Edmund's military activities during his later æthelinghood will be discussed. The investigation of this aspect of Edmund's life will begin by considering the possibility that he participated in military affairs prior to his first appearance in the *ASC*. The chapter will then examine Edmund's known military exploits during his later æthelinghood. This will be followed by considering Edmund's demonstration of his worthiness to be king through the military exploits he undertook upon his accession. The third element of the tripartite analysis will examine Edmund's king-worthiness through his engagement in assembly politics. The factual bases of these investigations will be provided by the *ASC* and supplementary material will be drawn from other primary sources, particularly the Anglo-Norman narratives. The reliability of the latter will be assessed in the conclusion to this chapter. References from the Scandinavian sources will supplement the discussion of Edmund's war against Cnut, providing an alternative perspective on Edmund's conduct of the campaign. The chapter will conclude with an investigation of the manner of Edmund's death and his burial.

## **5:2 Edmund's Military Activities Prior to 1015**

Before his accession, Edmund Ironside is known to have raised three armies and engaged in a joint expedition with Earl Uhtred. None of the armies raised by the ætheling Edmund took to the field, and the expedition with Uhtred was short-lived and inconclusive.<sup>1</sup> The earliest records of Edmund's attempts to resist the Danes do not create an image of great generalship, but this has not prevented some historians from attributing military acumen to Edmund, nor stopped them from speculating about military exploits in which the ætheling Edmund participated but for which there is no record. Although he did not provide details in his exegesis of the origins of Norman England, Auguste Thierry explained the accession of Edmund Ironside as resulting from him having provided 'great proofs of his courage and skill'.<sup>2</sup> Sir Charles Oman was equally assertive in his belief that Edmund had participated in armed resistance to Viking incursions in the latter half of Æthelred's reign. Oman acknowledged the silence of the *ASC* on the subject but deduced the probability of Edmund's involvement in military affairs by calculating he was old enough to have fought.<sup>3</sup> Pauline Stafford made an important contribution to the debate about the ætheling Edmund's unrecorded military exploits when citing the military nature of many of the bequests in the will of Edmund's brother, Athelstan. These gifts, it is argued, indicate that the elder æthelings, Edmund included, had a military household. From this premise, Stafford concludes that the three elder æthelings, Athelstan,

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1 These events will be discussed later in this Chapter.

2 Thierry, *History of the Conquest of England*, p.106.

3 Oman, *England Before the Norman Conquest*, p.576. Oman's calculation that Edmund was twenty-two in 1015 is based on Edmund's name first appearing in S 876 (AD 993).

Edmund and Eadred, campaigned with Æthelred after 1009, fulfilling a function similar to that performed by the ætheling Edward the Elder in the final years of King Alfred's reign.<sup>4</sup>

Prior to his accession, the only known military exploit of Edward the Elder is recorded in the Chronicle of Ealdorman Æthelweard, in the annal for 893. In this account, the ætheling Edward was conducting a campaign somewhere in southern England (*fuert exercitando per notheas partes Anglorum*), which he interrupted to attack a Viking army at Farnham, Surrey (*Fearnhamme loco*). Driving the Vikings north of the Thames and besieging them at Thorney, Edward received assistance from London (*Subsidium clitoni praeuit...Lundonia scilicet ab urbe praefectus*).<sup>5</sup> The same event, recorded in the 'A' recension of the ASC, which dates from Edward's reign, omits him from participating in the engagement.<sup>6</sup>

The discrepancy between these two primary sources, whilst demonstrating that chroniclers exercise discrimination when compiling their accounts of historical events, also raises the possibility that the *Æthelredian Chronicles* are not a complete record of the military exploits of the ætheling Edmund Ironside. One should also consider the possibility that the *Æthelredian Chronicles*, like recension 'A' with regard to Edward the Elder, may have sought to save Edmund the embarrassment of recording any unsuccessful campaigns in which he might have participated.

There are however several references in the ASC to armed engagements, prior to 1015, in which the ætheling Edmund might have been involved. The earliest possibility occurred in 1009, the date proposed by Stafford for Edmund's military career. Æthelred, according to the ASC, intercepted a Viking raiding-army attempting to return to its ships (*se cyning hi forne forgan mid ealre fyrde þa hi*

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4 Stafford, 'The Reign of Æthelred II', p.35 and n.112, p.46. On the military nature of Athelstan's household, see Chapter Three.

5 Æthelweard, *Chronicle*, pp.49-50.

6 ASC, MS. A, p.85.

to *scypan woldan*).<sup>7</sup> Although Edmund's presence is not recorded by the Chronicle he would, at approximately twenty years of age, have been old enough to accompany Æthelred on campaign.

It is also possible that Edmund was in London with his father when Swein Forkbeard besieged the city in 1013. If so, it is probable that he contributed to the city's forceful resistance, which the Chronicle described as 'full battle' (*fullan wige*).<sup>8</sup> The remaining possibility is that Edmund accompanied Æthelred when he wrought destruction upon Lindsey for assisting Cnut in 1014.<sup>9</sup> It may be thought that being connected to members of the Midlands' nobility might have prevented Edmund from participating in Æthelred's aggravated retribution but in the following year Edmund, in concert with Uhtred, showed that he was capable of inflicting punishment upon Mercian towns sympathetic to the Danish cause.<sup>10</sup> The annals of the *ASC* might be accurate in not recording Edmund's military activities prior to his accession, but the Chronicle's exclusion of the ætheling Edward the Elder from the English victory at Farnham is evidence that an ætheling's participation in military engagements can be omitted from the historical record.

Further possibilities that the ætheling Edmund engaged in military activities that have gone unreported may be provided by the contemporary accounts of the skalds Sigvat Tordarson and Ottar Svarte, court poets to Olaf Haraldson (later St Olaf). Their verses, incorporated in Snorri Sturluson's thirteenth-century *Heimskringla*, tell of Æthelred's return from Normandy and re-taking of England.

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7 *ASC*, Vol.5, MS. C, pp.93-4. Also, *JW*, pp.462-3; *HA*, pp.346-7.

8 *ASC*, Vol. 5, MS. C, p.98. Also *GRA*, pp.302-3; *JW*, pp.472-3; *HA*, pp.352-3.

9 The *ASC* records that the army taken to Lindsey 'plundered and burned and killed all the inhabitants they could reach' (*hergode 7 bærnde 7 sloh eal þæt mancynn þæt man ræcan mihte*); Vol. 5, MS. C, p.99; also, *JW*, pp.478-9; *HA*, pp.352-3. Stenton assumed that Lindsey was one of the Five Boroughs visited by Edmund, and cited the wasting of the district for Edmund's acceptance in the Danelaw; *Anglo-Saxon England*, pp.388-9; and Ch. 4:5 above.

10 Edmund's raids will be discussed later in this Chapter.

Commented [David McD62]: 'in' inserted.

The inclusion of these contemporary references, argues Ian Howard, is persuasive evidence that Æthelred conducted a campaign to re-conquer England in 1014.<sup>11</sup> In Sturluson's version of events Æthelred, with the notable assistance of Olaf Haraldson, recaptured London from the Danes, and was victorious in battle against Ulfcytel Snelling in East Anglia.<sup>12</sup> Despite these successes, according to Sturluson, Æthelred faced fierce opposition, with many strongholds and parts of the country remaining in the control of 'Thingmen' and Danes<sup>13</sup> but Æthelred and Olaf eventually wrested the kingdom from Danish control. These references, if reliable, suggest that the resumption of English rule may have been more protracted and violent than indicated in the *ASC*.

Neither Sturluson's narrative, nor the skaldic verses he included, mention Edmund participating in the reconquest of England but in a saga concerned with giving a flattering account of the career of King Olaf, it is to be expected that persons and details considered irrelevant to Olaf's story would be omitted. If Edmund did participate in re-establishing Æthelred on the throne his absence in *Heimskringla*, like that of the ætheling Edward the Elder in the *ASC*, may be another instance of an ætheling's exploits being excluded. One must also consider the possibility that Edmund's absence in Sturluson's narrative is the result of Edmund not participating in the engagements conducted by Æthelred and Olaf. Whatever the reason for his non-appearance in *Heimskringla*, the possibility persists that Edmund may have participated in removing the remaining Danes from England.

The military engagements of the ætheling Alfred might also support the notion that the ætheling Edmund participated in campaigns. The contemporary *ASC* and the *Life of King Alfred* indicate that

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11 Howard, *Swein Forkbeard's Invasions*, p.121.

12 Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla Volume II: Olaf Haraldsson (The Saint)*, trans. A. Finlay and A. Faulkes (London, 2014), pp.9-11

13 The original Icelandic *þingmenn* is thought by Finlay and Faulkes to be an adaptation of Old English *þeningmenn* (servingmen), having the same meaning as *húskarlasveit* (company of housecarls), used to describe the personal following of some Danish kings; *Heimskringla*, p.12 and n.31.

during his æthelinghood Alfred commanded his own forces. In 871, according to the *Life of King Alfred*, the ætheling Alfred and his brother King Æthelred combined their forces to make one army (*adunatis viribus congregatoque exercitu*) before engaging Vikings at Reading.<sup>14</sup> Although it is clear that Alfred was in command of part of the English army, it is not known if he gathered his force in response to an order from the king, or if Alfred summoned the troops independently. The coalition between ætheling and king continued at the battle of Ashdown. Alfred's inferior status is clearly indicated in him being matched against the Vikings' earls while his brother took responsibility for opposing the Vikings' kings.<sup>15</sup> With regard to the degree of authority an ætheling could wield on the battlefield, Ashdown is significant for Alfred leading the English army in the absence of the king. Æthelred, according to Asser, was still at his prayers when the Viking army arrived, presenting Alfred with the dilemma of retreating or engaging the enemy without his brother. After some deliberation, Alfred led the combined English army against the Vikings (*more...copias contra hostiles exercitu*), leaving King Æthelred to join him when divine service was completed.<sup>16</sup>

An ætheling's ability to lead an army during the lifetime of the king, as previously discussed, was also demonstrated by the future Edward the Elder.<sup>17</sup> However, like the armies led by the ætheling Alfred, it is not known if Edward's force was gathered in his name or that of the king; or if the army was summoned on Edward's initiative or that of Alfred. Despite the uncertainty surrounding the details of how the armies of the æthelings Alfred and Edward were gathered, they were raised in a prolonged period of Viking raids and attempted conquest. The frequency and intensity of Viking aggression may help to explain the phenomenon of armies led by an ætheling in the late tenth

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14 Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, ed. W. H. Stevenson (Oxford, 1959), Cap.36, p.27.

15 ASC, MS. A, p.70; *Life of King Alfred*, p.79.

16 Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, Cap.38, p.29. Alfred and King Æthelred combined their armies again in 871, at Basing and Meretune; ASC, MS. A, p.72 and *Life of King Alfred*, p.80.

17 See Ch.5:2 above.

century. Similarly, the crisis created by Cnut's invasion in the early eleventh century might contribute to an explanation for Edmund Ironside's ostensible ability to summon and lead armies on his own authority. Involvement in military campaigns would also have been to Edmund's advantage. It would have given him the opportunity, as it did the rebellious ætheling Æthelwold, and Edward the Elder, to assert his authority and demonstrate his suitability for the throne.<sup>18</sup>

### **5:3 Three Armies of the Ætheling Edmund**

Edmund raised three armies in the penultimate year of his æthelinghood but while he was successful in assembling troops, extenuating circumstances prevented Edmund from taking any of these forces into battle. The primary sources agree that two armies were each assembled independently by Edmund and Ealdorman Eadric, with the *ASC* adding that Edmund gathered his forces in the North (*fyrde...se æðeling Eadmund be norðan*).<sup>19</sup> The raising of an army is Edmund's first recorded act after taking the territories of Sigeferth and Morcar; it may therefore be inferred that he assembled his force from those areas. The sources are silent regarding where Eadric assembled his army but it may be reasonable to speculate that it was recruited from within his ealdormanry. The Chronicle's ordering of events: Cnut raiding in parts of Wessex, Æthelred laying ill at Cosham, followed by the assembling of the two armies, suggests that Edmund and Eadric reacted rapidly to Cnut's raiding and did so because the king was unable to organise resistance to Cnut's depredations. The primary sources do not indicate precisely when the armies were gathered but the urgency of the situation confronting Edmund and Eadric may have provided ætheling and ealdorman with sufficient but dissimilar motivation to have gathered their respective forces by late September, or early October.

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<sup>18</sup> For Æthelwold's rebellion, see Ch. 4:4 above.

<sup>19</sup> *ASC*, Vol.7, MS. E, p.72. Also, *JW*, pp.480-1; *HA*, pp.354-5.



Having gathered their respective armies, Edmund and Eadric brought their forces together (*Ða hi togædre comon*)<sup>20</sup> but where they met is unknown. A possible meeting-point may be derived from the Chronicle's reference to Edmund gathering his army in the North. If he had been drawing support from his newly acquired Mercian territories, Edmund would most probably have taken the Fosse Way to reach Cnut pillaging in Wessex. Similarly, if Eadric's army had been assembled in his ealdormanry, particularly in Shropshire,<sup>21</sup> he may have travelled south-west along Watling Street in order to reach the Fosse Way at the only intersection of these two Roman roads at High Cross (Leics.). The strategic position of High Cross at the intersection of two Roman roads, where armies from different areas of Mercia would find a mutually convenient meeting-point, and an early opportunity for the ætheling and ealdorman to combine forces, make High Cross an attractive possible location for Edmund and Eadric to have brought their armies together.<sup>22</sup>

Although Edmund and Eadric appear to have responded quickly to Cnut's return, it is evident they gathered their armies for different purposes. Edmund's intention, probably ascertained accurately by William of Malmesbury, was to engage with the enemy (*temptavit quidem Edmundus occurrere*)<sup>23</sup> but the primary sources attribute a different motive to Eadric. When the armies of

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20 *ASC, Vol.7, MS. E, p.72*

21 Eadric's especial association with Shropshire is evidenced by his troops at *Assandun* consisting of the *Magesæton*, a group of people living along the Welsh borders of Herefordshire and South Shropshire; *ASC, Vol.7, MS. E, p.74*; Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p.46.

22 *Domesday Book* does not disclose any significant manors close to High Cross, but it was part of Guthlaxton Hundred, one of Leicestershire's four wapentakes.

23 *GRA*, pp.312-13.

Edmund and Eadric met, according to most recensions of the *Æthelredian Chronicle*, the ealdorman wished to betray Edmund (*þa wolde se ealdorman beswican þone ætheling*).<sup>24</sup>

Eadric's attempt to entrap Edmund proved unsuccessful. Instead of managing to deceive the ætheling, Eadric's treachery, according to the *Æthelredian Chronicle*, simply resulted in the two armies separating (*hi tohwurfon*).<sup>25</sup> The terse account of the *Chronicle* is expanded by John of Worcester, who attributes the immediate and mutual separation of the two armies (*mox ab invicem discesserunt*) to Edmund discovering the ealdorman's plans (*quibus cognitis*).<sup>26</sup> It is unknown where the respective armies relocated, but a clue as to where Edmund might have taken his troops may be found in the narrative of William of Malmesbury. In response to Eadric's 'many hinderences' (*prepeditus copias*), Edmund is said to have removed his forces to a safe place (*interim tuto loco continuit*).<sup>27</sup> If the two armies had met somewhere in Mercia, as suggested above, the security offered by Edmund's recently acquired territories may have made them appear to be the most practical place for him to withdraw his troops. It is possible, therefore, that Edmund may have gone to the nearest of the Five Boroughs. William of Malmesbury's reference to Eadric's 'many hinderences' also suggests the ealdorman was attempting to impede the progress of the two armies, in expectation of something happening during the delay. In the context of betraying Edmund, the intriguing possibility arises that Eadric may have been waiting for Cnut to arrive from Wessex to either take Edmund captive, or have him killed, but there is no evidence that Eadric was in communication with Cnut at that time.

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24 *ASC, Vol. 7, MS. E*, p.72. Also, *HA*, pp.354-5. John of Worcester refers to Eadric laying all sorts of traps for Edmund and trying to destroy him with guile (*omnibus insidias clitoni dux tetendit, illumque dolo perimere temptavit*), pp.480-1.

25 *ASC, Vol. 7, MS. E*, p.72.

26 *JW*, pp.480-1.

27 *GRA*, pp.312-13.

Whether Eadric's attempt to deceive Edmund was spontaneous or contrived, the primary sources do not supply the ealdorman with a motive for his treachery, but his subsequent actions may provide an explanation for his behaviour. Having failed to betray Edmund, Eadric persuaded forty ships to leave the service of the king, and submitted to Cnut (*ealdorman aspeon þa .xl. scipa fram þam cyning 7 beah þa to Cnute*).<sup>28</sup> If the singular account in John of Worcester can be relied upon, Eadric's task in persuading the ships to defect may have been assisted by them having a significant contingent of Danes (*Danicis multibus instructas*) who, presumably, were inclined to abandon their English employer and join their invading countrymen.<sup>29</sup> Having failed to betray Edmund, perhaps by delivering him to Cnut,<sup>30</sup> the forty ships may have been an alternative means for Eadric to ingratiate himself into Cnut's service.<sup>31</sup>

The interval between Edmund withdrawing his forces from those of Eadric and the raising of his second army is unknown but the reason for Edmund gathering another army is clear. In the early part of January 1016 Cnut's forces crossed into Warwickshire<sup>32</sup> where, according to the Æthelredian Chronicle, they 'raided and burned and killed all that they came to' (*hergodon 7 bærndon 7 slogon*

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28 *ASC, Vol. 7, MS. E, p.72*; also, *GRA*, pp.312-13.

29 *JW*, pp.480-1. These men may have joined the royal fleet when Thorkell entered Æthelred's service circa 1012.

30 Instances of an English king, or prince, being surrendered to an enemy are rare in Anglo-Saxon England, but the repudiation of Olaf Sihtricson by the Northumbrians in 952, and their repudiation of Eric 'Bloodaxe' in 954 are examples of putative kings betrayed by their subjects; *ASC, MS. E, p.113*.

31 In the Æthelredian Chronicle, Eadric's failed betrayal is followed immediately by his defection to Cnut, conveying the impression they occurred in rapid succession. In *JW* the interval between the two events is described with the phrase 'not long after' (*Non dui post idem*); pp.480-1. The proximity of events in the laconic accounts of the *ASC* and John of Worcester suggest that occurrences have been omitted for literary effect.

32 The *ASC* records that Cnut crossed into Mercia during the midwinter festival (*midwintres tide*), but a slightly more precise date is provided by John of Worcester who records Cnut crossing the Thames 'before the Lord's Epiphany' (*ante Epiphaniam Domini*), which is 6 January; *ASC, Vol.7, MS. E, p.72*; *JW*, pp.480-01.

*eall þæt hi to comon*).<sup>33</sup> Edmund's discovery of Cnut's depredations, according to the Chronicle and that of John of Worcester, prompted the ætheling to assemble another army.<sup>34</sup> An alternative explanation is provided by William of Malmesbury who attributes the mustering of the army to the patriotism of the Mercians, who are said to have been willing to shed their blood for their country (*paratos esse sanguinem suum patria impendere*).<sup>35</sup> After many meetings the Mercians, presumably represented by the leading thegns of the region, offered to make a stand against Cnut (*sepenumero congregati se ad resistendum offerebant*).<sup>36</sup> William does not identify any of those with whom the Mercians held their negotiations, but as the senior noble in Mercia, it was most probably Edmund to whom the proposition was made.

Despite the differences amongst the sources as to who was responsible for summoning the second army, there is unanimity in their accounts that the Mercians' proposal was conditional. In exchange for their resistance to Cnut, the Mercians required the king accompany them.<sup>37</sup> The sources are also consistent in having the Mercians make an additional request that they be assisted by a contingent from London (*burhware fultum of Lundene*).<sup>38</sup> Neither of their conditions were satisfied. None of the sources provide a complete report of what happened in response to the Mercians' submissions but the events can be reconstructed by combining the several accounts. There is agreement amongst the sources that neither Æthelred nor a contingent from London came

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33 The West Saxons are recorded as having submitted to Cnut, given hostages and supplied the raiding-part with horses:

*ASC, Vol. 7, MS. E, p.72; JW, pp.480-81.*

34 *ASC, MS. E, p.147.* The similar account in John of Worcester is supplemented by the first appearance in that narrative of Edmund's cognomen, 'Ironside' (*Ferreum Latus*); *JW, pp.480-81.*

35 These references to Mercian patriotism, made at the expense of not mentioning Edmund, may have been invented by William as a means of exculpating the Mercians from abandoning the campaign; *GRA, pp.312-13.*

36 *GRA, pp.312-13.*

37 *ASC, Vol. 7, MS. E, p.72; GRA, pp.312-13; JW, pp.480-01.*

38 *ASC, Vol.7, MS. E, p.72; GRA, pp.312-13; JW, pp.480-01.*

to the assistance of the Mercians, causing them, according to the *ASC* and John of Worcester, to abandon the campaign and return home.<sup>39</sup> Neither of the latter two sources provide an explanation for the absence of the king and the garrison but the narrative of William of Malmesbury attributes Æthelred's non-attendance to the king's cowardice, alleging that Æthelred remained behind the safety of London's walls for fear of treachery (*propter proditores (ut aiebat) nusquam procedens*).<sup>40</sup> Unique amongst the narratives, William's accusation that Æthelred was craven hearted may be intended to discredit further the king's reputation.

Opinions less prejudicial to Æthelred's reputation have been presented by several modern historians to account for the Mercians' reluctance to engage the enemy without the king leading them. In his general analysis of the ætheling Edmund's independent military activity as evidence of 'a monarchy in disarray', Richard Abels regards Edmund's status as an ætheling to be insufficient to retain the assembled force in the absence of the king.<sup>41</sup> In addition to Edmund lacking kingly status Abels, similar to Nicholas Higham before him, attributes Edmund's inability to lead the army to suspicions about his loyalty to Æthelred.<sup>42</sup> While it is true that Edmund's rebellion might call his support for the king into question, such doubts would have existed when Edmund summoned his first army; it withdrew because of Eadric's treachery,<sup>43</sup> not from suspicions concerning Edmund's filial fidelity.

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39 *ASC*, Vol. 7, MS. E, p.72; *GRA*, pp.312-13; *JW*, pp.480-01.

40 *GRA*, pp.312-13.

41 R. P. Abels, 'From Alfred to Harold II: The Military Failure of the Late Anglo-Saxon State', in *The Normans and Their Adversaries at War: Essays in Memory of C. Warren Hollister*, ed. R. P. Abels and B. S. Bachrach (Woodbridge, 2001), pp.15-30, at p.28.

42 Higham, *The Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, p.64; Abels, 'From Alfred to Harold II', p.28.

43 See Ch. 5:3 above.

The suggestion that Edmund's inferior status was responsible for the army disbanding was anticipated by C. Warren Hollister, who eloquently critiqued and countered the notion. With the exception of Edmund's second army, it is argued, there is no evidence that other locally raised troops, such as Edmund's first army and that raised by Earl Godwine in 1051, made the presence of the king a condition of their service.<sup>44</sup> An explanation for the failure of Edmund's second army to take to the field must be sought elsewhere. Part of that explanation, Hollister suggested credibly, may be found in the Mercians' other stipulation that Æthelred be accompanied by the London garrison. It may simply have been the case that the Mercian army believed it had insufficient manpower to match the forces of Cnut, and therefore wanted their numbers strengthened by a contingent from London.<sup>45</sup>

The Mercians may have had good reason to request more troops. The size of Cnut's army had been increased by the addition of Eadric's force and the complement of the forty manned ships that had deserted the royal fleet. The ranks of Cnut's army are also recorded as having been augmented by the West Saxons.<sup>46</sup> Contrary to the impression created by the unanimous accounts of the sources, it is unlikely that the entirety of Wessex defected to Cnut. It is more probable, argues Timothy Bolton, that references to the defection of Wessex indicate that support for Æthelred's regime was waning amongst some sections of the West Saxon nobility.<sup>47</sup> It is probable, therefore, that Cnut's combined force exceeded that of the Mercians who, understandably, might have considered it more prudent to withdraw.

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44 C. Warren Hollister, *Anglo-Saxon Military Institutions On the Eve of the Norman Conquest* (Oxford, 1962), pp.90-91.

45 Hollister, *Anglo-Saxon Military Institutions*, p.91.

46 *ASC*, MS. E, p.146; *GRA*, pp.312-13; *JW*, pp.480-81.

47 Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut*, pp.36-7. The subject of West Saxon resistance to Edmund Ironside will be discussed in relation to the battle of Sherston.

The reluctance of the Mercians to engage with Cnut seems not to have diminished Edmund's determination to resist the Danish incursions, and a third force was subsequently raised. References in the *ASC* and John of Worcester to a third force being gathered after the celebration of 'the festival' (*æfter þære tide*) and 'the feast' (*Festivitate vero transacta*), indicate that it was summoned some time after 6 January and possibly shortly after the second army was disbanded.<sup>48</sup> While the sources are unanimous in having the third army raised at the beginning of the year, they provide inconsistent accounts regarding who summoned it. The *ASC* is surprisingly silent concerning the identity of the person responsible but John of Worcester names him as Edmund, whereas Henry of Huntingdon records that the army mustered in response to an edict put out by Æthelred (*Adelred fecit edictum*).<sup>49</sup> If John of Worcester and Henry of Huntingdon are regarded as partial accounts, their seemingly contrasting reports may be reconciled if they are combined. To do so would allow the fuller account to be read as Edmund putting into effect his father's order that an army be summoned. With Æthelred residing in London at the time of the summons, according to the *ASC* and John of Worcester, it was most probably Edmund who ensured that the army assembled.<sup>50</sup>

The nature of the third summons is unique among the forces that were raised at the end of 1015 and the beginning of 1016. The army, according to the *ASC*, was ordered to meet on 'full penalty' (*fullum wite*).<sup>51</sup> This sanction may have been threatened, according to Abels, to deter the army from

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48 *ASC*, Vol. 6, MS. D, p.60; *JW*, pp.482-3.

49 *JW*, pp.482-3; *HA*, pp.354-5.

50 *ASC*, Vol. 6, MS. D, p.60; *JW*, pp.482-3.

51 *ASC*, Vol. 6, MS. D, p.60. The penalties that could be imposed are to be found in *V Æthelred*, Clause 28: 'And if any one without permission desert an army in which the king is, it is at peril to himself and all his possessions; and he who otherwise deserts the army is to forfeit a hundred-and-twenty shillings'; Robertson, *The Laws of England*, pp.84-5.

disbanding as it had done before.<sup>52</sup> If this was the intention, its efficacy may be measured by the army duly responding to the summons. The threat of issuing a fine may also indicate the seriousness with which Cnut's depredations were regarded and, according to Abels, the gravity of Edmund's purpose.<sup>53</sup>

Further evidence of the magnitude of the menace posed by Cnut may be inferred from the several references in the sources to the size of the army that was summoned. The *ASC* records that each man who was fit for military service should go forth (*ælc man þe fere wære forðe wende*),<sup>54</sup> and John of Worcester reports that Edmund mustered an even greater army than before (*maiozem congregavit exercitum*).<sup>55</sup> Abels cautions against interpreting the *ASC*'s reference to the size of the army literally. To do so, it is argued, would mean that Edmund summoned 'every noble, commoner and slave', a situation which Abels describes as 'a logistical nightmare'. It would be more rational, he suggests, to restrict the reference to those who had a military obligation to attend. Even when the numbers of those eligible to be mustered are reduced to those with a military obligation, the sources appear to allude to a general summons, leading to what Abels describes as the inescapable conclusion that at the beginning of 1016 England was 'a nation in arms'.<sup>56</sup>

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52 There is no indication that Edmund's previous army was fined for abandoning the campaign, and questions if their dispersal amounted to a dereliction of duty; R. P. Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1988), p.177 and n.172, p.280.

53 Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation*, p.177.

54 *ASC*, Vol. 6, MS. D, p.60. Henry of Huntingdon makes a similar reference to 'every able-bodied Englishman' (*quicumque Anglorum sanus esset*). Henry's narrative is also worthy of note for contradicting William of Malmesbury's depiction of Æthelred as a coward. The army, according to Henry, was to accompany the king into battle (*secum in bello procederet*); *HA*, pp.354-5.

55 *JW*, pp.482-3.

56 Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation*, pp.176-7.



