Making or Breaking a King:

Kingship Ideals in Anglo-Saxon Historiography

MA Thesis Literary Studies: English Literature and Culture

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Image source: Anglo-Saxon coinage, https://oldcurrencyexchange.com/2015/04/04/anglo-saxon-coins-their-links-to-ireland/

Table of Contents

Introduction 5
Chapter 1: Constructing Alfred's Greatness 9
Chapter 2: Presenting Æthelred as Unready 23
Chapter 3: Cnut the Welcome Invader 37
Chapter 4: William the Conqueror 49
Conclusion 61
Bibliography 65

Introduction

Our modern perceptions of historical kings are often formed on the basis of literary bias. We are taught that certain kings are good, or even great (when it comes to Alfred the Great). On the other hand, some kings are typically characterised as terrible, such as Æthelred the Unready. Sometimes the propaganda surrounding kings stemmed from the royal court itself, where the king could have a direct and presumably positive influence on the writings. In addition, the writers of chronicles and histories often went back in time to alter past descriptions with the aid of hindsight or new circumstances. Contemporary research has already explored the bias surrounding kings; it is generally accepted that history was often written with creative embellishments. As Alice Sheppard has noted with respect to *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, "the annalists of conquest and invasion create stories of kingdom formation that can more properly be seen as defining or constitutive fictions in which lordship is written as the identifying ethos of the Anglo-Saxon people."[1] The occurrence of annals that are intentionally biased in order to agree with the political or cultural circumstances of the time is common in Anglo-Saxon historiography. One such example can be seen in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* entry for the year 886: "King Alfred occupied London fort and all the English race turned to him, except what was in captivity to Danish men."[2] The country is in turmoil with constant Danish invasions and the fear of conquest, it is therefore beneficial to portray Alfred as a pillar of strength, someone his subjects can "turn to" in their time of need. It is this deliberate bias, and the selective focus in Anglo-Saxon historiography that will be the focal point of this thesis, in order to explore the different propaganda techniques used by annalists when writing about specific kings.

Many scholars have researched the propaganda around individual kings, especially that surrounding Alfred and Æthelred. Contemporary research acknowledges the different reputations that kings acquire, as illustrated by Simon Keynes:

> In the gallery of Anglo-Saxon kings, there are two whose characters are fixed in the popular imagination by their familiar epithets: Alfred the Great and Æthelred the Unready. Of course both epithets are products of the posthumous development of the kings' reputations (in opposite directions), not expressions of genuinely contemporary attitudes to the kings themselves.[3]

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[1] Alice Sheppard, *Families of the King: Writing Identity in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 11.

[2] Michael Swanton, trans., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), 80.

[3] Simon Keynes, "A Tale of Two Kings: Alfred the Great and Æthelred the Unready," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 36 (1986): 195.

Here, Keynes highlights the differing directions the two kings' reputations have taken. Levi Roach, like Keynes, discusses the source of most of our information on Æthelred: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Roach questions the reliability of this reputation because of a bias in the writing, the *Chronicle* "was written after Æthelred's death with the benefit of hindsight: it telescopes events, presenting the Danish conquest of 1016 as the inevitable result of English cowardice and incompetence." [4] As our main account of Æthelred does not come from his lifetime, it would be interesting to compare the negative bias written posthumously, to a positive portrayal with possible influence from the king himself, such as that found in the contemporaneous writings about Alfred. Richard Abels discusses the fact that "Alfred was to be portrayed as a world figure, commanding the attention of rulers,"[5] a clear difference in bias compared to Æthelred's apparent "incompetence." Abels also highlights the obvious attempts to portray Alfred as an ideal king when he discusses Asser's "process of sanitising Alfred's image."[6] In order to portray Alfred as a successful leader, his good qualities had to be emphasised, in contrast to Æthelred's mistakes that were accentuated to make him appear weak. In short, the reputations that remain today were entirely crafted by the chroniclers of the time, meaning that unless the king was directly involved in the writing process he had no influence on his portrayal.

Similarly to Alfred and Æthelred, the conquering kings, Cnut and William were portrayed in contrasting ways by the Anglo-Saxon chroniclers. As kings of invasion it would be natural to assume that they were not accepted by the Anglo-Saxons. However, due to vastly different approaches the two kings received varied welcomes during their reigns. These differing receptions of Cnut and William are reflected in chronicle entries discussing the two. The main difference between William and Cnut was their treatment of the Anglo-Saxon people. Due to the dissimilar approaches to ruling, Cnut was portrayed well, for example in the year 1023, Cnut is described as, "the illustrious king,"[7] He was also described in positive terms when he met King Edward, even though he was the invader. The two kings "affirmed their

[4] Levi Roach, *Æthelred the Unready* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 4.

[5] Richard Abels, *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (London: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1998), 258.

[6] *Ibid*., 2.

[7] Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 156.

friendship,"[8] in the entry for 1016. On the other hand, William was portrayed as a bad and violent king, as can be seen in the annal for the year 1068:

> Here in this year King William gave Earl Robert the earldom in Northumberland. Then the local men came against him and killed him and 9 hundred men with him. And the ætheling Edgar came to York and made peace with all the Northumbrians, and the men of the market town made peace with him. And the king William came from the south with all his army and ravaged the town, and killed many hundreds of men.[9]

William is described as destroying his own people and ravaging their towns. The two kings were portrayed in vastly different terms. Although both were invaders, Cnut won the respect of the people meaning he was portrayed in a good light, while William – who was seen purely as the invader – was not.

This thesis will explore the ways in which propaganda employed different strategies to promote or discredit a king because there is a distinct lack of research in this area. It will also draw comparisons between various propaganda techniques. Joel Rosenthal discusses the ways in which kingship has been explored in recent years:

> Work on kings and kingship falls into three parts, and we can attack it accordingly. There is work on specific kings (and queens) and their reigns, largely biographical in focus and orientation. There is work on the institution or concept of kingship. And there is work with editing and elucidating those texts that pertain most directly to kings and/or kingship.[10]

This research will perfectly fit into the niche between works on specific kings and the analyses of those texts pertaining directly to them, since it will add a comparative angle. It will discover the ways in which written medieval sources created a literary image of a king, as opposed to only preserving the facts. The focus will be on King Alfred and King Cnut as examples of kings portrayed well in literature. In the same way, King Æthelred and King William will be studied as those who have received negative connotations in Anglo-Saxon historiographical sources.

By examining biases in writings about kings, such as *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the study will suggest that there are not as many differences between good and bad kings as the chroniclers would have us believe. Instead, the differences have been exacerbated by literary portrayals and propaganda, leaving today's readers with certain preconceptions on medieval

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[8] Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 153.

[9] *Ibid*., 202.

[10] Joel T. Rosenthal, "A Historiographical Survey: Anglo-Saxon Kings and Kingship since World War II." *Journal of British Studies* 24, (1985): 74.

kingship. The thesis will go on to compare these four kings in relation to any similarities in the use of propaganda. It is expected to find that the Anglo-Saxon chroniclers employed common strategies in their portrayals of the different kings. Additionally, it will explore any differences in these propaganda techniques. This research is important because it highlights the ways in which medieval historians distorted the facts in order to present someone in a positive or negative way - an effective technique still in use today; Anglo-Saxons chroniclers could be considered pioneers of alternative facts and fake news.

Chapter 1: Constructing Alfred's Greatness

There are many historiographical texts detailing the events of Alfred's life (849-899) and reign (871-899), and most of them are forms of propaganda. This chapter will focus on two such texts featuring Alfred the Great: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Asser's *Vita Aelfredi*, otherwise known as Asser's *Life of King Alfred*. Both of these sources were composed during Alfred's lifetime and quite possibly in his court or close by, as all sources from that time period are. R.C.H. Davis suggests that "King Alfred's reign presents the historian with an interesting problem, since he is confronted with the possibility that almost all the sources may have originated with either Alfred himself or his immediate entourage."[11] If the sources did originate in the king's immediate vicinity, this means that Alfred himself could have had a direct influence on the telling of his story and the way in which propaganda was used as a technique to improve his image.

While many historiographical texts surrounding kings include varying degrees of bias, Alfred had especially close ties with his historiographers. Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge describe *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* as, "a detailed narrative of the king's military activities in the face of Viking invasion."[12] They also discuss the importance of Asser's *Life of King Alfred*:

> This work affords the historian a vivid picture of Alfred in peace and war, and creates a striking impression of how the king ordered his own life; for no other pre-Conquest king does a comparable account of his rule survive.[13]

These two texts cover a wide range of events in Alfred's lifetime, military and political events as well as detailing his daily life. Many of these events were biased for the ruler's benefit, as will be discussed in this chapter. Propaganda techniques incorporated in historiographical texts on Alfred have a unique position in comparison to other medieval kings, particularly those to be discussed in later chapters. This chapter will introduce these two texts and explore the ways in which they employ propaganda to bolster the monarch's image.

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[11] R.C.H. Davis, "Alfred the Great: Propaganda and Truth," *The Journal of The Historical Association* 56 (1971): 169.

[12] Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, trans., *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources* (London: Penguin Books Limited, 2004), 10.

[13] *Ibid*.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is a chronicle written in Old English which details the important events of each year. Chronicles were compiled all over Europe in the Middle Ages as a method of charting time in order to accurately determine the date of Easter each year. In his introduction to *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, Michael Swanton discusses the growing importance of charting time in Easter tables, which are thought to be the predecessors of chronicles:

> To chart the passage of time was particularly important for the literate, that is to say, the church-educated, Anglo-Saxon, for whom the year was marked not only by the natural rhythm of the agricultural seasons: winter, seed-time and harvest, but by the regular sequence of religious festivals. The complicated business of determining the date of Easter […] was exceedingly important; and disagreement as to the correct method of calculation might result in schism or even accusations of heresy.[14]

As Easter tables evolved into chronicles, the annals themselves expanded to include more events each year, some of which were described in great detail, resulting in the historiographical texts that still survive today.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is one such historiography, which survives in the form of many different manuscripts. All the variants of the *Chronicle* include a core set of annals, otherwise known as the Common Stock. The Common Stock is generally accepted to have been written during the reign of King Alfred, after which each manuscript is comprised of continuations which include some variations that were written throughout the medieval period. Seeing as the Common Stock only has minor variations in all manuscripts, Courtnay Konshuh believes "it is logical to deal with the group to 891 as a unit […] they were compiled with common purpose and themes."[15] Although it is a debated point, the Common Stock is believed to have been written within Alfred's court, possibly even by Alfred himself, a debate which is still unresolved. In the words of Davis:

> The opinion which is most generally accepted about the authorship of the Chronicle is that of Sir Frank Stenton who argued that it was written not at Winchester nor under the patronage of the king, but for an ealdorman or thegn of one of the south-western shires, preferably Somerset […] it would be a mistake to ignore the Chronicle's most distinguished editor, Charles Plummer, who considered that the Chronicle was basically the work of Alfred himself.[16]

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[14] Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, xi.

[15] Courtnay Konshuh, "Fighting with a Lytle Werode: Alfred's Retinue in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle," in *The Medieval Chronicle X*, ed. Ilya Afanasyev, Juliana Dresvina and Erik Kooper (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 95.

[16] Davis, "Propaganda and Truth," 173-174.

Opinions are clearly divided on this matter, but there is a great deal of compelling evidence to suggest that the *Chronicle* was, if not written by Alfred himself, written by someone in his court. Davis believes that because the *Chronicle* has such a high quantity of precisely detailed military events and information it "read almost like Intelligence Reports, and it is hard to believe that they were written or compiled merely for some ealdorman or thegn of Somerset, rather than for the military headquarters of the king."[17] It is also arguable that the Common Stock must have been composed in Alfred's vicinity because a noble of Somerset would not have had much incentive to compile a chronicle which acted as a piece of propaganda for the king.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle *as propaganda*

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle functioned as a piece of propaganda for King Alfred and it did so by employing many different techniques. One main method used by the *Chronicle* to create a positive bias towards Alfred, and his family, was the incorporation of genealogies. The genealogy traced the sovereign's lineage back through influential kings in history until his original ancestor is revealed to be the first man, Adam. The genealogy in the *Chronicle* appears near the beginning of the annals covering Alfred's lifetime. Additionally, manuscript (MS) A, includes Alfred's full-length genealogy as a preface to the annals; this preface also occurs in other documents, but not all of the *Chronicle* manuscripts. The inclusion of these genealogies was an important propaganda technique because it showed that Alfred came from a strong and influential line of kings meaning that he had a legitimate right to lead the Anglo-Saxon people, as is evident in the preface to MS A:

> And he [Cerdic] held the kingdom 16 years, and then when he departed his son Cynric succeeded to the kingdom and held it 26 years. Then when he passed away, his son Ceawlin succeeded and held it 17 years. Then when he departed Ceol succeeded to the kingdom and held it 6 years […] And then Æthelbald his son succeeded to the kingdom and held it 5 years. Then his brother Æthelberht succeeded and held it 5 years. Then their brother Æthelred succeeded and held it 5 years. Then their brother Alfred succeeded to the kingdom; and he was then 23 years old.[18]

Alfred's lineage is shown to be influential because it stretches back to Cerdic and Cynric, the first Anglo-Saxon invaders and settlers. Many of the kings in the genealogy were also mentioned as having long reigns, 20 years or more. The fact that their reigns were long and

[17] Davis, "Propaganda and Truth," 174.

[18] Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 2-4.

uninterrupted suggests that they were successful kings because they were not deposed or disposed of during their rules. The end of the lineage which details Alfred's immediate family also proved his legitimacy because all his brothers had previously ruled and the genealogy makes no mention of their sons, suggesting that Alfred is the rightful heir and could be the legitimate successor to the kingdom.

