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Lucas Novko

University at Albany, State University of New York

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The Danelaw

The Scandinavian Influence on English Identity

by

Lucas Novko

Helene Scheck, Advisor

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Introduction

In today's socio-political environment we are seeing borders shift and morph as a result of several different events and factors, whether it be a conflict between two nations or a separation of a single state or even the peaceful merger of two different municipalities. As these borders begin to shift there is a particular exposure between the cultures that constitute those newly formed states or sovereignties. These cultures may have had previous interactions before these developments, but now they are both a part of something; they have become part of a single nation, but they may still maintain cultural diversity. Bringing separate cultural groups under one political rule can result in a number of various outcomes. Other than open conflict, these groups could either become a cultural hybrid, one culture could become assimilated into the other (or others if there is a multitude). It seems that generally whenever borders experience dramatic shifts at least one or more of these activities occur. A prime example of a time and location where this is most certainly relevant was during the 9th and 10th centuries under the Danelaw, one of the major high-points of Medieval (or Viking Age) Scandinavian activity in the British Isles. Though short lived, it was because of the Vikings and their conquest of the region that we today call England that political boundaries were morphed. It is because of the Viking invasion and settlement that we had the early makings of a unified political English people.

The Viking Age

The year was 793 CE. The monastery built upon the Holy Island of Lindisfarne was attacked by a band of men who sailed from the north in their sturdy long-ships. These sailors and warriors were known as the Danes or the Northmen to the Anglo-Saxons and today they are commonly known as the Vikings. This was the label given to an international conglomerate of

diverse groups of warriors, raiders, and tradesmen who ranged from Sweden, Denmark, and Norway¹. For the next two and a half centuries, these men and women from across the sea would be known as a terror to the Christian kingdoms, but unexpectedly with their eventual conversion to Christianity, some of these Scandinavians would become strong advocates for that same faith that had originally demonized them and their ancestors. It is after this infamous raid on the island monastery of Lindisfarne off the North-East coast of England nearly 1,200 years ago many historians today consider the Viking Age to have begun. In fact, if one was to look into any text on the Vikings, he or she would most likely find a passage describing this infamous raid within the first few paragraphs, if not sentences. This was a period of Scandinavian and European history that was characterized by raiding and other such violent interactions, social and political exchanges between this northern culture and the cultures they came in contact with, and trade and exploration around Europe, the Near East, and even North America.

The study of this period had gained popularity in the 19th century by the Victorian scholars and the history had been subject to the Romantic and the Nationalist movements that took hold in Europe and eventually became wide spread. As a result of these movements, though, our image of this northern European society had become disfigured. Having been clouded by Wagnerian imagery and a sense of barbarism for the longest time, the true history of these Scandinavian people is still being revealed to us through more developed forms of archaeological research. Adding this research to further studies of texts written in this age aids in our understanding as to what sorts of impacts the Vikings had on those they came in contact with. The purpose for the research I have conducted is to further explore what sort of affects the Vikings had on England and its people and how the territory they had claimed, called the Danelaw, gave the Anglo-Saxons a better sense of

¹ Karkov, 153

their own “Englishness” and pushed them towards the creation of their own identity. But first, in order to gain an understanding how the Anglo-Saxons saw themselves during this time, it is necessary to first explore how they came to England and the establishment of Christianity amongst English society. With this vital historical background information I wish for my reader to grasp the idea of what sort of changes the English experienced as a result of the Viking Age and how English identity as we know it today got its start. In other words, it is because of the Scandinavian activities of the ninth century that we have the formation of a unified English identity.

Early England and the Formation of the Kingdoms

After the year 450 CE when England was no longer under Roman occupation, the island was open to invasion by Germanic tribes. These tribes consisted of the Angles who came from a region known as Angeln, the Saxons who came from Saxony, and the Jutes who were from northern Denmark. Unfortunately this period of time does not provide us with enough contemporary contextual evidence, so we must rely on later sources in order to gain some understanding of how things played out during the first Germanic invasions of Britain. Of course we must take this information with reasonable skepticism. In his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Bede the Venerable, an early English writer from the late seventh and early eighth centuries, provides us with a detailed account of this heavy influx of Germanic peoples. Originally, these tribes from across the sea were invited by Vortigern, who was at that time king of the Britons, to aid him and his people in their fight against the Picts and other northern Celtic tribes that were a constant threat to the South. In the fifteenth chapter of his first volume he writes:

“IN the year of our Lord 449, Martian being made emperor with Valentinian, and the fortysixth from Augustus, ruled the empire seven years. Then the nation of the Angles, or Saxons, being

invited by the aforesaid king, arrived in Britain with three long ships, and had a place assigned them to reside in by the same king, in the eastern part of the island, that they might thus appear to be fighting for their country, whilst their real intentions were to enslave it.”²

The hiring of these mercenaries from the continent marked the beginning of German settlement on the island. These fighting men who sailed in their boats much like their Scandinavian cousins centuries later were paid for their services in land and after a time they took up residence in various regions of modern day England. These regions were inhabited by the different tribes as such:

“From the Jutes are descended the people of Kent, and of the Isle of Wight, and those also in the province of the West Saxons who are to this day called Jutes, seated opposite to the Isle of Wight. From the Saxons, that is, the country which is now called Old Saxony, came the East Saxons, the South Saxons, and the West Saxons. From the Angles, that is, the country which is called Anglia, and which is said, from that time, to remain desert to this day, between the provinces of the Jutes and the Saxons, are descended the East Angles, the Midland Angles, Mercians, all the race of the Northumbrians, that is, of those nations that dwell on the north side of the river Humber, and the other nations of the English.”³

In Bede’s account, after years of migration the number of Germans soon overwhelmed that of the native Britons which according to him led to the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes allying themselves with the Picts, their former enemy, and devastating the Britons, eventually pushing them north along the western coast and to the west into the regions of what are now modern day Wales and Cornwall where the natives “continuing in their own country, led a miserable life among

² Bede, Book I

³ Ibid.

the woods, rocks, and mountains, with scarcely enough food to support life, and expecting every moment to be their last”⁴ (though it is now highly believed that the British were not forced from their homelands, but instead adopted Anglo-Saxon culture

If we follow Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History*, in the later centuries of this domination by the Germans between 450 and 600 CE, kingdoms were formed by the leaders of the various tribes that came to the eastern coast of England and pushed their way west. The kingdoms that were given birth at this time were Kent, which was created by a man named Oisc, East Anglia, founded by King Wuffa, Deira which later was called Northumbria, Wessex and Sussex which were settled by the West Saxons and South Saxons respectively, and Mercia in the midland marches of England⁵. These names were coined later on to express this change of political and social climate and were reliant upon one another for their existence (for example, the West Saxons require the East and the South Saxons in order for their name to be relevant)⁶. These separate kingdoms were involved in several political conflicts (especially with the surviving British peoples in the west and the north of the island) and took part in a complicated system of alliances that brought about English expansion further west.

There are two accepted views held by scholars that explain how and why these early kingdoms formed where they did and both of these views are credible⁷. One idea in regards to the buildup of the Anglo-Saxon lands is the complete demolition of older Roman territorial markers and structures and replacing them with new ones that did not regard previous boundaries.⁸ This idea seems to correlate with the scenario described by Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History*. The other

⁴ Bede, Book I

⁵ Sommerville, J.P.

⁶ Highman 139

⁷ Ibid, 137

⁸ Ibid, 137

viewpoint is that these territories that were originally marked out during the Roman period and some of the Romano-British centers were taken over and experienced a continuity that aided in their survival into the early middle ages⁹. According to Highman, this idea does not focus on the idea of collected tribal kingdoms but rather it gives attention to the thought of scattered minority Anglo-Saxon groups becoming incorporated by their more sizable neighboring communities¹⁰.

