THE ANGLO-SCANDINAVIAN IDENTITY IN VIKING-AGE ENGLAND

By

MATTHEW R. SMITH

A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2017
To Grandpa and Grandma
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing this thesis revealed a lot about my character and the character of those around me. If I have learned anything other than medieval history these past few years it is that I can always count on those closest to me to be sources of support and love. I want to thank most of all my maternal grandparents for always pushing me to achieve my goals. My late grandfather was the inspiration for my love of history. I am so thankful for the memories we shared cultivating that love and developing it into a passion. My grandmother took this passion and supported it with every fiber of her being. I am eternally grateful for her constant push to see me succeed in life and to see me teach my first class as a sign that I have made my dream come true. I thank my parents, Michael and Rachel, who provided me with a reservoir of love and attention that I always knew was there when times looked bleak. Without their direction, I would have lost my path. In addition, I want to thank my brother, Patrick, for his continuous positivity. Finally, I want to thank my pillar of support, Nicole, who was there for me every step of the way with unwavering encouragement and kindness. I want to thank her for never giving up on me nor letting me give up on myself. Only she could have turned late nights of worry into ones of inspiration and long days of weariness into ones of liveliness. Without her, many of the thoughts in this paper would have never come to fruition. I am so grateful for her turning my frustration and despair into motivation and determination, always standing by me with words of wisdom and reassurance.

I want to also thank the members of my committee who made sure that this thesis would only be the highest of quality. I want to thank Dr. Bonnie Effros for her advice and patience in evolving my thoughts into a cohesive piece. I also want to thank Dr. James Davidson who came to my aid when no one else would and also provided me with a solid foundation on which to build my archaeological studies. Lastly, I want to thank my advisor Dr. Florin Curta for
imparting his knowledge of medieval history to me over the course of many classes and many office hours. I am extremely grateful for his expertise and counsel not only through the process of writing this thesis, but also through my entire time at the University of Florida.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1  INTRODUCTION: THE DOCUMENTARY AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE AND THE COMING OF THE ANGLO-SCANDINAVIAN IDENTITY</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE AND THEIR ANGLO-SAXON AUTHORS</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  THE ANGLO-SCANDINAVIAN MATERIAL CULTURE</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  CONCLUSION AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ANGLO-SCANDINAVIAN STUDIES</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF REFERENCES</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE ANGLO-SCANDINAVIAN IDENTITY IN VIKING-AGE ENGLAND

By

Matthew R. Smith

December 2017

Chair: Florin Curta
Major: History

Scholarship surrounding Viking-Age England has often been characterized by the studies of battles and wars between Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavian Vikings. Such scholarship characterizes the period as one of conflict between two cultures over the control of England. However, this binary narrative based on documentary evidence is complicated with the addition of archaeological evidence. This paper examines the documentary evidence in conjunction with archaeological evidence to reveal the emergence of a third cultural and ethnic identity forming in the Danelaw due to the merging of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian cultures. This Anglo-Scandinavian culture reveals that ethnic identity was not as divisive as documentary evidence would make it seem. In addition, the existence of this Anglo-Scandinavian culture reinforces the idea that ethnic and cultural identity was more of a fluid and malleable concept throughout the Viking Age.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION: THE DOCUMENTARY AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE AND THE COMING OF THE ANGLO-SCANDINAVIAN IDENTITY

Students and scholars of the Vikings in England rely on a wide range of evidence to recreate the past. Documentary evidence often serves as the backbone to understanding the history of Scandinavian influence and settlement on the isles. For the past half century there has been an increasing call for more material culture to be used in scholarly analysis. This increase in communication is a result of the field of archaeology developing and expanding drastically from its early days of antiquarians with shovels. The combination of these two fields has allowed scholars to examine aspects of the past that are absent from one particular form of evidence. Archaeology allows for the study of goods and material culture to be added to the documentary evidence of political trials and warfare. Combined, one would expect to examine an encompassing picture of the Vikings and their interactions with the English countryside. However, when the two fields are paired it readily becomes apparent that the evidence does not match in a number of places. Where a document claims movement and settlement of Vikings there can be a lack of material culture backing its claims. Where an artifact may display a mixing of cultural motifs the written record paints a picture of otherness and separation.

At first examination, these differences can be rather disappointing as the picture of past events is made increasingly complicated by conflicting evidence. However, the differences between the documentary and archaeological evidence for this time period should not be seen as

---

a hindrance to study. Differences should not be taken to mean that one form of evidence is right, and the other wrong. Instead, both materials should be used to understand the complex social and political details of this time period which does not lend itself to a simplistic view of Vikings fighting Anglo-Saxons. When all the evidence is examined in a multidisciplinary approach one reality becomes apparent, that Scandinavians and Anglo-Saxons saw a merging of their cultures into a new ethnicity to which I will refer as the Anglo-Scandinavian culture.

Using only documentary evidence or only material culture does not reveal all the intricate details of Viking interactions with England during this period. Documentary evidence primarily reveals the political landscape of the Viking Age, choosing to focus more on battles and wars, kings and lords, land and titles, removing much of the cultural aspects of the people participating in the events recorded. John Moreland points out that the historian’s obsession and preference for the written word and documentary evidence is a relatively modern phenomenon. For Moreland the medieval world preferred to use the Voice and Image as means of conveying information between those with power and those without. The transition from the Voice and Image to the Word is explained by Moreland to be a product of the Reformation and the invention of the printing press. By making the written word more accessible, the power of the Image and oral traditions slowly lost their ability to reveal the past in the eyes of researchers. Because of this transition, study of the medieval world and other aspects of history have utilized the written word much more than any other forms of evidence. The Word has the feel of being removed from happenings, removed from time and can be interpreted as a simple telling of events. However, this idea has been challenged. The Word is not pure certainty as it has several partialities and

---

5 Moreland, Archaeology and Text, pp. 35-36.
6 Moreland, Archaeology and Text, p. 61.
omissions. Therefore, one needs to examine the written word of the medieval period not as a source of unyielding truth, but as one of many tools in the intricate conversation playing out among all people in a society.\footnote{Moreland, \textit{Archaeology and Text}, p. 12.}

When one sees documentary evidence as but one tool, it is easier to incorporate other tools into research. One such tool is studying material culture through the field of archaeology. One of the pushes in historical scholarship has been to reveal more of what the ordinary people thought and went through during not just the medieval period, but in all aspects of history where people have had no historical voice.\footnote{Moreland, \textit{Archaeology and Text}, p. 13-15.} However, one should not assume that this is the only purpose of archaeology as it also allows for the study of the elites and upper classes as well.\footnote{Moreland, \textit{Archaeology and Text}, pp. 26-29.} Due to the political nature of the written word, documentary evidence often neglects the ordinary people and is simply another tool of their subjugation.\footnote{John Moreland, \textit{Archaeology, Theory and the Middle Ages} (London, 2010), pp. 159-160.} The use of material culture aides in allowing for more research to be done on the subaltern, the voiceless masses of England’s farms and towns as well as those wielding political power.

However, there is a tendency to plummet into the same pitfall as those who see documentary evidence as the only tool to determine the past. Moreland gets caught in this trap when discussing how archaeology can be used entirely on its own. His approach seems to respond to those historians who fail to utilize anything other than documents, but in responding in such a way, he encounters similar issues of his own. By arguing for the use of archaeology without other materials or references, he fails to fully recognize that archaeology, just like...
documentary evidence, is not a fully encompassing tool to understanding the past. I agree with Guy Halsall in that archaeology needs, at least to some degree, a reference point or a framework from which to develop ideas. This framework usually is developed from documentary evidence that has been analyzed to help understand what the material culture might be telling the researcher. That is not to say that we cannot develop theories based on the material culture itself, nor that documentary evidence should be seen as a substitute for theory. However, without a reference point, basically all interpretations that can be derived from the evidence are viable. Therefore, documentary evidence and material culture need to work together in a multidisciplinary approach to the past.¹¹

This reading of both documentary and material evidence together is not a new methodology for understanding the Viking Age or any part of the medieval era for that matter. While historians often favor the written word, medieval historians in recent years have taken to utilizing all forms of evidence, not just words. Evidence in this light includes the written word and material culture, as well as the field of art and art history.¹² Artistic interpretation and analysis of material culture is crucial to understanding the symbolic communication that took place during the medieval era. There are whole decades of time that have only a few scraps of evidence with minimal details on them available. Entire years in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* are given one to two sentences often commemorating the death or birth of an important individual.¹³

---


Excavations of material culture by archaeologists tend to reveal elements of how people thought and what they deemed important/unimportant.\(^\text{14}\)

Material culture displays how individuals represented themselves and others as well as how they were seen by the community. This can be seen in the field of mortuary data, where all the details of a burial site including both the artifacts within but also the geometry and spatial dimensions of the site. Mortuary rituals help to explain the identity of the deceased not only in terms of how they might have seen themselves, but also more likely how the community itself saw them.\(^\text{15}\) This community identity is derived from the fact that what actually ends up in the grave of a deceased individual is decided by those who outlived them. After all, one does not bury himself or herself. However, mortuary data is only one aspect of material culture with other artifacts and monuments able to be analyzed to explore the past.