Having assembled what may have amounted to a national army Edmund, according to the *ASC* and John of Worcester, sent messengers to London asking that Æthelred join the army. The severity of the situation may be inferred from the sources' unanimous references to requests that the king bring aid, the *ASC* recording that Æthelred was asked to come with the help he could gather (*mid þam fultume þe he gegaderian mihte*).<sup>57</sup> The impression that the country was confronting a crisis is particularly clear in John of Worcester: his narrative records that Æthelred was asked to join Edmund as quickly as possible (*citius posset occurreret*) and, having assembled many fighters (*multis pugnatores coadunatis*), the king quickly met with Edmund (*ille festinanter occurrit*).<sup>58</sup>

As discussed previously, it was not essential that Æthelred be present when an army took to the field but on this occasion the king may have perceived that the urgency of the situation necessitated his appearance. Æthelred may have lacked the reputation of a warrior-king and his practical contribution to the impending campaign might be questionable, but the royal presence could at least have bolstered the morale of those about to fight in his name. The place where Edmund and Æthelred combined their forces is unknown but England's system of Roman roads suggests some possible locations. The king most probably departed London from the Roman road that lead north-west from the city. From there, it joined with Watling Street and Akerman Street at St Albans where Edmund may have been waiting, having brought his army south-east along Watling Street. Alternatively, Æthelred may have gone to St Albans and travelled along Akerman Street to meet Edmund at Cirencester; from there, ætheling and king could have taken the Fosse Way into

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<sup>57</sup> *ASC*, Vol. 6, MS. D, p.60. A similar report occurs in John of Worcester, where Æthelred is asked to meet Edmund with all the men he could gather (*cum omnibus quos habere poterat*); *JW*, pp.482-3. The repeated references, across the primary sources, to the numbers of men who accompanied Æthelred may give support to the argument that Edmund's second army disbanded because it was under strength; see Ch 5:3 above.

<sup>58</sup> *JW*, pp.482-3. Henry of Huntingdon describes the size of the combined army as a 'countless host' (*congregata...innumera*); *HA*, pp.354-5.

Warwickshire. This possibility is less likely however, as Edmund would have had to risk engaging Cnut in order to reach the king. The location of Edmund and Æthelred's meeting may remain unknown but if their forces used the system of Roman roads, St Albans is a possible location for the armies to have met.

Commented [David McD63]: 'my' replaced with 'may'.

Despite responding quickly to the challenge posed by Cnut, the alacrity of the Anglo-Saxon army was insufficient to assuage the Æthelredian Chronicler's rebuke that it proved to be as ineffective as was customary (*þa ne beheold nan þinc ma ðe hit ofter ær dyde*).<sup>59</sup> The sources are consistent in their accounts that the army was deprived of its capacity to act by a plot to betray the king but none of them identify unequivocally the source of the threat against Æthelred. John of Worcester refers to certain of the king's allies (*quidam ex suis auxiliariis*), and Henry of Huntingdon is excessively vague in reporting that the danger came from Æthelred's men (*quod sui*).<sup>60</sup> Perhaps the most intriguing clue to the traitor's identity is that provided by the Æthelredian Chronicle; it refers to the betrayer as someone who should have been of help to the king (*hine man þa ðe him on fultume beon sceoldon*).<sup>61</sup>

The problem of identifying Æthelred's anonymous adversary has recently been addressed by Jeffrey James. Several possible solutions are offered, ranging from Danish mercenaries hired by Edmund, a faction from within Edmund's supposed Anglo-Danish retinue, to Æthelred suffering a bout of anxiety induced paranoia related to his recent illness.<sup>62</sup> The absence of any evidence that Edmund employed Danish mercenaries makes the first proposal unlikely<sup>63</sup> but Edmund's retinue may have contained family and former associates of Sigferth and Morcar, whose understandable

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<sup>59</sup> *ASC, Vol. 6, MS. D*, p.60.

<sup>60</sup> *JW*, pp.482-3; *HA*, pp.354-5.

<sup>61</sup> *ASC, Vol. 6, MS. D*, p.60.

<sup>62</sup> J. James, *An Onslaught of Spears: The Danish Conquest of England* (Stroud, 2013), p.161.

<sup>63</sup> The possibility that Edmund may have employed mercenaries at the battle of Brentford will be discussed later.

antipathy towards Æthelred extended to treason. The possibility that Æthelred was excessively concerned about his personal safety to the point of imagining enemies may be more easily dismissed; the sources are consistent in their accounts that news of an imminent betrayal was brought to the king, not that Æthelred uncovered a supposed plot against himself.

The identification of Æthelred's anonymous adversary that is perhaps most provocative was originally made by Ian Howard and developed in James's reading of the *ASC*. The person who should have been of help to the king but wanted to betray him, it is suggested, was Edmund.<sup>64</sup> This theory has some initial credibility. Edmund's rebellion could be regarded as a form of betrayal, making him a plausible candidate to betray the king at the armies' gathering. It is unlikely however, if it was Edmund's intention to usurp the throne, that he would have made his attempt so public and with the king present. The last ætheling who tried to remove his father from power, Æthelbald, had waited sensibly until the king was out of the country.<sup>65</sup>

The circumstances in which Edmund found himself at the beginning of 1016 were significantly different however from those of 855. Edmund and Æthelbald may both have been young, ambitious and just a little impatient to wear the crown, but unlike Æthelbald's father, Æthelred was in failing health. If Edmund believed Æthelred's deterioration was terminal, he may have felt emboldened to attempt the throne. The possibility that Edmund considered deposing an old and infirm Æthelred may have a parallel in the deposition of Charles the Fat. Having summoned a general assembly at Tribur in 887, the increasingly frail emperor was deserted by his followers who went over to Arnulf of Carinthia.<sup>66</sup> The identity of the unnamed traitor may never be known, but the possibility that it was Edmund, slight though it may be, cannot be dismissed entirely. Whether the threat of treachery

Commented [David McD64]: Arnulf of Carinthia.

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<sup>64</sup> Howard, *Swein Forkbeard's Invasions*, p.132, n.47; James, *An Onslaught of Spears*, p.161.

<sup>65</sup> See Ch. 4:7 above.

<sup>66</sup> Kurze, F. (ed.), *Regionis Abbatiss Prumiensis Chronicon cum Continuatione Treverensi*, MHG SS (Hanover, 1890), pp.127-8.

against Æthelred was real or imagined, and whoever the traitor may have been, the sources are unequivocal in their accounts of the king's response: Æthelred left the army, returning to the perceived safety of London.<sup>67</sup>

That Edmund Ironside initiated the gathering of armies, participated in assembling them, and was accepted as a military leader during his æthelinghood should not be considered exceptional. The rebellions staged by aggrieved princes in Anglo-Saxon England, Carolingian France and Ottonian Germany provide eloquent testimony to the capacity of royal sons to wage war.<sup>68</sup> Edmund's purpose in raising armies at the turn of 1015-16 was significantly different however. Although Edmund's marriage and possession of the 'Five Boroughs' were acts of rebellion, he appears not to have gathered armies to wrest some concession from Æthelred, or replace him. Rather, the armies raised by Edmund were intended for the defence of the country against an enemy common to ætheling and king. The unusual nature of Edmund's actions may be measured by the absence of a similar event appearing in the Anglo-Saxon sources for the entirety of the tenth century. Edmund's activities may therefore be described as extraordinary but his behaviour was not unique. In addition to the previously discussed armies led by the future Kings Alfred and Edward the Elder, the early medieval Continent also provides several examples of the sons of kings raising armies in the name of the king but also independently of him.

The power of a prince to gather and lead an army in the lifetime of his father is illustrated by Louis, the third son of Charlemagne and his second wife, Hildegard.<sup>69</sup> Prior to succeeding his father as Holy Roman Emperor, the future Louis the Pious summoned and led several armies but unlike the reticent evidence for the armies of the æthelings Alfred and Edward the Elder, the Carolingian

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<sup>67</sup> *ASC*, MS. D, p.147; *JW*, pp.482-3. Henry of Huntingdon adds that the army was dismissed by Æthelred; *HA*, pp.354-55.

<sup>68</sup> See Ch. 4:7 above.

<sup>69</sup> Einhard, 'The Life of Charlemagne', in *Two Lives of Charlemagne*, p.73.

narratives make a clear distinction between forces raised by Louis on the orders of Charlemagne, and those gathered by Louis on his initiative and authority. In the course of fifteen years, according to Louis's contemporary biographer, The Astronomer, Louis was commanded by Charlemagne to summon several armies. One of these was to assist Louis's elder brother Pippin<sup>70</sup> and the others were to enable Louis to accompany the emperor on campaign.<sup>71</sup>

In respect of where the ultimate authority for raising these armies resided, the forces gathered by Louis between 791-804 resemble Edmund's third army in them having been summoned by a son but in execution of his father's orders. Where the similarity between Louis's forces and Edmund's third army may be said to end is that Louis, as King of Aquitaine,<sup>72</sup> could have exercised his royal prerogative to raise troops whereas Edmund, who was not given responsibility for administering a region, seems to have invoked the authority of Æthelred. If the armies gathered in accordance with Charlemagne's orders were summoned on Louis's personal authority, they may be said to resemble more closely the armies Edmund assembled on his own initiative shortly after taking possession of Sigeferth and Morcar's territories.

A more striking semblance between the forces summoned by Edmund soon after acquiring his Mercian estates and the armies raised by the future Louis the Pious, can be seen in the forces Louis gathered for punitive expeditions. In the course of a dozen years between 800-812, Louis assembled four armies independently of any instruction from Charlemagne and ravaged the territories of

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70 In 791 Louis was ordered by Charlemagne to take an army to assist Pippin in Italy; The Astronomer, 'The Life of Emperor Louis', in *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, trans. T. F. X. Noble (Pennsylvania, 2009), p.232.

71 In 799 and 804 Louis was commanded by his father to support him on campaign; The Astronomer, 'The Life of Emperor Louis', p.235.

72 According to The Astronomer, Charlemagne conferred the kingdom of Aquitaine to Louis at his son's christening in 778; 'The Life of Emperor Louis', p.229. Louis was not crowned King of Aquitaine until he was three years old; P. Riche, *The Carolingians: The Family who Forged Europe*, trans. M. I. Allen (Pennsylvania, 1993), p.116.

dissident groups in Spain.<sup>73</sup> Similar to the armies Edmund summoned from within the region subject to his authority, Louis's forces were also raised from the domain under his jurisdiction: Aquitaine.<sup>74</sup>

#### **5:4 Edmund's Alliance with Earl Uhtred**

An insight into Edmund's character may be gained from his response to the dismissal of the third army and the departure of Æthelred for London; the primary sources are consistent in having Edmund ride to Northumbria to procure the assistance of Earl Uhtred,<sup>75</sup> indicating that Edmund remained determined to continue to raise resistance. The primary sources do not provide any details regarding how Edmund made his journey north, nor where he and the earl might have met. It is reasonable to speculate however that Edmund probably took the most practicable routes. If Edmund and Æthelred had parted company somewhere along Akerman Street, Edmund could have travelled along Watling Street to the Fosse Way, turning north to join Ermine Street at Lincoln, from where he could have travelled directly to York, the administrative capital of Uhtred's earldom of Northumbria.<sup>76</sup> Alternatively, Edmund may have joined Ermine Street a few miles north of London and thereby reached York more directly. Uhtred may not have been in York however, preferring to remain in his ancestral seat of Bamburgh. In that event, Edmund's onward journey would have been facilitated by him taking Dere Street leading north from York, enabling him to continue using the Roman roads until he was within a day's ride of Bamburgh.

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73 These expeditions will be discussed in more detail in relation to Edmund's alliance with Earl Uhtred.

74 Louis's ability to act autonomously against Spain was not absolute; in 808 Charlemagne forbade Louis to campaign, sending his *missus* to represent himself and Louis in Spain; The Astronomer, 'The Life of Emperor Louis', p.239.

75 *ASC*, MS. D, p.147; *JW*, pp.482-3; *HA*, pp.354-5.

76 Uhtred first attests as *dux* in S 921 (AD 1009).

Edmund's motive for seeking help from Uhtred are not manifest in the primary sources but several plausible possibilities suggest themselves. Foremost in Edmund's mind may have been the fact that Uhtred, as his brother-in-law, was obliged to assist the ætheling. Perhaps more importantly, Uhtred had proved himself successful in war and would therefore be a valuable military ally.<sup>77</sup> One should also consider the possibility, as suggested by Richard Fletcher, that Edmund journeyed to Northumbria to capitalise on a pre-existing alliance between himself and the earl. Edmund, it is argued, most probably made an ally of Uhtred when the ætheling appropriated the lands of Sigeferth and Morcar. Some of the estates confiscated by Æthelred were in Uhtred's earldom and Edmund could not, it is suggested, have taken those properties easily unless the earl had aligned himself with the rebellious ætheling.<sup>78</sup> With the exception of Uhtred's connection to Edmund by marriage, and the handful of diplomas attested by both ætheling and earl, there is no evidence to support the contention that Edmund had any other sort of relationship with Uhtred but Fletcher's hypothesis does help to explain how easily Edmund appears to have acquired his northern lands.<sup>79</sup>

An explanation for Edmund's choice of ally is also provided by Nicholas Higham. It is speculated that having submitted to Swein Forkbeard in 1013,<sup>80</sup> Uhtred's abandonment of Cnut's cause the following year seriously threatened the earl's chances of retaining his earldom should Cnut succeed in conquering England, assuming Uhtred was allowed to live.<sup>81</sup> Cnut's mutilation of the hostages given to his father provides grisly evidence that the Danish prince had a cruel and vindictive side to his character, and serves to justify any fears Uhtred may have felt for his safety.<sup>82</sup>

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77 For Uhtred's marriage and relieving the siege of Durham, see Chapter One.

78 Fletcher, *Bloodfeud*, p.83.

79 Edmund and Uhtred attested S 921-22; S 931 and S 933-34.

80 *ASC*, MS. E, p.143.

81 Higham, *Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, p.64.

82 For Cnut's mutilation of hostages, see *ASC*, MS. E, p.145.

Furthermore, Uhtred's submission to Swein is likely to have damaged the earl's relationship with Æthelred. With Uhtred's position at court most probably weakened, Edmund may have wagered that the earl was sufficiently self-interested to support the English contender for the throne in the hope of receiving favour. Part of the explanation for Edmund's journey to Northumbria may also be derived from Ian Howard's suggestion that Edmund was the unnamed antagonist responsible for the dismissal of the third army and Æthelred returning to London.<sup>83</sup> If Edmund were Æthelred's anonymous enemy, he may have thought to escape retribution by removing himself to Northumbria.

Although the primary sources do not indicate why Edmund chose Uhtred for his ally, they do suggest the motive for their joint expedition. The scribe of the Æthelredian Chronicle records that it was generally thought Edmund and Uhtred intended to summon an army against Cnut (*wende ealc man þæt hi woldon fyrde somnian ongean Cnut*).<sup>84</sup> This common assumption may have arisen from Edmund having raised three armies in nearly as many months. Having established a pattern of gathering armies, it would be natural to suppose that Edmund's alliance with Uhtred was to assemble another force. It is even conceivable that Edmund mislead people into believing that he intended to gather another army in the hope that the disinformation might conceal his true intentions from Cnut.

An alternative explanation for the purpose of the joint expedition, probably based upon Edmund's subsequent behaviour and framed with the benefit of hindsight, is provided by William of Malmesbury. After long deliberation (*diu deliberato consilio*) and in the midst of so many difficulties (*in tanta rerum angustia*), Edmund decided that his best course of action was to recover by force the cities which had rebelled (*urbes quae defecerant pugnado reciperet*), presumably by defecting to Cnut. In attacking those cities, according to William, Edmund and Uhtred believed that

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<sup>83</sup> See Ch. 5:3 above.

<sup>84</sup> ASC, Vol.6, MS. D, p.60; also JW, pp.482-3.



other cities whose loyalty was uncertain (*dubio favore*) would declare their support (*confirmandas*).<sup>85</sup> A dissenting opinion is given by John of Worcester. In what may be interpreted as criticism of Edmund's actions, John of Worcester levels the accusation that the joint expedition's policy of pillaging arose from a reluctance to fight against the Danes (*adversus Danorum exercitum ad pugnam exire nolere*).<sup>86</sup> The narrative does not disclose precisely who wished to avoid a direct confrontation with the Danes, nor the reason why. It is unlikely that Edmund, now gathering a fourth army, was unwilling to engage the enemy. If not Edmund, then suspicion must fall on the troops he raised. His Mercian forces had previously shown themselves hesitant to fight unless supported by reinforcements and they may have demurred on the same grounds, even when strengthened by Uhtred's troops.<sup>87</sup> It is also conceivable that in the absence of any source for his accusation of the army being averse to fighting the Danes, John of Worcester simply inferred their disinclination.

The contradictory accounts of William of Malmesbury and John of Worcester make it impossible to determine which is correct; there may be elements of truth in both. In the absence of knowing which narrative is the more reliable, it is still possible to see Edmund's decision not to attack Cnut as military practicable. If the difficulties referred to by William of Malmesbury allude to Edmund's armies disbanding before encountering the enemy, and Cnut's ongoing depredations, summoning a smaller force to punish rebellious cities and prevent further disaffection to the Danes may be regarded as a more prudent and expeditious strategy. Furthermore, if one can rely on William of Malmesbury's reference to the amount of time it took Edmund to decide to raid disloyal cities, the joint expedition better resembles a considered response to an immediate danger, rather than an impulsive reaction engendered by panic.

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<sup>85</sup> *GRA*, pp.312-3.

<sup>86</sup> *JW*, pp.482-3.

<sup>87</sup> For the reluctance of Edmund's previous armies to fight, see Ch. 5:3 above.

The areas raided by the alliance of ætheling and earl are identified in the *ASC*, and elsewhere, as Staffordshire, Shrewsbury and Chester.<sup>88</sup> Staffordshire, and the counties containing Shrewsbury and Chester, are contiguous with each other and the order in which their names appear in the Chronicle might also signify the sequence in which they were attacked. It is also possible that other regions suffered depredation from Edmund and Uhtred. John of Worcester makes the singular reference to a considerable number of other provinces being ravaged (*provincias...populati nonullas*).<sup>89</sup> As with Edmund's reason for choosing his brother-in-law for an ally, so the rationale in selecting those areas which were devastated has also exercised the imaginations of modern historians. Drawing attention to the fact that the shires known to have been attacked were the seat of Eadric's power in Mercia, Ann Williams makes the plausible case that Edmund and Uhtred were seeking to force the ealdorman to protect his territories, thus depriving Cnut of his English ally.<sup>90</sup>

As part of his acknowledgement of Williams's observations on the significance of the lands despoiled, Ryan Lavelle makes the intriguing suggestion that Edmund may have perceived his main opponent to be Eadric rather than Cnut.<sup>91</sup> Similarly, Nicholas Higham makes Eadric the focus of his explanation for Edmund and Uhtred targeting the ealdorman's power base, arguing that their attacks indicate their shared hatred for Eadric.<sup>92</sup> Animosity may have affected Edmund's motives; the pillaging of Eadric's lands possibly being retribution for his involvement in the executions of Sigeferth and Morcar. Edmund may also have resented the influence Eadric wielded over Æthelred, as the king's senior ealdorman. However, Higham's suggestion that Uhtred participated in

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88 *ASC*, MS. D, p.147; *JW*, pp.482-3; *HA*, pp.354-5.

89 *JW*, pp.482-3.

90 Williams, 'Cockles Amongst the Wheat', p.5; *Æthelred the Unready*, p.137.

91 Lavelle, *Æthelred II*, p.134.

92 Higham, *Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, p.64.

plundering Eadric's ealdormanry out of jealousy at the latter superseding him as the premier ealdorman, is not supported by the available evidence.<sup>93</sup>

In addition to speculating on the reasons for raiding territories controlled by Eadric, modern historians have also considered the significance of Edmund and Uhtred's alliance and the consequences of their expedition. The effect of being supported by Uhtred, according to Ian Howard, enabled Edmund to nullify Æthelred's authority in the north of England, effectively declaring the region independent of the king's jurisdiction.<sup>94</sup> This interpretation may initially appear to exaggerate the effectiveness of Edmund's alliance but Howard's argument has some merit. With Æthelred in rapidly declining health and unlikely to leave London; the Ealdorman of Mercia in a coalition attempting to conquer the country; and the most powerful magnate in the north of England acting in concert with the senior ætheling and independently of the king's will, Æthelred's ability to personally impose his authority in the north, or have it done on his behalf, was extremely weak. The implications of Edmund's alliance for a particular region are also considered by Lavelle, who argues that the attacks on Eadric's lands illustrate the degree to which the nobility could allow their local and regional interests to take priority over the arguably greater need to defend the country from Viking incursions.<sup>95</sup> It is possible therefore that Edmund might also have allowed his immediate self-interest to influence his actions against Eadric.

The effectiveness of Edmund's campaign may also be measured by the response it produced in Cnut. Preferring not to engage with Edmund, according to Ann Williams, Cnut curtailed his pillaging in Warwickshire, and proceeded along a circuitous route through the Midlands to reach

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93 Higham, *Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, p.64. Eadric was appointed to the position of ealdorman before Uhtred became an earl, and thereafter Uhtred's name never appears before that of Eadric, or that of any other *dux*; S 915; S 921-22; S 927; S 931; S 933-4.

94 Howard, *Swein Forkbeard's Invasions*, p.133.

95 Lavelle, *Alfred's Wars*, p.45.

York, laying waste to lands as he went.<sup>96</sup> Many of those areas ravaged by Cnut in his progress through northern England, as commented upon by Williams, were in the eastern edge of the Five Boroughs, recently acquired by Edmund.<sup>97</sup> The identification of the Five Boroughs visited by Edmund Ironside remains unresolved however and there is no evidence that either Sigeferth or Morcar owned estates in Stamford, Lincolnshire or Nottinghamshire.<sup>98</sup> Until such proof is found it may be prudent to defer identifying them definitively as towns of the Five Boroughs. Cnut's entry into Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire took him into areas where Edmund could be said to hold land, thereby making that aspect of Cnut's itinerary resemble an attack on Edmund's territory.<sup>99</sup> The route northwards taken by Cnut may also suggest other shires where Edmund had estates. Edmund is not known to have held land in Buckinghamshire but Cnut's depredations there may indicate that the ætheling possessed property in the area. Alternatively, it may have been the misfortune of Buckinghamshire to be directly in Cnut's path leaving Warwickshire to reach Bedfordshire, where Edmund is known to have acquired an estate through Sigeferth.

The consensus of the primary sources is that the destruction wrought by Cnut had a greater effect upon Uhtred than it did Edmund. When the earl heard that Cnut was heading towards York, according to the *Æthelredian Chronicle*, he abandoned his devastation and hastened northwards (*þa forlet he his hergunge 7 efstte norðweard*).<sup>100</sup> The *Chronicle* does not make explicit Uhtred's reasons for leaving but the earl's motive is supplied by William of Malmesbury as the understandable desire

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96 Williams, 'Cockles Among the Wheat', p.5. William of Malmesbury goes so far as to say that Edmund had been outwitted with a similar trick (*simili...ingenio circumvenit*); *GRA*, pp.314-5.

97 For the route taken by Cnut, see *ASC*, *MS. D*, p.149; Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.137.

98 See Ch. 4:5 above.

99 See Ch. 4:5 above.

100 *ASC*, *Vol.6, MS. D*, p.61. Also, *HA*, pp.354-5.

to defend his territory (*locorum Uhtredum ad sua defensanda*).<sup>101</sup> John of Worcester records the sequence of events differently, having Edmund abandon his devastation after learning of Cnut's depredations (*Quo cognito, clito Eadmundus populatione dimissa*) and leaving for London before Uhtred returned to the north.<sup>102</sup>

The lack of corroboration for this apparently alternative version of events may allow for this account to be dismissed as anomalous but John of Worcester's singular report may reveal an aspect of Cnut's counter-attack that the other primary sources have concealed. Rather than reading the narrative as Edmund leaving off his raiding in response to the news that Cnut was threatening Uhtred's lands, which seems unlikely, Edmund may instead have abandoned his pillaging upon discovering that his own territories had been ravaged. Unable to protect estates already despoiled, Edmund may have believed it better to return south and consolidate his position there while Cnut was in the far north.

An alternative explanation for Edmund leaving Mercia, as suggested by Ann Williams, is that Edmund's position in the north was compromised, owing to Cnut having married Ælfgifu of Northampton who wielded the same degree of influence as Edmund's own wife.<sup>103</sup> Ælfgifu's status in the Midlands may well have enabled her to raise support for Cnut, but it does not seem to have impeded Edmund's campaign there. Furthermore, Edmund's marriage to another member of Ealdorman Ælfhelm's extended family may have weakened, if not nullified, the chances of the ealdorman's kin assisting Cnut.<sup>104</sup>

With Uhtred in Northumbria attempting to preserve his earldom, Edmund, denuded of what was probably a significant portion of his force, may have had little option but to return to London and

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101 *GRA*, pp.314-5.

102 *JW*, pp.482-3.

103 Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.139.

104 Cnut may have married Ælfgifu in 1013, whereas Edmund most probably married Aldgyth in September 1015.

re-assess his situation.<sup>105</sup> Placing perhaps too much credence on the order of events as they appear in the Æthelredian Chronicle, Higham argues that Edmund remained in the north-west Midlands while

Uhtred unsuccessfully submitted to Cnut, only leaving the area when Cnut left Northumbria and entered western Mercia.<sup>106</sup> It is easy to understand how Higham may have formed this interpretation, for the Chronicle does not have Edmund turn to London until the Danish raiding-party returned to their ships before Easter (*7 com þa eall se here toforan þam Eastron to scypan*).<sup>107</sup> It is improbable however that Edmund, who until that point had shown himself to be decisive and eager to engage the enemy, would simply have waited to see how events would unfold. It is far more in keeping with what is known of Edmund's behaviour for him to have tried to maintain the momentum of his opposition to Cnut by returning south to raise more troops. An equally plausible explanation for Edmund returning to London, also provided by Higham, is Æthelred's impending death. Edmund may have believed, quite reasonably, that his chances of being chosen king by the *witan* would increase considerably if he were present to exert an influence on their deliberations.<sup>108</sup> Edmund may also have calculated that proximity to his father would provide him with opportunities to secure the king's support for election to the throne.

Cnut's return journey, which the Chronicle describes as taking place entirely to the west (*ealswa bewestan*), may be seen as designed to bring Cnut to his ships in the shortest possible time,

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105 All of the primary sources agree that Uhtred was killed and his earldom given to Eric of Hlode, which is generally understood to have happened in 1016; *ASC*, MS. D, p.148; *GRA*, pp.314-5; *JW*, pp.482-3; *HA*, pp.354-5. In an alternative reading of the sources, A. A. M. Duncan suggests that Uhtred may have lived until 1018; 'The Battle of Carham', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 55, No.159, Part 1 (1976), pp.20-28, at p.25.

106 Higham, *Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, p.65.

107 *ASC*, Vol.6, MS. D, p.61.

108 Higham, *Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, p.65.

eschewing Edmund in the process.<sup>109</sup> The impression that Cnut wished to gain the security of his ships with some celerity is also conveyed in the account of John of Worcester, which has Cnut return south 'briskly' (*alacer*).<sup>110</sup> The accounts of Cnut clinging to the west of England and apparently ignoring Edmund are contradicted by William of Malmesbury. In his narrative, Edmund is depicted as a fugitive trying to avoid seizure by travelling along by-roads (*Eadmundum, per semetra fugitantem*). Cnut only ceased his pursuit when Edmund reached the safety of London.<sup>111</sup> It would have been a radical departure from his previous behaviour for Cnut to have pursued Edmund but if Cnut believed his position in the north to be secure, he may have felt emboldened enough to attempt Edmund's capture. It is more probable however that Cnut's concern was to reach the mouth of the River Frome, and the lack of corroboration for William of Malmesbury's account may also diminish its credibility.

Edmund's decision to form an alliance with a family member in order to wage war against his enemies has its parallels in Anglo-Saxon England, Carolingian France and Ottonian Germany, suggesting that in allying himself with his brother-in-law, Edmund's behaviour was typical of young noblemen in a similar situation. Although Edmund's assaults on towns allegedly sympathetic to the Danes were a vicarious form of attack against the Vikings, they were ultimately similar in purpose to the resistance made by an earlier ætheling of the House of Wessex. According to Asser, King Alfred, when still an ætheling, conducted countless skirmishes (*irruptionibus innumerabilibus*) against Viking raiding-armies.<sup>112</sup> Alfred's forays resemble those engaged in by Edmund not only for being undertaken in the absence of the king, but for the alliances Alfred made. Asser and the ASC record that on each raid Alfred aligned himself with an individual ealdorman

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<sup>109</sup> ASC, Vol.6, MS. D, p.61.

<sup>110</sup> JW, p.482.

<sup>111</sup> GRA, pp.314-5.

<sup>112</sup> Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, Cap.42, p.33.

(*singuli duces*). On each occasion the anonymous ealdorman was accompanied by his men, suggesting that Alfred, like Edmund, may have chosen his ally for the military resources they could provide.<sup>113</sup>

Edmund's retributive campaign against rebellious towns also has a parallel in the punitive expedition his father Æthelred conducted against Cumbria. The Æthelredian Chronicle reports that the king's fleet, unable to join him in Cumbria, raided the Isle of Man instead.<sup>114</sup> In her analysis of the campaign, Pauline Stafford adopts a different perspective, arguing that the division of Æthelred's forces was not the result of incompetence but the deliberate strategy of sending a double expedition against two areas that had long given assistance to the Vikings of Dublin. In pillaging a region disloyal to the crown, according to Stafford, Æthelred's expedition was in accord with the punitive raids conducted by Kings Æthelstan and Edmund I.<sup>115</sup> If Stafford is correct in her analysis, which is persuasive, the argument that Æthelred was connected to a tradition of royal action may also be extended to include Edmund Ironside.

