The Collective Self-Representation of Ethnicity in Anglo-Saxon England (886-1066) and Medieval Iceland (1100-1264)

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Abstract

This thesis examines the collective self-representation of ethnicity in Anglo-Saxon England and medieval Iceland. It takes its cue from the definitions of ethnicity developed by scholars of ethnogenesis, but departs from that scholarship by using solely texts as source evidence. Ethnicity is not seen as a static characteristic, rather the product of an ongoing process of identification. It is not ethnicity itself that is being studied here, but rather the collective acts of ethnic identification made by the two groups. As the Anglo-Saxons and Icelanders both produced a significant body of written sources, it is possible to study collective self-representation by viewing the production of texts as acts of identification. These acts of identification produced ethnicity by defining the characteristics that group members shared and those that made them different from other groups.

This thesis studies four categories of characteristic: origin, language, religion and law. By examining how the elite of each group used texts to express their shared characteristics, it is possible to establish not only how ethnicity was represented, but also why it was represented in these ways. Through close reading of texts and strong historical contextualisation, it is possible to identify exactly how the elites of these groups wanted to portray their ethnic identity. The representation of ethnicity created the impression internal unity and also allowed these groups to interact with other groups through the expression of similarity and difference. Fundamentally, ethnic identification is a matter of belief in the existence of the group, and the approach taken here allows the formation and promulgation of this belief to be understood. This thesis explores the specific circumstances under which groups chose to make certain identifications, uncovering the links between culture, context and history in the representation of ethnicity and demonstrating the power of ethnicity as a political tool.

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Submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of History

Durham University

2021

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr Helen Foxhall Forbes, Professor Richard Gameson and Dr Eleanor Barraclough, for their help and guidance. I would also like to thank my friends who supported me and offered advice and distraction in equal measure, particularly Kate Dyer and Dr Rachael Harkes. I would further like to acknowledge Durham University for my Doctoral Studentship funding.

Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to study the collective self-representation of ethnicity in two case studies, Anglo-Saxon England and medieval Iceland, in order to determine what this can tell us about the process of ethnic identification in these groups and the way political and social context influenced the development of ethnic identity. Ethnicity is not a static characteristic, rather it is the product of an ongoing process of identification.[1] Ethnicity was produced in these two groups by acts of identification, some of which survive as texts, and these can show us which characteristics a group considered significant to their ethnicity. This significance was generated by the circumstances the groups experienced, their history and their contemporary context. Chapter 1 will discuss how ethnicity is defined and understood, and explore the disparity between our understanding of ethnicity and our ability to define it in a scholarly sense. While ethnicity is understood to mean a certain type of group identity, what characterises that identity and differentiates it from other identities has been hard to determine. There is no particular characteristic, whether it be territory, language, custom or law, that is definitive of ethnicity in every case. Plenty of ethnicities share characteristics, language being an obvious example, and there can be diversity within a group too, language is again a good example of this. Ethnicity is best defined as a belief among members that the group exists and that there are characteristics that the group shares that make it different from other groups.[2] In order to study the ethnicity of a group, we must know what characteristics the group sees as significant to its identity, and this varies from group to group and according to situation. It is therefore very difficult to study ethnicity in medieval groups, but the acts of identification that symbolise and produce ethnicity can be studied, and this will be the method employed by this thesis. Many things can be an act of identification on either an individual or group level, including physical acts, performance, the creation of material culture and the writing of texts.[3] For the purpose of this thesis, the acts of identification under consideration will be texts, as physical acts such as speech cannot be reconstructed and the significance of material culture is difficult to establish. Due to the limited access to literacy in this period, these texts can only reveal identifications made by the elite, but as it is collective self-representation that is being studied here this is not problematic. Collective identity is generated

[1] Walter Pohl, "Introduction — Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile", in Walter Pohl and Gerda Heydemann (ed.), *Strategies of Identification: Ethnicity and Religion in Early Medieval Europe* (Turnhout, 2013), p. 2.
[2] Guy Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 38
[3] Seteney Shami, "Historical Processes of Identity Formation: Displacement, Settlement, and Self- Representations of the Circassians in Jordan", *Iran & the Caucasus,* 13.1 (2009), pp. 153-156.

and expressed by the elite of a group. Individual acts of identification are much less well-attested by the sources so we cannot gain a full view of ethnicity as produced by individual and collective identification, but insight can be gained from studying collective self-representation on its own terms. Indeed, it may be the case that due to the increasing separation of elites from the rest of their groups in the late antique and early medieval period ethnicity itself was effectively restricted to the elite.[4] There are still challenges to studying collective identification in this way because of the wide variety of characteristics that can be seen and presented as significant to ethnicity. It has therefore been necessary to select characteristics on which to focus that are commonly considered significant to ethnicity: origin, language, religion and law. These characteristics are the focus of the subsequent chapters.

Chapters 2 to 5 explore each characteristic in turn to determine the way they were represented in acts of identification in these two groups. It will be shown that these acts of identification responded to the context in which they were created, meaning that the ethnicity they produced was both reliant on circumstance and extremely responsive to it. In Chapters 2 and 3, origin myth and language are considered. These two characteristics play an extremely significant role in identification and are presented as fundamental characteristics to the identities of these two groups. An origin myth represents a group's shared history and establishes the basis on which a group exists. In these case studies, a single origin for the whole group was emphasised in their origin myth, smoothing over the diversity of origin that seems to have existed in reality. This is a strong foundation for group identity, and it allows for further characterisations, such as the Icelandic need to express their relationship with Norway as it evolved and the Anglo-Saxon desire to make religious characterisations about their group. Language was also used to make fundamental characterisations of identity. For the Anglo-Saxons, language was characteristic of unity because the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms had used the same language prior to unification. For the Icelanders, language was a way to express difference from other groups because they had their own literary tradition that set them apart from other Scandinavian groups in spite of their shared language. In Chapters 4 and 5, religion and laws are examined as characteristics used in acts of collective identification. These characteristics appear to have enabled complex identifications, perhaps because of their ongoing political and social implications. Religion was the most significant characteristic in the representation of Anglo-Saxon ethnicity. It was used in other identifications concerning law, language and origin, and its significance developed over the period considered

[4] Guy Halsall, "Subject, individual, exclusion: Some theoretical reflections and Frankish applications", in S. Joye, C. La Rocca & S. Gioanni (ed.), *La Construction du Sujet Exclu (IVe-IXe Siècles): Discours, lieux et individus* (Turnhout, 2019), p. 25.

here until it reached its peak significance in the early eleventh century, when we see a concentration of texts representing the Anglo-Saxons as God's chosen people. The Icelanders, on the other hand, used religion to articulate their own most significant characteristics, language and law. Law in particular is the dominant theme in their conversion narrative. When it came to representations of ethnicity in legal texts, it was significant to the Anglo-Saxons to characterise themselves through their system of governance, the king and *witan*, in order to create a sense of shared history and unity among the previously divided Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. However, religion was also an important feature of the way the Anglo-Saxons represented themselves in these codes. The Icelanders used the law to articulate their relationship with Norway, using Norway as a premise for legitimacy and shared history in the twelfth century, and then expressing independence from Norway at the end of the period, although in reality their independence was waning. Law was also an important unifying factor for the Icelanders, as without a king it in itself had to represent a stable system of governance. The conclusion of this thesis is that elites built upon shared history and responded to contemporary context when they made collective self-representations of ethnicity, but some of the characteristics they attributed to their groups' identity acquired significance of their own and were embedded in the collective consciousness. It is also clear that there was no such things as 'Anglo-Saxon ethnic identity' or 'Icelandic ethnic identity', but rather these two concepts were subject to constant evolution in response to events. The way ethnic characteristics were represented in the texts changed in ways that suited the groups who produced them. These representations can therefore tell us important things about the groups themselves. In particular, this thesis will demonstrate that the Icelanders did not always see Norwegian influence in Iceland as negative, in fact many of their early acts of identification represent the Norwegian role in Icelandic history positively, and that the Anglo-Saxons used Old Testament history in a variety of ways in their identifications before narrowing their representations to focus on characterising the group as God's chosen people.

Case Studies

A relatively large quantity of texts written in a variety of genres were produced by these groups, making them ideal case studies. Anglo-Saxon England in particular has a great deal of written evidence extant. Iceland has a smaller quantity of extant texts from the period but writing in the vernacular was still fairly widespread. These groups experience a change of governance, the Icelanders submitting to the Norwegian crown in 1264 CE and the Anglo-Saxons succumbing to Norman invasion in 1066 CE, so there is a date at which it is sensible to end these case studies. The results of this imposition of external control on group identity are themselves worthy of study

but are not within the scope of this thesis. Determining the appropriate dates at which to begin these case studies is more challenging, as both of these groups trace their origin to a migration in their pre-literate periods. To begin these case studies at the time of the groups' migrations would be unhelpful as neither group produced texts at this time, and so all of the written sources available are retrospective. In the case of the Anglo-Saxons, their origin myth was set before they had actually unified into a single group. Instead, the migrations of the Anglo-Saxons and Icelanders will be treated as remembered migrations, and the role this memory played in identity will be examined. The dates at which to begin these case studies must therefore be chosen by different criteria. Clearly, in order to undertake this study, the groups must consider themselves a single group, and they must produce texts. Therefore, the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms are not the subject of this study, and my Anglo-Saxon case study starts at the beginning of the unification process under Alfred the Great. In Iceland, texts do not appear to have been written much before 1100, so this is the earliest point of my Icelandic case study. Both of these case studies are therefore confined to a period in which their groups understood themselves to be a single group, the elite of which were dominant within their own territory, and in which they wrote texts that pertain to the aims of this thesis.

There are of course some differences between the groups, which must be acknowledged. These differences allow a broader understanding of collective self-representation to be gained as they demonstrate the function of ethnicity under various circumstances. The Icelanders were the only group in Iceland during the period in question, while the Anglo-Saxons had territorial boundaries with a number of other groups. This gave the two groups different concerns: the Anglo-Saxons had to ensure the integrity and status of their group among other groups; the Icelanders had to forge relationships with groups abroad. Additionally, the Anglo-Saxons were undergoing a process of unification from their earlier kingdoms, whereas the Icelanders were attempting to maintain their separation from their putative homeland, Norway. This meant that different strategies were needed to ensure the survival of the groups. The further differences in circumstances of religion, language and government between the two groups also influenced the way their identities formed. Anglo-Saxon England and medieval Iceland therefore make ideal comparative case studies as they have a balance of similarities and differences that makes the comparison productive.

The names used for these two groups in this thesis will be 'the Anglo-Saxons' for the inhabitants of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom and 'the Icelanders' for the inhabitants of Iceland. There

have been some recent concerns about the use of the term 'Anglo-Saxon' due to its problematic uses in the modern era, but alternative terms that have been suggested such as 'English' or 'Angelcynn' have their own drawbacks.[5] In the context of ethnicity, using the term 'English' to describe the pre-Conquest inhabitants of England is potentially problematic as it suggests a continuity of identity from the medieval period to the modern day that is not reflected by reality. The term 'Angelcynn' is more neutral, but it had a variety of meanings in the Anglo-Saxon period and the complete connotations of the term are not fully understood, so using it as cognate with 'Anglo-Saxon' it may be unhelpful.[6] Additionally, the term 'Angelcynn' is not in modern everyday use and therefore using it instead of Anglo-Saxon is not inclusive to non-academic audiences. Both 'Angelcynn' and 'English' were used by the Anglo-Saxons to describe themselves, so using them instead of Anglo-Saxon is not incorrect and may be more suitable in other contexts, but here the term 'Anglo-Saxon' will be used with the understanding that is refers specifically to the people living in England under the rule of the Anglo-Saxon king between 886 and 1066.[7] The term 'Icelandic' has not been highlighted as problematic, and there is no real alternative to it, but it is still necessary to emphasise that it is not the intention of this thesis to suggest that modern-day Icelandic citizens are equivalent to the group studied here. The 'Icelanders' that are the subject of this thesis are those inhabiting the island between 1100 and 1264.

Anglo-Saxon England

The Anglo-Saxon period considered here begins in 886, when Alfred the Great became king of the Mercians in addition to the West Saxons, forming for the first time a kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons.[8] He had already pushed back the Scandinavian invasion and extended his control outside the West Saxon kingdom, the crown of which he had inherited in 871.[9] This eventually led to the unification of England under Alfred's successors. Prior to Alfred's reign, the Anglo-Saxons had existed as separate kingdoms and there is no evidence that they considered themselves to have a single ethnicity. The various groups that came to be the Anglo-Saxons had settled Britain in the fifth century, displacing the resident Britons, and their conversion to Christianity began in the late

[5] David Wilton, "What Do We Mean By Anglo-Saxon? Pre-Conquest to the Present", *Journal of English and Germanic Philology,* 119.4 (2020); Susan Reynolds, "What Do We Mean By "Anglo-Saxon" and "Anglo-Saxons"?", *Journal of British Studies,* 24.4 (1985).
[6] Sharon M. Rowley, *The Old English Version of Bede's 'Historia Ecclesiastica'* (2011), pp. 59-62; Pauline Stafford, "The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, Identity and the Making of England", *The Haskins Society Journal,* 19 (2007), pp. 32-34.
[7] Wilton, "What Do We Mean By Anglo-Saxon? Pre-Conquest to the Present", 435-439.
[8] George Molyneaux, *The Formation of the English Kingdom in the Tenth Century* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 26-27; Daniel Anlezark, *Alfred the Great* (Leeds, 2017), p. 55; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: MS. C* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 63.
[9] Anlezark, *Alfred the Great*, pp. 33-56.

sixth century.[10] The Anglo-Saxon groups continued to share the island with the Britons, the Scots, the Picts, and the Scandinavians.[11] Bede indicates in his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (*HE*), completed around 731, that there were non-Anglo-Saxon groups in Britain and that there were certain shared qualities among the Anglo-Saxon groups, including language and religion.[12] However, there is no evidence that the inhabitants of the separate Anglo-Saxon kingdoms expected unification or saw themselves as a unified group.[13] Unification was only begun by Alfred in the 880s, when he was able to take advantage of the weakened state of the surrounding kingdoms in the wake of Scandinavian invasions to unify what territory was not under Scandinavian control. Following Alfred's reign, his sons and grandsons continued to expand the Anglo-Saxon kingdom by taking control of Scandinavian-held territory. This process reached its fullest extent under Edgar (r. 959-975), Alfred's great-grandson, and renewed Scandinavian invasion caused the contraction of the kingdom again under Æthelræd.[14] Æthelræd was unseated from his throne by Swein Forkbeard, the Danish king, but recalled after Swein's death. Æthelræd therefore continued his struggles against Swein's son, Cnut, and after his death his son Edmund was defeated by Cnut and then died, leaving Cnut as the Anglo-Saxon king in 1016.[15] Cnut was succeeded by his sons, Harold and Harthacnut, but they died shortly after, and the West Saxon dynasty was restored by Edward the Confessor's accession in 1042. Upon his death, with no clear succession, first Harold Godwinson and then William of Normandy took the throne.[16] It is therefore clear that Anglo-Saxon kingdom was never truly stable in a geographical sense, and likewise the identity of the Anglo-Saxon people developed as the kingdom changed.

Extant sources from the Anglo-Saxon kingdom are clustered around the Alfredian court of the late ninth century, which saw a flourishing of vernacular writing, and the late tenth century following the monastic reform, which once again initiated a flurry of Anglo-Saxon writing.[17] That is not to say that there are no sources from the decades between, but the majority of sources for this thesis are drawn from the start and end of the period in question. These sources were created by the elite because the means to produce texts in Anglo-Saxon England was limited mainly to

[10] Molyneaux, *Formation of the English Kingdom*, pp. 16-17.
[11] Donnchadh Corráin, "Ireland, Scotland and Wales to the Early Eleventh Century", in Rosamund McKitterick (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 54-63.
[12] Bede, *Bede's ecclesiastical history of the English people* (Oxford, 1969), p. 16.
[13] Simon Keynes, "England, 700-900", in Rosamund McKitterick (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 18.
[14] Molyneaux, *Formation of the English Kingdom*, pp. 33-35.
[15] Ibid., pp. 35-36.
[16] Ibid., pp. 36-37.
[17] Susan Irvine, "Beginnings and Transitions: Old English", in Lynda Mugglestone (ed.), *Oxford History of English* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 44-54.

monasteries, wealthy families and the royal court.[18] They therefore offer a geographically limited picture of Anglo-Saxon identity as they were mostly produced in the south of England. This means that we do not have much evidence for how those in the north of England wished to present their identity. As this was an area that experienced an ongoing battle for control between the Scandinavians, Anglo-Saxons and various local factions, ethnic identifications in this region would be very interesting. The sources also tell us little about individual identity, particularly of those below the elite as they did not tend to produce texts. We have to accept, then, that our texts do not provide us with a full picture of how all Anglo-Saxons viewed their identity. However, the focus of this thesis is on collective identity, and texts produced at the Anglo-Saxon court and other elite institutions do provide insight into how the elite wished to identify themselves. We do not have evidence for exactly which individuals were part of this elite group at all times in the Anglo-Saxon kingdom, but we know that this included the king, and witness lists suggest that those involved in governance would also have included members of the royal family, noblemen, and advisors both secular and religious.[19] This elite group formed the collective that represented their ethnicity through acts of identification.

Previous studies of Anglo-Saxon identity have tended to focus on either the early or the late period of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom. Two particularly influential articles concerning the early development of Anglo-Saxon ethnicity, Patrick Wormald's '*Engla Lond*: the Making of an Allegiance' and Sarah Foot's 'The Making of *Angelcynn*: English Identity Before the Norman Conquest', take their starting point from Bede, and propose that Alfred built upon Bede's ideologies to promote an Anglo-Saxon identity.[20] Wormald's article has been particularly influential in this field. Wormald suggests that Bede's *HE* characterises the Anglo-Saxons as God's chosen people, and that Alfred then used this as a basis for his own unification of the people.[21] This hypothesis assumes that Bede's conception of Anglo-Saxon identity was the same kind of identity as the unified identity that Alfred was attempting to forge. Bede did identify certain shared characteristics among the Anglo-Saxons, including religion and language, and these were then used by the Anglo-Saxon elite as the group developed a unified identity to imply that there was a

[18] Malcom Godden, "Literacy in Anglo-Saxon England", in R. Gameson (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain* (Cambridge, 2011); Mechthild Gretsch, "Literacy and the uses of the Vernacular", in Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge, (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature* (Cambridge, 2013)
[19] Simon Keynes, "Church Councils, Royal Assemblies, and Anglo-Saxon Royal Diplomas", in Gale Owen-Crocker and Brian Schneider (ed.), *Kingship, Legislation and Power in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2013).
[20] Patrick Wormald, "*Engla Lond*: The Making of an Allegiance", *Journal of Historical Sociology,* 7.1 (1994); Sarah Foot, "The Making of *Angelcynn*: English Identity Before the Norman Conquest", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society,* 6 (1996).
[21] Wormald, "*Engla Lond*", pp. 12-14.

historical basis for unity. However, as George Molyneaux has noted, the version of Bede's *HE* that was circulating in the late nine and early tenth century was the Old English version, and this is somewhat different from the original. It therefore does not unproblematically follow that Alfred and his court's ideology matched that of Bede.[22] In the eighth century there was no indication that the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms would ever find themselves unified, so whatever shared characteristics Bede saw between the kingdoms, they existed at a supra-ethnic level, transcending group boundaries. It was only later under Alfred and subsequently as the Anglo-Saxon kingdom developed that these characteristics became the group boundaries. The adaptation of Bede's *HE* for a tenth-century context will be discussed in detail in Chapters 2 and 4.[23] Molyneaux's *The Formation of the English Kingdom in the Tenth Century* also problematises the assumption of a stable Anglo-Saxon identity from the late ninth century onwards as it emphasises the ongoing process of kingdom formation in the tenth century.[24] The focus this thesis has on individual acts of identification will hopefully shed light on the effect this changing context had on Anglo-Saxon identity.

At the other end of the period, some scholars of Anglo-Saxon identity have used the wealth of contemporary textual evidence to create a picture of ethnicity in the late tenth and early eleventh century. For example, Hugh Thomas' *The English and the Normans: Ethnic Hostility, Assimilation, and Identity 1066-c.1220* examines the effects of the Norman Conquest on ethnic identity in England. Thomas' study takes Anglo-Saxon identity immediately prior to the conquest as its starting point.[25] Likewise, Katherine Cross's recent comparison of English and Norman identities, *Heirs of the Vikings: History and Identity in Normandy and England, c.950–c.1015*, focuses on the period from 950 to 1015 with specific emphasis on the effect of Scandinavian settlement.[26] These approaches have a late focus as their aims are to explore the effect of specific events on identity, and so they offer important insight into Anglo-Saxon identity but only from a perspective late in the period. In fact, there is a general tendency to work backwards from the turn of the millennium in studies of Anglo-Saxon identity, seen even in scholarship on the Alfredian period. Anglo-Saxon identity in the early eleventh century is so well represented by the texts of the period that there is an inclination to assume that these representations must be rooted in much earlier ideology.[27] Even Wormald's

[22] George Molyneaux, "The *Old English Bede*: English Ideology or Christian Instruction?", *The English Historical Review,* 125.511 (2009).
[23] See below, pp. 31, 87.
[24] Molyneaux, *Formation of the English Kingdom*, pp. 232-249.
[25] Hugh M. Thomas, *The English and the Normans: Ethnic Hostility, Assimilation, and Identity 1066-c.1220* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 24-29.
[26] Katherine Cross, *Heirs of the Vikings: History and Identity in Normandy and England, c.950–c.1015* (York, 2018), p. 17.
[27] Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, p. 20.

work exhibits a desire to read facets of later Anglo-Saxon identity back into the Alfredian period or earlier, as he concludes that in 1014 Wulfstan represented Anglo-Saxon identity in similar ways to Alcuin in 793.[28] An examination of collective representation from the Alfredian period to the Conquest will demonstrate that the focused representations of identity in the eleventh century was a relatively new development.

Medieval Iceland

The Icelandic period studied here begins at around 1100, from when the first extant written sources date. There are no extant texts from approximately the first two centuries after settlement, although it is believed that some poetry was composed in this period, so the circumstances of the migration to the island are hard to verify.[29] However, archaeological evidence from early settlements on the island suggests that migration to Iceland began in the late ninth century, with migrants arriving from Norway and the British Isles.[30] It is unknown whether there were earlier settled inhabitants in Iceland, but there are later written accounts of Irish monks living on the island before the Scandinavian migration.[31] Whether these monks existed or not, there do not appear to have been any groups with whom the Icelanders had to share the island, in contrast to the Anglo-Saxon case study. Following settlement, the Icelanders established their own law in Iceland, and set up a system of regional assemblies called *þings*, with an annual *alþing* bringing together all of the members of the elite. Iceland under this system of governance is sometimes called the Icelandic Free State or Commonwealth, and while neither of these terms were used by the medieval Icelanders, I will be using Free State on occasion to refer to Iceland as a country.[32] The group was governed by *goði*, individuals from high-status families who offered patronage to lesser families in exchange for support. This system allowed disputes to be resolved legally without needing recourse to a king. One such dispute was over the conversion to Christianity, which was petitioned for at the *alþing* around 1000 CE following pressure from Norway. Iceland subsequently converted and the Icelanders incorporated Christianity into their culture. Over the course of the period under consideration in this thesis, power in Iceland became concentrated in the hands of a

[28] Wormald, "*Engla Lond*", pp. 16-17.
[29] Judy Quinn, "From orality to literacy in medieval Iceland", in Margaret Clunies Ross, (ed.), *Old Icelandic Literature and Society* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 41-46.
[30] Kevin P. Smith, "Landnám: The Settlement of Iceland in Archaeological and Historical Perspective", *World Archaeology,* 26.3 (1995), pp. 324-328.
[31] John Lindow, "Íslendingabók and Myth", *Scandinavian Studies,* 69 (1997), p. 456.
[32] Kirsten Hastrup, "Defining a Society: The Icelandic Free State Between Two Worlds", *Scandinavian Studies,* 56.3 (1984), p. 235.

small number of the most powerful families.[33] The increased power of a small elite destabilised the Icelandic system, which had previously relied on conflict being kept to a small scale, and meant that violence erupted on a larger scale from the 1230s onwards.[34] It also meant that the elite of Iceland increasingly looked to the Norwegian monarchy as a way to gain status and to provide stability.[35] There had previously been some conflict with Norway, including trade disputes in the 1220s that had included the threat of invasion.[36] However, King Hákon gained Iceland's submission in 1262 or 1264 without invasion and Norwegian control of Iceland appears to have been established bloodlessly.[37] This did not mean that the Icelanders welcomed Norwegian control, and the Icelandic reaction to the loss of autonomy in the mid thirteenth century is a theme that runs throughout this thesis.

The written sources available to study Iceland in the period under consideration are clustered at the end of the period, around 1250.[38] However, there are important texts from earlier, including *Íslendingabók* and *Landámabók* from the early twelfth century. I will only be considering sources that are known to have been written in the period of the case study, even though much of Iceland's celebrated saga literature is not attested this early. These sources were produced by members of the elite learned community. This community comprised powerful families, members of which were both *goði* and church elite, including the Oddaverjar, Sturlungar and Haukdœlir.[39] The named authors whom we know from this period are closely associated with these families, such as Snorri Sturluson, who was a member of the Sturlungar family, and Ari Þorgilsson, who was closely connected to the Haukdœlir family.[40] This means that, as in Anglo-Saxon England, our evidence for ethnic identification in Iceland is limited and we have little understanding of how those below the elite viewed their identity. Nevertheless, the texts produced by the elite can tell us about collective identifications because they indicate how the elite establishment wished to represent its ethnicity.

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[33] Sverrir Jakobsson, "The Process of State-Formation in Medieval Iceland", *Viator,* 40.2 (2009), pp. 162-163.
[34] Ibid., pp. 165-166.
[35] Ibid., pp. 168-169.
[36] Kevin J. Wanner, *Snorri Sturluson and the Edda: the conversion of cultural capital in medieval Scandinavia* (Toronto, 2008), p. 21.
[37] Jakobsson, "The Process of State-Formation", p. 169.
[38] Judith Jesch, *The Viking Diaspora* (Oxford, 2015), p. 14.
[39] Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy: The Role of Skaldic Verse in Icelandic Textual Culture of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Toronto, 2001), pp. 3-16; Jakobsson, "The Process of State-Formation"; Orri Vésteinsson, "The Christianisation of Iceland: Priests, Power and Social Change 1000-1300," diss. (University College London, 1996).
[40] Wanner, *Snorri Sturluson and the Edda*, pp. 4-16; Siân Grønlie, (ed.), *Íslendingabók - Kristni Saga: The Book of the Icelanders - the Story of the Conversion* (London, 2006), pp. x-xiv; Vésteinsson, "The Christianisation of Iceland".

There have been some studies of Icelandic identity but their focus has tended to be on an earlier period, particularly the 'Viking Age' from 750-1100 CE.[41] The problem often experienced by scholars studying this earlier period is the lack of written sources. This is true of Ann-Marie Long's *Iceland's Relationship with Norway c.870–c.1100: Memory, History and Identity*, which gives an account of Icelandic identity in the post-settlement period, but uses evidence extrapolated from thirteenth- and fourteenth-century sources.[42] Similarly, one of the most significant debates around Icelandic identity, the theory of Scandinavian diaspora, has been limited by a lack of sources from the time of the migration. Lesley Abrams has suggested that Scandinavian identity in the Viking Age can be seen as diasporic, and that there is therefore a sense of a unified identity among the Scandinavians of the period, including potentially the Icelanders.[43] Abrams argues that the Scandinavians meet Robin Cohen's criteria for diaspora, usually applied to modern groups like the Jews, and that therefore the Icelanders maintained links with their ancestral homeland and felt sa sense of co-ethnicity with other Scandinavians.[44] Abrams focuses her argument on shared cultural output, such as skaldic poetry and the decoration of ornaments, suggesting that the ongoing similarities in literary and material culture indicate a collective identity among Scandinavians of the Viking Age.[45] This argument raises the question of how we determine collective identity. If groups have attributes in common but consider themselves different, are they a collective? Chapter 1 of this thesis will argue that ethnicity is based on belief rather than objective characteristics. Abrams is unable to draw conclusions about what Viking-Age Scandinavians believed about their identity due to the lack of contemporary sources, which Abrams acknowledges as a limitation.[46] Abrams was conservative in her suggestions and careful to avoid using late sources, but Judith Jesch has advanced this theory by using later sources from the thirteenth and fourteenth century as evidence for traumatic dispersal from Norway and co-ethnic feeling among the Scandinavians in the tenth and eleventh centuries.[47] The temptation to use these later sources for evidence about the earlier period is due in part to the fact that many of the Sagas of the Icelanders are set in the Viking Age and purport to describe Viking-Age Icelandic society, although they were not recorded until the mid thirteenth century or later.[48] Thirteenth-century Icelandic sources do appear to describe the Icelandic relationship with Norway in terms that meet some of the criteria for diaspora, but they

[41] Jesch, *The Viking Diaspora*, p. 10.
[42] Ann-Marie Long, *Iceland's Relationship with Norway c.870–c.1100: Memory, History and Identity* (Leiden, 2017).
[43] Lesley Abrams, "Diaspora and Identity in the Viking Age", *Early Medieval Europe,* 20 (2012), p. 25.
[44] Ibid., p. 25; Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (Oxford, 2008), p. 6.
[45] Ibid., p. 25.
[46] Ibid., p. 20.
[47] Jesch, *The Viking Diaspora*, pp. 70-78.
[48] Jürg Glauser, "Sagas of the Icelanders (*Íslenginga sögur*) and *þættir* as the literary representation of a new social space", Ross, *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*.

were not written during the Viking Age, the time of the alleged diaspora, so their accounts of events such as the migration to Iceland reflect thirteenth-century concerns rather than those of the settlers.[49] This thesis studies Icelandic texts as acts of identification that represent the collective identity of those who created them, and so seeks to offer insight into identity in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Iceland.