So the question then becomes what does the documentary evidence and material culture reveal about Viking-Age England? Documentary evidence is first used to determine that Scandinavian factors were present in England due to invasions of Vikings and their long term settlement.\(^\text{16}\) Archaeological evidence then builds upon this framework to explain that in the areas where Scandinavians settled a new ethnic identity emerged from the mixing of new Scandinavian factors with existing Anglo-Saxon artifacts.\(^\text{17}\)

The documentary evidence is rather clear that the conflicts of Viking-Age England were largely fought between the ethnic Anglo-Saxons and the ethnic Scandinavians. It is largely

\(^{14}\) Hinton, *Gold and Gilt*, pp. 4-6.

\(^{15}\) Hinton, *Gold and Gilt*, p. 5.


shown to have been a conflict between domestic peoples against the foreigners. The Anglo-
Saxons were defeated time and again by the invading Vikings, but eventually triumphed over the
foreigners, only to be summarily conquered by foreign Normans.\textsuperscript{18} However, recent scholarship
has displayed that this idea of Anglo-Saxon defenders triumphing over Viking invaders is not
entirely what it seems. In fact, there is a much more muddied story present primarily in the
archaeological record. That is the formulation of an Anglo-Scandinavian culture in England.
Anglo-Scandinavian refers to the merging of cultural aspects from the Anglo-Saxons present in
England at the time of the Viking Age with those of Scandinavian settlers coming from across
the North Sea.\textsuperscript{19} The idea of a new Anglo-Scandinavian culture developing from so much
interaction between the two regions rewrites much about what scholars understand about
medieval England and even English identity. The “English” fought the invading and hostile
Vikings, a conflict of political powers but also a conflict of ethnicities. With the discovery of an
Anglo-Scandinavian culture being prominent in England, what it means to be “English” in
modern times might be subject to revision.\textsuperscript{20}

There are of course issues with the acceptance of a new cultural group, namely how it is
characterized and what it encapsulates. What makes Anglo-Scandinavian culture is the blending
of many artistic and culturally significant markers from both component cultures into unique
artifacts. It is this basis in artifacts and material culture that explains why archaeology has been
so influential in developing the idea that such a culture existed. Belt buckles and pins which are

\textsuperscript{18} Dawn M. Hadley, ‘The Creation of the Danelaw’, in Stefan Brink and Neil Price (eds), \textit{The Viking World} (New

\textsuperscript{19} Clare Downham, ‘Vikings in England’, in Stefan Brink and Neil Price (eds), \textit{The Viking World} (New York, 2008),
pp. 341-347.

\textsuperscript{20} Moreland, \textit{Archaeology, theory}, pp. 159-161.
of an Anglo-Saxon build but incorporate stylistic elements from Scandinavia, for example, are often seen as markers of Anglo-Scandinavian culture.\textsuperscript{21}

These artifacts along with mortuary rituals such as burial and memorial stones display characteristics that are symbolically important to both Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian cultures. The fact that these symbols are combined accentuates that there were two mentalities and two cultures which had combined to form a new identity.\textsuperscript{22}

Contemporary documents would not recognize the merging of cultures especially with that of the enemy. Acceptance of this reality would have been detrimental to any sort of political unity among all Anglo-Saxons as was enacted through the House of Wessex when they claimed to be Kings of the English, not just Wessex.\textsuperscript{23} This political landscape was created to be a dichotomous “us versus them” conflict in order to garner support from other Anglo-Saxon lords and soldiers. The idea that the very foot soldiers of the Anglo-Saxon armies were culturally similar to the Viking attackers would therefore be a detail to be carefully made absent from the official record. In addition, if this culture was known by those writing the documents they might have seen it as a symbolic death of Anglo-Saxon culture, so it should not be considered to be anything other than an aspect of conflict from the invasions themselves.

However, other scholars have argued that such political motives which cause documentary evidence to not reveal this new culture undermines another explanation: that those

\begin{itemize}
\end{itemize}
in a position of power were unaware of this merging of cultures.\textsuperscript{24} It could very well be that the Anglo-Scandinavian culture was that of the ordinary inhabitants of England and not the elite. The kings and lords from prominent Anglo-Saxon families would perhaps not be aware of what was transpiring among the people. However, this claim is more speculation and has less of a weight in the scholarly community. One would assume that these lords and clerics would know what was happening in the lands that they ruled and communicated with. This idea promotes such an element of class distinction and separation that it cannot be effectively examined.

Before the idea that there could be a new and heterogeneous Anglo-Scandinavian culture emerging in England over the course of the Viking Age, the material culture of the period was analyzed very differently. Mainly, some archaeologists tried desperately to find material culture that could be classified as “Viking” or “Scandinavian” in its entirety to designate where Vikings settled and moved within England.\textsuperscript{25} One would assume if there was a large influx of Scandinavian warriors and settlers that the amount of material from Scandinavia proper would be somewhat substantial. However, this was simply not the case. The objects we do have of a known Scandinavian origin are much fewer in number than one would expect based on the documentary evidence.\textsuperscript{26} The annals and letters detailed scores of armies consisting of hundreds and thousands of men.\textsuperscript{27} To argue that none of these men brought anything from the homeland which might be left behind is beyond jarring.

\textsuperscript{24} See Moreland’s section on power in the written word. Moreland, \textit{Archaeology and Text}, pp. 9-12.

\textsuperscript{25} Richards, ‘Viking Settlement’, p. 367.

\textsuperscript{26} Richards, ‘Viking Settlement’, p. 368.

\textsuperscript{27} Peter H. Sawyer, \textit{The Age of the Vikings} (New York, 1971), pp. 124-129.
When researchers began to see these differences between documents and artifacts, they began to create theories to explain why this would be the case. One early theorist was Peter Sawyer. Sawyer noticed the relatively small number of Viking artifacts being discovered and determined the explanation was that the number of Vikings in England was exaggerated. Quite simply, if there are only a few artifacts from Scandinavia present in England, then there were few Vikings from Scandinavia that had actually gone to England. To Sawyer the documentary evidence was not entirely false but the basis for understanding the number of Vikings in each army was changed. How many men ships could ferry across the North Sea had been a cornerstone in determining the size of immigration and Scandinavian armies for Sawyer and previous authors. Sawyer took this estimation of population movement to be the main issue and used archaeological research from the Gokstad ship in Norway to reduce what was considered the number of men a ship could hold from 70 to 40. All the issues about the disparity were then resolved, at least in Sawyer’s mind.\textsuperscript{28}

However, the reason for these differences in evidence cannot be explained away as simply as Sawyer would have wanted, and his theory has largely been discredited due to examination of a mixed material culture. Sawyer’s focus on “Viking” artifacts has been supplanted by the findings of a mixed material culture.\textsuperscript{29} When one examines this material culture as its own particular cultural motif it becomes clear that the Vikings who stayed in England did not continue their particular rituals and customs exactly as they did in Scandinavia. Instead, there was a sharing of symbolic meaning which developed into a new Anglo-

\textsuperscript{28} Sawyer, \textit{The Age of the Vikings}, p. 124.

\textsuperscript{29} Hadley, ‘The Creation of the Danelaw’, p. 325.
Scandinavian identity with new means of stylistic communication. The physical material from Scandinavia was not there, but the ideas and their importance were.

