MEDIEVAL IMAGINATIONS: MEMORIES OF THE *ADVENTUS SAXONUM* IN THE OLD ENGLISH BEDE, THE ANGLO-SAXON CHRONICLE, AND WULFSTAN

by

KASSANDRA L. CONLEY

(Under the Direction of Jonathan Evans)

ABSTRACT

Although the process of defining the *Angelcynn* took place over many years and many texts, three specific narratives are exemplary for their ability to reflect a rapidly changing understanding of "Englishness" in the late Anglo-Saxon era—the Old English Bede, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, and Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*. Each text appropriates conventional narratives of migration, invasion, and conquest and, thus, reflects the Anglo-Saxons' changing role on the island. While the Old English Bede relies on Christian metaphor to explain the events that led to English hegemony, the other texts secularize the narrative of conquest to account for both the dominance of the Alfredian court and the losses of the English in the face of Danish invasions. These narratives represent a politicized myth of *adventus Saxonum* and, ultimately, Anglo-Saxon identity, which allowed for self-definition in pre-Norman Conquest England.

INDEX WORDS: *Adventus Saxonum*, Alfred, *Angelcynn*, The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Bede, English Identity, Gildas, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, The Old English Bede, Medieval Historiography, *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, Wulfstan

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DEDICATION

To my parents, Joseph and Kerri Conley, for their unwavering faith and for raising me in a house filled with books.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Chapter 1

Introduction

In a 2002 speech to the National Press Club, Lynne Cheney, second lady and former head of the National Endowment for the Humanities, recounted a tale of the heroics of Joshua Chamberlain, a Union soldier during the civil war. After giving a detailed account of Chamberlain's tale of valor, Cheney quickly asserted that American history education today is undergoing a crisis; too few history teachers and students talk about men like Chamberlain, men whose stories, she claims, teach us "how precious our freedom is and how well worth defending."[1] As her speech progressed, she accused history departments who challenge accepted, morally instructive national narratives of America of contrariness at best and demagoguery at worst. America is under assault, she claimed, by those who would insist the value of history is not to cultivate patriotic feelings among a nation's citizens but rather to question the "myth that the powerful use to keep everybody else in their place." She blames the slow decline of American historical studies on historians' supposed insistence that "it is a mistake to study those we think of as leaders… doing so perpetrates the myth that he represents something important to all of us--and there is nothing important to all of us. Our society consists of different groups with different interests, according to this view, and those who say otherwise are simply trying to make sure that the oppressed stay that way." Of course, Cheney is not alone in voicing these concerns about the future of American historical education. In recent years, the West and America in particular have suffered an identity

[1] For a full transcript of Cheney's speech, see Lynne Cheney, "Remarks by Lynne Cheney on History at the National Press Club," 02 July 2002 http://www.whitehouse.gov/mrscheney/news/20020702.html.

crisis. The emergence of postmodern theory and the influence of social historical methodology have challenged the way in which we view our past and shared cultural heritage. For some, the definition and heuristic value of history have come into question.[2] At the core of this debate is how we render historical narrative, either as a heroic epic of just and brave deeds or as a series of power struggles, committed by those with personal or ulterior motives. For some, scholars engaging in postcolonial and poststructuralist theories of language and power fail to uphold their duty as custodians of cultural heritage; for others, these same scholars are simply giving a voice to those history has silenced.

This debate has grave implications for the future of Anglo-Saxon studies, a field whose literature often reifies a heroic code and whose scholars have traditionally embraced this ethos. Throughout the history of the field, Anglo-Saxonists have romanticized the medieval past in attempts to justify Anglo-American or Germanic dominance both culturally and politically. For many students and scholars of Old English, the history of the Anglo-Saxon era has been pliable, called upon as proof of both inherent superiority and a reminder of how far the English and their descendants have come. In *Desire for Origins,* Allen Frantzen examines the roots of this romantic reinterpretation of pre-Norman Conquest England. He explains that this era provided a blank slate for those desiring to establish their cultural heritage as ancient and epic. Frantzen claims that "[t]he study of Anglo-Saxon texts and history was always undertaken by those who were engaged in the pursuit of self-definition" (Frantzen 20).

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[2] For a lucid and even-handed overview of the development of modern historical studies from its inception as an empirical science during the Enlightenment to the current effect postmodern thought has had on it, see Joyce Appleby, Lynne Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth About History* (New York: Norton, 1995).

Veiled by misinformation and a sense of mystery, the Middle Ages have become only a semi-historical time for those with a surplus of imagination, a place where King Arthur and King Alfred co-exist, perhaps even fighting Romans side by side. Medieval Studies have often given way to Medievalism, a phenomenon that rivals Orientalism for its reliance more on the perceived than the actual.[3] While the Middle Ages are frequently envisioned as the "Dark Ages," a frightful and frightening nadir between the cultural peaks of Classical Rome and the Renaissance, those with a serious interest in Anglo-Saxon culture have at times reconceived pre-Norman Conquest England as a proto-democratic idyll from which its descendents have strayed.

As Frantzen astutely observes, the medieval is often imagined as a place of origin, a mythical time in which contemporary Anglo-American identity established its roots. Perhaps more than any other field, increased interest in Anglo-Saxon studies has corresponded with the nationalistic desires of those who study it. For many, Anglo-Saxon England is a paragon, a lost time where heroic valor defined public life and Christian ethics merged with the Germanic notion of *comitatus*. John Niles has claimed an accurate history of Anglo-Saxon studies would ostensibly become a study of Anglo-Saxonism, the act of appropriating Anglo-Saxon imagery and traditions for political causes. He claims it

> would read as the story of a series of appropriations of greater or lesser magnitude. In such a narrative, what would be of most significance would not be Anglo-Saxon England 'as it was,' whatever that lost object of desire may have been. Instead, it would be the *idea* of Anglo-Saxon

[3] Medievalism and Orientalism developed concurrently, both as means to conceptualize cultural Others. While Orientalism fetishizes a geographic Other, Medievalism fetishizes a temporal Other. For further discussion about the affinities between the two phenomena, see Ganim 123-34.

> England, as that idea has been formed, transformed, consigned to oblivion, or reconceived anew during every successive era since the time of the Anglo-Saxons themselves. (208).

Indeed, the Anglo-Saxons often exist in the abstract rather than the concrete. Their cultural identity has seen many manifestations, ranging from savage warriors of the Dark Ages to proto-democratic statesmen in the cultural imagination. Their myths (and the myths surrounding them) have proven themselves politically expedient, used to give meaning and precedent to myriad political movements.

Many current Anglo-Saxon literary critics and historians have devoted themselves to studying not just Anglo-Saxon history but the phenomenon of Anglo-Saxonism as well.[4] These scholars explore how the memory of Anglo-Saxon England has gained political importance at various points in history as it has been adapted to give historical precedent to the present. For example, Lynda Pratt has explored how nationalist Regency writers appropriated the image of Alfred, "already an integral part of national history and of a growing, increasingly articulate and articulated national consciousness…a monarch who was part of the national myth," to connect an imagined democratic Anglo-Saxon nation with conservative early nineteenth-century English politics (139-40). Similarly, in *Racial Myth in English History*, Hugh MacDougall demonstrates how the Victorian fascination with the myth of Anglo-Saxon cultural superiority and its ties to nationalism "was seen as a justification of whatever is, a theory that in time was bound to be well

[4] In the past few years, several excellent essay collections have been published that give an extensive overview of appropriations of the Anglo-Saxon period, usually beginning with the Renaissance imagination of the medieval past. Most notable are the 2001 publication *Anglo-Saxonism and the Construction of Social Identity*, edited by Frantzen and John Niles, and the 2000 publication *Literary Appropriations of the Anglo-Saxon*, edited by Donald Scragg and Caroline Weinberg. In addition to these and Frantzen's *Desire for Origins*, Nicholas Howe's *Migration and Myth-Making in Anglo-Saxon England* and Hugh MacDougall's *Racial Myth in English History* closely examine the re-visioning of the Anglo-Saxon past that has occurred arguably since the Anglo-Saxon period.

received by statesman and industrialists set on imperial expansion and domination" (90). Others have shown how the burgeoning of Anglo-Saxon studies corresponded with the rise in both German Romanticism and white racial identity in the American South (Frantzen; VanHoosier-Carey). Nicholas Howe and Allen Frantzen have both written on Thomas Jefferson's fascination with Anglo-Saxon language and culture, exploring how Jefferson's admiration for the Anglo-Saxons may have influenced his support for the U.S. policy of Manifest Destiny. By looking back to the Anglo-Saxon past as heroic, those who practice Anglo-Saxonism can justify their own actions insofar as they mirror the deeds of their mythological predecessors.

While much of Anglo-Saxon history has been rewritten to justify numerous Anglo-American political movements, most wholly appropriated has been the myth of the *adventus Saxonum*, or the myth of the Anglo-Saxon invasion. First developed by Gildas in his sixth-century jeremiad *De Excidio Brittaniae* as a warning to and condemnation of the British who were suffering under Anglo-Saxon rule, it has been rewritten by countless others as a way of understanding and explaining imperialism as well as heroic valor. While the narrative of Anglo-Saxon invasion exists in many variations, playing key roles in both nationalistic English texts and the Arthurian tradition, its core elements remain the same. In its most elemental form, the myth of the *adventus Saxonum* details how three groups of Germanic peoples—the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes—led by the brothers Hengest and Horsa traveled from the continent at the behest of a British king (later given the name Vortigern). According to the tradition, this king, being unable to defend his people from the onslaught of the Irish and the Picts, petitioned the Germanic tribes to fight for the Britons in exchange for land. The Germanic peoples conceded but

soon realized that the vulnerability of those who had commissioned them and the fertility of the land compelled them to take the island for themselves. Perceiving their own military strength, Hengest and Horsa then summoned more ships of Germanic warriors to fight the British and colonize the land. Battles ensued, with the newcomers gaining control of the island. Since its inception, this tale has captured an attentive audience, functioning as a definite example of English military and moral superiority.

For centuries, historiographers and artists, politicians and poets have embellished this tale and identified it as the origin of English martial dominance, divine right to rule, and cultural supremacy. The myth of invasion has served as an ideal for a strong English nation during periods of imperialism and provided a fabled heroic past for those who desired it (Evans 54). Kathleen Davis has claimed that "[a] nation can never purely be ideal *before* it is 'real;' rather, the remembrance of its ideal existence *in the past* actualizes the possibility of its existence *in the present*" (621). For many modern writers of English history, the *adventus Saxonum* has served this purpose; as an originary moment, it gives meaning and substance to the present. However, while many contemporary Anglo-Saxon scholars have done much work examining the way in which writers of the Renaissance and beyond manipulated this myth to achieve political ends, little has been written on how the Anglo-Saxons themselves adapted the narrative of invasion to account for their own political hegemony. Several excellent studies have been written regarding the late medieval imagination of the early medieval past. Besides Davis, Howe's *Migration and Myth-making in Anglo-Saxon England* details how the mythical migration, invasion, and conquest inform Anglo-Saxon literature as diverse as the Old English *Exodus* and *Beowulf*. Niles comes close to acknowledging the early

importance of the migration myth when he claims that it has been "reconceived anew during every successive era since the time of the Anglo-Saxons themselves." By the late Anglo-Saxon period, the alleged events of the year 449 were distant, even then just a dusty cultural memory of how the English (at this point called the *Angelcynn*) came to be.