As for the ruling of these separate kingdoms, leadership was derived from Germanic practices where leaders were typically chosen by how well they proved themselves in combat. Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England relied upon a mutually beneficial relationship between a king and his nobles or *þegns*. In Germanic tradition, whatever treasure or wealth that a tribal leader, or *cyng*, was able to procure through combat and raiding, a portion of it was divvied up between the nobles. This was to ensure that the king possessed the loyalty and service of his nobles while the nobles were also experienced the benefit of being paid for that loyalty. If we were to look at Bede's description of the kingdoms again, we'll find that he refers to them and their founding by group name rather than by the name of the area they occupied¹¹. What we could take from this is that these tribal groups and the kingdoms formed were based upon kinship and familial and ethnic ties. This concept along with the act of gift giving is what seemed to have held these kingdoms together in their infancy. However, it most definitely did not prevent these groups from fighting with one another especially given the fact that this society was focused on warfare, but this also does not mean that these kings relied solely upon violence to attain their right to rule and the loyalty of their followers. This could have also been achieved through negotiation and strategic placement near

⁹ Highman 137

¹⁰ Ibid, 139

¹¹ Ibid, 140

resources¹². Regardless of what alliances or feuds they had with each other, the fact is that these kingdoms and the people in them did not see themselves as one English people.

Early Christianity

Signs of Christianity, which had been a strong element in Romano-British culture, had nearly disappeared throughout England as a result of the Anglo-Saxon invasions. It seems that it survived with the Celtic kingdoms in the west but there is very little evidence for the practice of this religion between the fifth and late sixth centuries by the Anglo-Saxons who were already practicing their polytheistic religion that they brought with them from the continent¹³. The English movement to Christianity originally began in the south-east of England in the kingdom of Kent with the efforts of Augustine. Sent by Pope Gregory in 597 CE, this monk had successfully converted King Æthelberht of Kent and around ten thousand of his subjects, which could easily serve as an indicator for how their loyalty to their king affected the decisions of the English¹⁴. Augustine was able to settle himself and his followers in the ancient town of Canterbury where he acted as bishop from 597 to 604 CE. Because of Canterbury's role as a base of Christian operation in England, this bishop stationed here would be considered England's ultimate Christian authority¹⁵

Another effort was made by Irish missionaries such as Columba in the late sixth century to bring Christianity to Scotland, Northern England and the islands around the north of Britain. Because of his efforts and the efforts of his contemporaries, several monastic settlements were

¹² Highman, 143

¹³ Hadley, Sean, 6

¹⁴ Ibid, 6

¹⁵ Ibid, 7

successfully founded in Scotland in Columba's lifetime¹⁶. The one monastery founded by Columba that had become the most directly involved in Anglo-Saxon Christianity was located on the Isle of Iona. It was from this island monastery that the first known Anglo-Saxon Christians, who resided there as monks, were found. Oswald, who became king of Northumbria in 635 CE, stayed at the monastery during his exile before he was crowned and once he rose to power he asked for priests from the island to come to Northumbria so that they could convert all of his subjects¹⁷.

With the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and the reintroduction of Christianity to England, a tone was set for the future of this land and those that inhabited it. It did not, however, completely change the customs of the Anglo-Saxons especially during the infancy of English Christianity. Though he became a Christian himself, Æthelberht did not compose any laws that would forbid the practice of the older pagan customs. Therefore when his son, Eadbald who did not even convert in the first place, took the throne there was a "cultural return" to pagan tradition throughout Kent with the death of Æthelberht¹⁸. After paganism was outlawed in 640CE, the English form of Christianity still experienced a sort of fusion with Germanic traditions. German concepts such as *Wergeld*, or man price, were still a common idea held by the Anglo-Saxons along with the concept of revenge for wrongdoings¹⁹. This Latin-Germanic society of the seventh century with its conflicting identities can be seen as a parallel to the Anglo-Scandinavians that would emerge just a couple of centuries later with the formation of the Danelaw.

The Coming of the Northmen

¹⁶ Somerville web

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Hadley, Sean 6

¹⁹ Ibid 7

After the raid on Lindisfarne, more Danes and Norwegians made their way west, not limiting their raids to England, but instead making their way into and around the continent sailing along the coast and traversing rivers all around Europe. Men such as Olaf Tryggvason, Harald Bluetooth, along with several unnamed individuals would take part in the raiding and socio-political exchanges that marked this period, making a name for themselves and becoming historical figures of legendary status that still influence today's culture in the form of cinematic entertainment, technological innovations (such as Bluetooth), literature and so on. These men and women from northern Europe and their activities had affected the very political structure of empires such as those forged by the Byzantines and the Carolingians. Yet the focus of this work will be on what these people did to influence England's character and how the circumstances behind their invasion and settlement on the British Isles aided in the formation of English identity.

These were a people who spoke in a different language, worshipped different gods, and by most English men and women were seen as a curse from God with the sole purpose of destruction and the utter ruin of their home. But these Scandinavians were more similar to those same people who saw them as a terrible blight from the sea, more than the English would have fathomed. Given the fact that these two cultures, though miles of sea had separated them for several centuries, had stemmed from the same Germanic group there are still striking similarities to be found between the two cultures. For instance these groups had originally worshipped and followed the traditions of the same set of deities and the English had only been fully Christian for only a couple of centuries before they came into extended contact with the Danes. Their language, though it had diverged from that spoken by their Scandinavian cousins, still had many similar elements in their languages, such as grammar, and also used like terms for several people and objects.

Through the investigation of primary sources and the analysis of physical artifacts and material culture we will explore a variety of ways in which the Vikings might have had an impact (both direct and indirect) on English culture and how that impact had eventually led to a unified English people with a common identity. This will range from the use of coinage as a method of marking new sovereignty, to political arrangements made between the English and the Danes, to ecclesiastical monuments and the alterations made to them and what they might have entailed during the time of the Danelaw.

Chapter I

From Raiding to Ruling: The Danelaw and its Beginnings

The eighth century marked a time of drastic change in England and throughout the rest of Europe. Raiding parties from across the sea grew in number as young men from Scandinavia ventured forth to seek their fortune and to find glory in battle. What these warriors and raiders would find in these foreign lands were fractured kingdoms that had little-to-no central authority and were susceptible to invasion. Ireland and Scotland, who like England were also composed of separated kingdoms, felt the effects of the Viking forces; these being primarily from Norway and eventually these two lands fell to the foreign invaders. So, it is no surprise that England, though united in faith had yet to become a united nation that could adequately defend itself would fall victim to these forces.

The Danes in Wessex (835-850 C.E.)

After the raids that occurred in the late eighth century, there seems to be a relatively long gap where there is little to no mention of any Viking activity in England. It is not until the year 835 with the overtaking of the Island of Sheppey that the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* resumes in mentioning anything about the Vikings, or the Danes²⁰, as the English were accustomed to naming these invaders. This attack is only described with the words *Her heþne men oferhergeadon Sceapige*, or “Here heathen men overtook Sheppey”²¹ It is after this attack that raids became more frequent during the turn of the century and were planned and carried out on a much larger scale

²⁰ I intend to use the words Danes, Scandinavians, and Vikings will be used interchangeably to describe these people from northern Europe.

²¹ See *The Parker Chronicle*, year 832

than that of their predecessors who had sacked Lindisfarne. A year before this attack on Sheppey, the Danes were already raiding along the continent, concentrating on the Netherlands. According to A. H. Smith, this group of Vikings that took Sheppey may have some connection the groups that had been acting in the Netherlands²². If this was the case, then it is possible that the raiding party at Sheppey might have been part of a larger, more organized band like those sailing out from Scandinavia in later years. However, we do not seem to have enough evidence to support that claim and this group at Sheppey could have been a completely separate operation. After Sheppey, raids and battles between the English and the Vikings were the dominant topic in the *Chronicle* for years as the Vikings made their way up the Thames into Kent and further into England²³.

In the year 836 the Danes made their way around the southern coast of the island and landed at Carhampton on the Bristol Channel in Somerset. The Danes were met with resistance here from King Ecgberht of Wessex and his men who had suffered a terrible defeat²⁴. It may be said that it is this particular raid and following battle at Carhampton that mark the transition from mere pillaging to open battle between the English and the Vikings. The sheer numbers of the Danes can serve as an indicator as to the nature of this raid and how we can see the Scandinavian interest in England and its lands rise. As the battle is described in the *Chronicle*:

Her gefeaht Ecgbryht cyning wiþ xxxu

sciphlæsta æt Carrum 7 þær wearþ micel wæl geslægen,

7 þa Denescan ahton wæstowe gewald; 7 Herefertþ

²² Smith, 17

²³ Ferguson, 133

²⁴ A second engagement at Carhampton occurred in the year 843 between the Danes and Ecgberht's son, Æthelwulf, which resulted in an English victory. (See Parker Chronicle)

7 Wigþen tuegen biscepas forþferdon, 7 Dudda 7

*Osmod tuegen aldormen forþferdon*²⁵

“Here King Ecgberht fought with thirty five shiploads at Carhampton and there was a great slaughter, and the Danes took control of the field of battle, and the two bishops, Hereferth and Wighten, died, and the two aldormen [shire officials], Dudda and Osmond, died.”