The history of using the term “Viking” is long and convoluted, with many interpretations and definitions.\textsuperscript{30} It is important to recognize that the use of “Viking” is not a universal term used by all European peoples when describing Scandinavian raiders. Each culture had their own word or term to define these people and the use of Viking as a catch-all is a purely modern creation.\textsuperscript{31} Another issue with using “Viking” is that current modern popular culture understands Vikings as barbaric, bearded berserkers who rampaged across the continent killing, raping, and looting as they pleased. This idea is not entirely without merit, but it is a gross oversimplification of the broader historical reality. Vikings are often referred to as warriors who participated in raids that were violent, but the extent of the violence is debatable. There was plenty of violence throughout the medieval era, often perpetrated by figures praised today for greatness such as Charlemagne.\textsuperscript{32} With that being said, this paper will use the term “Viking” to refer to the peoples of Scandinavia who lived during the Viking Age and partook in raids, invasions, and otherwise violent acts.\textsuperscript{33} These were the warriors in the warbands and the soldiers in the armies. The prevalence of the term “Viking” in not only popular culture but in certain scholarly circles makes it more readily understood and easier to connect with the Scandinavian peoples of the Viking Age and therefore will be used throughout the piece. I will also use the term Scandinavian to refer to Vikings and other settlers originating from Scandinavia.\textsuperscript{34}


\textsuperscript{33} Winroth, \textit{Age of the Vikings}, p. 13.

\textsuperscript{34} Christiansen, \textit{The Norsemen}, p. 2.
It is also important to explain the time period of the Viking Age. The English and American definition of the Viking Age is from 793 to 1066. These dates coincide with the first major Viking raid in England at Lindisfarne and the death of King Harald Hardrada at the battle of Stamford Bridge respectively. The year 1066 was not the last time warriors set forth out of Scandinavia for pillage and war, but it was the last time that these men would be considered “Vikings.” The reasoning for this change in terminology is associated with religion. By this date, all of the Scandinavian lords and countries had converted to Christianity and had abandoned a large number of their previous ways of life. Raiding and naval invasions did not cease entirely, but the influence of Christianity among the people made international and interpersonal relations much more complex.

The Scandinavians were now integrated into a much wider world which had also figured out how to deal with the once feared Viking raiders. It is important to note that this range of dates is not the same throughout all scholarship as the emphasis of what makes it the “Viking Age” varies. Since this paper is about England and English history, I favor the English/American definition of that age stretching from the attack on Lindisfarne to the battle of Stamford Bridge.

---

CHAPTER 2
DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE AND THEIR ANGLO-SAXON AUTHORS

Before the popularization of archaeology in the scholarly world, the main source of information available for Viking-Age England were documents written about the time period. These pieces of written information varied from letters between noblemen to chronicles detailing events that took place every year.¹ What makes the written record of Vikings and Scandinavians in England stand out is the fact that most of these records were created by Vikings’ enemies, the West Saxons of Wessex.² These authors as well as other Anglo-Saxon writers detailed the destructive and deadly practices of Scandinavians as they tore through England, causing mayhem and taking lands from the local populations. However, this narrative was a carefully constructed one, aimed at using the Scandinavians as a means to unify England under a single dynasty.³

At the time of the Viking Age, writing was a fringe ability in the Scandinavian world. The younger Futhark alphabet allowed for a simple form of writing for Scandinavians, but these writings often took the form of memorial stones.⁴ The runic inscriptions on these stones has led many to refer to them as “rune stones,” so I will also be using this classification.⁵ What makes rune stones so difficult for use in interpreting past events is the fact that they were not very descriptive outside of an individual’s identification. These stones would identify the person for whom it was raised and maybe give a quick description of what they did and where they died. These inscriptions are not too terribly informative, which is problematic. One of the most

---

² Dumville, ‘Vikings in Insular chronicling’, p. 353.
⁴ Winroth, The Age of the Vikings, p. 216.
⁵ Winroth, The Age of the Vikings, p. 217.
intricate runestones exists in Rök, Sweden. The beginning of the stone states, “In memory of Vemod stand these runes. And Varin wrote them, the father, in memory of his dead son.” The Scandinavians, who would later become Viking warriors, did not use these runes to demark the events of a year in annals nor did they write complex histories of political and military intrigue. The best examples of Viking Age writings from a Nordic source come from the Sagas of Iceland. These sagas were written hundreds of years after the events they detail, rendering them not as reliable as one would hope. Their lack of reliability makes them poor documentary sources for the Viking Age in England. While some stories might be similar to other more contemporary sources, the similarities cannot be seen as a confirmation of events. The difference in time between compositions makes it clear that the sagas might have been influenced by previous sources instead of confirming their reports. Because of these issues, I do not see the sagas as reliable documentary evidence for Viking-Age England. However, this does not mean that these sagas are without merit. One benefit is that they provide insight into how the descendants of Norsemen viewed their ancestors and what stories were passed down. Through literary analysis these stories provided excellent details about the society present in Iceland centuries after the Viking Age. However, this benefit is not useful for this paper’s purpose. With the sagas being so far removed from the time period and with rune stones being so vague, historians have turned to Anglo-Saxon sources to provide the bulk of the documentary evidence for Viking-Age England as writing was an established practice in the region.

---

Record keeping in Anglo-Saxon England often took the form of annals which described the events of individual years.\textsuperscript{10} While these annals were by no means exhaustive in their material for each particular year, they provide enough information to stitch together a historical picture of Anglo-Saxon England, including the Viking Age. Some entries can mention only one event in passing while others describe large battles from beginning to end in great detail.\textsuperscript{11} There seems to be no way of understanding why this is the case. Despite the shortcomings of Anglo-Saxon literature, it provides a rather large picture of the Viking Age from which research can be derived from. It is for these reasons that I will be relying on Anglo-Saxon written sources for the documentary evidence of the period.

What the documents of the Anglo-Saxons reveal about the Viking Age is that it was a period of intense conflict with the aggressive Viking warriors from across the North Sea.\textsuperscript{12} The records focus on the military forces of both sides battling for riches, glory, and most importantly, land. If these documents and their words were taken at face value, it would be obvious that these Nordic warriors had nothing more on their mind than ending the lives of Anglo-Saxons. From the first major raid at Lindisfarne in 793, these men from across the sea were nothing but enemies to the Anglo-Saxon people for decades. The documents themselves convey very little about the other details of life on the island during this time period. Of course, there are some entries in the \textit{Anglo-Saxon Chronicle} which detail the births and deaths of important members of not only the nobility but also the clergy. However, the intricate details of land control, dress

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{10} Dumville, ‘Vikings in Insular chronicling’, p. 350.
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{11} Compare the annals for years 825 and 833 for one example. \textit{Anglo-Saxon chronicle}, pp. 40-41.
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{12} Winroth, \textit{The Age of the Vikings}, pp. 56-57.
\end{flushleft}
style, and economics among the Anglo-Saxons themselves are missing.\textsuperscript{13} Instead, the pages paint the picture of vicious Northmen raiding Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and toppling their governments only to be kept from further destruction by the powerful Anglo-Saxon kings of Wessex. The \textit{Chronicle} in particular has no information about mingling between the locals and invaders or mixing of cultures in the extremely complicated social landscape that was Viking-Age England.\textsuperscript{14}

The main source of documentary information for Viking-Age England comes from the various annals that make up the \textit{Anglo-Saxon Chronicle}.\textsuperscript{15} The \textit{Chronicle} consists of seven manuscripts and cover an extensive history of England from the invasion of Julius Caesar in 40 B.C. to the death of King Stephen in AD 1154.\textsuperscript{16} The manuscripts were completed by different authors at different times with the first compiler of the A manuscript writing up to the date of 891.\textsuperscript{17} While the origins of the \textit{Chronicle} are debated, one theory is that it was commissioned by the kings of Wessex to document their rise to power over the other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and all the Anglo-Saxon peoples of England. I will be accepting this origin as the most likely origin since the entries often revolved around the kings and lords of Wessex and generally took their perspective. This idea is also bolstered by \textit{The Life of King Alfred}, a biography of Alfred of Wessex written in 893 by the monk Asser.\textsuperscript{18} The biography takes many of the entries of the

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{14} Hadley, \textit{The Northern Danelaw}, p. 299.
\textsuperscript{16} Whitelock, ‘Introduction’, p. xii.
\textsuperscript{17} Whitelock, ‘Introduction’, p. xiii.
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{The Life of King Alfred}, trans. Albert S. Cook (Boston, 1906), p. 1.
\end{flushleft}
Chronicle nearly word for word, but varies in detail for years not copied. Due to the similarities in content as well as near coinciding dates of creation, the Chronicle’s first author was most likely written alongside or used as a reference for Asser’s The Life of King Alfred.¹⁹