Although early English appropriation of its own mythical history occurred as early as Bede's eighth-century Latin *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, it is not until the tenth century that the legendary *adventus Saxonum* appears to have entered the cultural imagination and begun to inform both literary and religious texts. Sarah Foot has argued that this interest in an invented past derives from the political implications of Alfred's ascension to the throne and his creation of a West Saxon dynasty in the late ninth century. During this time, Alfred engaged in a campaign to unite all the Germanic kingdoms of the island under the banner of *Angelcynn* through emphasizing their common language, heritage, and history, including their shared mythological origins in the island (Foot 52). To accomplish this goal, Alfred initiated a literacy campaign in which important Latin works such as Orosius's *Historiarum adversum paganos libri VII* and Bede's *Historia* were translated into the vernacular. Notably, Alfred's campaign concentrated on vernacular history to unite the diverse groups who had come under his command. By literally rewriting history to reflect a common past for all English speakers, these texts effectively created a national mythology dependent on ethnic rather than religious communal identification (Discenza). Implicitly and explicitly, many of these texts incorporated elements of the narrative of Anglo-Saxon invasion, developing the burgeoning English identity as one defined by migration and conquest. Concurrently, other vernacular works such as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle appropriated the narrative as

well in order to provide support and show precedent for a united Germanic front against other ethnic groups on the island. These narrative revisions ultimately differed from each other but did work to serve one political end: justification for a coherent Anglo-Saxon identity and history that would prove itself formidable as the *Angelcynn* and their new unified West Saxon throne battled against both internal and external challenges.

In this essay, I hope to explore the ways in which the mythology surrounding the Anglo-Saxon invasion informed national consciousness. Although the process of defining the *Angelcynn* took place over many years and many texts, I will look at only three specific narratives that I believe are exemplary for their ability to reflect a rapidly changing understanding of "Englishness" in the late Anglo-Saxon era. In the first section, I will examine the myth of Anglo-Saxon invasion as it appears in the Old English Bede and discuss the ways in which this narrative sympathizes with the vanquished British rather than wholly supporting the actions of the Anglo-Saxon invaders. Essentially developed as an Anglicized version of Gildas's *De Excidio Brittaniae*, the Old English Bede, while borrowing from nationalistic rhetoric, remains more of a Christian allegory than a tale of English hegemony. In the second section, I will contrast the narrative of the Old English Bede to its analogue in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Though the Chronicle clearly used Bede as a source for its own account of the year 449, it re-invents the narrative, stripping it of any violent action of the Anglo-Saxons and any sympathy toward the Britons. In doing so, it becomes a sort of apologia for Anglo-Saxon dominance of the island and, arguably, the more "English" of the two texts. Finally, I will consider how these two narratives manifest themselves in Wulfstan's early eleventh-century *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*. In the face of Danish invasion, Wulfstan writes his own version of the

adventus Saxonum that incorporates both the violence of the Old English Bede and the nationalistic leanings of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in order to write a political allegory that re-imagines English mythical history as biblical metaphor. These narratives represent a politicized myth of Anglo-Saxon invasion and, ultimately, Anglo-Saxon identity, which allowed for self-definition in pre-Norman-Conquest England.

Chapter 2

The Role of the Old English Bede in Alfredian National Discourse

In the past decade, many Anglo-Saxon literary critics and historians have begun to reconsider the political impetus and consequence of the surge of vernacular historiography surrounding the reign of King Alfred. These scholars focus on the emergence of what they consider early English nationalism fostered by the translation campaign of ninth-century England. They convincingly separate themselves from traditional scholars of nationalism and the nation, who tend to view the creation of the nation-state as a product of the Enlightenment. They argue that while the reign of King Alfred certainly did not achieve the political and geographical unity that characterizes the modern nation, late Anglo-Saxon England saw itself as an ethnic, if not political, unit.[5] Blending poststructuralist and postcolonial theory with traditional literary and historical analysis, these scholars suggest that the development of the term *Angelcynn* reflects a growing awareness of the English as a cohesive people with shared history and customs that separate it from all other former and contemporary inhabitants of the island. Sarah Foot, for example, maintains that Alfredian rhetoric places an importance on the common language of *Englisc* to overcome ancestral tension and strife to unite the Germanic peoples of the island. Nicole Guenther Discenza and Stephen Harris examine the way in which Alfredian translations of Bede and Orosius, respectively, strip authority away from

[5] The impulse to view the medieval period as a site of national discourse has proven to be a controversial endeavor. Many scholars who criticize this methodology claim that because the nation is a modern invention, the argument for a postcolonial approach to the Middle Ages is at best ahistorical. However, several Anglo-Saxonists point to the developments of an English literature and King Alfred's unification campaign as evidence of the formation of a proto-English identity. For further discussion, see Howe; Discenza; Davis; Harris; Foot; Niles; and Thormann.

Latin texts not only to give new authority to English texts but also to create the illusion of a common history for all of those who speak the vernacular. Kathleen Davis argues that Alfred's *Preface to Pastoral Care* creates a sense of a questionably shared remembered past by consciously linking it to an undeniably shared active present. Nicholas Howe proposes that while a shared language distinguishes the Anglo-Saxons as a whole, the repeated references to the biblical account of Exodus and the voyage of a chosen people psychically bound the Anglo-Saxons through a common myth of migration. The link between language, narrative, and history is explicit throughout this scholarship. The creation of what we now know as the English people relies on not just commonly-accepted stories of origin or common language but stories written in the vernacular. For many scholars, the pre-eminent instance of blending nationalist story-telling and vernacular language has been the ninth-century Old English translation of Bede's eighth-century *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*. The Old English Bede fulfills this duty through developing what has become the definitive narrative of a mythical Anglo-Saxon heroic past dating back to the *adventus Saxonum* of the fifth century.

The Old English translation of Bede arose from Alfred's campaign to increase literacy and expand the corpus of English texts. Accurately, if somewhat simplistically, it reiterates the story Bede tells in Latin, that is the story of the English church and, in turn, the English people. Working from any extant documents and histories, folk legend, and biblical exempla, Bede narrates the history of the English from the period of Roman colonization of the island to his own time. Despite the *Historia*'s interest in the English church rather than the English people, this work has become a touchstone for all those interested in exploring a nascent English ethnic consciousness. However, Bede's

reluctance to portray secular Germanic power as faultless complicates this reading. Even after its translation into the vernacular, Bede's history remains Latinate, discussing a not-yet defined *gens Anglorum* rather than an *Angelcynn*. The tension created by Bede's desire to present accurate history and a national mythos for his own *gens* can be seen most clearly in his account of the Anglo-Saxon conquest. While Bede's sympathies ultimately lie with the Anglo-Saxon invaders, his biblical worldview complicates his allegiance as he compares the destruction of Britain to the destruction of Jerusalem, finally reflecting on the fate of the indigenous people forced to the wild and the sea. Bede's fidelity to his source Gildas, whose own version of the story explicitly damns the Anglo-Saxons as barbarians, also complicate an over-zealous reading of Bede as a nationalistic text. Bede's narrative does not imagine a heroic past without consequences; in fact, much of its language owes more to an elegaic tradition than to battle poetry extolling the virtues of *comitatus*. The story of the *adventus Saxonum* that the Old English Bede presents is less a history of English dominance than it is of the destruction of the British.

It may seem counterintuitive to suggest that Bede's history of the Anglo-Saxon invasion is not quite an English history. Scholars such as Howe, Discenza, and Alfred Smyth have noted the chauvinistic nature of Bede's narrative and his desire to recount not just an ecclesiastical history of the island that extends centuries beyond the *adventus Saxonum*, but rather the ecclesiastical history of the dominant group of the island; Bede is concerned not just with the history of Christianity but with the specific history of the Christianity of the *gens Anglorum*, the English people. Smyth has suggested that "[t]here can be no denying how a work such as Bede's *History*, with its Anglo-centric approach

and its paranoid sense of Anglian insecurity towards Welsh and Northern British neighbors, must indeed have exercised a powerful hold on educated English minds" (41). Indeed, the work as a whole implies an audience of *Angelcynn* seeking to defend its position as the rightful spiritual and proprietary owners of a land for which they have had to fight. Bede's narrative begins innocuously with reflections on the diversity of the island, as he introduces and explains the assorted crops, geographical landmarks, languages, and peoples who populate Britain. However, any suggestion that what follows will be a history of the island is soon dismissed. Bede reminds his audience that his history is not of the island but of one group who ascended to lordship over the land and church. The story of the first four centuries of Roman occupation is reduced to comparatively few highlights and functions as a prelude to the true action—the conversion of the Germanic settlers and the their transformation into the English inheritors of the island.

When we consider the further nationalistic implications of the ninth-century Old English Bede, the argument for Bede's influence on the burgeoning English nation seems even stronger. One can reasonably argue that the works whose translation Alfred commissioned must have had some significance for English unification; many scholars have expressed the idea that the religious or the historical knowledge Alfred considered essential for creating not only a vernacular corpus but also a body of texts whose study would create a national ethos.[6] For example, Sarah Foot has argued that

[6] See Kathleen Davis's "National Writing in the Ninth Century: A Reminder for Postcolonial Thinking About The Nation" for a cogent discussion of the viability of analyzing Anglo-Saxon England within the framework of contemporary postcolonial theory. In this essay, she demonstrates how the works of Benedict Anderson and Homi K. Bhabha should contribute to our understanding of early national language, literacy, and narration.

> the Alfredian rhetoric…advance[s] the notion that all the Germanic subjects of the West Saxon king were essentially one 'Englishkind'. The common identity of the West Saxons, Mercians, and the men of Kent was defined by…their common cause under one leadership in opposition to the Danes, but also more generally in the sense of one people with a common heritage, one faith, and a shared history. (52)

The chosen texts represented the communal customs and narratives that would be vital in establishing an *Angelcynn* and unifying various tribes with competing pasts; if the Germanic peoples of the island were to embrace Alfred as an English king rather than a West Saxon leader, it was necessary that they first accept the idea of a shared cultural heritage. Thus, it is notable that Bede's Latin history was included with classical texts and seen as perhaps the most fundamental in inventing an authoritative English identity: "the Old English Bede both draws on and supports the same sense of English history, and English pride, to which the other translations appealed" (Discenza 80). For ninth-century Anglo-Saxons, Bede represented a domestic voice that chronicled the history, both real and imagined, of a newly-formed people.

The Old English *Historia* succeeds not only at chronicling the developments of an English church but the unification of the Germanic tribes as well through language that implies their ethnic divisions are obsolete or, by the time of his writing, mythical. Stephen Harris has suggested that the translation "offered…both an imperial vision and an ethnic identity, a combination of both blood and faith that extends beyond the Anglo-Saxon Church into the very marrow of Anglo-Saxon identity" (483). Bede's translator most clearly asserts his allegiance by describing the mercenaries who respond to the call

from the original Anglo-Saxon warriors as an unstoppable troop when united around the common cause of acquiring a homeland; he describes the Germanic invaders as *unoferswiðendlic weorud þa hi togædere geþeodde wæron* "an invincible troop when they were united together" (14).[7] This last description emphasizes the strength of the Germanic tribes once they were *geþeodde*, "united" or literally "peopled" together, with all the nationalistic and linguistic implications of this word. Power and success only come for the Anglo-Saxons once they put aside ethnic and geographical barriers and act as a single unit.

In *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England*, Nicholas Howe takes this argument even further, suggesting that Bede and later his translator create not only a history for the English but also an explicitly mythical past. Bede, Howe argues, develops a migration myth out of historical and legendary tales of the *adventus Saxonum* in which he casts the migration of the Germanic tribes as an analogue of the biblical account of the Exodus and the Germanic tribes themselves as the chosen people.[8] He suggests Bede likens the voyage of the Germanic peoples across the sea to "a divinely inspired journey like the Exodus of the Israelites" (5). Moreover, Howe argues that the Old English Bede suggests that its ninth-century readers collectively represent the new Israelites in an English Jerusalem:

> Since these parallels are not bound to the history of any one people, they could and did take on a very different meaning for an Anglo-Saxon

[7] All quotations from the Old English Bede have been taken from 15th edition of *Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Reader*, revised by Dorothy Whitelock. See "Bede's Account of the Coming of the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes," *Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Reader* 42-44. All Modern English translations are my own.

[8] For further discussion about Bede's reliance on oral history and folk tradition in his account of the Anglo-Saxon invasion, see Kleinschmidt, "Bede and the Jutes: A Critique of Historiography," *NOWELE: North-Western European Language Evolution* 24 (1994): 21-46.