[49] Jesch, *The Viking Diaspora*, pp. 71-79.

Ethnic Identity

'Individuals and groups do not *have* ethnicity, they produce it and are identified according to it.'[50]

The purpose of this thesis is to study the collective self-representation of ethnicity in Anglo-Saxon England and medieval Iceland. In order to do this, it is necessary first to define ethnicity. Most people, whether they are academics or not, are generally able to understand what ethnicity means, although their understandings will all be slightly different. It is well established that ethnicity relates to the large group of which an individual can consider themselves a part and be considered a part by others. More than this, most people are readily able to distinguish ethnicity from other forms of group identity such as age, class or gender. However, if we wish to define ethnicity more specifically, which is necessary for any productive study of collective self-representation, the nuances of what exactly ethnicity means are far less clear. What are the necessary characteristics of an ethnicity? Is belonging to an ethnic group a fact of one's birth? Is it a choice? Is it a physical or psychological attribute? Who decides the ethnicity of an individual? These questions have long been considered by scholars and their findings have advanced our understanding of modern and pre-modern ethnicity. Ethnicity is no longer seen as a biologically inherited trait, in spite of a recent flurry of activity surrounding new genetic sequencing techniques.[51] Rather, ethnicity is known to be psychological, a group affiliation that can have everything or nothing to do with an individual's place of origin.[52] Beyond this, creating a definition for ethnicity that is both accurate and encompasses our full understanding of the term has proven challenging for scholars of the subject. Here, I will outline the existing scholarly understanding of ethnicity and propose an approach to apply this to medieval groups in such a way as to allow productive research.

Defining Ethnicity

We might start the search for a definition by considering what ethnicity means in common discourse. The most common uses of the term ethnicity in conversational English are to mean

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[50] Pohl, "Introduction — Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile", p. 2.
[51] Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568*, p. 35; Patrick Geary, "Genetic History and Migrations in Western Eurasia, 500–1000", in Ni. Di Cosmo & M. Maas (ed.), *Empires and Exchanges in Eurasian Late Antiquity: Rome, China, Iran, and the Steppe, ca. 250–750* (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 147-150.
[52] Patrick Geary, "Ethnic Identity as a Situational Construct in the Early Middle Ages", *Mitteilungen der anthropologischen Gesellschaf,* 113 (1983), p. 16; Walter Pohl, "Introduction: Strategies of Distinction", in Walter Pohl and Helmut Reimitz (ed.), *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300-800* (Leiden, 1998), p. 21; Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568*, p. 36.

either a minority group within a country or a bureaucratic category on a form. These uses might articulate some of our informal understanding about what ethnicity is, but they do not offer a true definition. While in modern societies ethnicity may be felt most keenly by minority groups, who are confronted with their ethnicity most frequently, this does not mean that majority groups do not also have access to an ethnic identity. Today we do not tend to differentiate between the majority ethnic identity in a country and the national identity, so it is in instances where an individual's ethnicity and nationality are different that ethnicity is most visible and actualised. However, it has been recognised by anthropologists studying modern ethnicity that the majority group still has an ethnicity even if it is less visible.[53] The other modern vernacular use of the term ethnicity is to describe the identity chosen from a list on official forms and documents. In the UK this usually includes options such as 'White British', 'White Irish', 'Black British', 'Asian' and 'Other', and many others. Although these are commonly referred to as ethnicity, they are more properly ethnic group categories, within which there can be many ethnic identities. For example, a person born in Britain to first generation Ghanaian immigrants will likely have a different ethnic identity to that of a British-born person whose grandparents emigrated from the Caribbean, and the simple tick box of 'Black British' is insufficient to describe this diversity of ethnicity. The Office for National Statistics makes clear that these categories are to aid in the processing of data, and they fall under the 'measuring equality' section of the ONS methodology, suggesting that they are required for population demographic data rather than representing the truth about any individual's own identity.[54] Even the most expanded version of the list, which offers eighteen ethnic categories, is insufficient to describe the myriad of ethnicities experienced in the UK today. This use of the term ethnicity does not capture the meaning of ethnicity adequately as it forces individuals to identify themselves with one of a limited selection of ethnicities.[55] It is clear that scholars must look beyond the common uses of the term to find an accurate definition.

A number of academic fields have been involved in efforts to define ethnicity, including sociology, anthropology, history and archaeology, and a certain amount of consensus about what ethnicity is has been reached. The most basic feature of ethnicity is that it is a type of identity. Walter Pohl has suggested a distinction between 'ethnicity' and 'ethnic identity' where 'ethnicity' is the principle of differentiating between large groups and 'ethnic identity' is identity generated by

[53] Thomas Hylland Eriksen and Marek Jakoubek, (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries Today: A Legacy of Fifty Years* (Abingdon, 2019), p. 15.
[54] Ethnic group, national identity and religion, https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/measuringequality/ethnicgroupnationalidentityandreligion accessed 23/01/21
[55] Rebecca Gowland and Tim Thompson, *Human Identity and Identification* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 27.

the group.[56] This distinction has not been taken up widely in scholarship on the subject and in general the two terms are used interchangeably. While Pohl's suggestion is instructive as to the many levels on which ethnicity exists, distinguishing ethnicity and ethnic identity in this way is somewhat problematic as it artificially separates the overarching social organisation provided by ethnicities from the individual's relationship with the ethnic group. I will therefore not be distinguishing between the two terms in this thesis. To start to define ethnic identity, or ethnicity, one must first understand identity. The sociologist Richard Jenkins defines identity as 'the ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their relations with other individuals and collectivities'. This simple, functional definition draws out certain important aspects of identity, particularly that identity is relational and can apply to both individuals and groups.[57] The relational aspect of identity is widely acknowledged by scholars of the field.[58] Identity, therefore, is characterised by the differences and similarities that a group or individual sees between itself and others. An individual can identify themselves as a member of a group because they see similarities between themselves and the group, while a group can also identify itself as distinct by demonstrating differences between itself and other groups. It is worth noting that defining identity as relational does not mean that it is solely about differentiation; it can also include the drawing together of individuals and groups through recognition of similarities. There has been a movement within sociology to view ethnicity as solely a matter of difference, with scholars such as Stuart Hall claiming that ethnic groups only exist on the basis of excluding 'the Other'.[59] This has been refuted by Jenkins on the basis that difference and similarity are interdependent, and it certainly is impossible to separate similarity from difference when considering identity.[60] Any claim about the difference of 'the Other' makes a tacit claim about the similarity of group members. If an individual excludes themselves from a group on the basis of difference, this in turn creates an impression of similarity within the group. The claims to similarity and difference that constitute identity do not have any essential truth, but rather are a product of social processes that require acts of identification.[61] If, for example, a group identifies itself by the language it speaks, that language is not an essential for the existence of the group but rather becomes symbolic of the group through

[56] Pohl, "Introduction — Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile", p. 2.
[57] Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity* (Abingdon, 2014), p. 18.
[58] Margarita Díaz-Andreu and Sam Lucy, (ed.), *Archaeology of Identity* (London, 2005), pp. 1-2; Pohl, "Introduction — Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile", p. 1-2; Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?", *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London, 2011), p. 3; Thompson, *Human Identity and Identification*, p. 15.
[59] Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?", pp. 4-5.
[60] Jenkins, *Social Identity*, p. 21; Guy Halsall, *Subject, individual, exclusion: Some theoretical reflections and Frankish applications*, p. 17.
[61] Walter Pohl, "Comparing Communities—the Limits of Typology", *History and Anthropology,* 26.1 (2015), p. 22; Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?", p. 3; Jenkins, *Social Identity*, p. 46.

its use by group members and its association with the group. It is with this understanding of identity that a definition of ethnicity will be sought.

Ethnicity is an identity, but it is more specifically a group or collective identity in which individuals identify and are identified with a wider group.[62] As identity is based on relational similarities and differences, group identity can be said to be based on similarity within the group and difference from other groups.[63] This assertion raises the question: similarity according to whom? Are group identities judged from the outside, with individuals placed in categories according to some apparently observable qualities, or are they only experienced? The answer is of course both. Groups are identified from both without and within, and both are integral to identity.[64] This has specific relevance to pre-modern ethnicity as the early studies of ethnicity, the classical ethnographies, take a very different view of ethnicity from modern scholarship on ethnogenesis and pre-modern ethnicity. Classical ethnographies ascribed ethnicity to groups with which the Greeks and Romans came into contact, allowing the Greeks and Romans to categorise the peoples outside their own groups for their own purposes with little interest in how the people concerned characterised themselves.[65] Modern scholars of ethnogenesis study ethnicity with the aim of understanding how these non-Roman or post-Roman groups understood themselves as well were understood by outsiders. This research has not only suggested that some of the groups identified in classical texts were apparently categorised incorrectly, but has also problematised the concept of defining ethnic groups solely on externally observable characteristics. At first sight it seems doubtful that these two models, ethnicity as internal and ethnicity as external, can even be described as the same concept. However, both internal and external recognition of identity are necessary for group identity because a group needs to be acknowledged by outsiders as well as recognised by members in order to be 'real' in the sociological sense.[66] A collective identity that is only recognised by outsiders is a category rather than a group identity.[67] The classical ethnographies are therefore more like studies of categories than of group identities, much like our modern checklist choice of ethnicity discussed above, and therefore only offer a partial view of ethnicity. Ethnicity can therefore be said to be a group identity that is based on internally and externally acknowledged similarities and differences.

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[62] Jenkins, *Social Identity*, p. 103.
[63] Jenkins, *Social Identity*, p. 103.
[64] Ibid., p. 48; Thompson, *Human Identity and Identification*, p. 15; Pohl, "Introduction — Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile", p. 3.
[65] Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568*, pp. 48-53; Pohl, "Introduction — Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile", p. 15.
[66] Jenkins, *Social Identity*, p. 106.
[67] Ibid., p. 106.

The question remains as to what these differences and similarities are – after all many types of group identity could be described in this way, there must be something more specific that allows us to understand the concept of ethnicity. Ethnicity is widely understood to relate to geographical territory and ancestral origin, but it is not as simple as linking a person to the place where they or their ancestors were born or anchoring a group within a territory.[68] There is also an understanding that there is shared culture or behaviour within an ethnic group, perhaps generated by physical proximity or kinship.[69] These are vague assertions based as much on our vernacular use of the term ethnicity as a scholarly understanding of it. Scholars of late antique ethnogenesis have established that almost any characteristic that can define an ethnic group, such as origin, territory, material culture, language or religion, can also be shared by a number of ethnic groups or have plural forms within an ethnic group.[70] This makes sense, as we know today that many different ethnic groups share languages or religions and still see that feature as characteristic of their ethnicity. If there is a modern British ethnicity, it encompasses people who speak many languages, not only English, Welsh, Irish, Gaelic and Scots, but also languages from outside the British Isles. While English is probably the language most readily associated with British identity by both members and outsiders, it is not unique to the British people. English is spoken across the world as a first or additional language and is also associated with the identity of many groups for whom it is the main language, such as Australians or New Zealanders. These groups in turn have their own internal language diversity. At the other extreme, a language such as Welsh is associated with a group in which some of the members cannot actually speak the associated language. It is clearly not as simple as one language for every ethnicity. As Guy Halsall has suggested, ethnicity appears to be defined not by a strict catalogue of shared attributes but by a belief among the members that shared attributes exist and make them a distinct group.[71] It is therefore not specific similarities among members and differences between groups that define ethnicity but rather the belief in the group.

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[68] Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568*, p. 37; Walter Pohl, "Narratives of Origin and Migration in Early Medieval Europe: Problems of Interpretation", *The Medieval History Journal,* 21.2 (2018), p. 200;
[69] Frederik Barth, (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Bergen, 1969), p. 11; Pohl, "Introduction — Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile", p. 9; Anthony D. Smith, "The Origins of Nations", *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* 12.3 (1989), p. 344.
[70] Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568*, pp. 37-38; Pohl, "Strategies of Distinction", pp. 20-21; Pohl, "Introduction — Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile", p. 7; Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, p. 14.
[71] Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568*, p. 38. See also Pohl, "Strategies of Distinction", p. 20; Geary, "Ethnic Identity as a Situational Construct in the Early Middle Ages", p. 25.

Many definitions that articulate this description of ethnicity have been proposed by scholars of ethnogenesis, but there seems to be a disparity between the scholarly definition of ethnicity and the usual understanding of ethnicity. For example, Halsall has proposed that, 'The only common factor in defining ethnicity is belief: in the reality of your group and the difference of others.'[72] Given the above discussion, it is clear that this definition is accurate. However, it does not seem to define ethnicity satisfactorily in a way that encompasses all of our understanding of ethnicity. There is no mention of shared territory, history, language or dress. How is it that we can have a detailed enough notion of ethnicity to use the term in both scholarly and everyday discourse when the closest we can come to a definition is that ethnicity is a group identity constructed through belief in similarity and difference? Pohl's work on ethnogenesis has shed light on this. Pohl asserts:

> Ethnic identity denotes a reciprocal relationship between a person and a group that is reproduced through verbal or symbolic statements and acts of identification and complemented by ascriptions of alterity. Ethnic identity is thus created by serial and routinized identifications according to the pattern or discourse of ethnicity current in the respective society.[73]

Pohl is here distinguishing between ethnicity as a categorising principle and ethnic identity as a group identity, which as discussed above will not be sustained here. However, Pohl's consideration of ethnic identity is still salient. In defining ethnic identity, he emphasises the role of identifications. It is these identifications that give ethnic identity the characteristics we believe it to have, such as shared language, religion, territory. As these identifications are only made significant by their context; in different contexts different identifications can be seen as definitive of ethnicity.[74] This goes some way to explain why these characteristics appear definitive of ethnic identity despite the fact that none of them appear in all ethnic groups. Some scholars have sought to define ethnicity by the identifications members of ethnic groups make, such as Patrick Geary, who describes ethnicity as 'the long term, discontinuous use of certain labels that have come to be seen as "ethnic"'.[75] Anthony Smith has created a more exhaustive list of identifications, defining the characteristics of ethnic groups, which he calls *ethnies*, as:

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[72] Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568*, p. 38; Falko Daim, "Archaeology, Ethnicity, and the Structures of Identification: The Example of the Avars, Carantanians and Moravians in the Eighth Century", in Walter Pohl and Helmut Reimitz (ed.), *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300-800* (Leiden, 1998), pp. 75-76.

[73] Pohl, "Introduction — Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile", p. 2.

[74] Ibid., p. 3.

[75] Patrick Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton, 2002), p. 155.

1. a common name for the unit of population included;
2. a set of myths of common origins and descent for that population;
3. some common historical memories of things experienced together;
4. a common 'historic territory' or 'homeland', or an association with one;
5. one or more elements of common culture - language, customs, or religion;
6. a sense of solidarity among most members of the community.[76]

These are not true definitions of ethnicity, however, because ethnic identification is not the same as ethnicity. Ethnicity is a type of identity, while ethnic identification is a process.[77] Identification produces identity, and so ethnic identification produces ethnicity.[78] Exactly what these identifications are varies according to context, although there are certain things, such as the use of an ethnonym, that seem to evoke ethnicity particularly.[79] When a characteristic such as language is used to denote ethnicity, it is not because language is essential for ethnicity but because the members of an ethnic group or observers of an ethnic group feel that the group is distinguished by their language and act accordingly. They feel this because of their own cultural belief about what is definitive of ethnic groups in general and what is distinct about this group in particular. Ethnicity itself is therefore simultaneously made up of nothing more than the belief in the existence of the group and also the characteristics that are emphasised through identifications by group members. Understanding this difference between ethnicity and ethnic identification allows us to understand the gap between our ability to define ethnicity and our understanding of ethnicity. It is not necessary to try to close this gap by adding characteristics used for identification to the definition of ethnicity. Rather ethnicity can be defined as a group identity based on a belief in similarities and differences that is produced through identifications. These identifications make use of characteristics that are considered to be significant to the group due to the circumstances, contemporary and historic, that the group experiences.

This definition of ethnicity can be applied to the Anglo-Saxons and the Icelanders. Most fundamentally, both groups named themselves with ethnonyms in their own texts, engaging in a symbolic act of identification.[80] Furthermore, each group produced ethnicity through a variety of symbolic acts that made certain characteristics significant to their identities. In Anglo-Saxon

[76] Smith, "The Origins of Nations", pp. 344-345.
[77] Jenkins, *Social Identity*, p. 111.
[78] Ibid., p. 9.
[79] Pohl, "Introduction — Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile", p. 3.
[80] Ibid., p. 3.

England, for example, the Old English version of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* from the beginning of the period considered here emphasises the shared origin of the group in opposition to the other inhabitants of Britain, while Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* from towards the end of the period emphasises the shared religion of the group in opposition to the invading Scandinavians.[81] These texts, as well as others that will be discussed throughout this thesis, demonstrate that the Anglo-Saxons from the late ninth century onwards believed that there were similarities within their group and differences with other groups. In Iceland, one of the earliest surviving texts, the First Grammatical Treatise, identifies the language written by the Icelanders as specific to the Icelanders, while later texts such as *Laxæla saga* claim a common origin for the Icelanders.[82] As in Anglo-Saxon England, these Icelandic texts and others that will be discussed demonstrate a belief in the distinctiveness of the group and a process of ethnic identification. These groups were not solely ethnic in nature, and for many members ethnicity may not have been the primary way they identified themselves, but it is clear that, at least for the elite involved in the identifications described above, ethnicity was an identity that was produced within these groups and available to members.[83]

Ethnic Identification

Understanding ethnicity as a product of ethnic identification allows us to develop ways of studying pre-modern ethnicity. It is difficult to study a group's belief in unspecified similarities and differences, real or imagined, when there is only patchy material and textual evidence from which to reconstruct it. Therefore, ethnicity in the abstract is extremely difficult to study in pre-modern groups. If, however, we study the process of identification, then we can look for these identifications in order understand pre-modern ethnicity. This is still far from straightforward as understanding the significance of potential instances of identification is still hampered by limited source material, but it does give us a starting point to develop a methodology by which to study ethnicity. In order to study identifications, we must establish who does the identification and how. Identification is fundamentally a matter of what people do.[84] It is found in symbolic acts that create

[81] Rowley, *The Old English Version of Bede's 'Historia Ecclesiastica'*, p. 46; Andreas Lemke, "Fear-Mongering, Political Shrewdness or Setting the Stage for a 'Holy Society'?— Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi Ad Anglos*", *English Studies,* 95.7 (2014), pp. 764-765.
[82] Einar Haugen, "First Grammatical Treatise: The Earliest Germanic Phonology", *Language,* 26.4 (1950), p. 7; Long, *Iceland's Relationship with Norway*, p. 141.
[83] Pohl, "Comparing Communities—the Limits of Typology", p. 25; Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568*, p. 43.
[84] Jenkins, *Social Identity*, p. 138.

an appearance of similarity within the group even in the presence of actual diversity.[85] When we make an ethnic identification of either ourselves or others, we do so on the basis of certain characteristics that are seen as symbolic of collective identity. It is these characteristics, expressed verbally or through actions, that are seen as symbolic of both similarity within the group and difference from other groups.[86] The symbolic power of these acts of identification allows the fact that there may be diversity within the group or similarity between groups to be overlooked.[87] There are, as Pohl has proposed, three types of identification: an individual's own identification of themselves, a group's collective self-representation, and the identification of a group by outsiders.[88] Jenkins calls this latter type of identification 'categorisation' rather than group identification when it occurs in isolation.[89] In order for ethnicity to exist, all three types of identification are necessary. As discussed above, identity must be recognised from without as well as within. Additionally, it is impossible to imagine a group identity without both individual and collective self-identification.[90] Characteristics that have symbolic significance as identifiers of an ethnicity can be identified in all three ways. For example, a British person may speak English and view that as a symbol of their British identity, they speak English because they are British, and they may overlook the fact that they also speak other languages. Collectively, the British undertake symbolic acts that show that the English language is characteristic of their ethnicity, such as broadcasting media in English, making laws in English and writing in English on their money. Outsiders view the English language as symbolic of British identity, they entertain the possibility that a stranger speaking English is British or upon hearing that a person is British they may attempt to communicate in English. All of this is done in the knowledge that English is far from the only language spoken in Britain and that many other groups speak English. In order to study pre-modern ethnicity, we must find evidence of the process of identification in at least some of its forms in our sources.

Evidence of identification is invariably evidence of symbolic acts that imbue the group's real or imagined characteristics with significance.[91] As ethnicity requires belief, it is not enough for characteristics to simply exist, but rather they must be demonstrated to be, and this is done through acts of identification made in relation to these characteristics. This is part of the reason that it has been so difficult for scholars to identify characteristics of identity. How can we know what was

[85] Pohl, "Introduction — Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile", p. 2; Jenkins, *Social Identity*, pp. 143, 157.
[86] Pohl, "Introduction — Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile", p. 2.
[87] Jenkins, *Social Identity*, p. 157.
[88] Pohl, "Introduction — Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile", pp. 3, 46.
[89] Jenkins, *Social Identity*, pp. 103-109.
[90] Ibid., p. 102.
[91] Pohl, "Introduction — Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile", pp. 46, 51.

significant to the late antique groups that are the subject of studies of ethnogenesis? The prevalence of classical ethnographies means that it is fairly easy to tell what was seen as characteristic of ethnicity by certain outsiders and therefore to study identifications by outsiders, but this alone is not enough to study ethnicity. The challenge is to find evidence of group identifications made by individuals or the collective. There is a general consensus about what types of characteristics could be used for these identifications, but there is relatively little agreement about how to identify which ones actually were used by any given group. Pohl lists: 'actual or notional common origin, a shared memory of the past, and common territory, language, outward appearance and dress, customs, myths, norms, beliefs, codes of honour — in short, culture' as potential symbolic characteristics of ethnicity.[92] Halsall suggests belief in common descent, language, religion and law as commonly held characteristics of identity.[93] Smith's characteristics of *ethnies* are listed above and similarly emphasise origin, history, territory and culture.[94] Scholars of ethnogenesis such as Halsall and Pohl are quick to point out upon listing these characteristics that not all ethnic groups use any or all of these characteristics to symbolise their identity.[95] In order to know which characteristics were symbolic of ethnicity in a particular circumstance, scholars must find evidence of symbolic acts of identification that give these characteristics ethnic significance.[96] The way each group makes identifications is due to the social context that members experience.[97] Therefore any attempt to identify significant characteristics within a pre-modern group requires an understanding of the experiences of the group.

What might a characteristic made significant through acts of symbolism as a result of context for the purpose of identification look like? If, for example, we look to language as a characteristic of modern Welsh ethnicity, is the similarity that draws this group together the English language, which almost everyone who is Welsh speaks, or the Welsh language, which only some members of the group speak? The answer is neither, and also both. The Welsh language distinguishes the group from other groups as it is not a language spoken elsewhere, but it also highlights the regional differences within the group as certain parts of Wales have not historically spoken Welsh and would probably not wish to be excluded from the group on these grounds.[98]

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[92] Ibid., p. 3.
[93] Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568*, p. 37.
[94] Smith, "The Origins of Nations", pp. 344-345.
[95] Pohl, "Introduction — Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile", p. 6; Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568*, p. 37.
[96] Pohl, "Introduction — Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile", p. 51.
[97] Ibid., p. 40; Geary, "Ethnic Identity as a Situational Construct in the Early Middle Ages", p. 25.
[98] The only words of Welsh my grandmother, from Blaenavon, could speak were 'Nid wyf yn siarad Cymraeg' (I do not speak Welsh), yet she was nevertheless proud of her Welsh identity.

The English language, on the other hand, does nothing to distinguish the Welsh from many other groups. What is shared among the Welsh ethnic group is the experience of the two languages being used within the group; even if an individual does not speak both languages, they live with the plurality of language within the group. Furthermore, this duality of language within Wales is symbolic of the history of the group and its interaction with other groups. The widespread use of English instead of or as well as Welsh is a legacy of the contact between the English and the Welsh, and a demonstration of English cultural dominance in Wales.[99] Language is therefore a characteristic made significant by context. This significance leads to both individual and group acts of identification, using language as a symbol of identity. These acts may include an individual choosing to speak Welsh in certain circumstances or teaching their child Welsh alongside English as a first language. They also include collective acts such as the use of English and Welsh on road signs and the 2011 Welsh Language Measure passed by the Welsh national assembly, which requires Welsh and English to be accorded equal status within Welsh government.[100] Collective acts may characterise ethnicity differently from individual acts, as individual acts of identification will reflect the diversity present within the group. Therefore, individuals may view Welsh as the only language significant to Welsh identity and symbolise this using acts of identification such as communicating exclusively in Welsh or teaching Welsh to their children as their only first language. Conversely, other individuals within the same group may not view language as characteristic of their ethnicity in any way and not give significance to which language they speak or use, simply making practical situational choices. Collectively, however, the group expresses its experience of functioning as a bilingual society, and its acts of collective identification emphasise the place of Welsh alongside English, not instead of English, so giving significance to this bilingualism. This characterisation of Welsh identity may only be significant to some individuals, but it expresses identity in a way that is seen as effective by the group's elite establishment. It is fairly straightforward for scholars to uncover the social significance of language in Wales because the context is reasonably well known and well documented. We can therefore understand the nuance of the ethnic identification at work here. It is not simply that Welsh language symbolises Welsh identity, but that the act of using Welsh alongside English is believed to symbolise Welsh identity. The depth of knowledge that allows us to understand this modern context is hard to gain for a medieval context. Scholars of ethnogenesis have consistently attempted to overcome the problem of a lack of sources that can provide evidence of the significance of potential ethnic characteristics.

[99] Wayne Morris, "Towards a Liberation Theology of Indigenous Minority Language Groups: A Case Study on the Welsh Language", *Practical Theology,* 9.1 (2016), p. 62.
[100] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/mwa/2011/1/section/1/enacted, accessed 20/06/2021.

It is not necessary to delve too deeply here into the methodological problems faced by those studying ethnogenesis and their possible solutions because this thesis is not concerned with the ethnogenesis of the Anglo-Saxons or the Icelanders. The study of ethnogenesis generally seeks to answer questions about whether groups in late antiquity had an ethnic element and if so, how and why this formed.[101] Additionally, it seeks to determine whether the accounts of ethnic groups by outsiders have any correlation with ethnicity as experienced by the groups themselves. This generally involves the use of sources including external accounts, material culture and perhaps a few written sources native to the group. Sources written by the group can demonstrate individual or collective identifications, but these are often lacking in late antique societies.[102] Scholars therefore tend to use material culture to determine characteristics that were significant to identity and detect symbolic acts of identification.[103] This can be successful to a point, for example including items as grave goods is clearly a symbolic act and therefore we might be able to attach significance to the characteristics these items suggest about a group. However, it is very hard to fully substantiate that any characteristic had significance and that this significance was as an identifier of ethnicity rather than something else. Scholars of ethnogenesis therefore have to be conservative in the claims they make concerning the ethnicity of late antique groups.[104] My thesis is not concerned with late antique groups but with two medieval groups, and the nature of the sources available is different. There are a far greater number of extant texts written by these groups in the periods considered by this thesis than there are surviving texts written by the earlier groups studied by scholars of ethnogenesis. This means that the questions we can ask and answer are different. We do not need to ask whether the Anglo-Saxons or the Icelanders existed and recognised themselves as groups. As established above, it is clear that ethnic identity was produced by both of these groups. However, our sources still limit the extent of our understanding of this ethnic identity. There is limited written evidence of individual identification surviving in the sources as most written sources from the period are texts from the elite establishment. These sources give little evidence for the everyday identifications of individual members of the population. They may offer some evidence of identification by elite individuals, but this is an extremely limited picture of the way individual ethnic identity was experienced. There is some source evidence of how outsiders viewed these groups, but a study of external categorisation is not the same as a study of ethnicity. What the wealth of textual sources from these two medieval groups does offer us is an opportunity to understand the collective self-representation of ethnicity.