It is at this battle at Carhampton that we can already see that this is not just a regular raid like the one that had devastated Lindisfarne, but could be considered as the sowing of the aspiration for conquest. The number of ships given by the *Chronicle* here, if it is accurate enough, would have probably been too large a group for any sort of quick raid. The long ships that carried the Vikings across the sea on average were able to carry about twenty two men which means that this particular group of warriors and crewmen would have been between seven hundred and a thousand men²⁶. This would have been too many men to go into a village and leave in a hurry before any sort of defending force could arrive. The raids before this were typically composed of smaller bands of men as “access, outrage, and escape were easy for individual and uncoordinated raiding parties”²⁷. Stealth and surprise were what gave the Vikings their advantage when raiding along the coast.

As stated before, what is particularly interesting about these later groups was the sheer size of them. Though the raids taking place in the 830’s were fairly large, being anywhere from thirty to thirty-five ships strong, the English were still able to defend themselves from these groups which

²⁵ See *The Parker Chronicle*, 833

²⁶ Smith, 17

²⁷ Jones, 202

made them at least manageable²⁸. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* lists a few of the victories won by the people of Wessex against the Vikings. In 838 the Danes formed an alliance with the Cornishmen who at the time were hoping to break away from English authority²⁹. This combined force, however, was defeated by King Ecgberht and the men of Wessex at Hingston Down, which marked one of the first English victories over the foreigners. Despite these victories, though, the amount of Scandinavians arriving in England had risen tremendously in just a couple of decades, having not been deterred by the native resistance.

The attack on Canterbury and London in the year 851 was said to have been the work of an army of three hundred and fifty ships. Yet even with these numbers, the English did manage a victory from their engagement with the Vikings when Æthelwulf of Wessex and Beorhtwulf of Mercia crossed over the Thames to meet the Danes. This resulted in a victory which was described by chroniclers as *þæt mæste wæl geslogon on hæþnum herige þe we secgan hierdon oþ þisne ondweardan dæg*³⁰ or “the greatest slaughter of the heathen army that we heard tell up to this present day”. As Highman says, these Vikings were “a manageable if ever-present threat” if we are to rely on the impressions that the *Chronicle* paints for us in our reading of it³¹. The success of the English did not come without a price, however, as some of the aldormen were slain in battle and there were still some defeats that were experienced by the West Saxons and the Mercians. All of these engagements in the 830’s and 840’s were the signs for something far grander that would pose as a greater challenge for the English in the years to come.

The Great Army

²⁸ Highman, 258

²⁹ Smith, 17

³⁰ See *The Parker Chronicle*, year 851

³¹ Highman, 258

It was in the autumn of the year 865 that the Vikings landed with a huge force in England that the English had referred to (quite appropriately for that time and place) as a “Great Heathen Army”³² which had the sole purpose of territorial expansion. This was an ambition that could have been in development for the past few decades as the Danes *sæt*, or made camps for the winter, not in a hurry to rush back home, but instead made their own fortifications and stayed in one place for a relatively long time, longer than one would have expected with a usual raid in previous years. This sort of activity was not just limited to England either. In the year 840 C.E. Vikings stayed throughout the winter in Ireland and three years later there was a similar occurrence in Francia; the winter camps in England were a reflection of a change of Viking tendencies in Western Europe at the time³³. This great army, though, was not composed of men fresh from the north of Europe, but instead was made up of several different groups that had already been operating in Ireland, Francia, and the British Isles before making a pact between the Jarls and Kings that would lead the army in its pursuits with much efficiency and cooperation between them³⁴.

And no longer did the Danes keep their activities to the coastline, but instead they reached further inland through the numerous rivers and estuaries that could be found in England and that the Viking longboats were able to navigate due to their maneuverability and design that made them able to traverse shallower waters. Raids were usually short term seasonal affairs where they would take advantage of good sailing weather in the spring and would make themselves homeward bound before the seas turned rough with the winter season.. A pattern was being laid out for the new territorial boundaries that would be composed in the near future. As Ferguson writes in *The*

³² Ferguson, 135

³³ Highman, 258

³⁴ *Ibid*, 259

Vikings, this army's arrival and its determination for conquest had completely altered "the Viking presence in England"³⁵.

Said to have been lead by the sons of the famous Ragnar Lodbrok, Ingvar and Halfdan, this army made its way from East Anglia, having made peace with the East Anglians and been given supplies and horses, riding to the north across the River Humber and towards the city of York. At the time this city was experiencing discord between two men, Ælla and Osbert, both of whom were eager to take the throne of Northumbria for himself. By the time that these two men had seen the Great Army and its threat to York they were already doomed to fall to the Vikings³⁶. As it says in the *Chronicle*:

Þone here sohton æt Eoforwicceastre

7 on þa ceastre bræcon 7 hie sume inne wurdon;

7 þær was unmtlic wæl geslægen Norþanhymbra,

Sume binnan, sume butan, 7 þa cyningas begen

*Ofslægene, 7 sio laf wiþ þone ere friþ nam.*³⁷

"And the Danes camped at York and stormed the city and some of them got inside the walls, and there was an immense slaughter of Northumbrians, some within [the walls], some outside them, and both of the kings were slain, and whoever remained made peace with the Danes"

³⁵ Ferguson. 135

³⁶ Ferguson, 135

³⁷ *The Parker Chronicle*, year 867

After this battle and the taking of the city, we see one of the first cases of major political influence that the Danes had on any of the English peoples. With the deaths of Osbert and Ælla, the Danes, had installed a new leader of their choosing, a man by the name of Ecgberht (not to be confused with the late king of Wessex), who would serve as king operating under the influence of the Vikings and rule over the Northumbrians who submitted themselves to the Scandinavians.

Two years later the Great Army chose its next target, the Kingdom of East Anglia, and in the winter of 869 they took up winter quarters at Thetford³⁸. They were later met by King Edmund who had, along with his army, resisted the Danes and had been slain in the fighting. The *Chronicle* briefly describes the Great Army's travel through the Mercian kingdom and the battle that ensued. About this battle the anonymous chronicler wrote:

Her rad se here ofer Mierce innan East-

Engle 7 wintersetl namon æt Þeoforda. 7 þy winter

Eadmund cyning him wiþ feaht 7 þa Deniscan

sige namon 7 þone cyning ofslogon 7 þæt lond all

*geeodon*³⁹.

“Here the invading army rode through Mercia into East Anglia and took winter quarters at Thetford. And during that winter King Edmund fought with them and the Danes won the battle and the king was slain, and that land was taken.

³⁸ See Highman, pg 260

³⁹ Parker Chronicle, year 870

According to Nicholas Highman, this is the first time that the *Chronicle* specifically mentions any of the English kingdoms being taken over by the Viking host⁴⁰. Before this battle it seems that whatever victory the Vikings had before resulted in a peace agreement between them and the English, whereas this particular event describes a true takeover. With his death, King Edmund experienced martyrdom as a Christian king “killed at the hands of pagans” and his new saintly title is evident in later coinage (a powerful political tool which will be discussed in a later chapter) bearing the inscription *sce eadmund rex* or “O, Saint and King Edmund!”⁴¹.

A Tipping of the Scales: A Transition between the English Powers

Years before this invasion and the numerous raids that occurred before it Mercia had been the dominant kingdom on the isle. But with the movement and activity of these Scandinavian forces, however, the balance of power that had long characterized relations between the various English kingdoms would experience a dramatic shift in the ninth century. With the arrival of the Great Army in 866, Mercia was essentially a passage through which the Vikings would need to travel if they were to take advantage of the disunity and chaos conflict between Osberht and Ælla in the north. The army would return to Mercia in 867 late in the year after they had taken York and appointed a king of their choosing and would winter in Nottingham that year. These winter camps would have needed enough space and food to sustain a group of this size and one could imagine the toll that might have had on the local populace and resources that year.