> Christian who, living after the defeat of the British, enjoyed the victor's privilege of rewriting history. If the *superbus tyrrannus* of the British was to be likened to pharaoh and his counselors to the princes of Zoan…who then were the Israelites, the chosen people, but the Anglo-Saxons? (46)

Bede's translator certainly characterizes the pagan invaders positively as a group of warriors led by brave men of divine origin. He describes the men as *of þrim folcum ðam strangestan Germanie* "from three of the strongest folks of Germany" (19) who *eardungstowe onfeng* "seized the homeland" (7) by rightfully asserting their authority when confronted with *Brytta yrgþo* "British cowardice" (12). Their trek across the sea thus mirrors the travels of the Jews who will gain a homeland for their morality and rightness with God; Howe suggests that Bede and other Anglo-Saxon historians celebrate the loss of the island by the British not only for the political gains won but also as proof of the divine favor bestowed upon their people.

However, Howe's assertion that the story of the English parallels the Exodus falls short once we look past the initial positive characterizations of the English and consider them within the context of the story as a whole. While an element of a heroic migration myth certainly exists within *Historia ecclesiastica*, and even more clearly in its Old English rendition, the entry for the year 449 does not expressly reveal the *adventus Saxonum* as a version of Exodus. While both Exodus and the story of the Anglo-Saxon invasion elaborate an overarching narrative of migration, the Old English Bede does not necessarily present the Anglo-Saxons as Israelites at this point in his history: missing are the elements of exile and wandering so essential to the story of the Jews. Moreover, while Bede's loyalty is ultimately to the Germanic peoples, he depicts their settlement as

violent and somewhat brutish, even if God ordained it as a punishment for the island's previous inhabitants. For example, Bede's account lacks much of the heroic language prevalent in so many religious and secular texts of the Anglo-Saxon period. While Bede's translator uses terms such as *wigena* "warrior" (13), *heretogan* "leader" (28), and *weorod* "troop" (14) to describe the Anglo-Saxons, he does so only sparingly. The narration significantly lacks the more explicit diction one would expect in a heroic work; for instance, we see no *hæleð* in the story, and the word *gefeoht* "battle" (38) is used only once in regard to the strife the Anglo-Saxons were willing to accept in exchange for property from the Britons. While the Old English Bede may have excluded the characteristic language of both religious and worldly battles to lend historical accuracy to his work, perhaps its omission should prohibit an overzealous reading of Bede's unequivocal view of the Anglo-Saxons as the new Israelites.

The Old English Bede's negative characterization of the actions of the Germanic invaders further complicates this reading. Rather than presenting the situation of the Germanic tribes as one of exile and persecution, Bede's translator portrays the Anglo-Saxons as mercenaries who take advantage of a physically and morally weak indigenous population. They are the persecutors, albeit through the righteous vengeance of God. In Bede's account, the Anglo-Saxons rise to power through acts of deception and extortion. While the Britons hold most of the blame for their own demise due to their moral weakness and subsequent invitation to the tribes, the Germanic peoples quickly transform themselves from military aid to an invading troop. They send for ships covertly and form a secret pact with the Picts, the enemy the British commissioned them to fight. When the Anglo-Saxon troops declare their intentions openly, they do so in the form of a threat:

nemne hi him maran andlyfne sealdon, þæt hi woldan him sylfe niman and hergian, þær hi hit findan mihton "unless they should give them greater sustenance, they would carry off and ravage for themselves, where they might find it" (40-42). Once Hengest and Horsa declare their purpose, the focus of Bede's narrative drastically shifts; at this point any laudatory comments about the Germanic tribes end, and the action centers not on the history and motives of the Anglo-Saxons but almost entirely on the destruction and sorrow of the British.

The rest of the Old English Bede's account of this formative event echoes religious allegory; however, it does not elaborate on the possibility of the future English as the new Israelites, as Howe and others suggest. In fact, quite the opposite occurs, leaving readers confused as to who Bede suggests the new Israelites are. The reading of the Anglo-Saxons as the chosen people whom God rewards with a homeland for righteous deeds becomes even more tenuous when we examine the characterization of the British during the destruction of their land. Basing his history on the biblical exemplum of the ravaging of Jerusalem, with one reference Bede suggests that perhaps the British rather than the Anglo-Saxons should be seen as the Israelites, exiled from their homeland and bearing the brutal reality of diaspora. He suggests that the destruction *[n]e wæs ungelic wræcc þam ðe iu Chaldeas bærndon Hierusaleme weallas and ða cynelican getimbro mid fyre fornaman for ðæs Godes folces synnum* "it was not unlike the vengeance for that which the Chaldeans earlier burned the walls in Jerusalem and destroyed the royal buildings with fire for the sins of God's people" (44-46). Bede's translator explicitly compares the British to *Godes folc*, suggesting they are the Israelites

under duress while the Anglo-Saxons are simply tools of God's retribution for the failure of those who were responsible for keeping His laws.

Additionally, the Old English translation of the last section of Bede characterizes the destruction of the British in elegiac terms, encouraging the reader not only to question the motives and methods of the Anglo-Saxons but also to actively sympathize with the vanquished British. He paints a scene of great loss and sorrow that at times mitigates his earlier claims that the destruction is just punishment for a sinful population. After evoking a possible connection between the British and the Israelites, Bede's translator then depicts the dead British as *swa hreowlice acwealde* "so cruelly killed" (53). Though he earlier explains that the deaths are just, one must notice the intensifier *hreowlice*; since the translator could have chosen to use a modifier such as *rihtful* to emphasize the divine justice of the act or simply to describe the slain British as *acwealde*, it is telling that he modified the verb in this way. Furthermore, the Old English Bede encourages readers to perceive the Anglo-Saxon mercenaries as brutal by accentuating the fact that those "cruelly killed" were Christian as opposed to pagan peoples: *gehwær sacerdas and mæssepreostas betwih wibedum wæron slægene and cwylmde; biscopas mid folcum buton ænigre are sceawunge ætgædere mid iserne and lige fornumene wæron* "everywhere priests and mass priests were slain and killed between altars; both bishops and laymen were destroyed together by iron and flame without any regard to mercy" (49-52). Bede presents the Anglo-Saxons as especially ruthless by drawing attention to the murder not just of sinful laymen and corrupt priests but possibly of virtuous religious leaders and followers before an altar. Bede, as a Christian, surely must have recognized

the problematic nature of defending the actions of the pagan Anglo-Saxons who would willingly kill members of the faith in their own place of worship.

At this point, the narrative ignores the Anglo-Saxon invaders entirely and further highlights the suffering of the British. The last third of the account of the invasion tells a story not of Anglo-Saxon victory but of the loss of the indigenous population. The story takes on an elegiac tone, and the vivid imagery aligns the reader with the vanquished British. The Old English Bede does not present the glories of military victory; rather, it asks its reader to imagine the life the British are left to live, struggling for survival either in slavery or exiled in a wasteland: *sume ofer sæ sorgiende gewiton; sume forhtiende on eðle gebidon, and þearfende lif in wuda and in westenum and on hean cleofum sorgiende mode symle dydon* "some departed over seas grieving; some stayed in the homeland fearful and, grieving in heart continuously, led an impoverished life in the woods and in the wilderness and on the high cliffs" (57-60). While the British defeat may be divinely ordained, the emotional language, such as *þearfende*, *sorgiende mode*, and *forhtiende*, mirrors the language of elegiac poetry.[9] The reader is not witnessing the spoils of victory; instead, the final image of the invasion is of a people sent away from an *eðel*, deracinated and mournful. Tellingly, at this point in the text, the Old English translation still refers to the island as the *eðel* of the British; sovereignty does not yet belong to the Anglo-Saxons. Just as in "The Wanderer," the dramatic climax arises from the loss of an *eðel* by one people, not the gaining of it by another. If the goals of the Old English

[9] For a comparison, see The Wanderer (*Swa cwæð eardstapa/ earfeþa gemyndig/ wraþra wælsleahta* "So says the wanderer mindful of hardships and cruel slaughter") or The Wife's Lament (*min freond siteð/ under stanhliþe/ storme behrimed/ wine werigmod/ wætre beflowen* "my lover sits under a cliff frost-covered in a storm, weary-hearted friend marooned by water". Both texts can be found in . *Three Old English Elegies.*

Historia were truly to establish Alfredian authority, the use of this term seems unnecessary and even perplexing.

Several critics have suggested that Bede may have had practical reasons for representing the Anglo-Saxons as comparable to the pillagers who destroyed Jerusalem. Howe and others explain this unusual comparison by suggesting that Bede simply remained faithful to Gildas, his primary source. In his attempts to create a precise scholarly history of the church, Bede may have felt it necessary to reflect accurately a source that he viewed as a truthful representation of the event from the distinct perspective of a British cleric; thus, Gildas's own concern with the ruin of the British becomes Bede's concern in his later work. Nicholas Higham notes that Bede's own knowledge of the *adventus* was extremely limited and relied on earlier sources such as *De Excidio* to augment his own understanding of fifth-century English history. Fidelity to Gildas's earlier work accounts for even the smallest details of the *Historia*'s narrative. Higham claims that "Bede's dating depends entirely on Gildas's juxtaposition of the appeal of Aëtius (in or after 446) and the invitation to the Saxons" (154). Others have suggested that due to Bede's reliance on Gildas, the *Historia* simply presents an English re-telling of an essentially Romano-British history (Miller 241). Thus, one could ascribe any negative characterizations of the Anglo-Saxons to Bede's reliance on his British sources; that is, Gildas's own tale of the destruction of his people in *De Excidio* ultimately must define its English retelling.

While the continuities between Bede and Gildas must play some role in Bede's reluctance to lionize the Anglo-Saxon invaders, perhaps the negative characterization of the Germanic tribes is influenced by the type of history Bede attempts to create. Bede

has been mythologized himself in later histories of the Anglo-Saxon period; modern historians and cultural critics have made much of Bede's role as an English historian, presenting an apology for his own ethnic group. For example, Foot has argued that "the Old English Bede could…be seen as instruction for the English, the *Angelcynn*, in their shared inheritance of a common history… this historical literature gave the English a myth—a story with a veiled meaning—of their common origins" (42). Howe claims Bede is one of many *þeodwitas* whose work ultimately suggests knowledge of a people rather than an unbiased representation of historical fact (10). Although the Old English Bede advances a medieval national consciousness, its primary goal is not to uphold Alfredian power. Perhaps Bede should be understood not as an English historian but as a Christian historian who aims not to maintain secular power but to demonstrate the manifestation of biblical history throughout time. Jan Davidse has suggested that the duty of the Christian historian is to examine

> the double effect of time: on the one hand, it advances and creates distance, and on the other hand it is a movement back into time starting from the subject, who discovers a meaning in the past and bridges the gap in a meaningful communication. The "patres," and the Christian poets as well, continue to belong to that past, to their own time, but the things that they have to say to mankind. (656)

Bede's goal as a Christian historian is not necessarily to defend the authority of the king; instead, he defends the essential truth he sees as determining the course of human history. Although history is linear, beginning with the creation and ending with the final

judgment, the use of biblical exempla shows that in the medieval worldview history is also cyclical, constantly repeating itself.

If we accept that Bede, as a Christian historian, commits himself to an immaterial authority instead of a kingly one, his negative characterization of the Anglo-Saxons becomes less strange and counterintuitive. He presents a Christian history where the destruction of priests and religious laymen, though they have fallen, would typologically be repeating the biblical account of the fall of Jerusalem. The sins of the Germanic peoples cannot be ameliorated, just as the sins of the British cannot. The text of the Old English Bede does not strive to reify a nascent English authority; it presents the Anglo-Saxons as sinful, just as all people are in Christian teleology. God awarded the English the island not to reward their righteousness but to punish British iniquity. The English of Bede are transitory: they are but one beneficiary awarded the land, as the fate of the British warns that God may revoke this reward at will. Of course, this characterization of the English does not persist throughout the rest of the *Historia ecclesiastica*; as the Anglo-Saxons establish their control over the land and especially as they become a Christian *gens Anglorum*, Bede portrays them as more sympathetic and righteous. Through the history, the English people and, more importantly, the English Church establish themselves as the rightful owners of the island. However, in his telling of the *adventus Saxonum*, Bede's translator suggests the possibility that the Germanic conquest cannot be universally lauded as a triumph of the good over the wicked.