The Life of King Alfred is almost certainly a propaganda piece done by Asser to show the greatness of King Alfred of Wessex. In his life, Alfred would be the first person to stylize himself as “King of the Anglo-Saxons,” clearly claiming a sort of dominion over England.²⁰ This claim came after a “great army” of Vikings invaded England in 866 and proceeded to topple the kingdoms of Mercia, Northumbria, and East Anglia.²¹ The Life of King Alfred and the first section of The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle devote many pages to the wars between Anglo-Saxons and Vikings with the Anglo-Saxons nearly always being the men of Wessex. Alfred was able to defeat the “great army” in 878 and signed the Treaty of Wedmore with one of its leaders named Guthrum.²² This treaty brokered a shaky peace that would last for only seven years but agreed to divide England into two parts, one for Wessex and one for the Vikings. The region left to the Vikings would later be referred to as the Danelaw due to the prominence of Danish custom with the word “Danish” here being a generic term for Scandinavian.²³ The Life of King Alfred was written prior to the king’s death and therefore does not mention the subsequent conflicts that arose between Scandinavians and Anglo-Saxons in the years to follow.²⁴

²⁰ Anglo-Saxon chronicle, p. 49.
²⁴ Anglo-Saxon chronicle, p. 58.
These early documents of Viking-Age England primarily detail the military campaigns of Viking warriors into England, choosing to paint them in an exceptionally negative light, almost as if they were an unrelenting force. Starting from the beginning of the Viking Age, these two sources recorded the many raids and attacks by this mysterious outside enemy with seemingly no leader or real intent. While Viking warriors appear at first to have no real purpose in their invasion according to the authors, a few remarks reveal that there was at least some motivating factor: land. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle mentions on a few different occasions the conquering of land by the “great army.” The entry for 876 (877 in the C manuscript) records that Northumbria was conquered and “they proceeded to plough and to support themselves.” This however, is not a clear indication of Scandinavian settlement and should not be seen as a focus point for the development of the Anglo-Scandinavian culture. The reason for such a stance is that the writing is ambiguous on who “they” were. “They” could be in reference to Vikings or a reference to the Anglo-Saxons now under Viking rule. Despite the issues surrounding this entry, I believe it is key to understanding that Scandinavian settlement or at least lordship was a factor in motivating this “great army” and subsequent invasions.

Thematically, the message in the early Viking Age is quite clear in terms of ethnicity. The Anglo-Saxons were at war with the Scandinavians for the heart of England. The Life of King Alfred propagates this dichotomy as a means to rally all those who could be defined as Anglo-Saxon behind Alfred. The purpose for such a rallying call was due to the fact that Wessex was the only Anglo-Saxon kingdom that was not conquered by “the great army.” Anders Winroth takes this division to mean that the Anglo-Saxons were removed or left the region of the

---

25 Anglo-Saxon chronicle, p. 48.

26 The Life of King Alfred, pp. 26-32.
Danelaw, but this seems unlikely due to a number of factors. First, the region was very large, and if a sort of ethnic cleansing were to take place on that scale, it would be expected to have uncovered a multitude of mass graves which simply have not been found. Second, if the removal was peaceful, then the massive surge in immigrants would most definitely have been noted by Asser and the Chronicle as it would be a further justification of Alfred’s dominion over all Anglo-Saxons. However, there is no record of such a massive migration. I argue that the majority of the Anglo-Saxons in the Danelaw would have stayed on their lands and would have accepted Viking rulers as the new political order. The Anglo-Saxon kings in centuries before fought among each other so often that it seems that loyalty to a common ethnic identity would have seemed as foreign to the ordinary peasant as these men from across the sea.

By the end of the ninth century, Viking armies and forces were still active in England as well as the continent. While Viking raiding seems to have ceased or at least stalled for the majority of the tenth century that did not mean that this time was one of peace for England. The treaty of Wedmore had divided England between Anglo-Saxon Wessex and Scandinavian successor kingdoms, but the stylization of the kings of Wessex held that they were kings “of the Anglo-Saxons” and that they alone would exercise this right. Alfred’s son and successor Edward used this rhetoric as a validation for war with the Scandinavian lords. Alfred’s call to the Anglo-Saxon identity of those who lived in England was now used as a justification for conflict to free those Anglo-Saxons who were under the rule of Scandinavian lords. This style of writing

28 Based on there not being a loyalty to ethnicity among ordinary people developed from Moreland.
30 *Anglo-Saxon chronicle*, pp. 46-47.
is found throughout the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*’s commentary on Edward’s wars as he goes from place to place taking in the submissions of those “who had been under the rule of the Danes.”31 By the middle of the tenth century, the Kingdom of Wessex had unified the lands of the Danelaw under its leadership, creating the Kingdom of England.

Viking raiding resumed in the late tenth century, culminating in the conquest of England by King Sven “Forkbeard” of Denmark in 1013.32 Sven was recorded as conquering England with little to no bloodshed, quickly receiving the submission of the lords of England as he landed his troops in the Danelaw and traveled across the country. His son Cnut then succeeded him as King of England after a war with King Aethelred and his son Edmund “Ironside.”33 Danish monarchs ruled England until the death of Cnut’s son Harthacnut in 1042.34 The struggle between the Danish and Anglo-Saxons over England ultimately came to an end with the Norman lord, William “the Bastard,” seizing control of England in 1066.35 This event sealed the end of major Scandinavian influences in England.

The conflicts between the Danish and the Anglo-Saxon royal houses in the early eleventh century were described as being destructive, yet the terminology for this period in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is much less clear in terms of ethnicity. From the end of the tenth century to the end of Danish rule, the divisions between armies appear to be purely descriptive in terms of

---

31 *Anglo-Saxon chronicle*, p. 68


politics. Whereas Danish was used as a term in the beginning of the Viking Age to refer to many types of Scandinavians and their ethnicity in general, authors of this later period seem to be referring directly to the lords and kings from Denmark itself as a political entity. This development could be due to the fact that by this time, the kingdoms of England and Denmark had been cemented as political institutions as opposed to the much broader Scandinavian versus Anglo-Saxon cultural conflicts of the past.

Whereas there is some ambiguity over whether the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* was meant purely as prestige or propaganda, a major source for the later Viking Age, the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, was almost certainly created for that purpose. This work was written by a monk of St. Omer during the reign of King Harthacnut in either the year 1041 or 1042 and details the rise of Harthacnut’s family as rulers of England. M.K. Lawson believes it was intended to be a propaganda piece for Harthacnut’s mother Emma to display the power of her son and her husband in their domination over England. The *Encomium*, along with the *Chronicle*, provide for much of the documentary evidence for the later parts of the Viking Age in England from Sven to Harthacnut.

Anglo-Saxon writers chronicled the events of the Viking Age not for the sake of educating posterity, but primarily for political and social means. Chronicles and histories of royal families were intended to elevate the prestige of whomever commissioned them. Parts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, specifically the initial document, seem to be derived from works

36 Look at the entries from 988–1066 in *Anglo-Saxon chronicle*, pp. 81-145.


38 Lawson, *Cnut*, p. 56.
commissioned by the house of Wessex.\textsuperscript{39} Therefore, the pages listing off the numerous battles and conflicts that were fought by the house of Wessex against Viking warriors were likely used to display the military might and prestige of the house. These works were not necessarily propaganda in the modern sense of the word, which is often taken negatively but provided political influence for those who commissioned their writing. Political influence was not just a goal of kings and rulers, but also for the clergy as well. Prominent bishops played key roles in portraying the heathen Vikings as enemies not only of the Anglo-Saxons, but of God Himself.\textsuperscript{40}

One such source of documentary evidence from a clerical point of view is the life of Saint Aethelwold of Winchester written by his student Wulfstan.\textsuperscript{41} Wulfstan writes about how Aethelwold was a powerful political figure who used his influence to push for monastic reform. In the mind of Aethelwold, the issues surrounding the current decline of monasticism and the struggles of the English people were tied to a lack of faith and knowledge of religious matters by the laity. With more education and preaching to the Anglo-Saxon populace and elites, the problems of the time, both foreign and domestic, might be quelled. His life provides insight into the advisory nature of prominent members of the clergy for this time period. Aethelwold’s hagiography is an example of how leaders and kings believed they needed the council of the clergy to bring their lands back from the brink of destruction.\textsuperscript{42} This mindset makes the religious heads of Anglo-Saxon England much more influential in determining the direction of the kingdom. I believe that Wulfstan makes the political aspects of Aethelwold’s life especially