How could it affect later relations with Mercia

⁴⁰ Highman, pg 260

⁴¹ *Ibid.* pg 260

There was an attempt to remove this army from their camp by the Mercian King Burgred and his advisors who had called upon the aid of King Æthered and his younger brother, Alfred who at this time was twenty years old. In the end, however, even with the help of the kingdom of Wessex the Mercians were unsuccessful in their plans to drive the Danes away from their land. King Burgred was forced to pay off the Vikings in order to attain peace which they would do again in later years with renewed attacks on London and Lincolnshire in the years 871 and 872 respectively. It does not take much thought to have an idea of the sort of pressure that these repeated peace settlements with the Danes had on the Mercians as the price for peace was most likely a costly venture though there is no mention of an exact price in the *Chronicle*.

Not only did this army have an impact on the kingdom fiscally in their early activities, but they also had an effect on the Mercians spiritually when the Vikings seized the royal mausoleum. This was regarded as a place of spiritual importance and was also used as a cult site for the church of St. Wystan⁴². The location of this church would give the Scandinavians a strategic advantage as the Vikings entrenched themselves and developed fortifications forming a U-shape along this site.

The greatest blow to the Kingdom of Mercia, however, would be the ousting of King Burgred, ally to the king of Wessex, from his throne by the Danes as they overwintered in the year 874. This king-turned-exile travelled to the continent, eventually arriving in Rome and dying shortly after. After deposing Burgred and driving him into exile, the Scandinavian force put in his place a puppet king of their choosing, much like they did in the north with the city of York. This man who had taken the Mercian throne was known as Ceolwulf who would become the second of that name. Though he was described in an ill manner by the *Chronicle* (he was described as a

⁴² Highman, 260

“foolish king’s thegn”⁴³ given the fact that he was given his title by the invaders), there do not seem to be any records of anyone challenging his legitimacy.

This choice made by the Danes of installing Ceolwulf could have possibly had more political significance aside from the fact that this was a king of their choosing who would most likely act in their interest. There was a genealogy that accompanied this man that would strengthen his claim to the title of King of Mercia. It was thought that this Ceowulf was a descendent of King Ceolwulf I and the installment of Ceolwulf II entailed an historical claim to the throne. It should come to no surprise that this ancient line was actually a rival to Brugred’s house and this perhaps was part of some ploy by made by the Danes⁴⁴ to find a ruling fitting for their needs. This political involvement and the fact that the army was staying in England for such an elongated period heavily suggests that the Vikings were “politically astute in their actions, and were, perhaps, preparing the way for settlement”⁴⁵ as D.M. Hadley writes in his book *The Vikings in England*.

Ceolwulf’s personal view of himself appears to be that of a ruler of piety having been designated “by the Grace of God...King of the Mercians”⁴⁶. It seems that Ceolwulf II also acted in his own political ventures without referring to his Scandinavian supervisors in things such as the issuing of charters⁴⁷. In addition he was even recognized by the clergy and even the nobility, some being men who had previously served under the now-exiled Burgred. During Ceolwulf’s reign, Halfdan, who was one of the lords leading the Great Army, had begun to settle his men in Northumbria in 876. By the year 877, Halfdan and his army had returned to Mercia where he

⁴³ Hadley D.M. 12

⁴⁴ Smyth 52

⁴⁵ Hadley D.M. 12

⁴⁶ Smyth 53

⁴⁷ Highman, 261

“shared out some of it and gave some to Ceolwulf”⁴⁸ much like he had done in the north and would do again in East Anglia in 880. This had left Mercia a divided kingdom with a border between the English west and the Danish east. And with the north and the east already in their possession, Wessex had become the Danes main focus.

Further Struggle with Wessex

Throughout the 870’s Wessex had been one of the targets of the Great Army’s activities and there were several engagements that took place. Alfred had succeeded his brother, Æthelred, to the throne and had led the English against the Vikings, suffering many defeats early in his reign. What seem to characterize Alfred’s early years on the throne after the numerous battles he had fought would be the numerous exchanges he had with the Army in order to make peace settlements. The original settlements were made in 871, supposedly on the condition that the Vikings were to leave Wessex, yet in 876 they had returned to the kingdom and with the swearing of oaths and the Vikings giving hostages to the West Saxons to assure that those oaths would be fulfilled, peace was achieved again⁴⁹.

The Great Army advanced into Wessex, conquering as they went and causing some of the people of that kingdom to either flee or submit to the Vikings that now occupied the territory. Had not Alfred escaped from the advances of these invaders it surely would have meant the end of the royal line of the West Saxons⁵⁰. He along with his followers had travelled in the secluded parts of his kingdom eventually coming to the isle of Athelney which was guarded by the surrounding

⁴⁸ Hadley, D.M. pg 1

⁴⁹ Abels, however, states that we do not truly know the terms of this agreement though the chronicler, Asser, claimed that the Vikings were to leave Alfred’s kingdom, which they in fact did. (pg140)

⁵⁰ Highman, 261

impassable marshes of the Somerset Levels. This island would serve as a base of operations for him and his men as they carried out several raids against the Vikings who occupied their land⁵¹

Beginnings of a New Kingdom

After years of conflict between the two warring groups, a peace arrangement was finally made between kings Alfred and Guthrum. It is not entirely certain when this peace treaty was established, though scholars believe it to have been somewhere between the years 880 and 890 C.E.⁵². It seems that two copies of this treaty both exist as a part of a collection at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. As translated from the Old English script this treaty opens with:

This is the peace which King Alfred and King Guthrum and the councilors of all the English race and all the people who are in East Anglia have all agreed on and confirmed with oaths, for themselves and for their subjects, both for the living and the unborn who care to have God's favours or ours⁵³

With this treaty we already have a mention of an English "people" that the treaty is concerning. Through this treaty the boundaries of the Danelaw were established between Alfred and Guthrum. Along with this treaty, sovereignty over "all the English (Angelcyn) that were not under subjection of the Danes" was granted to King Alfred after his successful recapture of London according to the events of the year 886 C.E. in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*⁵⁴. The dating to all of these events regarding this treaty and Alfred's regard as being commander of all the English people is rather contested given the fact that we do not have a specific date for this treaty. In addition, so

⁵¹ *Highman*, 261

⁵² King's College. Web.

⁵³ Hadley, D.M. 31

⁵⁴ *Ibid* 31

far as Alfred is concerned, it is quite possible that even before his retaking of London and the submission of all the English peoples that this West Saxon king might have already viewed himself as a supreme commander, especially given the fact that he was the last king independent of the rule of the Danes. It is these events along and the early formations of the Danelaw along with Alfred's ruling over the lands outside of the Danelaw that will shape English culture and its countless interactions with that of the Danes which in turn will prove influential in the formation of an English identity.

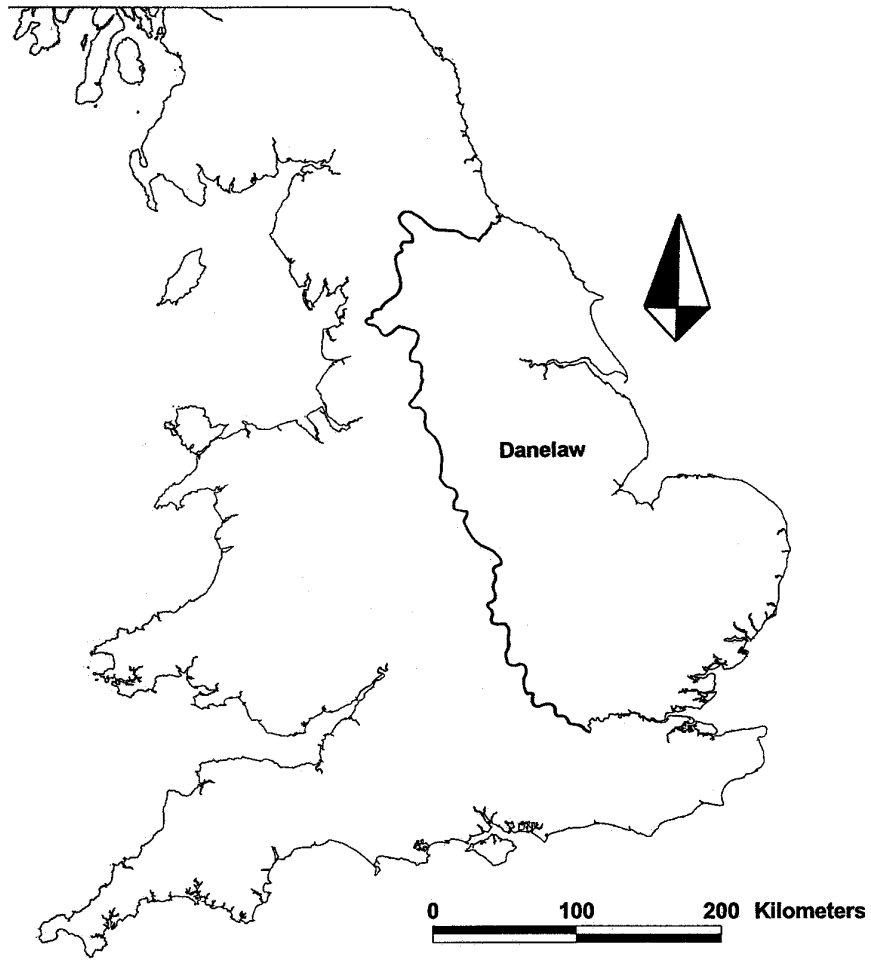


Figure I: A map of the Danelaw covering the regions of East Anglia and the eastern half of Mercia.