The Old English Bede served an important purpose in creating an early English political consciousness; yet, we cannot force the account into a simplified narrative mode that functions only as jingoistic propaganda. If the purpose of nationalist discourse is to

"[validate] the nation's existence, its 'people' and its borders," the Old English Bede falls short (Davis 611). Unlike later histories such as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the Old English Bede does not erase the violence of the invasion; the British of Bede's account are not bloodlessly assimilated into Anglo-Saxon culture but forlornly remain in the wasteland as a reminder of the wages of sin. Bede's and his translator's willingness to display the event as an act of betrayal and their emphasis on the mourning of the British complicate the reading of the Old English *Historia* as an entirely nationalistic text. The text ultimately presents a Christian rather than secular history that secures the place of the English as God's agents rather than God's people.

Chapter 3

Absolving the *Angelcynn* in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

Because of the religious metaphors that underlie the text of the Old English Bede, we should resist reading it as a wholly nationalistic text written only to support the secular concerns of Alfredian kingship. Despite being translated as part of Alfred's English literacy campaign, the Old English Bede views the foundation of Anglo-Saxon England through the lens of biblical history. The Anglo-Saxons do not come to power gloriously; instead, they establish hegemony by means of violent coercion of both the Christian British clergy and laymen. For Bede and his translator, the Anglo-Saxons are not the beneficiaries of divine approbation but rather the arbiters of divine judgment against the British, who are the actual protagonists of the Old English Bede's version of the *adventus Saxonum*. These nuances complicate the traditional reading of the Old English Bede as an Alfredian apologia and suggest that if one is looking for the origins of Anglo-Saxon nationalism, perhaps this text is not the one to approach. Instead, I propose that the years 449-446 of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle are a more valuable resource for those who wish to examine Anglo-Saxon ethnic self-consciousness. Unlike the Old English Bede, the migration tale in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle presents a blanched version of history that strips the invasion of violence and victims and, in turn, promotes a solely Anglo-Saxon version of events.

For a text that so definitively presents a politicized Anglo-Saxon narrative of invasion and conquest, surprisingly few Anglo-Saxonists have devoted much attention to it. Very little has been written on the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, especially the earlier

entries, when compared to contemporaneous historical works.[10] Often, it is equated to a companion piece to the Old English Bede. For example, Sarah Foot argues that both the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and Bede serve the same goal of providing mythic originary tales: "The Chronicle and Bede could both be seen as instruction for the English, the *Angelcynn*, in their shared inheritance of a common history…Together this historical literature gave the English a myth—a story with a veiled meaning—of their common origins" (42). Others, such as Nicholas Howe, have read the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as an addendum to the Old English Bede, complementing the pre-existing history rather than standing on its own (Howe 57). While much of the language of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle entry for 449 derives from Bede's account, modern interpretations neglect to acknowledge the substantial differences between the Chronicle and Bede. Rather than existing as an extension of the earlier work, in the words of Harald Kleinschmidt, the Chronicle "radicalized Bede" (33). Where the Old English Bede focuses on the suffering of the British and the destruction of the invading armies, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle eliminates these details and presents the invasion as a succession of quick, bloodless battles commanded by leaders whose lineage boasts of mythological origins. In the hands of the chronicler, the story of the invasion manifests the inherent superiority of the English, not the moral weakness of the British.

One might argue that the erasure of details that occurs between the Old English Bede and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle entries simply results from the inherent nature of chronicle history. Bede could expand his tale because he was writing narrative history; his readers would expect many traditional elements of storytelling in this type of history.

[10] Recently, mostly on account of the interest in nascent English political identity, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle has been examined as a literary work in its own right. For a range of these readings, see Foot; Thormann; Kleinschmidt; and Sheppard.

In *Metahistory*, Hayden White explains that the raw data of history, such as names, dates, and events, are "organized into a story by the further arrangement of the events into the components of a 'spectacle' or process of happening…An event which is simply reported as having happened at a certain time and place is transformed into an inaugurating event" (5). Thus, narrative history must expand rather than contract, as it fashions a workable and recognizable narrative out of unknowable people and places in the past. Chronicle history, on the other hand, concerns itself principally with the raw data; a chronicle must only list the notable events and the date of their occurrence without narrating the space in between. White claims, "Chronicles are, strictly speaking, open-ended. In principle, they have no *inaugurations*; they simply 'begin' when the chronicler starts recording events. And they have no culminations or resolutions; they can go on indefinitely" (5). Using the model White provides, one could assume that the Chronicle's silence on more evocative details found in Bede is a natural result of the movement from narrative to chronicle history. The chronicler pared Bede's narrative to its essential elements in order to acheive the expected format of a Chronicle.

On closer examination, however, this model does not fully account for the dissonance between the Old English Bede and the Chronicle. White's definitions of chronicle and narrative history seem to falter at his suggestion that chronicle history "simply begin[s]." By regarding chronicles as reported rather than crafted, White seems to assume a level of neutrality in chronicle history that does not exist in narrative history. This assumption neglects the reality of history writing: we may assume that chroniclers, just like those writing narrative history, have political or religious allegiances and motives that inform which events are included and how events are reported. Chronicle

history is as consciously written as narrative history, presenting its readers with a complete, if less readily recognizable, story of a nation or people.[11] Its inaugural and concluding dates provide a narrative framework, while the chronicler chooses the events that will compose the story arch. The selection process and the rhetoric with which the chronicler describes these chosen events shape a story that is different from a narrative history in form, style, and content. A chronicle may appear on paper as just a list, but it recounts a history told through its inclusions and omissions, through those it chooses to immortalize and those it deems inconsequential enough to forget.

In his study *Chronicles*, Chris Given-Wilson discusses the impetus for medieval chronicles as a desire to exteriorize cultural memory through writing instead of relying on the older, internalized method of passing history down through oral tradition. In his view, the duty of the chronicler was to determine which memories were so vital to the history of a people that they needed to be preserved in writing. He argues that "the act of writing can be said to begin with an attitude towards what ought to be remembered" (60). Elements deemed insignificant to the national narrative could be discarded or rewritten to fit within the chronicle framework. With this in mind, the disappearance of the violence, the British suffering, and even the military cunning of the Anglo-Saxons seem more deliberate, more a revision than a summary of established history. While the Old English Bede recounts a migration tale more recognizable as an English national narrative, it is less a story of Anglo-Saxon hegemony than the *adventus Saxonum* of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. The Chronicle version of the tale dilutes the brutality found in the Old

[11] Chris Given-Wilson has claimed that because of their prominence in medieval history, chronicle histories are one of the greatest resources to understanding the values of individual medieval societies; what may seem like a list of dates or standard depictions of battle are actually "a gateway to ethnology, and, thereby, a way to study the variability of human societies" (130).

English Bede and, in doing so, creates a laudatory tale of Anglo-Saxon dominance over the island.

If a national narrative must choose which events deserve commemoration in the collective memory, conversely it must decide which events to disregard. Discussing the erasure of alternative narratives in national discourse, Homi K. Bhabha suggests that "[t]o be obliged to forget—in the construction of the national present—is not a question of historical memory; it is the construction of a discourse on society that *performs* the problem of totalizing the people and unifying the national will" (311). National narrative thus must silence and omit in order to create the illusion of a cohesive nation or people, and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is no exception. It is not simply a truncated version of a longer story; rather, it presents an entirely different type of narrative with an ostensibly different purpose from the Old English Bede. Sarah Foot has argued that "[t]he Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in particular is a history with an inner hermeneutic. It is not propaganda for one dynasty; the Chronicle does not present, in the way Bede did, the history of one people in a linear progression with a beginning, a middle, and an end…but despite its annalistic form, it is a continuing and developed narrative" (42). The "continuing and developed narrative" readers encounter in the Chronicle is one that "forgets" the elements of Bede's account that complicate the Anglo-Saxon claim of unquestionable ownership of the island. While maintaining the language, it strips the Old English Bede of references to British suffering and suggestive religious allusions that vilify the invaders. By doing so, the Chronicle silences the victims of the invasion and creates a history that both reinforces English ethnic identity and allows the English to ignore the violence of their own past.

The urge to view the Chronicle as simply a less literary retelling of the Old English Bede is understandable; the Chronicle retains the most basic elements of the Bede, such as the names of the invading tribes, their invitation to defend the British in return for land, and the identities and genealogies of the Germanic leaders Hengest and Horsa. However, keeping in mind that chronicle history is not simply disconnected series of events, it is vital to resist the urge to read the Chronicle entries surrounding the *adventus Saxonum* as a somehow less mythological rendering of other narrative histories. Higham reminds readers that

> [d]espite the recording of several events that were not obviously fabrication, history cannot be wrought from the Chronicles until, at earliest, the late sixth century. Bedeviled by their reliance on chronological framework based retrospectively on Easter tables and by what must be later attempts to render oral traditions and tales into sequential form, the Chronicle entries are essentially myths, and no more than that. (155).

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle does not re-create a version of Bede devoid of myth and religion; rather, it creates a myth itself. Instead of the myth of British punishment and suffering informed by Christian metaphor, the myth of invasion the Chronicle presents is a secular myth of English political power, carefully constructed and exhibiting "textual self-awareness" (Thormann 64). If history is "what ought to be remembered," the Chronicle suggests that the Anglo-Saxon invasion should be remembered as an exercise in Germanic military power and leadership rather than an allegorical warning about the wages of sin and impiety for a Christian people.

The most notable difference between the Old English Bede's narrative of the year 449 and that of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is the Chronicle's lack of religious overtones. While Bede's concern ultimately lies with the greater moral truth to be gathered from biblical allegory and allusions to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle concerns itself more with establishing a secular justification for dominant English power. It tells a deeply political rather than a moral tale of conquest and victory, focusing almost all of its attention on the ethically questionable acts of the invading armies. Alice Sheppard has noted that while the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle entries show at least a passing awareness of earlier Christian allegorical renderings of the pagan past, they seemingly reject them in favor of current political analysis. She argues:

> The writers of history in Anglo-Saxon England were familiar with the conventional Christian idea that conquest and invasion were the outcome of sin. This tradition is present in Alcuin, Gildas, Nennius, and Bede, and it is also relevant for the loosely associated writers of history in Alfred's time…Nonetheless, the annalists of the *Chronicle* make very little use of this vision of the past. (6-7)

The annalists, in contrast to contemporaneous continental writers such as the composers of *Les Grandes Chroniques de France* or later English writers such as Wulfstan, reject a religiously-based epistemology regarding the history and heritage of the *Angelcynn.*[12]

More importantly, by discarding the religious allegory that defines other tales of the *adventus Saxonum*, most notably the Old English Bede, the writers of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle establish a new method of interpreting English history not through

[12] For a comprehensive analysis of how the simultaneously contrasting and complementary elements of ethnocentric history and biblical exempla similarly shaped early French nationalist discourse, see Gabrielle Spiegel.

shared religious belief (for the British were Christians as well) but through the concept of shared political mythos. Unlike Bede, the chroniclers did not use the history of the English church to define the inhabitants of the island; instead, they wrote the history of the English *þeod*, the concept that inextricably links the past and future of the English people with that of the English nation. In this sense, one could argue that by divorcing themselves from the religious sensibilities of earlier historians, the chroniclers present themselves as *þeodwitas* (knowers of the people/nation) rather than traditional historians. Howe explains the notion of *þeodwita* in Anglo-Saxon society as keeper of communal knowledge and custom, one whose loyalty to the greater interests of the *þeod* stands in opposition to the standard post-Enlightenment rigors of historiography:

> Historians are committed to an objective study of the past, and if they choose to distort it from motives of ideology or nationalism they have, to our minds, betrayed their discipline. By contrast, the *þeodwita* owes allegiance to a communal group, the *þeod*, and relates its past to give its members some sense of cohesion or to rouse them to action. (10)

I would argue that although Bede, because of his desire to present the history of the English church rather than lionize the individual members of that church, fits Howe's definition of historian much more readily than the writers of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. The chroniclers (at least those recording the invasion and subsequent battles), on the other hand, perform the duties of *þeodwitas* admirably: rather than expanding on the sufferings of the British as Bede and his translator did, they write tersely and myopically about the strength of the Anglo-Saxons and the formation of their nation.[13]