The campaigns conducted by Louis the Pious, prior to succeeding Charlemagne as Holy Roman Emperor, also provide a precedent for Edmund's alliance with Uhtred and demonstrate that punitive expeditions were considered a legitimate sanction for rebellion. Louis led several punitive expeditions against rebellious areas in Spain where some of the local nobility ostensibly recognised Louis as their overlord. Louis's ability to punish a defiant region is amply illustrated by his reaction to the Duke of Barcelona refusing to submit the city, in the year 800. In reprisal, Louis destroyed the city of Lerida, wasted and burned several others, and concluded his campaign by plundering the city of Huesca and burning its fields, which were full of crops, before returning to Aquitaine for the

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113 *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, Cap.42, p.33; ASC, MS. A, p.72.

114 ASC, MS. E, p.133.

115 Stafford, 'The Reign of Æthelred II', p.30 and n.80; p.44.



winter.<sup>116</sup> Not satisfied with the devastation he had wrought, Louis returned to Spain the following year leading a combined army which besieged Barcelona and forced the city into submission.<sup>117</sup> A little more than a decade later, in 812, Louis was in the Basque region where those who had recently accepted his overlordship had risen in rebellion (*in rebellionem adsurgeret*). When those accused of infidelity failed to appear to answer the charges, Louis sent a squadron to ravage everything they possessed (*cuncta eorum populari manum militarem permisit*).<sup>118</sup> Louis's serial pillaging may not have prevented rebellion but it does seem to have temporarily subdued the areas he plundered. Similarly, Edmund's expedition against rebellious towns may not have been able to produce enduring loyalty but it may have procured immediate obedience.

Ottonian Germany also provides examples of destruction directed against cities that establish Edmund's punitive expedition was consistent with a tradition of royal behaviour. In 906 the future King Henry the Fowler was sent by his father Duke Otto 'the Illustrious' of Saxony, to quell a Slavic rebellion in the province of Daleminzia. Henry, according to Thietmar of Merseburg, successfully pacified the region with an effective combination of annihilation and conflagration.<sup>119</sup> Edmund's and Uhtred's coalition also bears resemblance to the alliance of the brothers Counts Wichmann and Ekbert who rebelled against Otto I in 954-5. Their strategy was to deprive their enemies of fortresses, places where, as noted by Karl Leyser, 'wealth, dues and tribute accumulated and could be stored'.<sup>120</sup> Several years later, after Wichmann had been returned to the emperor's peace, the Count conducted raids into Sclavania and Saxony. The main purpose of these forays, estimates

Commented [David McD65]: 'Ottonian'.

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116 The Astronomer, 'The Life of Emperor Louis', p.235.

117 The Astronomer, 'The Life of Emperor Louis', p.237. Details of the composition of Louis's army are given by Ermoldus Nigellus, 'In Honour of Louis', in *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, pp.134-40.

118 The Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici Imperatoris*, pp.332 and 334.

119 Thietmar, *HABH*, p.68. Details of Henry's campaign can be found in Widukind, *Rerum Gestarum Saxoniarum*, p.16.

Leyser, was to acquire wealth and weapons.<sup>121</sup> Count Wichmann's apparent focus on the acquisitive aspects of warfare may further elucidate the purpose of Edmund and Uhtred's campaign. In addition to punishing disloyal towns, deterring disloyalty in others and avenging themselves on their mutual enemy Eadric, the ætheling and earl may also have seen an opportunity to supplement the contents of their coffers and armouries.

### **5:5 Accession**

The beginning of Easter 1016 saw Edmund ensconced in London and Cnut returned to his ships. Edmund may have been in the city for the dual purposes of securing his succession and, according to Freeman, to defend it from anticipated attack.<sup>122</sup> Cnut, as recorded by William of Malmesbury, was resting his troops until the passing of Easter, when he intended to launch all of his forces against London (*cum omnibus copiis urbem adoriretur*).<sup>123</sup> William's deduction of Cnut's intent was probably the product of hindsight, for the earliest contemporary source, the *ASC*, has Cnut turn towards London with all his ships after Easter (*æfter Eastron wende...Cnut mid eallen his scypon to Lunden weard*).<sup>124</sup> The date of Cnut's departure for the city is unknown but in 1016 Easter Sunday fell on 7 April, providing a *terminus ante quem* for Cnut sailing. A *terminus post quem* can also be established for Cnut's journey to London, for the Æthervedian chronicle records that before the Danish ships reached the city, King Æthelred died (*se cyning Æþelred forðferde ær ða scypo comon*).<sup>125</sup> His death, according to the chronicler, occurred on St George's Day (*sancte Georgius*

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120 Widukind, *Rerum Gestarum Saxonicarum*, p.129; Leyser, *Rule and Conflict*, p.21.

121 Widukind, *Rerum Gestarum Saxonicarum*, pp.142-5; Leyser, *Rule and Conflict*, p.22.

122 Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest*, p.417.

123 *GRA*, pp.314-5.

124 *ASC*, Vol. 6, MS. D, p.61; also *HA*, pp.354-5.

125 *ASC*, Vol. 6, MS. D, p.61. Also, *GRA*, pp.314-5; *HA*, pp.354-5.

*mæssedæg*).<sup>126</sup> Then, as now, St George's Day was celebrated on 23 April.<sup>127</sup> It is most probable therefore, that Cnut sailed for London sometime between 7 – 23 April.

In typical fashion the primary sources do not disclose the date of Edmund's accession but they are unanimous in having him elected as king after Æthelred's death.<sup>128</sup> The ASC records that Edmund was chosen to be king by all the councillors who were in London (*ealle þa witan þe on Lundene*), and the citizens of the city (*7 seo buruhwaru*).<sup>129</sup> It is a telling reference, indicating that it was not a full complement of the witan who chose Edmund, suggesting that those who were present constituted, or considered themselves as constituting, a body sufficient in numbers to elect a king. The inclusion of the city's citizenry in the king-making process may also be significant. If the witan was not quorate to elect a new king, the chief inhabitants, or a group representing them, may have been co-opted to provide the number of men necessary for the election to occur. The participation of London's leading men also indicates that Edmund's election had the crucial support of its most influential inhabitants, men who perhaps represented London's commercial interests, in addition to the city's political elite.<sup>130</sup>

Edmund's promotion to the status of king was not necessarily predictable, with factors possibly working in his favour as much as elements tempering his election to the throne. Nicholas Higham has identified several considerations which, operating in combination, can be said to have contributed to Edmund's election. His accession was assisted, it is argued, by the influence the

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126 ASC, Vol. 6, MS. D, p.61.

127 John of Worcester identifies the day of the week on which Æthelred died as Monday; JW, pp.484-5.

128 ASC, MSS. D and E, pp.148-9; GRA, pp.314-5; JW, pp.484-5; HA, pp.354-5.

129 ASC, Vol. 6, MS. D, p.61.

130 A later recension of the ASC, the late eleventh-early twelfth-century MS. F, has Edmund chosen by all the councillors of the English race (*ealle Angelcynnes witan*) but the late composition of this account makes it unreliable; ASC, Vol. 8, MS. F, p.108.

senior ætheling's presence might have exerted on the witan's deliberations.<sup>131</sup> A variation of this theory may be said to have been developed by Nicole Marafioti, who suggests that Edmund, as the senior ætheling, effectively had control of Æthelred's body and funeral. Edmund's presence and his seniority, it is argued, enabled him to assert his hereditary right to the throne.<sup>132</sup> Higham also cites as elements working in Edmund's favour, Cnut's attempts to conquer the country, and the debilitating effect of Eadric Streona, the leading Ealdorman, defecting to the Danes. In isolation, each of these elements may not have been sufficient to have swayed support for Edmund but taken together, they may have worked to mitigate against selecting Edmund's half-brother, a minor, for the crown.<sup>133</sup>

The possibility of a junior member of the royal family acceding to the throne was further reduced, as has been indicated by Ryan Lavelle, by the exile in Normandy of Edmund's younger half-brothers, Edward and Alfred.<sup>134</sup> Their mother, Queen Emma, seems to have remained in London but if she argued for the election of her eldest absent son, her advocacy appears to have been ineffective. Lavelle also makes the reasonable suggestion that Edmund's chances of election to the throne may have been increased by Æthelred designating his eldest surviving son to succeed him. The arguments put forward by Higham and Lavelle may create the impression, in the latter's words, that Edmund might have had 'a relatively uncomplicated succession' but there were also considerations which may have counted against Edmund's election.<sup>135</sup> His rebellion, as noted previously by Freeman, may have lost Edmund the support of the nobility in southern England who

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131 Higham, *Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, p.65.

132 N. Marafioti, *The King's Body: Burial and Succession in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto, 2014), p.92.

133 Higham, *Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, p.65.

134 Lavelle, *Æthelred II*, p.135.

135 Lavelle, *Æthelred II*, p.135.

had remained faithful to Æthelred.<sup>136</sup> Under such circumstances, argues Lavelle, for Edmund to have acceded, or been able to exercise royal authority, was 'quite remarkable'.<sup>137</sup>

In addition to repeating the account of the Æthelredian Chronicle that Edmund was elected by the citizens of London and those nobles present at the time, the narrative of John of Worcester has the unique account of a double-election in 1016. After the death of Æthelred, according to John of Worcester, the bishops, abbots, ealdorman and all the nobles of England (*episcopi, abbates, duces et quique nobiliores Anglie*) met at Southampton and by general agreement elected Cnut to be their lord and king (*pari consensu, in dominum et regem sibi Canutum elegere*).<sup>138</sup> One of the reasons for the alleged election of Cnut, as suggested by Edward Freeman, was the decision of the witan outside of London that further resistance to Cnut was 'hopeless'.<sup>139</sup> The *ASC* does not contain any accounts of Cnut meeting with resistance to his pillaging but one may reasonably infer that the local fyrd made some attempt to defend their homes and families from the Danes' depredations. The failure to stop Cnut from creating a swathe of destruction in the Midlands, and the submission of Earl Uhtred, may have persuaded a significant number of the witan that to withstand further was impracticable. The inability of the three armies known to have been raised to engage with the enemy may also have contributed to a belief that continued opposition was without purpose.

Furthermore, as indicated earlier in relation to those factors which may have mitigated against Edmund's election in London, Freeman suggests that Edmund's 'turbulence and self-will' with regard to his marriage and subjection of territories, may have persuaded the assembly outside of London that Cnut was a more preferable candidate for the crown.<sup>140</sup> It is possible that Edmund's

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136 Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest*, p.418; Lavelle, *Æthelred II*, p.135.

137 Lavelle, *Æthelred II*, p.135.

138 *JW*, pp.484-5.

139 Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest*, 418.

140 Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest*, 418.

rebellious streak may have made him, in the minds of some councillors, a questionable choice for king, but one can also argue that Cnut's mutilation of hostages two years previously was a gruesome indication that the Danish competitor for the throne was also capable of violent and intractable behaviour.

John of Worcester does not provide any authority for his reference to the election of Cnut, an omission which causes Ann Williams to wonder if John's account is simply a misplaced repetition of the submission made to Cnut after Edmund's death.<sup>141</sup> There are, however, certain indications that the submission at Southampton may have happened. When the assembly met, according to John of Worcester, it renounced and repudiated all the descendants of King Æthelred (*omnemque progeniem regis Agelredi...abnegando repudiantes*).<sup>142</sup> The renunciation, suggests Williams, is reminiscent of the assembly of councillors, lay and clerical, that pronounced a declaration of exile on every Danish king (*æfre ealcne denisce cyning utlagede*), as part of the negotiations for Æthelred's return from Normandy.<sup>143</sup> If Cnut knew of the edict of outlawry against him he may, in Williams's view, have demanded that the line of English kings be similarly rejected.<sup>144</sup> It may also be significant, according to Williams, that Edmund did not take possession of Wessex until after Cnut and his fleet had arrived at London in the second week of May.<sup>145</sup> Edmund's subjection of the region, it is suggested, was in response to the submission at Southampton, further indicating that the account of a double election may have some basis in fact.<sup>146</sup>

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141 Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.140.

142 JW, pp.484-5.

143 ASC, Vol. 7, MS. E, p.71.

144 Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.140.

145 Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.140.

146 Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.140.

It is also related by John of Worcester that when Edmund arrived in Wessex, he was received with great joy (*omni populo magna susceptus congratulatione*) and that many of the English, upon hearing this, hastily submitted to Edmund voluntarily (*multi Anglorum populi...fastinatione...dederunt voluntarie*).<sup>147</sup> In typical fashion, John does not identify the source from which he acquired his unique account of Edmund's reception, a factor which may mitigate against its credibility. The report of Edmund's rapturous welcome might be a literary trope about a new king being lauded by his subjects, intended to convey the legitimacy of Edmund's accession. The impression that Edmund was received in Wessex, and elsewhere, with unqualified enthusiasm is also questioned by Jeffrey James. He argues that had Cnut been elected, it is more probable that Edmund's arrival instilled 'fear and foreboding'. The nobility of the region would not have renounced their pledges of loyalty, so recently made to Cnut, and accepted Edmund unless they had been threatened with death.<sup>148</sup> The argument that not all the southern and western nobility supported Edmund is also indicated, as has been discussed separately by Ann Williams and Timothy Bolton, by the English defections at the battle of Sherston.<sup>149</sup>

The manner of Edmund's departure from London, and the reaction in Wessex to his arrival, as recorded in the *Æthelredian Chronicle*, is illuminating. Edmund is said to have ridden to Wessex (*gerad þa Westseaxon*), where all the people submitted to him (*him beah eall þæt folc to*).<sup>150</sup> The simplicity of the account may be deceptive. As Ann Williams has observed, the wording might convey the sense that Edmund employed force to take control of Wessex, if the Old English '*gerad*' is based on the verb '*ridan*', meaning 'to seize' or 'to occupy', both of which imply forcible

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<sup>147</sup> *JW*, pp.484-5.

<sup>148</sup> James, *An Onslaught of Spears*, p.169.

<sup>149</sup> Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.140; Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut*, pp.36-9. The Battle of Sherston will be discussed in greater detail later in this Chapter.

<sup>150</sup> *ASC, Vol. 6, MS. D*, p.61.

possession.<sup>151</sup> The Chronicle's report of Edmund's entry into Wessex may also allude to the legitimacy of his right to rule. R. H. C. Davis and Dorothy Whitelock independently demonstrated how the Chronicle's use of the term '*geridan*' can reveal the degree to which King Alfred's Wessex was controlled by the Vikings but Lavelle, in a compelling argument, suggests that the application of the same term to describe Alfred's activities, may be evidence of the chronicler supporting Alfred's claim to kingship.<sup>152</sup> By extension, the Chronicle's identical description of Edmund Ironside's entry into Wessex may be a similarly explicit endorsement of his claim to the kingdom.

If Edmund's occupation of Wessex was essentially achieved by force, the impetus for his entry into Wessex may have been Cnut's actions in the region the previous year. The ASC records that after his arrival in Wessex, Cnut raided (*hergoda*) in Dorset, Wiltshire and Somerset.<sup>153</sup> In addition to its meanings of 'to ravage' and 'to plunder', the Old English verb '*hergian*' can also mean 'to seize' or 'to capture'.<sup>154</sup> The ASC's account of Cnut's actions in Wessex may therefore be read not simply as the destruction of parts of the region, but Cnut compelling areas to accept his rule. Just as Edmund and Uhtred had, according to William of Malmesbury, attacked cities in western Mercia that had allegedly deserted to Cnut, there may have been parts of Wessex that had capitulated to Cnut which Edmund now sought to recover. Depending on the credibility one can attach to the twelfth-century narrative of William of Malmesbury, the possibility that Edmund was in Wessex to

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151 Williams makes a comparison with the modern terms 'override' and 'ride roughshod over'; *Aethelred the Unready*, pp.142-3 and n.63, p.226.

152 R.H.C. Davis, 'Alfred the Great: Propaganda and Truth', *History*, 56 (1971), pp.169-82, at pp.171-72; Whitelock, 'The Importance of the Battle of Edington', in Dorothy Whitelock, *From Bede to Alfred: Studies in Early Anglo-Saxon Literature and History*, No. XIII (London, 1980), pp.9-10; also, R. Lavelle, 'Geographies of Power in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: The Royal Estates of Anglo-Saxon Wessex', in *Reading the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, p.207.

153 ASC, Vol. 6, MS. D, p.60.

154 CA-SD, p.180.



retake towns that had surrendered to the Danes, may receive some support from William's reference to Cnut taking possession of cities and towns (*urbes et vicos applicare*) while the English were trying to raise armies against him.<sup>155</sup>

Although Thietmar of Merseburg, as previously discussed in Chapter One, is probably mistaken in recording that Edmund was in London when Cnut arrived, his contemporary *Chronicon* does suggest another reason for Edmund's eventual departure from the city. Queen Emma, whom Thietmar identifies as responsible for the defence of London, is alleged to have entered into an undertaking with Cnut whereby she agreed to have Edmund and Athelstan killed in exchange for her guaranteed safety.<sup>156</sup> The proposed double killing is made questionable by the absence of any corroboration for Thietmar's depiction of Emma as an aspiring assassin, and the fact that Athelstan had died the previous year. However, as previously discussed in Chapter One, Ian Howard suggests that Edmund's death would have been politically advantageous to the Queen.<sup>157</sup> If Thietmar is essentially correct about a threat to Edmund's life from within London, he may have thought it prudent to leave the city before he became trapped by enemies within and without. Furthermore, Emma's hostility, as discussed in Chapter Four, may have contributed to Edmund's rebellion.<sup>158</sup> Edmund leaving London may also be explained by him anticipating that Cnut, like Swein Forkbeard in 1013, would come to London and besiege the city. Trapped inside the walls of the town, Edmund's ability to mount an effective resistance to the Danes would be severely compromised. He may therefore have concluded that it would be best to secure his liberty and continue to co-ordinate opposition to Cnut, trusting that the city would withstand the inevitable siege, as it had done three years previously. Edmund might also have believed that he would be

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155 *GRA*, pp.312-3.

156 Thietmar, *Chronicon*, p.335; and Ch. 2:3 above.

157 See CH. 2:3 above.

158 See Ch 4:7 above.

better able to help London if he were outside the city, where he could gather a force to dislodge the Danes.

While it is clear from the Æthelredian Chronicle that Edmund had left London before the arrival of Cnut's fleet (*Edmund cyng ær þan gewend ut*) the date of his departure is not given.<sup>159</sup> A possible date for Edmund leaving London is provided by John of Worcester, who reports that after his election, Edmund left for Wessex 'without delay' (*sine cunctatione*), indicating that he left the city within a matter of days, and probably before the end of April.<sup>160</sup> John of Worcester does not identify a source for his account of Edmund's rapid departure however, suggesting that he may have called upon his imagination to supply Edmund with a sense of urgency, thinking perhaps that a newly elected king, whose country had been invaded, would want to leave the confines of London in order to lead the resistance.

Commented [David McD66]: 'does'.

### **5:6 Edmund's Five Battles**

#### Penselwood

While Edmund was attempting to consolidate his position in Wessex, Cnut and his fleet, according to John of Worcester, arrived at London.<sup>161</sup> The Æthelredian Chronicle records that Cnut first arrived at Greenwich during the Rogation days, 7-9 May, and within a little while (*binnan litlan fece*) turned to London.<sup>162</sup> Although it is not known precisely when Edmund left for Wessex, Cnut's arrival at London by the second week of May does provide a *terminus post quem* for the new king's

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<sup>159</sup> *ASC, Vol. 6, MS. D*, p.61

<sup>160</sup> *JW*, pp.484-5.

<sup>161</sup> *JW*, pp.484-5.

<sup>162</sup> *ASC, Vol. 6, MS. D*, p.61.

departure. In Edmund's absence, according to the *ASC*, the Danes encircled London with a ditch and regularly attacked the city, which withstood the assaults.<sup>163</sup>

It was perhaps the resolute resistance put up by the defenders of London, as recorded in the *ASC*, that persuaded Cnut to abandon his siege and follow Edmund into Wessex. It may also have been the case that Cnut believed he might expedite the capitulation of the city by defeating Edmund in battle, in addition to becoming king. The manner of Cnut's departure, as reported in John of Worcester, is telling. Leaving part of his army to guard his ships, Cnut is said to have left for Wessex in haste (*abierunt propere*), which gave Edmund no time to raise an army (*spatium congregandi exercitum non dedere*).<sup>164</sup> The implication that in his subsequent battle with the Danes, Edmund's forces were under strength, is unique to John of Worcester. The absence of any reference in the contemporary *Æthelredian Chronicle*, or the other Anglo-Norman narratives, to the size of Edmund's army may therefore cast doubt on John of Worcester's version of events. References to the preparation denied Edmund, and his consequently reduced army, may be explained as John's attempt to exaggerate the significance of the victory he subsequently ascribed to Edmund. The alacrity attributed to Cnut may also be accounted for as his concern to restore the pledges of loyalty he allegedly received at Southampton.

The *Æthelredian Chronicle*, which does not report Cnut's activities in London beyond besieging the city, records that soon after the submission of Wessex, Edmund fought the Danes at '*Peonnan wið Gillingaham*'.<sup>165</sup> The proximity of Penselwood to the shared boundaries of Dorset, Somerset

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<sup>163</sup> *ASC*, MSS. D and E, p.149.

<sup>164</sup> *JW*, pp.486-7.

<sup>165</sup> *ASC*, Vol. 6, MS. D, p.61. Penselwood is recorded as '*Penne*' in Domesday Book, but as '*Penne in Selwood*', by 1345; A. D. Mills, *A Dictionary of English Place-Names* (Oxford, 1991), p.256. The place name '*Peonnum*' also occurs in reference to a battle fought by King Cenwalh of Wessex against the Welsh, in AD 658. Freeman was unconvinced that Cenwalh fought at Penselwood, suggesting instead that the battle of 658 may have been fought

and Wiltshire, led Freeman to make the reasonable assertion that Edmund had recruited the army he led into battle from the aforementioned shires.<sup>166</sup> The date of the battle is given by William of Malmesbury as 'Rogationtide' (*diebus Rogationum*) but this may be a misplaced reference to Cnut's arrival at Greenwich.<sup>167</sup> The element 'pen', from the Brythonic Celtic toponym for 'top', may refer to the high elevation of the terrain. The position of Penselwood, on a ridge of high ground next to forest, may have been only one factor which contributed to it being selected as a suitable place to fight. John Baker and Stuart Brookes, in the course of their continuing research into Anglo-Saxon assembly sites, have identified a small group of Anglo-Saxon meeting-places that are highly distinguishable by their domination of the landscape. One such feature, termed a 'hanging promontory', lies just one kilometre to the south-east of Penselwood.<sup>168</sup> Adjacent to the county boundaries of Dorset and Somerset, Moot Hill Piece is described, in a later piece of research, as a possible 'supraregional' assembly site. If Baker and Brookes are correct in their analyses, and their arguments are persuasive, Moot Hill Piece may have provided Edmund with a mustering place for his army. If Edmund's army did not assemble at Moot Hill Piece, it may have mustered at another location nearby. 1 km to the north-east of Penselwood is Coombe Street, one of the possible locations of Egbert's Stone (*Ecgbryhtes stan*), where King Alfred is reported to have assembled the

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nearby at Pen Pits, or Orchard Castle; *History of the Norman Conquest*, p.423. Alternatively, W. G. Hoskins suggested Pinhoe, Devon; *The Westward Expansion of Wessex* (Leicester, 1960), pp.15-16.

<sup>166</sup> Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest*, p.421-2.

<sup>167</sup> *GRA*, pp.314-5.

<sup>168</sup> J. Baker and S. Brookes, 'Monumentalising the Landscape: A Special Class of Anglo-Saxon Assembly Sites', *Antiquaries Journal* 94 (2013), pp.1-16, at pp. 3-5.

armies of Somerset, Wiltshire and Hampshire west of Southampton Water, prior to defeating the Danes at the Battle of Edington.<sup>169</sup>

It is also plausible that Edmund, as did Alfred, used the render from significant West Saxon estates. The importance of royal estates, as has been discussed by Lavelle, was essential to the maintenance of kingship and was one of the means by which the king expressed his legitimacy to rule.<sup>170</sup> It is conceivable therefore that Edmund stayed at the nearby royal estate at Gillingham, using its resources to entertain and feed his closest followers in much the same way that Alfred, during the campaign that culminated at Edington, is reported to have given his closest followers '*pastum*', which Lavelle suggests is a possible Latin synonym for '*feorm*'.<sup>171</sup> The notion of feasting before a battle may, as Lavelle has discussed, seem inappropriate to a modern mind but such an opinion underestimates the significant contribution feasting would have made to strengthening social ties.<sup>172</sup> In his possible use of assembly sites and royal estates, Edmund Ironside may have employed the Wessex landscape to assert his kingship.

Speculating on who initiated the fighting at Penselwood, Jeffrey James argues that it is unlikely to have been Edmund, who had a small army.<sup>173</sup> If his forces were lacking in numbers, it may be fair to attribute caution to Edmund, but the argument appears to be based on an uncritical acceptance of John of Worcester's uncorroborated account of Edmund being denied sufficient time

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169 ASC, MS. A, p.76; Baker and Brookes, 'Identifying Outdoor Assembly Sites in Early Medieval England', *Journal of Field Archaeology*, 40, No.1 (2015), p.3-21, at p.14.

170 R. Lavelle, 'The Farm of One Night and the Organisation of Royal Estates in Late Anglo-Saxon Wessex', *Haskins Society Journal*, 14 (2005 for 2003), pp.53-82.

171 Æthelweard, *Chronicon*, p.42; Lavelle, *Alfred's Wars*, pp.110; 180.

172 Lavelle, 'Geographies of Power', p.206. For the social significance of feasting, see Hugh Magennis, *Anglo-Saxon Appetites: Food and Drink and Their Consumption in Old English and Related Literature* (Dublin, 1999), pp.22-36.

173 James, *An Onslaught of Spears*, p.170.

to recruit a large force. Hypothesizing further on how Edmund's supposedly inferior forces may have affected the nature of the fighting and the course of the engagement, James also suggests the engagement was closer to a 'thrust-and-parry' than a full scale battle. The paucity of Edmund's numbers would also, it is argued, have compelled him to take up a defensive position on the high ground presently

occupied by St Michael's church. If driven from his position, it is suggested Edmund may have retreated to an Iron-Age hill fort, Kenwalch's Castle, approximately 1.5 miles north-west, where his army could take advantage of the protection afforded by the fortification's ditch and vallum.<sup>174</sup>

Much of this theorising relies heavily upon accepting the accuracy, and the implication, of John of Worcester's singular report concerning the size of Edmund's army. The identification of St Michael's church, at the relatively commanding position of one hundred and ninety-nine metres above sea level, is a plausible location for the battle, but there is higher ground still, at two hundred metres, less than a third of a mile further north. If securing the highest terrain was Edmund's priority at Penselwood, he would have been better served occupying Kenwalch's Castle, on a contour of two hundred and thirty seven feet.

In relation to Edmund's other battles, the *Æthelredian Chronicle* is unusually terse in its account of Penselwood, giving no information about the nature or duration of the fighting, nor the outcome of the engagement, recording merely that Edmund fought there. Such brevity may suggest that the encounter at Penselwood was an inconclusive affair and did not merit more than a brief mention. Alternatively, the Chronicle's taciturn account may actually be reticence; if not an actual defeat for Edmund, Penselwood may have been something of an embarrassment for the English and the chronicler was consequently disinclined to provide more than the absolute minimum of information. Writing more than one hundred years after the events they purport to describe, the twelfth century

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<sup>174</sup> James, *An Onslaught of Spears*, p.170.

historians provide the earliest accounts of the outcome of Pensewood; without identifying their source, the Anglo-Norman narratives are virtually identical in unanimously making Edmund the winner at Pensewood, claiming either that he put the Danes to flight,<sup>175</sup> or gained a clear victory.<sup>176</sup>

The distance in time between the Anglo-Norman historians and the events of 1016, and their inclusion of unprovenanced material not contained in the *Æthelredian Chronicle*, casts doubt on the reliability of their accounts of Edmund's victory. The reasons for the Anglo-Norman narratives awarding success to the English at Pensewood may be explained by Pauline Stafford's perceptive summary of the writing of history in twelfth-century England, as mentioned previously in Chapter Two. Part of the Anglo-Norman historians' purpose in creating their histories of England, it is argued, was to commemorate the Anglo-Saxon past.<sup>177</sup> It is possible therefore that when their sources were quiescent on the subject, the twelfth-century apologists for pre-Norman England attributed a victory to Edmund Ironside at Pensewood.

### Sherston

None of the primary sources provide a date for the Battle of Pensewood but taking into account that Edmund had probably left London by the second week of May, and securing the submission of Wessex may have taken several weeks of negotiations in different parts of the region, he may not have fought Cnut until the beginning of June. Edmund's second battle receives better treatment in the primary sources but the precise date of the engagement has to be pieced together from their partial accounts. The brevity of the *Æthelredian Chronicle* creates the impression that Edmund was eager for a second encounter with the enemy, for the passage which succinctly relates the Battle of Pensewood continues with Edmund fighting after midsummer at Sherston (*7...he gefeaht æfter*

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<sup>175</sup> *GRA*, pp.314-5; *JW*, pp.486-7.

<sup>176</sup> *HA*, pp.356-7.