[101] Pohl, "Strategies of Distinction", pp. 7-9.
[102] Patrick Geary, "Power and Ethnicity History and Anthropology", *History and Anthropology,* 26.1 (2017), pp. 14-15.
[103] Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568*, pp. 57-62.
[104] Daim, "Archaeology, Ethnicity, and the Structures of Identification: The Example of the Avars, Carantanians and Moravians in the Eighth Century", pp. 75-83.

In order to study the progression of this collective self-representation among the Anglo-Saxons and the Icelanders, it is necessary to determine which characteristics the groups believed to be significant about their own identities through the symbolic acts of identification that they undertook. The nature of ethnicity and of collective self-identification in particular means that it is not necessary to demonstrate that all of these acts were undertaken and understood by all members of the group. Ethnicity does not preclude diversity, and so collective identifications do not require recognition by every individual member.[105] Rather, collective identifications can promote certain characteristics as symbolic of ethnicity and imbue new characteristics with significance.[106] Not every member of the group need feel this significance, and indeed some group members may be disinterested in ethnicity in general if their circumstances mean it is not significant. Even if they only give insight into the beliefs of a small section of the group, studying acts of collective identification and the characteristics to which they give significance exposes various elements of early medieval society. We can uncover what the elite establishment of a group wished to make characteristic of their identity, and therefore what was important to the elite, either for ideological or practical reasons. Ethnicity is a powerful political tool, and the way it was mobilised by elites in medieval societies reveals their political interests and aims.[107] It is therefore still worthwhile to study the development of collective self-representation in these two societies in spite of the fact that a complete picture of all three types of identification cannot be gained from the available sources. In order to do this, sources that can provide evidence of acts of identification need to be found. Acts of identification can take a variety of forms, including cultural performances, events, the creation of objects and the writing of texts.[108] The focus of this thesis will be on texts written by the Anglo-Saxons and Icelanders during the period under consideration. The creation of these texts are acts of collective identification because they are part of the network of communication through which the collective make statements about group identity to individual members, outsiders and to the collective itself. The results of these statements, whether laws were enforced, languages spoken, or religions practised, are often unknown, but that does not preclude the collective identifications from being significant. As Pohl acknowledges, 'Even where (as is usual) we have little information about the actual short-term impact of a text, there are ways to

[105] Jenkins, *Social Identity*, p. 137.
[106] Pohl, "Introduction — Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile", p. 46.
[107] Geary, "Ethnic Identity as a Situational Construct in the Early Middle Ages", pp. 24-25; Pohl, "Comparing Communities—the Limits of Typology", pp. 20-21; Pohl, "Introduction — Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile", p. 45.
[108] Pohl, "Introduction — Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile", p. 43; Shami, "Historical Processes of Identity Formation: Displacement, Settlement, and Self- Representations of the Circassians in Jordan", p. 153.

reconstruct "negotiations of identity"s.'[109] In societies in which text production was expensive and labour intensive, texts were predominantly the domain of the elite establishment. Text production in the medieval world relied on the elite for the education and resources needed, and required a relatively large network of individuals to supply patronage and expertise.[110] Even texts written in a single hand required far more than a single individual to produce.[111] Texts that spoke to characteristics of the group can therefore be seen as acts of collective identification by the elite of a society. Collective identification may not be the purpose of any given text, but it is still the result of characterising a group in a certain way through texts.

As discussed above, there is a huge variety of potential characteristics that can be made symbolic of identity through acts of identification, so it has been necessary to be selective when choosing which will be studied in this thesis. After all, in the modern day there are a myriad of tiny identifications made constantly by individuals and groups that lend significance to otherwise inconsequential characteristics. What it is exactly that becomes symbolic of ethnicity is unpredictable; taking milk in coffee instead of cream, putting a 'u' in 'colour', and using Celsius instead of Fahrenheit could all be small acts of ethnic identification in certain circumstances, such as a British person finding themselves in America. On the scale of collective identification, one could look at the Opening Ceremony of the 2012 London Olympics, which contained an eclectic mix of symbols of British identification. Many were predictable and might be seen as classic ethnic characteristics, such as references to institutions including the monarchy and the National Health Service, to iconic territorial landmarks such as the Thames, and to highly recognisable cultural products such as James Bond. However, there were also less predictable aspects of British culture that were imbued with significance through this act of identification, such as The Wind in the Willows and music by Frank Turner, and even individuals were singled out for promotion as symbolic of British identity, such as Tim Berners-Lee and Isambard Kingdom Brunel. None of these are necessarily uncharacteristic of British identity, but they are also not necessarily things that would be immediately obvious to either group members or outsiders as significant to British identity if not for their inclusion in the Opening Ceremony. The variety of these identifications demonstrates the difficulty of determining which acts and identifications we should be looking for in the study of pre-modern groups. Almost anything could have been considered characteristic of ethnicity in these two groups, it is context that generates significance, so we are unlikely ever to

[109] Pohl, "Introduction — Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile", p. 43.
[110] Richard Gameson, "Anglo-Saxon Scribes and Scriptoria", in Richard Gameson (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain Volume 1: c.400–1100* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 96-120.
[111] Michael T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066 - 1307* (Chichester, 2013), pp. 116-127.

discover everything that was seen as significant. However, some characteristics must be focused on in order to study ethnicity. It is helpful to start by determining the usual nature of characteristics used to make ethnic identifications. In general, these characteristics attribute qualities to the group of both culture and history and make requirements for membership of both behaviour and origin. Whether it be the simple act of putting a 'u' in 'colour' or the complex symbolism of placing both English and Welsh on Welsh road signs, the use of language is a characteristic that draws on shared history and shared behaviour within the group, and conversely difference of history and difference of behaviour between groups. In order to examine my two case studies side by side, I have chosen four characteristics that can be seen in the written evidence from both groups and are well-established characteristics used in acts of identification. These are origin myth, language, religion and law. These characteristics are used frequently by modern scholars of ethnicity and were also understood to be characteristics of ethnicity in the pre-modern period.[112]

All acts of collective identification are deeply rooted in their social context, and this means that they can also have political motivations.[113] The aspects of the Olympic Opening Ceremony mentioned above were not chosen simply because they were thought to be particularly symbolic of British identity, but because they were indicative of what the elite wished to portray about British identity to group members and the outside world.[114] Individual members of the group may have had little interest in many of the identifications made by the Ceremony, but it was still an important act of collective identification. Whether the aim of those who made ethnic identifications for political purposes was to affect ethnicity in pre-modern societies is extremely hard to determine. Acts intended to generate ethnicity may be seen as a political expedient to regulate behaviour and encourage loyalty, and ethnicity may even be a by-product of political processes.[115] Most probably the political elite of a pre-modern group undertook actions that they hoped would generate support or direct their group in a particular direction, not consciously contributing to ethnic identity but wishing to make use of the benefits a belief in the group's coherence gave. When considering the development of collective self-representation, then, it is necessary to consider the role played by politics and to question how politics have influenced the texts studied here. The comparative nature of this thesis will allow a focus on the influence of political context on

[112] Geary, "Ethnic Identity as a Situational Construct in the Early Middle Ages", p. 19; Pohl, "Introduction — Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile", p. 3; Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568*, p. 37; Smith, "The Origins of Nations", pp. 344-345.
[113] Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066 - 1307*, p. 45.
[114] Anika Oettler, "The London 2012 Olympics Opening Ceremony and Its Polyphonous Aftermath", *Journal of Sport and Social Issues,* 39.3 (2015), pp. 248-251.
[115] Geary, "Ethnic Identity as a Situational Construct in the Early Middle Ages", pp. 24-25; Pohl, "Introduction — Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile", pp. 40-45.

ethnicity, as the comparison will highlight the effects of the different circumstances experienced by these two groups on the significance given to the same characteristics.

Origin, language, religion and law were all used to make collective identifications of ethnicity in Anglo-Saxon England and medieval Iceland. There are of course many characteristics that could have been chosen for study, but these four are well-attested by the sources and facilitate an instructive comparison of my case studies. These characteristics are recurrent features in the written sources; of course language features in every written source as well as being the focus of texts that specifically promote and regulate the vernacular, origin myths were recorded in histories and were themes in some literary works, religion appeared both in texts devoted to it and in many other cultural outputs, and laws were recorded in law codes as well as being alluded to in other types of text. There is therefore an adequate amount of evidence to understand these characteristics as significant to ethnicity. Creating and recording an origin myth is an act of identification, and the consideration of origin myth as a characteristic here will focus on the developing representations of these groups' origins and what they specifically represent about identity. The way language can have ethnic significance has already been modelled above through the example of Welsh and it is clear that it is not as simple as linking a language to an ethnic group. In the two case studies discussed here, both Latin and the vernacular were written. As the sources used here are texts, spoken language will not be considered, although this does not mean that spoken language was not significant. The focus will be on the written use of the vernacular, referred to here as 'vernacular literacy', and the way this interacted with Latin. While both groups were Christian, along with most of the rest of Europe, both gave significance to the specific ways they related to religion. Religion influenced their history, behaviour and culture in contextually specific ways. Recording law generates a belief in the unity of the group and fosters group behaviour, leading to further acts of identification. As discussed above, this significance is reliant on context, and it will be necessary to adequately contextualise each text as an act of identification. This thesis will investigate the expression of these characteristics as ethnically significant in texts that operate as acts of identification. This will give insight into not only the functioning of these two societies but also how collective self-representation functions more generally.

Origin Myth

Having a shared origin is a characteristic that can be given a great deal of significance through acts of identification. It provides a theoretical shared history for the group and places notional requirements of origin on its members. Origin myths suggest who should be in the group, both unifying people who are believed to share an origin and allowing access to those who adopt the notional origin. They also allow for the exclusion of those who do not share the origin. Additionally, the recording of an origin myth is an act that can give significance to characteristics not only concerning the mechanism of origin, in both these cases a migration, but also to associated characteristics such as who the group's ancestors were and why their territory has the boundaries it does. As implied by the terms 'origin myth' and 'notional origin', an origin that is represented to be characteristic of the group is not necessarily historical fact. Rather, the origin myth is a simplified or invented history of the group which explains the contemporary situation and promotes important aspects of group identity. The origin myths of these two groups were written at least two centuries after the migrations themselves in both cases, and both contain, to greater or lesser extents, material that correlates with archaeological data concerning the migrations and material that appears to deviate from archaeological evidence about what may have occurred. This can give us clues as to the development of the migration myth, whether aspects appear to have been preserved from the actual experience of migration or whether details have been created later to suggest particular aspects as significant to the group. Both options are instructive as to the representation of ethnic identity because the preservation of knowledge is not a neutral process, even accounts that appear to be an accurate record of events are a product of selective cultural memory, while later additions show the concerns of those who generated them.[116] In both England and Iceland, the characteristics identified by the texts that referred to the origin myth evolved over time to respond to the changing circumstances the groups experienced. The act of recording an origin myth is therefore one of identification on multiple levels and is a powerful tool by which the collective can represent characteristics that they view as significant to themselves. It responds both to history and contemporary social and political context and gives significance to characteristics that are relevant to the elite that undertakes it.

[116] Walter Pohl and Ian Wood, "Introduction: Cultural Memory and the Resources of the Past", in R. McKitterick C. Gantner, & S. Meeder (ed.), *The Resources of the Past in Early Medieval Europe* 2015), pp. 3-6.

England

In this study of the Anglo-Saxon migration myth, it is not the actual migration, which can only be reconstructed to a small extent using material and archaeological evidence, that is being discussed, but rather the remembered migration described in the written sources. The Anglo-Saxon migration myth is told in written sources from before the beginning of the period under consideration, first by Gildas, and then by Bede, and it is then reproduced and referenced by later authors such as Alcuin, Wulfstan and the compilers of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.[117] It is also a source of inspiration for vernacular poetry such as *Exodus*. The narrative told remains fairly stable throughout these accounts. It claims that the Angles, Saxons and Jutes were invited to Britain from their homelands in Europe by the Britons as mercenaries to fight against the Picts. After defeating the Picts, the incomers decided Britain was an attractive place to stay, and therefore overcame the Britons to the point of annihilation in many areas and established their own kingdoms. The narrative of the migration represents the Anglo-Saxons as being allowed to conquer Britain by God as punishment for the sinfulness of the Britons. This logic played an important role in representing Anglo-Saxon identity and was extended in the work of later writers such as Wulfstan to suggest that the Scandinavian incursions were a punishment for the sinfulness of the Anglo-Saxons.[118]

It is unlikely that the migration occurred as it is described even in early sources such as Gildas' *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*, which was written perhaps a hundred years after the migration, although the dating of both the source and the event is uncertain.[119] In recent decades a critical approach has been taken to archaeological and historical sources concerning the migration and the traditional narrative of Bede and Gildas has been questioned.[120] Susan Oosthuizen has questioned whether the migration happened at all, and if so whether it was truly responsible for any change in identity or society.[121] While no migration at all seems unlikely on linguistic grounds, it is probable that the migration of immigrants from the European continent to Britain was a slower and more varied process than is presented in the written sources.[122] That the Anglo-Saxons formed such fixed and enduring ideas about their own migration myth is therefore significant in

[117] Nicholas Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* (Indiana, 1989), pp. 2-5.
[118] Stephanie Hollis, "The Thematic Structure of the 'Sermo Lupi'", *Anglo-Saxon England,* 6 (1977), p. 180.
[119] Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, p. 33.
[120] Catherine Hills, "The Anglo-Saxon Migration: An Archaeological Case Study of Disruption", in Brenda J. Baker and Takeyuki Tsuda (ed.), *Toward a Unifying Theory of Ancient and Contemporary Migrations* (Gainesville, 2015), pp. 37-41.
[121] Susan Oosthuizen, *Emergence of the English* (Leeds, 2019), pp. 46-47.
[122] Hills, "The Anglo-Saxon Migration", pp. 47-48.

itself. The migration was clearly an emotive subject through which the Anglo-Saxon elite expressed the characteristics of their collective identity that they found most important.

The Account in the *Old English Historia Ecclesiastica*

The *Old English Historia Ecclesiastica* (*OEHE*) is a vernacular version of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* written in the late ninth century in either Wessex or Mercia.[123] It is associated, by date if nothing else, with the Alfredian translations of significant Latin texts, but may not have been directly related to Alfred's court. Nevertheless, Sharon Rowley has suggested that the Old English version of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* was the main way Bede was accessed in the tenth century, as copies of the Latin version do not appear to have been made in this period, while copies of the *OEHE* were.[124] This of course relies on the presumption that the manuscript survival is representative of manuscript creation, but it would seem unlikely that all Latin versions copied in this period have been lost and vernacular versions survived. There are five extant manuscripts of the *OEHE* and evidence for significantly more having been made that have not survived.[125] It therefore seems appropriate to use the *OEHE* when studying how the Anglo-Saxons viewed their migratory history in the late ninth and tenth centuries. Unlike the account of the Anglo-Saxon conversion to Christianity, the account of the migration itself remains largely the same between the two texts, although there are some alterations that will be highlighted below.[126]

The *OEHE* gives an account of the migration to Britain that represents specific characteristics that the Anglo-Saxons identified as significant to their identity, symbolised through the narrative of their migratory history and the nature of their migration. The act of translating Bede's *HE* was an opportunity for the Anglo-Saxon elite to express characteristics of their identity that were significant to them, and the fact it was further copied confirms the significance of this text to the Anglo-Saxon establishment of the late ninth and tenth century. Interpretation of the *OEHE* in this light is complicated by the need to consider both Bede's context and the context of the translation. While it is the translation that is the main focus of discussion here, the translator was working with a text written a century and a half earlier in an entirely different political and social context. While changes were made to the original text, the translator was not writing an

[123] Andreas Lemke, *The Old English Translation of Bede's* Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum *in its Historical and Cultural Context* (Göttingen, 2015), p. 17.
[124] Rowley, *The Old English Version of Bede's 'Historia Ecclesiastica'*, p. 59.
[125] Lemke, *The Old English Translation of Bede's HE*, p. 49.
[126] See below, pp. 87-90.

origin myth from scratch for the sole interests of the Anglo-Saxon elite but rather grappling with the history of the origin narrative while also reflecting the needs of their own society. Nevertheless, the narrative tells us important things about how the Anglo-Saxon elite at the turn of the tenth century wished to portray themselves through their origin, both in the groups that migrated and the reason for their migration. This representation of identity characterises the Anglo-Saxons as a unified people with a single origin and an ongoing purpose in settling Britain.

The migration myth presented in the *OEHE* exposes how the Anglo-Saxons wished collectively to represent their Germanic predecessors. The groups that were involved in the migration were significant to the Anglo-Saxons because the Anglo-Saxons collectively considered them their direct ancestors, and this had implications to how they presented their identity. The Germanic groups who first come to Britain are described as 'Angel þeod ⁊ Seaxna' (Angle and Saxon people).[127] In the narrative, these groups are successful militarily and soon send home for more fighters. As the narrative progresses, more detail is given as to who the migrants were. The migrants are described as, 'þrim folcum ðam strangestan Germanie, þæt of Seaxum ⁊ of Angle ⁊ of Geatum' (the three strongest people of Germany, that of the Saxons, and the Angles and of the Jutes).[128] There is then a very neat division of the different Germanic groups into what would have been recognisably separate kingdoms to Bede's original audience. The people of Kent and the Isle of Wight are of Jutish origin, the Saxons gave rise to the East Saxons, and the South Saxons, and the West Saxons, and the East Angles, the Middle Angles, the Mercians, and the Northumbrians were Angles.[129] In the eighth century, this description would have aligned the migrating Germanic groups to the kingdoms that Bede and his audience inhabited, but by the late ninth and tenth century, these kingdoms no longer existed in this form, the viking invasions having dismantled them, and the West Saxon dynasty was beginning to expand a single Anglo-Saxon kingdom.[130] While regional distinctions would have been significant to the Anglo-Saxons of the tenth century too, in spite of the developing unification, it would perhaps not have been to the same extent.[131] Some of the detail of Bede's account of these groups and their relation to the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms is omitted in the *OEHE*. Bede elaborates on where the Jutes settled and alludes to

[127] Thomas Miller, *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (London, 1890), p. 50. I will refer to the Angles, Saxons and Jutes collectively as 'Germanic groups' to avoid confusion. In the text they are at times referred to collectively as Angles and Saxons, at other times Angles, Saxons and Jutes, and at other times Saxons, and it is unclear whether these terms have different implications.
[128] Miller, *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, p. 52.
[129] Ibid., p. 52.
[130] Molyneaux, *Formation of the English Kingdom*, p. 25.
[131] Gretsch, "Literacy and the uses of the Vernacular", Lapidge, *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature* Molyneaux, *Formation of the English Kingdom*, pp. 27-28.

additional Anglian groups, which is cut from the *OEHE*.[132] As this omission is so small, it is unclear whether it is deliberate or a result of scribal error. It is therefore hard to be sure whether we can see this as contributing to the act of identification that the creation of the *OEHE* constituted. However, the fact that the translator has shortened the account may suggest that while the Anglo-Saxons of the tenth century were still interested in their origin, attention to the details of the exact relationships of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes had been replaced by a preference for the broad strokes of who went where. Nevertheless, the interest in who the Anglo-Saxons' predecessors were and how they were linked to regional identities endured.

It was not only the specific migrating groups that were significant to the Anglo-Saxons but also the number of migrants in relation to surviving Britons. It was claimed that the migration occurred in such numbers that the land of the Angles was left empty and the Britons were entirely displaced from most of Britain. The huge scale of the migration may have been seen to explain the limited ongoing relationship with the Germanic homelands. Certainly, the image of the land of the Angles left empty by the migration is a powerful one, and one that has been retained in the *OEHE* from the original where other details have been omitted. The more significant implication of the scale of the migration described is on the ability of the Germanic groups to displace the Britons almost entirely. The *OEHE* explains the actions of the Germanic groups against the Britons: 'bærdon ⁊ hergedon ⁊ slogan fram eastsæ oð westsæ; ⁊ him nænig wiðstod' (they burned and harried and slaughtered from the east sea to the west sea; and none withstood them).[133] The Anglo-Saxon origin myth therefore represented them as the most numerous population in Britain, and this served to erase any ongoing British presence in Anglo-Saxon territory. While this did of course 'other' the Britons and present them as a people who lived on the margins of Britain, it also opened up Anglo-Saxon collective identity to everyone who resided in Anglo-Saxon territory. Individuals may or may not have known their own heritage, but collectively the Anglo-Saxons represented themselves as being homogenous in their descent from the migrants.

Whether the Germanic groups did actually replace the Britons and whether all those in Anglo-Saxon England were truly of Germanic descent has been called into question by archaeological evidence. The two possibilities are that the *OEHE* is correct and there was mass migration from the continent that completely replaced the British population, or there was a small-scale migration that led to the establishment of a Germanic elite and the subsequent acculturation

[132] Bede, *Bede's ecclesiastical history of the English people*, p. 50.
[133] Ibid., p. 52.

by the British population.[134] How we view ethnicity affects how we assess the evidence for these two hypotheses. If ethnicity is cognitive, as it is viewed to be in this thesis, then the evidence provided by material culture may not indicate whether a person was descended from Germanic immigrants or native Britons, but rather the ethnicity with which they identified.[135] Likewise, finding evidence of a person from Anglo-Saxon England's biological descent, for example through DNA analysis, does not tell scholars what identity they believed themselves to be. Therefore, while DNA evidence may be able to indicate the scale of the migration to some extent, it cannot show the details of the how groups from the continent spread, and archaeological interpretation that categorises items of material culture as British or Anglo-Saxon cannot determine whether the associated individuals were lineally immigrant or native. It is not necessary to dissect the arguments surrounding the numbers of migrants and how they dispersed here, as the events of the migration are not the subject of this thesis. However, whether descendants of Britons were part of the Anglo-Saxon group does bear consideration.

As there is so little evidence to determine what happened in fifth-and-ssixth century Britain, what exactly happened to the British population following the migration is unclear. The account in the *OEHE* suggests a genocide, but this has not been borne out by archaeological evidence. However, there does seem to be a distinct lack of British presence in the historical and archaeological record in Anglo-Saxon England.[136] While it is clear that there were Britons in Britain immediately following the migration, it is not clear what happened to them.[137] The two possibilities are that they integrated into what became the Anglo-Saxon group or were somehow outcompeted within the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.[138] In support of out-competition, Heinrich Härke and his colleagues have suggested a model for group interaction that involves the Germanic groups forming ten or twenty percent of the population following migration, and this percentage rising due to an apartheid-like system that prevented intermarriage.[139] This model was developed to support the findings of two studies using Y-chromosome DNA evidence drawn from modern populations in Britain and other northern European areas that have suggested that the modern

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134 Helena Hamerow, "Migration Theory and the Migration Period", in Blaise Vyner (ed.), *Building on the Past: Papers Celebrating 150 Years of the Royal Archaeological Institute* (London, 1994), p. 174; Heinrich Härke, "Anglo-Saxon Immigration and Ethnogenesis", *Medieval Archaeology,* 55.1 (2011), pp. 2-4.
135 Nicholas Higham, *An English Empire: Bede and the Early Anglo-Saxon Kings* (Manchester, 1995), pp. 176-178.
136 Härke, "Anglo-Saxon Immigration and Ethnogenesis", p. 14.
137 Bryan Ward-Perkins, "Why Did the Anglo-Saxons Not Become More British?", *The English Historical Review,* 115.462 (2000), p. 522.
138 Härke, "Anglo-Saxon Immigration and Ethnogenesis", pp. 14-15.
139 Ibid., p. 15; Michael P. H. Stumpf and Heinrich Härke Mark G. Thomas, "Evidence for an Apartheid-Like Social Structure in Early Anglo-Saxon England", *Proceedings: Biological Sciences,* 273.1601 (2006), p. 2651; Michael P. H. Stumpf and Heinrich Härke Mark G. Thomas, "Integration Versus Apartheid in Post-Roman Britain: A Response to Pattison", *Proceedings: Biological Sciences,* 275.1650 (2008), p. 2419.

population of English males have approximately fifty percent, but perhaps even as high as one hundred percent, 'Germanic' ancestry.[140] These findings would require an unfeasibly large number of continental immigrants, perhaps as many as a million, and so Härke has suggested that due to a system that prevented intermarriage, British DNA did not enter the 'Germanic' gene pool and the Britons died out.[141] These Y chromosome studies, now almost twenty years old, have serious methodological disadvantages, not least using modern DNA to study the medieval period, limited sample sizes and assumptions about which modern populations correlate with where the continental groups originated.[142] This theory is not particularly well substantiated by historical evidence either, relying on one historical source, the *Laws of Ine*, which may never have been implemented and provides no evidence for events beyond Wessex.[143] Additionally, as Y chromosomes are passed down the male line, it is unclear why a high percentage of 'Germanic' Y chromosomes in the modern population would preclude British female ancestry. Intermarriage could have occurred in one direction, particularly as Härke has suggested there were fewer female continental settlers than male.[144] More persuasive are arguments for regionally diverse forms of migration and integration that saw different types of migration across a long migration period and regional variation in the modes of interaction between groups, such as Catherine Hills'.[145] This has been supported by more recent DNA research from 2016, this time using full genome sequencing of ancient DNA from skeletal remains from the first century BCE, fifth to sixth century CE and seventh to ninth century CE.[146] While this is a small sample set, the results, which show genetic mixing in skeletons from the fifth to the sixth century, less genetically diverse 'Germanic' individuals buried in the seventh to ninth century, and a genetically (although not necessarily ethnically) British person with what is usually assumed to be a continental-style grave good (a cruciform broach), all suggest that a single model for migration and integration does not exist.[147] The results do not suggest that the Britons were eliminated from central Britain, nor seamlessly integrated into the incoming group, but rather suggest that different process took place in different places.

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[140] Michael E. Weale et al., "Y Chromosome Evidence for Anglo-Saxon Mass Migration", *Molecular Biololgy and Evolution,* 19.7 (2002); Cristian Capelli et al., "A Y Chromosome Census of the British Isles", *Current Biology,* 13 (2003). Capelli *et al.* suggested a huge amount of variation across Britain in terms of the proportion of Germanic heritage.

[141] Härke, "Anglo-Saxon Immigration and Ethnogenesis", p. 8.

[142] al., "A Y Chromosome Census of the British Isles", p. 979; al., "Y Chromosome Evidence for Anglo-Saxon Mass Migration", p. 1009; Hills, "The Anglo-Saxon Migration", p. 42-43.

[143] John E. Pattison, "Integration Versus Apartheid in Post-Roman Britain: A Response to Thomas Et Al. (2008)", *Human Biology,* 83.6 (2011), pp. 725-726.

[144] Härke, "Anglo-Saxon Immigration and Ethnogenesis", p. 8.

[145] Hills, "The Anglo-Saxon Migration", pp. 42-43.

[146] Stephan Schiffels et al., "Iron Age and Anglo-Saxon Genomes From East England Reveal British Migration History", *Nature Communications,* 7.10408 (2016), p. 2.

[147] Ibid., pp. 6-7.