The second genealogy detailing Alfred's lineage occurs within the main text of the *Chronicle*. It is included in an interesting annal as it does not occur in the year of Alfred's birth, or the year of his succession. Alfred's succession in the entry for the year 871 is merely documented with the brief mention: "then his brother Alfred, Æthelwulf's offspring succeeded to the kingdom of Wessex."[19] Instead, the genealogy occurs in the year 855 and is presented as the lineage of Æthelwulf. This means that when the reader is introduced to the new King Alfred as "Æthelwulf's offspring," the annalist delicately reminds the reader of Æthelwulf's, and therefore Alfred's, impressive lineage. This genealogy is also important because, unlike the preface, it leads back to various important biblical figures before culminating in Adam, as is visible in annal 855: "Itermon Hrathra's offspring – he was born in the ark: Noah, Lamech, Methuselah, Enoch, Jared, Mahalaleel, Cainan, Enos, Seth, Adam."[20] The continuation to Adam is a clear form of propaganda; not only did it link Alfred to the first man, thereby giving him a right to rule, it proved that his lineage was Christian. Ultimately, both genealogies served the same purpose, to legitimise Alfred's leadership and to cement him as an influential, but more importantly – especially in the intext genealogy – to identify him as a Christian king.

Alfred's kingship was idealized in many ways, not only by stating his impressive lineage. In order to create an idealized persona which resulted in an image of perfect kingship, editing and sculpting of Alfred's narrative started from his infancy. There is very little information remaining about Alfred's childhood and, as Abels states, the material that does survive is "a much-idealized vision of the young Alfred,"[21] in other words, propaganda. The *Chronicle* did not refer to Alfred's birth because chroniclers did not traditionally record births, only important events, successions, and deaths. Before the king's adult inclusion in the royal circle the *Chronicle* occasionally mentioned Alfred in relation to his father. The first record of Alfred in the *Chronicle* is the year 853: "King Æthelwulf sent his son Alfred to Rome. *Dom*

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[19] Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 72.

[20] *Ibid*., 66.

[21] Abels, *Alfred the Great*, 45.

Leo was pope in Rome then, and he consecrated him as king and took him as son at confirmation."[22] The inclusion of the consecration is a blatant propaganda technique as it actually occurs whilst his older brothers are still alive, yet it suggests that the youngest sibling is the rightful king. The entry provides a link to the religious tone that runs throughout the annals of the monarch's reign and helps to legitimise his leadership. It is interesting that some academics do not attribute the inclusion of this event as a propaganda technique. Susan Irvine claims that there was a "misunderstanding of the nature or the ceremony."[23] Misunderstanding a lenient description in this case; the ceremony is generally accepted to have been a consular investiture, in which an object, mistakenly thought to be a crown, was placed on Alfred's head. However, it can be argued that the presence of the ceremony in the *Chronicle* is no misunderstanding, but a conscious misrepresentation which aimed to highlight Alfred's importance. The inclusion of this consecration can be seen as a propaganda technique used to portray Alfred as an ideal candidate for king as he was chosen by the pope, God's representative on earth. This arguably gave Alfred a claim to rule before his brothers, a claim he did not act upon.

The relationship between Alfred and his brother Æthelred was of great importance in the *Chronicle*. Alfred's respect and loyalty towards his brother followed the expectations of the Anglo-Saxon lordship bond, as Sheppard explains:

> The annalists depict a personal relationship between lord and man, a relationship that is contracted through carefully staged rituals of submission and oath swearing and defined by a set of structured reciprocal expectations by which the lord and man might transact gifts, protection, loyalty, and even peace … Though in Anglo-Saxon England, such political and social questions of land tenure and military service were part of one form of lordship practice, the *Chronicle* annalists focus only on the lordship bond of the king and his men and, in particular, on the personal aspect of that tie.[24]

Although there is no mention of a ritual between Alfred and his brother, Alfred respects the lordship bond and provides Æthelred with loyalty and protection, as can be seen in the entry for the year 871: "King Æthelred and Alfred, his brother, led a great army there to Reading, and fought against the raiding-army."[25] Alfred was loyal to Æthelred and was rewarded with

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[22] Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 64.

[23] Susan Irvine, "The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the idea of Rome in Alfredian literature," in *Alfred the Great: Papers from the Eleventh- Centenary Conferences*, ed. Timothy Reuter (Michigan: Ashgate, 2003), 66.

[24] Sheppard, *Families of the King*, 14.

[25] Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 70.

responsibility and power, he fought alongside his brother, both helping and protecting him and in turn had the honour of leading the army with him. Additionally, Alfred's respect of the bond between a king and his people was another subtle reference towards his own successful leadership. By honouring his brother, Alfred proved that he too would uphold his lordship bond when he succeeded to the throne. He is depicted as a strong leader in annal 871, even before he becomes king: "Æthelred fought against the kings' force, and there the king Bagsecg was killed; and Alfred, his brother, fought against the jarls' force, and there Jarl Sidroc the Old was killed and Jarl Sidroc the Young and Jarl Osbern and Jarl Fræna and Jarl Harald."[26] There are many references to Alfred leading the army with his brother, or fighting alongside him and often killing a greater number of important enemies than his brother. These instances contribute towards building a biased view of Alfred's heroic military feats.

The emphasis on the sovereign's heroic military feats was another important aspect in creating the bias surrounding him. The *Chronicle* depicts Alfred as a successful and brave military king, despite him losing many men and battles to the Vikings, Abels states:

> The *Chronicle*'s detailed reporting of Alfred's campaigns against the Vikings contrasts starkly with the often laconic manner in which it had recorded the Great Heathen Army's conquest of Wessex's neighbours. The narrative is constructed to place Alfred in the best light possible.[27]

The *Chronicle* constructed an image of Alfred's dominant leadership and successful military endeavours despite many defeats. The king is regularly shown to have lead his army from the front, often with only a small troop of warriors, such as that described in the entry for 878: "the greatest part of the others they over-rode – and they turned to them – except for Alfred the king, and he with a small troop went with difficulty through the woods and into swamp-fastness."[28] Depicting the Anglo-Saxons as outnumbered is a recurring theme and can be seen again in the latter half of anal 878: "King Alfred with a small troop built a fortification at Athelney."[29] Alfred and his men seem almost insignificant in comparison to the multitude of the Vikings, often referred to as the Great Heathen Army. This vast difference in size, which was frequently exploited throughout the *Chronicle*, is a form of propaganda which justifies the ruler's actions and their outcome in all situations. When discussing this theme, Konshuh states:

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[26] Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 70.

[27] Abels, *Alfred the Great*, 17.

[28] Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 74.

[29] *Ibid*., 76.

"considering the Chronicler's pro-Alfred stance throughout the *Chronicle*, this seems to present evidence of extenuating circumstances, exonerating Alfred of blame."[30] When Alfred won a battle, he was shown as the defending hero who defeated the invader against all odds. Additionally, the monarch was not to blame for any defeat he suffered, he was still depicted as the defending hero because he stepped forward in an attempt to defend his kingdom and subjects even though they were greatly outnumbered and had no hope of winning. By constantly making Alfred's army seem tiny in comparison to the invading Vikings, Alfred could not be held accountable for losing, whilst he simultaneously looked like an impressive defender for any success he achieved in battle.

Moreover, the *Chronicle* specifically highlights any victories Alfred made on the battlefield, but at the same time it is left ambiguous if the Vikings win. There is much detail included whenever Alfred succeeds, King Guthrum's baptism in 878 is a prime example:

> King Guthrum came to him, one of thirty of the most honourable men who were in the raiding army, at Aller – and that is near Athelney – and there the king received him at baptism; and his chrism-losing was at Wedmore; and he was 12 days with the king, and he greatly honoured him and his companions with riches.[31]

This was a clear victory for both Alfred and Christianity and it is described in great detail and length, with the specification of exact places. Emphasis was also placed on honour and riches: Alfred succeeded in converting the heathens which bought them all honour and they in turn are rewarded with wealth. Meanwhile, when Alfred suffers a defeat the entries are left short and no detail is provided, as can be seen in the entry for the year 871: "King Alfred with a small troop fought at Wilton against the whole raiding-army, and for a long time in the day put them to flight, and the Danish had possession of the place of slaughter."[32] Notice, Alfred's defeat is not overtly stated, merely suggested. There is such a bias in this style of record that it even seems as though Alfred was winning for most of the battle. The entry 871 finally culminates in the Danes gaining possession of a place of slaughter; not only are they not explicitly said to have won, but the land they have gained is described as undesirable, suggesting that Alfred would not have wanted this land even if he had defeated his opponents. In other words, as Keynes describes it: "the Danes may have won, but didn't the English do well?"[33] By

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[30] Konshuh, "Fighting with a Lytle Werode," 98-99.

[31] Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 76.

[32] *Ibid* 72.

[33] Keynes, "A Tale of Two Kings," 199.

continuously showing Alfred to be vastly outnumbered, the chronicler insinuates that the sovereign's small troop could not possibly succeed against an entire army; meaning Alfred cannot be blamed for any defeat. The technique of choosing which events to elaborate on, and which to limit the amount information given, effectively heightens Alfred's victories and minimises his defeats. Alfred's victories are openly discussed making them the memorable focus points of the *Chronicle* which results in the appearance of many more victories than defeats, even though this is not necessarily the case.

Asser's Vita Aelfredi

Asser's *Vita Aelfredi* (*Life of King Alfred*) is a biography of King Alfred – the earliest existing biography of the king. Asser was a member of King Alfred's court and therefore had first-hand information about the king, and was possibly directly influenced by him. At one point, it was thought that *Life of King Alfred* was not genuine, but most scholars now disagree with Keynes and Lapidge's hypothesis:

> It is necessary to apply one more stripe to a horse not yet but nearly dead, namely, the hypothesis that the Life is not the authentic work of a late-ninth-century Welshman named Asser, but rather the work of a later forger. This hypothesis has been propounded in various forms during the past 150 years, most recently in 1964 by V. H. Galbraith […] Galbraith's arguments make compelling reading, but they collapse on further investigation.[34]

The debate appears to be almost over, in which case we can view *Life of King Alfred* as an extremely interesting text in terms of propaganda. Davis discusses the creation of *Life*:

> It was written by the king's own mass-priest, who took the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as the basis of his narrative and dedicated it to none other than his lord King Alfred. In these circumstances it is perhaps not surprising that we find no criticism of the king but only adulation.[35]

Davis highlights two interesting points; firstly, the fact that Asser used a copy of the *Chronicle*, one now no longer in existence, as the foundation of his text. Secondly, *Life* was dedicated to Alfred and it is therefore unsurprisingly biased. This means there are a great many similarities in both content and propaganda techniques between Asser's *Life of King Alfred* and *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

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[34] Keynes and Lapidge, *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, 50.

[35] Davis, "Propaganda and Truth," 170.

Asser's Vita Aelfredi *as propaganda*

Asser used his biography of Alfred as a platform on which to present his propaganda. He used many similar techniques to the *Chronicle*, or possibly adopted them directly from the *Chronicle* itself. Once such common technique is the inclusion of a genealogy. Asser's genealogy seems to be a conglomeration of both lineages found in the *Chronicle*. Asser's genealogy is situated at the opening of his biography, like the *Chronicle*'s preface, but it follows the same form and includes the same people as the *Chronicle*'s intext genealogy:

> King Alfred was the son of King Æthelwulf, the son of Egbert, the son of Ealhmund, the son of Eafa, the son of Eoppa, the son of Ingild. Ingild and Ine, the famous king of the West Saxons […] the son of Brand, the son of Bældæg, the son of Woden, the son of Frithuwald […] the son of Cainan, the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam.[36]

Asser traced Alfred's heritage through the Anglo-Saxon kings in his lineage, to influential Germanic leaders and gods, finally culminating in biblical figures descended from Adam. The method of depicting Alfred as a decedent of the first man legitimised his right to Anglo-Saxon leadership, whilst it simultaneously secured his role as an important Christian king. The genealogies in both texts cannot be seen as biologically accurate, but rather, as Abels states:

> Ideological documents intended to establish the political legitimacy of the current king and his line, a crucial endeavour given the uncertain nature of succession in middle Saxon England. As political circumstances changed so did royal genealogies."[37]

In other words, Asser included this exact list of Alfred's supposed ancestors because it was beneficial to his kingship at that point in time.

After the genealogy, Asser records Alfred's birth then moves on to important events which occurred during Alfred's childhood, but there is actually very little pertaining directly to Alfred himself. The first event in *Life* which directly involves Alfred is Alfred's visit to Rome. This correlates with the first mention of Alfred in the *Chronicle*. In the year 853, Asser confirms that:

> King Æthelwulf sent his son Alfred to Rome in state, accompanied by a great number of both nobles and commoners. At this time the lord Pope Leo was ruling

[36] Keynes and Lapidge, *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, 66-67.

[37] Abels, *Alfred the Great*, 47-48.

> the apostolic see; he anointed the child Alfred as king, ordaining him properly, received him as an adoptive son and confirmed him.[38]

By including Alfred's supposed consecration by the pope, both Asser and the chronicler depict Alfred as a pious Christian, destined to become king from his infancy onwards. The inclusion of this particular version of the event is intentional, as Irvine states, "whatever prompted the reinterpretation of events, it is clear from the *Chronicle* entry for 853 that the perception of Alfred as having been consecrated king by the pope in Rome was one the chronicler wished retrospectively to instil."[39] The fact that both Asser and the chronicler included this reinterpretation suggests that they either used a similar source, or Alfred himself had a direct influence on the telling of this incident. The inclusion of Alfred's consecration was a premeditated use of propaganda designed to complement the other forms of bias and create the overall image of ideal kingship.

A bias exists in all writings on Alfred, from his early life onwards. Nevertheless, the majority of propaganda pertains to Alfred's adult life, during and just before his reign as king. Once Alfred had reached adulthood, the use of bias differs between Asser and the *Chronicle*. While the ultimate aim of both is the same – to idealise Alfred as the image of the perfect king, – Asser and the chronicler achieve this outcome via different techniques. Asser focuses on Alfred the person, while the annalist emphasises Alfred's military deeds. The first form of bias used by Asser, as previously touched upon, is the technique of continuously placing Alfred in a Christian setting. This method presented Alfred as a heroic defender of the faith and an honourable Christian. Asser used the image of piousness in direct contrast to his brother's misdemeanours:

> Once King Æthelwulf was dead, Æthelbald, his son, against God's prohibition and Christian dignity, and also contrary to the practice of all pagans, took over his father's marriage-bed and married Judith, daughter of Charles [the Bald], king of the Franks, incurring great disgrace from all who heard of it; and he controlled the government of the kingdom of the West Saxons for two and a half lawless years after his father.[40]

Here Alfred's brother Æthelbald is described as acting "against Christian dignity." Asser deliberately included Æthelbald's unchristian deeds in direct contrast to Alfred's purity. There is a subtle suggestion in this entry, that because the West Saxons were not controlled by a king

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[38] Keynes and Lapidge, *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, 69.