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{39} Downham, ‘Vikings in England’, p. 341.
\textsuperscript{40} Dumville, ‘Vikings in Insular chronicling’, p. 355.
\textsuperscript{41} Hadley, \textit{The Vikings in England}, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{42} Hadley, \textit{The Vikings in England}, pp. 44-45.
\end{flushright}
prominent because he was justifying his own position in the court of Aethelred. This work reveals that the church fathers were working together with the kings of England to use religion as a unifying political factor. Therefore, the ethnicity of the invading Vikings and their ties to heathen practices would once again provide a separation from the Christian populace of England.43

The problem with using saints’ lives for Viking-Age England is that there are not as many works as there are saints for the period. Most of the information about prominent Anglo-Saxon saints come from chronicles, not particular works dedicated to their specific life. For this reason, I will not be using as many hagiographical sources as I would like and will instead mainly rely on chronic evidence.44

Because of the political implications of the documentary sources, there is a distinction and separation between the Vikings and the Anglo-Saxons. Authors writing for kings and their kingdoms detailed the fact that Anglo-Saxons and the “English” were under attack from the fury of the Danes/Northmen/heathens.45 Details were used to create a dichotomy between the groups and unite the Anglo-Saxons against a common foe. Before and during the Viking Age, the country we now know as England was segmented into various petty kingdoms. The kingdoms of Northumbria, East Anglia, Mercia, and Wessex fought each other for power and prominence within the Anglo-Saxon world. With the kingdoms of East Anglia, Mercia, and Northumbria falling to the Vikings, it was left to Wessex to throw back this seemingly unstoppable force.46

---

44 Careful examination of the Chronicle reveals information about prominent members of the clergy who will become saints. Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, pp. 26-153.
order to do this, the kings of Wessex had to unite the various Anglo-Saxon peoples under one leadership: theirs. Therefore, there was no attempt to humanize the Vikings or the Scandinavian settlers within England as they were necessary in cultivating a narrative portraying them as the terrible enemy that had to be destroyed. Anglo-Saxons from Mercia would put aside the fact that they battled for decades with Wessex and joined forces in order to defeat their now mutual foe.

An added trait of the Anglo-Saxon authorship is just how large the conquests were in the writing and how much detail is given to the conflict between Scandinavians and Anglo-Saxons. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in particular devotes most of its pages to the conflicts raging across the land. A few entries detail the settlement of Scandinavians in England after the initial conquests by Viking armies. However, these are overshadowed by detailed accounts of armies taking towns and the movements of ships for invasion. By portraying the events in this fashion, the documentary evidence provides a narrative of the powerful and valiant Anglo-Saxon kings of Wessex pushing back the terrible Vikings. The authors were not interested in trying to explain that these Vikings had crossed the North Sea for land and farms. Instead, the authors wished to explain how these men came only for war and conquest. Military prowess is the most important aspect of the material and therefore the conflict was seen as the main reason for unification behind Wessex. It is for this reason that other aspects of life were less prominent within the works.

If military might equated to political influence and even the power to command the other Anglo-Saxon peoples, then that would be the main focus of these works. Of course, the main point of conquest was the land beneath their feet, but what they did once it was won was of little

---

47 Examples include the entries for years 876 and 877, in Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 48.

concern when compared to recording how they won it. Detailing how Vikings came and settled in the lands of Anglo-Saxons might have served as a rallying cry for a powerful king to remove them, but the only way to see this to fruition was to call upon armies and force the enemy out.\textsuperscript{39}

Because political intrigue and power were vital for the main authors of the period, there would not be a need to discuss the day-to-day events of the average peasant. Their land being taken by Vikings was important only if it was first and foremost the king’s or church’s land. What these individuals were doing on the land was of no concern to the authors, as seen by the lack of writings on the farming of the lands after conquest.

The purpose of explaining that some Vikings settled in certain areas was that it provided a precedent for depicting the mobilization of those same Scandinavian settlers in a later entry. These later entries include how the people of certain areas reacted to certain political events such as the succession of King Edmund to the throne of England in 942. This entry for 942 is intriguing as it claims that Edmund “redeemed” the “Danes..(who)..were previously subjected by force under the Norsemen.”\textsuperscript{50} This particular entry is important in understanding that there could have been a merging of the local Anglo-Saxon population with the Scandinavians from Denmark. By revealing that there was a multiethnic population in this area and that all were considered the subjects of the king it can reveal that the populace was not simply a continuation of Anglo-Saxon identity. In fact, this entry reveals that the ethnic conflict of the previous decades might have been only thought of in terms of leadership and lordship. Thus, the people in

\textsuperscript{39} Andrew Reynolds, ‘Archaeological correlates for Anglo-Saxon military activity in comparative perspective’, in John Baker, Stuart Brookes and Andrew Reynolds (eds), \textit{Landscape of Defence in Early Medieval Europe} (Turnhout, 2013), pp. 23-25,

\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Anglo Saxon Chronicle}, p. 71.
England could be Scandinavian or Anglo-Saxon, but as long as their lords were not Scandinavian, there would be peace and acceptance.

However, I do not believe that to be the case. This interpretation neglects the animosity recorded between Scandinavians and Anglo-Saxons. The removal of this information from records would be out of character for later authors. I would claim that this is more indicative of the political rhetoric of division between cultures found throughout other entries and times. Claiming the Danish population of England as part of Edmund’s people is not an example of unity, but of power and domination. These Scandinavians now submitted to the king of Wessex. They thus became his people but not due to being accepted among the Anglo-Saxons. Instead, because his power was so secure and prominent that all submitted to his rule. His influence was all encompassing and applied even to the progeny of the Viking invaders.

With conflict being such an important aspect of the documents, one might have thought the king would consider exterminating the Scandinavian populace to display his military might. But this might not have been a viable option for the king. The cultural mixing of the region would have made conflict risky and complicated as ethnic loyalty would not be an effective rallying cry. If he marched his army through, killing anyone who Norse or dressed “Viking”, he could have seen massive unrest and disorder. It is for that reason that the king declared that these people were now his. He declared this to be the case. He did not accept the people nor did he unify them, but rather he claimed power and dominion over a people whom he liberated from Viking rule.

If any period of Viking-Age England could be considered accepting of a multi-ethnic identity, it would be the years under Danish rule from 1013/1016-1042. While the documentary evidence for this time period does show many of the same themes of war and conflict between
Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians, the rule of Cnut in particular displays ethnic distinctions. This is seen when Cnut came to power. He assigned parts of the country to men not based on their ethnic identity, but based on their loyalty to him. These were Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians from all over the region.\textsuperscript{51} I interpret Cnut’s attitude concerning loyalty above ethnicity to mean that by this period, the cultural war used by Alfred and the house of Wessex had ended. The cultures present in England did not have the same amount of animosity towards one another as they had in previous centuries. It can also be the case that there may not have been that much animosity in actuality and the rhetoric of early authors was simply a literary tool used to accentuate the sides of conflict.

The Anglo-Saxon authors depicted the Viking Age as a time of near constant war and strife. Vikings from Scandinavia assaulted England, raiding and conquering the land from its dominant Anglo-Saxon people. While this was the case, these documents served a greater purpose of elevating the status of the rulers of England. The first half of the period saw the rise of Wessex and used ethnic conflict as a means to obtain legitimacy. The later conquests by Danish monarchs kept the same military prowess, but being foreigners themselves much of the division based on ethnicity was removed from the record. Nevertheless, these documents displayed that strife was apparent between Scandinavians and Anglo-Saxons. However, when one examines the material culture of this period it becomes apparent that there was not pure animosity between these two cultures, but instead a merging of the two into a new identity.