[13] As the Chronicle progresses, the tone and language of the entries shift. The chroniclers present more fully developed accounts of events and notable personages and at times include poetry as entries, resulting

The Chronicle's desire to represent Alfredian nationalistic political interests while nominally presenting itself as legitimate history has caused modern scholars to disregard the Chronicle as too unreliable for modern readers to examine seriously. For example, in her study on medieval historiography, Gabrielle Spiegel sums up the problem of medieval history for the postmodern reader as one of differing sensibilities and definitions of truth. She claims that "the 'truth' of the past that underwrote the utility of historiography to medieval rulers and political actors, whose interests, to be sure, lay not in recuperating an account of 'what actually happened,' but in the legitimation of their propagandistic and political goals [through] straightforward yet strangely deformed texts" (xiii). This view, however, seems simplistic when we remember the concept of history as we conceive it—a scientific discipline based on accurately depicting the past through reliable accounts and scrupulous research—was virtually non-existent before the scientific revolution of the Enlightenment and certainly did not exist in tenth-century Anglo-Saxon England. Kathleen Davis reminds readers that they must suspend their

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in a much more "literary" text that owes more to the works of Bede than the earliest Chronicle entries. For example, the entry for the year 878, in which the annalist describes Danish violence against the Alfredian court, uses language similar to the language used by Bede to describe his own kinsmen's deceit against the British: *Her hine bestel se here on midne winter ofer tuelftan niht to Cippanhamme 7 geridon Wesseaxna lond 7 gesæton 7 micel þæs folces 7 ofer se adræfdon, 7 þæs oþres þone mæstan del hie geridon 7 himto gecirdon buton þam cyninge Elfrede, 7 he lytle werede unieþelice æfter wudum for 7on morfæstenum* "Here in the middle of winter after the twelfth night, the army stole away to Chippenham and they conquered the land of the West Saxons and settled it and drove many of the people across the sea, and conquered most of the others, and the people submitted to them with the exception of King Alfred. And he, in some difficulty, traveled with a small army through the woods and the moor-fastness". The language corresponds closely with Bede's description of the ravage and subsequent exile of the British; both sympathize with those "driven across the sea" or forced into "the woods and moor-fastness." Sheppard argues that in doing so, the chroniclers manage to dehumanize the Danish into an "amoral Other." I would argue that this dehumanization allows the Anglo-Saxons to engage in remorseless battle with the Northmen and inspire their troops by unifying them with a sense of loss. It, thus, becomes clear why the annals for 449, in contrast to the later entries on the Danish invasion, avoid characterizing the destruction of Britain as such: it serves *þeodwitas* no purpose to present their *þeod* as an "amoral Other." For more discussion on the year 878, see "Making Alfred King" in Sheppard's *Families of the King* (26-50).

disbelief to an extent when reading medieval history or at least remind themselves that nationalist texts of any era are not the likeliest source of impartial knowledge:

> Much discussion has thus been devoted to whether this description is "truth" or "propaganda"—a dichotomy that misses the historical function of nationalist discourse, which cannot be reduced either to a documentary source of reliable information or to the work of an individual manipulator standing apart from the ideological current of the time. (624)

It is too simplistic to claim simply that in omitting the details of the Anglo-Saxon invasion provided by the Old English Bede, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is flawed history or, as Spiegel suggests, a "strangely deformed text." Placed within their separate historical contexts, the texts serve different political purposes, reflected in their individual retellings of the *adventus Saxonum*.

If the translation of Bede into Old English fulfilled the larger goal of supplanting Latin as the language of literature and learning on the island, creating an imagined literary heritage for contemporary and future English authors, the goal of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was perhaps to divorce English history from that of Bede and, by extension, native British writers such as Nennius and Gildas to create a similarly imagined shared political heritage. The omissions that occur between the Old English Bede and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle do not necessarily reveal a nation unaware of its violent past or one willfully deceiving itself, though this explanation is possible. Instead, I would argue that the omissions occur on account of the desire to rewrite the narrative to reflect the growing need for a more palatable and, indeed, a more heroic national mythos

for a people just beginning to form a cohesive identity in the wake of King Alfred's unification efforts.

At this point, a close reading of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is necessary in order to contrast it with the Old English Bede.[14] The most striking difference between the two works at first glance is its lengthiness compared to the chronicle entries surrounding the Anglo-Saxon invasion. Because of this visible disparity, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle may appear to be a more neutral account; this difference has perhaps caused the reaction among scholars such as Howe and Foot to view the Chronicle as an abridged version of Bede, a narrative without inventiveness or equal literary merit. Sheppard has commented that "[t]hese approaches have unintentionally denied the artistry and ideologies of the Chronicle to such an extent that the annals are frequently perceived as a collection of unrelated facts; that is, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is often seen as an unreadable text, a text without significance or meaning in it own right" (3). Indeed, to discuss the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, one must first discuss what the text lacks. The Chronicle account tempers the language of the Old English Bede in such a way that it insinuates impartiality. While the account of the British diaspora disappears, so too does any overtly laudatory language used by Bede's translator to describe the Anglo-Saxons. For example, while Bede describes the Germanic invaders as *strengran wigena* "strong warriors" (13) and *unoferswiðenlic weorod* "invincible troop" (14), the Chronicle account

[14] I have chosen to work with the Peterborough Chronicle (E) of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for several reasons. First, it provides the most detailed account of the invasion. Compared with the earliest MS, the Parker Chronicle (A), the Peterborough Chronicle presents a more thorough retelling of the invasion, including such details as Hengest and Horsa's lineage and the cowardice of the Britons. Secondly, the language of the Peterborough Chronicle most closely resembles the language of the Old English Bede, which makes it the most relevant Chronicle for this study. Finally, because it continued to be written well after the Norman Conquest and the dominance of Anglo-Norman, the Peterborough Chronicle perhaps more than the others represents the desire to maintain a distinctly Anglo-Saxon identity. For a more comprehensive account of the manuscript history, see Swanton xi-xxxv.

includes no such admiring descriptors. The Chronicle does not even casually mention the strength of the Germanic tribes in comparison to those left behind on the continent, as Bede does. Whereas Bede's translator claims the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes *[c]omon…of þrim folcum ðam strangestan Germanie* "came from the three strongest folks of Germany" (19), the Chronicle omits even this detail: *Ða comon þa men of þrim megðum Germanie* "Then men came from three German tribes".[15] This reluctance to apply positive adjectives to the invaders often overshadows the Chronicle's disinclination to present the inherent violence of invasion that the Old English Bede does not avoid, leading readers to conclude what Sheppard suggests: the Chronicle is meaningless without Bede. However, it is precisely this erasure of violence that defines the Chronicle account and marks it as primarily a nationalist text.

The Chronicle not only fails to include the violence prevalent in the Old English Bede, but, unlike *Historia*, it seemingly absolves the Anglo-Saxons of any culpability for the invasion and the subsequent battles. The chronicler places blame directly on the Britons and particularly their leader, Vortigern. For example, though Bede's translator does mention British cowardice (*Brytta yrgþo*) as an impetus for further waves of Germanic incursion, he does not specifically mention Vortigern as the leader and, thus, the summoner of the invading tribes. Instead, the translator refers to him only as the *foresprecenan cyninge* "aforementioned king" (5), focusing his attention on the British as a homogenous people. Even more tellingly, Bede's translator presents the invitation from this nameless king in a passive sentence construction that implicitly shifts the attention from the actions of Vortigern and the British to the actions of the Germanic tribes. The

[15] All quotations from the Peterborough Chronicle come from Charles Plummer and John Earle, ed. *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel: A Revised Text* 4th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965). All translations are mine.

invitation is described as a boon for the Anglo-Saxons rather than a folly committed by the British king: *Ða Angelþeod and Seaxna wæs gelaðod fram þam foresprecenan cyninge* "Then the people of the Angles and Saxons were invited by the aforementioned king" (4-5). The Chronicle rendering of this same encounter, in contrast, not only mentions the name of the British king openly but also rewrites the text of the Old English Bede so that Vortigern bears complete responsibility for the destruction of his people. The chronicler claims that *Se cyning Wyrtgeorn gef heom land on suðan eastan ðissum lande wiððan þe hi sceoldan feohtan wið Pyhtas* "The king Vortigern gave them land in the southeast of this land provided that they should fight against the Picts". The statement is clear, active, and direct: Vortigern is the agent, and he, not the Anglo-Saxons, must accept responsibility for the ensuing battles over the island.

Furthermore, the nature of the invasion changes. According to the Old English Bede, the Germanic peoples *wæs gelaðod* "were invited" (4); however, the Chronicle states that Vortigern *gef* "gave" a very specific piece of the island away. While this difference is subtle, the Old English Bede indicates an awareness of the violation of the host/guest relationship not found in the Chronicle text. The Old English Bede presents the relationship between the Germanic tribes and the British as a civil and political one. The Anglo-Saxons ultimately did not uphold their duty to the British hosts to behave as guests should when they *eardungstowe onfeng* "seized the homeland" (7) and ravaged its land and people. The Chronicle, however, more clearly depicts this scene as a business transaction between an impotent king and a mercenary army; the relationship between the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons is neither polite nor social. The Anglo-Saxons did not seize the land in a breach of contract, but as payment for services rendered.

This displacement of responsibility for the actions of the invaders allows the Chronicle to "forget" the brutality associated with conquering a foreign land and ultimately allows the Chronicle writer to create a more nationalistic Anglo-Saxon text than the Old English Bede from which it derives. It does not need to concern itself with the devastation of the British *eðel* because it has established that by simply giving the land away in exchange for Germanic military protection, the British have lost their land rights before the Anglo-Saxons even arrive. In fact, the Chronicle account makes scarce mention of any battles or bloodshed associated with the *adventus Saxonum*. The Old English Bede presents the invasion as a morality tale narrating the dangers of cowardice and sin; therefore, it must highlight the cruelty of the invaders and the sufferings of the immoral in order to display fully the consequences of sin and God's wrath. By necessity, Bede's account must concentrate on the British as the protagonists of the tale. However, since the Chronicle is ultimately a political text, not a morally instructive one, its narrative has the advantage of sanitizing the violence so that the invasion does not reflect poorly on the descendants of the Anglo-Saxons, the burgeoning *Angelcynn*. Moreover, when the Chronicle mentions the battles associated with the invasion in later entries, deaths are presented matter-of-factly in straightforward, simple sentences. For example, in the entry for the year 456, the chronicler describes the sacking of Crayford and the death of four British troops emotionlessly: *Her Hengest 7 Æsc ge fuhton wið Bryttas on þere stow þe is gecweden Crecgan ford. Þer ofslogon iiii werad* "Here Hengest and Æsc fought against the Britons in the place that is called Crayford. There they slew four troops". This description contrasts sharply with the pathetic portrayal of similar events of Anglo-Saxon military dominance over the British as presented in the Old English

Bede: *bærndon and hergedon and slogan fram eastsæ to westsæ, and him nænig wiðstod* "they burned and ravaged and slew from the eastern sea to the western sea, and none withstood them" (43-44). Whereas the Bedan account evokes pity for the British and perhaps even antipathy towards the Anglo-Saxons, the Chronicle account leaves little room for the reader to question the motives or tactics of the Germanic invaders.