<sup>177</sup> Stafford, *Unification and Conquest*, p.20.

*middansummera at Sceorstane*).<sup>178</sup> The account by William of Malmesbury is similarly vague: using the alternative name for midsummer, he reports that Edmund joined in battle after St John's Day (*Post festum sancti Iohannis*).<sup>179</sup> Neither of these sources specify the interim which elapsed between midsummer's day, 25 June, and the actual battle, but they do provide a *terminus ante quem* for the engagement. John of Worcester however, in his remarkably detailed account, is emphatic that when midsummer had passed (*media estate transacta*), the first day of the battle was a Monday (*primo die belli, lune scilicet die*).<sup>180</sup> John may be correct but his identification of Monday, 26 June is slightly problematical. In 1016 midsummer fell on a Sunday, making John of Worcester's account appear to be consistent with the ASC, but he may have nominated Monday on the basis that he believed it to be the first day after midsummer when fighting could have taken place. The slight differences between the primary sources should not be exaggerated. They are consistent in recording Edmund's second battle, as king, taking place after midsummer and within the last week of June.

As has been noted by Freeman and Williams, the location of Sherston is similar to that of Penselwood, in being a peripheral settlement. Situated on the borders of modern day Wiltshire, Somerset and Gloucestershire, in what may be considered the western marches of Wessex, the location of Edmund's second battle suggests that the more easterly parts of the region may have been under Danish control.<sup>181</sup> Sherston's proximity to the borders of several counties may, as with

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<sup>178</sup> ASC, Vol. 7, MS. E, p.73.

<sup>179</sup> GRA, pp.314-5.

<sup>180</sup> JW, pp.486-7.

<sup>181</sup> Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest*, p.423; Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.143. John of Worcester records that Sherston is in *Hwiccia*, contrary to the generally accepted location of Wiltshire. In a footnote in his nineteenth-century translation of John, Thomas Forester suggests that the hamlet of Chimney in Oxfordshire may be the site of the battle: 'chimney' being a translation of the Danish '*Skorsteen*'; *Chronicon ex Chronicis*, p.127 and n.1.



Penselwood, indicate that it was close to a mustering point. Sherston also lies close to the Fosse Way, a logistical advantage which may have recommended itself to Edmund, and Cnut, whose armies were most probably travelling by horse. Sherston is also beside the River Avon, a feature which has led Jeffrey James to speculate that it may have been used by Thorkill to transport troops to the battle. These factors may have contributed to the engagement occurring at Sherston. The exact location of the battle site has not been authoritatively identified but James claims that it is known locally as 'the Gaston', placing the fighting on the south-eastern slopes of Sherston Cliff.<sup>182</sup>

With one exception the primary sources are unanimous in identifying Edmund as leading the English army at Sherston.<sup>183</sup> They do not however indicate any of the individuals who fought with him but one may infer they included some of those men who comprised Edmund's retinue from his days as an ætheling, former associates of Sigeferth and Morcar and perhaps some of those who elected Edmund to be king. There is, however, a single reference to the composition of Edmund's army which perhaps indicates the areas from which he recruited his troops. John of Worcester, in what may be a fictional address delivered by Eadric *Streona*, has the ealdorman exhort the men of Dorset, Devon and Wiltshire (*Dorsetenses, Dommani, Wiltonienses*) to flee the battlefield.<sup>184</sup> If this reference can be relied upon, a process of elimination allows one to deduce that eastern and, according to Ann Williams, central Wessex, were in the possession of the Danes.<sup>185</sup>

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182 James, *An Onslaught of Spears*, p.173. There is no such place as 'the Gaston' in Sherston, but there is a 'Gastons

Lane' opposite the church, occupying some of the highest ground in the village, and therefore a potential location for the battle.

183 The *Encomium* reports the battle but does not refer to Edmund by name.

184 *JW*, pp.488-9.

185 Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.143.

Whilst acknowledging that none of the primary sources mention the Somerset levies, Freeman added them to Edmund's forces, arguing they 'can hardly fail' to have assisted the English army.<sup>186</sup> Despite the lack of textual evidence, the geographical location of Somerset gives credence to Freeman's assertion. Contiguous with all three counties mentioned by John of Worcester, and lying between Wiltshire and Devon, it is a plausible inference that Edmund also recruited in Somerset. Commenting on the predominantly West Country component of the English army, Freeman may have exaggerated when he conjectured that Edmund's force largely consisted of men of 'Welsh descent'.<sup>187</sup> The possibility that Edmund's army contained non-English elements was also considered by Jeffrey James, who suggests that Edmund may have attracted a contingent of Scandinavians.<sup>188</sup> No evidence is offered to support the contention but it is reasonable to suggest that not every Scandinavian mercenary in Æthelred's employ deserted the English cause upon his death, and some may have transferred their allegiance to Edmund.

Although it is certain that Edmund Ironside led the English forces at Sherston, the primary sources are divided concerning the leadership of the Danish army. The panegyric *Knútsdrápa*, written within a decade of the events it purports to describe, has Cnut lead the Danish army at Sherston but the slightly later *Encomium*, also written to praise Cnut, gives the responsibility of leading the Danish army to Thorkell, who had to dissuade Cnut from going into battle.<sup>189</sup> The credibility of the *Encomium's* version of events was questioned by Alistair Campbell who cited the author of *Knútsdrápa*, Cnut's skald Óttar Svarti, and its earlier composition, as evidence of its

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186 Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest*, p.423.

187 Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest*, p.424.

188 James, *An Onslaught of Spears*, p.174.

189 'Knútsdrápa', in *English and Norse Documents*, p.138; *Encomium*, pp.20-21. Thorkell is also described as leading the Danish army by Gaimar; *EE*, L.4229, pp.230-31. For the dating of *Knútsdrápa* and the *Encomium*, see Chapter Two.

greater authority. Campbell also referred to the anachronistic position of the Battle of Sherston in the Encomiast's narrative as evidence of unreliability. The authorship of *Knútsdrápa*, and the Encomiast's dislocation of events, have also been employed by Ann Williams to render suspect the report that Thorkell led the Danish army.<sup>190</sup>

In contrast to the single, and late, reference to the structure of Edmund's army, the primary sources are relatively detailed concerning the composition of Cnut's army and they are consistent in indicating the presence of English defectors amongst the Danish ranks. The *Æthelredian Chronicle* reports that the 'raiding army' at Sherston was assisted against King Edmund by Ealdorman Eadric and Ælfmær Darling (*Eadric ealdorman 7 Ælmær Deorlingc wæron þam here on fultume ongean Eadmund cyng*).<sup>191</sup> In addition to citing these aforementioned rebels, John of Worcester identifies another English rebel, Ælfgar, son of Meaw (*Algarusque filius Meawes*).<sup>192</sup> English defections are also reported in the narrative of Geoffrey Gaimar, who uniquely describes them occurring in the course of the battle. A lack of corroboration for this particular detail, which might be a misplaced account of desertions at *Assandun*, might prevent it from being taken seriously but Gaimar's version of events deserves further study.

Although his identification of deserters is limited to Eadric, Gaimar makes the plausible accusation they included 'several others whom Kings Edward and Æthelred had brought up' (*plusurs alres k'out nurit li reis Eadward [e] Edelret*).<sup>193</sup> The reference to King Edward might be Æthelred's older half-brother Edward 'the Martyr' or possibly a scribal error for Edmund Ironside. Whether Gaimar was referring to those who had been fostered at the royal court, or had received some form of royal patronage, it is reasonable to suggest that some of those who had close relations

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<sup>190</sup> Campbell, *Encomium*, p.lviii; Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.143.

<sup>191</sup> *ASC, Vol. 7, MS. E*, p.73. The same names are also reported by Henry of Huntingdon; *HA*, pp. 356-7.

<sup>192</sup> *JW*, pp.486-7.

<sup>193</sup> *EE*, pp.230-31, Ll.4240-41.

to either Edward, Æthelred or Edmund, may have defected to the Danes. The task of nominating individuals alluded to by Gaimar's general reference is made difficult by the lack of information regarding the fostering of noble children in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, and the paucity of detail concerning those who, in addition to Eadric, might have objected to the accession of Edmund Ironside sufficiently to side with Cnut.

Despite the Æthelredian Chronicle and John of Worcester not supplying either Ælfmær Darling or Ælfgar, son of Meaw, with a specific status, Freeman gave both men the rank of ealdorman.<sup>194</sup> The simple fact that the primary sources mention Ælfmær and Ælfgar in association with Eadric may have led Freeman to infer that both men shared the same rank as the ealdorman. There is, however, no contemporary evidence to indicate that Ælfmær was an ealdorman, and beyond the context of the Battle of Sherston he is unknown. In the absence of any other references to the 'mysterious' Ælfmær, Timothy Bolton plausibly suggests that he may have been a follower of Eadric.<sup>195</sup> The inclusion of Ælfgar in the list of English collaborators at Sherston, according to Bolton, is of greater significance. Citing the *Tewkesbury Chronicle*, Bolton establishes that Ælfgar held several estates in Dorset: Cranborne, Wimborne, Dewlish and High Ashton; in addition to Loosebeare and Medland, in Devon.<sup>196</sup> If Ælfgar recruited from these counties which, according to John of Worcester, also contributed men to the English army, it indicates that Edmund may not have commanded the unanimous support of Dorset and Devon, and illustrates further the divisions which existed amongst the nobility of Wessex.

In addition to the presence of Eadric, Ælfmær and Ælfgar, and presumably their followers, the ranks of the Danish army were also augmented, according to John of Worcester, by the men of

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194 Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest*, p.423.

195 Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut*, p.38

196 London British Library., Additional, MS. 36985, fol. 1 iv; Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut*, pp.38-9. The family of Ælfgar meaw is discussed by Ann Williams; *World Before Domesday*, pp.13-15.

Hampshire and Wiltshire (*Suthamtoniensibus et Wiltoniensibus*).<sup>197</sup> It may be expected that Hampshire, the county which hosted the alleged submission to Cnut, would send men to support the Danes. The men of Wiltshire, however, are also reported by John of Worcester to have been in Edmund's army. If the reference to them is reliable, it is another indication that the political structure of Wessex, and the allegiances of its nobles, were deeply fragmented.

Although John of Worcester does not identify the leaders of the contingents from Hampshire and Wiltshire who fought for the Danes, it is possible that they were the followers of one of the three named Englishmen in the Danish army. There are, however, practical objections to Eadric, Ælfmær or Ælfgar leading the forces of Hampshire and Wiltshire. It is unlikely that Eadric led either contingent, argues Bolton, as the closest territory Eadric possessed to the counties was in the Mercian county of Gloucestershire.<sup>198</sup> It is also doubtful, Bolton suggests, that a significant group of men would be led by the otherwise unknown Ælfmær Darling. Ælfgar, son of Meaw, may also be excluded from consideration, as the estates he is known to have possessed suggest he is more likely to have had jurisdiction in Dorset and Devon. It is also improbable, it is argued, that Ælfgar led the men of Hampshire or Wiltshire, on the basis that Ælfgar's son, Beorhtric, held only one estate in Wiltshire and none in Hampshire.<sup>199</sup>

The primary sources do not explain the motives for the disaffection of the English at Sherston, but a plausible explanation for their presence in the Danish ranks is supplied by Bolton. Edmund's long standing association with the eastern Danelaw thegns Sigferth and Morcar, his marriage to Sigferth's widow and his subjugation of the dead thegns' former territories may, it is suggested, have unintentionally alienated the West-Saxon and west Mercian nobility, who then began to

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<sup>197</sup> *JW*, pp.486-7.

<sup>198</sup> Eadric's authority in Gloucestershire is attested by Hemming; *Hemingi Chartularium Ecclesie Wigorniensis*, ed. T. Hearne, 2 Vols. (Oxford, 1723), Vol.1, p.280; Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut*, p.38, and n.115.

<sup>199</sup> Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut*, p.38 and n.116.

consider Cnut as the candidate for the throne more likely to promote their interests.<sup>200</sup> The Battle of Sherston clearly demonstrates that Edmund was unable to command the unanimous support of the West-Saxon and Mercian aristocracies. Despite the impression created by the Æthelredian Chronicle that the entirety of Wessex submitted to Edmund it is manifest, as has been observed by Williams, that elements of resistance to Edmund's rule remained.<sup>201</sup> Similarly, in the opinion of Bolton, it would be a mistake to interpret English collaboration as evidence of widespread revolt. Antipathy to Edmund appears to have been confined to southern Mercia and Wessex, and the aversion to him may have been restricted to a small group whose reservations about Edmund were unique to them.<sup>202</sup>

One of the few details of the Battle of Sherston to be recorded in the Æthelredian Chronicle refers to the extremely violent nature of the fighting, where it is reported that 'a great slaughter fell on either side' (*mycal wæll feoll on ægðre healfe*).<sup>203</sup> Statements of a similar sort may also be found in the other primary sources. The *Encomium* refers to the English cutting down the Danes with 'terrible slaughter' (*dira cede Danos obruncarunt*), who then retaliated by raging madly against their enemies (*tanta in hostes debachati sunt insania*).<sup>204</sup> Notable amongst the Anglo-Norman historians for his extraordinarily detailed account of the battle, John of Worcester also describes the conflict as 'harsh and cruel' (*durum tamque cruentum*) and has the English slaying many of the Danes (*Danos...multos prostrebant*).<sup>205</sup>

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200 Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut*, pp.38-9. Edmund's associations and marriage are discussed in detail in Chapter Four, above.

201 Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.143.

202 Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut*, p.38.

203 ASC, Vol. 7, MS. E, p.73.

204 *Encomium*, pp.20-21.

205 JW, pp.486-7 and 488-9, respectively.

Despite the repeated references in the primary sources to the ferocity of the fighting and the multitude of men slain on either side, Jeffrey James estimates that the death toll at Sherston was probably low. In the absence of any accounts that neither army broke in a rout, it is argued, fleeing enemies could not be cut down indiscriminately and therefore the tally of the dead must be small.<sup>206</sup> The argument may be without solid foundation but the suggestion that reports of unaccountable killing at Sherston may be an exaggeration might have some currency. The extent to which the *Æthelredian Chronicle* refers to 'slaughter' in its account of battles suggests that it may be a literary trope. Similarly, the Anglo-Norman historians, possibly writing under the influence of romance literature, are likely to have included references to carnage to enliven their narratives.<sup>207</sup>

With the possible exception of the Battle of *Assandun*, the most detailed accounts of Edmund's abilities as a military leader are to found in the primary sources' reports of the Battle of Sherston. The most descriptive version of events is that of John of Worcester. In preparation for battle, according to John's unique narrative, Edmund arranged his army according to the terrain and, putting his best troops in the front line, kept the rest in reserve. Having inspired his forces with an exhortation that identified what they fought for, Edmund then ordered the trumpets to sound, thereby signalling his army to advance.<sup>208</sup> These accounts of Edmund's generalship have been accepted uncritically. Freeman suggested that the front line of the English army consisted of Edmund's *comitatus*, and Hollister saw a similarity in the disposition of Edmund's troops to those of King Harold Godwineson at Hastings. Commenting on the order for the English army to advance, Hollister also believed the Battle of Sherston provided 'an interesting variation' on the traditional formation of Anglo-Saxon infantry.<sup>209</sup>

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206 James, *An Onslaught of Spears*, p.175.

207 The influence of romance literature on the Anglo-Norman historians is discussed in Chapter Two.

208 *JW*, pp.486-7.

209 Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest*, p.424; Hollister, *Anglo-Saxon Military Institutions*, p.133.

Richard Abels and Stephen Morillo, noting that John of Worcester used classical phrases such as '*copiis instruit*' to describe the ordering of Edmund's forces, and '*cohortes*' to refer to the English advance, perceived the strong similarity between the manner in which Edmund Ironside conducted warfare and that of the Romans. Abels and Morillo acknowledged the inevitability of some Latin words and phrases appearing in medieval chroniclers' descriptions of warfare but their suspicions about the extensive use of classical authors were confirmed when they read R. R. Darlington and P. McGurk's paper on John of Worcester's sources. The majority of John's account of Sherston, albeit edited, had been plagiarised from Sallust's *Catiline*. John of Worcester's knowledge of the Battle of Sherston, maintain Abels and Morillo, was derived solely from the sparse account in the *ASC* and details from Sallust were added to enliven the narrative and demonstrate John's erudition.<sup>210</sup> Taking an opposing stance, Bernard S. Bachrach believed that John of Worcester had selected passages from Sallust for their accurate characterization of what had occurred at Sherston. Bachrach's acceptance of John's account can, in part, be explained by his *a priori* belief in the continuity of military history between the ancient and medieval periods.<sup>211</sup> More importantly perhaps, Bachrach's argument also relies upon the assumption that John of Worcester knew what had occurred at Sherston, beyond the brief description give by the *ASC*. It is possible that John had access to an unknown, more detailed, recension of the Chronicle which enabled him to find a Classical parallel for its contents but John's habitual non-identification of sources and the uniqueness of his account,

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210 R. R. Darlington and P. McGurk, 'The 'Chronicon ex Chronicis' of 'Florence' of Worcester and Its Use of Sources', *ANS* 5 (1983), pp.185-96, at p.193, n.37; R. P. Abels and S. Morillo, 'A Lying Legacy? A Preliminary Discussion of Images of Antiquity and Altered Reality in Medieval Military History', *Journal of Medieval Military History*, 3 (2005), pp.1-13, at p.2 and p.3, n.8. The relevant sections of *Catiline* are *capitis* lix-ix.

211 Abels and Morillo, 'A Lying Legacy?', pp.2-3; Bernard S. Bachrach, 'Medieval Military Historiography', in *Companion to Historiography*, ed. M. Bentley (London, 1997), pp.192-208, at p.194.



suggest that Abels and Morillo are essentially correct to doubt the tactics attributed to Edmund at Sherston.

In addition to borrowing verbatim from Sallust, John of Worcester also adapted his classical source to suit his contemporary audience by replacing words that would otherwise have appeared anachronistic. One example of this process of substitution cited by Abels and Morillo, and commented upon by Ryan Lavelle, is where John changed the javelins and swords of the Roman world (*pilla omittunt, gladius res geritur*) to lances and swords (*lanceis et gladius pugna geritur*).<sup>212</sup> John of Worcester's adaptation of his source can also be seen in Edmund Ironside's speech to his army where, similar to the exhortations in *Catiline*, he reminds them they are fighting for their 'country, children...and homes' (*pro patria, pro liberis...atque sui domibus*) but the original reference to temples (*templi*) is replaced with 'wives' (*coniugibus*).<sup>213</sup> It is understandable that John, a twelfth-century monk, would not make an ostensibly Christian king invoke a centre of pagan practices to encourage his troops.

Regardless of how John altered the speech in Sallust to sit more comfortably with the religious sensibilities of his contemporary readers, the report that Edmund addressed each of his troops by name (*unumquemque nominans appellat*) is challenged by Jeffrey James. It is argued, quite reasonably, that it would have been implausible for Edmund to have known the name of every individual who fought for him at Sherston. It is more likely, continues James, that John of Worcester fabricated the oration to 'embellish' Edmund's image as an inspirational general.<sup>214</sup> The debate about Edmund's Ironside's abilities as a military leader, as depicted in John of Worcester's account of the Battle of Sherston, is eloquently summarised by Abels and Morillo. In all probability, Edmund

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212 *JW*, pp.486-7; Abels and Morillo, 'A Lying Legacy?', p.3; Lavelle, *Alfred's Wars*, p.272.

213 *JW*, pp.486-7.

214 *JW*, pp.486-7; James, *An Onslaught of Spears*, p.174.

Ironsides did not command and fight like a Roman general but John of Worcester portrayed him as such to demonstrate his familiarity with 'a classical authority then in vogue'.<sup>215</sup>

The narratives of John of Worcester, and that of William of Malmesbury, are also notable for their accounts of Edmund in relation to Eadric *Streona*. Both texts have Eadric claim that Edmund is dead, but they differ in their details of the alleged slaying. William of Malmesbury has Eadric brandish a bloodied sword, with which he had dispatched a 'country fellow' (*rustico*) and claim that it had killed Edmund: 'Look, this is the sword which has killed your king!' (*Ecce rex vester hoc ense occisus est!*).<sup>216</sup> John of Worcester, in a more dramatic version of Edmund's alleged demise, has Eadric decapitate a certain Osmear who resembled Edmund 'in face and hair' (*facie capillisque simillimi*) and display the head to the English army, claiming it to be that of Edmund (*en domini vestri caput, Eadmundi basilei*).<sup>217</sup> Osmear is not known beyond the Battle of Sherston. If he existed at all, he may have been an unfortunate local, which would correspond with the account by William of Malmesbury. Alternatively, he may have been one of Edmund's soldiers, captured by Eadric; more gruesomely, Osmear may have been one of Eadric's followers sacrificed to facilitate another of the ealdorman's deceptions. More credibly perhaps, Eadric's pretences of killing Edmund were invented by William and John to denigrate further the ealdorman's already defamed reputation.<sup>218</sup>

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215 Abels and Morillo, 'A Lying Legacy?', p.3. The rising popularity of Sallust between the tenth and eleventh-centuries is suggested by the increasing number of copies of his work over the same period; L. D. Reynolds, (ed.) *Texts and Transmission. A Survey of the Latin Classics* (Oxford, 1983), pp.xxvi-xxvii.

216 *GRA*, pp.314-15.

217 *JW*, pp.488-9.

218 For Eadric's own decapitation and posthumous reputation, see Jay Paul Gates, 'A Crowning Achievement: the Royal Execution and Decapitation of Eadric *Streona*', in *Heads Will Roll: Decapitation in the Medieval and Early Modern Imagination*, ed. Larissa Tracy and Jeff Massey (Leiden, 2012), pp.53-72.

Eadric was unsuccessful in his attempt to disperse Edmund's forces. Without explaining how they penetrated Eadric's deception, John of Worcester has the English army come to realize that their king is alive (*rex viveret comperto*) and attack the Danes with renewed vigour. William of Malmesbury attributes the prevention of an English rout to Edmund. Hearing of Eadric's subterfuge, Edmund went to a prominent hill where he removed his helmet and bared his head to his soldiers, (*ablata galea caput suum commilitonibus ostentans*) to show that he lived.<sup>219</sup> The remarkable similarity between William of Malmesbury's unique account of Edmund's quick thinking, and the story of William of Normandy removing his helmet at Hastings to dispel rumours of his death, invite suspicion that the Anglo-Norman chronicler may have borrowed the tale to enliven his narrative and to depict Edmund as a resourceful and inspiring leader.<sup>220</sup>

Further indications of Edmund's personal qualities, particularly his tremendous physical strength, are reported by William of Malmesbury. Incensed perhaps, by Eadric's deception, Edmund is said to have hurled an iron spear at the ealdorman. The projectile missed its intended target but it struck the soldier standing next to Eadric with such force that it transfixing a second man (*millitem prope stantem peccavit adeo ut alterum quoque affigeret*).<sup>221</sup> Edmund Ironside would have had to possess superhuman strength to have accomplished the feat with which he is credited. The report may therefore be a fiction, invented by William to illustrate his explanation of the soubriquet 'Ironside', which allegedly was given to Edmund by the English on account of his 'great strength of mind and

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219 *JW*, pp.488-9; *GRA*, pp.314-15.

220 The account of William baring his head to prove he still lived, can be found in *The Carmen de Hastingæ Prolio of Guy Bishop of Amiens*, ed. Catherine Morton and Hope Muntz (Oxford, 1972), p.29; William of Poitiers, *Histoire de Guillaume le Conquérant*, ed. Raymonde Foreville (Paris, 1952), p.190.

221 *GRA*, pp.314-15.

body' (*magni roboris et animo et corpore*).<sup>222</sup> The reliability of the adulatory exegesis of Edmund's cognomen is also made questionable by its proximity to the unflattering reference to King Æthelred's putative sloth (*ingaviam*).<sup>223</sup> William, with his demonstrable record of defaming Æthelred's reputation, may have sought to do so again by juxtaposing the king's alleged mortal sin to Edmund's admirable, and possibly exaggerated, qualities. William's description of the spear supposedly thrown by Edmund, an '*hastile ferreum*' is also dubious.<sup>224</sup> William had borrowed from Vergil to describe the origins of Edmund's mother, and the reference to an 'iron spear' may also have been borrowed from Vergil who, instead of using '*hastile*' for just the spear shaft, uncommonly employed it to describe the entire spear.<sup>225</sup>

The conclusion of the Battle of Sherston is treated with uniform succinctness in the primary sources. The *Æthelredian Chronicle*, having recorded the 'great slaughter' done on both sides, reports the 'raiding-armies' broke off the fight (*heres him sylfe toedon on ðam gefohte*).<sup>226</sup> The Chronicler's use of the same word to describe the English and Danish armies is intriguing. Usually applied to the Viking forces fought by King Alfred and his brothers, and later the armies of Swein Forkbeard and Cnut, the description of '*here*' for Edmund's troops requires some clarification. It is unlikely that the Chronicler used '*here*' to express doubts concerning the legitimacy of Edmund's

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222 *GRA*, pp.312-13. A similar account of prodigious strength is alleged by Abbo Cuneus in his late ninth-century account of the Viking siege of Paris. Abbo, an eye-witness of the siege, reported that Ebohus pierced several Vikings simultaneously with a single spear. It is not known if William of Malmesbury borrowed the story from Abbo, but if not, the similarity suggests the possibility of a literary trope; Abbo Cuneus, *Viking Attacks on Paris: The 'Bella parisiacae urbis' of Abbo of Saint Germain-des-Prés*, ed. and trans. Nirmal Dass (Leuven, 2007), p.35, L.109.

223 *GRA*, pp.312-13.

224 *GRA*, pp.314-15.

225 The reference to Edmund's mother can be found in *The Aeneid*, Bk.5, L.302, and the reference to the iron spear is in Bk.9, L.402, [www.thelatinlibrary.com/vergil/aen9.shtml](http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/vergil/aen9.shtml) [online database, accessed July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015].

226 *ASC, Vol. 7, MS. E*, p.73.

rule, as the same writer consistently refers to him as 'king' following the death of Æthelred. On several occasions however, as explained by Michael Swanton, the term was used for invading English armies where the priority was to attack rather than defend.<sup>227</sup> In describing the English army at Sherston as '*here*' immediately after the reference to the magnitude of the killing, the Æthelredian Chronicler may have been alluding to the ferocity of Edmund's forces.

An indication of the duration of the battle is provided by William of Malmesbury, who has the conflict last until nightfall (*Nox prelium diremit*), suggesting that the armies would have continued to fight had there been sufficient light. William's account also seems to imply that both armies recognised the impracticality of waging war in darkness; the two sides, it is alleged, separated as though by prior agreement (*atibus quasi ex coniventia discedentibus*).<sup>228</sup> Unique among the Anglo-Norman accounts is John of Worcester's claim that the battle was fought over two days. Agreeing with William of Malmesbury, the first day of fighting came to end at sunset by mutual accord (*sole iam occidente, ab invicem sit digressus spontanea voluntate*) and John has the second day of battle conclude similarly.<sup>229</sup> The unusually long duration which John of Worcester claims for the battle is disputed by James. Citing the Battles of Brunanburh and Hastings, which probably involved larger armies and had a more significant effect on English history but which lasted no longer than a single day, James is perhaps justified in dismissing a two-day Battle of Sherston as 'an exaggeration'.<sup>230</sup>

The conclusion of the Battle of Sherston has received a varied treatment from the primary sources. The Æthelredian Chronicle displays an unusual degree of equanimity in reporting the

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<sup>227</sup> Swanton, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, p.xxxiv.

<sup>228</sup> *GRA*, pp.314-15. Henry of Huntingdon only refers to the armies separating of their own accord; *HA*, pp.356-7.

<sup>229</sup> *JW*, pp.486-7 and 488-9.

<sup>230</sup> James, *An Onslaught of Spears*, p.175. The implausibility of the Battle of Sherston lasting two days is underscored by Stephen Morillo's observation that Hastings was itself 'unusually long'; 'Hastings, An Unusual Battle', *The Haskins Society Journal* 2 (1990), pp.95-1004., at p.95.

battle, referring to the comparable loss of life on both sides and the apparent consensus of the combatants to cease hostilities. The candour of the Chronicle's account in not recording an outright winner may be relied upon, for King Æthelred I and his brother Alfred fought an inconclusive battle against the Vikings at Ashdown. Like Sherston, 'many thousands' were killed and the battle lasted until nightfall, at which point the Chronicle's account of the engagement ends. Presumably neither side could claim possession of the place of slaughter.<sup>231</sup> It is perhaps not surprising that the *Encomium*, with its generally flattering depiction of Cnut, records that after receiving an inspiring oration from Thorkell, the Danes renewed their attack on the English and gained the victory they desired (*politi optata victoria*).<sup>232</sup> The panegyric nature of the *Encomium*, its contradiction of the Æthelredian Chronicle, and significant errors committed by the Encomiast in reporting Sherston, suggest that the account of Danish victory is a fabrication.<sup>233</sup>

Similar to the *ASC*, William of Malmesbury does not award a clear victory to either side but he intimates that after the armies had separated, the English had hope of victory (*Anglis tamen victoriam pene sperantibus*).<sup>234</sup> William is tantalisingly taciturn concerning the origins of this optimism, giving no indication of what may have led the English to believe they would triumph. The unexplained expectation of the English, according to William, was sufficiently potent however for the West Saxons to change their minds and acknowledge Edmund as their rightful lord (*Westsaxonum conversi animi dominum legitimum cognoverunt*).<sup>235</sup> In addition to Eadric, the naming of the West Saxons is the only other occasion when William refers to the English who assisted Cnut at Sherston. This might be a general reference to the men of Hampshire and Wiltshire

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231 *ASC*, MS. A, p.70.