\textsuperscript{51} Lawson, \textit{Cnut}, pp. 174-175.
CHAPTER 3
THE ANGLO-SCANDINAVIAN MATERIAL CULTURE

I have pointed out how the documentary evidence for Viking-Age England was crafted for political purposes first and foremost. As this was the case the development of societies and the influences Scandinavians played on the contemporary Anglo-Saxon populace were not addressed. However, the cultural impact of Scandinavians is found throughout the archaeological record and can be seen in the material culture of the time period.\(^1\) It is through this material culture that the Anglo-Scandinavian ethnic identity is present. Previous attempts to use archaeology to analyze Viking-Age England aimed to find as many indicators of Vikings in the material culture as possible. This included looking for furnished graves with grave goods which originated from Scandinavia, including belt buckles, oval brooches, and most importantly weaponry that could be determined to have been of Scandinavian style.\(^2\) This methodology, however, drastically simplifies the nature of the material culture for this time period into Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian blocs. Upon further examination of material culture, what is revealed is not this dichotomy but a melting pot of cultural influences and ethnic identifiers. Much of the material culture reveals the creation and proliferation of a new ethnic identity in the region due to extensive merging.\(^3\)

Before going further, it is prudent to discuss what I mean by ethnicity in this section and how the archaeological record can or cannot display it. Ethnicity, as I define it, is not an inherent identity that one is born with based on a series of genetic factors. It is an identity that is crafted


from social factors and can be constructed by self-identification with particular cultural traits.\textsuperscript{4} The idea that someone can be a “Dane” or an “Englishman” in the modern sense is a product of nationalism and nationalistic identities developed in modern times. Many of the claims to national identity focus on the location of one’s birth as well as the nationalities of one’s parents. Ethnicity is often tied to the national identity that one has in today’s world, but this was not so true in the medieval context.\textsuperscript{5} The nation-state as we know it was not a cemented factor during the Viking Age. True, the kingdoms of Denmark, Norway, Wessex, etc. existed as political entities, but what it meant to be someone from those places was not as well defined as being from a nation-state. Ethnicity was much more of a social construction based on local populations. These intimate groups developed their own ideas of what it meant to be Anglo-Saxon or Scandinavian. Modern interpretations of these ethnic identities as having certain criteria would be alien for these individuals. Ethnic identity was not a checklist to display that one belongs to an ethnic group.

Additionally, time plays an important role on how an individual views himself or herself and his/her ethnic identity. What it meant to have a certain ethnic identity has shifted and changed throughout time.\textsuperscript{6} An individual who wanted to display his Anglo-Saxon heritage in the early ninth century would not display the exact same indicators as an individual in the early eleventh century. Because of this variability over time it is quite difficult to say with certainty what items or symbols are an exact representation of any given ethnicity. Instead, archaeologists have to study the time period and its society’s many cultural aspects to determine what is

\textsuperscript{4} Moreland, \textit{Archaeology, theory}, p. 162.

\textsuperscript{5} Moreland, \textit{Archaeology, theory}, p. 168.

\textsuperscript{6} Moreland, \textit{Archaeology, theory}, p. 160.
symbolic and important to the individuals living at that time. Once symbolic meaning is determined then it can be used to determine if that same symbolic meaning is being used for certain graves and therefore can be used to determine the ethnic identity of the deceased.⁷

The most informative source of material evidence for Vikin-Age England are mortuary data. The mortuary data usually are associated with furnished graves. These graves include not only the bones of the deceased, but also any number of other artifacts called grave goods. ⁸By studying the deceased and the items buried with them scholars are able to discern certain aspects of their identity that would be lost if one only had osteological data. It is for this reason that I will mainly be focused on furnished graves to look for the Anglo-Scandinavian presence in the mortuary rituals. Without such evidence there is too much speculation over the identity of the deceased. The traditional view of furnished burials was that Christians phased them out after conversion, leaving only pagans to continue the practice. This had the effect of being able to indicate when Germanic or Scandinavian peoples came to a new land due to the presence of furnished graves. The pagan Germanic and Scandinavian peoples typically did not stop the practice of furnished burial until their own conversion, after which mortuary evidence becomes more difficult to use. However, in recent years, this idea of a purely Christian versus pagan view on furnished graves became questioned.⁹ Why do we find evidence of crosses in certain furnished burials or find furnished graves located next to churches? In terms of Scandinavia in

---

⁷ Richards, ‘Viking Settlement’, p. 368.

⁸ Richards, ‘Viking Settlement’, p. 368 also see Hinton, Gold and Gilt, p. 124.

the Viking Age, the king of Denmark Harald Bluetooth converted to Christianity in the 960s, making it questionable if the Danes who came to England after that were Christian.\(^{10}\)

The simple fact is that it may not be a clear cut case of Christian or pagan rituals. This idea was argued in Merovingian Gaul by Guy Halsall who refuted the idea that furnished graves along the border with Germanic peoples indicated the presence of those same people coming into Gaul. Instead, when the grave goods of these burials were examined what he found was that many of these burials had rituals which would have only been known or seen as special to the Christian Gallo-Romans. Therefore, these graves which were only before understood as Germanic were now considered to be Gauls utilizing the ritual of furnished burial to express certain social ideas. These Gallo-Romans were not utilizing this rite because they had become pagan, but because they saw in the ritual the ability to display their attachment to ethnic identity and use it in the struggle for land control.\(^{11}\) I believe that this same analysis of furnished graves can be utilized for Viking-Age England. Although there are only a handful of furnished graves, the contents of these burials raise many questions as to the ethnic identity associated with the interred individual. The typology of grave goods is not the key factor in determining ethnic identity, but what these items might have meant at the time of burial could determine what identity was being displayed.

This idea that furnished goods are not entirely tied to pagan rites is emphasized by the use of that ritual by Anglo-Saxons in the seventh century. These Anglo-Saxon furnished graves were created prior to direct contact with Scandinavian attacks and display many features of furnished graves from previous centuries. In fact, these furnished graves look remarkably similar to the

---


furnished graves created during the Viking Age. This information coupled with the sparse frequency of furnished graves even in the Viking Age has led to the conclusion that mortuary practices are not able to be used as means of determining ethnicity. However, one should not despair, but instead should examine these furnished graves in terms of an Anglo-Scandinavian identity. In these terms, furnished grave goods of the period can be seen as a mix of lasting Anglo-Saxon rituals being combined with contemporary mortuary rituals practiced in Scandinavia. While graves without any grave goods can be understood as a changing cultural practice from one of furnished graves to unfurnished graves. The rise of unfurnished graves could be the result of Scandinavians accepting the style of Anglo-Saxon burials for the time with furnished graves having another purpose all together.

Anders Winroth claims that the reason for the mortuary data being so similar between Scandinavians and Anglo-Saxons was the fast pace of cultural appropriation. However, he also claims that these same Vikings removed those Anglo-Saxons previously living there through force or maybe through their own will in a rather quick manner. It stands to reason that this idea is puzzling, for why would Viking settlers adopt the practices of Anglo-Saxons when they removed those very people from their lands? Also from which Anglo-Saxons would they be incorporating these cultural indicators, since all were removed from the lands settled? It could be argued that neighboring communities might have influenced the first generation of settlers. However, then we would expect there to be not as much ethnic mixing the farther from the border one gets, which is simply not the case. I argue that the invading Vikings did not remove all of the local Anglo-Saxon populace from these regions. It is more likely that these regions

---


were stripped of some local populations to make room for the Scandinavian settlers, leaving much of the land to be cultivated by the existing populace. The material culture reveals that it may have been the local elites that were the main target of extermination or otherwise removal due to the existence of Anglo-Scandinavian symbols of authority and power. These symbols include the burials near churches as well as the large stone crosses found throughout the countryside.\(^{14}\) In addition, coins struck with Scandinavian names throughout the regions conquered by the invaders suggests that the local elites who would have administrated currency production were replaced by Scandinavians.

Knowledge surrounding the deceased is a key aspect of mortuary data. The more knowledge one can gain from a body, the greater the understanding of aspects of the society pertaining to identity. Scholars are constantly on the look for techniques which help to gain more knowledge on the deceased’s past. One technique which is gaining some traction in the archaeological community is isotope analysis. Isotope analysis is a process which uses the osteological evidence to determine the relative location in which an individual was raised as a child. The way this process works is by examining strontium or oxygen isotopes found primarily in the teeth of deceased individuals. The isotope composition that can be located in the osteological record is unique to certain locations. These isotopes then get deposited in the teeth of individuals in their early years of development. Therefore, the isotope composition found within the teeth can point to the location of where a person lived as a child. This method of analysis has been used to determine if burials dating to the Viking Age were of local Anglo-Saxons or invasive Scandinavians. By determining if these individuals spent their developmental

years in Scandinavia researchers can determine that these people migrated to England. This research has been influential in determining the identities of those buried in mass graves or other Viking Age burials in which little to no identifiable grave goods have been discovered.\(^\text{15}\)

The 2008 excavation of 37 male bodies in Oxford is one example of the utilization of isotopic analysis in the study of Viking-Age England. Visual analysis of the bones revealed that there was trauma on many of the individuals indicating that they had suffered wounds. The position of the bodies in the mass grave indicated that these men were executed. In addition to wounds, the bones had evidence of being burned. Because of the burn marks, it has been postulated that these men were executed by being burned alive. Initial conclusions from this site pointed towards these men being the decedents of Scandinavians targeted in the St. Brice’s Day Massacre. The massacre was ordered by King Aethelred “the Unready” and targeted all Danish men living within England. The remains matched a written account of a 1004 charter which describes a group of Danish men running to a church that was then surrounded and burned to the ground. While this does seem to be a fairly convincing comparison, the physical evidence within the bones does not support that conclusion.