Because the narrative does not expound the violent implications of the invasion or justifications for Anglo-Saxon behavior in the way that the Old English Bede and other accounts must, it becomes a vehicle for establishing the glory of the *adventus Saxonum* rather than an apologia for the sins of the past. Though it lacks the approbatory language that the Old English Bede employs to describe the Anglo-Saxons, the Chronicle is still eager to demonstrate the powerful and divine background of the Germanic invaders and their tenth-century descendents. The entry for 449 reads as a genealogy demonstrating Hengest and Horsa's ancestral link to Woden rather than an explanation of the event itself. While the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes may not earn the distinction of coming *of þrim folcum ðam strangestan Germanie*, they clearly derive much of their identity and their strength from their ties to the continent and the Germanic pantheon: *Heora heretogan wæron twegen ge broðra Hengest 7 Horsa þe wæron Wihtgilses suna. Wihtgils wæs Witting. Witta Wecting. Wecta Wodning. Fram þan Wodne awoc eall ure cyne cynn 7 Suðan hymbra eac* "Their commanders were two brothers Hengest and Horsa who were the sons of Wihtgils. Wihtgils was the son of Witta who was the son of Wecta who was the son of Woden. From Woden sprung forth all our royal kinsmen and also those of the Southumbrians." Although the Old English Bede also includes this information, it becomes the primary focus of the narrative in the Chronicle. Of the

twenty-one lines comprising the entry for 449, ten are devoted solely to demonstrating the divine lineage of the Germanic people. The goal of the Chronicle appears to be establishing secular authority through genealogy, much in the way other texts derive British or French authority through their mythological connections to the Trojans, rather than drawing any explicit religious or moral conclusions about the Anglo-Saxons.

Alice Sheppard notes that the idea of protecting the primacy of *cyne cynn* "royal kinsmen" informs the entire Chronicle and serves as a way to understand the political and social implications of the narrative. The Chronicle transforms the religious elegy of Bede into a political text that validates Anglo-Saxon dominance over the island. She argues:

> The political nature of this designation is reinforced by the annalist's choice of the Old English *cynn*, 'family.' By raising the question of descent, the Alfred annalist appears to echo a second discourse on royal authority, one that focuses on lineage…This material appears again at significant junctures in the annals, suggesting a connection between a claimant's suitability for or the right to the throne and his birthright. But Anglo-Saxon succession does not necessarily proceed by birthright; thus the power of the genealogy is, as many scholars have shown, ideological. (32)

Indeed, the lineage presented in the year 449 reflects a clear ideological goal: the Alfredian desire to establish the Anglo-Saxons of the past as unified into a single genealogical identity to unite the rapidly developing *Angelcynn*. The invaders of the past were not three disparate tribes solely acting out the will of God; instead, the Chronicle argues, even in the fifth century, the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes formed a cohesive unit

based on the lineage of the kings. This assertion plays an important role in encouraging the *Angelcynn* of East Anglia, Mercia, Kent, Northumbria, and West Saxon to unite under a West Saxon throne. If all the Anglo-Saxon kings *fram Wodne awoc* "sprung forth from Woden", all the Anglo-Saxon people, regardless of tribal affiliation, must have as well. Thus, the genealogy of 449 not only suggests that geographical and ancestral divisions should be arbitrary for the *Angelcynn* but also implicitly supports their erasure under a single authority.

By creating this vision of English history that totalizes the Anglo-Saxon people and absolves them of any suffering they caused in the past, the Chronicle narrative implicitly endorses the Alfredian goals of political unity. It re-creates the damning narrative of the year 449 in the Old English Bede as a political myth: the myth of a just and painless conquest of the island. This invented history proved powerful and lasting in the English cultural consciousness and, as a result, helped strengthen the idea that the various kingships across the land could amalgamate into a single ethnic group, the *Angelcynn*, an identity that would be re-invented yet again in the face of the Danish invasions that followed a century later.

Chapter 4

Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi* and Nationalist Imagination

In the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the Old English Bede, two different forms of discourse develop around the myth of the *adventus Saxonum*, resulting in two distinct narratives of the conquest and its repercussions for the developing identity of the *Angelcynn*. As I have shown in the previous chapters, the Old English Bede relies more on Christian paradigms of history such as the importance of biblical prototypes and their typological presence on current events. Its aim is morally instructive, and it presents a conquest that speaks more to a universal condition of sin and suffering than to nationalist concerns. The years surrounding the invasion in the Chronicle, on the other hand, create a tale that eschews religious metaphor in an attempt to present the Anglo-Saxons sympathetically and implicitly defend their incursions. Unlike the Old English Bede, it establishes a national identity rather than a Christian one. It is from these traditions that Wulfstan creates a new vision of the *adventus Saxonum* that incorporates both the Christian rhetoric of Bede and the nationalistic rhetoric of the Chronicle. Written during the first decade of the eleventh-century, over a century after these Alfredian texts, Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* synthesizes both forms of discourse surrounding later Anglo-Saxon memory of the fifth century into a political allegory that can recognize the horrors of conquest only insofar as they reflect the tenth- and eleventh-century political trauma of Danish invasion. Wulfstan draws on the shared historical memory presented in the Chronicle in the same fashion that the Old English Bede incorporates biblical allegory in its account. Whereas the Old English Bede relies on allusions to the suffering of the

Israelites to describe the punishment of the British, Wulfstan, in turn, uses the suffering of the fifth-century British population to lend credence to his vision of the causes for the punishments of the English in the eleventh century. Wulfstan upends the Anglo-Saxon originary tale from history itself to create a national mythology for the English people.

Though the *Sermo* may share elements with the Bede's account, it does not recount the story of the British in the same fashion as the Old English Bede; instead, for Wulfstan, the Anglo-Saxon invasion functions as a historical exemplum and a warning to the English that they too may suffer the fate that traditionally befalls sinful inhabitants of the island. While Wulfstan often emphasizes the eternal ramifications of sin in the sermon, ultimately his concerns lie with the secular consequences that the misdeeds of the English may result in. Namely, a morally weak English nation will not be able to preserve itself in the face of Danish onslaught and, in turn, will lose not just land and property but their distinct English identity as well. Alice Sheppard has suggested that for Wulfstan, the loss of identity and political autonomy seems just as dire as the possibility of eternal punishment. She claims:

> On one level, Wulfstan refers to the Anglo-Saxons' afterlife; if they do not reform, they will suffer eternal damnation. But the examples he gives, that of the Britons, also speaks to the survival of the Anglo-Saxons' identity as a people…For the Britons, the wages of sin are not just the loss of their territory, but also the loss of their identity. (89-90)

Several scholars have suggested that by making these connections between the Britons and the English, Wulfstan seems to equate national identity and interest with the fate of

individual mortal souls.[16] Wulfstan intertwines nationalist discourse with Christianity, creating a narrative that argues for a version of history that is not only morally instructive but also politically expedient.

As he revises the history of the English, Wulfstan performs not only as a Christian homilist but also as a political commentator documenting his historical moment. Jonathan Wilcox has suggested that the *Sermo* is a "political performance" in which Wulfstan vocalizes the national trauma associated with the Danish invasion led by Swein Forkbeard in the year 1013 ("Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi Ad Anglos* as Political Performance: 16 February 1014 and Beyond" 378). According to the corresponding Chronicle entries, Forkbeard successfully received allegiance first from the Danelaw and then from surrounding areas of land under English rule. Because many English people seemed willing to separate themselves from English culture and embrace the customs of the pagan invaders, one could argue that Wulfstan saw a need to establish and reinforce the moral jeopardy of abandoning Christian (in this case, English) identity in favor of pagan (in this case, Danish) identity. He accomplishes this goal in the *Sermo* by equating Danish conquest with the coming of Antichrist and the ensuing apocalypse. His rhetoric emphasizes the dangers the English who renounce Christianity must face: by not upholding the religious and secular rule of law, his countrymen will lose their morality, then their identities, and finally their souls.

In his essay "Apocalypse and Invasion in Late Anglo-Saxon England," Malcolm Godden further explains the political necessity of equating compliance with the pagan Danish with the sins that according to the biblical accounts will bring about the

[16] For further discussion on Wulfstan's importance to nationalist rhetoric, see Cowen; Godden; and Wilcox. For a counterargument that suggests that while nationalist rhetoric informs Wulfstan's *Sermo*, the text is ultimately Christian moral instruction, see Hollis.

apocalypse. According to Godden, what originally may have been Wulfstan's Christian apocalyptic vision gains new meaning as the *Dena here* progressively gains more control over the island. He argues that "[t]he text seems to have originated early in 1014 as a short apocalyptic sermon, but twice within the next two years, probably within the same year, Wulfstan expanded it to take account of the Viking attacks. In the process, its emphasis gradually shifted from the apocalyptic crisis to the national one" (152). By blending apocalyptic vision and political commentary, Wulfstan moves the theme of migration, invasion, and conquest common throughout Anglo-Saxon literature into the realm of biblical allegory. His warnings of the Antichrist's advent, I would argue, are informed more by his uneasiness towards English political troubles than by genuine millennial fears.

Of course, many scholars would disagree that the *Sermo* should be read solely as a metaphorical rendering of secular political disturbances. Clearly, the *Sermo* presents an unmistakably apocalyptic warning for readers that is not dependant on the readers' knowledge of tenth-century Anglo-Saxon politics. Stephanie Hollis suggests that the historical allusions throughout the text only highlight how unique the depravity of the English is. In isolating his contemporaries for their exceptionally sinful nature, Wulfstan demonstrates that their actions are the final insults against God that will lead to the coming of Antichrist and the death of the tangible world:

> The third passage referring to afflictions (174-89) consists of an historic parallel with the English conquest of the Britons which is meant to make the audience see that the present perilous state of the nation is unprecedented….If, for the magnitude of their sins, the Britons were

> exterminated, the fate of the English nation, whose sins, Wulfstan insists, are immeasurably greater…must also be immeasurably worse. What he has in mind must be the imminent reign of Antichrist, a fate far worse than national extermination. (191)

Other scholars concede that if he is not presenting the case for the arrival of the end times, Wulfstan is clearly manipulating the millennial fear typically associated with the year 1000.[17] For example, Alice Sheppard has noted that the *Sermo* has much in common with "salvation history," a genre that she claims "explains the transfer of power in the context of theology…not identifying of the people whose story it tells" (24). If Wulfstan is writing a "salvation history," then there is no reason to assume that the situation he describes applies only to the English in their current struggle against the Danish armies. The condition of the English serves only as a microcosm for the larger struggle of all Christian people against the devastation of sin.

In fact, the sermon does initially appeal to universal Christian themes of divine punishment manifested in the ultimate destruction of the world and its people. Wulfstan addresses his audience by warning them that their sins have invited the coming of Antichrist and the apocalypse. He compels them to recognize that the material world is at its end due to their own iniquities: *Leofan men, gecnawað þæt soð is: ðeos worold is on ofste, and hit nealæcð þam ende, and þy hit is on worold aa swa leng swa wyrse, and swa hit sceal nyde for folces synnan ær Antecristnes tocyme yfelian swyþe* "Dear men, know

[17] Scholars disagree on how acute these fears actually were in the years surrounding the first millennium. Traditionally, historians have suggested that the year 1000 brought mass panic throughout Europe as the Christian population awaited the coming of Christ and the fulfillment of the prophesies in the book of Revelation. More recently, historians have found evidence that this mass panic may never have occurred; the belief that millennial terror overcame Europe around the year 1000 reflects more on modern misinterpretation and fetishization of medieval culture than on the actual customs and beliefs of the medieval populace. For further discussion on the prevalence of apocalyptic fears in the tenth and eleventh centuries, particularly in regards to their appearance in the *Sermo*, see Duncan.

what is true: this world is in haste, and it approaches the end, and the longer the world exists, the worse it is, and thus it must grow much worse from the folk's sins before the coming of Antichrist" (1-4**)**.[18] Not only is Antichrist coming, Wulfstan claims, but his arrival will bring dire consequences for all, not just the English whose sinfulness provoked him: *se byrst wyrð gemæne* "this loss will become universal" (47). Moreover, Wulfstan creates a sense of timelessness with his repetition of *gelome* "often" and *oft* "often". The word *gelome* appears13 times in the sermon and the word *oft* 17 times. Five times these words can be found in the construction *oft and gelome*, which emphasizes the frequency of occurrence. The problems faced by the English are not temporal or connected with one particular moment; rather they represent a continuing problem that left unchecked will bring out the destruction of the world.