232 *Encomium*, pp.20-21.

233 For a discussion of the *Encomium*'s origins and the Encomiast's misplacing of Sherston, see Ch. 2:4 above.

234 *GRA*, pp.314-15.

235 *GRA*, pp.314-15.

included in John of Worcester's narrative. The acceptance of Edmund's rule by the rebellious West Saxons is unique to William, which may cast doubt on its credibility but repeated references in the primary sources to Edmund later raising armies in Wessex indicate that after Sherston his position in Wessex appears to have become more secure. The alleged recognition of Edmund's right to rule may therefore have some basis in fact.

One may infer a vicarious victory for the English from John of Worcester's account that when the night was far advanced, Cnut ordered his men to leave their camp silently (*Canutis e castris suos abire silentio iussit*).<sup>236</sup> The purpose of the Danes' departure, according to John, was to renew the siege of London but Cnut's insistence that stealth be employed invites the interpretation that he did not want his decampment to be discovered and consequently interrupted. The surreptitious manner of Cnut's withdrawal was seized upon by Edward Freeman as giving the 'practical advantage' to the English.<sup>237</sup> Concentrating on Cnut's nocturnal retreat, Jeffrey James argues that Sherston should be regarded as a 'marginal' English victory as it was Edmund, by the traditional calculation of victory, who retained possession of the battlefield. Another plausible argument is that in returning to London, according to James, Cnut effectively relinquished his control of the eastern portion of Wessex, thereby enabling Edmund to increase the area from which he recruited.<sup>238</sup>

The Battle of Sherston may be said to have been King Edmund Ironside's first major engagement against the Danes but accounts of the battle have suffered from the affects of accretion. The strong similarity between passages in the Anglo-Norman narratives and some earlier, non-English sources, make certain actions attributed to Edmund unreliable. Similarly, accounts of Edmund's superhuman strength suggest, as discussed previously, that they are exaggerated explanations of his cognomen 'Ironside'. Literary borrowings and fabrications may reveal more about the historians who employed

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236 *JW*, pp.488-9.

237 Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest*, p.425.

238 James, *An Onslaught of Spears*, p.175.

them, and the developing reputation of Edmund, than they do of the battles he fought. When the biases of the primary sources are removed the remaining probabilities are that the battle occurred on 26 June, and may have occurred close to an assembly site or mustering place. The location of the battle suggests that Edmund's strongest support was in the western half of Wessex, and he was confronted by English opposition to his rule. It is also probable that the most reliable account of the engagement is that of the *ASC*: the battle was long, hard-fought but perceived as inconclusive. The significance of Sherston for Edmund can be measured in his subsequent actions, permitting his performance as a military leader to be put into perspective. Ann Williams, acknowledging the confutation of the primary sources, considers Sherston to have been a pivotal moment for Edmund, providing him a 'platform' which facilitated his continued resistance to Cnut.<sup>239</sup>

#### The Relief of London and the Battle at Brentford

With typical brevity the *ASC* records Edmund responding to the contentious outcome of the battle at Sherston by raising a third army which he then took to London to relieve the siege of the city which the Danes had resumed.<sup>240</sup> The majority of the later primary sources follow this sequence of events but provide additional information that is sometimes intriguing. The *ASC* does not indicate the size of Edmund's new force but the closely contemporary *Encomium* has him gather an army 'not insignificant but immense' (*non mediocori sed innumerabili*).<sup>241</sup> If the account in the *Encomium* is accurate, Edmund's ability to raise so large an army might be said to reflect well on his popularity but the report may be unreliable. The attribution of so great an army to Edmund may be part of the

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239 Williams, *Aethelred the Unready*, p.143.

240 *ASC*, MSS. D and E, pp.150-51.

241 *Encomium*, pp.24-25. Also, *JW*, pp.488-9.



Encomiast's attempt to justify Cnut leaving London fearing that his enemies within the town would deliver him to his enemies should they besiege the city.<sup>242</sup>

The later primary sources also indicate where Edmund recruited and reveal some clues concerning the composition of his troops. John of Worcester has Edmund raise his army in Wessex (*congregaturus exercitum in Westsaxoniam*) and records that he was joined by Ealdorman Eadric, who swore to remain faithful (*fidelem ei permansurum iuravit*).<sup>243</sup> For Edmund to assemble another army in Wessex is consistent with what is known about where he recruited for the engagements at Penselwood and Sherston. The report of Eadric returning to the English side is problematic. It is unique to John of Worcester and conflicts with the account in the *ASC* which has Eadric submitting to Edmund later and only after the Danes had been beaten at Otford and fled to Sheppey.<sup>244</sup> If precedence is any indication of credibility, the earlier account of the *ASC* may be preferred to that of John of Worcester, which may be a misplaced report of Eadric's submission.

The most puzzling references to the composition of Edmund's army are provided by Henry of Huntingdon and Thietmar of Merseburg. Henry has Edmund bring to the relief of London a team of chosen warriors (*manu electa bellatorum*) which, if they existed, one may infer was small in number and an elite group within Edmund's army.<sup>245</sup> Henry reveals nothing of this group's origin or the source he used but a solution to the mystery may be found in the otherwise confused and confusing account of English affairs by Thietmar. Closely contemporary to the events it purports to describe, Thietmar's chronicle has the siege of London relieved by the arrival of the ætheling Athelstan with a contingent of Britons.<sup>246</sup> The impossibility of Athelstan's presence weakens

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<sup>242</sup> *Encomium*, pp.22-23.

<sup>243</sup> *JW*, pp.488-9.

<sup>244</sup> *ASC*, MSS. D, E and F, pp.150-51.

<sup>245</sup> *HA*, pp.356-7.

<sup>246</sup> *Chronicon*, p.336.

Thietmar's credibility but the reference in *Liðsmannaflokkur* to the Danes' swords striking British mail coats (*brezkum brynjum*) at London may indicate that the English army had a proportion of men with British, that is, Welsh, antecedents.<sup>247</sup> The possibility that Edmund recruited from the more Celtic fringes of Wessex is also suggested by a diploma of Cnut, confirming an exchange of land for an estate Edmund had held in Cornwall.<sup>248</sup> Henry of Huntingdon's enigmatic allusion may therefore indicate that a substantially British section of Edmund's army distinguished itself at London. Alternatively, Henry of Huntingdon's reference to select warriors may refer to a corps of professional warriors similar in nature to the company of housecarls possibly introduced to England by Swein Forkbeard<sup>249</sup> but reputedly by Cnut,<sup>250</sup> and who served successive kings of England up to and including Harold Godwinson.<sup>251</sup>

With one exception, the recensions of the *ASC* do not disclose how Edmund's army approached London but MS. C has him keep to the north of the Thames (*eal be norðan Temese*) which presumably prevented the Danes from detecting his approach. His arrival undiscovered, Edmund descended upon the besiegers by way of Clay Hangar (*ut þuruh Clæihangran*).<sup>252</sup> The location from which Edmund emerged to surprise the Danes has been identified in a thirteenth century Assize Roll

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247 *Liðsmannaflokkur*, in Poole, 'Skaldic Verse', p.89.

248 S 951 (AD 1018).

249 *Flateyjarbok*, ed. C. R. Unger, 3 Vols. (Christiana, 1860-68), Vol. I, pp.203 and 205; Vol. II, p.22; Sturluson, *Heimskringla Vol. II*, pp.9-11.

250 Svenno, 'Lex Castrensis', in *Scriptores Rerum Danicarum Medii Ævi*, ed. J. Langebek *et al.*, 9 Vols. (Copenhagen, 1772-1878), Vol. III, p144. Also Larson, 'The King's Household before the Norman Conquest', *Bulletin of the University of Wisconsin*, 100 (Madison, 1904), pp.55-204, at pp.158-9; Poole, 'Skaldic Verse', p.271.

251 Hollister, *Anglo-Saxon Military Institutions*, pp.12-13.

252 *ASC*, Vol. 5, MS. C, p.102.

as *Clayhangre extra villam de Totenham*, now known as Clayhill Farm, Tottenham.<sup>253</sup> The obstacles that confronted Edmund when he arrived at London are indicated by William of Malmesbury. As part of their siege tactics, according to William, the Danes had dug a moat around the areas of the city not next to the Thames (*fossa etiam urbem qua fluvio Tamensi non alluitur*).<sup>254</sup> This was presumably the same moat, which is recorded in the *ASC* as constructed by the Danes when they arrived at London in May that year.<sup>255</sup>

The exact manner in which Edmund freed the city is not known, the *ASC* simply recording that he rescued the inhabitants (*buruhwaru aredde*) and drove the Danes to their ships (*here aflynde to scipe*).<sup>256</sup> Edmund may have successfully negotiated the impediment of the moat surrounding the city and fought off the Danes but a reference to Edmund engaging with the enemy is conspicuous by its absence. Compared to the Chronicler's reports of fighting at Penselwood and Sherston, the *ASC* is curiously silent concerning hostilities at the liberation of London. Edmund may not have been able to traverse the Danes' defences and William of Malmesbury may be close to the truth of the situation in his account that when the Danes heard of Edmund's approach they retreated at top speed (*audito regis adventu fugam per bona invadunt*).<sup>257</sup> It is possible that William's report is fictional, intended to give Edmund a moral victory but Cnut's apologist, L. M. Larson, supported the notion of the Danes retreating without fighting. Unable to conduct simultaneously a siege and

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253 J. E. B. Cover, *The Place Names of Middlesex* (London, 1922), p.79. Also Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p.391 and n.1.

254 *GRA*, pp.314-15.

255 *ASC*, MS. E, p.149.

256 *ASC*, Vol. 6, MS. D, p.61.

257 *GRA*, pp.314-15.

engage with a determined enemy such as Edmund, it is argued, Cnut prudently abandoned the siege and withdrew to his ships.<sup>258</sup>

The most unusual and probably unreliable incident alleged to have happened at the siege appears in the *Encomium*. Contradicting all other primary sources, the *Encomiast* has Cnut enter London but doubting the loyalty of its citizens, he coincidentally leaves the city as Edmund arrives with his army. Seeing the Danes depart, Edmund challenges Cnut to single combat which is declined and Cnut makes his way unmolested to winter on the Isle of Sheppey.<sup>259</sup> The uniqueness of the overall account makes it questionable and the individual elements of the tale are equally dubious. The synchronicity of Cnut's departure and Edmund's arrival is unlikely; it is improbable that a king such as Edmund, who had repeatedly demonstrated his inclination to fight pitched battles, would risk his crown on the outcome of single fight; and it is implausible that Edmund, who is repeatedly reported in the primary sources as pursuing a retreating enemy, would permit the Danes to leave unscathed. It is more probable that the *Encomiast* manufactured the departure of the Danes to spare his patroness the embarrassment of Cnut failing to take London while Edmund lived.<sup>260</sup>

There is general agreement amongst the primary sources that Edmund remained in London for two days before riding to Brentford in pursuit of the Danes.<sup>261</sup> The exception is William of Malmesbury who, perhaps for the purpose of maintaining the momentum of his narrative, has Edmund follow close behind the Danes at they retreat (*subsecutus eos e vestigio*).<sup>262</sup> A plausible explanation for Edmund's sojourn in London is provided by Larson, who inferred that some part of

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258 Larson, *Canute the Great*, pp.89-90.

259 *Encomium*, pp.22-25.

260 For the origin and purposes of the *Encomium* see Chapter 2:4.

261 ASC, MSS. D and E, pp.150-51; *JW*, pp.488-9; *HA*, pp.356-7.

262 *GRA*, pp.314-15.

the Danish force must have remained at London.<sup>263</sup> Had part of the Danish fleet stayed behind it would have continued to pose a threat and it is doubtful that Edmund would have left London so soon after its liberation to allow the remaining Danes to resume their siege. Edmund may therefore have waited until the portion of the Danish fleet joined the rest of Cnut's forces before engaging the enemy, preferring to fight the Danes when they were assembled in one place. It is also possible that after journeying from Wessex, Edmund may have thought it prudent to rest his troops prior to going into battle. He may also have taken counsel from the leading citizens of London and attended to the defences of the city.

Edmund may have had several compelling and practical motives for staying in London but his presence in the city, as remarked upon by Stenton, gave the Danes the opportunity to establish themselves somewhere else.<sup>264</sup> Cnut's new position may have been the southern bank of the Thames, opposite Brentford or, as has been suggested by Russell Poole, at Brentford itself.<sup>265</sup> Brentford, nine miles to the west of London, may have seemed attractive to Cnut for several reasons. It was the first point at which the river could be forded, it is on the same side of the Thames as London and Brentford was on a Roman road which connected London to the West Country. Cnut may have thought that if he were to establish himself at Brentford, his attempt to take London could continue. The anticipation that the Danes would use the crossing at Brentford to continue their campaign, or the reality of them having established themselves on the north bank of the river, serves to explain why the primary sources are unanimous in reporting that Edmund went to Brentford. They differ however in their accounts of what occurred when he arrived.

In the account of the *ASC*, Edmund crossed the Thames at Brentford (*gewende ofer æt Brægentforda*) which is followed immediately by the report that he fought the raiding army (*þone*

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263 Larson, *Canute the Great*, pp.90.

264 Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, pp.391.

265 Poole, 'Skaldic Verse', p.274.

*here gefeaht*).<sup>266</sup> The relative positions of these clauses creates the impression that Edmund engaged with the Danes on the south side of the Thames, which is how Stenton interpreted the Chronicle.<sup>267</sup> Certain of the primary sources suggest that the account of the *ASC*, amongst others, may be incomplete. It is possible that fighting first occurred on the northern bank of the Thames: Henry of Huntingdon's Anglo-Norman narrative has Edmund wage battle at Brentford. The late date of his account may initially invalidate his report but it is corroborated by a more contemporary source. If *Knútsdrápa* is to be believed, Cnut was responsible for a considerable amount of destruction at Brentford (*brauzt með byggðu setri Brandfurðu*) where he subjected the English to a storm of spears (*danskr herr skaut þá dorum drótt*).<sup>268</sup> One might expect a poem written in praise of Cnut to exaggerate his achievements but *Knútsdrápa* may, as suggested by Poole, record an aspect of the battle at Brentford not included in the *ASC*.<sup>269</sup> If the Danes were at Brentford when Edmund arrived, the apparently conflicting accounts may be reconciled by the fighting beginning on the northern bank but spreading to the southern side of the Thames when they were dislodged from their position and pursued by the English.

One of the lesser aspects of Edmund's engagement at Brentford revives the debate of how he liberated London. As mentioned earlier, the absence in the primary sources of any account of fighting during the lifting of the siege raised the possibility that the city's freedom was won without a stroke being delivered. This contingency would appear to be confirmed by John of Worcester's report that Brentford was Edmund's third battle against the Danes (*cum Danis tertio prelium*).<sup>270</sup> This is contradicted by John's contemporary, Henry of Huntingdon, who provides a different tally of

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<sup>266</sup> *ASC*, Vol. 6, MS. D, p.61. Also *GRA*, pp.314-15; *JW*, pp.488-9.

<sup>267</sup> Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, pp.391.

<sup>268</sup> 'Knútsdrápa', in *English and Norse Documents*, p.138.

<sup>269</sup> Poole, 'Skaldic Verse', p.274.

<sup>270</sup> *JW*, pp.488-9.

Edmund' engagements, citing Brentford as his fourth battle against the same army (*Quartum bellum ...contra eundem exercitum*).<sup>271</sup> The singularity of Henry' report makes it suspect however and he may have assumed that Edmund had to fight to win back London.<sup>272</sup>

Despite the slight discrepancy between the sources concerning the precise number of battles, the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman sources unanimously give victory to the English.<sup>273</sup> The account in the Danish *Knútsdrápa* characteristically praises Cnut for putting the English to flight (*rakt flotla*).<sup>274</sup> Both versions of events are probably biased and the truth may lie somewhere in-between. Evidence that the English did not emerge unscathed from the engagement, and the Danes may have inflicted serious losses on their enemy, might lie in the common reference to many of Edmund's men drowning in the Thames. The *ASC* partially attributes the submersion of his forces to their own carelessness (*gymeleaste*) and the majority of Anglo-Norman narratives employ a similar adjective when explaining why the English drowned.<sup>275</sup>

The *ASC* is unique however in adding that the carelessness occurred when part of the army overtook the rest (*ferdon beforan þære fyrde*) in their desire for loot (*feng woldon fon*).<sup>276</sup> This

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271 *HA*, pp.356-7.

272 A similar explanation is given by Freeman who, assuming that Edmund fought to liberate London, explains the discrepancy between the two narratives as John of Worcester counting the armies Edmund raised, but Henry of Huntingdon reckoning the battles; *History of the Norman Conquest*, p.427, n.2.

273 *ASC*, MSS. D and E, pp.150-51; *GRA*, pp.314-15; *JW*, pp.488-9; *HA*, pp.356-7.

274 'Knútsdrápa', in *English and Norse Documents*, p.138.

275 *ASC*, Vol. 6, MS. D, p.61. John of Worcester describes the English as crossing the Thames 'incautiously' (*incautius*); *JW*, pp.48-9. Henry of Huntingdon has them drown because they crossed 'too quickly' (*nimis fastinantes*); *HA*, pp.356-7. Margaret Ashdown's translation of *Knútsdrápa* does not refer to the English drowning, but that of Vigfusson and Powell simply records that they did; *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, Vol. 2, p.156.

276 *ASC*, Vol. 6, MS. D, p.61. Charles Oman, in his account of the Battle of Brentford, appears to discount the explanation of inattentiveness given by the *ASC*, arguing that the Danes rallied and thrust the English into the

singular reference to the covetousness of Edmund's troops invites speculation that those who drowned may have been mercenaries. If Edmund had such forces at Brentford, he could be said to have augmented his army by adopting the policy of his father, King Æthelred.<sup>277</sup> Assuming that Edmund employed stipendiary warriors, a passage unique to *Knútsdrápa* may explain where they, or the majority of them, originated. The praise poem credits Cnut with taking Frisian lives (*Fjorlausá hykk Frisi*).<sup>278</sup> The suggestion that a contingent of Frisian soldiers may have served Edmund Ironside cannot be corroborated but this may reflect the incomplete nature of the contemporary sources.<sup>279</sup> The possible presence of Frisians at Brentford might also explain the origin of the select warriors who allegedly participated in the liberation of London.

Having lost a section of his army crossing the Thames, Edmund would have arrived on the southern bank with a depleted force but, according to the majority of the primary sources, he was still able to secure a victory. Whether through the reduction of his force by drowning, or the additional effect of losing men in the fighting, the ferocity of the Battle of Brentford and its affect on Edmund's army may be determined from his subsequent behaviour. After the battle, according to

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Thames. For this to be correct, the retreating Danes would have had to out-flank the English vanguard, putting themselves at risk of being attacked from their rear by the main body of the English army; *England Before the Norman Conquest*, p.579.

277 For mercenaries in the service of King Æthelred see Abels, 'Household Men, Mercenaries and Vikings', pp.152; 155-7; Lavelle, *Alfred's Wars*, p.105.

278 'Knútsdrápa', in *English and Norse Documents*, p.138. The possibility 'Frisian' might be a generic reference is raised by Kelly de Vries; 'Medieval Mercenaries: Methodology, Definitions, and Problems', in *Mercenaries and Paid Men: The Mercenary Identity in the Middle Ages*, ed. John France (Leiden, 2007), pp.43-60, at p.49.

279 The possibility that Edmund had Frisian mercenaries is acknowledged by Russell Poole, who also offers the alternative but less convincing explanation that Frisians trading at Brentford unintentionally became involved in the fighting; 'Skaldic Verse', p.274. The presence of Frisians in the service of an Anglo-Saxon king is not unknown; the ASC records Frisian mercenaries serving King Alfred; ASC, MS. A, p.91.



the ASC, Edmund returned to Wessex and assembled another army.<sup>280</sup> John of Worcester's statement that Edmund 'hurried' into Wessex (*Westsaxoniam properat*) may imply the urgency to replace troops but might also have been made to present Edmund anticipating the resumption of the siege of London and trying to limit the Danes' ability to re-establish themselves.<sup>281</sup> Discussing Edmund's reason for going into Wessex, Stenton is probably correct in his assertion that Edmund did so to replenish the severe losses he had incurred at Brentford.<sup>282</sup>

The probability that Edmund was compelled to assemble another army to restore his depleted forces would indicate, as was believed by Oman, that Brentford was a 'pitched' battle but his contemporary, Larson, argued otherwise. Calculating, perhaps unreasonably, that Edmund's losses were limited to those who drowned, Larson refuted Oman's description of Brentford, implying the engagement was more of a skirmish.<sup>283</sup> A more modern commentator, Russell Poole, shares Stenton's opinion that Edmund suffered heavy casualties at Brentford and is probably correct to suggest that replacing his losses was paramount for Edmund. Poole is also sympathetic to the Londoners; from their perspective, it is argued, Brentford may not have appeared to be an English triumph, for the Danes remained a sufficiently large force to resume their siege in Edmund's absence.<sup>284</sup>

One further aspect of Edmund's return to Wessex requires deserves consideration. In his account of the Danes resuming their siege, William of Malmesbury describes it occurring while Edmund took a short break (*aliquantam feriato*) and regrouped his forces.<sup>285</sup> The reference to Edmund

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280 ASC, MSS. D and E, pp.150-51.

281 JW, pp.488-9.

282 Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p.391.

283 Oman, *England Before the Norman Conquest*, p.579; Larson, *Canute the Great*, p.190.

284 Poole, 'Skaldic Verse', p.275.

285 GRA, pp.316-17.

replenishing the English losses suffered at Brentford is corroborated by the other primary sources but the report of Edmund resting is unique and requires deeper scrutiny. The task of trying to fathom what William meant by his remark has been described by James as 'near impossible' but some attempt must be made. It is unlikely, having presented Edmund as a vigorous commander capable of assembling several armies and fighting successive engagements, that William intended to portray Edmund taking a holiday or enjoying a period of idleness. It is perhaps more plausible that William meant his words to convey the impression that Edmund was attending to other matters which, as James suggests, demanded the king's attention.<sup>286</sup> It might also be the case that Edmund's alleged period of inactivity is a coded reference to him taking time to recuperate from the cumulative effect of his recent exertions: an illness, or a wound received at Brentford, all of which would have necessitated rest. Had Edmund resumed his campaign before he was fully recovered, the continued demands he made upon his already weakened body may serve to explain his premature death later that year.

#### A 'Battle at Otford'?

Defied by the staunch resistance of the Londoners, the Danes abandoned their third siege of the city and raided in Mercia where they procured provisions. It may have been the unanimity of the primary sources having the Danes raiding Mercia that led Larson to believe, probably correctly, that the crops had recently been gathered. The plundering of Mercia and the alleged subsequent Battle of Otford may therefore have occurred in the early part of September.<sup>287</sup> The Danes, according to the *ASC*, then drove their ships and the herds they had stolen to the River Medway.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> James, *An Onslaught of Spears*, p.178. The assertion by Henry of Huntingdon that Edmund returned to Wessex on the advice of Eadric is uncorroborated and may be an attempt to blame him for the Danes' reinvesting London; *HA*, pp.356-7.

<sup>287</sup> *ASC*, MSS. D, E and F, pp.150-51; *GRA*, pp.316-17; *JW*, pp.488-9; *HA*, pp.356-7; Larson, *Canute the Great*, p.91.

Clarification as to how Edmund came to fight his fourth recorded battle is provided by John of Worcester's slightly more detailed account of the events leading up to the supposed battle. Having plundered Mercia the Danish infantry, according to John, travelled by ship to the Medway but the Danish horsemen drove the stolen animals by land (*vivam predam per terram minant*).<sup>289</sup> None of the primary sources provide an explanation for the Danes assembling in the Medway but their presence there may be connected to the proximity of the Isle of Sheppey, which the Danes might have intended to use as a base of operations, as had been done in the mid ninth-century.<sup>290</sup>

The army which accompanied Edmund from Wessex appears to have greatly outnumbered the Danish riders; the ASC credits Edmund with having assembled 'the entire English nation' (*ealle Engla þeode*).<sup>291</sup> This may be an exaggeration but it is conceivable that forces from parts of the country closest to Wessex may have joined Edmund there. His army may also have been augmented as it travelled towards London, a possibility which Freeman asserted as fact, claiming that when Edmund reached Brentford his force included levies from Mercia.<sup>292</sup> At Brentford, according to the ASC, Edmund crossed the Thames and travelled into Kent (*ferde innan Cent*),<sup>293</sup> presumably having received intelligence of the Danes' location. Edmund's re-crossing of the Thames seems to have been unopposed, indicating that despite the strategic significance of Brentford the Danes did not re-occupy the ford in Edmund's absence. What appears to have been a tactical oversight may be

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288 ASC, MSS. D, E and F, pp.150-51

289 JW, pp.488-91.

290 Scandinavian raiders had previously wintered on Sheppey in 855; ASC, MSS. A and E, pp.66-67.

291 ASC, Vol. 7, MS. E, p.73; also JW, pp.490-91. One may reasonable infer that this was an unusually large army but should not, as Abels advises, read the Chronicle too literally; the reference to the 'entire English nation' probably refers only to those who had a military obligation to attend the summons; *Lordship and Military Obligation*, p.177.

292 Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest*, p.427.

293 ASC, Vol. 7, MS. E, p.73; also HA, pp.358-9.

explained by a reference in the narrative of William of Malmesbury which reports that Edmund 'had previously seized the ford' (*preoccupatoque vado*) at Brentford.<sup>294</sup> This may only be a succinct allusion to Edmund's victory at Brentford but it might also indicate that Edmund had installed a contingent of troops at the river-crossing to prevent the Danes from re-taking it while he recruited in Wessex.

The primary sources are at variance when reporting where Edmund next encountered the Danes. The ASC does not disclose where the two forces met, recording only that the raiding army, presumably cognizant of Edmund's approach, fled before him (*fleah beforan*).<sup>295</sup> Greater detail is given by two of the Anglo-Norman narratives, each of which may complement the other. William of Malmesbury has an intriguing reference to Edmund engaging the Danes in battle and dislodging them from their position in the Medway (*pugnante fugata*),<sup>296</sup> indicating perhaps that Cnut's ships had remained in the river while the riders went deeper into Kent. It is unlikely that any fighting occurred between the two forces, based respectively on land and sea but if William is to be relied upon, the sight of Edmund's army or knowledge of its proximity, may have been sufficient to persuade the ships to leave their position. William's account may also indicate that Edmund's journey into Kent was facilitated by him travelling along Watling Street, running between London and Canterbury.

Having removed the Danes from the Medway, Edmund may then have gone in pursuit of the riders and their plunder. Unique to the narrative of John of Worcester, is the account that Edmund joined battle with the Danes near Otford (*iuxta Ottafordam*). Unable to withstand Edmund's assault (*non ferentes impetum*), according to John, the Danes fled with their horses towards Sheppey (*cum*

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294 *GRA*, pp.316-7.

295 *ASC*, Vol. 7, MS. E, p.73.

296 *GRA*, pp.316-7.

*suis equis in Sceapege fugerunt*).<sup>297</sup> Despite the ferocity implied in John's report, Larson, who focused on the fact that the primary sources all have the Danes fleeing, may have been correct to maintain 'much fighting there could not have been'.<sup>298</sup> However fierce the fighting may have been, the absence of a reference to Edmund crossing the River Darent at Otford may indicate that his encounter with the Danes, if it happened, occurred to the north of the village.<sup>299</sup>

Doubts concerning the credibility of John's account of Otford arise not merely from the lack of corroboration in the other primary sources but his singular report is made questionable by logistical considerations. If the Danish riders intended to reach the Isle of Sheppey, as reported by the *ASC* and John of Worcester himself,<sup>300</sup> one must account for John having Edmund encounter the Danes in the western rather than the eastern part of Kent. If John is to be believed, one must accept that the Danish riders had travelled in the opposite direction to the one apparently taken by their ships, which also put them moving in the direction from which Edmund was advancing. It is possible that the Danes had a valid reason for being in the vicinity of Otford, and John of Worcester may have had access to information not available to the writer of the *ASC*, but with the unlikelihood of the Danes being in western Kent, and John of Worcester as the only contemporary source for the

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297 *JW*, pp.490-91.

298 *ASC*, MSS. D, E and F, pp.150-51; *GRA*, pp.316-7; *JW*, pp.490-91; *HA*, pp.358-9; Larson, *Canute the Great*, p.92.