Once isotopic analysis was performed on these remains it became clear that these men most likely spent their childhood years in Scandinavia, not England. Therefore, these men were not the decedents of Danish settlers targeted by the massacre, but Scandinavians themselves. The bones then underwent radiocarbon dating which determined that these men most probably died in the mid-tenth century, although there a large margin of error with radiocarbon dating. In this

case the isotopic analysis was able to refute the initial conclusions derived by excavators and revealed that these men were most likely migrants or perhaps raiders from Scandinavia, not the targets of Aethelred’s rage.\textsuperscript{16}

Unfortunately, isotope analysis has a side effect of convincing some scholars that they can determine the ethnic identity of individuals from their place of origin. This is a flawed idea as it makes ethnicity and culture the equivalent of a biological race tied to a geographic area which is then immutable. Growing up as a child in Scandinavia is not the same as being a pre-condition of a Scandinavian ethnic identity. This sort of approach neglects the importance of individual or communal identity that is important to determining ethnicity. Local communities can display their own forms of ethnic identity that can vary from the larger geographic area while still having many of the same trappings.\textsuperscript{17} Another key aspect of this analysis is that it fails to take into account the idea that one’s ethnic identity can change as one ages and relocates. It could very well be the case that an individual could have been born on the Jutland Peninsula (modern day Denmark), moved to England as part of a colonizing and settling party, and adopted a new identity. By conflating the place of origin with the society in which the person existed within, scholarship simplifies the complex nature of ethnicity and culture. This simplification is great for developing neat and organized models for settlement and migration, but as a marker of ethnicity or culture it is far from sufficient.

I believe that isotopic analysis can be a useful tool in determining the movement of populations from one location to another, but not as direct evidence of an ethnic identity. The type of movement is ambiguous and cannot be detected by isotopes alone, but with the proper

\textsuperscript{16} Pollard et al, ‘Sprouting like a cockle amongst the wheat’, pp. 97-98.

\textsuperscript{17} Glǿrstad, ‘Homeland -- strange land’, pp. 153-154.
contextualization more work can be done to understand the nature of such events. What will really further the understanding of the material culture in terms of an Anglo-Scandinavian ethnicity would be the coupling of isotopic analysis with grave goods and other pieces of material evidence. The fact that a man was born and raised in Scandinavia and then was buried with Anglo-Saxon materials could display that the ethnic identity of that individual underwent a change. The isotopes within the skeleton are but one piece of the puzzle in determining the initial ethnic identity of the deceased. This then becomes marred after the first generation of immigrants from Scandinavia as future generations born in England would display the same isotopic distribution as the population that had lived there for centuries. Ultimately, isotopic analysis can be utilized to examine the initial movement of Scandinavians to England, but does not allow for the broad picture of cultural and ethnic identity that plays a large part in determining the lasting socio-political impact of such a movement.

Mortuary data is but one aspect of exploring how the Scandinavian population attempted to reevaluate its ethnic identity into one of an Anglo-Scandinavian culture. To cement power in the region, certain aspects of the Anglo-Saxon identity were blended with Scandinavian influences. This can be seen in the large stone monuments erected in cemeteries. These monuments include stone crosses, cross slabs, and hogbacks. Erecting stone monuments was a practice of Anglo-Saxons that was popular in the eighth century before the arrival of Viking raiders and invaders. Around the tenth century these stone monuments begin to display Scandinavian influences and styles. While stone monuments with Scandinavian influences are

---


found throughout England, the highest concentration is in northern Yorkshire, cemented firmly in the Danelaw. One of the most impressive and decorated stone crosses is located at Gosforth and displays the most exquisite Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian symbols. The Gosforth cross displays a characteristically Christian cross at the very top of the sculpture with Scandinavian motifs running along the sides. The Scandinavian-inspired elements have been interpreted as scenes from the Scandinavian myth of Ragnarök. Zanette Tsagaridas Glørstad utilizes Siân Jones’ argument surrounding the nature of Scandinavian animal symbols to recognize that these motifs were intended to stress Scandinavian ancestry and an inherited symbolic meaning.\(^{20}\) I would agree that these symbols are not a simple artistic choice, but a deeper connection between Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon cultural influences which when combined allowed for expression of a unique identity.

The combination of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian designs into a combined mortuary element is an impressive display of the Anglo-Scandinavian identity. By the tenth century Scandinavians had been exposed to the Christian Church and would have realized its power in England. For this reason Phil Sidebottom argues that these stones were erected by powerful Scandinavians who wished to display their devotion to the local religion. This was done in order to cement their power in the region as new Christian converts, displaying that they were not as foreign as their subjects might have seen them as.\(^{21}\) In addition, the time period in which these crosses were erected coincides with the conquest of the Danelaw by Wessex. Sidebottom sees


the development of these crosses as the local Scandinavian elite displaying the process of conversion to the religion of their new king.\textsuperscript{22}

However, this interpretation implies that the local Scandinavian and Anglo-Scandinavian populace had retained their pagan roots in their entirety until Wessex conquered them. This seems unlikely as the local Anglo-Saxon population would have already been Christian. In addition, there were many churches still active during this period and prominent members of the clergy were even involved in the politics of the Danelaw. The idea that Scandinavians were already well aware of Christianity and its importance before the tenth century is exemplified by records of Scandinavians building churches and being publicly converted such as Guthrum in the ninth century.\textsuperscript{23}

Aside from mortuary data and monument construction, archaeologists have turned to artifacts associated with dress and settlement to examine the extent of Anglo-Scandinavian influence. Of all the settlements in the Danelaw the most important source for Anglo-Scandinavian and Viking Age material culture in general is York.\textsuperscript{24} York was the second largest city in England during the Viking Age and was a highly important trading center for not only the Viking kingdoms, but also the united English kingdom. The city was ruled by a Scandinavian king for almost a century, only submitting to Anglo-Saxon rule in 954.\textsuperscript{25} The largest source of material culture from York is derived from the Coppergate excavation carried out in 1976-1981.\textsuperscript{26} This excavation unearthed thousands of individual artifacts from Viking Age York which

\textsuperscript{22} Sidebottom, ‘Viking Age Stone Monuments’, p. 231.

\textsuperscript{23} Anglo-Saxon chronicle, p. 49.


\textsuperscript{25} Hall, ‘York’, p. 379.

\textsuperscript{26} Hall, ‘York’, p. 380.
has revealed much about the identity of its inhabitants and its place in the cultural milieu. Much of the material evidence displays the Scandinavian presence in England from artisan materials to ornaments of dress. But more importantly, with regard to this paper, is that York has revealed a great deal of evidence regarding the Anglo-Scandinavian culture present there.\(^{27}\)

The material culture of Viking Age York however was not entirely based on outside trade, but on local production as well. Before going on to describe the importance of such production it is important to note that Anglo-Scandinavian artifacts which deal with dress and appearance do not directly correlate to settlement by Vikings and other Scandinavians. Jewelry and metalwork in particular is easily transportable and therefore can only be analyzed in terms of social interaction and artisan centers. York was one of these Anglo-Scandinavian centers and therefore was seen as an important place of consumerism for these types of goods. In regards to ornamentation creation there have been findings of disc brooches with Jellinge and Borre styles integrated into them at York, combining the traditional type of Anglo-Saxon brooch with symbolism from Scandinavia.\(^{28}\) Strap-ends from belts are another example of a traditional Anglo-Saxon style of dress which then saw Scandinavian animal motifs being integrated into the metalwork.\(^{29}\)

When it comes to questions of ornamentation and dress a problem arises with regards to production and use. The production of Anglo-Scandinavian dress types in England and not in Scandinavia makes one wonder who would be wearing such material and for what purpose. It can be argued that the prevalence of Anglo-Scandinavian brooches and belts were seen as a way


for the Anglo-Saxon populace of the Danelaw to emulate and imitate the Scandinavian nobility. These dress accessories do not imply that the population was Scandinavian, but that the influences that Scandinavians brought with them had become so integrated that their style was combined with Anglo-Saxon items and constituted a new form of identity to display.\textsuperscript{30} Emulation of Scandinavians displayed a desire to incorporate Scandinavian mentalities within the Danelaw which led to more of a distinguished Anglo-Scandinavian cultural impact.\textsuperscript{31}

Dress and crafts were not the only means in which York helped to display the impact of an Anglo-Scandinavian cultural shift. Perhaps the most striking example is the large amount of Anglo-Scandinavian coins created in the tenth century. The Coppergate excavation revealed two iron dies for coins which were developed for the kings of York.\textsuperscript{32} One iron die displays a Latin inscription with a Scandinavian style sword. This same die depicts what can be interpreted as Thor’s hammer in the lower portion of the inscription. The Latin inscription indicates a strong Christian influence with the sword and hammer having strong Scandinavian ties.\textsuperscript{33} Such coins show that the kings of York were good English Christians and at the same time Scandinavian. An Anglo-Scandinavian culture had developed in the region.