It is significant for the consideration of Anglo-Saxon self-representation in the late ninth and tenth century that it was clearly not the case that the Britons were cleared by the incoming continental groups or that the Anglo-Saxons of the tenth century were homogenously 'Germanic'. In fact, the small amount of evidence gained from the 2016 study suggests that there was immediate mixing between the 'Germanic' groups and the Britons when migration commenced.[148] Even those who accept the figure of fifty to one hundred percent 'Germanic' male ancestry in the modern male population and propose an apartheid explanation, such as Härke, are only prepared to suggest ten or twenty percent immigration from the continent.[149] More recent DNA analysis has suggested that the modern population of Britain have between twenty-five and forty percent 'Germanic' ancestry in one 2016 study and between ten and forty percent in another 2015 study, which again suggests integration rather than apartheid and discounts suggestions that the Britons were eliminated by either genocide or out-competition.[150] This evidence suggests that there was quite a large proportion of people living in Anglo-Saxon England who were genetically British in part or whole. It is therefore significant that the Anglo-Saxon origin myth presents the Britons as eliminated from central Britain entirely when perhaps the majority of the group thought of as the Anglo-Saxons had British ancestry. The emphasis of this collective self-representation was on a single origin for what was in fact a diverse group. Similarly, the stress on a single migration when it is more likely that migration was a lengthy process emphasises a single origin that overlooks the potential for diversity.[151]

The fact that many of the Anglo-Saxon group may not have had continental ancestry may be the reason that the Anglo-Saxon origin myth remained fairly non-specific in terms of individual migration, particularly in comparison to the Icelandic origin myth. The only named individual migrants in this account are Hengest and Horsa, described thus: 'Wæron ða ærest heora latteowas ⁊ heretogan twegen gebroðra Hengest ⁊ Horsa. Hi wæron Wihtgylses suna, þæs fæder wæs Wihta haten ⁊ þæs Wihta fæder wæs Woden nemned, of ðæs strynde monigra mægða cyningcynn fruman lædde.' (Then their first leaders and commanders were two brothers Hengest and Horsa. They were Wihtgyls' sons, whose father was called Wihta, whose father was named Woden, from this lineage the royal lines of many peoples take their origin.)[152] Where the Icelanders' *Landnámabók*

[148] Ibid., p. 7.
[149] Härke, "Anglo-Saxon Immigration and Ethnogenesis", pp. 11-16.
[150] al., "Iron Age and Anglo-Saxon Genomes From East England Reveal British Migration History", p. 3; Stephen Leslie et al., "The Fine-Scale Genetic Structure of the British Population", *Nature,* 519 (2015), p. 313.
[151] Härke, "Anglo-Saxon Immigration and Ethnogenesis", p. 9.
[152] Miller, *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, p. 52.

records the migration of a huge number of individual settlers (see below), the *OEHE* only names the two leaders. While of course these two texts are very different and had different purposes – the *OEHE* is an edited translation of an ecclesiastical history and *Landnámabók* is, as the name suggests, a record of land claiming – the contrast in terms of the type of knowledge supplied by these two texts and the implications this had for identity is stark. No individual Anglo-Saxon could use this origin myth to trace their own migration. In fact, while Bede associates Hengest and Horsa with Kent, presumably referencing Hengest's place in the Kentish royal genealogy, the *OEHE* omits that link in this section and associates no particular Anglo-Saxon kingdom with the two leaders.[153] If Philip Shaw is correct that this section of the *HE* is Bede's attempt to bring together Kentish origin stories and wider Anglo-Saxon origin myths, then the downplaying of the Kentish connection in this part of the *OEHE* must be seen as a minimising of regional identity and an emphasis of collective Anglo-Saxon identity. The impossibility of any individual using the origin narrative of the *OEHE* to trace the migration of their ancestors means that this representation of identity could be applied to all sections of the group equally.[154] Hengest is still included in the Kentish genealogy in Book II of the *OEHE*, so the link between Hengest and Kent is clearly not forgotten, but it is not included in this section.[155] The origin narrative therefore suggests that every member of the Anglo-Saxon group in the tenth century was descended from Germanic migrants, but no individual was descended from a specific migrant, and therefore it created an impression of unity that allowed for the diversity of origin that most likely existed within the Anglo-Saxon kingdom without acknowledging it. The Anglo-Saxons were apparently descended from peoples who were well-catalogued collectively, but entirely anonymous individually. This characterised the Anglo-Saxons collectively as having a single origin, which was symbolic of their ethnic identity, without the need for any individuals to make detailed individual identifications.

The purpose of migration as depicted in the origin myth also makes significant characterisations of the Anglo-Saxons. The Germanic groups are claimed to arrive in Britain initially because they were engaged as mercenaries by the British king Vortigern to fight the Picts. The *OEHE* reads, '⁊ on eastedæle þyses ealondes eardungstowe onfeng þurh ðæs ylcan cyninges bebod, þe hi hider gelaðode, þæt hi sceoldan for heors eðle compian ⁊ feohtan.' (and in the east of this island they were given dwellings by order of that same king, who had invited them here,

[153] Bede, *Bede's ecclesiastical history of the English people*, p. 50.
[154] Philip Andrew Shaw, "Uses of Woden: The Development of His Cult and of Medieval Literary Responses to it," diss. (2002), pp. 101-102.
[155] Miller, *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, p. 110.

that they should battle for their homeland and fight.)[156] The *OEHE* version differs here from Bede's original. Following the explanation that the Angles and Saxons came to Britain to fight, the original includes the phrase, 're autem uera hanc expugnatura suscepi' (but their real intention was to conquer it).[157] This does not appear in the *OEHE*, although again the omission is small so the translator's intention is unclear. However, speculatively it could be suggested that this omission represents a desire to remove some of the premeditation in the Germanic groups' change of sides from the narrative. If this is the case, it shows an alteration to the way the Anglo-Saxon elite wished to characterise their group through their origin myth. The double cross is not removed from the *OEHE* entirely – the Germanic groups are described as 'secende intingan ⁊ towyrde heora gedales wið Bryttas' (seeking a cause and opportunity to separate from the Britons) with some calculation – but in this version it is not described as the original intention of the Germanic groups.[158] As the narrative progresses, the aim of the Germanic groups changes from mercenary work to permanent settlement due to the 'þysses landes wæstmbærnysse, ⁊ Brytta yrgþo' (the fertility of this land and the cowardice of the Britons).[159] The migration is therefore a search for a fruitful land facilitated by the Britons' lack of military prowess and moral fibre.

The aims of the Germanic groups in migrating are augmented by God's intentions for the Anglo-Saxon people. The Germanic groups are the agents of God, even though they themselves are not Christian, and they are carrying out the 'rihte Godes dome' (rightful judgement of God). This is perhaps the most significant part of the Anglo-Saxon origin myth. Although much of the myth is not historically factual, the Anglo-Saxons did have certain historical facts with which they had to contend when remembering their migration. They had, unarguably, not been Christian when they came to Britain and displaced large portions of the British population. The Britons, on the other hand, had been predominantly Christian at this time. A pagan group displacing a Christian group had the potential to be an unflattering and unsettling narrative for the Christian Anglo-Saxons of the late ninth and tenth century, particularly following the invasion of non-Christian Scandinavians in the ninth century. However, the migration of the Germanic groups is justified because it is the will of God. The dichotomy of the non-Christian Germanic groups acting as God's agents is expressed in the *OEHE* as, 'Swa þonne her fram þære arleasan ðeode, hwæðere rihte Godes dome, neh ceastra gehwylce ⁊ land forhergeode wæron.' (So then here by this impious

[156] Ibid., p. 50.
[157] Bede, *Bede's ecclesiastical history of the English people*, p. 50.
[158] Ibid., p. 52.
[159] Ibid., p. 50.

people, nevertheless by God's right judgment, nearly every city and land was ravaged.)[160] Even in their origin myth, then, which describes a time before they were Christian, the Anglo-Saxons claimed a special relationship with God. The use of the allusion to the biblical burning of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, which the Book of Jeremiah suggests is caused by the apostasy of the people of Israel, reinforces this. The *OEHE* reads, 'Ne wæs ungelic wræcc þam ðe iú Chaldeas bærndon Hierusaleme weallas ⁊ ða cynelican getimbro mid fyre fornaman for ðæs Godes folces synnum.' (Their vengeance was not unlike when the Chaldeans burned the walls of Jerusalem and destroyed the royal buildings with fire for the sins of God's people.)[161] By the logic of the origin myth, just as Nebuchadnezzar II is described as a servant of God, in spite of being non-Christian, because God used him to punish the people of Jerusalem, so the pre-Christian Anglo-Saxons served God by punishing the sinful Britons.[162] The 'wræcc' (vengeance) that the Anglo-Saxons wreak on the Britons is not their own vengeance but God's. The *OEHE* therefore characterises the Anglo-Saxons as a people who were guided by God and served God from their earliest history, even before conversion.

The special religious position the Anglo-Saxons of the late ninth and tenth century claimed in the *OEHE* does not mean that they characterised themselves as God's chosen people. Patrick Wormald has suggested that this ideology was present as early as Bede's original version of the *HE*, and that Bede explicitly establishes the Anglo-Saxons as the chosen people of God and England as a new Israel.[163] George Molyneaux, on the other hand, does not see any articulation of this ideology in Bede's *HE* or any subsequent Anglo-Saxon text.[164] It is clear that the Anglo-Saxons did see themselves as having God's favour, and as having a special function on God's behalf, but there does not seem to be an identification of the Anglo-Saxons with the Old Testament Jews in the migration account. Rather, the Anglo-Saxons are compared with the Chaldeans, who waged war on God's chosen people when the Jews lost God's favour, and the Britons were identified with the Jews. This is perhaps unsurprising, as the late ninth-century *OEHE* is a translation of an eighth-century text, and the eighth century would be a very early stage for the ideology of the Anglo-Saxons as a single, chosen people to develop. The Anglo-Saxon groups of the eighth century may have experienced religious unity, but they were not at this time a single people politically or

[160] Ibid., p. 52.
[161] Ibid., p. 52.
[162] *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft (Stuttgart, 2007), https://www.academic-bible.com/en/online-bibles/biblia-sacra-vulgata/read-the-bible-text/bibel/text/lesen/stelle/24/250001/259999/ch/682edfb128ecd4b6bac7e422b097b57e/, accessed 28/07/2021.
[163] Wormald, "*Engla Lond*", p. 14.
[164] Molyneaux, "The *Old English Bede*", pp. 736-737.

practically. However, later texts do characterise the Anglo-Saxons as a chosen people of God, and the seeds for such an ideology are present in this origin myth, as it characterises the Anglo-Saxons as a people who had a particular relationship with God and who were in Britain by God's will. This characterisation is developed and expanded by later acts of identification.

The Old English *Exodus*

There are several Anglo-Saxon texts that have been identified as representing directly or indirectly the remembered migration, including the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Wulfstan's *Sermo ad Lupi Anglos*, *Beowulf*, *Genesis A*, and *The Battle of Brunanburh*, but the Old English *Exodus* is particularly significant in its use of the origin myth to characterise Anglo-Saxon identity.[165] The poem provides a particularly in-depth exploration of how the Anglo-Saxons symbolised identity through their migration myth.[166] *Exodus* does not describe the Anglo-Saxon migration directly, but rather narrates the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, covering a portion of the Old Testament Exodus narrative and inserting certain elements from Genesis. Nevertheless, Nicholas Howe has demonstrated thoroughly that by representing the Israelites as a seafaring army, the poet of *Exodus* is identifying them with the Anglo-Saxons who migrated to Britain.[167] Howe also shows how the use of the sail image with which God protects the Israelites in the desert creates a correspondence between this exodus and the Anglo-Saxon migration through the use of imagery that is relevant to both Christianity and the migration myth.[168] This is notably different from the *OEHE*, in which the Anglo-Saxons are identified with the Chaldeans rather than the Israelites. There is no need to reconcile the poem's use of the Old Testament with that of the *HE*, even if, as Peter Lucas has suggested, the poem's composition date is early and the two texts are therefore contemporary with one another.[169] *Exodus* demonstrates, as Howe points out, a desire to place the Anglo-Saxon migration within Old Testament history in order to strengthen the Anglo-Saxon's Christian identity and reconcile their pre-Christian past.[170] The use of the Chaldeans in the *OEHE* performs a similar function, although it emphasises a different aspect of the migration myth, the conquest rather than the journey. These two motifs are therefore different ways of characterising the Anglo-Saxons that had the same aim in placing the Anglo-Saxons in Old Testament history. That *Exodus*'s

[165] Peter Lucas, *Exodus* (Liverpool, 2020); Fabienne L. Michelet, "Lost At Sea: Nautical Travels in the Old English Exodus, the Old English Andreas, and Accounts of the Adventus Saxonum", in Sebastian I. Sobecki (ed.), *The Sea and Englishness in the Middle Ages: Maritime Narratives, Identity and Culture* (Woodbridge, 2011), p. 60.
[166] Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, p. 107.
[167] Ibid., pp. 76-88.
[168] Ibid., pp. 98-99.
[169] Lucas, *Exodus*, p. 71.
[170] Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, pp. 105-106.

approach to this, the use of the Israelites rather than the Chaldeans, reflects a more successful motif that became widely used in later Anglo-Saxon texts suggests that the features that make the Anglo-Saxons and Israelites comparable were felt to be more significant to Anglo-Saxon identity as the period progressed.[171]

Exodus is a complex poem with many levels of meaning and interpretation, so it is necessary to narrow the scope of discussion here. There are two interconnected themes in *Exodus* that specifically relate to the Anglo-Saxon origin myth and therefore identification, that of a rightful homeland, and that of a two-way covenant. As discussed above, a key feature of the Anglo-Saxon origin myth is that even before the Anglo-Saxons were Christian, they were granted victory against the Britons, and therefore sovereignty over much of Britain, by God. In *Exodus*, the motif of a rightful homeland granted by God runs through the entire poem. It is asserted as early as line 18, in the description of Moses' ancestry, that God has given the descendants of Abraham 'onwist eðles' (inhabitation of the homeland).[172] This motif is repeated further on in the poem, immediately following the march of the Jewish people in their family groups over the bed of the Red Sea and immediately preceding the digression concerning Noah and Abraham. In this case, the poem refers to the 'landriht' (land-right) given to Abraham by God, that is, the right to settle and rule the land of Canaan.[173] The placement of this is significant, as it occurs at the pivotal point in the migration, the crossing of the sea. The placement suggests clearly that in the eyes of the poet, the crossing of the sea is an integral part of claiming a rightful land, and *vice versa*. It also links the main action of the poem with the coming digression, which will be discussed below, and again references Abraham. The motif is fully realised in Moses' final speech of the poem, which describes this promise of land-right as about to be fulfilled. Moses says, 'Hafað us on Cananea cyn gelyfed, / burh ond beagas, brade rice;' ([God] has granted to us the kin of the Canaanites, city and treasure, broad power.)[174] Some translations of this section translate 'us on Cananea cyn gelyfed' as 'granted our kindred the Canaanite land', but if Lucas is correct and 'us', in the dative, is governed by 'on', then 'cyn', in the accusative, cannot also be governed by it, so this is not possible.[175] Instead, it appears that the kindred of Canaanites have been granted to the Israelites. This makes clear that there are existing groups already in the land that has been promised to the Israelites, a fact that is

[171] Lemke, "Fear-Mongering", p. 759. Lemke discusses Wulfstan's use of the Anglo-Saxon belief that they were a chosen people of God. This development will be discussed further in the Religion Chapter.
[172] Lucas, *Exodus*, p. 77, line 18.
[173] Ibid., p. 122, line 354.
[174] Ibid., p. 145, lines 556-557.
[175] Damian Love, "The Old English Exodus: A Verse Translation", *Neophilologus,* 86 (2002), p. 634; Lucas, *Exodus*, p. 145.

of course made clear in the Bible in both Genesis and Joshua, but not previously mentioned in the poem. Even if 'cyn' is better translated here metaphorically as land or territory, it is still the case that that land belongs to an existing people, the Canaanites. These groups will be conquered by the Israelites, and additionally their goods will be seized. This echoes the Anglo-Saxons' own origin myth, in which they conquered and displaced the Britons as ordained by God. It is not surprising that the theme of rightful homeland is included in a poem about the exodus, but its placement and repetition is significant. Rightful homeland is brought up at the beginning, middle and end of the poem, which emphasises and sustains the motif. It is also connected specifically to concepts of kinship and inheritance, as its first use is in the description of Moses' lineage, and its second is in the description of the various family groups of the Israelites, all descended from Abraham. This is specifically relevant to Anglo-Saxon identity as the Anglo-Saxons remember through their origin myth a time when God allowed them to conquer Britain and claim it as a rightful homeland, and the idea that this can be passed down through kin encouraged the idea that God continued to ensure their right to this homeland.

The other significant theme in *Exodus* is the covenant between the Israelites and God, and this also has relevance to Anglo-Saxon identity. This theme has been identified in *Exodus* by several scholars and has been variously called the theme of 'Salvation by Faith and Obedience' by Peter Lucas, and 'Help of God' by Robert Farrell.[176] The covenant as described in *Exodus* requires faith and loyalty to God on the part of the Israelites, and in return God rewards them with victory and safety. This is clearly linked to the motif of a rightful homeland discussed above, because part of God's covenant with Abraham is that his descendants will have a homeland of their own, but it also defines a specific relationship with God. This relationship is alluded to throughout the poem. The loyalty of the Israelites is emphasised in key places, for example they are referred to as 'þeodenholde' (loyal to the lord, 'the faithful') specifically in the context of God shielding them from the sun with a sail as 'hleo' (protection).[177] Advancing this theme, as the Israelites enter the parted Red Sea, they are described again in terms of loyalty and covenant: 'Wæs seo eorla gedriht anes modes, / fæstum fæðmum freoðowære heold' (That troop of warriors was of one resolve, it held fast grasp to the covenant).[178] Again, it is at a point at which God's protection is most clear that readers are reminded of the relationship between God and his people. The covenant is reciprocal: God provides protection through his parting of the sea, while the Israelites are staying faithful to God, holding fast, and so the covenant is complete. Clearly in *Exodus*, God's protection,

[176] Ibid., p. 61; Robert T. Farrell, "A Reading of Oe. *Exodus*", *The Review of English Studies,* 80 (1969), p. 404.
[177] Lucas, *Exodus*, pp. 89-90, lines 79-87. The translation 'the faithful' for 'þeodenholde' is given by Lucas (p. 200).
[178] Ibid., p. 117, lines 305-306.

'Salvation' as Lucas terms it or 'Help' as Farrell puts it, is linked intrinsically to the loyalty or faithfulness of the Israelites. The concept of loyalty and covenant is invoked later in the poem, in the digression that describes Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, when God himself says:

> þæt þu wið Waldend wære heolde,
> fæste treowe, seo þe freode sceal
> in lifdagum longest weorðan
> awa to alder unswiciendo.[179]
> (That you [Abraham] would hold fast covenant with the Lord, which shall become goodwill for you in life for the longest time always for ever loyal.)

The reciprocity of this relationship is again clear from this passage. Abraham's faith in God, his willingness to sacrifice his own child, is rewarded with God's goodwill in perpetuity. This is not a novel concept to *Exodus*, of course – it is sourced from the Bible – but it is made a particular theme in the poem. Indeed, this entire digression, which follows the march of the Israelites across the parted Red Sea, is themed around covenant, first Noah's with God and then Abraham's with God.[180] At the beginning of this digression it is said of Noah that, 'Hæfde him on hreðre halige treowa' (He holds in his heart the holy covenant).[181] This digression was previously thought to be an interpolation because it was seen to diverge from the action of the poem, and without an understanding of the importance of this reciprocal covenant throughout the poem, the significance of the digression is not fully apparent.[182] The digression details the history of the covenant between God and the Israelites, and paves the way for this to be fulfilled in the main action of the poem with the ultimate protection of the Israelites through the destruction of the Egyptians, which follows the digression.[183] God's covenant is not only his provision of a homeland, but also his 'hleo' (protection) and 'freod' (goodwill). In the Anglo-Saxon origin myth God has granted them a homeland, it might also be hoped therefore that the rest of the covenant as described in *Exodus* would be granted to the Anglo-Saxons in return for their faith.

It is not possible to say what the significance was of *Exodus* to the Anglo-Saxons who composed it, because there is no certain date or context for composition, but it is possible to examine the significance of the poem in the context of the manuscript's creation. *Exodus* is in the

[179] Ibid., p. 129 lines 422-425.
[180] P. F. Ferguson, "Noah, Abraham and the Crossing of the Red Sea", *Neophilologus,* 65 (1981), p. 283; Daniel Anlezark, "Connecting the Patriarchs: Noah and Abraham in the Old English 'Exodus'", *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology,* 104.2 (2005), p. 173.
[181] Lucas, *Exodus*, p. 123 line 366.
[182] Ibid., pp. 30-31.
[183] Although some text appears to be missing here, perhaps as much as 66 lines, but this was most likely the initial description of the Egyptians entering the parted sea, given where the texts resumes (Ibid., pp. 15, 131).

MS Junius 11, which dates to approximately 1000 CE.[184] A narrower period of between 960 and 990 has been advocated by Leslie Lockett.[185] Such a narrow dating assumes that the scribes followed the most contemporary trends in codicology, palaeography and illustration. On close examination, Lockett's narrow dating is far from secure, with the manuscript demonstrating codicological features that are variously found more usually in the tenth and more usually in the eleventh century.[186] On codicological and palaeographical grounds Lockett gives the date range of 950-1010 and looks to stylistic evidence to narrow this window.[187] The use of the styles of the decorative initials and illustrations to narrow the dates is somewhat problematic because it assumes that scribes all discarded old practices and adopted new ones at broadly the same time, when in fact individuals may have kept their favourite practices or practised hybrid ones. Dating the manuscript to pre-990 can only be done on the aggregation of features that may have been more common in the tenth century than the eleventh, and this overlooks the fact that individuals made their own stylistic choices. It also assumes that our current interpretation of the art is correct, and interpretations of the art in MS Junius 11 has changed over the decades, with Barbara Raw suggesting in the 1970s that the art had a Scandinavian style and should date the manuscript to 1025-1050.[188] However, on aggregate the features noted by Lockett are persuasive in suggesting a dating of 960-990.

The manuscript version of *Exodus* was therefore most likely written either in Edgar's reign (r. 959-975) or the early part of Æthelræd's reign (r. 978-1016). During Edgar's reign the Anglo-Saxon elite appear to have developed an ideology of imperialism over the rest of Britain. Janet Nelson has identified a body of evidence suggesting that this is the case, including the 973 submission of Kenneth king of the Scots and a ritual in the same year that involved eight sub-kings joining Edgar in rowing along the Dee.[189] Nelson therefore sees Edgar's late coronation in 973 not as evidence that he postponed his consecration as king of England, but as evidence that he had acquired imperial power over the rest of Britain, if only in a confederate style.[190] Julia Crick has suggested that this imperial attitude negates claims that the Anglo-Saxons linked their political group with their ethnicity, and instead argues that the Anglo-Saxon elite had 'a sense of dominion

[184] Ibid., p. 1.
[185] Leslie Lockett, "An Integrated Re-Examination of the Dating of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 11", *Anglo-Saxon England,* 31 (2002), p. 173.
[186] Ibid., pp. 144-145.
[187] Ibid., pp. 145, 156, 158.
[188] Barbara Raw, "The Probable Derivation of Most of the Illustrations in Junius Ii From anIllustrated Old Saxon Genesis", *Anglo-Saxon England,* 5 (1976), p. 134.
[189] Janet Nelson, *Politics and ritual in early medieval Europe* (London, 1986), pp. 302-303.
[190] Ibid., p. 300.

unbounded by ethnic history'.[191] However, this does not necessarily follow. *IV Edgar* contained laws intended for 'ægðer ge Anglum ge Denum ge Bryttum' (either Angles or Danes or Brittons), demonstrating an acknowledgment of the different groups in Britain under Edgar's influence.[192] It appears that the Danes at least had their own laws and were also expected to follow certain laws given by Edgar, suggesting a more complex situation than the complete divorce of ethnic and political grouping that Crick supposes.[193] Additionally, under Nelson's suggested system of *ducatas*, a confederacy built on a common need for defence against invading Scandinavians, rather than *regnum*, an empire based on conquest, there would have been no need for the Anglo-Saxon political entity to disappear just because a broader British political alliance was forming.[194] Within this political context, a text such as *Exodus* – which describes a group's journey to a land that they were promised by God and of which they will be rulers – may have been seen as a particularly appropriate identification. Just as the Israelites were promised hegemony over the 'cyn' of Canaan by God once they completed their exodus, so the Anglo-Saxons had come to Britain and taken control of both the territory and the inhabitants. *Exodus* shows the inner workings of the covenant that God has with a chosen people, and therefore demonstrated how the Anglo-Saxons had been granted control of Britain in return for their piety. If the manuscript is from later in the period, this potentially places its creation in a tumultuous period in Anglo-Saxon history, during the reign of Æthelræd Unræd, which saw renewed Scandinavian raiding and increasing political turmoil. Under these circumstances, the text may have had a more aspirational purpose, reminding the Anglo-Saxons that they were a chosen people who had been granted their land by God. In the late tenth century, then, acts of identification such as the copying of *Exodus*, and the creation of other texts that will be discussed in later chapters, built on earlier identifications to characterise the Anglo-Saxons in a way that was specifically relevant to the political context.

Iceland

Iceland was settled from Norway and other Scandinavian territories in the late ninth century, a process often called *landnám*. This is verified by both the written sources and the archaeological evidence, as is the fact that the island was devoid of a settled population when the Scandinavians arrived. The migration myth is recorded in a number of written sources, initially Ari Þorgilsson's

[191] Julia Crick, "Edgar, Albion and Insular Dominion", in Donald Scragg (ed.), *Edgar, King of the English 959–975: New Interpretations* (Woodbridge, 2008), p. 170.
[192] Lieberman, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, p. 210; Nelson, *Politics and ritual*, p. 302.
[193] See below, p. 125.
[194] Nelson, *Politics and ritual*, p. 302.

Íslendingabók, then *Landnámabók*, a text possibly also connected to Ari, and it is also found at the beginning of many of the Icelandic sagas as a description of how a particular family arrived in Iceland. *Íslendingabók* was written in the first half of the twelfth century, two and a half centuries after the migration, and this leads to similar problems as we find with the Anglo-Saxon migration myth. There is no intervening written evidence that could help us understand the sources for Ari's account and little way of verifying its accuracy. Later accounts clearly draw from *Íslendingabók* or similar unknown sources, as the narrative that they tell is fairly uniform. The narrative we receive from the combined sources is that the Icelanders are people who left Norway when Harald Finehair began to consolidate his power there because they did not wish to be ruled by him. These families settled first generally in the Scandinavian settlements in the British Isles, and then continued their journey on to Iceland where they claimed land and developed their own system of governance. This narrative presented the Icelanders as the people who had left Norway under a specific set of circumstances and for a particular purpose, but some of the details we now associate with the migration are late additions to the tradition. Early accounts of the migration focus on the act of taking land and rely on the Icelanders' Norwegian origin to legitimise this, while later accounts express a more contentious relationship with Norway in response to the changing poltical situation.

The Accounts in *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók*

Íslendingabók appears to have been written between 1122 and 1133 CE based on details given in the text. It was written by Ari Þorgilsson possibly as an ecclesiastical history of Iceland, and certainly the detail is focused on the conversion and subsequent church history of the Icelanders, but it is not a traditional ecclesiastical history.[195] The focus of *Íslendingabók* is largely on Iceland, although I do not share Siân Grønlie's opinion that the text fails to situate the Icelandic church within the context of European Christianity, as will be discussed below, but it is certainly the case that foreign Church events are not discussed.[196] *Íslendingabók* is a history written by a churchman, rather than a Church history, and therefore it prioritises ecclesiastical events but does not limit itself to them. It is the first extant example of the Icelandic migration narrative, and one of the earliest surviving Icelandic texts, and it therefore gives us the earliest information we have concerning the *landnám*. *Landnámabók* may be a somewhat later text, and though it has been suggested that Ari may have written it, its author remains unknown. It is possible that Ari was

[195] Grønlie, *Íslendingabók - Kristni Saga*, pp. xii-xxiii.
[196] Ibid., p. xxii.

involved with its early compilation and then it was extended or completed in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century.[197] The earliest extant manuscript, *Sturlubók* (AM 107 fol.), is from the late thirteenth century, and it is uncertain exactly how much this is altered from the earlier versions.[198] *Landnámabók* is more detailed than the earlier *Íslendingabók*, and this presents further problems with determining accuracy, as new historical details recorded in a later text without a source may suggest invention rather than recollection. The additional details are of over 400 settlers, their journeys to Iceland, their family lineages, and where they claimed land. *Landnámabók* therefore clearly has a certain purpose in establishing land claims in the twelfth and thirteenth century, as well as being a record of settlement.[199] Both of these texts provide a wealth of detail concerning the migration and *landnám*, and it is likely that the reason for this detail is to present the Icelanders as having as legitimate claim to their land both individually and collectively.

Íslendingabók and *Landnámabók* give very specific details about the initial settlement of Iceland, and these details demonstrate what was considered significant to the Icelanders about their origin myth. The most fundamental characteristic of Icelandic identity is that the Icelanders came from Norway. *Íslendingabók* begins, 'Ísland byggðisk fyrst ýr Norvegi' (Iceland was settled first from Norway), and *Landnámabók* reads, 'Ísland fannsk ok byggðisk af Nóregi' (Iceland was discovered and settled from Norway).[200] *Landnámabók* subsequently mentions settlers from the British Isles, but these tend to be low-status enslaved people or captives and their contribution is downplayed.[201] This presents the Icelanders as having a single, simple origin, which provides a sense of unity and also perhaps justifies the ongoing relationship with Norway. Significantly, in these two twelfth-century texts there is no substantial mention of the traumatic dislocation that will become a feature of the migration narrative in later texts. The impression given by *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók* then is of the Icelanders as a people with close kin ties to Norway.