299 Although the precise location of the battle is not identified it was suggested in the Eighteenth-century that 'Dane Field' in Otford was the probable site of Edmund's engagement with the Danes. Furthermore, when the turnpike road which passed through Otford was widened in 1767, skeletons were reportedly found in the chalks banks on either side, which at the time were attributed to the fighting of 1016; E. Hasted, 'Parishes: Otford', in *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent*, 3 (Canterbury, 1797), pp.19-31 [electronic database, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-kent/vol3/pp19-31> accessed August 27<sup>th</sup>, 2015]. If such remains were discovered, they may be unrelated to Edmund's recorded battle. For a scholarly consideration of unusual Anglo-Saxon burial practises, see A. Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs* (Oxford, 2009).

300 *ASC*, MSS. D, E and F, pp.150-51; *JW*, pp.488-9. Also, *HA*, pp.358-9.

engagement at Otford, his account is questionable. The encounter may have been invented for dramatic effect and to maintain the momentum of his narrative. John of Worcester may have been inspired by the battle at Otford in 776 between the Mercians and the inhabitants of Kent.<sup>301</sup> Rather than Edmund finding the Danes near a ford on the River Darent, it is perhaps more probable that they were on the southern side of the Medway, following its course to Aylesford, where they intended to cross the river and proceed to Sheppey.<sup>302</sup>

Wherever Edmund engaged with the Danes, the primary sources are consistent in having him pursue them and inflicting severe casualties.<sup>303</sup> Edmund ceased his pursuit at Aylesford where the *ASC* records, somewhat ambiguously, that Eadric 'turned to join the king' (*gewnede þa ðæne cyng ongean*).<sup>304</sup> One reading of the phrase would have Eadric return to Edmund's service at Aylesford, an interpretation adopted by several modern historians.<sup>305</sup> John of Worcester gives a contrasting account, recording that Eadric returned to Edmund after Sherston.<sup>306</sup> Drawing on the ambiguity of the language of the *ASC*, Larson argued that the Old English *gewende ongean* may indicate that Eadric quarrelled with Edmund about pursuing the Danes further, implying that Edmund had accepted Eadric sometime before Aylesford.<sup>307</sup> Larson's conclusion relies upon transposing the syntax of the Old English source, the effects of which may create an unreliable interpretation.

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301 *ASC*, MSS. A and E, pp.50-51.

302 Aylesford is the lowest crossing point on the Medway.

303 *ASC*, MSS. D, E and F, pp.150-51; *GRA*, pp.316-17; *JW*, pp.490-91; *HA*, pp.358-9.

304 *ASC*, Vol. 7, MS. E, p.73.

305 Hodgkin, *The History of England*, p.397; Oman, *England Before the Norman Conquest*, p.580; Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p.392.

306 *JW*, pp.488-9; also *GRA*, pp.316-17. The account in the F recension of the *ASC* that Eadric made the English army by means of a trick (*per dolum fecit exercitum Anglorum redire*) was written with the benefit of hindsight in the late eleventh-century. *ASC*, Vol. 8, MS. F, p.110. For the dating of MS. F see Ch. 2:1.

307 Larson, *Canute the Great*, p.92.

Regardless of when Eadric rejoined Edmund, the effect of the ealdorman's presence at Aylesford was significant. The *ASC* does not disclose any details of what happened but William of Malmesbury and John of Worcester condemn Eadric for persuading Edmund not to pursue the Danes further.<sup>308</sup> The only explanation for how this was achieved is given by William, who has Eadric detain Edmund by assuring him the Danes 'would not go any further' (*nichil ultra ausuros affirmaret*).<sup>309</sup> The singular nature of this report makes it improbable that William knew the contents of the conversation between Edmund and Eadric. The ealdorman's assurance may therefore be the product of William's imagination, intended to illustrate the treachery of Eadric.

The detrimental consequences of Edmund either receiving Eadric into his service and/or taking his counsel are expressed with unanimity in the primary sources. The *ASC* is cryptic in its reference to a 'no more unwise decision' (*nan mare unræd gered*) but one may reasonably infer that it alludes partly to permitting the Danes to escape.<sup>310</sup> Written in the century following the events they purport to describe, the Anglo-Norman narratives appear prophetic in their patriotic pronouncements that had Edmund continued his pursuit the Danes would have been vanquished.<sup>311</sup> The sense of despondency which characterises these accounts of Aylesford is epitomised by William of Malmesbury. Infused with the knowledge of how Edmund's war with Cnut concluded, William summarised the effect of Edmund allowing the Danes to depart as 'disaster for himself and England' (*sibi exitium et Angliae*).<sup>312</sup>

#### The Battle of Assandun

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308 *GRA*, pp.316-17; *JW*, pp.490-91.

309 *GRA*, pp.316-17.

310 *ASC*, *Vol. 7, MS. E*, p.73; also *HA*, pp.358-9.

311 *GRA*, pp.316-17; *JW*, pp.488-9; *HA*, pp.356-7.

312 *GRA*, pp.316-17.

The consequences of Edmund permitting the Danes to proceed from Aylesford without inflicting further injury quickly became apparent. Cnut's army, according to the *ASC*, travelled to Essex and from there to Mercia where it euphemistically 'did for all that it travelled over' (*forðyde eall þæt he oferferde*).<sup>313</sup> Less restrained in his description of the Danes' behaviour, John of Worcester has them engaging energetically in pillaging, indiscriminate slaughter, and the destruction of towns and fields. Unique to John, his account may be an attempt to juxtapose the allegedly barbaric behaviour of the Danes against innocent civilians with Edmund justifiably destroying Danes in defence of his kingdom.<sup>314</sup>

Edmund appears to have been unaware of the Danes' whereabouts and their depredations for, according to the *ASC*, he did not assemble another army until he had learned they had gone inland.<sup>315</sup> The explanation for Edmund's lack of knowledge may be found in John of Worcester who is alone in reporting that after the engagement at Aylesford, Edmund returned to Wessex.<sup>316</sup> John's earlier account that Edmund returned to Wessex after the battle at Brentford may invite speculation that such reports are a literary trope but Edmund's presence in Wessex would explain his immediate lack of knowledge concerning events in Mercia, and may also indicate that he incurred losses in Kent of a magnitude that required replacement.

The army Edmund assembled, according to the *ASC*, appears to have been similar to that which he gathered to pursue the Danes in Kent, in that it was drawn from 'the entire English nation' (*ealla*

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313 *ASC*, Vol. 5, MS. C, p.102. The Danes' route to Mercia via Essex may indicate that they originally departed from Sheppey.

314 *JW*, pp.491-2. William of Malmesbury makes a singular contribution to the debate concerning the Danes activities in Mercia by having them engage the East Angles in battle; *GRA*, pp. 316-17. For a scholarly consideration of this possibility, see Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, pp.144-5.

315 *ASC*, MSS. D and E, pp.151-3.

316 *JW*, pp.491-2.



*Engla þeode*).<sup>317</sup> One should again be mindful of Abels's advice not to read this phrase literally<sup>318</sup> but there is strong evidence that Edmund's appeal extended beyond Wessex. The presence in Edmund's army of contingents from East Anglia and Lindsey, can reasonably be inferred, as did Freeman, from those identified killed at *Assandun* which included Ulfcytel of East Anglia and Ealdorman Godwine of Lindsey, a region devastated by Æthelred but now supporting Edmund.<sup>319</sup> The proliferation of those with a connection to East Anglia amongst the named dead at *Assandun* was remarked upon by Larson who reasonably concluded that the main constituent of the English army at *Assandun* was East Anglian.<sup>320</sup> This may be an exaggeration, as the subsequent defection of Ealdorman Eadric and those under his command had a significantly deleterious affect on the English army's ability to withstand the Danes, suggesting that Eadric's Mercian troops represented a substantial component of Edmund's forces.

Edmund evidently knew where to find the Danes, for the *ASC* records that he 'travelled behind them' (*ferde him æthindan*).<sup>321</sup> The Danes, having concluded their spoliation, according to John of Worcester, were returning to their ships.<sup>322</sup> None of the primary sources record the precise route which Edmund took in pursuit of the Danes but Ann Williams has made the credible suggestion that for Edmund to reach the eastern part of England he would probably have travelled along Ermine

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317 *ASC, Vol. 5, MS. C*, p.102; also *JW*, pp.491-2.

318 Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation*, p.177.

319 *ASC, MSS. D and E*, p.152; Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest*, p.428.

320 Larson, *Canute the Great*, p.95; also Higham, *Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp.67; 100. The possibility that the East Anglians were predominant amongst the English forces at *Assandun* supports William of Malmesbury's account of them engaging with the Danes prior to the battle; see above.

321 *ASC, Vol. 5, MS. C*, p.102.

322 *JW*, pp.491-2.

Street from London and than taken the Icknield Way which cuts across East Anglia from Godmanchester to Colchester.<sup>323</sup>

Edmund appears to have acted with alacrity in summoning another army and pursuing the Danes, for the *ASC* records that he was able to overtake them in Essex (*offerde hi on Eastsexum*).<sup>324</sup> Whilst the Chronicle is quite clear concerning the celerity of the English, the location at which they outstripped the retreating Danes is contested. The *ASC* has Edmund gain on the Danes at the hill called *Assandun* (*æt þære dune þeman hæst Assandun*) but the closely contemporary writer of the *Encomium* has the Danes encounter the English in *Æsceneduno* which he translated into the Latin *mons fraxinorum* (hill of the ashes). In the twelfth century John of Worcester echoed the *ASC* in having the English overtake the Danes at *monte Assandun* but he explained the Old English toponym as meaning 'Ass's Hill' (*mons asini*).<sup>325</sup>

Disagreement amongst the primary sources has resulted in the nomination of two principal locations for the battle of *Assandun*: Ashingdon in south-east Essex, and Ashdon in the north-west of the county. Whilst the place-name evidence is inconclusive, strategic and tactical considerations have recently swung the debate away from Ashingdon in favour of Ashdon. Williams has argued convincingly that for the Danes to have reached Ashingdon from Essex, they would have negotiated the River Crouch but this has no islands nor natural harbours to accommodate the Danes' presumably large fleet. Alternatively, the reference in the *ASC* to Essex suggests that the Danes took the route they had previously used to raid Mercia, entering the confluence of the Rivers Orwell and

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323 Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.145.

324 *ASC*, Vol. 5, MS. C, p.102.

325 *ASC*, Vol. 5, MS. C, p.102, *Encomium*, pp.24-5; *JW*, pp.491-2.

Stour, with a natural harbour at Harwich. The valley of the Stour leads to the headwaters of the River Granta which is fed by the River Bourne at the head of which lies Ashdon.<sup>326</sup>

Having overtaken the Danes at *Assandun*, the *ASC* then reports that Edmund resolutely joined battle (*heardlice fengon*) conveying the impression that hostilities began almost immediately and that fighting was fierce. A similar description occurs in the *Encomium* which reports there was a severe infantry battle (*preluim pedestre gravissimum*).<sup>327</sup> As with the majority of the engagements fought by Edmund, the closely contemporary sources do not indicate when the battle of *Assandun* occurred but the obit of Bishop Eadnoth of Dorchester, whom the *ASC* reports was killed at *Assandun*, is recorded in a twelfth century Ely kalendar as 18 October.<sup>328</sup> It is arguably rare for a primary source to reveal precisely when an early medieval battle began and finished but with regard to *Assandun* the historian may be fortunate. The *Encomium* is unusual in that it reports the battle began at the ninth hour (*hora dei nona*) and continued after nightfall (*necque horrebant tenebras*).<sup>329</sup> If the information provided by the *Encomiast* is reliable, the battle began at approximately 15:00 hours and on 18 October, 1016 sunset came at around 17:00 hours. The battle

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326 Williams, *Aethelred the Unready*, pp.144-5. For a detailed discussion of the evidence supporting the claims for Ashingdon and Ashdon see C. Hart, 'The Site of Assandun', in *The Danelaw*, pp.553-65; W. Rodwell, 'The Battle of Assandun and its Memorial Church', in *The Battle of Maldon: Fiction and Fact*, ed. J. Cooper (London, 1993), pp.127-58. In determining the location of *Assandun*, or any other conflict site, one should also be mindful, as suggested by Thomas Williams, of military factors such as muster sites, communication networks and fortified places, in addition to battlefield sites reflecting the relationship between social, political and cosmological considerations; 'Landscape and warfare in Anglo-Saxon England and the Viking Campaign of 1006', *Early Medieval Europe*, 23, No.3 (2015), pp.329-59, at p.335.

327 *ASC*, Vol. 5, MS. C, p.102; *Encomium*, pp.24-25.

328 B. Dickens, 'The day of Byrhtnoth's death and other obits from a twelfth-century Ely kalendar', *Leeds Studies in English* VI (1937), pp.14-24, at p.21.

329 *Encomium*, pp.26-27.

was only able to continue after the onset of darkness, according to the *Encomiast*, because the shining moon showed who was the enemy (*luna clarescens...monstratet hostem*).<sup>330</sup> The unique nature of the *Encomiast's* account may seem fanciful but on the date of the battle there was a waxing gibbous moon which probably provided sufficient illumination for combatants to distinguish friend from foe.

The *Encomiast's* closely contemporary narrative also provides a clue as to when the hostilities terminated. The Danes, it is reported, were restrained by the darkness of night (*noctis obscuritate... retenti*) which prevented them from pursuing the fleeing English.<sup>331</sup> If the setting of the moon made further fighting impossible, which seems probable, the effective end of the battle can be calculated to approximately 22:00 hours.<sup>332</sup> If the *Encomiast's* account is accurate, the battle of *Assandun* was a prolonged engagement, lasting some seven hours. Examples of Anglo-Saxon battles lasting so long are rare but as Brunanburh and Hastings indicate, not impossible.<sup>333</sup>

While there may be some truth in the claim of the *ASC* that Edmund's army at *Assandun* was representative of the entire nation, it is impossible to know the precise numbers of those involved in the engagement. Some primary sources do indicate which side had the greatest number of men. The *Encomium* claims that the Danes were less numerous (*Dani licet pauciores*)<sup>334</sup> but this may be the writer's attempt to magnify their eventual victory. Equally dubious is the late account of Geoffrei

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330 *Encomium*, pp.26-27.

331 *Encomium*, pp.26-27.

332 I am grateful to Alex Boxley, Planetarium Officer at the Winchester Science Centre, for calculating the phases of the moon for 18 October, 1016.

333 See Morillo, 'Hastings, An Unusual Battle', p.95.

334 *Encomium*, pp.26-27.

Gaimar who reported that Edmund had inferior numbers (*poi de gent*).<sup>335</sup> Gaimar may have recorded Edmund's army as smaller to provide an acceptable explanation for the English defeat. Similar to him allegedly addressing the English army at Sherston, Edmund is reported to have addressed his troops at *Assandun* prior to the armies exchanging blows but the sources provide contradictory accounts of exactly when Edmund is supposed to have delivered his oration. The *Encomiast* has Edmund speak to his troops after Eadric deserted, whereas John of Worcester has Edmund address his army before Eadric left the field. In the event of two irreconcilable accounts it may be prudent to accept the earlier source but both of them may have fabricated Edmund's exhortation. In the case of the *Encomium*, Edmund's appeal to the army that they fight for their liberty and country (*pro libertate et patria*) has been shown by Campbell to have been borrowed from Sallust.<sup>336</sup> John of Worcester used the Roman writer to embellish his description of Sherston and there is evidence to suggest that he did so for his account of *Assandun*: Edmund's reference to his troops' previous courage and victory (*pristine virtutis atque victoria*) is redolent of the exhortation given by Catiline. Edmund's supposed speech at *Assandun*, like the one he reportedly gave at Sherston, may have been invented to demonstrate John's erudition, enhance Edmund's reputation as a military leader and satisfy the literary expectations of John's readers.<sup>337</sup>

Some of the reputed boldness and bravery which contributed to Edmund's cognomen *Ironsides* may be also evident in the *Encomium*. Edmund is said to have advanced into the midst of the enemy as he addressed his troops (*dicens in medios ingreditur hostes*), cutting down Danes on every side (*circumtaque caedens Danos*) which inspired his followers to emulate Edmund's behaviour. This

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335 *EE*, L4245, pp.230-31.

336 Campbell, *Encomium*, p.xxix; the relevant passage is from *Catiline*, Cap.lviii.

337 See above.

passage may be the product of the Encomiast's imagination but it does suggest that stories which may have contributed to Edmund's soubriquet were circulating in the reign of Harthacnut.<sup>338</sup>

Although Edmund is presented as less impetuous by John of Worcester, his account of the beginning of the battle remains questionable. Edmund is reported as not giving the order to attack until Cnut occupied the level ground. The strongly similar description in Sallust, where hostilities begin only after Catiline had taken the high ground, suggest it may have inspired John and both narratives also refer to the determination of all combatants.<sup>339</sup> The demonstrable reliance of some primary sources on a classical writer may invalidate their reports that Edmund initiated the battle of *Assandun*, particularly John of Worcester's account that Edmund surrendered his strategically superior position to fight on level ground. A plausible explanation for Edmund's alleged tactics was provided by Freeman. Edmund had no choice, it is argued, but to relinquish his strong, defensive position if he were to prevent the Danes from returning to their ships. In descending to the lower ground, claimed Freeman, Edmund lost his advantageous post but gained from the impetus charging downhill gave to his attack.<sup>340</sup>

Whatever expedience Edmund may have gained by initiating a precipitous attack on the Danes, it appears to have been ephemeral. At some point during the early stages of the battle Eadric deserted Edmund. The *ASC* unreservedly attributes the rout of the English army to Eadric, reporting that he started the flight, taking with him the men of the *Magonsæte* (*astealde þæne fleam ærest med Magesæton*).<sup>341</sup> The Chronicle does not disclose when Eadric left the field and the sources that

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338 The reference to Edmund advancing into the middle of the Danish line is similar to Sallust but according to

Campbell it is something that any two writers might have arrived at independently; *Encomium*, p.xxx. Similar accounts of Edmund's bravery may also be found in Henry of Huntingdon; *HA*, pp.358-9.

339 *Catiline*, *capitis lix-lix*; *JW*, pp.491-2.

340 Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest*, p.429.

341 *ASC*, *Vol. 5, MS. C*, p.102.

do are contradictory. The *Encomium* has Eadric desert before the fighting began (*nondum congressi facta*), having persuaded his followers that death was inevitable against the Danes.<sup>342</sup> The later narrative of John of Worcester disagrees, reporting the ealdorman abandoned the English after Edmund attacked and the Danish line faltered (*Danorum aciem inclinatum*). Despite the disagreement between the two earliest accounts of when Eadric might have fled, they agree that the ealdorman's desertion had been arranged with Cnut.<sup>343</sup> John of Worcester also contributes to the debate about how Edmund lost at *Assandun* by reporting that in addition to the Magonsæte, Eadric was accompanied by that section of the army under his command (*exercitus parte cui preerat fugam capessit*).<sup>344</sup>

Although the size of each army is unknown it is probable that Edmund, who was able to replace his losses repeatedly, had the larger force whereas it is unlikely that after Sherston the Danes would have been able to supplement their forces. The departure of Eadric and his followers seems to have caused many of Edmund's remaining troops to flee also. If Eadric was responsible for removing a section of the army, the contingent under his command may have comprised a significant portion of the English forces. Their defection and the further desertions it allegedly caused, help to explain the victory of a probably numerically inferior force at *Assandun*. It is possible, however, that John's unique and expanded account of those who were led away by Eadric is another example of how the Anglo-Norman historians sought to depict the ealdorman as a traitor who contributed to the conquest of England.<sup>345</sup>

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342 *Encomium*, pp.24-25.

343 *Encomium*, pp.24-25; *JW*, pp.491-2.

344 *JW*, pp.491-2.

345 See Ch. 2:5.

In keeping with the calumny that is customarily heaped upon Eadric, the *ASC* records that the affect of his actions was the destruction of Edmund and the whole nation (*aswac...cynehlaforde 7 ealre Anglecynnnes þeode*).<sup>346</sup> Despite the devastating effect of Eadric's desertion, and others, a late account of the battle indicates that Edmund was not abandoned entirely at *Assandun*. William of Malmesbury records that some men, mindful of their reputation, remained in formation and were all killed (*unam interempti*).<sup>347</sup> Intended perhaps to illustrate the loyalty and bravery of Edmund's followers, this reference might be a literary borrowing from an Anglo-Saxon source such as the *Battle of Maldon*, where Ealdorman Byrhtnoth's men encouraged each other to continue fighting and remain with their dying lord.<sup>348</sup>

The overwhelming impression created by the primary sources is that Eadric's treachery at *Assandun* cost Edmund his crown but Ann Williams has suggested that the perfidious ealdorman may not be entirely to blame. Edmund's successes, it is mooted, may have made him overconfident which resulted in him attacking impetuously 'a dangerous and powerful enemy'.<sup>349</sup> Cut off from their ships and, according to the *Encomium*, inferior in numbers and aware that flight was inherently dangerous, the perilousness of the Danes' situation may have made them desperate and more determined to fight.<sup>350</sup> The English had reason to be equally resolute. If Cnut were defeated decisively, the English may have believed that the Danes would be compelled to abandon their attempts at conquest. Edmund's probable numerical superiority would indicate that his forces were the stronger and although Eadric's faithlessness may not explain entirely why the English lost

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346 *ASC, Vol. 5, MS. C*, p.102.

347 *GRA*, pp.316-7.

348 For essays on the Battle of Maldon see *The Battle of Maldon AD 991*, ed. D. Scragg (Oxford, 1991).

349 Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.146.

350 *Encomium*, pp.26-27.



*Assandun*, the ealdorman's departure, along with the consequent desertions it initiated, should be considered a significant contributory factor.

The ASC's report that Edmund and the whole nation had been destroyed is followed by the pronouncement that Cnut had 'won himself all England'.<sup>351</sup> Written after Edmund's death and Cnut's accession, the alleged downfall of England may not have been so apparent immediately after *Assandun*. Prior to the negotiation of the peace agreement at Alney, several primary sources report that Edmund was determined to continue his campaign against Cnut but his ability to do so may have been severely compromised.<sup>352</sup> The list of the English killed at *Assandun* is brief but it indicates that Edmund had lost powerful allies, ecclesiastical and lay, from around the country. In addition to Ealdorman Godwine and Ulfcytel, Æthelweard, son of Ealdorman Æthelwine of East Anglia and Ealdorman Ælfric of Hampshire, are also recorded amongst the dead, as are the senior churchmen Bishop Eadnoth of Dorchester and Abbot Wulfsige of Ramsey. The remaining English fallen are referred to collectively in the ASC as 'all the nobility of the English race' (*eall Angelcynnes duguð*).<sup>353</sup> This is an exaggeration as Cnut was able to find English nobles to serve in his witan but the Chronicler's poetic hyperbole does suggest that Edmund's losses at *Assandun* were perceived to be profound.<sup>354</sup>

#### The Danaskógar

Sources sympathetic to the Danish cause, the *Knútsdrápa* and the *Encomium*, contain a curious suggestion that between the Battle of *Assandun* and the peace negotiations at Alney, Edmund may

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351 ASC, MSS. D and E, p153.

352 The treaty at Alney will be discussed later in this Chapter.

353 ASC, Vol. 5, MS. C, p.102.

354 For Cnut's recruitment of English nobles into his service see Mack, 'Changing Thegns'; S. Keynes, 'Cnut's Earls', in Rumble, (ed.), *The Reign of Cnut*, pp.43-88, at pp.67-81; Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut*, p.38-9.

have fought another engagement. *Knútsdrápa* appears to claim that Cnut won renown with a massacre north of the *Danaskógar*.<sup>355</sup> The possibility of another encounter after *Assandun* may also receive some support from the account in the *Encomium* which has Edmund, in an unspecified location, seeking to assemble a yet more powerful army (*fortiori multitudine collecta*) to continue the conflict.<sup>356</sup> While this reference may indicate that Edmund remained undaunted by his recent defeat, the *Encomium* does not record if Edmund's new army, assuming it was assembled, saw action. An attempt to identify the location of the enigmatic *Danaskógar* (possibly 'the Danes' Wood') was made by Margaret Ashdown. The skald Óttarr does not specifically indicate where the *Danaskógar* lay in relation to *Assandun* but Ashdown believed that the *helmingar* relating to *Assandun* and the *Danaskógar* were connected, therefore placing the former north of the latter. On this basis Ashdown argued the wood must have been in Essex and suggested the area between Maldon and Chelmsford, formerly part of a large wood, as a possible site.<sup>357</sup> The implication of the praise-poem that *Assandun* lay to the north of the *Danaskógar* was considered by Cyril Hart who found no evidence to support the contention that the latter was in Essex; Ashdon lies north of Hale's Wood, and it is doubtful if any woodland existed south of Ashingdon in 1016.<sup>358</sup>

Hart's opinion concerning the problematic nature of placing the *Danaskógar* close to either possible battle site has been embraced by Russell Poole, who suggests that the *helmingar* have been linked incorrectly and the skald intended a battle different from *Assandun*. The inherent flaw in this argument, as Poole admits, is the absence of any corroboration in the other primary sources. The

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355 'Knútsdrápa', in *Skaldic Verse*, p.275.

356 *Encomium*, pp.26-27.

357 Ashdown, *English and Norse Documents*, p.301; E. D. Laborde, 'The Site of the Battle of Maldon', *English Historical Review*, XL, No. CLVIII (1925), pp.161-73, at p.171.

358 Hart, 'The Site of Assandun', p.558, n.26.

ASC is clear that Cnut's first action after *Assandun* was to follow Edmund into Gloucestershire.<sup>359</sup> Poole's alternative suggestion for locating the *Danaskógar* is that Óttarr may have misunderstood the nature of the negotiations at Alney. Relations between the two parties preparatory to the peace-talks may have been bellicose: in addition to the Encomiast recording that Edmund was raising another army, William of Malmesbury reports that Edmund challenged Cnut to single combat, and Geoffrey Gaimar also has the fighting continue after *Assandun* for several days. Óttarr may therefore, according to Poole, have incorrectly attributed Cnut's acquisition of a 'great name' (*konungsnafn*) after *Assandun* to warfare instead of negotiation.<sup>360</sup> This explanation depends on the reliability of Edmund's reported determination to continue the conflict but the primary sources' unanimous accounts of him repeatedly raising armies makes plausible the possibility that Óttarr mistakenly transferred the aggression displayed at *Assandun* to Alney. In the event that the reference to the *Danaskógar* is connected to the treaty at Alney, the location of the mysterious wood may lie to the south of where the peace was concluded. Allowing for sound substitution, argues Poole, such as where the Old English *Brægentforda* becomes Old Norse *Brandfurða*, the Old English element *denu* (valley) may have been transmuted by Óttarr, making *Danaskógar* a probable Old Norse rendering of the Forest of Dean, which is south of Alney.<sup>361</sup>

### **5:7 Peace Concluded**

Contrary to his practise of returning to Wessex after engaging the Danes Edmund, after *Assandun*, altered his behaviour slightly by going into Gloucestershire where, according to the ASC, he was

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359 ASC, MSS. D and E, p.152; Poole, *Skaldic Verse*, p.275.

360 See above for Edmund assembling an army after *Assandun*; *GRA*, pp.316-19; *EE*, pp.232-3; Poole, *Skaldic Verse*, pp.275-6.

361 D. Hill, *An Atlas of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1981), map 23, pp.16-17.

discovered by Cnut who had followed him.<sup>362</sup> Edmund's reason for selecting southern Mercia is unknown but his repeated recruitment in Wessex may have exhausted the region's supply of troops. If the accounts of him wanting to raise another army are reliable, Edmund may have sought fresh forces from another area.<sup>363</sup> The strength of Edmund's resolve to maintain the momentum of his campaign may be inferred from John of Worcester's account that Edmund was advised to make peace only a few days (*paucis diebus*) after *Assandun*.<sup>364</sup> The instigator of this proposal, according to the majority of the primary sources, was Eadric, who had rejoined Edmund.<sup>365</sup> How the duplicitous ealdorman was able to ingratiate himself with Edmund after deserting him at *Assandun* is not known but Eadric's presence amongst Edmund's advisers may indicate that the king considered him to be useful. Alternatively, having Eadric as a counsellor may have been thought the best means of monitoring him for indications of further treachery. Edmund was also advised to share the kingdom with Cnut but the sources disagree whether the suggestion came from Eadric or Cnut.<sup>366</sup>

The ASC does not record Edmund's reaction to the advice he received but the closely contemporary *Encomium* reports that he was initially unwilling to enter into peace negotiations but eventually relented and sent messengers to Cnut.<sup>367</sup> Edmund's reluctance to make terms is consistent with the reports that he wished to continue the war but the Encomiast does not reveal

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362 ASC, MSS. D and E, p.152.

363 See *Encomium*, pp.26-27; *GRA*, pp.316-17; *JW*, pp.492-3.

364 *JW*, pp.492-3; also, *EE*, pp.232-3, L.4252.

365 ASC, MSS. D and E, pp.152-3; *Encomium*, pp.28-29; *JW*, pp.492-3. William of Malmesbury places these initial discussions in Gloucester; *GRA*, pp.316-17.

366 The Encomiast and John of Worcester credit Eadric; *Encomium*, pp.28-29 and *JW*, pp.492-3. William of Malmesbury has Cnut propose dividing the kingdom after rejecting Edmund's offer of single combat; *GRA*, pp.318-19. Henry of Huntingdon has Cnut make the suggestion during his duel with Edmund; *HA*, pp.360-61.