[39] *Ibid*., 67.

[40] *Ibid*., 73.

who upheld Christian sensibilities the kingdom descended into lawlessness and anarchy. This lawlessness is presented as a direct opposite to Alfred's reign, meaning the reader can clearly distinguish between good and bad kingship qualities. The kingdom was united and lawful under the rule of Æthelred and then again under Alfred, although both were subject to invasion. There was unity and cohesion within the kingdom, which presented their Wessex as an ideal kingdom against the backdrop of Æthelbald's chaos.

Asser – like the chronicler– employed the strategy of depicting Alfred as a loyal subject of the king, such as can be seen in the entry for the year 871: "now the Christians had decided that King Æthelred and his forces should engage the two Viking kings in battle, while his brother Alfred and his troops should submit to the fortunes of war against all the Viking earls."[41] Alfred was depicted as willingly fighting alongside his brother and submitting to his directions. Additionally, there are many mentions – entry 866 for example – of how loved Alfred is in *Asser*, "now, he was greatly loved, more than all his brothers, by his father and mother – indeed, by everybody – with a universal and profound love."[42] While this technique of bias is not in relation to a specific event, it creates an overall feeling of love and generosity. This sense that Alfred was loved by all also contributed to Alfred's respect of the lordship bond; Asser claims that everyone would have supported Alfred becoming king before his brother's death:

> Indeed, he could easily have taken it over with the consent of all while his brother Æthelred was alive, had he considered himself worthy to do so, for he surpassed all his brothers both in wisdom and in all good habits; and in particular because he was a great warrior and victorious in virtually all battles.[43]

Despite the depiction of Alfred's popularity, he is shown to respect the bond with his brother and lord. The fact that Asser portrays Alfred as humble in not wishing to replace his brother, even though he would have been supported, enhanced the positive perception of Alfred as a person and showed that he would continue to uphold the lordship bond during his reign. This bias was another technique to show that Alfred was a respectable and honourable king.

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[41] Keynes and Lapidge, *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, 79.

[42] *Ibid*., 74.

[43]*Ibid*., 80-81.

Finally, the *Chronicle* selectively discusses Alfred's military actions. Asser applied this technique in descriptions of Alfred's political influence and governmental decisions, Abels writes:

> Asser knew exactly which of Alfred's governmental activities would impress his readers, in part because he had before him the model of Einhard's *Life of Charlemagne*. Like Charlemagne, Alfred was to be portrayed as a world figure, commanding the attention of rulers.[44]

Abels suggests that Asser actively chose which of Alfred's activities to include in order to portray him as someone who would be noticed by other powerful leaders. Asser opted to include information on Alfred's judicial role:

> King Alfred used also to sit at judicial hearings for the benefit both of his nobles and of the common people, since they frequently disagreed violently among themselves at assemblies of ealdormen or reeves, to the point where virtually none of them could agree that any judgement reached by the ealdormen or reeves in question was just.[45]

Here, Alfred is portrayed as the mediator between his nobles and the commoners, but he also appears to have better judgement than all his subjects. In Asser's opinion, Alfred was just and right, he could solve any problem and often did. The mention that he often sat at judicial hearings was designed to show his attentiveness to his people no matter what rank they may have been.

The just monarch is shown to be concerned with each subject and all areas of dispute within his kingdom. Asser thereby portrayed him as a competent leader who was capable of resolving any disagreement, which therefore kept balance and harmony. Moreover, Alfred was presented as a wise ruler as a result of his impeccable judgement, Asser states:

> Accordingly, if the judges in question were to confess after all that they had indeed passed judgement in such a way because they had not known better in the circumstances, then the king, admonishing their inexperience and foolishness with discretion and restraint, would reply as follows: 'I am astonished at this arrogance of yours, since through God's authority and my own you have enjoyed the office and status of wise men, yet you have neglected the study and application of wisdom. For that reason, I command you either to relinquish immediately the offices of worldly power that you possess, or else to apply yourselves much more attentively to the pursuit of wisdom.'[46]

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[44] Abels, *Alfred the Great*, 258.

[45] Keynes and Lapidge, *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, 109.

[46] *Ibid.*, 109.

Asser depicted Alfred as the only one with enough wisdom to see and resolve the mistakes made by a judge. His kingship is presented as ideal because he had better judgement than the average person – which made him a wise ruler – and he used his good judgement to create a perfect society, or so Asser would have us believe.

To conclude, Alfred may have been great, but that greatness was, to a certain extent, constructed by the writers surrounding him. In particular, the anonymous annalists of the *Chronicle*, and Asser, greatly contributed to the way we view the great sovereign today. By writing with varying amounts of bias and including specific propaganda techniques they were able to construct a narrative which portrayed Alfred in the best light possible, an effort which was both impressive and important in a tumultuous time of invasion. There are many similar strategies used in the *Chronicle* and *Life*: the inclusion of long genealogies which bind the king's lineage to many impressive leaders, as well as rooting him to a Christian past. The technique of cementing his status as a pious Christian king who was consecrated by the pope suggested that he had the only legitimate claim to the throne also included an element of divinity to his rule. It is important to compare these two texts in order to establish what methods the writers of Anglo-Saxon historiographical texts commonly used in order to create a positive bias. The two texts also use some differing techniques. The *Chronicle*, on the one hand, adopted a military perspective which emphasised Alfred's success as a leader and drew attention to his victories while downplaying his defeats. It gave the impression that the monarch was in far greater control of his kingdom and the invasion than he actually was. On the other hand, Asser accentuated Alfred's governmental success to show that he was in absolute control and capable of being renown by other great leaders. Asser also portrayed Alfred as the wiser than all others, this image of the king as a wise ruler resulted in the portrayal of Alfred as a truly great king. Ultimately both texts aim to present the Anglo-Saxon ruler as the image of ideal kingship, which they achieve by employing varying degrees of bias. They bolster Alfred's positive image until what remains is propaganda filled with alternative facts and only a sprinkling of reality.

Chapter 2: Presenting Æthelred as Unready

King Æthelred II, otherwise known as, Æthelred the Unready, ruled from 978-1013, then again from 1014-1016. Æthelred was not as fortunate as King Alfred when it came to propaganda. There is a great deal of bias surrounding Æthelred in historiographical texts, most of which is negative. The information concerning the infamous king is also extremely limited as he is not included in many contemporaneous historiographical texts. The most useful source on Æthelred, when discussing the use of propaganda, is *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Even though the entries on Æthelred were not written during his lifetime, the *Chronicle* is the closest surviving historiographical text to Æthelred's reign in terms of its composition date. However, due to its post-death date of composition, hindsight is employed in the Æthelred annals which accounts for the overt bias found in them, as Roach explains:

> Our main narrative for Æthelred's reign, preserved in the C, D and E versions of the composite work known as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, was written after Æthelred's death with the benefit of hindsight: it telescopes events, presenting the Danish conquest of 1016 as the inevitable result of English cowardice and incompetence. [47]

In other words, the benefit of hindsight allows for extremely negative forms of propaganda to be included into the history of Æthelred. Some modern scholars even suggest the bias has skewed our current perception of the king, and although he can never be considered a good king, he might not be all bad, Roach states: "both Stafford and Keynes argued that Æthelred was a much misunderstood figure: although ultimately unsuccessful, he was far from incompetent."[48] This chapter will not focus on the ways in which the monarch is misunderstood, but rather the techniques which were used to create this misunderstanding. The previous chapter focused on the ways in which propaganda was used to portray Alfred in a good light during his lifetime, while this chapter will explore contrasting methods used in the *Chronicle* in order to create a negative bias. The *Chronicle* of Alfred's reign made use of certain propaganda techniques, which played specific roles that were beneficial to him at that moment in time. Instead, this chapter will focus on the influence hindsight had on the specific methods of propaganda used in the annals depicting Æthelred and what the purpose of those techniques might have been.

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[47] Roach, *Æthelred the Unready*, 4.

[48] *Ibid*., 3.

The chronicle of Æthelred and Cnut

The annals covering the reigns of Æthelred and his successor are sometimes referred to as the *Æthelred-Cnut Chronicle*. The *Æthelred-Cnut Chronicle* was written by one annalist writing sometime after Æthelred's death, Nicholas Brooks discusses the composition of the *Æthelred-Cnut Chronicle*:

> The existing annals for 983–1016 represent a deliberate recasting in *c.* 1022, perhaps by a priest now in Cnut's service, of an earlier year- by- year record of the reign that had been maintained in the royal household. We may suspect that the previous record has been effectively suppressed. A deliberate attempt to rewrite history may explain the presence of the identical Chronicle text for 983–1022 in C, D and E.[49]

This means the *Æthelred-Cnut Chronicle* cannot be considered factually correct, but rather that it should be viewed as a form of propaganda used by Cnut to discredit Æthelred. Keynes thinks that "one might wish to assume that the annals for Æthelred's reign in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* constitute a full and contemporary narrative, set down year by year; but it has long been recognised that such an assumption is untenable."[50] Nevertheless, these annals are extremely important when it comes to studying propaganda, they prove that history can be re-written and facts can be twisted with the knowledge of hindsight for the benefit of future generations, or in this case a specific king.

It is interesting to note here, that the *Æthelred-Cnut Chronicle* is one of many continuations added to the original block of annals that had been written during Alfred's reign. The various continuations have resulted in slight disparities between the different manuscripts of the *Chronicle*. MS E includes much more detail in each annal in comparison to the other manuscripts which may be due to its later date of composition, Swanton states that "it was written in one hand and at one time down to the entry for 1121."[51] Once again, this version of the *Chronicle* is written with the benefit of hindsight. Although the MS E continuation was written in one stint, it is the result of many common annals composed nearer to the events themselves and copied between three different extensions of the *Chronicle*, Brooks explores the continuations of various manuscripts:

> The next readily identifiable common 'continuation' of the *Anglo- Saxon Chronicle* comprises the annals for the years from 983 to 1022. Here essentially the same text

[49] Nicholas Brooks, "Why Is the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle About Kings?" *Anglo-Saxon England* 39 (2010): 52.

[50] Simon Keynes, "Re-Reading King Æthelred the Unready," in *Writing Medieval Biography, 750-1250: Essays in Honour of Frank Barlow* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2006), 79.

[51] Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, xxvi.

> is found in just three manuscripts (C, D and E) […] A remarkable feature of these annals for the years 983–1022, and particularly after 991, however, is that their narrative is so much more detailed than that of the preceding annals – or at least than any since those describing the later years of the Viking wars of King Alfred's reign. We must indeed question (following Professor Keynes's example) how in *c.* 1022 any individual could possibly have remembered in such clear order the detailed sequence of events of the previous thirty- nine years. We may therefore agree with him that the author of these annals must have had access to a detailed year by year record.[52]

It is evident that the chronicler was able to write in great detail by compiling earlier records. With the benefit of hindsight, he was able rewrite history by inserting his own biased narrative in order to supress the original portrayal of events. This chapter will mainly refer to MS E (unless otherwise stated) because it includes the most detail on the *Æthelred-Cnut Chronicle*. Additionally, as Keynes discusses, the annals in MS E are extremely propagandic in nature due to the circumstances of its composition:

> The main account of the reign in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is very far from being the balanced, judicious and dispassionate record that we should so like it to be. It is a striking piece of narrative prose, which is full of literary interest and quite obviously of the greatest historical importance. Yet it was written *not* year by year, as might be assumed at first sight, but by someone looking back from his vantage point after the end of the reign. It is infused with all the defeatism of one who knew that worse was to come, and articulated with all the hyperbole of one committed to his own analysis of events.[53]

It is interesting that the years separating MS E from the events themselves do not only result in greater detail, but also a greater bias. The chronicler's knowledge of history actively affected his recording of past events.

Ruling under King Edward's shadow

The depiction of King Æthelred in the *Chronicle* is biased from the outset. The early years of the sovereign's rule are not officially part of the *Æthelred-Cnut Chronicle*, but Sheppard claims they are still important because they are written in the same style:

> The annals for 979-82, the annals of Æthelred's early years, are not formally considered part of the *Æthelred-Cnut Chronicle*, but they do establish a conceptual preface to the Æthelred-Cnut annals themselves. Though the Æthelred-Cnut annalist may not have written these entries himself, he continues their thematic

[52] Brooks, "Why Is the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle About Kings," 52.

[53] Simon Keynes, "Re-Reading King Æthelred," 79.

> emphasis on fighting and develops the implication that a willingness to fight is an essential part of Anglo-Saxon identity.[54]

The first mention of Æthelred within the annals that act as a preface to the *Æthelred-Cnut Chronicle*, is presented alongside the suspicious death of the previous king: his half-brother Edward. The passage describing Edward's murder in the year 979 is important and warrants quotation in full:

> Here King Edward was killed in the evening-time on 18 March at Corfe 'passage'; and they buried him at Wareham without any royal honours. No worse deed for the English race was done than this was, since they first sought out the land of Britain. Men murdered him, but God exalted him. In life he was an earthly king; after death he is now a heavenly saint. His earthly relatives would not avenge him, but his Heavenly Father has much avenged him. Those earthly slayers wanted to destroy his memory on the earth, but the sublime Avenger has spread abroad his memory in the heavens and on the earth. Those who earlier would not bow to his living body, those now humbly bow the knees to his dead bones. Now we can perceive that the wisdom and deliberations of men, and their councels, are worthless against God's purpose. And here Æthelred succeeded to the kingdom, and very quickly after that, with great rejoicing of the councillors of the English race, was consecrated as king at Kingston.[55]

Firstly, King Edward is presented as a martyred hero in this annal; the perfect image of ideal kingship. The entry seems to subtly suggest that this was an image Æthelred would not be able to uphold. Æthelred was Edward's half-brother, yet the annal mentions that Edward's "earthly relatives would not avenge him." This immediately introduced the new leader as a dishonourable king who was weak and unwilling to avenge the death of his family members. It also suggested that Æthelred prized the throne over his half-brother's life. While the annalist does not directly link the king to the murder, as the killers remain anonymous, he does incorporate much religious terminology, some of which suggests that Æthelred's unwillingness to revenge Edward goes against God's will. In opposition to the constructive religious propaganda surrounding Alfred, the dubious events concluding in Æthelred's coronation cast an unholy light on his reign.