(After Turner. 2000: fig. 1)

Chapter II

Colonization, Coinage, and Material Culture

Guthrum and his Kingship

In the year 878CE, after their defeat by Alfred and the West Saxon army at the battle of Edington, the chief of the Scandinavian force, Guthrum, along with several of his followers were baptized into Christianity and it is here that Guthrum takes on his Christian name, Æthelstan (the name which belonged to Alfred's older brother), and becomes the godson of King Alfred. Two years later, Guthrum had settled and "Shared out the land" with his men in East Anglia, which was most likely already under Scandinavian occupation at that time⁵⁵. As result of this settlement, King Alfred had signed a treaty with King Guthrum which formed a definitive boundary between the two kingdoms and is considered by some to be the earliest record of the development of the Danelaw, though the nature of the treaty and the boundary it describes is still debated by today's scholars⁵⁶. According to D.M. Hadley, the treaty written between these two kings may have also been an attempt for each of them to gain a better sense of each other's customs and to better manage the development of this newfound relationship between the Scandinavians and the native English population⁵⁷. Whatever the case, this treaty still presented Guthrum as a Christian king, which he seemed to have been willing to display himself as in order to better accommodate himself in this foreign land and one could say that the formation of this Anglo-Scandinavian kingdom paved the way for further Scandinavian settlement on the island.

⁵⁵ Hadley 30

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 31-32

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 32

Colonization of England

To grasp the idea of Viking influence in the creation of a united English identity, we must keep in mind the idea of postcolonial theory. According to Catherine E. Karkov in her work *Postcolonial Theory and Anglo-Saxon England*, this theory generally entails “the performance of a relationship between a colonizing power and a colonized subject that can either take the form of or be constructed and played out through language, territory, political and social institutions, and literary and material culture”⁵⁸. Obviously in this case the Scandinavians take the part of a colonizing power while the Anglo-Saxons fill the role of the subjects of said power. As a result of this colonization and the Viking invasions and the strengthening of English notion of identity, several “cultural binaries”⁵⁹ began to form that are still present in today’s research and scholarship. Many of these binaries carried with them (and still somewhat carry today) a strong bias against the Vikings, placing them under the category of illiterate, barbaric pagans who were a contrast from the literate culture of the civilized, Christian Anglo-Saxons⁶⁰. Much of this will be described in further detail in the next chapter.

Material Culture and the Complexities of Anglo-Scandinavian Identities

Material culture is the primary focus of archaeological research and it is from this material that archaeologists and historians are able to construct an idea of what these recovered objects can reveal. When it comes to identity we must be careful with how we interpret the evidence given to us and be sure not to over-simplify some of the concepts that the material entails. As Martin J. Ryan says in *The Anglo-Saxon World*, “Material culture or language does not passively reflect

⁵⁸ Karkov 149

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 153

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 153

ethnic identity, much less personal origin.”⁶¹. So how might scholars today be able to make any clear distinctions between the two cultures through these physical remains? What characteristics would make these artifacts English or Scandinavian? Though it may not be the most reliable method for us to use in defining Scandinavian impact on the island, the investigation in material culture is a necessity given that there is only so much that we can gather from written sources. As a result of this a collaboration between written and physical materials is inevitable. In addition might still provide us with some vital information on Anglo-Scandinavian relations given that there is still a relatively large quantity of physical evidence of Viking activity throughout the north-eastern regions of England.

So perhaps there is a particular approach that we as modern-day scholars can take in order for us to find our way past this predicament regarding the complexity of identity and gain better knowledge of what sort of impact the Vikings had on England’s identity. If we are to observe the cultural markings left on England and the early formations of English identity during this period, it is imperative that we attempt to recognize some of the distinctions between these cultures along with the contrasts that these two major groups might have recognized for themselves.

In addition to the complexities in making solid cultural distinctions between the Anglo-Saxons and the Vikings in the Danelaw, there is the fact that not only did the Anglo-Saxons have several localized and regional identities that defined them, but the Vikings themselves were composed of several different nationalities that were added to the mixture of Anglo-Scandinavian identities and interactions.

New Kingship Comes with New Coinage

⁶¹ Ryan 285

With the continuing migration of Scandinavians to eastern and northern England, the Danish and Norwegian occupiers found the need to establish a strong foothold for their newfound authority in England. Some of the Scandinavian rulers accomplished this feat through the use of several methods such as the utilization of Christian symbolism and ruling over their subjects in the fashion of Anglo-Saxon kings⁶². This was surely necessary in order for this foreign minority to effectively control these newly-established kingdoms that were still inhabited by those who we consider to still be ethnically “English”. There also had to have been some cooperation between the clerical powers that already existed in these areas, such as the Archbishop of York. Hadley explores this relationship between the Viking kings and the Archbishop through the study of coinage. The Vikings had brought a supply of silver with them and developed a system of coinage that imitated preexisting English coinage (this early phase of Danish coin production being known as the Imitative phase⁶³), but had higher value since the native coinage was experiencing a time of debasement, the coins being made from brass instead of precious metals⁶⁴. This study of coinage in the Danelaw is necessary due to the fact that coins are one of the few examples of material evidence that we can directly link with the Scandinavians⁶⁵ and it further illustrates the political relations of the Danes and the English after the initial conquest.

The coins of these rulers are decorated with crosses and script that was common practice during the process of designing and minting coins in Christian kingdoms. In order for these newer issues of coins to be made, they required people who were literate and well practiced in Christian symbolism to design them. The most likely candidates for this task were members of the

⁶² Hadley 44

⁶³ Blackburn 20

⁶⁴ Hadley 45

⁶⁵ Blackburn 18

ecclesiastical institutions such as the Archbishop, Wulfhere, though according to Hadley, the Scandinavians were the ones who ultimately had control over the design due to the fact that there were some gaps in the use of literary devices on the mints⁶⁶. There are also a few prominent examples of the incorporation of pagan imagery into the issuing of coinage later in the early tenth century.

In York a particular coin was being minted in the name of St. Peter decorated with the inscription *Sci Petri Mo* or “St. Peter’s Money” (pg 47). In later production, this coin eventually was embellished with swords and Thor’s hammers on the reverse side of the coin (see figure ii). This minting serves as a perfect example of Christian and Pagan duality in the production of coins in this period. This sort of pagan imagery can also be found on the Ragnall coins, Ragnall being the man who had proclaimed himself ruler of York around the year 919⁶⁷.



Fig iii: A stamp used for minting the St Peter coinage. Notice the sword and hammer designed for the reverse of the coin (After Yorkshire Museum.)

⁶⁶ Hadley 45

⁶⁷ Ibid 47

Another coin dating to the early tenth century from York was a silver penny minted under the reign of Anlaf (Olaf) Guthfrithsson, whose rule over Northumbria was short-lived after his taking of York from Edmund in the year 939 C.E. Upon this coin was struck an image depicting a bird that could possibly represent a raven which was the pagan symbol for the Norse god Odin or perhaps an eagle which was a symbol associated with St. John the Evangelist⁶⁸. It is symbols such as this bird of prey that leaves us with a sense of ambiguity in regards to what denomination this coin had the purpose of representing. Could this have represented a raven as a part of the religion that was brought over by the Vikings? Or perhaps it was intended as a Christian symbol and was to serve as a representation for how the Viking rulers were beginning to fashion themselves as Christian kings.