367 *Encomium*, pp.28-29.

how Edmund was persuaded to alter his aggressive stance. A plausible explanation for Edmund's new posture may be provided by William of Malmesbury's late account that Edmund was overwhelmed by the unanimous support for peace talks to begin.<sup>368</sup> If Edmund had faced strong opposition to his plans to perpetuate the campaign he may have considered it more judicious to comply with the wishes of his counsellors. In granting his counsellors' pleas for peace, Edmund also demonstrated that in addition to fulfilling the role of military leader, he could also play the part of statesman.

As a precondition to Edmund meeting with Cnut, according to the D recension of the *ASC*, it was agreed that hostages be exchanged. The *Chronicle* does not reveal the author of this stipulation but the slightly later *Encomium* records it was delivered to the Danes by Edmund's messengers.<sup>369</sup> In agreeing to exchange hostages, it may be said that Edmund was acting in accord with other Anglo-Saxon rulers who, according to Paul Kershaw and Adam Kosto, regarded hostages as a means of indicating their prestige and asserting their authority.<sup>370</sup> The practical advantage Edmund might have gained in exchanging hostages may also be revealed in Lavelle's observation that hostages, susceptible to various forms of physical violence if agreements were broken, were potentially an effective means for ensuring peace was maintained.<sup>371</sup> The exchange of hostages prior to Edmund and Cnut meeting may have a parallel in the preliminary hostages (*foregislas*) granted to Alfred by Guthrum before they met at Aller, but the non-reciprocal nature of that hostage-giving may indicate

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368 *GRA*, pp.318-19; also *JW*, pp.492-3.

369 *ASC*, MS. E, p.153; *Encomium*, pp.30-31. Also, *JW*, pp.492-3.

370 P. Kershaw, *Peaceful Kings: Peace, Power and the Early Medieval Political Imagination* (Oxford, 2011), pp.242-61; A. Kosto, 'Hostages in the Carolingian World', *Early Medieval Europe*, 11, No. 2 (2002) pp.123-47.

371 R. Lavelle, 'The Use and Abuse of Hostages in Later Anglo-Saxon England', *Early Medieval Europe*, 14, No.3 (2006), pp.269-96.

that Edmund was not in as strong a position as Alfred had been, and that Edmund negotiated with Cnut as if they were equals.<sup>372</sup>

The English overtures for peace were also, according to the *Encomium*, advantageous for Cnut. For a source that is usually sympathetic to the Danes, the *Encomium* is extraordinarily candid in having them conclude they would ultimately lose the war with Edmund who was continually able to replace his losses, whereas the Danes were unable to fill the places of their own dead (*nec erat qui locum morientum suppleret*). Acknowledging to himself that Edmund would eventually win by attrition Cnut, claims the Encomiast, recalled Edmund's messengers and agreed to their terms.<sup>373</sup> The negotiations were not an unqualified success for English diplomacy however. Cnut, in what could be described as a face-saving exercise, made it a condition of his acceptance that Edmund pay tribute to the Danish army.<sup>374</sup> Edmund complied with Cnut's ultimatum but in agreeing to the payment as a condition for peace, Edmund was following a policy practised by previous English kings. Alfred, according to Ealdorman Æthelweard, made a *pactum* with the Danes at Wareham that included a money payment, and Æthelred made increasingly larger payments to several Viking armies as part of his peace settlements.<sup>375</sup>

The preliminary stages of the peace talks concluded, Edmund and Cnut met, according to the D recession of the ASC, at Alney, near Deorhurst (*Olanige wið Deorhyrste*).<sup>376</sup> John of Worcester, writing in the twelfth century but perhaps recording a local tradition, has Edmund stationed with his men on the west bank of the River Severn and Cnut with his on the east, prior to them reaching the

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372 ASC, MS. A, p.76

373 *Encomium*, pp.30-31.

374 *Encomium*, pp.30-31.

375 Æthelweard, *Chronicon*, p.41. Æthelred paid increasingly greater taxes to raiding-armies in 994, 1002 and 1007. A lesser tax was paid in 1012; ASC, MS. E, pp.129; 133; 138; 142.

376 ASC, Vol. 6, MS. D, p.62.

island by fishing boat.<sup>377</sup> The decision to hold the peace talks on the island may have been influenced by its position on the borders of two shires. Situated on the borders of Gloucestershire and Worcestershire such places, as noted by Baker and Brooks, were sometimes the locations of several types of assembly including meetings between royalty and nobles.<sup>378</sup> Alney may also have been chosen for its political neutrality. In 1016 the manor of Deerhurst, suggests Williams, may already have been owned by Ealdorman Odda, who was identified in the twelfth century by William of Malmesbury to be a relation (*cognatus*) of Edmund's half-brother Edward the Confessor. It is also suggested that Odda was related to Ælgar *meaw* who fought for Cnut at Sherston, and whose family owned the neighbouring manor of Tewksbury. Related to those involved on both sides of the war, Odda may have appeared impartial. He may also, Williams plausibly argues, have been thought to have the necessary rank and wealth to host a significant meeting between the leaders of two nations.<sup>379</sup>

The majority of the manuscripts of the *ASC*, ranging in date from the mid eleventh to the early twelfth century, record that Edmund and Cnut formally and publicly demonstrated their desire to establish a peace at Alney by declaring their 'friendship' (*freondscype*) which they duly affirmed with pledges and oaths.<sup>380</sup> A more detailed and significant account of the kings' declaration is contained in MS. D of the Chronicle. This recension records that Edmund and Cnut announced their intention to become partners (*feolagan*) and pledge-brothers (*wedbroðra*) which they also affirmed

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377 *JW*, pp.492-3.

378 Baker and Brooks, 'Identifying outdoor assembly sites', p.17. Alney's position on the border of two shires in the early eleventh-century was established by H. P. R. Finberg; *Gloucestershire Studies* (Leicester, 1957), p.36.

379 *GRA*, pp.360-61; Williams, *World Before Domesday*, pp.11-15; also, T. Bolton, *Conquest and Controversy The Early Career of Odda of Deerhurst* (Deerhurst, 2007).

380 *ASC*, Vol. 5, MS. C, p.103; Vol. 7, MS. E, p.74; Vol. 8, MS. F, pp.109-10.

with pledges and oaths.<sup>381</sup> The reference to *feolaga* is derived from the Old Norse *félagi* which Judith Jesch has demonstrated, in her comprehensive exposition of runic inscriptions, has the meaning of 'partner', whether in war, trade or landownership.<sup>382</sup>

Although Old Norse loan-words in Old English documents are not uncommon, particularly in those produced at the court of Cnut,<sup>383</sup> the use of *feolaga*, as observed by Simon Roffey and Ryan Lavelle, is relatively uncommon in an Anglo-Saxon context and requires explanation.<sup>384</sup> Jesch makes the convincing case that with regard to Edmund and Cnut, *feolagan* and *wedbroðra* are synonymous terms and were used at Alney to represent the ethnic origins of Edmund and Cnut.<sup>385</sup> The probability that an Old Norse loan-word accurately describes the new relationship between Edmund and Cnut, is supported by Sara Pons-Sanz, who cites the significance of the peace settlement at Alney for English and Danes.<sup>386</sup> The discrepancy between the account in MS. D, also known as the 'Worcester manuscript', and the other recensions may be explained by Archbishop

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381 ASC, Vol. 6, *MS. D*, p.62.

382 J. Jesch, *Ships and Men in the Late Viking Age: The Vocabulary of Runic Inscriptions and Skaldic Verse* (Woodbridge, 2001), pp.232-5; also, R. I. Page, *Runes* (London, 1987), p.51; D. Tweddle., M. Biddle and B. Kjølbbye-Biddle, (ed.) *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture Vol. IV, South-East England* (Oxford, 1995), p.279.

383 See M. Townend, *Language and History in Viking Age England: Linguistic Relations between Speakers of Old Norse and Old English* (Turnhout, 2002), p.193.

384 S. Roffey and R. Lavelle, 'West Saxons and Danes Negotiating Early Medieval Identities', in *Danes in Wessex: The Scandinavian Impact on Southern England*, ed. R. Lavelle and S. Roffey (Oxford, 2016), pp.7-34, at p.20. The only other example of the use of *feolaga* is the will of Thurstan, son of Wine; S 1531 (AD 1043x1045).

385 Jesch, *Ships and Men in the Late Viking Age*, p.235.

386 S. M. Pons-Sanz, 'Norse Derived Vocabulary in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', in Jorgensen, (ed.), *Reading the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, pp.275-304, at p.280; also, R. Dance, *Words Derived from Old Norse in Early Middle English; Studies in the Vocabulary of the South-West Midland Texts, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, 246 (Tempe, 2003), p.192, n.12.



Wulfstan of York also holding the bishopric of Worcester. As a senior ecclesiastic, Wulfstan may have witnessed the events at Alney and related them when he next visited Worcester. This possibility would also explain why the D manuscript is unique in identifying Deerhurst as the location of the meeting.

The degree of cooperation and fraternity professed by Edmund and Cnut may have been exaggerated by some of the Anglo-Norman historians. Henry of Huntingdon has Cnut propose that he and Edmund become 'brothers by adoption' and, implausibly, that Edmund should also govern in Denmark. Gaimar, reiterating references to brotherhood by adoption, taxes credulity by having Cnut suggest that he and Edmund undertake a joint campaign of conquest and divide the territory.<sup>387</sup> The affirmations ascribed to Edmund and Cnut also receive augmentation from the Anglo-Norman historians. John of Worcester adds that Edmund and Cnut exchanged arms and garments, while Henry of Huntingdon and Gaimar report the two kings exchanged the kiss of peace.<sup>388</sup> As with his descriptions of Sherston and *Assandun*, inspiration for John of Worcester's report of an exchange of weapons and clothing may have come from a classical source. Freeman drew a comparison between John of Worcester's account and the exchange of arms in the *Iliad*, between Gluakos and Diomedes, and Hector and Atlas, as a token of goodwill.<sup>389</sup> Similarly, there is Biblical precedent for an agreement to be concluded with an exchange of weapons and clothing, which John would have known and may have adapted for his narrative.<sup>390</sup> The alleged kiss of peace, which only appears in the later primary sources, may also be a fabrication and based on a practise that was contemporary to Henry of Huntingdon and Gaimar.

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387 *HA*, pp.360-61; *EE*, pp.236-6, Ll.4335-8.

388 *JW*, pp.492-3; *HA*, pp.360-61; *EE*, pp.236-7, Ll.4356-7.

389 *The Iliad*, Bks. 6 and 7; Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest*, p.436 and n.2.

390 1 Samuel, 18:3-4.

In addition to publicly confirming their fraternity, Edmund and Cnut set the payment to be made to the Danish army which, according to the Encomiast, Cnut had stipulated be paid for Edmund's part of the kingdom.<sup>391</sup> Larson, perhaps unduly mindful of the Encomiast's version of events, argued the payment suggested Edmund recognised Cnut as his overlord.<sup>392</sup> This interpretation may be refuted with reference to Æthelred paying tribute to Olaf Trygvasson, which reduced the contents of his coffers but did not make him subservient to Olaf.<sup>393</sup> Evidence that Edmund's sovereignty was undiminished may also be found in the later narrative of John of Worcester who, having detailed the division of the kingdom has the realm, presumably meaning the overlordship of the country, remaining with Edmund (*regni Edmundo remansit*).<sup>394</sup> None of the primary sources specify the amount to be paid but the increasing payments made by Æthelred suggest that the sum to be paid by Edmund would exceed those made by his father.<sup>395</sup>

It is unknown at what point in their deliberations Edmund and Cnut discussed the division of the kingdom but the ASC has the peace settlement conclude with them departing to their respective halves of the kingdom. Edmund is reported to have gone to Wessex and Cnut to Mercia.<sup>396</sup> The proposal to divide the kingdom in this manner may have come from the English. If the Encomiast is to be relied upon, it was Edmund's messengers who suggested to Cnut that he should have the north

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391 ASC, MSS. D and E, pp.152-3.

392 Larson, *Canute the Great*, p.98.

393 ASC, MS. E, p.129.

394 *JW*, pp.492-3.

395 Between 994 and 1007 Æthelred made three payments of £16,000; £24,000 and £30,000, indicating that Edmund's payment could have been close to £40,000.

396 ASC, MS. E, p.153. The D recension of the Chronicle is unique in having Cnut go 'to the north part' (*þam norðdæle*); ASC, Vol. 6, MS. D, p.62. The anomalous account by John of Worcester that Cnut's portion included Wessex may be the result of a corrupt document; *JW*, pp.492-3.

and Edmund 'the southern area', to which Cnut agreed.<sup>397</sup> In their territorial settlement, as observed by Timothy Reuter, Edmund and Cnut partitioned the country along the political fracture lines that had threatened English unification in the succession crises of 924-5 between Æthelstan and Ælfweard, and of 955-7 between Eadwig and Edmund's grandfather, Edgar.<sup>398</sup>

Unlike Alfred's treaty with Guthrum, details of the border between Edmund and Cnut's territories are not known but the impression created by the primary sources has Edmund possessing Wessex only.<sup>399</sup> At the time of the treaty it is probable that Wessex, according to Barbara Yorke's working definition of the region, consisted of Devon, Somerset, Dorset, Wiltshire, Berkshire and Hampshire (including the Isle of Wight). It is also possible that Edmund's share of the kingdom included all of the country south of the Thames.<sup>400</sup> If this estimation of Edmund's territory is correct, the region he controlled was similar in size to that retained by Alfred.

In his comparison of the treaties concluded between Alfred and Guthrum, and Edmund and Cnut, Freeman argued that Alfred, who surrendered regions he never ruled, fared better than Edmund who was compelled to give up territory where Æthelred had ruled unchallenged.<sup>401</sup> While it is true that areas ceded to Guthrum had not been controlled by Alfred, Freeman is incorrect to declare that Edmund lost regions where Æthelred reigned supreme. Throughout much of his reign, as has been

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397 *Encomium*, pp.30-31.

398 ASC, MS. D, pp.105 and 113; T. Reuter, 'The Making of England and Germany', in *Medieval Europeans: Studies in Ethnic Identity and National Perspectives I Medieval Europe*, ed. Alfred P. Smyth (London, 1998), pp.53-70, at p.56.

399 Alfred's treaty with Guthrum is contained in *Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, pp.98-100. The earliest details of the division of the kingdom between Edmund and Cnut are provided by Gaimar whose account, while identifying mostly different boundary points, is suspiciously similar to the division between Alfred and Guthrum; *EE*, pp.238-9, LI.4371-80; LI.4389-92.

400 B. Yorke, *Wessex in the Early Middle Ages* (London, 1995), pp.1-7.

401 Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest*, p.581.

demonstrated by Pauline Stafford, Æthelred's ability to govern independently was constrained by his need for the cooperation of powerful individuals and factions.<sup>402</sup> Freeman may also have exaggerated the significance of Cnut's gains. In what may be considered a contentious argument, Higham has suggested that the lands ceded by Edmund were on the political periphery of England whereas Edmund retained for himself the governmental centre of the country, which made him superior to Cnut.<sup>403</sup> There is some merit in Higham's argument. As David Hill has clearly demonstrated in his examination of the itineraries of tenth-century kings, Edmund's predecessors rarely travelled outside of Wessex, 'and more particularly the four heartland shires of Wessex'. The itineraries of Æthelred and Cnut also indicate that neither king frequented the Midlands.<sup>404</sup>

The division of the country may also have been intended to be temporary. Freeman suggested that both parties believed they would be released from the agreement with the death of the other, or the settlement would be annulled when a dispute arose between them.<sup>405</sup> Curiously absent from what is known of the negotiations at Alney, but present in the Alfred-Guthrum treaty, are references to legal and commercial relations between the English and Danes. It is unlikely that Edmund and Cnut intended to rule in isolation and therefore probable that some provision was made for their respective kingdoms to interact for the purposes of dispute settlement and trade, but such arrangements, if recorded, have not survived.

### **5:8 Edmund's Death**

The accord achieved at Alney lasted little more than a month. On the feast of St Andrew, according to the ASC, King Edmund died and was buried with (*mid*) his grandfather King Edgar, at

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402 Stafford, 'The Reign of Æthelred II', pp.15-46.

403 Higham, *Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, p.76.

404 Hill, *An Atlas of Anglo-Saxon England*, p.85.

405 Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest*, p.436.

Glastonbury. In the twelfth century, John of Worcester removed the ambiguity of the Chronicle's account when he recorded, probably accurately, that Edmund was buried 'next to' (*iuxta*) Edgar.<sup>406</sup> Regardless of the semantic distinction concerning where Edmund's body was laid to rest, his death effectively nullified the peace treaty. The reason for Edmund's interment at Glastonbury is explained by John's contemporary, William of Malmesbury, whose intriguing account also gives the precise location of Edmund's tomb. On his death-bed, according to William, Edmund granted some land and his body to Glastonbury, where he was buried before the high altar (*ante maius altare*).<sup>407</sup> If William of Malmesbury's account is credible, practical matters may have influenced Edmund's decision. The abbey may have been the closest, most suitable location to where Edmund died. That Glastonbury had sufficient status to house the remains of a king of England was established when it became the final resting place of Edmund's probable namesake Edmund I; the burial of Edmund's grandfather, King Edgar, at Glastonbury may also have been an important consideration.

An alternative explanation for Edmund's burial at Glastonbury is provided by Nicole Marafioti. While acknowledging the suitability of Glastonbury as a royal burial place, it is argued that Edmund's interment was the result of a 'strategic decision' taken by Cnut. Rather than having Edmund buried in the city that had elected him king, Cnut chose to bury Edmund at Glastonbury where his remains could not become the focus for anti-Danish sentiment that London had defiantly and repeatedly exhibited.<sup>408</sup> London's opposition to the Danes had been eloquently demonstrated by the city staunchly resisting several sieges by Swein Forkbeard and Cnut but the argument that political expediency was responsible for Edmund's interment at Glastonbury, described by Marafioti

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406 ASC, MSS. D and E, p.152-3; *JW*, pp.492-3.

407 William of Malmesbury, *The Early History of Glastonbury: An Edition, Translation and Study of William of Malmesbury's 'De Antiquitate Glastonie Ecclesie' by John Scott* (Woodbridge, 1981), pp.132-3.

408 Marafioti, *The King's Body*, pp.96-7.

as 'toward the political periphery of Cnut's new kingdom', rests upon the uncritical acceptance of John of Worcester's report that Edmund died in London.<sup>409</sup>

Neither the late eleventh century *Miraculis S. Eadmundi*, nor the twelfth-century account of John of Worcester are corroborated by the ASC and the late date of John's narrative also provides good grounds for disputing his identification of London as the scene of Edmund's death. John of Worcester's report was also discounted by Larson, who reasoned it was improbable that Edmund would have been in London which was occupied by Cnut and his army. The alternative identification by Henry of Huntingdon that Edmund died in Oxford, was similarly disputed by Larson who believed it unlikely that Edmund would visit the city where his traitorous brother-in-law Eadric had a residence.<sup>410</sup> Larson was probably correct to identify London and Oxford as potentially dangerous for Edmund and it is extremely doubtful that within a month of the division of the kingdom Edmund was in the half of the country assigned to Cnut, particularly the city then occupied by his recent foe. It is more credible that Edmund remained in Wessex, where he may have died at a royal estate, possibly near Glastonbury.<sup>411</sup>

Marafioti's attendant argument that the translation of Edmund's body from London to Glastonbury presented Cnut with an opportunity to make political capital is equally questionable. It is argued that had Cnut accompanied Edmund's supposed funeral cortège on its hundred mile journey to Glastonbury, it would have demonstrated that Cnut was honouring Edmund and respecting the institution of English kingship, but also signified the legitimacy of Cnut's rule and emphasised his military supremacy.<sup>412</sup> Marafioti is probably correct in defining the propaganda Cnut could have made by participating in Edmund's burial but the suggestion depends on Edmund

Commented [David McD68]: Neither *Miraculis S. Eadmundi* nor John of Worcester have corroboration from the ASC.

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409 JW, pp.492-3; Marafioti, *The King's Body*, p.96.

410 HA, pp.360-61; Larson, *Canute the Great*, pp.99-100.

411 For the identification and discussion of royal estates in Wessex, see Lavelle, *Royal Estates in Anglo-Saxon Wessex*.

412 Marafioti, *The King's Body*, p.97.

having died in London. As before, if the unsubstantiated and improbable assertion of John of Worcester is discounted, the alleged transportation of Edmund's body from London and the subsequent public relations exercise orchestrated by Cnut, become untenable.

Although it is unlikely that Cnut decided where Edmund would be buried and accompanied the transferral of the body to Glastonbury, it is perhaps more probable that Cnut visited Edmund's tomb after he had secured his succession to the entire kingdom. As discussed previously in Chapter One, William of Malmesbury records that on his return from Rome in 1031, Cnut officiated at a ceremony beside Edmund's grave. Cnut's repeated professions of fraternity with Edmund are in accord with the accounts in the *ASC* that Edmund and Cnut at Alney became 'partners' and 'pledge-brothers' and indicate that after Edmund's death Cnut, probably to reiterate the legitimacy of his rule, continued to declare his quasi-kinship connection with Edmund.

The possibility that Cnut affirmed his affiliation to Edmund for political advantage, may also be found in Cnut's ratification of estates to Bishop Burhwold of Cornwall, which the bishop had received in exchange for an estate held by King Edmund.<sup>413</sup> Pierre Chaplais and Simon Keynes have independently questioned the authenticity of the diploma<sup>414</sup> but if the document is genuine it provides further evidence, according to Dorothy Whitelock, that Cnut 'was willing to rule like his Saxon predecessors'. The diploma also demonstrates, argued Whitelock, that although Edmund's reign was brief, it had at least one land transaction.<sup>415</sup>

There may be a further political dimension to Cnut's visit to Glastonbury. When retelling the tale of Cnut honouring the remains of Edmund, William of Malmesbury, in his *De Antiquitate*, discloses

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413 S 951 (AD 1018) in *EHD*, pp.551-53.

414 P. Chaplais, 'The Authenticity of the Royal Anglo-Saxon Diplomas of Exeter', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 39, Issue 99 (1966), pp.1-34, at pp.21-22; Keynes, 'Cnut's Earls', p.68, n.143.

415 Whitelock, *EHD*, p.551.

the event occurred on the anniversary of Edmund's death.<sup>416</sup> The significance of the date has been commented upon by Marafioti, who suggests that Cnut's visit was prompted by an immediate and specific political concern. As mentioned above, Cnut may have been exploiting his 'honorary kinship' with Edmund but Marafioti connects Cnut's actions to the succession of Harthacnut. With Edmund's exiled sons approaching their political maturity, it is argued that Cnut sought to ensure his son's accession by stressing his own legitimacy.<sup>417</sup> Several of the Anglo-Norman historians report that Cnut sent Edmund's two sons abroad to be murdered, only to have his plans frustrated when the children were removed to Hungary for their safety.<sup>418</sup>

In the absence of any other relationship Edmund is known to have had, his sons are generally assumed to have been born to the widow of Sigeferth. If correct, they would have been fourteen or fifteen years of age in 1031 and potential contenders for the throne. If Harthacnut was born within a year of Cnut marrying Emma, he would have been approximately thirteen years old and approaching his coming of age when his father went to Glastonbury. However, Cnut may not have felt the exiled æthelings presented an immediate threat to Harthacnut's accession: according to the Anglo-Norman narratives, there is no indication of the imminent return of Edmund's children from Hungary.

The uncertainty in some of the sources about where Edmund died is reflected in the increasingly elaborate stories concerning the manner of his death. The earliest account is provided by the Encomiast, who drew upon his monastic training to explain Edmund's death.<sup>419</sup> Alluding to the passage in the Gospel of Mark that a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand,<sup>420</sup> the Encomiast

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416 William of Malmesbury, *De Antiquitate*, pp.132-3.

417 Marafioti, *The King's Body*, p.98.

418 *GRA*, pp.318-9; *JW*, pp.503-3; *EE*, pp.246-55.

419 For the Encomiast's monastic background, see *Encomium*, pp.xix-xxi.

420 Mark, 3:24.



reported that God took Edmund 'away from the body' to prevent the inevitable conflict when there are two kings.<sup>421</sup> Toward the end of the eleventh-century however, Edmund's death begins to be attributed to murder. Adam of Bremen, whose credibility regarding events in early eleventh century England is contentious,<sup>422</sup> has Edmund poisoned by an unknown slayer, to facilitate the succession of Cnut.<sup>423</sup> Adam's allegation that Edmund was murdered has some merit, but the method is questionable. The assassination of Cnut's opponents is well documented but they were killed violently, whereas poisoning is surreptitious.<sup>424</sup> Although it is more probable that Edmund died from wounds received in battle, the nineteenth century German historian Johann Lappenberg suggested that the expensive pall placed by Cnut on Edmund's grave at Glastonbury raised the suspicion that Cnut was somehow implicated in Edmund's death.<sup>425</sup> This interpretation of Cnut's beneficence, when applied to his recognition of the abbey's privileges, may also appear to be an attempt to exculpate himself.<sup>426</sup>

In the narratives of the Anglo-Norman historians, the accounts of Edmund's death all implicate Eadric and can be read as a variation on an increasingly gruesome theme. William of Malmesbury, claiming to be repeating a rumour, has Eadric persuade two of Edmund's chamberlains to drive an iron hook into the king's 'hinder parts' when he 'took his seat for the requirements of nature'.<sup>427</sup> Altering the details of the story only slightly, Henry of Huntingdon has Eadric persuade his son to

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421 *Encomium*, pp.30-31.

422 See Ch. 2:3 above.

423 *HAB*, p.91.

424 For the spate of slayings at the beginning of Cnut's reign, see *ASC*, MSS. D and E, pp.154-5.

425 See Ch. 1:1 above.

426 *GRA*, pp.332-33.

427 *GRA*, pp.318-19.

hide in the pit of the privy used by Edmund, and then strike a knife into Edmund's 'private parts'.<sup>428</sup>

The most detailed and gory account of Edmund's alleged murder is that by Geoffrei Gaimar. In his version of the tale, Gaimar has Eadric invite Edmund to visit his new toilet where he was skewered by a deadly contraption known as 'the bow-that-never-misses'.<sup>429</sup> The credibility of each of these stories is made questionable by the late date of their composition but they are consistent with the Anglo-Norman historians' depiction of Eadric as an incorrigible traitor and should be read as literary creations intended to defame the ealdorman.<sup>430</sup>

The conspiracy theories of the Anglo-Normans may be nothing more than fanciful conjecture, created as much to entertain as to edify. One of the simplest, and possibly more accurate explanations for Edmund's death, was proposed by Freeman. The protracted exertion of travelling across the country, raising armies and fighting battles, it was argued, must have eventually overwhelmed Edmund and he died of exhaustion.<sup>431</sup> Severe fatigue alone may not have killed Edmund; if the campaign against Cnut had weakened him physically, Edmund might have succumbed to contributory factors such as illness, or complications arising from a wound received in battle, as might be indicated in William of Malmesbury's intriguing reference to Edmund interrupting his campaign.<sup>432</sup>

Despite the unanimity of the primary sources that Edmund was buried in Glastonbury it is possible, according to a compelling theory by Martin Biddle and Birthe Kjølbye-Biddle, that Edmund's remains, or some of them, were translated to Winchester cathedral where they now reside. The evidence for Edmund's re-burial at Winchester is an inscribed marble slab, currently

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428 *HA*, pp.360-61.

429 *EE*, pp.240-41.

430 See Ch. 2:5 above.

431 Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest*, p.438.

432 See Ch. 5:6 above.

located on the north side of the south screen of the presbytery. The inscription on the slab has lettering which, according to Biddle, suggests a late twelfth-century date, reads: 'HIC : IACET : EDMUNDUS : REX : EÐELDREDI : REGIS : FILIUS' (Here lies King Edmund, son of King Æthelred).<sup>433</sup> The cathedral also houses a mortuary chest that bears the inscription: 'EDMUDUS REX' (King Edmund). The implication that Edmund was translated from Glastonbury and re-interred at Winchester is problematic; John Leland, who visited Glastonbury in the early sixteenth century, recorded that Edmund's tomb was located on the south side of the presbytery.<sup>434</sup> The removal of Edmund's tomb from its original position before the high altar may be explained by the re-burial of the supposed remains of King Arthur before the high altar in 1278.

The apparent existence of Edmund's grave-slab at Winchester, it is suggested, is either a fabrication or evidence of Edmund's unrecorded re-burial. The evidence assembled to establish that Edmund was translated to Winchester is circumstantial but persuasive. The burials of Cnut, his wife Emma, their son Harthacnut and Cnut's nephew, Earl Beorn, argues Biddle, indicate that Cnut intended the Old Minster to be his family's mausoleum. To this family group it is suggested, can be added Edmund, who was Emma's stepson through her marriage to Æthelred, and Edmund was Cnut's posthumous stepson through his marriage to Emma. Cnut might also have translated Edmund to Winchester to prevent a potentially subversive cult of Edmund developing at Glastonbury. It is not known when Edmund might have been re-interred at Winchester but the most probable moment, according to Biddle, was the occasion of Cnut's visit to Glastonbury when the gift of the decorated cloak may have been given in exchange for removing at least some of

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433 M. Biddle and Birthe Kjølbbye-Biddle, 'Danish Royal Burials in Winchester: Cnut and his Family', in Lavelle and Roffey, (ed.), *Danes in Wessex*, pp.212-49, at p.224.