In contrast to this long and negative introduction to Æthelred, MS A merely states: "Here King Edward was killed. In this same year his brother, the ætheling Æthelred, succeeded to the kingdom."[56] While this entry is obviously short in comparison to the one quoted above,

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[54] Sheppard, *Families of the King*, 74.

[55] Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 123.

[56] *Ibid.*, 122.

it is also relatively neutral. Kings were frequently killed and Edward was described in the same manner, Æthelred is simply mentioned as Edward's successor and was not linked to his death in any way. This shows that the description of events can be altered and expanded with hindsight. With added information gathered over time, a chronicler writing about the past can manipulate the facts and create different perspectives for certain events, depending on what was beneficial to the annalist, or king he was writing for at that particular time. MS A was not written in Cnut's court meaning it was not necessary to portray Æthelred in a bad light. In contrast to MS A, Pauline Stafford explores the fact that MSS C, D and E all share certain traits with Wulfstan's poetic writings:

> It is the Vikings whom Wulfstan has in mind. It was they who made the terrors of the Millennium and the coming of the Antichrist an urgent reality for him. It is they who prompt his picture of a society in disintegration which has brought its own ruin upon it which informs the Sermon of the Wolf […] The powerful evocation of these ideas in Wulfstan's Sermon is a product of the specific situation at the end of Æthelred's reign. So too is the account of the reign given in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*. Apart from A, all versions have a copied common account. The anonymous author shares with Wulfstan the note of passion and nemesis, and like him looks inwards for the causes of defeat, not outwards to the nature of Viking attack. Unlike Wulfstan, he blames not moral collapse but treachery and poor leadership.[57]

It is interesting to note that there seem to be common methods of inserting propaganda into an Anglo-Saxon text. The process of creating a bias follows a certain pattern, elements of which can also be seen, as Stafford suggests, in Wulfstan's poetical writings as well as his political texts. Wulfstan wrote for both Æthelred and then Cnut, it is only logical that his later writings benefitted Cnut rather than his predecessor. Wulfstan's style of writing and bias against Æthelred was imitated in MS E in passages such as that of Edward's death it presents his death – the worst deed – parallel to Æthelred's accession, therefore suggesting Æthelred is bad for the country. As we can see, Cnut's propaganda is clearly visible in MS E, the advantage of hindsight allows Cnut's chronicler to put a bias on every mention of Æthelred in the *Chronicle* in order to discredit the monarch as a successful ruler.

Æthelred's failed lordship

The *Æthelred-Cnut Chronicle* does not overtly portray Æthelred as a bad king, instead, he is depicted as ineffectual. The annals show him making a series of wrong decisions, or sometimes

[57] Pauline Stafford, *Unification and Conquest: A Political and Social History of England in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989), 15.

failing to take action completely. The entry for the year 1004 is interesting because it introduces Ulfcytel – an East Anglian nobleman who briefly fulfils Æthelred's responsibilities:

> Ulfcytel with the councillors in East Anglia decided that it would be better that they buy peace from the enemy before they did too much harm in the country, because they came unexpectedly and he had not time in which he could gather his army. Then under cover of truce which should have been between them, the raiding-army stole up from their ships and turned their course to Thetford. Then when Ulfcytel realised that, he sent that they should chop up the ships – but those he thought of failed; and then he secretly gathered his army as quickly as he could.[58]

This entry incorporated propaganda in two ways: firstly, by showing that the supreme ruler was so inactive that others had to fill his leadership vacuum. Secondly, the entry proved that Æthelred's actions, such as the paying of Danegeld were only acceptable as the first step of negotiations with the invaders. It then showed that the king stagnated at this point when he should have abandoned his first attempts and defended his kingdom as Ulfcytel did for him. The bias in this entry highlighted Æthelred's inactivity in comparison to Ulfcytel; the king did not come to Ulfcytel's aid which created a noticeable absence, as illustrated by Shepard:

> By acting on his responsibilities, Ulfcytel demonstrates his loyalty to his king; by taking the field, he demonstrates his loyalty to his men. In this version of events, Æthelred's absence from the field is conspicuous, and the annalist underscores its effects by momentarily making Ulfcytel, a regional leader.[59]

In fact, Æthelred is not mentioned at all in the annal for that year. Ulfcytel took Æthelred's place as leader and tried to negotiate with the invaders and pay them for a peace treaty. Æthelred was absent which forced Ulfcytel to lead in his place; this was included as a successful propaganda tactic that allowed the chronicler to undermine the absent leader's authority.

Paying taxes was a useful approach in slowing the invasion and it was employed by many kings, including Alfred and Æthelred. However, the annals depict Æthelred as a coward for continuously paying the Danes off without any retaliation despite many broken treaties and often paying them off too late to stop many raids, one such example can be seen in the annal for 1011:

> Here in this year the king and his councillors sent to the raiding-army, and begged peace, and promised them tax and provisions on condition that they leave off their raiding. They had the overrun: East Anglia and Essex and Middlesex and Oxfordshire and Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire and half Huntingdonshire, and to the south of the Thames all the

[58] Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 135.

[59] Sheppard, *Families of the King*, 105.

> Kentish and South Saxons and the Hastings district and Surrey and Berkshire and Hampshire and much in Wiltshire. All these misfortunes befell us through lack of decision, in that they were not offered tax in time; but when they had done great evil, then a truce and peace was made with them. And nonetheless for all this truce and peace and tax, they travelled everywhere in bands and raided and roped up and killed our wretched people.[60]

This was a repetitive cycle for Æthelred, the year 1007 notes: "the tax that was paid to the hostile raiding-army was 30 thousand pounds."[61] Æthelred constantly paid tax to the invaders which was not a problem in itself, but the chronicler insinuates that he is a coward when the Danes immediately break the peace and raid again and he does not retaliate, instead he pays tax year after year. The sovereign made the mistake of constantly listening to his councillors and paying taxes to the invaders and for this the chronicler barely mentions him at all in times of great trouble; instead, noblemen who fought and defended their land are turned into the heroes and decision makers of his kingdom. In contrast to viewing Æthelred as a coward, Courtnay Konshuh suggests in the article "Anraed in their Unraed," that the constant paying of taxes should be attributed to Æthelred's advisers and that his fault lies in constantly following their advice:

> It is also the *witan*, *deman* (judges), *heretogan* (war-leaders) and named *ealdormen* (e.g., Ælfric, Ulfcytel, Eadric) who decide on the controversial payment of tribute payments (*gafol*). Rather than vilifying the king for making bad decisions, the text puts distance between Æthelred and the tribute payments, military defeats and internal problems by concentrating on the actions of others, and direct criticism of Æthelred is not obvious.[62]

While direct criticism is not obvious, the bias in the Ulfcytel entry indirectly criticises Æthelred by highlighting his absence and his failure to defend his subjects and uphold his duties as the king. In opposition to Konshuh, any perceived distance between the king and the payments can be seen as a criticism in its own right because Æthelred is portrayed as such an ineffectual leader that he cannot negotiate his own peace treaties, others must do it in his place. Regardless of whether there is distance between Æthelred and the payments or not, a nobleman was negotiating, making decisions, and defending the country instead of the king; therefore, the reader must naturally assume that the monarch is ineffectual.

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[60] Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 141.

[61] *Ibid*., 138.

[62] Courtnay Konshuh, "Anraed in their Unraed: The Æthelredian Annals (983–1016) and their Presentation of King and Advisors." *English Studies: A Journal of English Language and Literature* 97 (2016): 141-142.

The propaganda techniques used throughout the *Æthelred-Cnut Chronicle* follow a pattern of repetition. One important theme was the creation of a bias which made Æthelred seem weak and unwilling to fight, as can be seen in the entry for 1009:

> All the East Kentish made peace with the raiding-army, and granted them 3 thousand pounds. And then immediately after that the raiding-army turned about until they came to the Isle of Wight, and raided and burned, as their custom was, everywhere in Sussex and in Hampshire and also in Berkshire. Then the king ordered the whole nation to be called out, in order to guard against them on all sides, but nevertheless they travelled just where they wanted.[63]

The chronicler frequently mentions the payment of taxes alongside the raiding-army completely ignoring the peace treaty in an attempt to equate Æthelred's continued payments with cowardice and a lack of control over his subjects. The king's subjects were not loyal to him and did not support him in annal 1013:

> King Swein came with his fleet to Sandwich, and very quickly turned round East Anglia into the mouth of the Humber, and so upwards along the Trent until he came to Gainsborough. And then Earl Uhtred and all Northumbria immediately submitted to him, and all the people in Lindsey, and afterwards the people of the Five Boroughs.[64]

The submission of such a large number of Æthelred's subjects suggests that he did not command the respect of his troops and his noblemen were not willing to fight for him. This was a reversal of the propaganda used by the Alfred chronicler, Alfred is shown to honour the lordship bond and fight for his people, in return they are loyal to him. Whereas the Æthelred chronicler highlights the lack of a lordship bond to show that Æthelred did not uphold the contract to his people. This contrast against Alfred then enhanced the suggestion that the later leader of the Anglo-Saxon people was the image of unreliable kingship which Sheppard believes contributed to the loss of the kingdom:

> As the Æthelred-Cnut annalist presents the narrative of Æthelred's reign, the king's unwillingness to take to the field and his decision to pay tribute do not inspire the loyalty necessary for his men to be effective in battle. Because the resulting defeats and betrayals endanger the people and the church, the annalist is able to suggest that the king has failed in his duty to protect them. He further implies that the king's shortcomings derive from his abuse of royal power and that these problems – abuses or sins – culminate in the loss of the kingdom.[65]

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[63] Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 139.

[64] *Ibid*., 143.

[65] Sheppard, *Families of the King*, 72.

It is important to remember the annalist was writing with hindsight which meant he was able to attribute a bias linked to the invasion because he knew the kingdom was ultimately lost.

Æthelred did not inspire loyalty among his people and as a result of that, they frequently lost battles or refused to participate at all. With knowledge of the final outcome it was very easy for the annalist to insinuate that Æthelred was a bad leader and did not uphold his lordship bond which resulted in chaos and the loss of his kingdom. In this respect, he is depicted as the complete opposite of Alfred, as Sheppard mentions:

> The Æthelred-Cnut annalist also implies that Æthelred's personal actions run counter to the tenets of ideal kingship and thus that the loss of the kingdom is a just retribution for the king's misdeeds. The king actively harasses his people instead of protecting them.[66]

While Alfred's reign is portrayed as blessed by God, Æthelred's is seen as cursed in annal 986: "here the king did for a bishopric at Rochester: and here the great pestilence among cattle first came to England."[67] As Sheppard mentions, the unpopular monarch was not described as actively protecting his people and as a result disasters were presented directly alongside his deeds. This method of propaganda presented all misfortune that befell the country as a direct sign or warning from God: Æthelred was not a good king, therefore he would destroy the country.

It was beneficial to portray Æthelred as the root of the country's destruction. The chronicler was associated with Cnut's court and therefore it was advantageous to depict Cnut as the redeemer of England, not the invader. The aim to undermine Æthelred is even apparent in sections that seem to portray him in a good light, such as his return to kingship from exile in the entry for 1014: "then all councillors, both ordained and lay, advised that King Æthelred should be sent for, and declared that no lord was dearer to them than their natural lord – if he would govern them more justly than before."[68] The chronicler subtly tarnishes the joy of Æthelred's return by emphasising the clause in his regained leadership. By insisting that he was allowed to rule again under the condition he was more just in the future, the annalist immediately insinuated his entire reign until that point was unjust and therefore proved that Æthelred was not a reliable king. The chronicler also achieved this sense of false hope in annal 1014, by leaving certain elements out: "then during that spring King Æthelred came home to

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[66] Sheppard, *Families of the King*, 74.

[67] Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 125.

[68] *Ibid*., 145.

his own people, and he was gladly received by them all."[69] The details of his return – an event which was positive at the time – are somewhat vague in comparison to reality, a fact which is noted by Roach:

> Æthelred returned to England during Lent, the traditional period of fasting and repentance. Though the timing was dictated by political rather than religious considerations, the coincidence must have added poignancy to the reconciliation between the king and his people, both of whom had reason to regret their recent actions.[70]

By omitting the coincidental significance of Æthelred's return during a holy period dedicated to repentance, the *Chronicle* is able to continue the overall portrayal of Æthelred as a king without God's favour. Æthelred was not depicted as honourable; therefore, associating his return to the throne with a period of repentance would not have been beneficial in Cnut's court. Its inclusion could have legitimised Æthelred's rule and destroyed the image of Cnut's invasion as a punishment sent by God.

Æthelred's absence

The subtle criticism surrounding Æthelred's noticeable absence occurs in many entries. Æthelred was only mentioned once in the eleven years following his coronation. Instead, the annals focused on the constant threat his kingdom faced in 981: "here first came 7 ships and raided Southampton."[71] This is followed by the 985 entry: "here Ealdorman Ælfric was driven out," and annal 987: "here Wachet was raided."[72] One propaganda technique applied to these years was to keep the entries short with little information. It presented the years as a list of terrible events that happened to England. When this list of calamities was presented alongside entries that make no mention of the king, it made it seem as though he was not a strong or leader and not often present in a time of crisis.

However, the *Chronicle* makes no mention of the new sovereign's young age, while Roach states: "in Æthelred's case he had come to the throne at somewhere between eight and twelve and would not, therefore, have expected to wait long before taking over."[73] There is a sense of subtle criticism towards Æthelred because he was not present or defending his country, especially during the early years of his reign even though he was not technically in control. Roach notes that "in Æthelred's own case there are hints that he may have begun to take on a

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[69] Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 145.

[70] Roach, *Æthelred the Unready*, 296.

[71] Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 125.

[72] *Ibid*.