The influence of Scandinavian culture is felt throughout the archaeological record of Viking-Age England. Mortuary data reveals that the idea of the furnished Viking grave is not a necessity in determining the extent of a Scandinavian presence in England. The fact that the mortuary ritual appears to be so similar for people born in Scandinavia and for “Englishmen”

\textsuperscript{30} Hinton, \textit{Gold and Gilt}, p. 138.

\textsuperscript{31} Glǿrstad, ‘Homeland -- strange land’, p. 159.

\textsuperscript{32} Hinton, \textit{Gold and Gilt}, p. 135.

\textsuperscript{33} Hall, ‘York’, pp. 382-383.
suggests that a cultural shift has occurred in regards to the mortuary ritual, moving away from furnished graves and towards unfurnished inhumations. The mortuary data in particular is not very convincing for the presence of Vikings, nor for a combined Anglo-Scandinavian culture in England. The Anglo-Scandinavian influences and ethnic identifiers are displayed in the material culture in the form of stone monuments and other crafted goods. These items often built upon a lasting Anglo-Saxon practice and transformed it with the addition of Scandinavian motifs and symbols. Such a transformation of the material culture displays the merging of ethnic identities during the Viking Age towards a new Anglo-Scandinavian culture.
CHAPTER 4
CONCLUSION AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ANGLO-SCANDINAVIAN STUDIES

The lack of a static understanding of ethnicity during the medieval period tied to geographic and childhood influences created an opportunity to create one’s own identity. This lack of what can be considered a cemented ethnic identity was especially prominent among Scandinavians as seen in the other places of Scandinavian colonization. Scandinavians’ ability and acceptance of other cultures and their incorporation of these influences into their own indicates that ethnicity was a practice brought with them wherever they went. Two of the most prominent locations of Scandinavian colonization and assimilation are Normandy and Rus’, the polity which would later become modern Russia.¹ In both of these locations the documentary evidence and material culture reveal an influential Scandinavian elite and the merging of ethnic identifiers to display Scandinavian motifs alongside the established culture’s material.² Within a couple generations all three locations displayed a mixing of ethnic identity, showing that Scandinavians did bring their culture with them, but then created a new, unique culture with the local population.

There was no Scandinavian “purity” that people in modern times might associate with ethnically diverse peoples. If this was the case then there would not be multiple instances of heterogeneous ethnicities developed in regions where Scandinavians settled. Instead, one would expect, like the original archaeologists of Viking-Age England, to find a dominant, superior material culture which replaced the local, inferior one. Not only would one expect this for England, but also for Normandy and Rus’. However, in all three cases there is a distinct period of


merging cultural influences found in the material culture and to some extent the linguistic material.

It must be stressed that fluidity of ethnic identity was not unique to Scandinavians of the Viking Age. To find a similar parallel one needs only to turn to the inhabitants of England whom the Vikings fought, the Anglo-Saxons. John Moreland, while not the first, argues that the Anglo-Saxon identity that became so influential in England during the medieval period was created by the elites of these people after a period of cultural mixing and assimilation. The old concept derived from Bede that the Angles, Jutes, and Saxons came and conquered England in a blaze of battle and fire has been revisited using the material culture of Migration-Period England. There is no layer of eradication found in the archaeological record that would indicate a complete destruction and replacing of the indigenous British culture developed in Roman times. Instead, there is a mixing of cultural elements which can be seen in building typology as well as dress accessories.

The only time that an identity that can be described as Anglo-Saxon comes into the historical record is when the elites created that idea in the seventh century. According to Moreland, this was intended as a means of defining succession and keeping power within a small group of people who claimed descent from Germanic immigrants. It is this political motivation that would then lead to the creation of a native vs. foreign dichotomy throughout the Viking Age. It is the seventh century reliance on a common ethnic background for political power which

---

5 Moreland, *Archaeology, theory*, pp. 174-175.
shaped the attitudes and motivations of authors when dealing with Scandinavian invaders. These political motivations would manifest themselves in the exclusion of a developing Anglo-Scandinavian identity in England as control was cemented in the idea of Anglo-Saxon cultural identity. By painting the Vikings and other Scandinavians as not only enemies, but also as *ethnic* enemies, Anglo-Saxon elites such as the house of Wessex could claim that they would never have any legitimate hold over the English countryside.

The hardline stance against Scandinavian prominence in England softened with the rise of Danish monarchs to rule England in the early eleventh century. It is only at this time that documents would hint at the fact that England was an ethnically diverse country, with acceptance of people based on qualities not tied to their constructed identity. However, the idea that these cultures were by any means merging to form a new one is completely absent from any documentary material. It is only when one turns to the material culture that the combined Anglo-Scandinavian identity is revealed.

At first glance the mortuary data of Viking-Age England displays an overpowering of Scandinavian cultural indicators in favor of the Anglo-Saxon rituals surrounding death. This could be interpreted as Scandinavians abandoning their identity for the Anglo-Saxon one. However, when other elements of the material culture such as stone monuments and goods created in the Danelaw are considered, it becomes clear that Scandinavians did not simply adopt Anglo-Saxon traits. Instead, there was a merging of symbolic items of Anglo-Saxon production with Scandinavian design, symbolizing that both were important to the people of the Danelaw. Both elites and common people chose how they wished to display themselves, and what was significant to their identity. By combining elements of importance together, these people created

---

a new ethnicity and culture for themselves, being not Anglo-Saxon nor Scandinavian, but a
hybrid, Anglo-Scandinavian identity.

It should be noted that the idea of an Anglo-Scandinavian presence in England is largely
absent in the collective Zeitgeist of the modern country. Instead, people learn and study the
Anglo-Saxon culture which is seen as the major force in medieval England.7 The notion that
Scandinavians are largely absent from the cultural identity of England is a testament to the fact
that English identity and “Englishness” are constructed in their own right.8 This identity was
carefully constructed using select pieces of the past that were given significance while other
events and pieces were discarded. This process parallels medieval notions of identity, yet the
idea of a mutable identity might take some time for modern populations to accept.

However, I am hopeful that the Anglo-Scandinavian culture will become a more accepted
part of England’s historical identity. If the people can accept that the Anglo-Saxons did not
conquer England in a massive invasion, they can accept that those very Anglo-Saxons merged
their culture with Scandinavians during the Viking Age. What this does however, is changing the
idea of what a person knows about his or her country and how that affects his or her sense of
national pride and self-identification. Therefore, I see the concept of an Anglo-Scandinavian
culture playing more of a role in the development of what England’s past means to the public
and what being Anglo-Saxon truly encapsulates with its association. In effect, the idea of what
defines “Englishness” will be tested and revisited through propagation of this recently
established historical reality.

7 Moreland, Archaeology, theory, pp. 159-160.
8 Moreland, Archaeology, theory, p. 159.
The revelation and acceptance of this Anglo-Scandinavian identity is important for the continued study of ethnicity and culture not only in England, but in the medieval world in general. Study of this topic highlights the concept that identity and ethnicity is constructed and presented by individuals. This idea had largely been overshadowed in twentieth century by the idea of moving and stable cultural identities which could be analyzed as universal groups. Current developments and studies have turned this concept on its head as simplistic and unfounded. Cultures, ethnicities, identities all change through time and through interactions with others. They are in a near constant state of flux and while there are some indicators that can be used to define them, these indicators can always change over time.
LIST OF REFERENCES


*The Life of King Alfred*, trans. Albert S. Cook (Boston, 1906).


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Matthew R. Smith was born and raised in Tallahassee, Florida where he graduated from Lawton Chiles High School. He decided to leave Tallahassee and its local collegiate prospects to study at the University of Florida in Gainesville. Matthew majored in history and focused his attention on Medieval Europe with a further focus on the Viking Age. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in the fall of 2014. After graduation, Matthew decided to further pursue a career in academia and once again enrolled at the University of Florida. He graduated with a Master of Arts degree in the fall of 2017.