434 John Leland, *The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the years 1535-1543*, ed. L. Toumlin Smith (London, 5 Vols., 1964), Vol.1, p.288.

Edmund's remains.<sup>435</sup> Cnut's recognition of Glastonbury's privileges, referred to above, may also be related to the remuneration for removing Edmund.

The possibility that Edmund's remains were translated from Glastonbury to Winchester may also receive some support from the *Liber Vitae* of the New Minster and Hyde Abbey, Winchester. There are two regnal lists in the *Liber Vitae*: one that omits Edmund's name, passing from Æthelred to conclude with Cnut;<sup>436</sup> and a second, the *West Saxon Genealogical Regnal List*, composed c.1031, according to Simon Keynes. The second list originally ended with the name of Æthelred but was continued by a twelfth century compiler who added the kings from Edmund to Stephen.<sup>437</sup> Some details of the two regnal lists require examination. The omission of Edmund in the first regnal list may be explained by the scribe regarding Edmund's reign as an interregnum between what he believed to be the legitimate reigns of Æthelred and Cnut. The second regnal list is more problematic. If Keynes is correct that the original scribe worked from a compilation that ended with Æthelred, it does raise the question as to why the scribe, working c.1031, did not add the names of the two kings he must have known had ruled since Æthelred, one of whom was alive at the time of writing. The curious omission of the eleventh century may be unfathomable but the inclusion of Edmund in the first continuation may indicate that at some time *after* 1031, the date of Cnut's visit to Glastonbury, Edmund had been translated to Winchester.

Edmund's tomb, assuming he was translated to Winchester, has been moved several times over the centuries since it was removed from the Old Minster and placed in the new Norman cathedral. In 1525 the contents of the majority of royal tombs, possibly including Edmund's, were placed in ten wooden chests atop the new screens in the east of the cathedral. Six of these boxes were

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435 M. Biddle and B. Kjølbbye-Biddle, 'Danish Royal Burials in Winchester', p.226.

436 Keynes, *The Liber Vitae of the New Minster*, fol.39v.

437 Keynes, *The Liber Vitae of the New Minster*, p.83; fol.14r.

destroyed in 1642 and the scattered contents eventually placed in two new chests.<sup>438</sup> The box bearing Edmund's name escaped destruction but when its contents were inspected by Henry Howard in 1797, he reported that the chest contained, amongst other bones, five skulls.<sup>439</sup> If the chest ever contained the remains of Edmund Ironside, they had become mixed and it was impossible to assign them to a particular individual. The identities of those whose bones were placed in Edmund's mortuary box may have remained a mystery but at the beginning of 2015 the Dean and Chapter of Winchester announced that after initial testing by the University of Oxford, to determine the age of the remains, further forensic investigation will be conducted by the University of Bristol. It is possible, therefore, that in the following few years the final resting place of Edmund Ironside may be known.

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438 For the several translations of Edmund's Winchester tomb, see M. Biddle and B. Kjølbbye-Biddle, 'Danish Royal Burials in Winchester', pp.220, fig.12.6; 226-7; 230-32.

439 J. Milner, *The History, Civil and Ecclesiastical, & Survey of the Antiquities of Winchester*, 2 Vols. (Winchester, 1809), Vol. 2, p.51.

## Conclusions

A study of the career and reign of Edmund Ironside need not end with his death. With the foundation of the biographical data in place, it is also possible to examine the historical reputation of Edmund that has emerged over the last millenium, and some observations on this topic are necessary before making some final conclusions. The foundations of Edmund's reputation were laid early in the eleventh-century. In a passage possibly written soon after Cnut's accession,<sup>1</sup> the *ASC* records that Edmund, having been elected king, 'resolutely defended his kingdom for as long as his time was'.<sup>2</sup> Written retrospectively, the summation of Edmund's reign is sympathetic and, by alluding to his military exploits, concentrates on Edmund's martial prowess. The Chronicler's support for Edmund is not unalloyed however, and his account also contains some criticism that later writers would incorporate into their own perspectives on Edmund; namely accepting the submission of Eadric, and not pursuing the Danes beyond Aylesford.<sup>3</sup> In addition to recording Edmund's accomplishments and perceived faults, the Chronicler also referred to the amity and fraternity that allegedly existed between Edmund and Cnut at the conclusion of the war.<sup>4</sup> A later scribe, writing in the second half of the eleventh century, also provided the first explanation for Edmund's cognomen 'Ironside'.<sup>5</sup> The combination of sympathy and criticism that characterises the portrayal of Edmund in the *ASC* consequently became the core around which subsequent historians constructed their depiction of him.

Commented [David McD69]: Consideration of Edmund's posthumous reputation.

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1 See Ch. 2:1.

2 *ASC*, MSS D and E, pp.149.

3 See Ch. 5:6.

4 See Ch. 6:7.

5 See Ch. 2:1.

Later in the eleventh century, during the brief reign of Harthacnut, the Encomiast reiterated Edmund's alleged dedication to the defence of England, and his reputation for bravery. Determined to organise opposition to Cnut, Edmund is described as tireless in his efforts to assemble those inclined to the English cause; and although defeated at *Assandun*, Edmund is reported to have remained hopeful of assembling a greater army to continue the war.<sup>6</sup> In addition to providing instances of Edmund's indomitable attitude, the narrative of the Encomiast might also contain evidence of the development of Edmund's reputation for bravery, that coalesced later in the century into his soubriquet. More than a decade before the first appearance in the *ASC* of the epithet 'Ironsides', which Edmund is said to have earned as a result of his 'bravery' (*snellscipe*),<sup>7</sup> the *Encomium* has Edmund compensate for his alleged shortage of numbers at Sherston by relying on his 'courage' (*virtute*) to defeat his enemies. Perhaps more explicit in associating Edmund with notions of valour and audacity, is the Encomiast's account of Edmund's triumphal entry to London, where the populace exhort him to be a 'bold man' (*virum fortem*).<sup>8</sup> Collectively, these references to bravery might indicate that Edmund's reputation for fearlessness, defined in the late 1050s, were circulating from the early 1040s.

Motivated by their desire to present a favourable impression of the Anglo-Saxon past,<sup>9</sup> the Anglo-Norman historians present Edmund as a capable war-leader, and expand upon his appellation. Edmund continues to be the determined defender of his kingdom, but one might detect exaggeration in John of Worcester's description of Edmund performing simultaneously the 'duties of a hardy soldier and of an able general'.<sup>10</sup> Instances of hyperbole are also present in the personal

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<sup>6</sup> *Encomium*, pp.23;27.

<sup>7</sup> See Ch. 2:1.

<sup>8</sup> *Encomium*, pp.21;25.

<sup>9</sup> See Ch. 2:5.

<sup>10</sup> *JW*, p.487.

qualities attributed to Edmund in the twelfth century. Elaborating upon the origin of 'Ironside', William of Malmesbury, as discussed previously, has Edmund given the nickname because of his tremendous physical and mental strength, which William illustrated by having Edmund transfix two Vikings on the same spear, and avert disaster at Sherston by demonstrating he still lived.<sup>11</sup> The Anglo-Norman historians also overstated the partnership professed between Edmund and Cnut at Alney. As mentioned previously, Henry of Huntingdon has Cnut suggest that Denmark be governed by Edmund; and Gaimar has Cnut propose that he and Edmund conquer and divide the country between them.<sup>12</sup> The adulatory but inflated twelfth century accounts of Edmund's abilities and transformed relationship with Cnut are tempered by criticism of Edmund's behaviour towards Eadric. The Anglo-Norman historians acknowledged the ruinous consequences of readmitting the ealdorman but, as indicated earlier, the greatest condemnation came from William of Malmesbury who accused Edmund of creating disaster for himself and England.<sup>13</sup>

Historians in the thirteenth century appear to have treated Edmund's reputation more generously, eschewing defamation of their subject in favour of expanding upon his perceived virtues and fabricating details to justify their hyperbole. Exaggeration is evident in *La Estoire de Seint Ædward le Rei* where the anonymous author compared Edmund's bravery to that of a lion, and asserted that Edmund's courage surpassed 'the best of his line'.<sup>14</sup> More extravagant still is the account of another anonymous writer, whose contemporary *Le Livre de Reis de Engleterre* reiterates the trope of Edmund's bravery but alleges that Edmund demonstrated his valour daily by defeating twenty-four knights.<sup>15</sup> Edmund continued to receive favourable treatment in the fourteenth century, with Pierre

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11 See Ch. 6:6.

12 See Ch. 6:7.

13 See Ch.6:6.

14 'La Estoire de Seint Ædward le Rei', in *Lives of Edward the Confessor*, ed. H. R. Lunt (London, 1858), pp.183-4.

15 *Le Livre de Reis de Engleterre*, ed. J. Glover (London, 1865), p.99.



de Longtoft presenting Edmund as a warrior aetheling and king with popular appeal. Assuming responsibility for England's defence when Æthelred fell ill, Edmund is said to have summoned the nobility, and 'from Wales to Dover' the population bound themselves to him. Similarly, the 'barons of the north' are said to have welcomed Edmund's accession, and attended him to 'perform their fealties'.<sup>16</sup>

Edmund's reputation remained buoyant in the fifteenth century, with the Scottish chronicler Walter Bower depicting Edmund in possession of incomparable virtues. In a litany of superlatives there was, according to Bower, no one 'braver...more charming...more bold...more cautious...more confident in adversity... nor anyone more self-controlled in prosperity' than Edmund Ironside.<sup>17</sup> In the following century historians continued to be well disposed toward Edmund but their praise for the warrior king is juxtaposed with allegations of poor judgement. To substantiate his assertion that Edmund was 'fierce and strong of mind and body' Polydore Vergil, writing in the mid-sixteenth century and claiming to reiterate the reports of previous writers, whom he does not identify, had Salisbury oppressed by a fictitious Danish army, and Edmund come to the city's relief.<sup>18</sup> In recording this imaginary event, Vergil illustrates the difficulty of separating history from fiction in the works of early modern historians. Unique to Vergil is the allegation that Edmund was entirely to blame for allowing the Danes to escape following the battle of Otford. In Vergil's version of events it was Edmund's decision to rest his army, without any consultation with Eadric, that proved to be the Danes' 'salvation' but the ruin of the English.<sup>19</sup> Later in the same century there was an attempt

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<sup>16</sup> *The Chronicle of Pierre de Longtoft*, ed. Thomas Wright (London, 1866).

<sup>17</sup> Walter Bower, *Scotichronicon*, ed. J. and W. MacQueen, and Der Watt, 9 Vols. (Edinburgh, 1987-95), Vol. 3 (1995), p.323.

<sup>18</sup> Polydore Vergil, *Anglica Historia*, ed and trans. Dana. F. Sulton (2005) [electronic database, accessed 13 Dec. 2017], Bk.7, Caps.7:9.

<sup>19</sup> Polydore Vergil, *Anglica Historia*, Bk.7, Cap.10

by Ralph Holinshed to partially exculpate Edmund for failing to deal decisively with the Danes in the aftermath of Otford. Holinshed restores Eadric to Edmund's company and, perhaps aware of Vergil's account, has the earl advise rest after the exertions of the battle. However, the qualifier that Eadric counselled the king 'as some write' invites the possibility that Edmund reached his decision independently and bore full responsibility for the calamitous consequences.<sup>20</sup> Holinshed's *Chronicles*, in the opinion of Leah Scragg, was the 'principal source' for the anonymous Elizabethan history play *Edmund Ironside* which, it is argued, is a 'heightened reworking of Holinshed's concept of the glory of early eleventh-century England'.<sup>21</sup> In the play, Edmund is depicted as Cnut's military superior, constantly defeating the Danes: '...Canutus is o'ercome and Edmund hunts him out from place to place'.<sup>22</sup> However, in keeping with Holinshed, and other narratives, the eponymous Edmund is also vulnerable to Eadric's machinations. In Act IV he gullibly accepts the ealdorman's lie that he joined Cnut only to learn his secrets, and appoints Eadric as 'captain-general' of the English army.<sup>23</sup>

The presentation of Edmund tirelessly devoted to the defence of his kingdom, and capable of extraordinary feats, persisted in the seventeenth century. In the early part of the century, John Speed extended Edmund's reputation for 'exceeding toil and restless hazards of his body' into his æthelinghood, claiming that prior to his accession Edmund had 'followed...with great courage' the

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20 Ralph Holinshed, *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* (London, 1577), p.254.

21 Leah Scragg, 'Saxons versus Danes: the anonymous *Edmund Ironside*', in D. Scragg and C. Weinberg (eds.), *Literary Appropriations of the Anglo-Saxons from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 2000), pp.93-106, at pp.97; 100.

22 Eric Sams, (ed.), *Shakespeare's Lost Play: Edmund Ironside* (London, 1985), p. 85, Ll.964-5.

23 *Shakespeare's Lost Play: Edmund Ironside*, p.99. Ll.1418-24.

activities of the Vikings for seventeen years.<sup>24</sup> In the latter part of the seventeenth century Richard Baker illustrated Edmund's bravery and military acumen by minimising his losses at Otford to five hundred men, compared to the four thousand, five hundred allegedly lost by Cnut. Baker also exculpated Edmund for allowing the remaining Danes to escape, firmly fixing the blame on Eadric for dissuading Edmund with warnings of 'ambushes and other dangers'.<sup>25</sup>

Interpretations of Edmund's career and kingship by eighteenth-century historians indicate that he was still held in high regard. As in the previous century, Edmund is shown opposing the Danes during his æthelinghood but his eagerness to engage with the enemy, and his oratorical ability, is illustrated by Paul de Rapin Thoyras crediting Edmund with successfully persuading the reluctant Æthelred to lead the English army. Edmund's indomitable spirit was further demonstrated by de Rapin Thoyras contradicting the ASC by having Edmund pursue Cnut post *Assandun*.<sup>26</sup> Edmund's valour was also recognised by David Hume. While admitting that Edmund could have prevented England sinking into 'calamities', Hume exonerates Edmund by describing the country's difficulties as an 'abyss of misery' from which England could not be rescued.<sup>27</sup> The criticism attached to Edmund's dealings with Eadric also varied. For not capitalising on the English success at Otford, de Rapin Thoyras apportioned blame equally, not knowing which was greater: Edmund's 'imprudence', or Eadric's 'boldness and confidence'.<sup>28</sup> In keeping with his sympathetic treatment of Edmund,

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24 John Speed, *The History of Great Britaine Under the Conquests of the Romans, Saxons, Danes and Normans* (London, 1611), p.380.

25 Richard Baker, *A Chronicle of the Kings of England From the Time of the Romans' Government unto the Death of King James* (London, 1670), p.15.

26 Paul de Rapin Thoyras, *The History of England* (1726), trans. N. Tindal. 6Vols. (London, 1785-8), Vol.1, pp.122-3.

27 David Hume, *The History of England From the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*. 6Vols. (London, 1754-62, rep. 1854), Vol.1., p.122.

28 Rapin Thoyras, *History of England*, p.123.

Hume advanced practical considerations to explain Edmund's continued reliance on Eadric. Despite the earl's repeated perfidy, Edmund acknowledged Eadric's power and needed his support.<sup>29</sup>

Edmund's reputation continued to remain relatively unscathed in the nineteenth century. Foremost amongst those to praise him was Edward Freeman who regarded Edmund as an heroic figure. As mentioned previously, Freeman juxtaposed the 'superhuman activity' of Edmund's brief reign to that of Æthelred's twenty-eight year rule of 'unutterable weakness and degradation'.<sup>30</sup> Although elevating Edmund to the position of a hero, Freeman was aware of Edmund's perceived faults, admitting that despite being 'unconquered by arms' Edmund was not invulnerable to the 'warfare in which Eadric was so skilful', and this weakness resulted in him re-accepting Eadric.<sup>31</sup>

In the twentieth century opinions about Edmund were more clearly polarised. L. M. Larson, whose pro-Scandinavian bias was discussed previously, acknowledged Edmund's bravery in battle but for not winning a 'great battle', presumably *Assandun*, Larson dismissed Edmund's military exploits as 'exaggerated'.<sup>32</sup> Most illustrative of Larson's prejudice, was his summation of Edmund as an 'English Viking' possessing the same qualities as Cnut, for which Edmund was criticised but Cnut was praised.<sup>33</sup> In the latter part of the century a contrary position was adopted by Michael Wood, who promoted Edmund's image as a warrior king. For his initial victories against the Danes, Edmund was awarded the accolade 'legend...in the making', who had reversed the military failures of his father's reign by 'nerve, luck, magnetism and hard fighting'.<sup>34</sup>

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29 Hume, *A History of England*, p.122.

30 See Ch.1:1.

31 Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest*, p.425.

32 Larson, *Canute the Great*, p.101.

33 See Ch. 1:2.

34 Michael Wood, *In Search of the Dark Ages* (London, 1981), p.198.

The broad division amongst historians between supporters and detractors of Edmund Ironside, as has been shown in Chapter One, continues into the twenty-first century. Favourable depictions in the primary sources, according to Ian Howard, has created the impression of Edmund as one of the 'great hero kings' but, as indicated previously, Howard believed Edmund's reign was a mere 'postscript' to that of Æthelred.<sup>35</sup> In the same year that Howard published his dismissive opinion of Edmund, Ann Williams' portrayal of Edmund suggests that he is worthy of approval. Within a year, Edmund had transformed from one who could not retain his armies, to a capable general. Although defeated at *Assandun*, Edmund remained, it is argued, 'formidable enough to force a compromise' with Cnut.<sup>36</sup> Edmund's performance as military leader also had a significant influence on how his reputation was perceived by Levi Roach. For fighting Cnut to a 'standstill', Edmund was regarded as a 'worthy successor' to Æthelred.<sup>37</sup> Timothy Bolton also focused on Edmund's generalship but was more conservative in his estimation of Edmund's martial abilities. Edmund's strategy of repeatedly raising armies, compared to Cnut's 'more underhand methods', led Bolton to conclude that while Cnut was 'a cunning and intelligent man' Edmund was 'a more straight-forward warrior'.<sup>38</sup>

The reputation of Edmund Ironside was established soon after his death and for the last one thousand years it has remained, for the most part, consistent. Early in the eleventh century it was perceived that Edmund had two opposite but complementary qualities: his remarkable capacity for bravery and endurance was matched by his poor judgement in heeding the advice of Eadric. In the intervening centuries historians have continued to take a two-fold approach to Edmund Ironside; praising his courage and strength, sometimes unrealistically, while criticising him for errors of judgement. Not wishing to condemn Edmund too harshly, some of his critics provided extenuating

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35 Howard, *Swein Forkbeard's Invasions*, p.6; also Ch.1:3 above.

36 Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, p.148.

37 Levi Roach, *Æthelred the Unready* (New Haven and London, 2016), p.311.

38 Timothy Bolton, *Cnut the Great* (New Haven and London, 2017), p.91.

circumstances to mitigate Edmund's culpability. Regardless of attempts to ameliorate Edmund's mistakes, they remain integral to his legacy. In the public imagination, Edmund does not enjoy the popularity of Alfred, nor is he undeservedly associated with failure, as is Æthelred. Edmund might have occasionally exercised poor judgement but he is remembered most, by supporters and detractors, for his laudable qualities. Edmund's fame ultimately rests on his reputation for exceptional courage and perseverance, for which he is the only king of England to be accorded the accolade 'Ironside'.

Commented [David McD70]: Consideration of Edmund's posthumous reputation ends.

Edmund's reputation for bravery has remained intact for a millenium, but when attempting to write his biography one is confronted by a scarcity of sources and the extent to which one may identify agency. These difficulties are common to all historical biography but the problems of writing the biography of Edmund Ironside are particularly acute. Edmund had the shortest reign of any Anglo-Saxon King of England, just 222 days, but the difficulties presented by a dearth of biographical information can be mitigated by examining the evidence that is available with immense scrutiny. Furthermore, despite the tendency of some medieval sources to depict monarchs as exemplars rather than people, the ability of medieval kings to affect events means that the examination of agency and royal relationships remains possible. For the biography of Edmund Ironside an effective methodology has been to examine his life in relation to the various social environments and political roles he occupied.

Commented [David McD71]: 'effect' replaced with 'affect'.

The ASC is the pre-Conquest source upon which this biography of Edmund is built and the main source from which the Anglo-Norman historians drew for their accounts of Edmund. The closely contemporary date of the annals relating to Edmund might suggest that they are reliable but the Chronicles' criticism of Æthelred and contrasting portrayal of Edmund might indicate that the annals for 983-1016 were written to suit Danish interests.<sup>39</sup> The possibility that the installation of a

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<sup>39</sup> See Ch. 2:1.

foreign king influenced the recording of Edmund's career makes aspects of the *ASC*'s account questionable, but it is still possible to use this source to provide a basic chronology of events.

*Liðsmannaflókkur* and *Knútsdrápa* are closely contemporary sources but the bias of these texts is evident in the praise bestowed upon Cnut. These sources also contain references that contradict the *ASC*, which can make difficult the task of determining which source is the more reliable. Thietmar of Merseburg is also closely contemporary but is often factually inaccurate about events in England. The reliability of the *Encomium* is made questionable by its use of classical references to describe and moralise but the value of this closely contemporary source is that it complements the *ASC* by expanding upon some of the incidents described only briefly in the Chronicle, and provides an alternative perspective to some of the events that are reported in the *ASC* and may contain eye-witness accounts of some of the incidents it relates.

The later primary sources, particularly the post-conquest narratives, exhibit characteristics that are typical of twelfth century history writing but which qualify the credibility of their content.<sup>40</sup> Passages borrowed from classical authors, such as those found in the *Encomium* and John of Worcester, make descriptions of battles vivid but do not provide dependable accounts of early eleventh-century warfare. Similarly, the attribution of motive or a physical ability to a subject, such as can be found in William of Malmesbury, may be the writer's personal opinion.<sup>41</sup> The various tales of Edmund's death, in William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon and Geoffry Gaimar, may also indicate that folkloric elements have been incorporated in the Anglo-Norman narratives.<sup>42</sup> These do not necessarily invalidate the sources entirely, but the inclusion of folklore may make particular details, in some twelfth century accounts, unreliable. The over reliance that has been placed by some modern historians on certain passages in the Anglo-Norman narratives justifies the detailed

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40 See Ch. 2:5.

41 See Ch. 5:6

42 See Ch. 5:8.

examination of the twelfth century sources in Chapters Four and Five, which aims to arrive at the most reasonable interpretation of the evidence and reconcile the variations in those accounts.

In addition to expressing personal opinion, attributing motives to their subjects, borrowing from classical sources, fabricating incidents and including folkloric elements in their histories, the contemporary and Anglo-Norman narratives contain some examples of circumstantial evidence that give credence to some of their accounts. The claim of the *Encomiast* that there was sufficient moonlight at *Assandun* to allow the fighting to continue after sunset, and the combatants to distinguish friend from foe, might seem fantastical but the meteorological conditions that pertained in Essex on 18 October, 1016 have been verified scientifically.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, accounts in pre- and post-conquest sources, of Edmund receiving non-English support, also have the cumulative effect of making such circumstantial evidence persuasive.<sup>44</sup>

The absence of sufficient documentation has produced various lacunae in the telling of Edmund's life-story, particularly his childhood, his education, his religious attitudes and his political outlook. There are also gaps in those areas of Edmund's career which have received better treatment in the sources. It is not always disclosed how and where Edmund assembled his armies, or what routes they took to reach the place of battle.<sup>45</sup> The details of how legal and commercial relations between the English and Danes would be conducted after the division of the country are also unknown.<sup>46</sup> A greater understanding of the relationship between Edmund and Eadric might help to explain why the ealdorman was repeatedly admitted to Edmund's service despite Eadric's persistent infamy, which, as discussed previously, may have been exaggerated by certain twelfth-century writers.<sup>47</sup>

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43 See Ch. 5:6.

44 See Ch. 5:6.

45 See Chs. 5:3; 5:4; 5:6.

46 See Ch. 5:7.

47 See Ch. 5:6.



Despite interstices in the materials, and the ambiguity of some accounts, the examination of the extant evidence has enabled progress to be made on previous studies of Edmund and the late Anglo-Saxon period. The methodology employed by Katherine Mack in identifying thegns who may have transferred their allegiance from Æthelred to Cnut, has been employed to suggest that members of Edmund's entourage might also have found favour with Cnut.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, studies of the Ætheling Athelstan's will and Edmund's lease for Holcombe, such as those made independently by Pauline Stafford and Ann Williams,<sup>49</sup> have been extended to examine in detail the associations of Edmund.<sup>50</sup> Some of the individuals with whom Edmund is known to have been connected are limited to the lease for Holcombe but diploma evidence indicates that some of the individuals who witnessed the lease were known to Edmund in a considerably broader context.

The rebellious nature of Edmund's marriage and the borderline illegality of his diplomas has been established by Pauline Stafford and Ann Williams respectively, but the reconsideration of his marriage and appropriation of territory has revealed that Edmund's actions were not simply mutinous but criminal.<sup>51</sup> Auguste Thierry, Sir Charles Oman and Pauline Stafford have speculated, independently, the Ætheling Edmund participated in military activity prior to 1015.<sup>52</sup> Support for the possibility that the Ætheling Edmund was involved in military affairs may be derived from several accounts in the *ASC* of engagements in which Edmund could have participated. Furthermore, the ample evidence that early medieval princes and noblemen engaged in war, as discussed previously,

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48 See Ch. 4:5.

49 See Ch. 3:3.

50 See Chs. 3:5; 3:6.

51 See Chs. 4:4; 4:5.

52 See Ch. 5:2.

suggest that the ætheling Edmund might have been involved in military affairs but his exploits may have gone unreported.<sup>53</sup>

In addition to augmenting some of the arguments that have been made concerning Edmund Ironside, the pre-and post-conquest materials relating to him have been scrutinised for their reliability to an unprecedented degree. The composition of Edmund's entourage has been examined and similarities found to exist with the households of kings and richer thegns.<sup>54</sup> It has been shown that Edmund's marriage, rebellion and alliance with Uhtred have Anglo-Saxon and Continental parallels.<sup>55</sup> These have provided insights into Edmund's possible motives and provided a clearer understanding of his actions. In so doing, the limitations within which Edmund operated have become apparent. For repeatedly raising armies Edmund demonstrated his ability for assembly politics and for engaging with the Danes he deserves the reputation of a warrior-king, but his negotiations at Alney also indicate that he was able to practise diplomacy.<sup>56</sup>

The emphasis given to Edmund's military affairs has created the impression of a king whose reign was dominated by domestic opposition to his rule, and a determined enemy competing for this throne. Edmund himself is depicted as energetic and brave but his heroic qualities are tempered by apparent impulsiveness and questionable judgement. Unlike some of his forebears whose reigns were longer and enjoyed more extended periods of peace, the turbulence and brevity of Edmund's reign prevented him from making innovations in legislation, renovating the currency, reforming the Church, initiating town-building or transforming military structures. Had Edmund lived longer it is possible that some of these topics could have received his attention. One might also consider, as indicated by the composition of Cnut's army at Sherston, that Edmund may have had to contend

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<sup>53</sup> See Ch. 5:2.

<sup>54</sup> See Ch. 3:3.

<sup>55</sup> See Chs. 4:4; 4:7; 4:8; 5:4.

<sup>56</sup> See Ch. 5:7.

with problems of loyalty within his half of the kingdom.<sup>57</sup> However, what Edmund might have achieved and what difficulties he may have faced, is speculation, not history.<sup>58</sup> The short and eventful reign of Edmund Ironside should not therefore be judged for what it lacks, but appreciated for what success he attained in demanding circumstances.

A biography of Edmund Ironside can be a useful case study of how quickly political power can change but the political structures, albeit with some replacement of personnel, remain intact. A study that focuses on Edmund Ironside also allows for the topics of æthelinghood, succession and kingship to be re-examined from a different perspective. Further research on Edmund remains to be done. The consideration of the posthumous reputation of Edmund must necessarily be cursory for the purposes of this thesis, and there is yet more to be said about the millenium since 1016, there are other historical figures, and places, that are pertinent to the study of Edmund. His campaign against Cnut would not have been possible without the assistance of other powerful lords, such as Uhtred, and Ulfcytel. Their biographies deserve to be written, as does that of Edmund's English nemesis, Eadric *Streona*. Forensic examination of the contents of the ossuaries from Winchester Cathedral is currently taking place and when the results are announced the final resting place of Edmund Ironside may be known. Much more archaeological research may yet be undertaken with regard to Edmund. Archaeological analysis of the potential battle sites, and Alney, may provide tangible evidence and new information relating to the turbulent period in which he lived and ruled.

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<sup>57</sup> See Ch. 5:6.

<sup>58</sup> For a scholarly consideration of what might have occurred had Edmund won at *Assandun* and survived into middle age, see Timothy Venner, *An Alternative History of Britain: The Anglo-Saxon Age* (Barnsley, 2013), pp.137-47.

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