Maybe the imagery on this coin was supposed to be dual-purpose, serving as an acceptable symbol for both the Christians and pagans living under the rule of Anlaf⁶⁹ (though Karkov would possibly argue that this may be a little too simplistic a thought⁷⁰). What is also interesting about this penny besides the bird image is the inscription around the coin. It reads ANLAF CVNVNC or *King Olaf* in the Old Norse tongue, possibly an indicator that this coin was designed independently from the clergy unlike some of the other coinage found from this period, especially given the fact that nearly all of the other coins issued bore Latin inscriptions⁷¹. We'll find in our discussion of the church's response to the Danelaw and how it was effected by this new kingdom that this crossing between English and Norse symbolism is not limited to just coinage.

⁶⁸ The British Museum

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Karkov 153

⁷¹ *The British Museum*



Fig. iv: A silver penny minted for Anlaf Guthfrithsson in York, England between 939-941 C.E. (After British Museum.)

As for the coins made a few decades earlier during the time of King Alfred and the early stages of the Danelaw, there are four primary groups of mints known to us that happen to be imitations of the coins that were minted under Alfred's rule. They are known as the Ohsnaforda (Oxford), the Doro (Canterbury), the Two-Line (Horizontal), and the London Monogram types⁷². These various groups of coins have been found in several hordes around England. One such horde found at Ashdown contained solely coins of the Horizontal type of Danelaw variety which was the main issue of coin between 885 and 995 CE. During this imitative phase of coinage, the die-engravers in the Danelaw used not only the names of moneyers from English coins in their engraving, but interestingly enough they had brought in the names of moneyers from continental Europe into their coinage as well⁷³. So, not only did the Danes take a part of material culture that had originally belonged to the Anglo-Saxons and made it their own, but they also brought in other foreign influences into this form of material culture. With this development of new coinage by

⁷² Blackburn 21

⁷³ Ibid 22

Guthrum and the other rulers of the Danelaw we are witnessing this struggle between the native English culture and that of the Vikings.

As discussed previously, the kings of this newly founded Danelaw did not seem to have the intention of displaying themselves as supreme Scandinavian lords, but instead sought to fashion themselves as Anglo-Saxon kings instead. Rather than simply “transplanting” Scandinavian identities into a land that was foreign to the Danes and the Norwegians, they instead represented a sort of hybridization of the two cultures that is referred to by today’s scholars as Anglo-Scandinavian⁷⁴. With the combining of English and Danish culture also came a melding of material culture that is evident in the art and sculpture of this period and will be further discussed and analyzed in the next chapter.

Language in the Danelaw

Language has become one of those fundamental necessities for communication and everyday life. The ability to form a language is a definitive part of culture and a given language (or group of languages) can typically be associated with a corresponding culture and region. This was most likely the same case in the time of King Alfred: the Vikings would have spoken variations of Old Norse from their respective groups and regions whereas the West Saxons would communicate with their own dialect of Old English. Both of these languages belong to the Germanic branch of the family of Indo-European languages and thus shared many similar features such as vocabulary and alphabet⁷⁵ (at least until the Roman alphabet was adopted in England),

⁷⁴ Ryan, 286

⁷⁵ The Angles and Saxons that migrated to Britain as well as the Scandinavians used a runic alphabet that was widespread amongst the Germanic peoples of Europe. These runes served a variety of purposes such as charms, short inscriptions on grave markers, etc. As the centuries passed by, these groups had developed their own variations of this alphabet.

though how intelligible they were to each other is still matter of debate today⁷⁶. Studying linguistic evidence from this period would give us a better idea of the nature of the interactions between the English and the Vikings and what sort of knowledge they thought was crucial to their interactions.

As the Vikings began to take up more permanent residence in England and partook in diplomacy with Alfred and his men, there came the need for the two groups to be able to communicate with one another effectively. In her published work *The Vikings in England* D.M. Hadley, professor of Medieval archaeology at the University of Sheffield, has thoroughly explored the subject of Scandinavian settlement along with its impact on England as a whole and the numerous changes that occurred in both the spoken and written language of the period. In her work, Hadley poses to us several excellent questions to consider when delving into the relations between the English and the Viking in terms of language barriers. Such questions included how Guthrum and Alfred would have made peace negotiations and stayed within the same vicinity of each other for two weeks time while also exchanging ideas of “the rudiments of the Christian faith”⁷⁷ which would later prove to be an essential piece of Guthrum’s presence as king? Hadley also brings up the topic of land purchases and exchanges between the English and the Vikings later on and how this might have possibly been accomplished⁷⁸. More important in regards to our study of the Scandinavian impact on English identity is how this northern European language had affected the English tongue with the presence of the Danelaw.

Scandinavian colonization as well as the northern Germanic language that was brought along with it had a considerable influence on the still (at the time of the mid and late 9th century)

⁷⁶ Hadley, D.M., 93

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 93

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 93.

relatively juvenile English world in regards to place names. The names of places can be a helpful tool when it comes to piecing together the history of a particular area of space and the cultures involved with the process of settling it. Place names may indicate a natural formation or occurrence, a person of historical interest, or something as simple as naming it after the person (or persons) who lived there. Nevertheless, whatever the purpose for a given name, this practice of naming areas and territories is part of the cultural experience and it has the potential to reveal how the people occupying might have viewed themselves and the surrounding landscape. In studying the Danelaw and its territorial reach, scholars have researched and recorded English place names that possess names which are distinctly of Old Norse origin. As one could guess based on the history briefly described in the previous chapter, the greatest concentration of Scandinavian place-names in England occurs in the eastern half of the country given the established borders for Viking occupation.

Dr. Matthew Townend is one of many scholars who has conducted a vast amount of research into Old Norse and Old English. Having also explored the social concerns regarding these two languages spoken in the Danelaw, Dr. Townend suggests that these two groups possessed “adequate mutual intelligibility” of each other and that Anglo-Saxons later on would also have been bilingual⁷⁹. If we move beyond written evidence, Townend’s conclusion is most evident in the place-names given during the tenth century which would generally consist of cognates. D.M. Hadley on the other hand writes that these cognates may not necessarily serve as an indicator of a significant level of intelligibility between these two major groups⁸⁰.

⁷⁹ Townend 3

⁸⁰ Hadley 94

Though it is not as clearly evident in sources contemporary to Alfred's reign, Old Norse has had a sizeable impact on the English language as a whole and is not limited to the category of place names. In written Old English sources we have only found one hundred fifty loan words from Old Norse. In written Middle English, however, that number of loan words had reached the thousands and not only was there evidence of these loan words, but also of a grammatical impact resulting from the presence of Old Norse on the island⁸¹. Much of this was due to the interactions that were necessary for the English and the Danes to continue to exist in both the shared space of the Danelaw and the separated spaces of the Danelaw and that land that was still under English rule.

Especially where language is concerned both groups were impacted. Though it seems that the Scandinavians did eventually become a part of English society later on, it has been debated whether this transferal was actually a case of cultural hybridization between these different cultures or whether the Scandinavians simply assimilated and had little impact. Though most scholars agree that culturally speaking the English had a greater impact on the Scandinavians than the other way around,⁸² we cannot ignore the fact that without the presence of the Vikings in England and their imitations of and contributions to Anglo-Saxon culture, there may not have been a need for this united English people, at least during that period in time.

With the ancient ties between these two cultures through common ancestry, an adoption of Christian customs and names, and even the production of their own coinage that was perhaps closely based upon native currency, we can surmise that the English, in particular those of higher social standing whose power was being taken away by these invaders, felt not only great

⁸¹Ibid 92.

⁸² Lewis-Simpson 14

resentment towards this group, but perhaps there was something even deeper than bitter feelings towards the Scandinavians. Perhaps it is a possibility that these English noblemen and clergymen and some portion of the common people felt a certain fear of these foreigners, not just because of the invading force that the Great Armies were comprised of , but because these men and women from across the sea were so different yet so similar and perhaps it was because of these similarities that these two cultures were able to form a cultural hybrid in the eastern half of England where even today we can still find faint traces of Scandinavian influence.