However, I would argue that reading *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* as a primarily apocalyptic text is insufficient. While it may use the apocalypse metaphorically to represent how dire the sins of the English truly are, it is ultimately a reaction elicited by anxiety about the fate of the English nation specifically rather than the fate of all Christendom. Edwin Duncan has noted that the dating of the sermon places it safely outside a timeframe when millennial fears might dictate mainstream Christian discourse. He asks, "if the apocalypse was necessarily associated with the year 1000, then why was Wulfstan still warning of the coming of the Antichrist in 1014, over a decade after the critical time had supposedly passed?" (16). By the time Wulfstan wrote the *Sermo*, such

[18] I have taken all line numbers for the *Sermo* from Wulfstan, "Wulfstan's Address to the English," *Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Reader*, 4th ed., ed. Dorothy Whitelock (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2002) 85-93. All Modern English translations are my own.

fears would surely seem at least slightly anachronistic.[19] Futhermore, as Wilcox has noted, though Wulfstan may initially assert the universal quality of his claims, his rhetoric is tied so closely to the national, historically specific moment in English history that once the threat of Danish invasion wanes, the sermon becomes irrelevant. After the Norman Conquest, the *Sermo* became increasingly less copied because it no longer resonated with a population that would have increasingly found it difficult to conflate the *Dena here* with Antichrist (Wilcox "Wulfstan and the Twelfth Century" 93).

Even more troublesome for the reading of the *Sermo* as strictly apocalyptic literature is its consistent emphasis on the possibility of change. Many times, Wulfstan mentions the need for and possibility of remedy and absolution from God. In fact, though he begins the homily by cautioning his listeners of Antichrist's coming, he immediately assuages their fears by noting that redemption is still possible. Early on, he claims that *gif we ænige bote gebidan scylan, þonne mote we þæs to Gode ernian bet þonne we ær þysan dydan* "if we shall experience any remedy, then we must earn that from God better than we did earlier than this" (12-14). He reinforces this possibility before he introduces the parallel between the English and the Britons. After listing the manifold crimes of the English in a quick, rhetorically effective succession, he reminds his listeners that all is not lost: *Ac la, on Godes naman, utan don swa us neod is, beorgan us sylfum swa we geornost magan, þe læs we ætgædere ealle forweorðan* "Lo, in God's name, let us do for ourselves as is necessary, save ourselves as we most eagerly may, lest we all perish together" (173-75). What is striking about these occurrences and others like them throughout the sermon is that in leaving the possibility for change, they seemingly

[19] For further discussion on the dangers of superimposing ninth century millennial anxiety on a text written at least fourteen years after its occurrence, see Godden; Howe; and Wilcox.

create a possibility for averting the apocalypse. However, if Wulfstan is truly discussing metaphysics and biblical time, as Hollis and others suggest, it seems unlikely that any improved behavior on behalf of the English could postpone the end times. This inconsistency becomes more understandable if Wulfstan is not foreseeing the end of time but rather a disaster that the English may more plausibly avoid: the end of the nation caused by the inability of the English to defend their land and identity against the *Dena here*.

More importantly, though Wulfstan frames his sermon with millennial anxiety, he directs much of his anger at the English nation (*þeod*) instead of the whole of Christendom. Fifteen times in the sermon, Wulfstan uses the word *þeod* to describe the recipients of God's wrath. He constantly emphasizes God's anger at the nation, not at individual Christians or even the Christian church. He explains how the Danish invaders have inverted the social structure of the English by pillaging and encouraging slaves to revolt against their lords and to abandon Christianity, but he does not seem to suggest that the slaves or even the pagans hold most of the blame. Instead, he claims that this misfortune and all others suffered by the English come from the failings of the *þeod* itself: *and la, hwæt is ænig oðer on eallum þam gelimpum butan Godes yrre ofer þas þeode swutol and gesæne* "and lo, what else is clear and evident in all those events but God's ire over the nation" (124-26). These sins and the resulting divine wrath unite the English, and Wulfstan recognizes the consequences not just for individual Christian sinners but for a cohesive English political structure as well. He claims, *wearð þes þeodscipe, swa hit þincan mæg, swyþe forsyngod þurh mænigfold synna and þurh fela misdæda* "the nation becomes, so it may seem, very corrupted through manifold sins and

many misdeeds" (129-131). Because he frames the Danish onslaught in terms of national piety, the rewards and punishments for wantonness are national rather than personally spiritual for the individual sinners. He warns that the depravity of the English has not led to undue suffering (for many of the sinners he describes seem to welcome their sinful lifestyle); instead, national, rather than individual, interest is at risk.

Moreover, the greatest manifestation of divine punishment comes in the form of foreign influence in the land. Wulfstan claims that God's wrath reveals itself in the continual weakening of social boundaries, foreign intruders, and the failure of the English to both defend and expand their own borders: *[n]e dohte hit nu lange inne ne ute* "nothing has prospered for long at home or abroad" (106). Tellingly, though Wulfstan begins his sermon with prophecy of apocalypse and the imminent arrival of Antichrist, he quickly shifts his focus to the arrival of the heathen Danes as the primary concern for the Christian English. Sins are magnified when they not only affect the soul of the sinner but also result in the loss of English autonomy to the Northern invaders. Several times, Wulfstan uses the expression *fremdum to gewealde* "into the control of foreigners" to emphasize the dangerous implications of English sins. For example, in lines 81-88, he describes the sin of buying women jointly for the sexual gratification of many men. However, he seems less concerned with the immorality of a sexual slave trade than with the fact that eventually these Christian English women become the property of the Danes.[20] This emphasis on the moral failings associated with selling property (if we consider Christian English women the property of God and English men) to foreigners

[20] Or, as Godden suggests, "The story of rape seems to be told not so much with sympathy for the female victims but rather in a tone of contempt for the thegn whose sense of his own power and importance is shattered when he has to watch helplessly while his own female kindred are abused" (149).

reflects Wulfstan's desire to present the Danish invasion as a threat to national sovereignty rather than a threat to individual English souls.

Interestingly, however, in Wulfstan's eschatology, the Danes are not analogous to the Antichrist. He does not seem simply to frame apocalypse in national terms; instead, it would appear that the national crisis is his primary concern, and his apocalyptic rhetoric only enhances and hyperbolizes the conflict with the heathen adversaries. While emphasizing the danger of giving over property and identity to the Danes, Wulfstan does not necessarily present foreigners as evil agents of Antichrist (Godden 153). They pose a danger to the English men fighting to maintain their sovereignty over the island and, indeed, their ethnic self-consciousness, but they do not seem to foreshadow the apocalypse. In fact, in the first paragraph, Wulfstan does not damn the Danes for their lack of Christian beliefs. Instead, he describes them as a people pious in their pagan beliefs and, thus, somewhat more honorable than the Christian English who disregard their own religious customs, texts, buildings, and clergymen:

> On hæþenum þeodum ne dear man forhealdan lytel ne micel þæs þe gelagod is to gedwolgoda weorðunge; and we forhealdað æghwær Godes gerihta ealles to gelome. And ne dear man gewanian on hæþenum þeodum inne ne ute ænig þære þinga þe gedwolgodan broht bið and to lacum betæht bið; and we habbað Godes hus inne and ute clæne berypte. And Godes þeowas syndan mæþe and munde gewelhwær bedælde; and gedwolgoda þenan ne dear man misbeodan on ænig wis mid hæþenum leodum.

> [In the heathen people, one does not dare withhold little or much of that which is ordained for the worship of false gods; and everywhere we withhold God's laws all too often. And in the heathen people, one does not dare restrain inwardly or outwardly anything that is brought to the false god and entrusted for offering; and we have stripped God's house clean in and out. And God's servants are deprived of honor and protection nearly everywhere; and one does not dare injure the servants of false gods in the any way amongst the heathen people.] (22-30)

Wulfstan contrasts the Christian English with the pagan Danes perhaps to explain just how depraved the English have become: even pagans outstrip them in religious devotion. However, such passages detract from any attempts to parallel the coming of the Danes with the coming of Antichrist and even present the invaders in a somewhat sympathetic light.

Wulfstan's insistence that the English are to blame for their own affliction complicates the comparison between the Danes and Antichrist even further. Malcolm Godden suggests that Wulfstan's rhetoric "does flatteringly suggest that the Vikings were agents of divine wrath against the English—that it was not the Dane's fault, as it were, if they went around raping and pillaging" (158-59). Indeed, it appears that Wulfstan places blame for the invasion solely on the shoulders of the English, signifying that any loss of land or identity is self-inflicted. He insists that the violence of the Danish marauders is simply God's response to the inaction and depravity of the English nation: *þæt is gesyne on þysse þeode þæt us Godes yrre hetelice in sit* "it is evident in this nation that God's ire sits violently on us" (94-95). The Danes appear absolved of their own brutality either

because they are pagans and do not follow God's law or, more likely, because their attacks are well deserved for an iniquitous people.

At this point, we must ask why Wulfstan, as a nationalist writer hoping to unite the English against the *Dena here*, does not condemn the Danes for their assault against the English, effectively creating a common enemy. One could argue that Wulfstan is simply following a pattern set by Gildas and other British chroniclers who, after witnessing the effects of their own pagan invasion, blamed the members of their own ethnic group who did little to prevent their conquest. However, this claim seems implausible because, unlike Gildas and others, Wulfstan witnessed the devastation as it occurred; he does not pontificate or document the event decades after it has passed.[21] The myth of migration earlier developed by Bede and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle can readily account for this discrepancy. It would appear that in this sermon, Wulfstan employs the myth of the *adventus Saxonum* and the implications of just conquest to explain the tenth-century wave of pagan invasion. By Wulfstan's time, the traditional narrative of the Anglo-Saxon invasion absolved the English of their violent actions against the Christian British inhabitants of the island. Not only did this narrative create historical precedent for the pagan invasion and subjugation of impious Christian inhabitants of the island; texts such as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle implied that such an invasion was warranted.

[21] It is not clear whether *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* was finished before or after the Danish conquest was complete and Cnut seized power. Although the text is dated 1014, the last section comparing the fate of the English to the fate of the British appears only in the latest manuscript, which could have been written sometime after the English had lost their cause. If this is the case, then comparisons between Wulfstan and Gildas seem more plausible; both would have been theorizing an event that had already occurred instead of inspiring the folk to rise up and prevent it. However, it is important to remember that even if the last manuscript were written after Cnut's ascension to power, this version of *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* would still only outdate the Danish conquest by a few years, not the several decades that separated *De Excidio Britanniae* from the Anglo-Saxon invasion. For further discussion on the dating of the text, see Godden.

As he makes the connection between the Britons of Gildas's day and the English of his own, Wulfstan clarifies his position on the causes of the *adventus Saxonum* and, in turn, the invasion of any morally weakened Christian people. He unequivocally presents the events of the fifth century as divine justice against the Christian British who had failed to uphold religious devotion. He claims that the Britons *mid Heora synnum swa oferlice swyþe God gegræmedan þæt he let æt nyhstan Engla here Heora eard gewinnan and Brytta dugeþe fordon mid ealle* "so excessively angered God with their sins that He finally allowed the English army to gain their land and entirely destroy the British nobility" (177-79). For Wulfstan, the fault for the demise of British sovereignty over the island lies completely with the British themselves, a point that he reinforces just a few lines later: *heora eard hy forworhtan and selfe hy forwurdan* "they forfeited their land and they themselves perished" (185-86). Wulfstan's perception of these events is not unique. His assessment follows the culturally acceptable analysis of the Anglo-Saxon invasion that relieves the English of guilt about their conquest and justifies the actions taken in order to secure the island for themselves. As nationalist texts such as the Chronicle insist, pagan conquerors acting through divine or military right are exonerated from responsibility for indigenous Christian suffering. Nicholas Howe has suggested that much of English historical consciousness manifests itself as the awareness that a people can only maintain power as long as they remain pious. Wulfstan's sermon simply reflects this idea: "The history of his þeod establishes this truth in a dazzlingly symmetrical manner by recording how men have acted in this world: The British did not perform God's will and lost the island; the Anglo-Saxons will hold it for as long as they do perform it" (Howe 20). In the English cultural conscience, the pattern of history

proves that Christian people hold power only as long as they behave in a Christian manner. If they cannot do so, God may display his displeasure (and has) by allowing foreign pagans to overcome the land.