However, this most fundamental aspect of the migration myth, that the Icelanders were originally Norwegian, has been shown by archaeological evidence to be somewhat inaccurate. Determining population demographics for a medieval population is challenging, but a variety of different genetic and archaeological techniques have been used in recent years to attempt to

[197] Diana Whaley, "A useful past: historical writing in medieval Iceland", in Ross, *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, pp. 172-173.
[198] Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, "Landnámabók and Its Sturlubók Version", in Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and Sverrir Jakobsson (ed.), *Sturla Þórðarson: Skald, Chieftain and Lawman* 2017), p. 48.
[199] Ibid., p. 46.
[200] Ari Þorgilsson and Jakob Benediktsson, *Íslendingabók; Landnámabók* (Reykjavík, 1968), pp. 4, 32.
[201] William Sayers, "Management of the Celtic Fact in *Landnámabók*", *Scandinavian Studies,* 66.2 (1994), p. 140.

determine whether the Icelanders really were exclusively Scandinavian. There has been particular focus on the proportion of Irish or British settlers, as many of the sagas mention settlers bringing enslaved people or wives from these places on the way to Iceland. There are two options to study Icelandic genetics to attempt to gauge population demographic in the medieval period. These are the study of modern Icelandic genetics and the study of genetics from medieval skeletal remains. Studies using mtDNA and Y chromosomes from the modern Icelandic population have suggested that there was a significant number of settlers from the British Isles at the time of *landnám*.[202] These studies, undertaken by Agnar Helgason *et al.* in conjunction with deCODE Genetics Inc., have suggested that there may have been a fairly high proportion of female settlers who were 'Gaelic', as the studies describe them, while a much smaller, but still significant, proportion of male settlers also were.[203] There are problems with using genetics from the modern population to determine the medieval population demographics. Not only has Einer Árnason called into question the accuracy of the information in the databases used by deCODE, but there are more fundamental questions concerning genetic drift, subsequent migration and demographic change which makes using modern DNA somewhat problematic.[204] A study of Viking-age genetics using skeletons from the period estimated that settlers had a mean Norse ancestry of 0.554, with only marginally higher Gaelic ancestry among females than males.[205] This implies that Icelanders were only a little over half Norse genetically, less than is found in modern Icelandic DNA. This methodology also presents problems, including a small sample size of 27 and the certainty with which skeletons could be dated to the settlement era.[206] When considered in the context of ethnic identity, which is self-identified and does not rely on genetics, this genetic evidence must also be qualified because the Scandinavians had significant settlements in the British Isles, meaning that individuals could have had genetics which suggested British or Irish ancestry but considered themselves ethnically Scandinavian. Nevertheless, the evidence that we have does not support the simplistic view of the origin of the settlers given in the opening lines of both *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók* that they came from Norway. *Landnámabók* does subsequently describe journeys via the British Isles in the section of the text that deals with the individual journeys of the settlers, and mentions Irish and British slaves, but the clear message from both texts is that the most important origin for the

[202] Agnar Helgason et al., "Estimating Scandinavian and Gaelic Ancestry in the Male Settlers of Iceland", *American Journal of Human Genetics,* 67.3 (2000), pp. 174-175; Agnar Helgason et al., "Mtdna and the Origin of the Icelanders: Deciphering Signals of Recent Population History", *American Journal of Human Genetics,* 66 (2000), p. 1009.
[203] al., "Estimating Scandinavian and Gaelic Ancestry", p. 175.
[204] Einar Árnason, "Genetic Heterogeneity of Icelanders", *Annals of Human Genetics,* 67 (2003), pp. 6-12;
[205] Sigríður Sunna Ebenesersdóttir et al., "Ancient Genomes From Iceland Reveal the Making of a Human Population", *Science,* 360.6392 (2018), p. 6.
[206] Ibid., p. 3.

settlers is Norway.[207] The archaeological evidence suggests that this represents a prioritising of Norse ancestry over Irish or British when in fact the number of settlers from Norway may have been barely greater than those from the British Isles, and this is in line with William Sayers' findings concerning the treatment of 'Celtic' settlers in *Landnámabók*.[208] This demonstrates the ongoing importance of the relationship with Norway to Icelandic identity in the twelfth and thirteenth century, when *Landnámabók* was composed. Norse ancestry clearly has significance within Iceland, and it may also have had significance to the way Iceland was viewed by Norway. In the thirteenth century, when there were rising tensions with Norway over trade and control of Iceland, this emphasising of Norwegian heritage may have been important to the negotiation of this relationship.

Following the origin of the Icelanders, the migration narrative further includes a great many chronological, personal, and geographical details. The inclusion of these details legitimises the land claims that make up much of the rest of these texts. *Íslendingabók* opens by recounting the settlement of Ingólfr, which it describes as the first settlement of Iceland.[209] *Landnámabók* expands this account to include earlier expeditions to Iceland, by Naddodd, Garðarr and Flóki, none of which resulted in permanent settlement.[210] These early explorations demonstrate that Iceland was a difficult place on which to settle, subsequent settlement was therefore an achievement, but it is clear from their omission from *Íslendingabók* that the true migration to Iceland was seen to have begun with Ingólfr. *Landnámabók* acknowledges this by calling Ingólfr the most famous of all settlers.[211] This gives the migration myth a specific start date, and for both texts this start date is related first to general European ecclesiastical history, and then specifically to the life of Haraldr Finehair. *Íslendingabók* judges this to be at the time of the martyring of St Edmund, while *Landnámabók* dates settlement to the pontificate of Adrian, and the reign of Louis son of Louis in Frankia, and the reign of Leo and his son Alexander in Byzantium.[212] *Íslendingabók* goes on to specify that Ingólfr's first expedition to Iceland was when Haraldr Fairhair was sixteen years old, followed by a second one some time later to settle the island, which *Landnámabók* identifies as the twelfth year of Haraldr's reign (c. 872-930).[213] There is a specificity about this migration narrative that makes it different in kind from the Anglo-Saxon origin myth. It was clearly a priority for the

[207] Sayers, "Celtic Fact in *Landnámabók*", p. 130-149
[208] Ibid., p. 149.
[209] Benediktsson, *Íslendingabók; Landnámabók*, p. 5.
[210] Ibid., pp. 34-42.
[211] Ibid., p. 47.
[212] Ibid., pp. 4, 32.
[213] Ibid., pp. 5, 42.

Icelanders of the twelfth century to record exactly when the migration took place within a broad European, Christian context, and who the individuals were who undertook the migration. A note in a fourteenth-century manuscript of *Landnámabók*, Melabók (AM 445b 4°), suggests that the purpose of the text is to secure the land claims of the Icelanders against foreigners who might malign them as slaves or thieves.[214] This concern, as Sveinbjörn Rafnsson has suggested, may also have been current in the twelfth century, when *Landnámabók* was originally written, because this was a time at which neighbouring monarchs were making claims to land abroad, such as in England, and the Icelanders may have felt vulnerable to such behaviour.[215] The specificity of time, place and people found in *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók* expresses a desire by the Icelanders to locate themselves within Scandinavian and European history in order to establish territorial claim on an individual and group level in a legalistic manner.[216] The late date of the migration in part facilitated the use of this international context, as when this narrative came to be recorded in the twelfth century the Icelanders had a range of foreign histories on which to draw, but the thorough contextualisation also speaks to the purpose of *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók*, which is to legitimise land claims. Through this act of identification, the Icelanders collectively represented themselves as both rooted in European history and with a strong claim to their own land.

The date of the settlement given in *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók* appears to be approximately correct based on the archaeological dating of early settlements. The layer of tephra from a volcanic eruption, which can be reliably dated to 871 through examination of ice-cores from Greenland that contain the same tephra layer, can be used to date the signs of settlement, such as the turf walls at Herjolfsdalur, found immediately above it.[217] Radiocarbon dating of archaeological deposits such as grave goods has given some very early dates, and the validity of these have been questioned, so the use of a tephra layer is a more reliable way of dating this evidence.[218] The high concentration of archaeological deposits found immediately above this layer indicates that settlement occurred shortly after 871.[219] This evidence suggests that the migration narrative is correct in its record of the date of migration, in spite of the long gap between the event and its recording. That these details survived demonstrates the importance of the migration to the Icelanders and the care taken with its recording in the twelfth century. It also reinforces the

[214] Rafnsson, "Landnámabók and Its Sturlubók Version", p. 46.
[215] Ibid., p. 47.
[216] Ibid., p. 47.
[217] Orri Vésteinsson, "Patterns of Settlement in Iceland: A Study in Prehistory", *Saga-Book of the Viking Society,* 25 (1998), p. 3; Smith, "Landnám", p. 326.
[218] Vésteinsson, "Patterns of Settlement", p. 3.
[219] Ibid., p. 4.

impression of legalistic specificity created by *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók* in order to back up the land claims of the Icelanders.

The engagement with Europe demonstrated by the use of European chronology is also symbolised by the inclusion of the Irish *papar* who it is told had a settlement on Iceland before the Norwegians discovered it.[220] *Íslendingabók* describes this pre-history:

> Í þann tið Ísland viði vaxit á miðli fjalls ok fjǫru. Þá váru hér men kristnir, þeir es Norðmenn kalla papa, en þeir fóru siðan á braut, af því at þeir vildu eigi vera hér við heiða men, ok létu eptir bœkr írskar ok bjǫllur ok bagla; af því mátti skilja, at þeir váru men írskir.[221]
> (At that time Iceland was overgrown with woods between the mountains and the shore. Then there were Christian men here, whom the Northmen call *papar* [monks], but they later went away, because they did not want to be here with heathen men, and they left behind Irish books and bells and croziers; because of this it may be known, that they were Irishmen.)

The accuracy and basis for this statement is unclear. There is no archaeological evidence available to confirm or disprove the presence of these early monks, so whether this passage represents a real memory of surviving artefacts is unknown.[222] Clearly, the presence of these Christians on the island inserts Iceland into Christian history at a much earlier stage than the later Icelandic conversion, and so allows the Icelanders to engage with the early Christian history from which they would otherwise have been excluded.[223] It also allowed the Icelanders to reference their pre-Christianity in relation to the Christianity of an existing group, which somewhat mirrors Bede's account of the Anglo-Saxon settlement of Britain, and therefore again allows for a wider engagement with European Christian history. It has also been suggested that this section of *Íslendingabók* is an attempt by Ari to present the Icelandic migration as a parallel to the exodus of the Israelites.[224] It is certainly possible that this was Ari's personal intention, but no extant Icelandic texts exist that further this comparison in the way the Old English *Exodus* and other Anglo-Saxon texts do, so it does not seem that this formed a significant part of Icelandic identity. The continuing relationship with the Norwegians may have prevented this from becoming a fully realised motif in Icelandic identity, as the Icelandic migration was not a flight from an alien oppressor, but rather a breaking away from a people with whom they still strongly identified. What is characterised here and made significant to Icelandic identity is the desire to engage widely in European culture and

[220] Benediktsson, *Íslendingabók; Landnámabók*, p. 32.
[221] Ibid., p. 5.
[222] Vésteinsson, "Patterns of Settlement", p. 4.
[223] Lindow, "Íslendingabók and Myth", p. 456.
[224] Grønlie, *Íslendingabók - Kristni Saga*, ed. Grønlie, p. xxi

to insert themselves into European history as early as possible.

The recording of the origin myth in the twelfth century was an act of identification that characterised the Icelanders collectively as the descendants of Norwegians who had a strong claim to their new land and a firm place in wider European history. In the narrative, the Icelanders are presented as of Norwegian descent, and any other potential ancestry is overlooked.[225] As with the Anglo-Saxon origin myth, the Icelanders are described as a group who came from a single place, to a single place, at a single time. This created a shared history and origin; it was a unifier, creating a sense of naturalness to the single group that the Icelanders formed. They were also represented as a people who claimed land, in the model of Ingólfr, at the same time and in the same way. This again created a sense of shared history, but it also encouraged individuals to buy into this Icelandic identity as it strengthened their own claims to land in the twelfth century and later. The origin myth further represents Icelandic identity as it demonstrates at an early stage the desire to engage with wider European culture and to establish themselves as a legitimate part of that culture.

Laxdæla saga

Laxdæla saga represents the Icelandic migration and its implications for identity differently from the earlier texts, suggesting that rather than migrating to claim land the Icelanders had migrated to escape the Norwegian king. Like many of the Icelandic sagas, *Laxdæla saga* begins with the family's displacement from Norway and journey to Iceland. What is significant about *Laxdæla saga* is that the same settlers, Bjǫrn the Easterner and Auðr the Deep-minded (also called Unnr), are mentioned in *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók* as well. Laxdæla saga appears to have been composed in the mid thirteenth century, the oldest fragment, AM 162 D2 fol., having been dated to around 1250.[226] This can give us an impression of the evolution of the narrative, from the early-twelfth-century *Íslendingabók*, to the late-twelfth or early-thirteenth-century *Landnámabók*, to the mid-thirteenth-century *Laxdæla saga*.[227] These texts had different purposes: as mentioned above *Íslendingabók* has an ecclesiastical bearing, and *Landnámabók* is concerned with establishing land claims, while this section of *Laxdæla saga* is specifically devoted to detailing the received history of one family. However, examining the differences between these narratives can be instructive. In

[225] Ibid., p. xxv.
[226] A. Margaret Arent Madelung, *The* Laxdœla Saga*: Its Structural Patterns* (Chapel Hill, 1972), p. 238; Slavica Ranković, "In the Refracted Light of the Mirror Phrases *Sem Fyrr Var Sagt and Sem Fyrr Var Ritat*: Sagas of Icelanders and the Orality–Literacy Interfaces", *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology,* 115.3 (2016), p. 315.
[227] The versions of these texts that we have are all from later manuscripts, and therefore it is uncertain whether this is the exact form in which the text was composed.

particular, it can aid in the interrogation of the concept of a 'traumatic dispersal' from Norway, which some scholars have used to underpin the idea of a 'Scandinavian diaspora'. Lesley Abrams and Judith Jesch have been instrumental in developing the concept of Scandinavian diaspora.[228] Jesch has argued that the Icelanders meet most of the criteria for diaspora given by Robin Cohen, barring of course those that relate to interaction with a host community.[229] These are: a traumatic dispersal from the homeland (Norway); expansion in search of work, trade or colonisation; a collective memory of the homeland; an idealisation of the ancestral home; continuous return or conversation with the homeland; strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and a sense of co-responsibility with co-ethnic members abroad.[230] This concept of a Scandinavian diaspora that saw 'co-ethnicity' across the Scandinavian colonies calls into question the existence of a distinct Icelandic ethnicity. However, as Abrams notes, in order to draw these conclusions we must draw on later sources such as the sagas.[231] *Laxdæla saga* demonstrates that using these late texts may distort our understanding of the Icelandic migration narrative.

Laxdæla saga demonstrates the 'traumatic dispersal' from Norway recorded in many sagas. Auðr the Deep-minded and her family leave Norway because her father, Ketill Flatnose, realises that King Haraldr Finehair will not be content leaving Ketill in possession of his customary power and influence. Ketill tells his family that they cannot trust the king and they must leave Norway or be slain. His children choose to leave, the two brothers, Bjǫrn and Helgi, to Iceland, and Auðr with her father to Scotland. It is not until Auðr's son, Thorstein, is killed harrying and her father also dies that she travels on to Iceland, and after staying with her brother she claims land where her high-seat pillars wash up.[232] This narrative emphasises the overbearing and untrustworthy nature of the Norwegian monarchy, echoed in other sagas such as *Egils saga*, in which King Haraldr refuses to pay appropriate wergild to Kveldúlfr for the death of his son. The slight against Ketill is less specific than that against Kveldúlfr, but it is suggested that he expects to suffer similar mistreatment. *Laxdæla saga* gives Ketill's reason for leaving Norway as hearing that Haraldr will 'honum slíkan kost ætlat sem ǫðrum ríkismǫnnum, at hafa frænd óbœtta, en gǫrr þó at leigumanni sjálfr' (offer him such a choice as to other great men, to have kinsmen uncompensated, and even himself become a hireman).[233] This appears to have been drawn from *Egils saga* or a similar story, as nothing of this kind actually happens to Ketill in the narrative, but he is depicted as anticipating

[228] Abrams, "Diaspora and Identity"; Jesch, *The Viking Diaspora*.
[229] Jesch, *The Viking Diaspora*, p. 70.
[230] Ibid., pp. 71-79.
[231] Abrams, "Diaspora and Identity", p. 20.
[232] *Laxdæla Saga* (Reykjavik, 1934), pp. 4-9.
[233] Ibid., p. 4.

the very thing that Kveldúlfr suffers happening to him. Indeed, what has actually transpired between Ketill and Haraldr to make him so suspicious is omitted from the narrative; Ketill only says Haraldr has 'fjándskap' (ill intention) towards him.[234] The implication of the text is that Ketill has heard of Haraldr's behaviour towards other men of standing in Norway, perhaps including Kveldúlfr given the reference to uncompensated kinsmen, and feels that behaviour will be turned upon him. However, *Laxdæla saga* was written down in its first extant copy in the mid thirteenth century, and it is not known whether this was truly the first version of the story, or whether it was preserved orally from an earlier period. It is believed that the sagas had existed in oral form for some time before they were written down, but this does not mean they were not altered to suit contemporary tastes when they were recorded.[235] Ketill's complaint about Haraldr Finehair may therefore be a very clear thirteenth-century memory of rumours circulating in Norway in the ninth century, or it may an example of a trope that developed either in the thirteenth century itself or the intervening period.

The narrative of the iniquity of Haraldr Finehair is not echoed in *Landnámabók*, or in the shorter account in *Íslendingabók*, suggesting that it may have been a later development. *Landnámabók* does not include the circumstances of Auðr leaving Norway with her father. Instead, she is introduced as living in Ireland, having married the Irish king, Óláfr the White, and she leaves for Scotland after his death, where the narrative then re-joins the version in *Laxdæla saga*.[236] *Landnámbók*'s version of Ketill's disagreement with Haraldr Finehair is also different, as *Landnámabók* describes, 'Enn er Ketill helt skǫttum fyrir Haraldi konungi enum hárfagra, þá rak konungr Bjǫrn son hans af eignum sínum ok tók undir sik.' (But when Ketill held tribute from King Haraldr Finehair, then the king drove his son Bjǫrn out of his own possessions and took them under himself.)[237] This is a rather different account, and it does not necessarily fault Haraldr. Rather, it is neutral as to which party is at fault, and whether Ketill should have paid tribute or Haraldr's demands were unreasonable is not stated. Certainly, none of the outrage at having to pay tribute and submit to Haraldr's power that is found in *Laxdæla saga* is found in *Landnámabók*. It is also notable that this is not a family-wide displacement event, as Auðr is already away from Norway at this time, Ketill is in the British Isles, and Bjǫrn's other siblings are not mentioned here. Although it was only written perhaps a few decades earlier, *Landnámabók* does not appear to share *Laxdæla saga*'s desire to represent the family's settlement of Iceland as a traumatic dislocation from

[234] Ibid., p. 4.
[235] Quinn, "From orality to literacy in medieval Iceland", p. 31.
[236] Benediktsson, *Íslendingabók; Landnámabók*, p. 136.
[237] Ibid., p. 122.

Norway due to the overbearing nature of the Norwegian monarch. *Laxdæla saga* may have used *Landnámabók* as a source, and many of the descriptions are similar, such as Auðr leaving Scotland, but it is clear that the traumatic dispersal motif does not come from *Landnámabók*. It also does not appear to come from *Íslendingabók*, which only mentions Auðr as an ancestor of Bishop Þorlákr. The disagreement with King Haraldr and the time spent in Scotland are not mentioned.[238] This does not necessarily mean that traumatic displacement was a novel idea in the mid thirteenth century, since it may have been preserved orally or written in a now lost text, but it does suggest that there was a specific impulse to record or create the motif in this period.

Laxdæla saga was written at a time in which the Icelanders were struggling to maintain the integrity of their own system of governance and independence from Norway, culminating in the 1264 submission, so a negative impression of Norwegian royal power may have been timely. Moreover, that the Icelanders were a people who had left Norway specifically for the purpose of avoiding an overbearing Norwegian monarch may have been a characteristic that the Icelanders wanted to emphasise and develop at this particular time. This characteristic is somewhat at odds with the simple representation in *Íslendingabók*, discussed above, that the Icelanders came from Norway to claim land. Rather than being a feature of the migration itself, the 'traumatic dispersal' now seen as integral to the 'Scandinavian diaspora' theory by scholars such as Judith Jesch may have been a late addition to the origin myth as it adapted to the politics of the mid thirteenth century.[239] This in turn problematises the idea inherent in diaspora that the dispersed are 'co-ethnic', that is, members of the same ethnic group.[240] If the 'traumatic dispersal' element of the proposed diaspora was in fact a later invention intended to distance the Icelanders from their Norwegian neighbours, as is suggested by the context in which it is introduced into the textual sources, then this migration myth was not used to encourage 'a sense of empathy and co-responsibility with co-ethnic members abroad'.[241] It was instead intended to strengthen the sense of a separate ethnic identity in response to a threat to the integrity of that identity. The development of the Icelandic migration myth over the course of the thirteenth century served to differentiate the Icelanders further from the Norwegians through the introduction of a traumatic shared Icelandic history.

[238] Ibid., p. 26.
[239] Jesch, *The Viking Diaspora*, p. 71.
[240] Abrams, "Diaspora and Identity", p. 20.
[241] Ibid., p. 20.

Conclusion

The recording of an origin myth was an act of identification that allowed groups to express certain characteristics that were seen as fundamental to their identity. It is also clear that circumstance, both the history of the group and the political context when the texts were written, had a significant influence on the way groups represented themselves. The Anglo-Saxon migration had happened in the fifth century, while the Icelandic migration happened in the ninth, and this may have allowed the Icelanders access to more accurate and detailed information about what had actually happened during their migration. The result of this difference may have been the focus on individuals in the Icelandic migration narrative and the focus on the groups in the Anglo-Saxon migration myth. However, these groups used their different histories and contexts to express what they wished to emphasise about their own identity. It suited the Anglo-Saxon elite to be vague about the identities of those who migrated and the Icelandic elite to be specific. The origin myths had a foundation in the shared history of the migration, which shaped what was seen as characteristic of identity, but certain facets of the available information were emphasised and preserved in response to what was seen as significant by the elite. In this way, the origin myths were shaped by the dual forces of the history and politics of these groups and so were ideal symbols of identity.

The use of the origin myth in acts of identification shows a process of development in both these groups. *Landnámabók* and *Íslendingabók* demonstrate this. The origin myth presented in *Íslendingabók* is more compact than the later *Landnámabók*, and it barely mentions settlers from the British Isles. *Landnámabók* presents a far more detailed account and includes far more references to settlers from Ireland and Britain, although these settlers are generally low status and the core message from *Íslendingabók*, that the settlers were Norwegian, is maintained. These additional details included in *Landnámabók* were either preserved elsewhere but not considered appropriate for inclusion in *Íslendingabók*, or they were invented for *Landnámabók*. In either case, it is clear that the context in which the origin myth is recorded affects the information included, and this in turn affects the characteristics with which the group is identified. It may have been that in the early twelfth century, when *Íslendingabók* was written, a simple message of a single origin for the Icelanders was all that was required from the origin myth, and that this altered in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century when more details about specific settlers were required. Likewise, the Anglo-Saxon origin myth developed throughout the Anglo-Saxon period and was employed in different ways to suit the elite establishment. Although the widespread use of Bede's early account of the migration led to quite a uniform origin myth, hints of varying characterisations may be seen

in the movement away from the early equating of the pre-conversion Anglo-Saxons with the Chaldeans towards an equation with the Israelites. It certainly seems to be the case that new characteristics are emphasised by these acts of identification using the origin myths of these groups as the context that these groups experience changes. For the Icelanders, this was the emphasis on their traumatic dispersal from Iceland at the hands of Haraldr Finehair, included from the mid twelfth century. For the Anglo-Saxons, this was the increasing identification of the Anglo-Saxon migration with the Jewish exodus, which reached its height in the late tenth century, as will be established in more detail in later chapters. The origin myths were therefore used in collective acts of identification in ways that were closely linked to context and the interests of the elite. While these origin myths were adapted as needed, they were still extremely effective at creating a belief in group identity, and this belief has continued to affect modern conceptions of Anglo-Saxon and Icelandic identity.

Language

Language is one of the most immediately obvious characteristics associated with ethnicity, both in the medieval and modern periods. It is both a behavioural and a cultural quality, and it demonstrates differences of history and culture between groups, so it can be significant to ethnicity in a variety of contexts. Spoken language is extremely hard to reconstruct for the medieval period, and even if such a thing were possible, the significance of this language to ethnic identity would be hard to understand. We cannot reconstruct acts of identification that were spoken except if they were recorded in a text, and this gives us only a second-hand impression of these acts. Efforts to reconstruct the interactions between spoken languages through their depiction in texts can still be instructive, such as Alaric Hall's study of the interlinguistic communication in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (*HE*).[242] Hall's examination of the *HE* is illuminating as to how Bede viewed the relationships between different spoken languages, but our understanding of the significance of spoken language more widely is limited even in this approach by the lack of evidence for context. For example, what does the author of the First Grammatical Treatise mean when he writes that the Icelanders and English are 'einnar tungu' (of one tongue)?[243] If the Icelanders really saw themselves as speaking the same language as the English then clearly our modern ideas about language were very different to theirs. If the author did not mean this, then while we can speculate, we do not truly understand what he did mean. We cannot gain a complete impression of the significance of spoken language as an act of identification from references to spoken language in texts.

Studying written language is more fruitful because the texts studied are themselves acts of identification. Both the Anglo-Saxons and Icelanders wrote in a vernacular language, Old English and Old Norse respectively, as well as producing non-vernacular texts in Latin. The act of identification is not necessarily in the language used in the text – language can be functional as well as ideological – but in the significance given to language as a characteristic of ethnicity. Texts that actively encourage the use of one language over another or claim a specific language for a specific group are particularly instructive. The relationship between Latin and the vernacular is significant in this regard, because both of these groups had initially been literate in Latin following their

[242] Alaric Hall, "Interlinguistic Communication in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*", in Agnes Kiricsi, Alaric Hall, Olga Timofeeva and Bethany Fox (ed.), *Interfaces between Language and Culture in Medieval England: A Festschrift for Matti Kilpiö* (Leiden, 2010).
[243] Haugen, "First Grammatical Treatise", p. 12.

conversions to Christianity before developing literacy in their own language.[244] Latin was not a language that any one group could claim, and so the use of language to characterise identity generally focussed on the vernacular. Nevertheless, Latin had an important place in these societies because it linked them both to Christianity and Christian Europe. Language was a way to symbolise shared similarities and differences both within the group and between groups. For the Anglo-Saxons, the focus of their linguistic acts of identification was on shared characteristics within the group, for the Icelanders it was on characterising difference from other groups.

England

The earliest and perhaps most explicit linking of Anglo-Saxon language and identity is found in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (*HE*). This text was written earlier than the period considered here, but its influence on later Anglo-Saxon thought, particularly in Alfred's court in the late ninth century, was significant. Although I have used the *OEHE* elsewhere, I will briefly consider the *HE* here because of its significance as a pre-vernacular text that influenced later vernacular texts. In the *HE*, Bede names the five languages of the five different peoples living in Britain: English, British, Scottish, Pictish, and Latin.[245] The way these 'quinque gentium linguis' (five languages of different groups) are treated by Bede makes it difficult to determine the exact relationship between language and people, as Latin is given as a language, therefore implying that it belongs to a *gens*, but is then described as 'communis' (common) to all groups.[246] Indeed, these languages are not described as spoken languages, but rather written languages with which the 'sublimitatis scientiam scrutatur' (study of divine knowledge) could be undertaken, although the extent to which scripture was studied in any of the vernaculars Bede mentions in the eighth century is unclear.[247] The suggestion of the passage must surely be that Bede viewed language as the means through which a specific group wrote and experienced divine law, and that is what he portrayed in the *HE*. This is an early example of the Anglo-Saxon peoples being treated as a single unit. Although they were divided politically into kingdoms in this period, Bede portrays the Anglo-Saxons as being united by a common language and religion. This grouping together is not the same as the ideology of political or ethnic unity that would emerge later, but it was a foundation upon which the elite of the ninth and tenth centuries could build a single Anglo-Saxon identity. Later

[244] Although runic inscriptions do appear to have been used for some purposes prior to conversion. Quinn, "From orality to literacy in medieval Iceland", p. 30; Rosalind Love, "Insular Latin Literature to 900", in Clare A. Lees (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Early Medieval English Literature* 2012), pp. 122-123.
[245] Bede, *Bede's ecclesiastical history of the English people*, p. 16.
[246] Ibid., p. 16.
[247] Ibid., p. 16; Hall, "Interlinguistic Communication", pp. 41-42.

texts used the concept that the Anglo-Saxons were a people who shared a single language to promote a unified identity. The use of the vernacular in texts began developing in earnest during Alfred's reign, and the ideological foundation that accompanied this change was largely established in this period, with further development throughout the tenth century.