[73] Roach, *Æthelred the Unready*, 92.

more active role in the months and years leading up to 984."[74] If this is the case, then the chronicler deliberately chose to record the first five years as an absence of the king, rather than the fact that he was not actively governing his own kingdom during that period. The chronicler applied a propaganda technique in which he chose to highlight the leader's lack of appearance rather than inform the reader that he was a child king. Rather than showing Æthelred's immaturity, the chronicler created an image of unreliability. The image of Æthelred as an unreliable king could have been beneficial in order to portray Cnut as a positive and stable influence in contrast to Æthelred's absence. The contrast would have been especially important as Cnut was often physically absent whilst visiting his other kingdoms in Scandinavia. By creating a bias against Æthelred, Cnut was able to make his own absences appear excusable.

Regardless of whether Æthelred's unreliability was created or embellished in the *Æthelred-Cnut Chronicle*, he did make some mistakes during his reign, most of which have been exaggerated in some form by the chronicler. However, the events which are left intentionally plain are of more interest, one such event was the 'Massacre of St Brice's Day' in the entry for the year 1002: "in that year the king ordered all the Danish men who were among the English race to be killed on Brice's Day, because it was made known to the king that they wanted to ensnare his life."[75] This entry is interesting because a chronicler in Cnut's court could have presented the murders of many Danish men as a terrible and tragic event, but it was actually written in a fairly neutral tone. It was simply presented as a response to a risk on Æthelred's life. This may be because leaving the details at a minimum linked to the propaganda techniques used throughout the Æthelred annals, techniques such as highlighting Æthelred's incompetence and showing that he often made bad decisions. By including minimal detail the chronicler essentially insinuates that Æthelred had a large number of people killed on the basis of a rumour. Moreover, targeting the Danish men would surely result in retaliation which emphasised Æthelred's incompetence because he was shown to make a rash decision without any forethought.

The *Æthelred-Cnut Chronicle* refers to Æthelred in a different way to all previous kings, Konshuh claims that "there are no entries before Æthelred's time in which a king is addressed by his title alone."[76] In contrast, many – if not most – of the annals discussing Æthelred do not mention him by name, instead they simply refer to him as "the king." This helped, as Konshuh

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[74] Roach, *Æthelred the Unready*, 93.

[75] Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 134-135.

[76] Konshuh, "Anraed in their Unraed," 142.

believes, to bolster the idea that Æthelred was an obscure king, it was a method of propaganda which made him seem absent during most of his reign:

> Though other Chronicle entries seldom explicitly outline the king's exact actions, the king initiated campaigns and internal politics and led armies. This device is used to glorify or legitimise these kings by highlighting their leadership, whereas King Æthelred's role in the conquest of England is underplayed. This is an unusual Chronicle style, and the contrast between the predominance of earlier kings in their annals and Æthelred's obscurity in his own annals may arouse suspicion as to what the king should have been doing.[77]

By underplaying Æthelred's actions the chronicler was able to obscure Æthelred and make him appear incompetent. He also has a lack of persona in all entries which ultimately lead to the sense of an ineffective king and even a lack of leadership in general, Konshuh states: "the chronicler has left Æthelred as uncharacterised as possible in order to show his lack of involvement in all of the intrigues taking place through these decades."[78] The chronicler created a bias which made the country seem to drift along, barely staying afloat without a strong leader in times of turmoil and invasion. The method of hardly mentioning Æthelred by name made his presence weak, he seemed noticeably absent in the annals. At the same time, it was made to feel as though he should have been actively defending his country; therefore, Æthelred has been sculpted into the image of problematic kingship.

In short, Æthelred was subject to the misfortune of having his history written by his opponents. His narrative was written with the benefit of hindsight, this meant the chronicler could warp the facts or choose to omit certain elements of events in order to skew the perspective. Æthelred was constantly found lacking in comparison to others such as his half-brother Edward, or the nobleman Ulfcytel. To further the disadvantage in his portrayal, he was often simply referred to as "the king," rather than being constantly named, this technique was new to the *Chronicle* in Æthelred's annals. Not only was the monarch not often named, but there are multiple entries detailing disaster with no mention of the king at all. The absence of the sovereign's name created an aloof persona for Æthelred, when he was mentioned he seemed to be noticeably lacking ideal kingship qualities in comparison to others, but when he was not mentioned the entries overtly lack their king: his absence was glaring. Moreover, whenever Æthelred was included, he was often surrounded by subtle criticism suggesting he was unwilling to fight or

[77] Konshuh, "Anraed in their Unraed," 142.

[78] *Ibid*., 145.

defend his country, an action which went against Anglo-Saxon kingship ideals. All this criticism was presented alongside the suggestion that his inability and unwillingness to fight was causing the invasion which was sent as a punishment from God. All in all, Æthelred was portrayed as Alfred's polar opposite: Alfred was righteous and courageous where Æthelred was not, Alfred was present as opposed to Æthelred's obscurity, and finally, Alfred had God's blessing, whereas Æthelred only received God's implied punishment. The chronicler successfully limited the infamous ruler's presence in an age of turmoil which resulted in the *Chronicle* portraying Æthelred as an absent and unreliable king.

Chapter 3: Cnut the Welcome Invader

King Cnut holds a unique position amongst *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*'s kings: he was an invader whose kingship was accepted. The invader held the English throne from 1016-1035. Surviving historiographical texts portray Cnut in a positive light in comparison to other invaders, but he was also contrasted with some particularly unsuccessful Anglo-Saxon kings, such as Æthelred. One reason the historiographical texts cast a positive light on Cnut's annals was his influence over the *Chronicle* itself. His chronicler used the *Chronicle* to distribute written propaganda throughout Anglo-Saxon society in order to present Cnut as an acceptable king in the eyes of his new subjects, as Thijs Porck states:

> Cnut's political propaganda – evident in his actions, laws, letters and parts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* written in his time – makes him an interesting figure, particularly in this time of elections. This was a Viking who presented himself as more Anglo-Saxon than the Anglo-Saxons.[79]

Cnut's chronicler, like Alfred's, expertly manipulated certain events in order to create the most advantageous portrayal of Cnut's actions during his rule. In other words, the *Æthelred-Cnut Chronicle* actively incorporated alternative facts. This chapter will highlight some similarities between Cnut and Alfred's chronicler's methods of sculpting a positive bias. Cnut's favourable portrayal was also echoed in other historiographical texts, such as the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, a piece of propaganda commissioned by his wife Emma after his death. Of course, the aim of the propaganda was to depict Cnut in the best light possible, but he was also extremely competent in his kingship – as far as we can tell from the biased sources – which allowed the chroniclers to highlight his abilities as king while slyly obscuring any unwanted information. In truth, Cnut dominated Anglo-Saxon society and literature so successfully that he was barely seen as an invader by the end of his reign.

Cnut's invasion in The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

The previous chapter discussed the *Æthelred-Cnut Chronicle* as a set of annals written with a negative bias intended to destroy Æthelred's reliability as king. This chapter will now explore the *Æthelred-Cnut Chronicle* as a form of promotional propaganda designed to ease Cnut's transition from invader to king. The transition from invader to king was an important one because the Vikings caused much destruction in England – some of it under Cnut's command

[79] Thijs Porck, "Samples of an Anglo-Saxonist's Research: Cnut the Great. A Teacher's Contribution," *GAG MAG* (2010): 10-11.

– which Timothy Bolton claims severely hindered Anglo-Saxon society from effectively functioning:

> It is important to note that Swen and Cnut's arrival in 1013 came at the end of some thirty-five years of devastating Scandinavian raids on English territory. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is normally a rather dry account, reading like a sparse bulletin of events, condensing even the most emotive of acts into a few blank words, but here it descends slowly into a deeply impassioned narrative describing the violence of the invaders and the collapse of a society.[80]

Despite the invader's introduction being featured alongside an impassioned account of the destruction of the English, he was still portrayed with a certain degree of honour. Cnut was trusted by his men and associated with loyalty. The Danish leader's introduction in the *Chronicle* appears in the annal for the year 1013 which is an entry of turmoil and terror for the English: "then after he [Swein] recognised that all the people had submitted to him, he ordered that his raiding-army should be provisioned and horsed; then he turned southward with his whole army, and entrusted his ships and the hostages to Cnut, his son."[81] Although still perceived as the invader, Cnut is described as trusted from the outset – even though it is later revealed that he mutilated the hostages in his care, the chronicler separated the events involving Cnut and the hostages. This bias was incorporated to show that Cnut was trusted by his father and the Danes, which suggested that he would be a reliable king in the future.

The annals of invasion continued in the same vein with only a few irregularities. There were, however, some occasions in which the Dane was portrayed in extremely unflattering terms, a surprising inclusion considering the *Æthelred-Cnut Chronicle* stemmed from Cnut's own court. In rebuttal, Æthelred was always placed alongside a negative comment in order to suggest that Cnut's cruelty was provoked by Æthelred's weakness as can be seen in the entry for the year 1014:

> Then all human kind that could be got at were raided and burned and killed. Cnut himself went out with his fleet – and thus the wretched people were betrayed through him – and then turned southwards until he came to Sandwich, and there put ashore the hostages which were granted to his father, and cut off their hands and noses. And besides all these evils, the king [Æthelred] ordered the raiding-army that lay at Greenwich to be paid 21 thousand pounds. And in this year on St Michael's Eve, that great sea-flood came widely throughout this country and ran further inland

[80] Timothy Bolton, *Cnut the Great* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 54.

[81] Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 143.

> than it ever did before, and drowned many settlements and a countless number of human beings.[82]

Cnut's misconduct was presented alongside Æthelred's weakness and willingness to pay taxes to the Danes. Moreover, the destruction bought by Cnut is described in the same terms as the natural disaster – a flood – which occurred later in the year, just as the Danes are often described as raiding across the country, the flood "came widely" through the country both are portrayed as having destructive qualitied. By equating the invader with a force of nature, which was thought to be controlled by God, the chronicler suggested that Cnut was merely another form of God's punishment aimed at Æthelred for his unsuccessful leadership. Alternatively, the inclusion of natural disasters could have simply been included as a sign of Æthelred's bad rule, in which case, Cnut was presented alongside as a contrast to his predecessor's ineffective kingship. Therefore, the Danish ruler's cruelty towards the English people was excusable as Sheppard argues it was essentially caused by Æthelred's weak leadership:

> Conventional interpretations of the Æthelred-Cnut annals prioritize the entries that feature the king's inability to keep his promise and carry out his duties. In doing so, they create an all-encompassing narrative – a salvation history – of a corrupt realm in which Æthelred is responsible for the loss of the kingdom.[83]

It was a clever technique to make Æthelred solely responsible for the loss of the kingdom because it automatically transformed his successor's actions into a by-product of Æthelred's incapability. As a prominent part of the invasion, the chronicler could then attribute any casualties caused by Cnut, to Æthelred because he held all the responsibility. It was essentially an elaborate propaganda technique to remove the blame of any wrongdoing Cnut perpetrated during the invasion which in turn presented him as a preferable alternative to Æthelred.

Propaganda in the annals of Cnut's rule

Once we reach the period of Cnut's rule, an explosion of propaganda techniques can be seen. Cnut aimed to integrate himself into all areas of Anglo-Saxon society and politics and this was reflected in the *Chronicle*. During his rule, the Danish king was dedicated to the English Church, like Alfred, it was important for the new ruler of the Anglo-Saxon's to solidify his reputation as a Christian king. In order to accomplish this reputation, he was generous to the Church, as discussed by Bolton:

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[82] Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 145.

[83] Sheppard, *Families of the King*, 94.

> More evidence of Cnut's interaction with the English Church survives than for any other king of Anglo-Saxon England. There are records of land grants and gifts of expensive objects to religious figures and houses, the foundation of monasteries and construction of new buildings within existing communities, the translation of saint-relics, and evidence of royal interference with certain ecclesiastical appointments.[84]

Cnut's dedication to Christianity was noted in the *Chronicle* which recorded specific details, such as his connection to the pope and archbishops of England. The chronicler used these connections a means of propaganda to highlight Cnut's support of the English Church. His involvement with the Church also proved that Cnut had no connection to any 'heathen' Scandinavian religion, in the entry for 1031: "Cnut went to Rome."[85] The pope was just one of the religious figures the chronicler felt it necessary to connect Cnut with. His respect of the Church and visits to Rome are reminiscent of other great English kings, such as Alfred. Alfred was known as a pious king who was supposedly ordained by the pope himself during his visit, therefore, it was beneficial for Cnut's papal visits to be recorded in the *Chronicle*, just as Alfred's were. In drawing this subtle comparison, the chronicler ranks Cnut amongst the greatest and most respected rulers of England. It was also especially important to uphold Cnut's religious attitude to show the contrast against Æthelred's apparent failure to defend the Christian faith. The contrast between Cnut and Æthelred allowed the new king to maintain his reputation as the religious saviour of England.

Another way in which the chronicler used religion as a propaganda tool was to emphasise the Danish ruler's association with the martyred English archbishop: St Ælfheah. Ælfheah's martyrdom was a symbol of Danish brutality and disregard for the English Church, Nicole Marafioti explores the importance of Cnut's connection with Ælfheah:

> Danes were outsiders in England. After Cnut's accession as king in late 1016, this perception began to shift. The Danish conqueror promised to rule as well as his Anglo-Saxon predecessors, became a patron of churches and monasteries, advanced his subjects' interests on the Continent, and issued a magisterial body of Old English Law. Yet even as Cnut met the expectations for a king of England, Ælfheah remained one of London's most popular saints and an unambiguous reminder of Viking atrocity in a city that had spent years under siege.[86]

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[84] Timothy Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great: Conquest and the Consolidation of Power in Northern Europe in the Early Eleventh Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 77.

[85] Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 157.

[86] Nicole Marafioti, *The King's Body: Burial and Succession in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 193.