Chapter III

The Dividing Line: England under Alfred's Reign

As with several things in life there are causes and effects that correlate with one another. As has been proposed earlier it was ultimately the invasion by the Great Army and the development of the Danelaw that led to the English forming their own common identity before the Normans took over in 1066 C.E. Yet it seems that this was not solely a result of Scandinavian colonization: there were other factors that played into this development of English identity, yet the Vikings seemed to play the significant part as a catalyst in order for it to happen. The Vikings' actions led to a response from the native English men and women and especially from Alfred, the king of Wessex.

Alfred, King of "All the English people"

Throughout the invasion by the Great Army there were several major figures that played key roles in the events that transpired during the early formation of the Danelaw. The figure that we will be studying further in this chapter is King Alfred, who even today is still considered one of the major heroes found in English history. His efforts to rally the West Saxons and combat with Guthrum's forces helped to preserve native autonomy in the western half of England and with the men under his command he was able to retake significant portions of land conquered by the Danes, especially the lands surrounding London. He is also credited with further developing and standardizing written English (though this wouldn't be achieved for centuries after his death). After he had compromised with Guthrum and his men, Alfred had a hand in several matters concerning the design of a new united English kingdom that was forged from what remained of the previous kingdoms after the Viking conquests. Because of what the Vikings had done in

England and because the Danelaw did come into existence, Alfred and his people felt the need to react and thus made great headway in establishing a single English identity. This would be accomplished through several outlets in politics and even in academics.

Born around the year 849 C.E. Alfred was the youngest son of King Æthelwulf who was the father of five sons and one daughter. At a young age he was sent to Rome by his father where he was received by Pope Leo IV who adopted the boy and became his “spiritual father”⁸³, further strengthening the bonds between Rome and England. According to Asser, a Welsh monk and Alfred’s biographer, the king’s youth was filled with educational pursuits that excelled beyond his siblings according to Asser, along with more physical activities appropriate for his class and status at the time, such as archery, swordsmanship and the like⁸⁴. Alfred’s youth and childhood alone could provide us with enough material for another chapter or so, but our focus will be on the more militaristic and political accomplishments that this king experienced later in his lifetime. The West Saxon throne had changed hands several times before it finally came to Alfred in 871 C.E. Originally his father Æthelwulf had partitioned the lands he controlled to his bestowed rule over Kent to his eldest son, Æthelstan⁸⁵, but his rule along with that of his younger brothers up until Alfred was rather short lived. Alfred rose to power as king of Wessex after his brother, Ethelred, was mortally wounded in battle and the defense of West Saxon lands from the Viking invaders was left to him.

As he matured as a military and tactical leader and before he rose to become the king of Wessex, Alfred had experienced several defeats at the hands of the Vikings. This West Saxon

⁸³ Abels 60

⁸⁴ *Ibid* 54-55

⁸⁵ There have been arguments that Æthelstan was in fact Æthelwulf’s younger brother, though that is highly unlikely, or possibly the son of an earlier marriage. See Abels pg 50.

nobleman in addition occupied himself with forming marriage alliances, particularly with the neighboring kingdom of Mercia. Due to increased movement of the Vikings into Mercia in 867C.E., Alfred was married to a Mercian noblewoman by the name of Ealhswith. This was a continuation of the numerous marriage alliances formed between the kingdoms of Wessex and Mercia. Another such marriage occurred fifteen years earlier in 853 C.E. the Mercian King Burgred had taken upon himself to marry Alfred's sister, Æthelswith⁸⁶. These newly bound familial ties and sense of obligation these two kingdoms had to one another are part of what defined the events that followed Alfred's rise to kingship after the death of his brother, Ethelred. The close ties that Mercia and Wessex shared led to each respective kingdom calling for and receiving aid from each other which in turn resulted in the deaths of Alfred's older brothers and ultimately his kingship.

Wessex Royal Family Tree

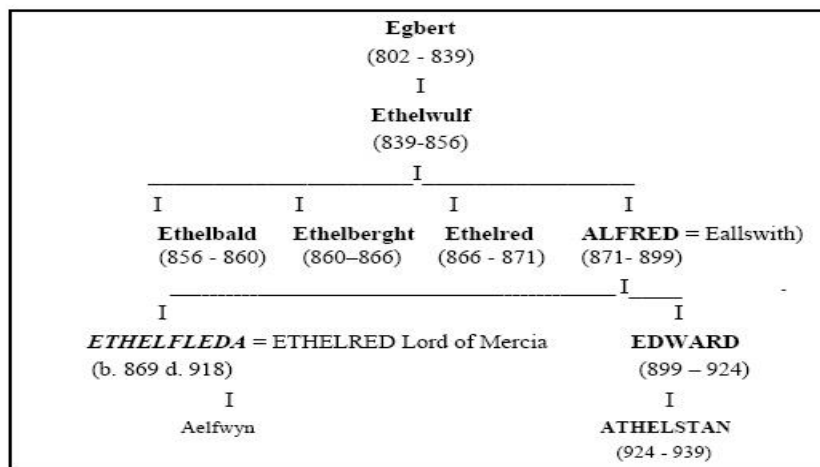


Fig. v: A diagram of the royal line of the House of Wessex, concentrating on the patrilineal reign of the family. In this case Æthelstan has been excluded from Alfred's immediate family line.

⁸⁶ Abels 119

The Churches Role in Anglo-Scandinavian Relations

One of the major groups that showed the greatest resentment towards the Vikings and their activities within England was the church. Lindisfarne, Iona, along with several other monastic centers was targeted by the Vikings in the late eighth century and it will come to no surprise that the later members of the clergy would label these people as monsters. But going beyond records and chronicles from later centuries that were undoubtedly brimming with a spiritual hatred towards these Scandinavians, what were actual relations between the conquerors and this ecclesiastical system like? What sorts of influences were made on the church and how did they deal with the pagans settling in England? What reactions did the clergymen have and how did this help shape English identity?

In order to continue in our exploration of the Danelaw and its interaction with the pre-existing church, we must keep a few things in mind. It seems that ever since it's spread throughout the continent, Christianity and paganism in Europe have been at odds with one another. As time passed by Christian influence grew as more and more people began to convert to this faith that was still, for the most part, in its infancy. Eventually the church had become a dominating power in Europe and by the time that the initial Viking raids in England commenced in the late eighth century, it seems that the ecclesiastical system in England had become well established especially in the north where the monastic institutions thrived. However, Christianity in England was still relatively new, having been introduced to the Germanic people of the British Isles only a couple of centuries prior to this. Old Germanic pagan imagery and traditions still had a presence in English life and even church practices. There had even been cases where some English kings had reverted to the pagan beliefs and practices of their ancestors. So it would be easy to understand that the

Christian leaders of the surviving native kingdoms in the ninth century would definitely feel threatened by the presence of these pagans from across the sea.

The Church was a power that the common lay people would turn to in times of hardship and strife. It, along with the invasion by the Great Army itself, acted as an effective force that provided the Angles-Saxons with common purpose. The Vikings, especially those who might not have converted right away, would be seen as the “other”. They would have been an entity outside of English society that the Anglo-Saxons and the church would most likely have felt threatened by and as a result the subjects of King Alfred felt the need to distance themselves from these foreigners.

The fear of and disdain for the Vikings that the church possessed did not hinder it from cooperating with these non-Christian folk, as seen in their possible assistance with the minting of coins. It can be said that it was the church that happened to provide the Vikings with a means to integrate into the indigenous society⁸⁷, especially through the use of baptism and conversions with consent. There is no written evidence, though, of any of these conversions being a part of any specific missionary work in the Danelaw conducted by missionaries from Wessex⁸⁸. So, this suggests that the Scandinavians were willing to convert so that they could interact with the Christians from Wessex and those who still resided within the borders of the Danelaw.

The conversions that the Vikings took part in were accompanied by certain benefits in regards to their migration to England and their interactions with the native population. One of the major benefits that converting to Christianity had for the Vikings is the ability to trade openly with other Christians. Trading between Christians and pagans or other non-Christians was forbidden by

⁸⁷ Hadley (online), 309

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*,

the papacy, which would prove problematic for those Norsemen who wished to sell the goods that they either produced or gained through plunder. We cannot truly know how much this policy was enforced in England, but perhaps the fact that these people had endured a foreign invasion would have made the practice of this policy more prominent, especially in Wessex, which would have distinguished itself from the other former kingdoms that had recently fallen to the Vikings. In addition, religious assimilation could have given the Scandinavian leaders a stronger standing in their newly acquired lands while at the same time the Vikings who did convert may not have necessarily invested themselves in this new religion. It is possible that they did convert but still practice some of the traditions that they brought over with them.