Because Wulfstan relies on this metaphorical view of history, he complicates his view of the Danish invasions and essentially exempts the Northern migrations from blame. Whether or not he intended to so, Wulfstan suggests the Danes fulfill the same role as the Anglo-Saxon invaders when they overtook the Britons. Godden notes the problems with the implicit parallel between Anglo-Saxon and Danish invaders and with what it might insinuate about the fate of the English:

> In turning finally to the Gildas paradigm, Wulfstan was, consciously or not, turning to a story which allowed for eventual acceptance of the invaders within the fold of religion and civilization. He was drawing a parallel between the Viking invaders and the earlier Anglo-Saxon invaders who had arrived as barbarians but rapidly established a new Christian civilization. (156)

Alice Cowen suggests that the implications of Wulfstan's parallel are even more dire than Godden suggests, concluding that Wulfstan may have recognized the similarities between the two pagan troops and deemed the eventual Danish military success as inevitable:[22]

> The Vikings…act as a kind of dark *alter ego* for the English. The threat that the English will lose their political autonomy to the Vikings is

[22] While Godden does not conclude that Wulfstan was aware of the logical conclusions his parallel draws, he suggests that Wulfstan's willingness to embrace "the Gildas paradigm" at least subconsciously prepared him to accept the role of Cnut's advisor after the English had lost their battle. Godden claims that "[i]t was no doubt because of that paradigm that he was able so quickly to achieve the frame of mind that enabled him to become Cnut's advisor"(156). Because Wulfstan viewed the tenth century invasions as a sort of re-enactment of the *adventus Saxonum*, one could argue that he saw few problems accepting a position in the Danish hierarchy. In fact, if in his mind the Danish would attain the wealth and influence of the English, his shifting loyalties could only be considered advantageous, if not a little mercenary.

> anticipated by a sense that they are already losing their distinct identity…While the contemporary English face the same awful fate of the Britons, the Vikings undertake the avenging role that was formerly played by the *Engla here*. (410)

While the parallel Wulfstan draws between the *Engla here* and the *Dena here* may not have been deliberate, it is difficult to ignore its consequences. By invoking Gildas and the myth of Anglo-Saxon migration, Wulfstan places the Danes in the place of the Anglo-Saxons, which suggests that the former may be as just as the latter in the their motives and tactics.

As Cowen and others note, if the Danes are analogous to the Anglo-Saxons in Wulfstan's teleology, then it must follow that the English perform the same role as the British they conquered. Tellingly, Wulfstan's description of English sin closely follows the Old English Bede's account of British misdeeds. Both groups commit acts of sexual indecency and disrespect towards the church and its leaders who fail to uphold Christian values themselves. Perhaps most evocative is Wulfstan's emphasis on the cowardice of the English, the one vice that both the Old English Bede and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle agree was the greatest British shortcoming. He suggests that the transgressions of the English are compounded by their unwillingness to avenge themselves against those who have wronged them. Instead, Wulfstan claims, the English reward the Danes for their punishment and disgrace: *ealne þæne bysmore þe we oft þoliað we gyldað mid weorðscipe þam þe us scendað: we him gyldað singallice, and hy us hynað dæghwamlice* "we pay for all the insult that we often suffer with honor to those who insult us: we pay them incessantly, and they humiliate us daily" (121-23). This weakness is reminiscent of

the Britons' own lack of defense that justifies their defeat throughout Anglo-Saxon literature. In fact, several times throughout Wulfstan's direct comparison between the two groups, he insists that the English have transgressed worse than their British counterparts did. He warns his listeners that *wyrsan dæda we witan mid Englum þonne we mid Bryttan ahwar gehyrdan; and þy us is þearf micel þæt we us beþencan and wið God sylfne þingian georne* "we know of worse deeds with the English than we have heard anywhere with the British; and for this we have much need to remember ourselves and plead well with God himself" (187-90). Although he ends the sermon with similar calls for atonement, given that the English are more sinful than the British, whose transgressions resulted in the eradication of their own distinct identity, it seems unlikely at this point that Wulfstan foresees any lesser punishment for the offenses of the English.

By incorporating these elements of the narrative of the Anglo-Saxon invasion established in the Old English Bede and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Wulfstan appropriates and rewrites the tale to correspond with his own historical moment. The narrative that was sympathetic to the vanquished British in the Old English Bede and stripped of violence in the Chronicle now appears in the *Sermo* as political allegory to demonstrate the inevitable downfall of the English people. While the myth of the *adventus Saxonum* was interpreted to support Alfredian West Saxon hegemony in the tenth century, Wulfstan's version instead questions the right of the English to rule in the face of their own moral and physical weakness against both the threats and the temptations posed by the Danes. As Gabrielle Spiegel notes, in much medieval writing, history serves only the historian as a way of understanding the present. She argues that "such a peculiar position towards the past affected the nature of medieval historiography,

shaping a vision of the past that could be manipulated to supply legitimacy to the present" (86). In this sense, Wulfstan is fulfilling the duty of the medieval historiographer: to render metaphorically past events to explain his own. However, by treating the Anglo-Saxon invasion simply as an allegorical counterpart to the Danish attacks, he renders it as paradoxically impotent and powerful as biblical and classical allusion. Though such allusion often has great rhetorical effect, it is remote, and the events it depicts lose historical significance. While Wulfstan's sermon may inspire or cast fear into the hearts of those he addresses, it ultimately reduces the bloody history of the English and the island to a hyperbolic simile.

By transforming the invasion narrative into an allegorical commentary on English suffering, Wulfstan can reintroduce the violence of conquest that the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle removed because the violence no longer would implicate the English for their wrong-doings. Whereas the Chronicle account needed to detract from the violence of invasion to create a positive national originary myth, Wulfstan has no need to do so. The brutality of the Anglo-Saxon invasion no longer belongs to the English, nor even the Danish; it becomes a literary device to describe any hardships suffered by a Christian people on the verge of losing their land and group identity. Thus, the narrative of the *adventus Saxonum* no longer chronicles what the English did but rather what will become of them. The British exist for Wulfstan only insofar as they metaphorically represent the English nation. In the *Sermo*, Wulfstan incorporates language similar to that of the Old English Bede to describe the horrors that the English must face. For example, he portrays the Danish invasion very similarly to Bede's representation of Anglo-Saxon violence, down to the modes of destruction both invading armies employed. He laments that the

Danes *bærnað, rypað, and reafiað and to scipe lædað* "burn, plunder, rob, and carry to ship" (124) in language similar to the Old English Bede's portrayal of the English pillaging of the British cities. Likewise, Wulfstan's emphasis on slavery and the killing of priests is reminiscent of Bede's own concerns for the British laymen who were forced into servitude and the mass priests slaughtered at their altars. Indeed, Wulfstan's description of an English diaspora very closely resembles the elegiac close of the Old English Bede: *Oft twegen sæmen, oððe þry hwilum, drifað þa drafe cristenra manna fram sæ to sæ, ut þurh þas þeode, gewelede togædere, us eallum to worouldscame* "Often two seamen, or sometimes three, drive a band of Christian men from sea to sea, out from the nation, huddled together" (118-120). However, while the Old English Bede seems to mourn for the victims of conquest, Wulfstan does not. Rather than exposing the cruelty of the invaders, Wulfstan is addressing those suffering, insisting that they must look to themselves and God to prevent further abuse.

Through this transferal of guilt, Wulfstan effectively rewrites the story of British suffering into a story of English suffering. He transforms the narrative from a Christian allegory into a historical one deeply informed by the political trauma of his time. On the surface, *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* appears unsympathetic to the crisis of national identity that the English must face as wave after wave of invaders reach the island. However, his antipathy towards his own countrymen is more understandable when viewed through the lens of nationalist accounts of the Anglo-Saxon invasion, such as those presented in the Chronicle. For Wulfstan, history and his own theology demonstrate that the spiritually weak deserve to be deprived of identity and property by superior pagan invaders as divine punishment for sins. He appropriates this view of history in his sermon, which serves a

vital political function in the midst of the Danish invasion. Wulfstan effectively allows his English listeners to remember the lessons of their past, emphasizing the consequences they must face as they submit to their own pagan occupation.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Just as Anglo-Saxonists in other eras appropriated the early medieval past for their own political ends, so too did the Anglo-Saxons themselves. The fundamental narrative of the *adventus Saxonum*—the invitation, the migration across the sea, and the ultimate conquest of the island—served as a powerful and evocative literary tool for writers and historiographers of Alfred's court and beyond. For much of Anglo-Saxon literature, this tale of invasion served as a basic building-block for the national narrative. It provided these authors with material to imagine and ultimately fictionalize the past to create a shared cultural heritage that was at times laudatory and mournful, intensely nationalistic and yet concerned with the violent implications of pagan occupation. Discussing the national narrative that underlies the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Harald Kleinschmidt claims:

> whatever the annals reported beyond the names seems to represent "invented traditions," that is retrospective constructs of traditions which were attached to migrationistic perceptions current in the ninth and tenth centuries but with little or no bearing on the Migration Age…what mattered more than faithfulness to their sources was to provide an historical record of the past which made sense in their very present. (16)

In a sense, the medieval historian acted as both a political commentator and a national apologist; for him, the act of writing history was one not of accuracy but rather of validation of his own historical moment. As Kleinschmidt notes, medieval narratives of

the migration have little to do with the migration itself. Instead, they give insight into how the event was remembered, and, in the tenth century, how that memory served a tangible need for a mythology that would unite a disparate group of tribes with various allegiances under a single throne.

Of course, Kleinschmidt's analysis of the Chronicle could easily be applied to any account of the Anglo-Saxon invasion from the Alfredian era onward. Both the Old English Bede and Wulfstan's *Sermo* create their own distinct versions of the migration story that reflect a culture determining its future by reconsidering its past. This phenomenon is in no way unique. What is notable, however, is how differently these texts approach the same story. Writing within 100 years of each other, Bede's translator, the Chronicle annalist, and Wulfstan provide remarkably different accounts that show a rapidly changing English national consciousness. The differences among the three accounts illustrate the instability of *Angelcynn* as an ethnic identity throughout the rapidly changing political atmosphere of tenth-century Anglo-Saxon England, which saw both the rise of Alfredian hegemony and the onslaught of the Danes. The varying perceptions of the invasion suggest the complexity of the Anglo-Saxon historical imagination; they served the diverse needs of a motley group of Germanic people struggling to define themselves as a cohesive whole. For Bede's translator, this need was fulfilled through a complex narrative dependent more on upholding Christian morality than on developing an English political consciousness. Out of the very same narrative, however, the Chronicle annalist constructs an Alfredian mythology that values secular English rather than Christian ethics, allowing the English to envision their foundation as heroic and bloodless. The conquest is rewritten to justify and defend English military dominance

during a period that saw a vast expansion of centralized English power. This rationalization of invasion continued to be utilized and transformed even as English power began to wane. In the face of Danish occupation, Wulfstan appropriated the narrative of invasion yet again, considering both the religious implications of the Old English Bede and the political implications of the Chronicle to create a new vision of the Anglo-Saxon's role on the island. For Wulfstan, the *adventus Saxonum* demonstrates that conquest is concurrently divine punishment for those who suffer and divine reward for those who conquer. At once, the narrative of the invasion is Christian instruction and political fable.

As John Niles reminds us, Anglo-Saxon England is merely an idea; in reality, the period of unification was fraught with divisions regarding issues as fundamental as self-definition. Each of these narratives shows Anglo-Saxon culture as variable, striving to reconcile the present with the past in myriad ways. Then, as now, national and religious identities were multifaceted, often competing directly and employing each other to serve different ends. Niles claims that "[w]hether these appropriations are the work of individuals acting in relative isolation or of groups acting in concert, the results of this activity tend to be expressive of an underlying ideology that is characteristic of a given time and place as well as of specific class interests, ethnic allegiances, and so on" (205). If we accept this definition of culture, the importance of understanding societies' relationship to their pasts becomes clear. In fact, this study of revision and appropriation has already found its place in contemporary Anglo-Saxon studies that strive to understand English imperialism or Manifest Destiny by analyzing these movements' major proponents fascination with the migrational movements of the Anglo-Saxons. However,

we must remember that romantic imagination is not a modern invention. Just as we can attempt to understand Anglo-Saxonists through their appropriations, so too can we begin to understand the Anglo-Saxons themselves.

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