Cnut's association with Ælfheah was important for two reasons: to give deference to and honour an English martyr which would gain the foreign monarch respect, and to associate a new and constructive memory of the Danes in relation to Ælfheah. Cnut was able to offer recompense for the terrible events caused by the Danes surrounding Ælfheah's death. It was also a convenient opportunity for the chronicler to present Cnut's association with Ælfheah as a celebratory occasion which occurred in the annal for the year 1023:

> Here, in St Paul's minster inside London, King Cnut granted full leave to Archbishop Æthelnot and Bishop Beorhtwine, and all God's servants who were with them, that they might take up the archbishop Ælfheah from the burial-place; and they did so on 8 June. And the illustrious king, and the archbishop, and diocesan bishops, and earls, and very many, ordained and lay, conveyed his holy body by ship over the Thames to Southwark, and there entrusted the holy martyr to the archbishop and his companions; and then with an honourable company joyous pleasure they conveyed him to Rochester. Then on the third day came Emma the Lady with her royal child Harthacnut, and then with great pomp and rejoicing and hymns of praise they all conveyed the holy archbishop into Canterbury.[87]

The chronicler recorded the event with a bias: the loss London suffered when its inhabitants had their beloved saint removed was not included. The removal of Ælfheah's relics to Canterbury meant that the Londoners were no longer able to worship at his grave, yet this was not mentioned by the chronicler. Instead, the joy of the royal procession, and the honour and righteousness of undoing the wrong of Ælfheah's martyrdom by reinstating him to his rightful place in Canterbury was the focal point of the entry. The association with Ælfheah was important for Cnut, as Marafioti states:

> The *Chronicle* construed the translation as a joyful event, which brought honour to Ælfheah and his home foundation in Canterbury, but it was also a political opportunity which allowed Cnut and his family to associate themselves with a prominent Anglo-Saxon saint […] In 1023, more was at stake at Ælfheah's translation than an expression of royal piety, for by a certain logic, the new king of England was responsible for the martyrdom of London's most popular saint: Cnut and his father had led the Scandinavian armies into England, and the perpetrators of the crime had been their subordinates. Although neither king was directly implicated in the killing itself, Ælfheah's translation in effect reversed the damage their countrymen had inflicted and redeemed Cnut of any hint of complicity in the saint's death.[88]

The idea of recompense and humility that is prominent in this entry is a form of propaganda used to remove any anger that may have been directed towards the Danes for their invasion

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[87] Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 156.

[88] Marafioti, *The King's Body*, 194-195.

and mistreatment of religious leaders. Furthermore, the inclusion of this detailed event solidified Cnut's reputation as an honourable, Christian king of England and removed all blame from his name in relation to the persecution of religious figures during the invasion. In other words, like the earlier technique of pinning the blame of the invasion on Æthelred, highlighting the connection between Cnut and Ælfheah was another method to ensure that Cnut was not held accountable for his actions or association with the invasion.

The tone that is established throughout the annals on Cnut is one of integration. It was extremely important for the chronicler to create a bias to underscore the foreign sovereign's seamless integration into Anglo-Saxon society. It was also necessary to prove that the Danish king upheld Anglo-Saxon ideals in order to depict his takeover as a simple change in leadership, rather than showing him as a violent conqueror, Sheppard argues that:

> By narrating what could otherwise be seen as a military conquest as a transfer of power that enables the Anglo-Saxon's to return to the identifying culture of their ancestors, the Æthelred-Cnut annalist forestalls an interpretation of the Danish Conquest as a disruption in Anglo-Saxon history and Old English historiographical practice.[89]

Even the simple practice of continuing a copy of the *Chronicle* at his court ensured that Cnut was integrated into all aspects of Anglo-Saxon culture. The invading king's gesture of respecting the written tradition of Anglo-Saxon culture also allowed him to control and manipulate his own narrative; his chronicler could present the facts that were beneficial to his rule or compose alternative facts to ensure the strength of the bias.

The Encomium Emmae Reginae

The *Encomium Emmae Reginae* was commissioned sometime after Cnut's death by his second wife, Queen Emma. Alistair Campbell and Simon Keynes describe the *Encomium* as follows:

> The *Encomium Emmae Reginae* was written for the queen by an unidentified Flemish churchman – probably a monk from the abbey of Saint-Bertin, in Saint-Omer, Flanders – after the accession of Harthacnut in 1040, and after the return of Edward from Normandy to England in 1041, but before the death of Harthacnut in 1042.[90]

Although Emma was married to King Æthelred before her marriage to Cnut, the *Encomium* starts with the political context of the Danish invasion led by Swein Forkbeard and Cnut. It

[89] Sheppard, *Families of the King*, 119.

[90] Alistair Campbell trans. and Simon Keynes ed., *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), xiv.

then follows Cnut's reign and culminates with the reign of Emma's son, Harthacnut, as noted by Campbell and Keynes:

> The third part of the work is an account of the struggle for power in 1035-40, with much emphasis on the iniquity of Harold Harefoot, and culminating with a view of Queen Emma in her moment of glory at the beginning of the reign of Harthacnut (1040-2). Told in this way, it is a story which would have appealed most of all to Emma herself, and which might have helped to promote her interests in the early 1040s […] one cannot read the *Encomium* without understanding that it is highly politicised.[91]

Emma commissioned the *Encomium* to act as a platform on which she could present her propaganda. At this point in her life, it was beneficial to focus on her marriage to Cnut and exclude Æthelred completely. By portraying Cnut as her king and highlighting the positive side of his reign, Emma legitimised the rule of Harthacnut. Harthacnut's rule needed legitimising because there were many other claims to the throne, particularly from Emma's other sons from her marriage with her previous husband, hence the reason it was important to emphasise her allegiance to Cnut rather than Æthelred. With the production of the *Encomium* she was also able to solidify the royal social status she was accustomed to during her life, as she gained power with her position as the queen mother. In short, the *Encomium* was a piece of political propaganda which portrayed Cnut favourably in order to ensure that there was stability in the positions of her and her son, the new king.

Use of Propaganda in the Encomium Emmae Reginae

The *Encomium Emmae Reginae* used a different tone than the *Chronicle* in its discussion of Cnut. While the theme of loyalty between a king and his people was still emphasised in the *Encomium*, its intention was to legitimise Cnut's rule in order to solidify Queen Emma's position in society after Cnut's death and establish her son Harthacut as a legitimate king. Even though Queen Emma is the object of praise in this narrative, it starts with King Swein's invasion, in order to introduce and validate Cnut's reign, Sheppard states:

> The text self-consciously begins not with Emma, but with the story of Swein and the years leading up to the Danish Conquest. This prehistory is no unimportant prelude to the queen's own story, however; it occupies two of the three books. The encomiast concentrates on the ways in which the central figures of Cnut's and Æthelred's reigns are bound to each other. Though like the Anglo-Saxons, the Danes experience crisis at moments of succession and in father-son relationships,

[91] Campbell and Keynes, *Encomium*, xiv.

> the Danes, unlike the Anglo-Saxons, are able to overcome these difficulties through loyalty.[92]

The focus on the new English sovereign both before and after the conquest was important in establishing his right to reign on the English throne, it was achieved by showing the process of his accession. Cnut's introduction in the *Encomium* shows his loyalty in supporting his father, whilst also suggesting he was not fully supportive of the English invasion as illustrated by the encomiast:

> And so having summoned Knútr, his elder son, he began to inquire what his views were concerning this matter. He, questioned by his father, fearing to be accused, if he opposed the proposal, of wily sloth, not only approved of attacking the country, but urged and exhorted that no delay should hold back the undertaking.[93]

Cnut's enthusiasm for the invasion was turned into a piece of defensive propaganda. By insinuating that Cnut's willingness to fight was actually an act of loyalty to his father, the encomiast adapts a problematic fact –Cnut's active involvement in the invasion– into a moment in which Cnut is both respected in his actions and respectful of his father.

Another way in which the *Chronicle* and the *Encomuim* differ is the intended purpose of the texts and their use of propaganda. The *Chronicle* is a collective of narratives which was used as a platform on which various kings (or their chroniclers) could present their propaganda within a historical record. Even though the *Æthelred-Cnut Chronicle* only appears in the C,D, and E manuscripts of the *Chronicle*, it is included within a wider tradition of chronicle writing. On the other hand, Stafford believes the *Encomium* was only ever intended to be a stand-alone propaganda device:

> The consecutive narrative traditions of English historical writing date from the mid eleventh century. From the mid-1030s the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* provided detailed, but now differing accounts. Perhaps earlier than these is the *Encomium Emmae Reginae* of 1041. This is the first of a relatively new breed of *pieces justificatives*, virtually propagandist works which increase in number in this century.[94]

History in the *Chronicle* was adaptable depending on the chronicler's allegiance. On the other hand, the *Encomium* did not have to follow a set template as the continuations of the *Chronicle* did.

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[92] Sheppard, *Families of the King*, 119.

[93] Campbell and Keynes, *Encomium*, 11.

[94] Stafford, *Unification and Conquest*, 16.

Evidence of history's subjectivity can be seen in the *Encomium*'s narrative of Cnut's accession:

> To hasten on to other matters, and turn my pen to the death of Sveinn in order to illuminate the beginning of the happy reign of King Knútr. For, when the king who has been often referred to [Sveinn] was enthroned over the whole country of the English, and when already scarcely anyone resisted him, he survived for a period which was short, although it was glorious. Feeling, therefore that the dissolution of his body was threatening him, he summoned his son Knútr, whom he had with him, and said that he must enter upon the way of all flesh. He exhorted him much concerning the government of the kingdom and the zealous practice of Christianity, and, thanks be to God, committed the royal sceptre to him, the most worthy of men.[95]

Unlike the brief *Chronicle* entries, the *Encomium* consists of long and explanatory passages, this allowed the encomiast to include elements of minute detail which contributed to a prominent bias. The Danish invader's accession was portrayed as an extremely happy moment for all, despite the death of his father. Swein's reign had been glorious and Cnut was dutifully taking over as the rightful heir and worthiest candidate. The writer infused this passage with praise of Cnut's loyalty and religious imagery which presented him as the image of ideal kingship; an important factor in legitimising his reign. Another element in legitimising Cnut's rule was the emphasis on "the happy reign of King Knútr," if the author could establish a bias which convinced the readers Cnut's reign was nothing but peace and happiness, there would be no need to question his son's accession.

Cnut's death in the *Encomium*, like his succession, aimed to promote a sense of love, loyalty, and religious devotion, although this time the loyalty stemmed from his subjects, the encomiast writes:

> And so this great king, after he had returned from Rome, and had lingered in his own kingdom some little time, having well arranged all matters, passed to the Lord, to be crowned upon his right hand by God himself the creator of all. Therefore all who had heard of his death were moved, and especially his own subjects, of whom the majority wold have wished to die with him, if this had not have been at variance with the divine plan.[96]

Again, the focus was on Cnut's standing as a Christian leader which was described in extremely exaggerated terms: "crowned upon his right hand by God himself the creator of all." In Biblical terms, Jesus Christ occupies the place at God's right hand, meaning that the chronicler could

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[95] Campbell and Keynes, *Encomium*, 15.

[96] *Ibid*., 39.

have been equating Cnut with divinity; his rule was legitimate because it was accepted by God. Additionally, the exaggerated religious imagery acted as a blanket cover to obscure any doubts about the state of the country or his successor. The monarch's death was also depicted as a moment to signify his loyalty and integration into Anglo-Saxon society once and for all, the encomiast states: "Knútr was dead and honourably buried in the monastery built at Winchester in honour of St. Peter."[97] The author made sure to note that Cnut – like the other great kings of England – was buried in the land of his people, not his original homeland. Marafioti states that it was extremely important that Cnut's burial place was in England:

> Although an erased passage in the *Encomium Emmae* may reflect some controversy surrounding the king's resting place, the grave remained secure enough that his son and widow would later be buried beside him in what remained one of the most prestigious royal mausolea in England. In his nearly twenty years on the throne, Cnut reinvented himself as a legitimate Christian ruler of England, and the fact that he was buried in his adopted realm rather than in Denmark suggests that he and his survivors were intent on perpetuating his identity as a rightful king of England and legitimate heir to the West Saxon dynasty.[98]

The inclusion and highlighting of Cnut's burial in England was not merely a bias to prove his loyalty to the country; it was a vital propaganda technique designed to solidify his place as an Anglo-Saxon leader. Legitimising his rule as a continuation of the West Saxon dynasty was extremely important as his heirs were not in England at the time of his death. Harthacnut was ruling on the continent and needed every promotion, be it via propaganda or not, in order to successfully claim the throne of England.

In brief, both the *Chronicle* and the *Encomium* incorporate various forms of propaganda which aim to legitimise Cnut's reign and include him alongside the great English Christian leaders throughout history. While both texts promoted Cnut, the *Chronicle* included propaganda favourable to Cnut during his reign which helped stabilise his kingship. Whereas, the *Encomium* consisted of a positive portrayal of Cnut for the benefit of his remaining family members, the bias – although an encouraging one – did not actually benefit Cnut himself. Both text also emphasised the importance of Cnut's devotion to Christianity. Christian ideals were a huge component of ideal kingship, which was an important status to secure for Cnut. The emphasis on his dedication to Christianity also allowed the reader to draw parallels between

[97] Campbell and Keynes, *Encomium*, 39.

[98] Marafioti, *The King's Body*, 196.

the reigns of Alfred and Cnut. The parallels between Alfred and Cnut may also be more prominent to a modern-day reader due to the fact that there were many common techniques used by the two king's chroniclers in order to create a positive bias. Finally, if the Danish king could be considered as great as Alfred, he was surely a legitimate ruler of England. The historiographical texts on Cnut moulded the facts in order to portray their own version of events and promote the new king and his heirs as the future lineage of English kings.

Chapter 4: William the Conqueror

As his famous nickname suggests, William of Normandy was a conqueror. His violent invasion did not culminate in integration as Cnut's did. Instead, he abruptly seized control and imposed a new and unwelcome ruling system on the country which was enforced throughout his reign from 1066-1087. As a result, William was hated by the English and this dislike is overtly reflected in the *Chronicle* entries for his rule. William was a firm ruler and rebellions were futile, the *Chronicle* was one form of propaganda used to criticise and oppose William's reign. The *Chronicle* provides an outlet for the trauma caused by the invasion as discussed by Courtnay Konshuh and Ryan Lavelle:

> The *Chronicles* were a way for the English to process their contemporary world. Especially traumatic cases, such as foreign conquests, could be fitted into this continuing history, making sense of loss and providing an example for recovery. Dying for your lord was a noble action, legendary in its importance and vital to the cohesiveness of Anglo-Saxon society. In the wake of conquest, however, dying for a lord who lost had lost […] was no longer culturally or tactically advisable. This was especially true for those on the losing side against William, who brutally put down every rebellion against his rule. In the face of this new order, post-Conquest Anglo-Saxons needed to find another way to express their cultural identity.[99]

The *Chronicle* provided a means to carry on expressing Anglo-Saxon identity, since it continued to be written in the vernacular, whilst the language of politics and the elite had changed to French with the insertion of new nobility. This chapter will explore the ways in which propaganda was used to oppose William and to voice displeasure at his reign.