The Emergence of Vernacular Literacy

In spite of the early linking of the Anglo-Saxons to their language, writing in the vernacular only became widespread in the late ninth century, although there are some examples of earlier vernacular texts.[248] Janet Bately's detailed survey of vernacular prose texts from before 900 has shown that the majority of these texts came from the West Saxon region, and a smaller number from the Anglian region.[249] Donald Scragg has also suggested a tradition of vernacular writing in ninth-century Northumbria, but this appears limited in comparison to the West Saxon corpus.[250] It is therefore probable that the majority of these texts were created under the auspices of Alfred's court, although it is not clear whether Alfred was directly responsible for them or whether they were a response to the promotion of vernacular literacy and translation that Alfred undertook. There are seven vernacular translations that survive from the late ninth century – *Pastoral Care*, *Dialogues*, *Consolation of Philosophy*, *Soliloquies*, *Psalms*, Orosius, and the *OEHE* – associated to varying degrees with Alfred.[251] There has been some debate about which of these can truly be associated with Alfred, with Bately arguing that *Pastoral Care*, *Consolation of Philosophy*, *Soliloquies*, Psalms are all attributable to Alfred's influence, while Malcom Godden contends that only *Dialogues* and *Pastoral Care* can be associated with Alfred.[252] For the purposes of this thesis, these translations and other associated texts are considered to be acts of collective self-representation by the elite establishment because they were written at court or other elite centres of text production and because many of them use the king's name.[253] Most pertinent of these texts to my argument is Alfred's Preface to the Old English translation of Gregory's *Regula Pastoralis* (henceforth *Pastoral Care*). This Preface, written in Alfred's voice and backed by his authority, reflects on the state of learning in England

[248] Janet Bately, "Old English Prose Before and During the Reign of Alfred", *Anglo-Saxon England,* 17 (1988), p 94; Malcom Godden, "The Alfredian Project and Its Aftermath: Rethinking the Literary History of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries", *Proceedings of the British Academy,* 162 (2009), p. 120; Donald Scragg, "A Ninth-Century Old English Homily From Northumbria", *Anglo-Saxon England,* 45 (2016), pp. 147-149.
[249] Ibid., p. 118.
[250] Scragg, "A Ninth-Century Old English Homily From Northumbria", p. 49.
[251] Godden, "The Alfredian Project", p. 119.
[252] Malcolm Godden, "Literary Language", in Richard Hogg (ed.), *Volume 1: The Beginnings to 1066* 1992), p. 513; Godden, "The Alfredian Project", p. 121; Janet Bately, "Did King Alfred Actually Translate Anything? The Integrity of the Alfredian Canon Revisited", *Medium Ævum,* 78.2 (2009), p. 209.
[253] Godden, "The Alfredian Project".

at the beginning of Alfred's reign, and sets out a programme of translation and educational reform for the country.[254] Whether or not this programme existed outside the elite imagination is unclear. However, it is not necessary for an act of identification to have visible impact in order for it to be significant.[255] The Preface characterises the Anglo-Saxons as having a shared linguistic history which implies unity and as sharing a vernacular language that has a high status.

The first section of the text is devoted to the country's descent from a golden age of learning to the apparently poor state Alfred has found, and it constructs a prestigious shared history for the Anglo-Saxons. In this age of learning, before viking raiding disrupted monastic life, it is remembered that, 'gesæliglica tida ða wæron giond Angelcynn' (happier times were throughout England).[256] This may not be an accurate representation of the earlier period, but it does demonstrate how Alfred and his circle wished the new Anglo-Saxon kingdom to conceive of its history. This past is unifying for all of those who might now consider themselves Alfred's subjects, as it is relevant 'giond Angelcynn' (throughout England). This suggests that learning and literacy provided a unity for the Anglo-Saxons that preceded political unity. There were 'wioten' (wise men) 'giond Angelcynn', who were both 'godcundra' (religious) and 'woruldcundra' (secular).[257] Again, 'giond Angelcynn' is used, the repetition of which suggests that there was no part of this constructed history that did not belong to Alfred or his West Saxon circle, in spite of the fact that much of the learning being referred to must have taken place outside Wessex. Bede, a Northumbrian, in particular looms large throughout this section of the text, although he is not named, as part of the pre-viking tradition of wise men writing religious texts.[258] While the geographical reach of the area termed 'Angelcynn', which is the term used to describe the Anglo-Saxons as a people and their land, is not specified, it seems capable of encompassing both the West Saxons and the Northumbrians. The 'Angel-' section derives from the *Angli* (Angles) from whom the Northumbrians took their descent, but the term was adopted by the West Saxons in the ninth century in spite of their purported Saxon descent. Northumbria itself was not under West Saxon rule at the time Alfred was pursuing his literary project, but clearly the literary achievements of past Northumbrians could be claimed by Alfred as part of Anglo-Saxon shared history.[259] A literary past that was not divided along the lines of the erstwhile Anglo-Saxon kingdoms was,

[254] Susan Irvine, "English Literature in the Ninth Century", in Clare A. Lees (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Early Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 227-229.
[255] Pohl, "Introduction — Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile", p. 43.
[256] *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's* Pastoral Care (London, 1871), p. 3.
[257] Ibid., p. 3.
[258] Catherine E. Karkov, *The Ruler Portraits of Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2004), p. 35.
[259] Molyneaux, *Formation of the English Kingdom*, pp. 26-27.

therefore, constructed for all the Anglo-Saxons to share. This shared history is not specifically linguistic, as most of the learning described would have been Latin, but it was used as a precursor to a vernacular literary identity.

While glorifying the learned past, the Preface makes clear that the future of literacy in England will be vernacular, creating a distinct break with the past and strengthening Anglo-Saxon linguistic identity. The impetus for this break, the Preface suggests, is the literary dark age into which England has fallen. Between the beginning of viking raiding and Alfred's present, the Preface claims, the Anglo-Saxons had lost the ability to read Latin and could no longer access the work of their forefathers.[260] The Preface argues that a new literary path is therefore necessary, one which earlier learned men had not taken, although the potential criticism here is ameliorated with the suggestion that the scholars of the past could not have predicted the state to which Anglo-Saxon learning had declined.[261] Alfred's contemporaries could not understand the texts of the past because 'hie næron ón hiora agen geðiode awritene' (they were not written in their own language).[262] Again, it is significant that there is a claim to a communal Anglo-Saxon identity here in 'hiora agen geðiode' (their own language). This is the most basic level of identity formation – the simple claiming of a communal language in opposition to other languages. The opposition presented in the Preface is between the Anglo-Saxons' own language and Latin, a learned language held in high regard but not 'hiora agen geðiode'. The Preface not only provides this basic identification of the Anglo-Saxons with their own language, but also demonstrates a more complex process of identity formation, the development of vernacular literature. The plan proposed by the Preface, to 'ðæt geðiode wenden ðe we ealle gecnawen mægen' (translate into a language that we can all understand) 'niedbeðearfosta' (the most necessary) texts, appears practical, but it is set against an ideological background.[263] The Preface sets Alfred's proposed translation project within a tradition of the translation of biblical scripture, from the Greeks' translation of Hebrew, to the Romans translating Greek, to diverse Christian groups translating into their own languages.[264] This alters the translation of Latin into Old English from a practical reaction to the poor state of Latin learning in England to a continuation of a venerable religious tradition. The Anglo-Saxons become part of this flow of Christian translation, something with which the pre-unification wise men had not engaged. The Preface, therefore, establishes a new mode of learning and literacy for the Anglo-Saxons. Learned texts would now be in the vernacular, and although past wisdom was

[260] *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, p. 3.
[261] Ibid., p. 5.
[262] Ibid., p. 5.
[263] Ibid., p. 7.
[264] Ibid., p. 7.

acknowledged and built upon, Latin literacy was no longer relevant in the way it had been. This new path rests on Christian traditions of translation, giving it a status that is distinct from past learning, and giving vernacular literacy a new significance.

This new mode of literacy in Anglo-Saxon England altered the existing hierarchy of languages, made the use of Old English characteristic of Anglo-Saxon identity and made Old English more prestigious. The Preface demonstrates a movement away from the past, in which Latin learning was prized, and into the future, in which Old English would be prioritised. Hall has established that Latin was viewed by Bede and others in the pre-unification period as a higher status language than Old English, for both practical and ideological reasons.[265] It is often assumed that the Preface portrays Old English as a stepping stone for Latin learning, but this is not supported by the language of the text.[266] The Preface suggests that in Alfred's new age of Anglo-Saxon learning, Old English should assume a prestigious status as both the practical and ideological first choice of language.[267] It provides for all young freemen in England ('on Angelcynne') to learn to 'Englisc gewrit arædan' (read English writing).[268] Only then might Latin be taught to those destined for 'hierran hade', usually translated as 'holy orders', but suggested by Godden to mean nothing more specific than 'higher office'.[269] The Preface presents this as a break from tradition, an innovation on Alfred's part, by describing the logic behind Alfred's instruction.[270] This was far more than just the linking of a language with a group as it simultaneously linked the Anglo-Saxons with their language and attached high status to that language. The Preface articulates a programme that, through the prioritisation of its use, transformed the vernacular into a language of high enough status to be part of the tradition of ecclesiastical translation that included Hebrew, Greek and Latin.[271] It suggests that Latin was a practical requirement for those seeking high office and provided a link to pre-unification history as the language of learned writing, but Old English was characteristic of Anglo-Saxon identity. It may be that the elite wished to promote Old English in this way to attempt to give higher status to the nascent Anglo-Saxon identity. Language was one of the few characteristics that the groups that were starting to coalesce into the Anglo-Saxons

[265] Hall, "Interlinguistic Communication", pp. 49-62.
[266] Irvine, "English Literature in the Ninth Century", p. 217; Helen Gittos, "The Audience for Old English Texts: Ælfric, Rhetoric and 'the Edification of the Simple'", *Anglo-Saxon England,* 43 (2014), pp. 233, 261.
[267] Gittos, "The Audience for Old English Texts: Ælfric, Rhetoric and 'the Edification of the Simple'", p. 262.
[268] Ibid., p. 7.
[269] Ibid., p. 7; Malcom Godden, "King Alfred's Preface and the Teaching of Latin in Anglo-Saxon England", *The English Historical Review,* 117.472 (2002), p. 602.
[270] In fact, Alfred's translation project may not have been as innovative as suggested by the Preface, as Godden has suggested a number of vernacular translations that may have predated Alfred's reign. It is therefore significant that Alfred is making these claims in the Preface. (Godden, "The Alfredian Project", pp. 121-120)
[271] Robert Stanton, *The culture of translation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2002), p. 72.

shared, and so focusing on this shared characteristic and promoting it may have been designed to promote unity.

That this choice to promote vernacular literacy was a response to the shared language of the earlier Anglo-Saxon kingdoms is suggested by the similarities and differences between the Preface's proposed project and the Carolingian literary project. Alfred's proposed project may have been based on Charlemagne's literary project, and the Carolingian project was, like Alfred's, presented as a rejuvenation of learning in the kingdom, but it was Latin learning, not vernacular literacy. Godden has shown that the Preface to *Pastoral Care* has clear influences from Carolingian prefaces, particularly those written by Alcuin and Paul the Deacon.[272] There is evidence that Alcuin's work was known to Alfred and his court, and therefore it seems likely that the Preface was written with an awareness of the earlier Carolingian literacy programme and at least in some part in response to it.[273] Godden goes as far as to suggest that the Preface may consciously imitate the Carolingian preface to Paul the Deacon's homiliary in order to present Alfred's literary programme as a direct continuation of Charlemagne's.[274] However, Charlemagne's programme of education reform in the early ninth century concerned Latin literacy and Alfred's programme in the late ninth century was designed to educate people in the vernacular. The choice to promote the vernacular as a characteristic of Anglo-Saxon identity therefore appears to have been influenced by the context in which the Anglo-Saxon elite found themselves in the late ninth century, which was markedly different from the Carolingian's position. The groups under Carolingian rule spoke a variety of Germanic and Romance languages, so Latin provided a *lingua franca* and reinforced the dominance of the Carolingian establishment.[275]

The Anglo-Saxons, on the other hand, shared a language before they were ever united politically, as described by Bede in his *HE*. At the time Bede was writing the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were not unified, but clearly the idea that they shared a language, which differentiated them from the other groups inhabiting Britain, was current. Alfred drew heavily from Bede, and the Old English translation of Bede's *HE* was made around this time. Although the *OEHE* appears to be of Anglian origin, the Preface is West Saxon and suggests West Saxon dissemination

[272] Malcom Godden, "Prologues and Epilogues in the Old English Pastoral Care, and Their Carolingian Models", *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology,* 110.4 (2011), pp. 443-445.
[273] Ibid., pp. 445-446
[274] Ibid., pp. 452-453.
[275] Janet Nelson, "Literacy in Carolingian Government", in Rosamund McKitterick (ed.), *The Uses of Literacy in Early Mediaeval Europe* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 263-264.

of the text around this period.[276] It is unclear from Bede's text to what extent he believed the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms shared an identity, as he uses the term *Angli*, the exact meaning of which is unclear.[277] His history treats the Anglo-Saxons as a single people in a religious and linguistic sense, but recognises the political, and to some extent ethnic, differences between the kingdoms. Most notably, Bede describes the continental origins of the various kingdoms, demonstrating their differing histories. It is therefore not possible to say that Bede's *HE* presents a unified ethnic identity for the Anglo-Saxons, but it does present a unified linguistic identity for them. This unified linguistic identity was not enough by itself to create the impression of a single Anglo-Saxon people, but it was a characteristic that could be used by Alfred and his court as they attempted to build a unified identity.[278] The Preface to *Pastoral Care* makes it clear that Old English was the language of Alfred's kingdom, one which he wished to promote to a higher status than it previously held. The vernacular was a shared characteristic for the Anglo-Saxons, one which implied shared history as well as shared behaviour, and the Preface formalised this by promoting vernacular literacy in a way that made reference to this shared history.

The Preface to *Pastoral Care*, while itself an act of collective identification, also requests acts of individual identification with the group from members. This request appears to have been made at a time when the permanence of the group was by no means assured. The political unity that Alfred and his elite were trying to establish within what remained of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms after the Scandinavian invasion was not stable when the Preface was written in the 890s and would only become a reality under his son and grandson. The new kingdom under West Saxon control encompassed a number of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, most notably Mercia.[279] The Preface's request for young men to be educated in Old English allowed for some members, still elite members but acting on an individual level, to actively participate in this newly unified Anglo-Saxon identity by educating themselves in the vernacular or associating themselves with vernacular literacy. The Preface orders that 'eall sio gioguð ðe nu is on Angelcynne friora monna' (all the young free men who are now in England) learn vernacular literacy; it does not limit who those free men should be in any other way. This open statement would have allowed for acts of individual identification by individuals from a variety of non-West-Saxon backgrounds, certainly Mercians and perhaps even Scandinavians settling from the Danelaw or Britons on the Welsh border who might not otherwise be identified with Anglo-Saxon ethnicity. If Irvine is correct in her assertion that Mercia was seen

[276] See below, pp. 87-90. Greg Waite, "The Preface to the Old English Bede: Authorship, Transmission, and Connection With the *West Saxon Genealogical Regnal List*", *Anglo-Saxon England,* 44 (2015), p. 86.
[277] Lemke, *The Old English Translation of Bede's HE*, p. 368.
[278] Stanton, *The culture of translation in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 70-72.
[279] Molyneaux, *Formation of the English Kingdom*, p. 25.

as a seat of vernacular learning in the early ninth century, then the West Saxon adoption of this characteristic may have been a way of incorporating Mercian individuals into the group by claiming a characteristic that was significant to them.[280] In this way, the Preface not only requested individual identification but compelled it, making any individual use of vernacular literacy an act of identification with the group. We cannot know the extent to which individuals wished to make acts of identification in this period, but we can see the close link this text forged between an activity that individuals may have wished to engage in for practical reasons and Anglo-Saxon identity. As the dominant political force, the elite establishment was able to claim vernacular literacy as a characteristic of Anglo-Saxon ethnicity and construct a sense of shared identity.

Continuing Development of the Vernacular

Following the initial flourishing of Anglo-Saxon vernacular literacy, a fairly vibrant literary tradition appears to have been established. Vernacular language was used extensively for ecclesiastical and legal texts and the language was refined, with even some movement apparently made towards standardisation.[281] However, there were two contradictory strains of discourse surrounding the use of the vernacular. There were many vernacular translations of Latin texts made in the tenth century, often associated with the Benedictine reform, and this suggests an ongoing development and elevation of the vernacular.[282] On the other hand, there were texts written, some as prefaces, prologues or associated in other ways with these translations, that describe Old English as a language unsuitable for the communication of complex religious or philosophical ideas.[283] Some tenth-century texts that discuss translation, such as Æthelwold's *Edgar's Establishment of Monasteries* and Ælfric's prefaces to *Catholic Homilies*, portray translation from Latin into Old English as a last resort because of the lack of Latin learning, and thus imply that Latin was the language of first preference.[284] This portrayal suggests that the Preface's practical impact may have been limited in making Old English the equal of Latin, but it also suggests that the Preface had been ideologically successful in associating vernacular literacy with the wider Anglo-Saxon group, as Elaine Treharne has noted.[285] The text that accompanied a copy of Æthelwold's translation of the *Rule of St Benedict*,

[280] Irvine, "English Literature in the Ninth Century", p. 212.
[281] Elaine Treharne, "The Authority of English, 900–1150", in Clare A. Lees (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Early Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 577-578.
[282] Gittos, "The Audience for Old English Texts: Ælfric, Rhetoric and 'the Edification of the Simple'", p. 260.
[283] Joyce Hill, "Translating the Tradition: Manuscripts, Models and Methodologies in the Composition of Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies*", *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library,* 79.1 (1997), p. 65.
[284] Treharne, "The Authority of English, 900–1150", pp. 561-563; Melinda J. Menzer, "Ælfric's Grammar: Solving the Problme of the English-Language Text", *Neophilologus,* 83 (1999), p. 638.
[285] Treharne, "The Authority of English, 900–1150", p. 562

usually called *Edgar's Establishment of Monasteries*, describes the translation's intended audience as 'ungelæreden inlendisce' (unlearned natives) who could only learn through reading their own language ('agenes gereordes').[286] It must be assumed that Æthelwold, writing around the 960s, used 'inlendisce' (natives) to describe the Anglo-Saxons rather than the Britons as the text was, David Pratt has suggested, intended for a female monastic house in Wessex and written in King Edgar's voice.[287] Æthelwold's text, an act of collective identification in terms of its elite production and use of the king's name, strongly identifies the Anglo-Saxon group with their language. Treharne has described Old English as, 'the authorized and validated written medium for national elite networks, ecclesiastical and political'.[288] The broader intelligibility of the vernacular meant that it had widespread use at all levels, and wide usage secured its position as a shared characteristic integral to Anglo-Saxon identity.

It appears from their texts that tenth-century writers such as Æthelwold and Ælfric, while acknowledging that Old English was the language that characterised their people, did not feel that it was a high-status language fit for scholarly discourse.[289] However, it may be hazardous to assume that the objections to translation raised by these writers were a reflection of their beliefs, because, as Helen Gittos has established, they are often expressed in prefaces that draw on classical conventions and modesty *topoi*.[290] There is also some evidence that the vernacular was being developed and standardised by those same writers in order to make it more suitable for distinguished texts. Scholars who argue that Old English was standardised into the dialect often called 'late West Saxon' generally assert that it occurred at Winchester under the guidance of Æthelwold, Bishop of Winchester, the same writer who suggested Old English was for the 'ungelæreden' (unlearned).[291] Th standardisation hypothesis was set out most clearly by Helmut Gneuss in 1972, and his argument has been central to the view of Old English standardisation.[292] Gnuess proposes that the translations and interlinear glosses produced at Winchester in the late tenth century show a deliberate process of language standardisation by their scribes.[293] This

[286] Martin Brett Dorothy Whitelock, Frederick Maurice Powicke and Christopher Brooke, (ed.), *Councils and Synods With Other Documents Relating to the English Church I: 871–1066* (Oxford, 1964), pp. 151-152; Gittos, "The Audience for Old English Texts: Ælfric, Rhetoric and 'the Edification of the Simple'", p. 237.
[287] David Pratt, "The Voice of the King in 'King Edgar's Establishment of Monasteries'", *Anglo-Saxon England,* 41 (2012), p. 196.
[288] Treharne, "The Authority of English, 900–1150", p. 570.
[289] Menzer, "Ælfric's Grammar: Solving the Problme of the English-Language Text", p. 369.
[290] Gittos, "The Audience for Old English Texts: Ælfric, Rhetoric and 'the Edification of the Simple'", pp. 258-259.
[291] Helmut Gneuss, "The Origin of Standard Old English and Æthelwold's School At Winchester", *Anglo-Saxon England,* 1 (1972), pp. 70-81.
[292] Mark Faulkner, "Quantifying the Consistency of 'Standard' Old English Spelling", *Transactions of the Philological Society,* 118.1 (2020), p. 192.
[293] Gneuss, "The Origin of Standard Old English", p. 81.

'process of language unification' was driven by the Benedictine reform, which prioritised a high standard of learning and literary production.[294] If Gneuss' argument is taken uncritically, it would imply that at this time active steps were taken on the part of some of the Anglo-Saxon intellectual elite to produce a standardised vernacular language. Mechthild Gretsch goes further in this regard, describing the development of the vernacular during the Benedictine reform as distinctively Anglo-Saxon.[295] The texts that are generally agreed to show a deliberate refinement of Old English, if not standardisation, are vernacular translations and interlinear glosses of Latin texts. These show that there was a deliberate development of vocabulary which could be used to translate Latin words.[296] Gneuss suggests this demonstrates a specific aim to create a 'literary language' from the vernacular, one that could be used to produce high-quality translated texts.[297] When considering the implications of this vernacular standardisation, Gneuss's idea of 'unification' is worth returning to. It has been argued above that the Preface presents language as a shared characteristic in order to promote unity. The ongoing standardisation of the vernacular may be understood as a continuation of this desire to represent unity through language.

While not all scholars see late West Saxon as a truly standardised language, it seems clear that movement in that direction can be found in some texts from the second half of the tenth century. Among others, Joan Beal and Lucia Kornexl have expressed doubt that there is enough evidence to call late West Saxon a standard Old English. These doubts pertain to the relatively high level of variation within late West Saxon texts, and the fact that the group of texts which uses this dialect is relatively small.[298] The latter is perhaps the most damning refutation of late West Saxon as the standard Old English, as any definition of a standard language for the Anglo-Saxons must require that language to be used across the Anglo-Saxon group. Kornexl compounds this by noting other instances of potential standardisation of various Old English dialects.[299] In response to these criticisms, Mark Faulkner has recently attempted a quantitative analysis of the standardisation of Old English. He studied the appearance of two language segments, the infinitive verb ending and the dipthong *ea/ēa*, in three databases of Old English texts, the York-Toronto-Helsinki-Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose, the Manchester Eleventh-Century Spellings

[294] Ibid., p. 82.
[295] Mechthild Gretsch, *The Intellectual Foundations of the English Benedictine Reform* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 427.
[296] Gneuss, "The Origin of Standard Old English", pp. 75-81.
[297] Ibid., p. 81.
[298] Lucia Kornexl, "Old English: Standardization", in Alexander Bergs and Laurel J. Brinton (ed.), *English Historical Linguistics: An International Handbook Vol 1* (Berlin, 2012), pp. 382-383; Joan C. Beal, "Standardization", in M. Kytö, & Pahta, P (ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of English Historical Linguistics* (Cambridge, 2016), pp. 306-307.
[299] Kornexl, "Old English: Standardization", p. 383.

Database, and the Linguistic Atlas of Early Middle English.[300] This study revealed, by Faulkner's analysis, a consistency of spelling across the source material which suggests a deliberate process of standardisation. He concludes this consistency 'is too stable over time, too regular across different regions and found in the work of too many scribes to be attributed merely to ordinary linguistic processes'.[301] While this is compelling evidence, the use of only two segments means that at this stage the technique cannot be said to have confirmed standardisation. A study of a wide range of language segments would be necessary to do so, and perhaps will in the future. It may not be possible to say there was definitely standardisation on the basis of the limited evidence available, but it is clearly the case that the Anglo-Saxon intellectual elite were interested in the further development of the vernacular, somewhat at odds with their protestations about the unsuitability of Old English.[302]

There therefore appears to have been ongoing acts of identification throughout the tenth century that gave significance to the vernacular as a characteristic of identity both through its association with group unity and through its ongoing use in high-status texts. It is significant that the same characteristics were given significance by acts of identification made at the West Saxon court of Alfred and at Winchester Cathedral a century later.[303] The Benedictine reform that began in the 960s was the driving force behind the text production that saw this tenth-century development of the vernacular. It was not the existential threat to the Anglo-Saxon group that Scandinavian invasion was in ninth and early eleventh century and Edgar's reign is usually described as peaceful.[304] However, the ecclesiastical elite who produced these texts, including Æthelwold and his circle, were intimately involved in the royal politics of the period.[305] These politics were still responding to the division of the kingdom under Eadwig that had directly proceeded Edgar's reign and may have been a result of deeper factional divisions within the court elite.[306] The divisions may have continued through Edgar's reign, as Shashi Jayakumar has suggested, and caused the instability that marked the reigns of his sons.[307] Within this political uncertainty, the Church establishment was recasting its role in politics, underscoring ecclesiastical unity and the unity of the ecclesiastical and royal establishments.[308] The two routes of using

[300] Faulkner, "'Standard' Old English Spelling", pp. 194-195.
[301] Ibid., p. 203.
[302] Gittos, "The Audience for Old English Texts: Ælfric, Rhetoric and 'the Edification of the Simple'", p. 265.
[303] Pratt, "The Voice of the King in 'King Edgar's Establishment of Monasteries'", p. 196.
[304] Molyneaux, *Formation of the English Kingdom*, p. 34.
[305] Pratt, "The Voice of the King in 'King Edgar's Establishment of Monasteries'", p. 154.
[306] Shashi Jayakumar, "Eadwig and Edgar: Politics, Propaganda, Faction", in Donald Scragg (ed.), *Edgar, King of the English 959–975: New Interpretations* (Woodbridge, 2008), pp. 83-90.
[307] Ibid., p. 103.
[308] Pratt, "The Voice of the King in 'King Edgar's Establishment of Monasteries'", p. 154.

language as a characteristic of ethnicity discussed above, presenting it as a trait shared by the Anglo-Saxon masses and elevating it to a high status, may both have played a part in the political machinations of Edgar's reign. The vernacular translations that elevated Old English and the prefaces and associated texts that described it as a 'native' attribute were all acts of collective identification that emphasised shared characteristics and group unity.

Iceland

Where the Anglo-Saxons predominantly presented language as a shared characteristic that symbolised unity within the group, the Icelanders used it to express difference from other groups. When considering language as a characteristic of ethnic identity in medieval Iceland, the most obvious concern must be that the Icelanders did not have a vernacular specific to them. Rather, they shared Old Norse with the rest of Scandinavia.[309] This has led to a certain amount of scholarly debate about whether the Icelanders had an Icelandic linguistic identity. Kirsten Hastrup and Lesley Abrams have both considered language as part of their wider studies of Icelandic identity.[310] Hastrup notes that language is not an index of ethnic identity, that is, there is no on-to-one equivalence between the spoken language and the ethnic group, but language is instead used to establish or change identity.[311] Therefore, Hastrup believes that texts such as *Íslendingabók* and the First Grammatical Treatise demonstrate that language shaped a specifically Icelandic identity.[312] In contrast, Abrams notes that the shared language of Scandinavia links Iceland to a broader 'cultural zone', rather than being a means by which they established an independent identity.[313] Both of these arguments have merit; the shared Norse language did allow the Icelanders to communicate internationally in their vernacular. However, the Icelanders also used language, particularly their skills in vernacular literature, to characterise their group as different from other Scandinavian groups and express how they wished to be viewed by other groups.

Claiming the Vernacular

In spite of the fact that the Icelanders shared Norse with other Scandinavian groups, they still made the production of vernacular texts characteristic of their identity. The Icelanders were the

[309] Stephen Pax Leonard, *Language, Society and Identity in early Iceland* (Chichester, 2012), p. 90.
[310] Kirsten Hastrup, "Establishing an Ethnicity: The Emergence of the 'Icelanders' in the Early Middle Ages", in David Parkin (ed.), *Semantic Anthropology* (London, 1982), p. 152; Abrams, "Diaspora and Identity", p. 21.
[311] Hastrup, "Establishing an Ethnicity", p. 152.
[312] Ibid., p. 152.
[313] Abrams, "Diaspora and Identity", p. 21.

most prolific writers of Old Norse.[314] Preben Meulengracht Sørensen seeks to explain what he sees as the paradox of a country that was otherwise slow to develop in a medieval European context having such a high literary production. He argues that it is both a product of the high level of education in Iceland and a result of the 'exceptional circumstances' of the formation of Icelandic society, suggesting that such a society would want both to record its history and to shape its history through its literature in order establish its position within the wider Christian world.[315] The latter explanation is most relevant here, although practical considerations such as the former suggestion must be borne in mind. Literacy allowed the Icelanders both to place themselves in the culture of learning that existed internationally and to articulate their difference from outside groups, as Diana Whaley has identified.[316] Saga literature, in particular, functioned as a powerful act of collective self-representation in medieval Iceland due to its ability to present a range of characteristics including shared history, difference from other groups, idealised Icelandic behaviour and the Icelandic legal system. *Egils saga*, which communicates all of these characteristics at various points in the text, is pertinent to the present discussion because it contains a great deal of poetry apparently composed by the protagonist, and because there is sustained action outside Iceland, within other Scandinavia-controlled areas. Many of the characters with whom the protagonist, Egill, interacts are Norwegian or from further afield, and through their interactions the text shows us how Icelanders wished outsiders to view them. The saga reads largely as a list of Egill's and his family's successes against unjust and devious foreigners, and although the portrayal of Egill himself often seems unflattering to a modern reader, the results of his escapades and his victories in the face of insurmountable odds suggest that he is a figure who was designed by the Icelandic author to be admired as, if not attractive, certainly effective. The earliest manuscript fragment of the saga, in AM 162 A fol., appears to be from the mid thirteenth century.[317] This is an unsurprising time for a saga so deeply concerning the Norwegian court to have been written, as the first half of the thirteenth century saw waxing Norwegian influence in Iceland, culminating in the 1262/64 Icelandic submission to the Norwegian crown.[318] However, it must be remembered that this earliest manuscript exists only as a fragment, so our current understanding of the text is based on later manuscripts, but the thirteenth-century version is related to the later manuscript from which we take the full text, the fourteenth-century *Möðruvallabók*.[319] There has been speculation that *Egils*

[314] Einar Haugen, "Semicommunication: The Language Gap in Scandinavia", *Sociological Inquiry,* 36.2 (1966), p. 34.
[315] Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, "Social institutions and belief systems of medieval Iceland (c. 870-1400) and their relations to literary production" in Ross, *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, pp. 11-14.
[316] Diana Whaley, "A useful past: historical writing in medieval Iceland", in Ross, *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, p. 193.
[317] Bjarni Einarsson, *Egill's Saga* (London, 2003), p. ix-xv.
[318] Long, *Iceland's Relationship with Norway*, p. 141.
[319] Einarsson, *Egill's Saga*, p. ix.

saga was written by Snorri Sturluson, the author of the *Prose Edda*, but as this is unconfirmed, authorship will be assumed to have been among the Icelandic elite of which Snorri was a member.[320] *Egils saga* is therefore a text that simultaneously demonstrates how Icelanders saw their literary identity and their relationship with foreign groups.