Norse Effects on Church Imagery

Catherine Karkov provides us with the term *cultural* syncretism, or the “process of assimilation in which Christian and pagan could exist side by side”⁸⁹ Though ultimately these two cultures, English and Scandinavian, became a part of a cultural (and highly likely ethnic) hybridization later on, initially relations between these two groups would have certainly been strained. Rather than it being a case of simple assimilation of the Vikings into English society and lifestyle, though, Karkov suggests a much more complicated process. On the road to assimilation, the Vikings and the English were part of a process of cultural negotiation before any sort of assimilation could take place⁹⁰. This held true especially within the realm of religious art and design.

Before the Great Army began its invasion of England in 865 C.E., the Vikings already had a strong tradition of monumental sculpture and engraving in stone and wood, a tradition that in

⁸⁹ Karkov, 153

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 153

some regions of Scandinavia predated that of Anglo-Saxon England⁹¹. And it would seem that this tradition survived in England years after the truce between Guthrum and Alfred. There was essentially an explosion of production in sculpture after the takeover of Northumbria and the Midlands. The number of sculptures and stone monuments in England had multiplied by at least three times as many as those found from the eighth and ninth centuries, much of the iconography displaying some form of Scandinavian influence⁹². Like many other elements of life in the Danelaw, Scandinavian culture had a strong presence in this medium of art. Eventually the introduction of this northern European style to England became the cause for a metamorphosis in the native styles of stone carving and had begun to mold a new form that can be described as Anglo-Scandinavian.

Several images depicting elements of Nordic style and culture can be found on monuments of Christian origin, a prime example being lithographic artifacts such as the Nunburnholme cross, a stone monument found within the vicinity of York. Originally used by the Romans in one of their numerous construction projects in England, this block of limestone would later be recycled and fashioned into its crucifix form later on after the Angles and the Saxons had converted to the Christian faith. This monument would undergo several renovations and additions throughout the years by the time of the Vikings and later the Normans in England. With the arrival of the Vikings and the establishment of York as the capital of the Danelaw, a new pair of hands, which has been categorized as Anglo-Scandinavian⁹³, had a turn in working with the stone that formed the Nunburnholme cross and carved new images that bore a resemblance to other Scandinavian pieces from this period. We can say with this blending of English and Scandinavian art the natives of

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 153

⁹² Hadley, 214-215

⁹³ Karkov, 158

England had begun to experience the development of a new culture that was the result of the Vikings imposing parts of their own culture onto the existing parts of English ecclesiastical culture.

In her work, Karkov labels the sides of the Nunburnholme Cross Sides A through D ⁹⁴and here we shall do likewise in order to keep a specific order when describing and interpreting the images carved onto this monument. The first side of this four-sided cross that we shall take a quick study of depicts a man sitting in a chair (or possibly throne) grasping a sword that resembles those that would have been used by the elites of the Great Army (see figure vi.). This particular subject, which was carved during Viking occupation, is more secular than one might expect from a cross whose earlier subjects were predominantly ecclesiastical in nature. The sitting figure is located above (though not originally⁹⁵) two other figures kneeling on either side of a central figure that possibly represents witnesses to a crucifixion (see figure vii). Another note to make on this bottom panel, though, is the two birds that rest on the central figure's shoulders and that his or her hands appear to be resting on the heads of those kneeling besides the person. Like Anlaf's penny, this can have several different interpretations as to the nature and purpose of these carvings. Out of all of the various interpretations, however, the one that sticks out is the possibility that they represent the god Odin and his ravens, key figures in the Germanic religion practiced by the Scandinavians of this period and the earlier Anglo-Saxons.

⁹⁴ Karkov 155

⁹⁵ During the restoration process, the sides of this cross had been mismatched. The seated figure had originally been above a carving of another seated figure and a centaur creature (Karkov 157)

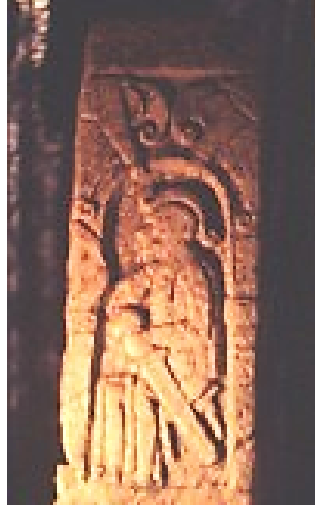


Fig. vi: Upper half of Side A of the Nunburnholme Cross depicting a seated warrior (After Hawkes J. 2002: Fig xxiii)



Fig. vii : Lower half of Side A of the Nunburnholme Cross depicting what appears to be a crucifixion. (After Karkov, C. 2012: Fig. 10.1)

Fig. vii: Top of side D of the Nunburnholme Cross depicting gripping angels. This same motif is also cut into the tops of sides A and B. (After Hawkes, Jane. 2002: Fig xv. Xvii)

But what seems to be one of the most significant parts of the piece is the material used to construct this cross. As previously stated, the stone used to build this cross was originally intended for Roman construction centuries earlier, but it found its way into Christian and eventually pagan art. A tradition that had developed in the Medieval Period is the connection of culture to a Roman presence as a display of authority. By using Roman material, the Anglo-Saxons who first carved this piece had a connection to the Ancient Romans who were seen historically as the definition of what it meant to be powerful, cultured, and civilized.

The major change that Anglo-Saxon art had undergone during this time was a form of secularization of existing Christian monuments. Karkov presumes that the Vikings had brought about this secular movement into pre-existing Anglo-Saxon art as a way of displaying a shift in political power, a tactic that was commonplace in this period (much in the same way that older structures would be converted to fit the needs and political statements of the new ruling minority)⁹⁶. Like how the original craftsmen used material connected with the Ancient Romans to construct the Nunburnholme Cross, the Vikings used secularization and Germanic motifs as a way to symbolize their newfound authority in England.

Through the interposition of their cultural motifs on monuments of ecclesiastical nature, much like their adaptation of native coinage and making it their own, the Vikings were able to assert their authority in their newly acquired territories. This had led to several reactions on the

⁹⁶ Karkov, 154

part on Alfred in his attempts to establish culture in his recently unified England, which could lead us to believe that at least among the elites there was a curiosity and perhaps a drive that would cause figures such as Alfred to attempt the social and political reforms of his kingdom in the late 9th century. As previously stated, the Scandinavian occupation brought about change to the mentality and appearance of English cultural and political identity through both direct and indirect means over the course of the 9th and 10th centuries.

Conclusion

Throughout this exploration of English life, culture, and politics in the ninth century we have seen plenty of examples of Norse colonization's impact on the people of England. What was once a division of several kingdoms that experienced shifting alliances and struggles for power over the course of their existence had eventually brought about a sense of unity to the island with the multiple invasions and raids carried out by the Norse, especially with the actions of the Great Army and the Great Summer Army that followed it. One could go so far as to say that the Vikings and their occupation of England and construction of the Danelaw are the reason that we today called the inhabitants that nation English instead of West Saxon or South Saxon or even East Anglian or Northumbrian.

Though we can surmise that their pursuits were originally for wealth, the Vikings had undergone a change in the course of their raiding and as a result of this more and more of their activity led to settlement on the British Isles rather than making their way back to Scandinavia. Then came the Great army in 786 C.E. which had successfully gained new territories in the north and east of England, taking control of Northumbria, East Anglia, and half of Mercia. . This occupation of the isle in conjunction with Alfred's efforts to retake those occupied land as a response to the Vikings' conquest and settlement led to Alfred's reign over a unified English people.

We have made a quick study of linguistic evidence as well as analyzed and interpreted a few pieces of material evidence in order to gain a further understanding of what was occurring in this particular period of English history. In this study some assessments have been made as to what grade of influence these people of Northern Europe had on each other. As a result of this study of

both material and written materials of the 9th and 10th centuries, the conclusion we have arrived at is that although eventually Scandinavians did begin to blend with Anglo-Saxons, they still left their marks on the English people and their monuments and other such materials that help define a culture through art. So, with these direct and indirect influences the Viking invasions of England and the formation of the Danelaw, the Scandinavian occupation of England had its own impact on English cultural identity before the introduction of Norman culture in 1066.

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