The bias evident in historiographical writings during the Conqueror's reign is different from the forms of propaganda discussed in all the previous chapters because it was possibly written within William's household, yet it was composed within new political system that was disliked. In other words, the chronicler may have written the negative William annals while still in service to the king. The *Chronicle* was intended to be read by the Anglo-Saxon's during William's reign – as suggested by the continued use of the vernacular – it was not aimed at a Norman readership. While the identity of the William annalist is not known, Brooks suggests that although he compiled the annals in one go, he had access to an exemplar with annals written almost contemporaneously to the events:

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[99] Courtnay Konshuh and Ryan Lavelle, "Chronicles of the Conquered," *History Today* 66 (2016): 15.

> We therefore do not have here annals that were being contemporaneously updated in stints of one or of a few years. D may, however, preserve some trace that annals written in annual stints did reach the clergy of Archbishop Ealdred of York (1061–9), with whom the later stages of this manuscript seem to have been connected. Moreover the complex and changing way in which D seems to conflate material that is now extant in C and E might most easily be explained by the supposition that this conflation had been taking place in the royal household. There a royal priest, perhaps recruited from Ealdred's following could have seen the annals being circulated by other royal priests.[100]

The William chronicler compiled and possibly expanded annals written during the conquest. The William annals narrate the invasion and deterioration of Anglo-Saxon ideals which, as Sheppard illustrates, results in Williams's destruction of the country:

> The William annalist suggests that the reasons for the loss of Anglo-Saxon lordship culture lie among the Anglo-Saxons themselves and portrays the Norman Conquest as a series of events that foreclose any return to the discourses of identity and ideal lordship articulated earlier in the Alfred and Aethelred-Cnut annals. And this particular perspective leads to an account in which the actions William takes to secure his new kingdom are given a new and more sinister significance.[101]

The *Chronicle* offers a particularly biased perspective of William because he represented the end of the Anglo-Saxon era and highlighted their disunity.

Although culture and ideals were abruptly changed with the conquest of 1066, a few manuscripts of the *Chronicle* were continued. The most important annals for the years immediately following the conquest occur in MS D because they are thought to have been based on annals written during the invasion. David Bates discusses the importance of MS D when studying sources that are contemporary to William's rule:

> The literary creativity of the years immediately after the Battle of Hastings is a commentary on its multiple consequences and on their turbulence […] The section of the 'D' *Chronicle* that deals with these years has long been seen as possessing a contemporaneity that makes it likely that it was based on a text written close to events and subsequently revised.[102]

Therefore, this chapter will use MS D as the main source for the invasion and the first years of William's reign because it was based on the most contemporaneous Anglo-Saxon

[100] Brooks, "Why Is the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* About Kings," 56.

[101] Sheppard, *Families of the King*, 121.

[102] David Bates, *William the Conqueror* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 211.

historiographical text. MS D concluded during William's reign leaving MS E as the soul continuation, as Brooks explains:

> After D's last extant annal for 1079, we are left with just a single text of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, now represented by the E manuscript, and we cannot proceed by focusing our attention upon passages that are common to several manuscripts. E's content can still, however, tell us something about its composition […] The writer identifies himself as one who had been, but no longer was, part of a larger group in William's household.[103]

Therefore, MS E will be referred to for the latter half of William's reign because it is the only text still in circulation. It also offers the uniquely biased perspective of a writer that was acquainted with William's household.

William's invasion process

One form of propaganda present in the William annals of MS D, was the inclusion of descriptions that tarnished the invader's character. Marc Morris discusses the characteristics that have been attributed to William in order to create a biased depiction: "if Harold is the doomed Hero, it follows that William is the cunning villain and therefore must possess the full panoply of villainous characteristics: authoritarian, duplicitous, mirthless and cruel."[104] The Conqueror is stereotyped from the outset, he is never presented as a heroic king. Instead, he is depicted as a villain, as can be seen in his first mention in the *Chronicle* which is found in the annal for the year 1066: "King Harold […] gathered a greater raiding ship-army and also raiding land-army than any king here in the land had ever done before, because he was informed that William the Bastard wanted to come here and win this land."[105] William's introduction in the *Chronicle* was as "the Bastard," this was a term he was known by – as it was factually correct – but, the name did not inspire respect, for a more neutral introduction, Earl William (as he was known before his coronation) would have sufficed. Instead, the chronicler introduced the idea of a bastard invading England. This derogatory title attached an additional bias to William, as a bastard – whether he was royal or not – he would not have been considered a legitimate candidate for king. Nevertheless, William took the throne by force and was rewarded with an unfavourable portrayal in the *Chronicle*.

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[103] Brooks, "Why Is the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* About Kings," 56-57.

[104] Marc Morris, "The Conqueror Reassessed," *History Today* 66 (2016): 43.

[105] Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 195-197.

The chronicler seized every opportunity to criticise William, his depiction of the coronation in annal 1066 of MS D, for instance, was not a favourable one:

> Then on Midwinter's Day Archbishop Aldred consecrated him king in Westminster; and he gave his hand on it and on *Christ's* book, and also swore, before he [Aldred] would set the crown on his head, that he would hold this nation as well as the best of any kings before him did, if they would be loyal to him. Nevertheless he charged men a very stiff tax, and then in the spring went across to Normandy […] Bishop Odo and Earl William were left behind here, and they built castles widely throughout this nation, and oppressed the wretched people; and afterwards it always grew very much worse.[106]

The new king is described as immediately breaking his promise to the English people, which was a propaganda technique the chronicler used to make the reader prejudiced against William's rule from the outset.

From the very start, William adopted an oppressive reign; a reign which the Anglo-Saxons viewed as dishonourable. Bates suggests that "when its [annal 1066] powerful contemporary feel is taken into account, it becomes tantamount to a statement that William had almost immediately broken his oath to Ealdred and was failing to treat his new English subjects equitably."[107] William's failure in the eyes of the Anglo-Saxons was reflected in annal 1066, there is a sense of anger at William and commiseration for the Anglo-Saxons' new position in society. The new monarch did not govern in a similar fashion to previous kings as he promised, but imposed his own system with strict taxes. Hugh Thomas explains the chronicler's view on the taxations imposed by the newly crowned foreign ruler:

> From the writer's point of view, heavy taxation clearly did not represent good government, but William might have replied that such taxation was a well established tradition by 1066. Moreover, William's stipulation soon gave him an excuse to ignore his oath, for the English were not particularly loyal to him in the years following the coronation.[108]

As Thomas mentions, the chronicler presents William's government of the country as unbeneficial to the Anglo-Saxons, but it was also an extremely biased perspective. The chronicler was very quick to remark on William's failure to uphold his promise, but does not include any mention of English rebellion at this point in the *Chronicle*. Alternatively, the

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[106] Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 200.

[107] Bates, *William the Conqueror*, 261.

[108] Hugh M. Thomas, *The Norman Conquest: England After William the Conqueror* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 58.

chronicler's overt inclusion of the oath could also be seen as a propaganda technique that was, as Bates suggests, intended to control William and bind him to his word:

> The preparatory oath exacted from William by Ealdred before his coronation that he would rule like the best of previous kings represents both an attempt to control William and to set the English on a course for redemption. The subsequent criticisms of William, which include excessive taxation, the breaking of promises, oppression and the unnecessary taking of life, were not patriotic resentment of an unwelcome newcomer – although they may have been that as well – but above all a critique of a king who was failing to live up to Ealdred's and others' expectations.[109]

The entry attempted to both bind the new leader to his oath and criticise his failure when he broke it. By actively choosing not to include the English people's half of the broken agreement, the chronicler produced a strong bias which indicated that William was untrustworthy and possibly indifferent towards his English subjects.

Part of William's invasion process – after the battle of Hastings – was to build castles in potentially rebellious areas. The building of defensive castles was not always well received by the Anglo-Saxons as it was a physical reminder of the invasion as the annal of 1067 insinuates: "then when the king was informed that his people in the north had gathered together and would stand against him if he came, he went to Nottingham and built a castle there, and so went to York, and there built two castles, and in Lincoln, and everywhere in the region."[110] Although there is no direct criticism in this entry, the chronicler detailed the building of many castles as though it were an excessive reaction to the threat of rebellion. There is a subtle suggestion that building defensive castles instead of facing the Anglo-Saxon rebellion head on was dishonourable and was an overt proclamation of William's conquest. Marafioti claims that the building of castles "may […] have been perceived as a symbol of colonisation."[111] The fact that the chronicler bothered to mention the building of castles proves that it was important to the Anglo-Saxons. Moreover, William's overt display of dominance created an opening for the chronicler to use the invading king's defensive strategy as a propaganda technique in order to portray him as an arrogant and unlikable king.

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[109] David Bates, "The Conqueror's Earliest Historians and the Writing of His Biography," in *Writing Medieval Biography, 750–1250: Essays in Honour of Frank Barlow*, ed. David Bates, Julia Crick, and Sarah Hamilton (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2006), 131.

[110] Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 202.

[111] Marafioti, *The King's Body*, 237.

Parallels in biases surrounding William and Æthelred

While William and Æthelred had vastly different ruling tactics, they are both portrayed unfavourably in the *Chronicle*. There are some remarkable similarities in the techniques used by the chroniclers to create a general negative bias which runs through the two narratives. It could be argued that the William chronicler is influenced by the Æthelred chronicler's techniques of discrediting a king, which can be seen in the emphasis of William's promise to the people. This stress on William's promise immediately invokes memories of Æthelred returning from exile and promising to treat his people better than he had previously, if they too would promise to be loyal to him. By equating William's coronation with Æthelred, the chronicler suggested that William's rule would not be beneficial to the Anglo-Saxon people.

Not only was William equated with Æthelred, but his subjects were portrayed as making the same mistakes – when it came to William's invasion – as Æthelred did when confronting the Danes. These mistakes can be seen in the MS D entry for 1066:

> Earl William went back again to Hastings, and waited there to see whether he would be submitted to; but when he realized that no-one was willing to come to him, he went inland with all of his raiding-army which was left to him and [what] came to him afterwards across the sea, and raided all that region he travelled across until he came to Berkhamsted. And there came to meet him Archbishop Aldred, and Prince Edgar, and Earl Edwin, and Earl Morcar, and all the best men from London; and they submitted from necessity when the most harm was done – and it was great folly that it was not done thus earlier.[112]

Just as Æthelred failed to pay taxes until the Danes had caused a great deal of harm, the remaining leaders of the Anglo-Saxons did not submit to William until after he had caused a great deal of damage. Although the Anglo-Saxons' late submission cannot be seen as a criticism of William, it added to the sense of unease constructed by the chronicler which suggested that William's reign – like Æthelred's – was not going to be beneficial to the Anglo-Saxon people. The early defiance of the Anglo-Saxons in not submitting to William after the battle of Hastings was the consequence of a resentment towards kings which can be seen to start during Æthelred's reign. Stafford explains that "the experience of foreign rule under Cnut and his sons and a long history of growing royal exactions had been fostering the consciousness which now became articulate. Uneasiness with royal power was there in the sources for Æthelred's reign."[113] Uneasiness with kingship started during Æthelred's reign and eased again

[112] Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 200.

[113] Stafford, *Unification and Conquest*, 22.

after Cnut's successful invasion and integration into society, the worries began to resurface in William's reign due to his actions as king. By using common techniques to create a negative portrayal, the chronicler suggested that the trouble and unease that had started in Æthelred's reign would continue through William's and he was therefore not an image of ideal kingship.

One way in which the general negative atmosphere was created was by mentioning the Conqueror alongside disastrous events, such as that seen in the annal for the year 1067: "here the king came back to England on the Feast of St Nicholas. And that day Christ Church in Canterbury burned down."[114] This entry is reminiscent of the flooding and natural disasters that were frequently described during Æthelred's reign. Even though William was in no way connected to the fire, by presenting it alongside the sovereign's return the chronicler was able to create an image of unsafe leadership which is discussed by Sheppard:

> The story of William, his lordship and the land begins in the annal for 1067 […] William returns to England on St Nicholas's Day, and Christ's Church in Canterbury burns down. The two events are not causally linked, but exploiting *Chronicle* style conventions – they are linked with the conjunction 'and' – the annalist suggests, without stating, that one might be seen as a consequence of the other, and that both are symbols of an oncoming doom.[115]

In other words, the chronicler connected the two separate events as a propaganda technique in order to cast doubt on the success of William's coming reign. This technique was especially effective during the foreign king's reign because he often visited Normandy, meaning the chronicler could strategically place these events alongside William's return. It could be argued that had a disaster not occurred in this year, the annalist could have fitted this comparison into any other annal that featured William returning to England alongside a disaster of some sort; it is a fine example of the incorporation of 'fake news,' the two events are accurate but disconnected, their parallel presentation implicitly links them in order to implicate William.

William versus rebellions

The English attempted multiple rebellions during the reign of King William, all of which he quelled. The chronicler recorded rebellions in a strange manner. Unsurprisingly, he highlighted William's barbaric responses to rebellions. However, he also included an atmosphere of

[114] Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 200.

[115] Sheppard, *Families of the King*, 135.

hopelessness in connection to the Anglo-Saxons because he knew the rebellions would always fail. A pessimistic tone infiltrates the entries on rebellion, such as annal 1068 in MS D:

> Here in this year King William gave Earl Robert the earldom over Northumberland, but the local men surprised him inside the stronghold at Durham, and killed him and 900 men with him. And immediately after that the ætheling Edgar came to York with all the Northumbrians and the men of the stronghold made peace with him. And King William came upon them by surprise from the south with a streaming raiding-army and put them to flight, and then killed those who could not flee – that was several hundreds of men; and also ravaged and humiliated all the others.[116]

The chronicler seems to accept that William would inevitably defeat the rebels, whilst he simultaneously criticises William for crushing the rebellion so mercilessly.