The poetry in *Egils saga* is presented in a way that sets Icelandic poetry apart from that of other traditions. It is not composed in a traditionally literary setting such as a court or monastery, but often in the heat of the moment, and is used by Egill as a form of combat comparable to physical combat, in which Egill is equally proficient. While Egill, portrayed as visiting England in the mid tenth century, impresses King Æthelstan with his prowess in battle, and earns the king's favour, it is his poetic abilities that save him when he encounters King Erik at his court in York.[321] There is little insight throughout the poem as to exactly what composing poetry entails, but there is an interesting passage concerning Egill composing his praise poem for King Erik that describes his composition process, first using the verb 'yrkja' (to work, compose, here in the form 'orti'), then with 'hafði fest' (have fast, memorise) so that he 'mátti kveða' (could speak, could recite) the poem, suggesting a process of first composition then memorisation and recitation.[322] It is unclear whether this implies a physical writing process, and certainly the poem is set before the advent of Latin learning in Iceland, although it could be an anachronism on the part of the author, and reflect a thirteenth-century composition process. Whether this is strictly about vernacular literacy is therefore uncertain, but it does demonstrate the importance of vernacular poetry to the Icelanders. In all other cases in the saga, Egill does not seem to require the composition time, and instead produces stanzas as the situations require. When Egill fights the Swedish warrior Ljótr in Norway, he bests him not only in combat, but also interlaces his physical victory with taunting poetry. Ljótr is unable to match Egill in either.[323] Egill is clearly a prodigious poet, but his representativeness of Icelandic skalds has been viewed in varying lights. In the twentieth century, Lars Lönnroth saw Egill as an unattractive character who was the protagonist of his saga because he was interesting rather than admirable, while in stark contrast Jónas Kristjánsson believed Egill was 'portrayed with a spectacular grandeur which makes him unrivalled among all the great men we meet in the sagas of the Icelanders'.[324] These two opinions both seem extreme, and modern scholarship has shown Egill to be firmly within the mould of other Icelandic poets. He is referenced eight times in

[320] Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eddas and Sagas: Iceland's Medieval Literature,* trans. Peter Foote (Reykjavík, 1988), p. 269.
[321] Ibid., p. 81; p. 104.
[322] Ibid., p. 105.
[323] Ibid., pp. 118-121.
[324] Lars Lönnroth, "The Noble Heathen: A Theme in the Sagas", *Scandinavian Studies,* 41.1 (1969), p. 23; Kristjánsson, *Eddas and Sagas*, p. 69.

Skáldskaparmál, the second section of the *Prose Edda* which gives examples of kennings and other poetic language, making him the eleventh most referenced poet.[325] He is also held as the ancestor of a number of other significant Icelandic poets, including Snorri Sturluson and Einarr Skúlason.[326] *Egils saga* is therefore likely to present the tale of an illustrious but not atypical poet that the elite of the twelfth and thirteenth century who counted him as their ancestor would like to remember. It is clear from the evidence in this saga, then, that the Icelanders sought to characterise themselves as not only formidable warriors, but also more accomplished poets than other Scandinavian groups. This slightly unlikely priority for what was still a far from affluent society shows the importance of the Icelandic literary output to their identity.[327] It is clear that with *Egils saga*, the Icelanders, or at least the elite responsible for its composition, wished to demonstrate that poetry was an integral part of Icelandic life and identity, and a skill that they could utilise to great effect abroad.

While *Egils saga* represents a fictionalised, perhaps idealised, account of Icelandic vernacular literacy and how it represented Icelanders abroad, evidence for the development of language as a key feature of Icelandic identity in real terms is found in the grammatical treatises and other technical texts. The First Grammatical Treatise (1GT) is the earliest of these, dating from the mid twelfth century, and is one of the earliest texts in the vernacular.[328] It is particularly relevant to the current discussion, because its purpose was to provide the tools with which Icelandic could be effectively written using Latin letters. The opening section explains the anonymous author's motivation for writing, which is to provide a language by which Icelandic could be written. The text uses the terms 'oss íslendingum' (us Icelanders) and 'várrar tunga' (our tongue).[329] This alone is enough to suggest that there is already by the time of writing an understanding of a uniquely Icelandic written culture. Even more tellingly, the author explains that each 'þjóð' (people, race, nation) write in 'sina tungu' (their own tongue) when they 'lǫg sín setja menn á bœkr' (people set their laws in books). He also describes the pitfalls of using unsuitable foreign letters that do not adequately represent the sounds of a language, and uses the English as an example of a group who have managed to alter the Latin alphabet to suit their own language.[330]

[325] Jonas Wellendorf, "The Formation of an Old Norse Skaldic School Canon in the Early Thirteenth Century", *Interfaces,* 4 (2017), p. 135.
[326] Kari Ellen Gade, "Poetry and its changing importance in medieval Icelandic culture", in Ross, *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, pp. 79-83.
[327] Sørensen, "Social institutions and belief systems of medieval Iceland", p. 10.
[328] Haugen, "First Grammatical Treatise", p. 6.
[329] Ibid., p. 13.
[330] Ibid., p. 12. The author also claims that the Icelanders and the English share 'einnar tungu', and further investigation into the mutual intelligibility of languages would help our understanding of this text in the future.

These remarks clearly show that the author saw, and expected his readers to accept, a fundamental link between a group and its written language. The author describes the language he is developing as belonging to the Icelanders rather than the Scandinavians at large. The importance of this text to Icelandic identity formation has already been recognised by scholars such as Stephen Pax Leonard, who views the 1GT as early evidence of Icelandic 'cultural nationalism'.[331] In the context of ethnicity, the 1GT is a text that characterises the group as different from other groups through language. The Icelanders have their own language, the text claims, and they need to use an alphabet suitable for the vernacular to express it. It is notable that the 1GT never mentions Norse as a shared language, and while it does refer to '*danska tungu*' (Danish tongue) once, it is unclear whether this is to use it in the common sense of 'Norse language', or as another example of language writing techniques among other groups.[332] It is possible that at some points the Icelanders did not view their language as identical to the Danish language, due to the 'dialect cleaving' that had taken place between eastern and western Scandinavia.[333] Stephen Pax Leonard argues that the term *dönsk tunga* was superseded by *norræna* to mean the western Scandinavian language at some point in the late twelfth century, so perhaps a little later than the 1GT's composition, and it is clear that the exact meaning of the term *dönsk tunga* varied throughout the medieval period.[334] In this case, it seems to be referring to the Norse language as represented by an existing system of writing, perhaps used outside Iceland, in which the Latin alphabet is not altered when writing '*danska tungu*', resulting in an inferior text. As the 1GT is one of our earliest surviving Icelandic texts, it is uncertain whether the author meant that this practice was happening in Iceland, which would suggest the '*danska tungu*' refers to Norse in the usual way, or outside Iceland, which would make this a reference to foreign, flawed writing techniques. The author clearly views this system as inappropriate for the writing of Icelandic texts specifically, and tellingly calls Norse 'várrar tunga' when written correctly as he sees it, and '*danska tungu*' when written incorrectly. It seems most likely that the text is an attempt to promote a distinctive vernacular written language for the author's own specific group, which is described as Icelandic rather than Norse.[335] The author claims to have a practical motivation for doing so, which was to ensure that the correct sounds were available to writers. However, the text appears instead to have been more influential in its ideology than its practical application because, while writing in the vernacular became a notable part of Icelandic identity, the author's actual instructions have not been followed anywhere in our extant sources.[336] The

[331] Leonard, *Language, Society and Identity*, p. 131.
[332] Haugen, "First Grammatical Treatise", p. 14.
[333] Einar Haugen, "The Scandinavian Languages", *History of European Ideas,* 13.1-2 (1991), p. 34.
[334] Leonard, *Language, Society and Identity*, pp. 123-124.
[335] Diana Whaley, "A useful past", p. 162.
[336] Stefán Karlsson, *The Icelandic Language* (2004), p. 65.

1GT, then, is an early act of identification that gives significance to vernacular literacy as a characteristic of Icelandic identity by expressing the need to create an alphabet by which the Icelanders could write their own language, just as other groups wrote their own vernacular.

Once a vernacular language was established by texts such as the 1GT, the Icelanders then began further development of their language through grammatical texts. The other grammatical treatise of relevance here is the Third Grammatical Treatise (3GT), as the Second Grammatical Treatise (2GT) appears to have been a later text most likely written after the period treated in this thesis.[337] The 3GT is a text that uses classical archetypes and Icelandic sources to present a rubric for grammar and poetry.[338] It uses examples of skaldic poetry to demonstrate appropriate poetic technique. It is possible that this text and others like it, including *Skáldskaparmál*, were designed to standardise Icelandic literary output, as scholars such as Jonas Wellendorf and Pernille Herman have postulated.[339] This is not a standardisation of the language, as may have been begun in late Anglo-Saxon England, but rather a standardisation of literature.[340] Wellendorf argues that there was a process of academicization in skaldic poetry in the thirteenth century and that these treatises are not only the result of this academicization but were also used to develop a canon of skaldic poetry.[341] Herman suggests that those with access and academic expertise 'prioritised' certain texts, so the tradition was not only standardised but also guided in a direction that was representative of Icelandic identity.[342] There was a process of inclusion and exclusion through the choice of which poetry to include, and therefore not only do these treatises provide advice and guidance on the creation of poetry, but are also a series of acts of identification involving decisions about which texts were most suitable to be preserved by the group.[343] The production of these treatises that regulated the accepted history and canon of skaldic poetry were acts of collective identification that made it clear that the Icelandic intellectual elite had claimed vernacular literacy as a characteristic of their collective identity.

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337 Fabrizio D. Raschellá, *The So-Called Second Grammatical Treatise* (Florence, 1982), p. 130.
338 Valeria Micillo, "Classical Tradition and Norse Tradition in the 'Third Grammatical Treatise'", *Arkiv för nordisk filologi,* 108 (1993), p. 78.
339 Wellendorf, "The Formation of an Old Norse Skaldic School Canon", p. 140; Pernille Hermann, "Literacy", in Ármann Jakobsson and Sverrir Jakobsson (ed.), *The Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas* (Oxon, 2017), p. 38.
340 Leonard, *Language, Society and Identity*, p. 82.
341 Wellendorf, "The Formation of an Old Norse Skaldic School Canon", pp. 126-127.
342 Hermann, "Literacy", p. 38.
343 Ibid., p. 128.

Negotiating with Other Languages

Characterising Icelandic identity through the vernacular involved acts of identification that not only regulated textual output, but also engaged with other written languages and foreign groups, including Latin texts and other Scandinavian groups. The relationship between the Icelanders and other groups is established in the *Grágás* as being specifically based on language, primarily those who spoke Norse and those who did not.[344] The laws provided for the extension of certain privileges to those who spoke Norse; non-Norse speakers were not allowed to participate in politics until they had spent three years in Iceland and were limited in their inheritance rights in Iceland.[345] This is somewhat at odds with the above discussion of the 1GT and the Icelanders' claiming of a vernacular language specific to their group. Where the 1GT and *Egils saga* differentiate the Icelanders from other Norse speakers, the *Grágás* appear to offer a different impression by favouring other Norse speaking groups.[346] It is possible that this privileging of Norse speakers was purely pragmatic as Norse speakers were more easily dealt with than other foreigners, rather than being symptomatic of any feeling of solidarity between the Icelanders and the rest of Scandinavia.[347] This possibility is supported by the fact that non-Norse speakers only had to wait three years to be able to participate in court in Iceland, presumably an adequate length of time to become acquainted with the Icelandic system and perhaps learn the language, rather than being excluded entirely.[348] The law codes deal quite extensively with foreigners in Iceland and those foreigners were defined by their language. As will be discussed in the chapter on law, the *Grágás* established a hierarchy of foreignness based on language, with foreigners who spoke Norse considered closer to the Icelanders that foreigners who did not.[349] There are practical advantages to the system established. Those who came from Norse countries shared a language with and kin ties to Iceland and therefore required different regulation from those who did not, so it cannot be seen as purely ideological.[350] However, laws such as law 97, which gives Norse-speaking foreigners greater rights than non-Norse speaking foreigners on the death of a relative in Iceland, appear to go beyond the practical by linking language to identity both in foreign groups and for Icelanders.[351] This will be discussed as greater length in the law chapter below, but at the very least, the fact that

[344] See below, pp. 138-140.
[345] Peter Foote and Richard Perkins Andrew Dennis, *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás I* (Winnipeg, 2006), pp. 53, 160.
[346] Ibid., p. 70.
[347] Nichole Sterling, "The Other Inside: Icelandic Identity and Foreigners in the Íslendingasögur," diss. (University of California, 2008), p. 69.
[348] Andrew Dennis, *Laws of Early Iceland I*, p. 53.
[349] See below, pp. 138-140.
[350] Sterling, "The Other Inside", pp. 63-64.
[351] *Grágás: Konungsbók* (Odense, 1974), p. 172. See below, pp. 138-139.

language is used to determine ethnic identity in the *Grágás* does show that this was an important way that the Icelanders believed identity was characterised.

The Icelanders not only interacted with other groups speaking Norse; they also interacted with Latin as a written language through the adoption of Christianity, and this meant that, like other European groups, they had to negotiate between the status of their own vernacular language and the high status ecclesiastical language.[352] The Icelandic conversion, in approximately 1000CE, also led to the introduction of a literary culture, beginning with ecclesiastical texts in Latin, and graduating to vernacular texts on other subjects such as history and the sagas.[353] Classical texts were also introduced into Iceland, as they were throughout Europe, and the way this classical learning was integrated into Icelandic culture is significant in terms of the characterisation of ethnicity.[354] This is particularly true of texts that rely on Latin models. One such example is the 3GT, which closely follows classical grammatical texts, but uses examples from Icelandic poetry rather than the original Latin examples, so elevating vernacular poetry to the same status as classical writing.[355] Stephen Tranter argues that the author of the 3GT, Óláfr Þorðarson, deliberately sought to establish the status of vernacular poetry as equal to classical works, and that in attempting to establish this equality, the author was being innovative in his comparison.[356] This contrasts with Snorri Sturluson's slightly earlier *Háttatal*, the final part of the *Prose Edda*, which offers no comparison between Icelandic and classical tradition but rather sought to reproduce a traditional Latin genre in Icelandic.[357] *Háttatal* may therefore have been a pivotal text in the development of a vernacular written tradition, but the 3GT builds on this by elevating the vernacular to equal status with Latin. We can therefore perhaps see some evolution in thinking from Snorri Sturluson to Óláfr Þorðarson; while Snorri began the process of elevating Icelandic grammatical texts to match the classical in practical terms, Óláfr elevated Icelandic literature to an equal status to classical literature in ideological terms, by using vernacular examples to exemplify Latin grammatical points. The later 2GT, established by Fabrizio Raschellá to have been written between 1270 and 1300, shows little Latin influence, while the earlier *Íslendingabók* appears to be heavily influenced by Latin models.[358] This further suggests a development of the academic tradition from reliance on Latin

[352] Love, "Insular Latin Literature", p. 120.
[353] Quinn, "From orality to literacy in medieval Iceland", pp. 30-33.
[354] Ibid., p. 30.
[355] Stephen Tranter, "Medieval Icelandic *artes poeticae*", in Ross, *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, p. 144. Cf. *The Fourth Grammatical Treatise* (London, 2014), pp. xvi-lii, and Micillo, "Classical Tradition and Norse Tradition".
[356] Stephen Tranter, "Medieval Icelandic *artes poeticae*", p. 147.
[357] Ibid., pp. 149, 155.
[358] Raschellá, *The So-Called Second Grammatical Treatise*, p. 10; Diana Whaley, "A useful past: historical writing in medieval Iceland", in Ross, *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, pp. 169-170.

styles in the twelfth century to independence after the period considered here. The 3GT still makes use of Latin models, but promotes Icelandic literature and tradition. This suggests that while Óláfr Þorðarson and his contemporaries were attempting to establish the status of Icelandic vernacular literature, they were not doing so in an insular fashion, but were seeking to establish their literary tradition as being equal to those in Europe by using classical texts. The introduction of Latin to Iceland was a product of the adoption of Christianity, but this does not automatically require the use of classical grammatical texts as exemplars for Icelandic poetry. Rather, this use suggests a desire to demonstrate engagement with the rest of Europe on a cultural level. The Icelandic intellectual elite were attempting to fuse their own literary culture into the European model. The 3GT suggests that establishing their place within a broader international context was significant to Icelandic identity.

These grammatical texts further suggest interest in engaging internationally through vernacular literature by the renewed interest in skaldic poetry that they demonstrate. It has been suggested by scholars such as Guðrún Nordal and Gísli Sigurðsson that the development of skaldic poetry began in foreign courts first, only becoming popular in Iceland in the late twelfth century, when the Icelandic elite began to associate themselves with the European aristocracy.[359] Certainly, there are a large number of skaldic poets known to have practised in foreign courts in the tenth century, with fifteen Icelandic skalds recorded as having visiting the Norwegian court from 995-1030.[360] The draw of foreign courts may have been the gifts kings could give, and of course Iceland lacked a royal court, so perhaps it is unsurprising that there is less evidence for skalds practising in Iceland in this earlier period.[361] In the eleventh century, skalds played an important role in royal courts as they could control the image of the king through poetry that recorded heroic deeds, particularly commemorative eulogy, and thus kings saw their presence in royal courts as desirable.[362] The wider Scandinavian engagement with skaldic poetry has been suggested by Abrams to imply that skaldic poetry was a common feature of what she sees as the Norse diaspora.[363] This contradicts the idea of skaldic poetry as an Icelandic act of collective self-representation, just as Abrams' theory of diaspora opposes the theory of a strong Icelandic identity in favour of a broader Scandinavian identity more generally. However, the Icelanders' reputation

[359] Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, p. 130; Gísli Sigurðsson, "Óláfr Þórðarson hvítaskáld and oral poetry in the west of Iceland c. 1250: the evidence of references to poetry in The Third Grammatical Treatise", in Ross, *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, p. 112.
[360] Gade, "Poetry and its changing importance in medieval Icelandic culture", p. 78.
[361] Ibid., p. 85.
[362] Erin Michelle Goeres, *The Poetics of Commemoration: Skaldic Verse and Social Memory, c. 890–1070* (Oxford, 2015), p. 17.
[363] Abrams, "Diaspora and Identity", p. 25.

as the premier skalds and writers of Scandinavia appears to have been recognised internationally, because Saxo Grammaticus describes the Icelanders as a people famous for recording the deeds of others.[364] When the Icelandic aristocracy became wealthier in the thirteenth century, with power centralising around a few families, this aristocracy were able to generate skaldic activity in Iceland both by employing skalds and through members of these families practising the art themselves.[365] Their choice to do this suggests a desire to continue identifying with the characteristics that had set them apart in earlier centuries. These families did so not simply to elevate Icelandic learning, but to engage and compete with the Norwegian aristocracy, as the Icelandic relationship with Norway was increasingly important in the first half of the thirteenth century.[366]

Skaldic poetry in particular was heavily influenced by three factors identified by Nordal: Christianity, Latin tradition and aristocratic European culture.[367] This means that any understanding of Icelandic literature must view it as a negotiation between Icelandic traditions and foreign influences, and skaldic poetry may have acted as a mediator between the native and foreign.[368] Grammatical treatises such as the 3GT allowed learned Icelanders to engage with both classical traditions and their own vernacular ones through the use of vernacular examples within Latin models. The skaldic poetry they contained was the apex of compromise between Latin and Icelandic, native and foreign, due to the way it had been shaped by the interests of foreign kings before being reintroduced into Iceland and communicated through these Latin-influenced treatises.[369] Icelandic identity as characterised by vernacular literature was not simply representative of the Icelanders in a vacuum; it also responded to international cultural trends. When the most elite Icelandic families began to participate more seriously in high-level political interactions with other groups and compete among themselves for status, they engaged in activities that they viewed as high-status. This engagement produced acts of identification that were intelligible internationally and emphasised high-quality vernacular literacy as a characteristic that set Icelandic identity apart.

[364] Saxo Grammaticus, *Saxo Grammaticus: Gesta Danorum: The History of the Danes, Vol. 1* (2015), p. 7.
[365] Gade, "Poetry and its changing importance in medieval Icelandic culture", pp. 85-88; Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, pp. 130-131.
[366] Ibid., p. 131.
[367] Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, p. 340.
[368] Ibid., p. 340.
[369] Ibid., p. 206; Gade, "Poetry and its changing importance in medieval Icelandic culture", p. 89.

Conclusion

The Anglo-Saxons and the Icelanders both made language a significant characteristic of their identity through acts of identification. More specifically, both used their vernacular text production to represent their identity. For the Anglo-Saxons, this representation demonstrated them to be a single people for whom a shared language could be grounds for unity. The Icelanders, on the other hand, characterised themselves through language as separate from other groups, even those with whom they shared a language. As discussed in Chapter 1, expressing difference between groups implicitly expresses similarity within the group and *vice versa*, but it is still the case that in acts of identification the Anglo-Saxons emphasised unity and the Icelanders emphasised difference.[370] Both groups also sought to elevate their vernacular text output, the Anglo-Saxons in relation to Latin texts and the Icelanders with reference to their own illustrious history as poets in foreign courts. This involved an academicization in both groups that led to acts of identification in the form of grammars, treatises and translations, and these acts reflected the specific interests of the group. Anglo-Saxon texts associated with the Benedictine reform focused on creating an elevated form of Old English that was suitable for translating prestigious Latin texts. The Icelanders preserved their own literary traditions within a framework of Latin learning in texts such as *Háttatal* and the 3GT. History contributed to the significance of vernacular literacy in both these groups, with the Icelanders attempting to recapture and record an earlier time in which they had apparently stood out in Scandinavia through their skaldic poetry, and the Anglo-Saxons drawing on their pre-unification past in which language was a characteristic shared among the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. The contemporary context was also a factor in how these groups characterised themselves through language. The Icelandic elite began to undertake these acts of identification more frequently in the thirteenth century, a time at which their independence was under threat from Norwegian control and so characteristics that differentiated them from other Scandinavian groups were increasingly significant. *Egils saga* communicates this wish to demonstrate difference from Norway. This was also a time at which power was concentrating in the hands of a smaller elite, allowing them to engage in acts that were believed to generate prestige both in Iceland and internationally, such as skaldic poetry. For the Anglo-Saxon establishment, it was the ongoing threat to unity that made language as a shared characteristic significant to the group. The Preface to *Pastoral Care* makes this clear by suggesting an ambitious education programme that would see all those eligible within the group able to read the group's shared language. The relationship between these unifying acts of identification and the political context is perhaps less obvious in Edgar's reign, but the repeated

[370] See above, p. 15.

references to Old English as the shared language of the people implies that this was still an important frame of reference following the dividing of the kingdom under Eadwig. It is clear that these groups used language not as a simple marker of ethnicity, but as a way to express complex characterisations of their ethnic identity in ways that were heavily influenced by the group's historical and contemporary context.

Religion

Religion has been seen as a problematic characteristic of ethnicity because so many groups can share the same religion.[371] In the medieval period, much of Europe was Christian and many groups practised the same form of Roman Christianity. It is therefore not necessarily the religion itself that distinguishes ethnicity, but nevertheless groups can use religion to represent their identity if there are ways that they view it as significant. Fully understanding how religion operated as a characteristic of ethnicity must take into account the fact that being Christian was deeply entrenched in each society in the periods in which I am studying them. Individuals and the collective within these societies were unlikely to have seen Christianity as a choice, but rather it informed every aspect of life and the construction of society. Christianity was implicit in Anglo-Saxon and Icelandic identity, in that it was not possible to be Anglo-Saxon or Icelandic without being Christian. However, as it was possible to be Christian without being Anglo-Saxon or Icelandic, these groups developed specific ways of representing their ethnicity through Christianity. In Anglo-Saxon England and medieval Iceland, particular themes developed in texts that used religion as an identifying characteristic. Both groups knew they had a pre-Christian past and used this and their conversion histories to express characteristics significant to their identities. In spite of these similarities, these two groups characterised their identity through religion very differently and gave significance to characteristics that were specifically relevant to their own contemporary contexts.

England

In Anglo-Saxon England, Christianity was an important characteristic of common culture within the group. Throughout the period from 886 to 1066, the Anglo-Saxon kings associated themselves with Christianity and used the church to bolster their position in overt ways. These included depicting themselves as the defenders of God's law in their law codes, as Edgar did, a requirement for prayers to be said for the King and all his people, as in the 1009 law code under Æthelræd, and holding coronations on the day of religious festivals, as both Edward the Elder and Edward the Confessor did.[372] These were explicitly political acts that identified the king with Christianity, but to gain an understanding of wider collective identification more nuanced examples must be sought.

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371 Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568*, p. 37.

372 Felix Lieberman, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen* (Cambridge, 1903), pp. 208, 262, A. E. Redgate, *Religion, Politics and Society in Britain, 800-1066* (Abingdon, 2014), pp. 63-68.

Texts that portrayed both the Christian and pre-Christian past, produced at the beginning of the period, were intended to promote unity within the developing Anglo-Saxon kingdom by creating a shared history for the group. Later in the period, texts that reacted to the Scandinavian invasions and a Scandinavian king were created that represented the Anglo-Saxons as God's chosen people to enable them to withstand these traumatic events and to secure the future existence of their group intact.

The Pre-Christian Past

As the Anglo-Saxons knew that they had come to Britain before their conversion, they had to negotiate their pre-Christian past in light of their understanding of the sinfulness of paganism. Little evidence of Anglo-Saxon paganism exists in the written record, and little mention is made of pagan practice, unlike in Icelandic texts. In *Beowulf*, there is a brief reference to a non-Christian religious practice of some kind, but as the events of the narrative take place in Scandinavia, this cannot be seen to represent Anglo-Saxon pre-Christian practice.[373] It is unsurprising that pagan practice was not recorded in Anglo-Saxon texts, as text production began after the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, and therefore non-Christian topics may not have been considered suitable subjects, either because they were no longer relevant or because there was some concern about backsliding among the general population, making the subject somewhat taboo.[374] Even in the migration myth the Anglo-Saxons are portrayed within Christian theology using biblical parallels, migrating like the Jewish people of *Exodus* to a land promised by God, and conquering Britain like the Chaldeans did Jerusalem.[375] The migrating Anglo-Saxons are not portrayed in their later myths as pre-Christians, but as proto-Christians guided by God in spite of their paganism, and it is hard to see from their accounts of their own history any pre-Christian elements of identity. There was of course a precedent for a way of dealing with the pre-Christianity of Christian groups, demonstrated by the Old Testament, but this did not mention the Germanic peoples. This left a gap in Anglo-Saxon Christian ideology which allowed them to construct their pre-Christian history and link themselves to wider Christian history in their own way.