The manifold rebellions that occurred throughout William's reign were always reported in a biased manner and depicted William's reaction in an unfavourable light. The entry for the year 1076 includes another rebellion which William was forced to confront:

> Earl Roger was there, and Earl Waltheof, and bishops and abbots, and there they planned that they would drive out their royal lord from his kingdom. And this soon became known to the king in Normandy. Earl Ralph and Earl Roger were principles in this foolish plan, and they seduced the Bretons to them, and sent also to Denmark for a raiding-ship army to support them. And Roger travelled west to his earldom and gathered his people to the king's detriment, as he thought, but it turned out to their own great harm. Ralph, also, wanted to go forward with his earldom, but the castle-men which were in England, and also the local people, came against them and hindered them in everything so they did nothing […] And the king afterwards came to England and seized his relative, Earl Roger, and set him in prison. And Earl Waltheof travelled across the sea, and confessed, and asked forgiveness and offered treasures. But the king made light of it until he came to England – and then he had him taken afterwards.[117]

In this entry, the chronicler still acknowledged the foolishness of the rebellion and suggested that it was right for the monarch to react. Nevertheless, the chronicler tarnished any positive light the uprising may have thrown on William by highlighting his unreliability. This annal draws attention to the fact the Conqueror imprisoned his relative: Earl Roger. Lack of respect for one's family members is discussed unfavourably throughout the *Chronicle*, for instance Æthelred is criticised for his lack of respect towards his half-brother, Edward. In fact, by emphasising William's betrayal of his relative the chronicler uses another similar method of discrediting a king as the Æthelred chronicler – Æthelred was unwilling to avenge the murder

[116] Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 203.

[117] *Ibid*., 211.

of Edward. The inclusion of this event is used as another form of propaganda to cast William in an unfavourable light because, like Æthelred, William did not respect or honour his family members which suggested he was not a respectable man. Additionally, his honour is also questioned in this entry because he deceived Earl Waltheof into returning to England under the guise of forgiveness in order to capture him. As Sheppard explains:

> When the king returns, Waltheof is captured and then beheaded. Though we might want to read Waltheof's rebellion as an act of resistance […] the annalist prohibits any valorization of Waltheof and his resistance. Indeed, the story of Waltheof and William is part of the general disregard for the ideals of Anglo-Saxon lordship.[118]

In this entry, the chronicler showed that William was at fault because he did not adopt the Anglo-Saxon lordship ideals, but that the Anglo-Saxons also abandoned their ideals and did not respect the invader as their leader. Overall, the chronicler included these critical details in order to demonstrate that William was not a trustworthy ruler.

The portrayal of William in manuscript E

The E manuscript of the *Chronicle* includes long and detailed entries from William's reign – particularly the latter half. MS E was written in a similar tone to MS D meaning it also incorporated propaganda to create a bias against William. Additionally, the chronicler of MS E is thought to have been a member of William's household through some – if not all – of William's reign. Brooks states: "we do not know whether this author had left the royal household on the death of his lord, King William, or already at some earlier date."[119] We do however, know that the chronicler was at some point a member of the royal household, which means the chronicler had access to a great deal of information surrounding William. MS E includes many Church related annals, it differentiates between the Norman churches founded and supported by William, and the Anglo-Saxon churches which were often persecuted and had their leadership positions filled by Normans. The general lack of regard concerning the Anglo-Saxon Church during William's reign can be seen in MS E's annal 1083:

> One day the abbot strode into *chapter* and spoke against the monks and wanted to ill treat them, and sent for laymen and they came into the *chapter* fully armed upon the monks. And then the monks were very afraid of them, and did not know what they should do, but scattered. Some ran into the church and locked the doors against them; and they went after them into the minster, and wanted to drag them out since they dare not go out. But a pitiful thing happened there that day, in that the French men broke into the choir and pelted the alter where the monks were; and some of

[118] Sheppard, *Families of the King*, 139.

[119] Brooks, "Why Is the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* About Kings," 56.

> the knights went to the upper floor and shot arrows down towards the sanctuary […] what more can we say, but that they shot fiercely, and the others broke down doors there, and went in and did some of the monks to death, and wounded many in there, so that the blood came down from the alter onto the steps, and from the steps onto the floor.[120]

While William was not directly mentioned in this annal, it added to the building criticism surrounding his reign and highlighted his lack of respect for the Anglo-Saxon Church. The chronicler draws specific attention to the fact the attackers were French, and some of them were knights. Therefore, either the Norman king did not have control over his knights, or he did not care if they attacked an Anglo-Saxon church; either way this narrative shows that William was not a good king for England.

In the MS E entry for the year 1086 – the year of William's death – the chronicler writes of William in an extremely derogatory manner: "the king and the principle men greatly loved, and over-greatly, greed in gold and in silver, and did not care how sinfully it was got as long as it came to them."[121] William is criticised for his harsh taxations and it is biased in its representation by insinuation that all tax was collected because of William's greed. However, shortly after, the chronicler's tone changed completely and he mourned the king's death and honoured his reign. The same annal of 1086 states:

> The king William, about whom we speak, was a very wise man, and very powerful, and more worshipful and stronger than any of his predecessors were. He was kind to those good men who loved God, and stern beyond all measures to those men who opposed his will.[122]

Here the chronicler suddenly praised William for his successful kingship – a success which the chronicler contested greatly throughout his writing – and accepted that William was a stern but fair king. This could be evidence to suggest the chronicler was combining a number of different continuations with contradicting views and that he incorporated them both into the same entry.

There are many forms of criticism in both MS D and E. Bates states that taxation is the chroniclers' main form of criticism in both manuscripts:

> As we have seen, the geld of 1084 and the probable geld of 1086 were the subject of the 'E' *Chronicle*'s criticisms of William's rule, just as those at those at the start

[120] Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 214-215.

[121] *Ibid*., 218.

[122] *Ibid*., 219.

> of the reign had been of the 'D' *Chronicle* […] all this draws attention to the avarice and money grabbings so forcefully criticized by the author of the 'E' *Chronicle*.[123]

In short, it seems as though the E chronicler attempted to give William an honourable epitaph, but he could not abandon the carefully created bias and the Anglo-Saxon aversion to taxation that had infiltrated his writing. The entry also includes an interesting poem about the Norman king which comes after the praise of his achievements. The poem added to the negative bias surrounding William in the *Chronicle*:

> He had castles built
> and wretched men oppressed.
> The king was so very stark
> and seized from his subject men many a mark
> of gold, and more hundreds of pounds of silver
> that he took by weight, and with great injustice
> from his land's nation with little need.
> he was fallen into avarice,
> and he loved greediness above all.[124]

The poem provides blatant criticism of William within an entry that was torn between creating an epitaph that befitted a king, and negatively labelling William's reign once and for all, in order to highlight the cruelty that took place during his rule, and appease the Anglo-Saxons' anger at the conquest. The inclusion of the poem is a propaganda technique which demonstrated that the Anglo-Saxons still did not respect William, or accept his kingship at the end of his reign.

To conclude, the annals spanning the reign of William the Conqueror had a predominantly negative bias. William's kingship was never accepted by the Anglo-Saxons because he represented the end of Anglo-Saxon leadership. Although there had been previous invaders to hold the position of king – such as Cnut – they had integrated into Anglo-Saxon society and upheld lordship traditions. William on the other hand, took the country by force when the people of England would not submit to him after his initial victory at Hastings; in return he was villainised in Anglo-Saxon historiographical texts – namely the *Chronicle*. The chronicler used William's dominance and support of the Norman Church as material for propaganda which played a part in sculpting an overall bias against his reign. William had to subdue many rebellions and, while the chronicler recognised that he was right in stopping them, William still

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[123] Bates, *William the Conqueror*, 504-506.

[124] Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 220-221.

ends up being portrayed as the villain, whether it be because he was too harsh in his punishment, or because he enforced heavy taxation. Either way, minor details from William's reign are emphasised in the *Chronicle* and used to justify the chronicler's claim that William's kingship would be bad for England. The chronicler also incorporated a sense of doom into William's rule by placing unconnected disasters alongside details of William's life so that they appeared to be linked and therefore showed that William was bringing destruction to England. In brief, the chronicler actively manipulated the facts surrounding William in order to make him appear to have unreliable kingship practices.

Conclusion

Anglo-Saxon historiographical texts were often extremely propagandic in nature because individual kings used them as a means of promoting their kingship. In some cases, annalists would alter past narratives and re-write sections of history with the benefit of hindsight in order to provide an advantageous contrast for later kings. This thesis has discussed four kings whose appearance in historiographical texts are extremely biased in one form or another: Alfred, Æthelred, Cnut and William. Alfred and Cnut may have been in contact with their chroniclers and had a degree of control over what was written in the *Chronicle* which meant they were able to create a positive bias. William and Æthelred on the other hand, did not – or were not able to – assert any influence over their chroniclers and, as a consequence, have been written about in unfavourable terms. Furthermore, this thesis has included an important comparative aspect in relation to the propaganda techniques used throughout the *Chronicle*. It has successfully highlighted common methods of incorporating certain forms of bias into Anglo-Saxon historiography in order to sculpt favourable or detrimental images of kingship.

Alfred and Cnut are portrayed in similar terms; all of the historiographical texts explored in this thesis – the *Chronicle*, Asser's *Life*, and the *Encomium* – aim to legitimise the rule of both kings. The *Chronicle* and Asser's *Life*, use propaganda to establish Alfred's right to the throne by emphasising his important lineage and link to Christianity. This bias enabled Alfred to be ranked amongst the most important leaders of his era. The *Chronicle* also presents Alfred as the image of ideal kingship as he is never described as making a wrong decision or failing in his defence of the country; he is either depicted as the brave hero that won against all odds, or the valiant defender who tried his hardest but could not be expected to win an impossible fight. Meanwhile, the chronicler of the *Æthelred-Cnut Chronicle* imitated the technique of highlighting Alfred as a pious and religious king and applied that method to Cnut. By accentuating Cnut's dedication to the English Church, Cnut's chronicler was able to depict Cnut as an invader who had been accepted and welcomed by his new subjects. The propaganda in the *Encomium* is also centred around legitimising Cnut's reign, even though it was written a short while after his reign and with the intention of legitimising the reign of his son: Harthacnut. The *Encomium* creates a bias which illustrates the glory and success of Cnut's rule, it therefore insinuates that he was the image of ideal kingship because his people were prosperous and happy. It is evident that similar traits occur in the portrayals of both monarchs. The chroniclers used common propagandic techniques to create a positive bias with the aim of depicting their ruler in the best light possible and cementing them in history as images of ideal kingship.

In contrast to Alfred and Cnut's positive portrayals, Æthelred and William are described in extremely unfavourable terms. The surviving annals on Æthelred were actually written during Cnut's reign and the original narrative is likely to have been completely subdued. We cannot surmise what the original Æthelred annals may have contained, but the surviving *Æthelred-Cnut Chronicle* paints a picture of an incompetent king who was unable to protect his country or the Church from the onslaught of invasion. Æthelred is portrayed as ineffectual and often distant which resulted in the image of poor kingship because he did not appear to be running his own country. In some ways, both William and Æthelred are described as opposites of Alfred and Cnut, Æthelred did not successfully defend or honour the English Church and William directly opposed it. Moreover, the general bias in the annals of William and Æthelred present them in villainous terms in comparison to the heroic descriptions used to describe Alfred and Cnut. William headed a brutal invasion and abruptly changed many aspects of Anglo-Saxon society, the *Chronicle* acted as a means of objecting to William's reign. His kingship is not described favourably because it was not accepted by the Anglo-Saxons and his rule is described as being a disaster for England. Just as the chroniclers for Alfred and Cnut adopted similar traits in their writing techniques, so too did the annalists of Æthelred and the Conqueror. The chroniclers of the negative portrayals also employed common techniques in order to create an unfavourable bias surrounding the kingships they recorded.

This thesis has explored the use and introduction of propaganda into Anglo-Saxon historiographical texts. The use of written biases is an important area of study because it develops alongside the importance of written documents in society. This study has discovered that Anglo-Saxon writers were often extremely biased and multiple propaganda techniques were popular. Facts were malleable and could be adapted in order to present a specific perspective which benefited certain parties. The research for this thesis could have been widened to include non-Anglo-Saxon historiographical texts, such as Anglo-Norman chronicles. Or, the influence of propaganda in all Anglo-Saxon studies could have been included to provide wider analysis. The study of documents in the vernacular would have also revealed propaganda on a word level, but this thesis is able to provide a comparative angle without discussing the bias created by individual word choices. There is still a great deal to yield from the study of medieval propaganda, as the bias in writings is often touched upon among other research projects, but not explored in its own right. It would be interesting if further studies were able to explore the propaganda surrounding multiple kings or important figures in Anglo-Saxon England. Additionally, a particularly fascinating potential research

topic could be the identification of the earliest examples of propaganda within Anglo-Saxon texts.

In short, the writers of Anglo-Saxon historiographical texts can definitely be considered the pioneers of alternative facts. They included various propaganda methods – many of which are common in multiple annals or writings that employ the same positive or negative bias. The multiple techniques produced an overall bias aimed at promoting or discrediting a certain king. There were common strategies present in all the historiographical texts studied in this thesis, the most common one being the distortion or elimination of specific facts within important events. Interestingly, the distortion of facts was a method of incorporating propaganda that was employed in all areas, regardless of whether the bias the chronicler was creating was favourable or not. If an element did not match the overall image the writer was creating of the king – whether it was a positive or negative portrayal – it was simply left out or altered to match the general tone of the entries. In this respect, the Anglo-Saxons created their own form of 'fake news' and altered the facts to fit the purpose of their text. Therefore, we can conclude that the writers of Anglo-Saxon historiographical texts actively distorted history in order to create biased narratives to discredit certain leadership techniques, or promote the image of ideal kingship.

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