Although there is little textual evidence to show how exactly the Anglo-Saxons negotiated their pre-Christian past in relation to their Christian identity, genealogical texts seem to preserve

[373] Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles R. D. Fulk, (ed.), *Klaeber's Beowulf* (Toronto, 2008), p. 8, lines 175-176.
[374] J. S. Ryan, "Othin in England: Evidence From the Poetry for a Cult of Woden in Anglo-Saxon England", *Folklore,* 74.3 (1963), p. 461.
[375] Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, p. 2. See above, pp. 39-40.

an element of pre-Christian identity in a Christian context. Many of the royal genealogies trace royal ancestry back to Woden, a pre-Christian god whose name continued to be used into the Christian period, and include a number of other Germanic heroes.[376] These genealogies, while not factually accurate, had an important ideological function as acts of identification.[377] The royal line of each of the pre-unification Anglo-Saxon kingdoms had their own genealogies, which lie outside the period considered by this thesis, but the tradition was continued by the Alfredian court to establish Alfred's lineage and legitimacy.[378] The West Saxon genealogy recorded in the late ninth century is as close to an official statement from the royal court regarding the king's origins as it is possible to get.[379] The West Saxon royal genealogy for Æthelwulf, Alfred's father, is recorded in the *ASC* under the year 856 as follows:

> ⁊ se Aþelwulf wæs Ecgbrihting, Ecgbriht Ealmunding, Ealhmund Eafing, Eofa Eopping, Eoppa Ingelding, Ingeld wæs Ines broþor Wessexena cinges, ⁊ he heold þæt rice .xxxvii. wintra ⁊ eft ferde to Sancte Petre ⁊ þær his feorh sesealde, hi wæron Cenredes sunu. Cenred wæs Ceowalding, Ceolwald Cuðing, Cuþa Cuðwining, Cuðwine Ceaulining, Ceaulin Cynricing, Cynric Creoding, Creoda Cerdicing, Cerdic wæs Elesing, Elesa Esling, Esla Gewising, Gewis Wigging, Wig Freawining, Freawine Freoþogaring, Freoþogar Branding, Brand Bældægung, Bældæg Wodening, Woden Frealafing, Frealaf Finning, Finn Godulfing, Godulf Geatting, Geatt Tætwing, Tætwa Beawing, Beaw Scealdwaing, Scealdwa Heremoding, Heremod Itermoning, Itermon Haðraing, Haþra Hwalaing, Hwala Bedwiging, Bedwig Sceafing, id est filis Noe se wæs geboren on þære earce Noes, Lamech, Matusalem, Enoch, Iared, Malalehel, Camon, Enos, Seth, Adam primus homo, et pater noster id est Cristus.[380]

Certain elements of this genealogy have caused a great deal of scholarly debate, not least that it contains names that are also found in *Beowulf* – Sceaf, Scyld and Beow.[381] There is also the remarkable assertion that Sceaf, a Germanic hero, was the son of Noah, born on the ark. The *ASC* describes Sceaf as 'id est filis Noe se wæs geboren on þære earce' (the son of Noah that was born on the ark). Asser gives an almost identical genealogy in his *Vita Alfredi regis*, but names Seth instead of Sceaf as the son of Noah, suggesting some uncertainty surrounding this tradition.[382]

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[376] Craig R. Davis, "Cultural Assimilation in the Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies", *Anglo-Saxon England,* 21 (1992), pp. 25-26; Shaw, "Uses of Woden", p. 104.
[377] David N. Dumville, "Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists", in P. H. Sawyer and I. N. Wood (ed.), *Early Medieval Kingship* (Leeds, 1977), pp. 77-78.
[378] Daniel Anlezark, "Sceaf, Japeth and the Origins of the Anglo-Saxons", *Anglo-Saxon England,* 31 (2002), p. 45.
[379] Davis, "Cultural Assimilation", p. 35.
[380] *MS. C*, pp. 56-57. MS C and MS B are the only *ASC* MS to contain the genealogy in this form, MS C has been dated to the mid-eleventh century (pp. xv-xvi).
[381] Cf. Leonard Neidorf, "Beowulf Before *Beowulf*: Anglo-Saxon Anthroponymy and Heroic Legend", *The Review of English Studies,* 64.266 (2012).
[382] William Henry Stevenson, *Life of King Alfred together with the Annals of St. Neots erroneously ascribed to Asser* (Oxford, 1904), p. 3.

Æthelweard's *Chronicon* gives a similar list that finishes with Sceaf and an account of Sceaf's arrival in a boat on the shores of Skaney.[383] It appears that Sceaf's identification as Noah's son in the West Saxon genealogy must have taken place in the latter part of Alfred's reign, in the late ninth century, appearing as it does for the first time in the *ASC*.[384] The creation of a fourth son of Noah and his inclusion in the West Saxon genealogy creates a link to Old Testament history. There is clearly a political power to be gained from creating a distinct son of Noah for the West Saxon genealogy at a time when the West Saxons were attempting to secure their rule over the developing Anglo-Saxon kingdom. Exactly how this related to Anglo-Saxon identity is open to interpretation. Thomas Hill has seen the use of Sceaf as the ancestor of the West Saxons as a way for the West Saxon dynasty to separate themselves from the Anglo-Saxon masses, a distinction they had lost when Woden was euhemerised.[385] However, Daniel Anlezark has suggested that the privilege of an ark-born ancestor was intended for all of the Anglo-Saxons, not just royalty, and that at a time when the identity of the unified Anglo-Saxons was beginning to be defined it was ideologically significant to create a unique ancestry for the group.[386] Given that during Alfred's reign the purpose of much of the political manoeuvring was to create a unified kingdom, not to create a division between the West Saxon dynasty and the rest of the Anglo-Saxon people, the latter interpretation seems more persuasive. In this way, the Anglo-Saxons merged their own pre-Christian traditions with Christian ones to create an elevated place for themselves in Old Testament history.

There were a number of inclusions in Æthelwulf's genealogy that provided a link to the pre-Christian past and were potentially a point of commonality between the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. One such inclusion was Sceaf. The exact significance of the name Sceaf is hard to pin down. Craig Davis describes him as both a 'Germanic myth' and 'Danish dynastic legend', but though we know his position at the head of the Scylding dynasty in Norse tradition, his significance in Anglo-Saxon England is unknown.[387] He was clearly recognised by the ninth-century genealogists as having a significance, and his name appears in *Beowulf*, although not in the same genealogy, but there is no evidence that can tell modern historians how significant he was as a hero to the Alfredian genealogists. Anlezark sees his importance more as the newly minted ark-born son of Noah than for his heroic credentials, but nevertheless the name must have come from

[383] *The Chronicle of Æthelweard* (London, 1962), pp. 32-33.
[384] Anlezark, "Sceaf, Japeth and the Origins of the Anglo-Saxons", pp. 18-26.
[385] Thomas D. Hill, "The Myth of the Ark-Born Son of Noe and the West-Saxon Royal Genealogical Tables", *The Harvard Theological Review,* 80.3 (1987), pp. 380-383.
[386] Anlezark, "Sceaf, Japeth and the Origins of the Anglo-Saxons", pp. 33-35.
[387] Davis, "Cultural Assimilation", pp. 35, 30.

somewhere and must have been chosen for a reason; it was not newly created for this purpose.[388] However, Sceaf was not the only Germanic mythical character to appear in this genealogy, since Woden was also included. This is often overlooked by scholars considering the later Anglo-Saxon genealogies, because Woden is the origin-ancestor of the earlier genealogies of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, and his continued use in Christian genealogies is usually discussed with reference to these.[389] If the inclusion of Woden is considered in relation to Anlezark's interpretation of Sceaf as an ark-born ancestor for all the Anglo-Saxons, a continuing use for Woden in forming the identity of the emerging Anglo-Saxon kingdom can be seen. The Anglo-Saxon kingdoms had their own distinct royal genealogies prior to unification, and so Anglo-Saxon groups other than the West Saxons may have struggled to see the West Saxon genealogy as evidence of shared descent from an ark-born ancestor.[390] Though Woden had lost his position as a deity by the ninth century, he was still the origin-ancestor in seven eighth-century royal genealogies, those of Kent, Wessex, East Anglia, Mercia, Bernicia, Deira and Lindsey.[391] It can therefore be speculated that if a member of the Mercian elite, for example, upon finding themselves part of Alfred's growing Anglo-Saxon kingdom, could see a point at which his own lineage and the royal lineage converged, then he could accept and internalise the privilege of a communal ark-born ancestor. This point of convergence was Woden. I would suggest that Alfred's genealogists utilised the remnants of the pre-Christian past, which provided a shared mythology for the Anglo-Saxon groups, to subsume these groups into the West Saxon Christian identity. This in turn characterised the group as having a shared history.

It must be acknowledged that this is a speculative interpretation of the significance of pre-Christian mythology in the late ninth century. In general, we have very little knowledge of what understanding people in the ninth century and onwards had of their pre-conversion past and mythology.[392] For example, Dennis Cronan has an entirely different interpretation of the motivations behind the composition of the genealogy. He believes it to have been designed around the inclusion of Scyld, an important figure in Scandinavia, to give Alfred a link to the Danes. To ensure the genealogical superiority of the West Saxons, Scyld is made a descendant of Sceaf, and

[388] Ibid., pp. 34-35; Anlezark, "Sceaf, Japeth and the Origins of the Anglo-Saxons", p. 562.
[389] See Davis, "Cultural Assimilation"; Hermann Moisl, "Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies and Germanic Oral Tradition", *Journal of Medieval History,* 7.3 (1981); and Kenneth Sisam, "Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies", *Proceedings of the British Academy,* 39 (1953); cf. Dumville, "Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists", p. 79.
[390] Davis, "Cultural Assimilation", p. 26; Anlezark, "Sceaf, Japeth and the Origins of the Anglo-Saxons", p. 33.
[391] Davis, "Cultural Assimilation", pp. 25-26.
[392] A L. Meaney, "Woden in England: A Reconsideration of the Evidence", *Folklore,* 77.2 (1966), p. 115; Ryan, "Othin in England".

Sceaf a descendant of Adam, Christianising the lineage.[393] Cronan's emphasis on Scyld is somewhat tenuous as there is no evidence that Scyld is any more significant than any other name in the genealogy, but it is possible that Alfredian genealogists tried to subsume the Scandinavians into the West Saxon line through Scyld in a similar way to the drawing together of the Anglo-Saxon groups through Woden. After all, Alfred made himself Guðrum's godfather upon the Scandinavian king's baptism, and Anlezark suggests that the Sceaf ancestor was intended for all the North European peoples just as Noah's canonical sons had fathered various groups.[394] Certainly the Anglo-Saxons seem to have involved themselves in the conversion of the Scandinavian incomers, and part of the Anglo-Saxon collective identity may have been as converters of the heathen.[395] However, there is not enough evidence of who Scyld may have been in the minds of the ninth-century Scandinavian invaders or the knowledge of him in Anglo-Saxon England to draw a firm conclusion about the significance of Scyld in Æthelwulf's lineage. Much of the evidence for pre-Christian survival is in names, in genealogies and place names specifically, and what the Anglo-Saxons thought of these names and how they related to historical or mythical individuals is unknown. What can be said with some certainty is that pre-Christian mythology only appears in collective representations early in the period considered here. By the late tenth century knowledge of 'pagan' practice was limited to observation of the incoming Scandinavians, and the use of Sceaf as Noah's ark-born son had died out.[396] Memories from pre-Christian tradition may have served to act as a rallying cultural myth for the Alfredian court, side by side and synthesised with Christianity itself, but no enduring sign of it can be detected in later Anglo-Saxon acts of identification, suggesting its political usefulness was short-lived.

Conversion History

Conversion is an instance of shared history for any Christian group, and as conversion was inherently positive in a Christian society, it was an important and positive aspect of shared history for the Anglo-Saxons. The conversion itself is not within the scope of this study, and contemporary sources from the conversion period are scant, but later histories record that the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were converted in the seventh century following the Gregorian mission of 597. They did not convert as a single group, but rather within their different kingdoms. Nevertheless, the

[393] Dennis Cronan, "*Beowulf* and the Containment of Scyld in the West Saxon Royal Genealogy", in Leonard Neidorf (ed.), *The Dating of Beowulf: A Reassessment* (Cambridge, 2014), p. 120.
[394] Anlezark, "Sceaf, Japeth and the Origins of the Anglo-Saxons", p. 45.
[395] Lemke, *The Old English Translation of Bede's HE*, p. 298.
[396] Ryan, "Othin in England", pp. 464-465; Anlezark, "Sceaf, Japeth and the Origins of the Anglo-Saxons", p. 46.

conversion played an important role in characterising the identity of the Anglo-Saxons as a unified people through the memory of the Gregorian mission. The most significant written source for conversion history is Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (*HE*), which was known in the late ninth and tenth century primarily through the Old English translation (the *OEHE*).[397] Bede's history treats the Anglo-Saxons to some extent as a single entity in terms of the Gregorian mission, with Pope Gregory recorded as sending the mission to convert all the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.[398] The Irish mission is carefully integrated into this narrative of Roman Christianity converting the Anglo-Saxons by Bede, not ignored but rather brought into the Roman fold by the recording of Palladius' mission to the Irish.[399] Gregory is a key figure in this narrative and many details of his letters and life are included, emphasising the importance of the conversion he instigated.[400] This suggests that even before unification, conversion was seen as a point of shared history between the kingdoms and the mode of conversion was particularly important. Patrick Wormald argues that Anglo-Saxon unity relied on Bede's portrayal of the Anglo-Saxons as a people unified by Gregory's conversion mission and chosen by God.[401] While it is far from clear that Bede viewed the Anglo-Saxons as a unified chosen people, they are presented by Bede as sharing a religious identity and history. However, the *OEHE* is not an exact translation of the *HE* and offers a different emphasis in its handling of the conversion and Gregory, and therefore it must be viewed in its own context in order to determine what light it sheds on Anglo-Saxon identity in the period under consideration.[402]

The *OEHE* was most likely written in the late ninth century, and though there are some differences between the *OEHE* and those other Old English translations known to have been made in Alfred's court, it is probable that a translation written in this period would have been at least somewhat informed by the other translations made around the same time.[403] As with many late-ninth-century texts, there has been speculation as to whether the *OEHE* was translated by Alfred himself. The early suggestions that Alfred himself wrote it, perhaps with a Mercian gloss, are now largely dismissed, but some scholars still view the *OEHE* as firmly part of the Alfredian school, though perhaps a late addition.[404] There are too many discrepancies to place the *OEHE*

[397] Molyneaux, "The *Old English Bede*", p. 1294.
[398] Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, p. 108; Bede, *Bede's ecclesiastical history of the English people*, p. 4.
[399] Bede, *Bede's ecclesiastical history of the English people*, p. 29; Sarah McCann, "Plures De Scottorum Regione: Bede, Ireland, and the Irish", *Eolas: The Journal of the American Society of Irish Medieval Studies,* 8 (2015), p. 37.
[400] Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, p. 121.
[401] Wormald, "*Engla Lond*", pp. 13-14.
[402] Rowley, *The Old English Version of Bede's 'Historia Ecclesiastica'*, p. 75.
[403] Lemke, *The Old English Translation of Bede's HE*, p. 17.
[404] Nicole Guenther Discenza, "The Old English Bede and the Construction of Anglo-Saxon Authority", *Anglo-Saxon England,* 31 (2002), p. 80; Sherman M. Kuhn, "The Authorship of the Old English Bede Revisited", *Neuphilologische*

definitively as a product of Alfred's court, as the dialect has Mercian features and it lacks the usual prologue proceeding the translation.[405] I will therefore work on the basis that the *OEHE* was informed by the Alfredian court, being written at the same time that a significant amount of translation into Old English was undertaken, but cannot be safely attributed to it. The fact that the translation of Latin texts into Old English was taking place not only in Alfred's court but also elsewhere, perhaps in Mercian areas as well as West Saxon, is significant because it suggests that the use of Old English for high status texts was spread more widely than just the royal court. However, the exact origin of the translation cannot be determined with any degree of certainty. What is certain, is that there are no extant *HE* manuscripts produced in the late ninth and tenth century, whereas five manuscripts and three excerpts of the *OEHE* survive from this period, suggesting that the main access the Anglo-Saxons had to their conversion history in the period during which the Anglo-Saxon kingdom was formed was through the *OEHE*.[406]

The *HE* gives a clear picture of the significance of the conversion in the eighth century, but the prevalence of the *OEHE* over Bede's *HE* in this period raises questions about its importance to Anglo-Saxon identity following unification. The *OEHE* is different from the *HE* in some key ways, and George Molyneaux and Sharon Rowley have argued that these make it an unlikely act of identification.[407] The translation removes references to Bede's sources from the text, which may make it more suitable for teaching Christian behaviour through a series of examples than for preserving an ecclesiastical history.[408] The Pelagian heresy is removed, casting the Britons in a more positive light.[409] More significantly, the translator has removed many of Gregory's letters, and it has been suggested that this implies Gregory's role in the Anglo-Saxon conversion may not have been as important to the Anglo-Saxons in this period.[410] The marginalisation of Gregory's correspondence certainly problematises the idea that the conversion was a significant part of Anglo-Saxon identity in the late ninth century.[411] Rowley has argued that the removal of the papal letters diminishes the authority of Rome in the text, and it follows that any minimisation of Gregory and his mission may suggest that the status of the Anglo-Saxon conversion was not as important

Mitteilungen, 73.1 (1972); Dorothy Whitelock, "The Old English Bede", *Proceedings of the British Academy,* 48 (1962), 57-90.

[405] Lemke, *The Old English Translation of Bede's HE*, p. 110; Discenza, "The Old English Bede", p. 71.

[406] Molyneaux, "The *Old English Bede*", pp. 1292-1294; Rowley, *The Old English Version of Bede's 'Historia Ecclesiastica'*, p. 15.

[407] Molyneaux, "The *Old English Bede*"; Rowley, *The Old English Version of Bede's 'Historia Ecclesiastica'*.

[408] Molyneaux, "The *Old English Bede*", p. 1310.

[409] Rowley, *The Old English Version of Bede's 'Historia Ecclesiastica'*, p. 77.

[410] Molyneaux, "The *Old English Bede*", p. 1304.

[411] On the privileging of Bede's voice, see Discenza, "The Old English Bede".

in the late ninth century as in the early eighth.[412] However, it is not necessarily the case that the abridgment of the *HE* was done for the purpose of downplaying the importance of the Gregorian mission. Andreas Lemke has argued that it is part of what he sees as an 'editorial agenda' behind the changes made by the *OEHE*'s author. The editorial process foregrounded the Anglo-Saxon rise to dominance in Britain, emphasised the conversion narratives, and mitigated some of the criticism of the Britons by streamlining Bede's account of British wrongdoings.[413] Lemke argues that although some of Gregory's correspondence is omitted, the *OEHE* focuses on the Anglo-Saxon conversion. Particularly, the focus is on the fact that this conversion was initiated by the Pope, and indeed, Gregory and Augustine's roles are emphasised by the translation of their epitaphs into Old English.[414] The conversion created a privileged history for Anglo-Saxon Christians within broader Christian history. It separated them from British Christians and implied superiority over the British Church, because the Anglo-Saxon Church had been created by the pope, the ultimate temporal authority. Much of the Roman history was removed, automatically foregrounding Anglo-Saxon history, and this suggests that it was Anglo-Saxon history that was of importance to the translator in a far narrower sense than to Bede.[415] I would argue that this narrowing of the sense of the ecclesiastical history of the *gens Anglorum* from a broad history of Christianity in Britain to a history largely of the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons themselves was in itself ideological. It suggests that a particular ideology was being promoted that was different from that of the *HE*, and Lemke's identification of this ideology as the superiority of papally instigated conversion seems likely. The *OEHE* is different from the *HE*, although these differences do not downplay the role of conversion in the Anglo-Saxons' shared history, but rather promote it through a narrower focus on Anglo-Saxon history.

Indeed, the editorial changes made to the *HE* by the *OEHE*'s translator may demonstrate a hierarchy of identity being formed. The Anglo-Saxons were Christians, and this was integral to their identity. As a way of passively expressing identity, this may have been enough, but for the active, political representation of identity, this was a problematic identity as it also belonged to many other groups. It was therefore necessary to differentiate the Anglo-Saxons' Christianity from the Christianity of other groups. The conversion mission was an ideal way of identifying a discrete origin and history for Anglo-Saxon Christianity. There is a softening of tone towards the Britons in the *OEHE* from Bede's original text, perhaps because there were Britons in the Anglo-Saxon

412 Molyneaux, "The *Old English Bede*", p. 122.
413 Lemke, *The Old English Translation of Bede's HE*, pp. 274-277, 298, 309-313.
414 Ibid., pp. 292-293.
415 Ibid., pp. 277-278.

royal court, such as Asser, and the Britons were allies against the Scandinavians.[416] Although Lemke sees the lack of focus on British sins as a sign of unity between the Britons and Anglo-Saxons, I would instead suggest that this was rather an instance of the strengthening of Anglo-Saxon group identity.[417] While it may have been politically difficult to be as openly critical of the Britons in the late ninth century as Bede was in the eighth, the apparent close quarters between Anglo-Saxons and Britons could have led to a desire for the Anglo-Saxons to separate themselves in terms of identity, not draw themselves closer together, as identity formation involves the creation of boundaries between groups.[418] Translating the *HE* into Old English did not create a common Christian identity for the Anglo-Saxons and Britons, but instead it clearly set out a hierarchy of types of Christianity, in which the Anglo-Saxons tell a narrative of the primacy of the Anglo-Saxon church in their own language. The *OEHE* characterised the Anglo-Saxons as having a distinct and illustrious conversion history.

Although identifying the name used by a group is not enough to fully characterise their ethnicity, it is worth discussing here the way that *gens Anglorum*, the term Bede uses to describe the Anglo-Saxons, was translated in the *OEHE*. Key to Wormald's argument about the importance of conversion history to Anglo-Saxon identity is the use of the term *Angelcynn* to describe the Anglo-Saxon group, referencing the Anglian slaves called angels by Pope Gregory.[419] However, Molyneaux has challenged Wormald's hypothesis by arguing that the many Old English words used to translate *gens Anglorum* in the *OEHE* suggests that there was not a firm concept of Anglo-Saxon identity in this period.[420] It is therefore worth considering whether the *OEHE* bears out Wormald's assertions that Anglo-Saxon identity was unifying around the idea of an *Angelcynn* with a shared conversion history, or whether Molyneaux's objections to this theory are justified. Both Lemke and Rowley have done thorough examinations of the use of *Angelcynn*, and of related terms such as *Ongelþeod*, to determine whether or not the use of the term *Angelcynn* in the *OEHE* contributes to the idea of a shared identity for the Anglo-Saxons.[421] The *OEHE* uses more than twenty terms to translate *gens Anglorum*, almost exclusively spelling variations of *Angelcynn* and *Angelþeod*, the most frequently used being *Ongolþeod*, and *Angelcynn* being only the second most frequently used.[422] This does suggest that

[416] Ibid., p. 355.
[417] Ibid., p. 353.
[418] Ibid., p. 355.
[419] Wormald, "*Engla Lond*", p. 13.
[420] Molyneaux, "The *Old English Bede*", p. 1317.
[421] Lemke, *The Old English Translation of Bede's HE*, pp. 360-363; Rowley, *The Old English Version of Bede's 'Historia Ecclesiastica'*, pp. 63-70.
[422] Lemke, *The Old English Translation of Bede's HE*, p. 364; Rowley, *The Old English Version of Bede's 'Historia Ecclesiastica'*, p. 68.

there was not at this stage a single term that was used to identify the Anglo-Saxons, let alone one that referenced their conversion history, and Rowley suggests that this problematises the idea that the *OEHE* was written to promote shared Anglo-Saxon identity.[423] Lemke has also noted that the two suffixes used further dilutes any message of shared identity, and suggests that the *-cynn* suffix may be used to suggest biological kinship, whereas *–þeod* may have been used to suggest a religious or ethnic group not comprised of a single kin group.[424] This suggestion requires further substantiation, but it is clear that the *OEHE* does not translate *gens Anglorum* in a way that suggests there was the single, clear identity for the Anglo-Saxons of the late ninth century that some scholars argue Alfred attempted to create.[425] However, I would argue that the fact that *Angel/Ongel-* is the prefix used overwhelmingly frequently in words denoting group identity is more persuasive than the variations are problematic. This translation was made at a time when the Alfredian court was using the term *Angelcynn* and the translator uses the term *Angel* rather than any other, suggesting an engagement with the identity Alfred was developing if not a strict adherence to his terminology. Whether *Angel-/Ongel-* was chosen because it referenced Bede's original text, or because it referenced the Gregorian mission, or whether it references the text's potentially Mercian origins, as Mercians were purportedly descended from the Angles, cannot be determined from the limited evidence.[426] However, it does seem that in the late ninth century, a terminology was developing that, although not standardised, had some ecclesiastical significance, and which identified the Anglo-Saxons as *Angli*, whom Pope Gregory called angels. This story was popular at the time, so adopting a name for the group which referenced it was a constant reminder of their prestigious shared conversion history.[427] This identity was not necessarily as fixed and developed as Wormald suggests, but it was gaining characteristics that would later become emblematic of Anglo-Saxon identity.

The *OEHE* was a product of the newly emerging Anglo-Saxon identity, and it expressed a shared history of which the Anglo-Saxons could be proud. It focused on the Anglo-Saxon conversion rather than a broader history of Britain, and privileged Anglo-Saxon Christianity over British Christianity on the island.[428] There were obvious advantages to using the Anglo-Saxons' conversion history to promote a unified identity in the late ninth century. The Anglo-Saxons' religious unity preceded their political unity, so it could be used to promote the concept of a shared

[423] Rowley, *The Old English Version of Bede's 'Historia Ecclesiastica'*, p. 70.
[424] Lemke, *The Old English Translation of Bede's HE*, p. 366.
[425] Rowley, *The Old English Version of Bede's 'Historia Ecclesiastica'*, p. 69.
[426] See above, p. 32.
[427] Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, p. 121.
[428] Lemke, *The Old English Translation of Bede's HE*, p. 277.

history. A significant point in this religious unity was the Gregorian mission, which gave the Anglo-Saxons a distinguished religious history. The question remains as to whether Wormald's argument that the religious unity provided by their conversion history meant that the Anglo-Saxons in the late ninth century saw themselves as a chosen people of God has merit.[429] It does seem that even at this early point in Anglo-Saxon unification, there was some idea that the Anglo-Saxons were special in religious terms. This is seen in the *OEHE* in the account of their settlement of Britain, and also in the emphasis placed on the circumstances of their conversion.[430] However, there is not yet any clarity of vision in characterising the Anglo-Saxons as chosen in the way the biblical Israelites were chosen by God. The Anglo-Saxons may be presented by the text as theologically superior to the other groups around them, and perhaps even at times presented in similar terms to the Israelites, but the *OEHE* does not offer a single vision of Anglo-Saxon identity. This ideology is expressed far more clearly later in the Anglo-Saxon period.

Judith – the Poem and the Homily

Towards the end of the tenth century, the ideology that the Anglo-Saxons were a chosen people of God began to appear more frequently in their texts. This was a time of particular pressure on Anglo-Saxon identity, as Scandinavian raiding began again and culminated in the invasion of 1013 and the accession of Cnut as King of England in 1016. Being a chosen people was an effective way of defining and promoting Anglo-Saxon ethnicity because it made certain claims about the history and culture of the group, ordained by God to be the rightful rulers of the country, and it prescribed particular behaviour for the group to retain God's favour. In particular, Wulfstan uses this motif in his homilies and sermons, implying that the Anglo-Saxons were like the Jews in that they had a Covenant with God and were therefore a chosen people.[431] Wulfstan's work shows a pressing need for the Anglo-Saxons to be a faithful and pious people in order to avoid God's displeasure, which the Jewish people suffer many times in the Old Testament. This equation of the Anglo-Saxons with the Israelites is also found in other texts from the period.[432] The two Anglo-Saxon versions of Judith, Ælfric's homily and the anonymous poem, which offer differing approaches to the biblical Book of Judith, particularly engage with this facet of Anglo-Saxon identity.

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[429] Wormald, "*Engla Lond*", p. 14.
[430] See above, p. 39.
[431] Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 462-463; Lemke, "Fear-Mongering", p. 770.
[432] Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, pp. 462-463.

The *Old English Judith* is a poem found in the same codex as *Beowulf*, and presents a similar dating problem to that of *Beowulf*. The codex is dated to the turn of the eleventh century, but the date of composition is unknown, as is the author. There have been attempts to attribute the *OE Judith* to Cynewulf in the ninth century, but this is far from secure, and the only secure date we have is the date of the manuscript.[433] Whatever the circumstances of the original composition, there was clearly enough interest in the *OE Judith* in the late tenth or early eleventh century that it was considered worthy of copying into the extant manuscript. This would most probably have been in the reign of Æthelræd Unræd, a time of constant conflict with the Scandinavians which ended in Cnut's conquest of England. A text that pits God's chosen people against invading heathens would then have assumed particular significance. The invading Scandinavians were often characterised as heathen by writers such as Wulfstan in his *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, despite the fact that Scandinavia was converting throughout the tenth century, and Cnut himself was a Christian. This portrayal of the Scandinavians as heathen matched well with the Anglo-Saxon preoccupation with presenting themselves as a chosen people of God. A close examination of the *OE Judith* will show how the poem presents this ideology.

Throughout the text, the opposing groups, Bethulians and Assyrians, are described in terms that the Anglo-Saxons could have related to themselves and the Scandinavians. The beginning of the poem has been lost, and it is unknown how many lines preceded the existing first line.[434] The remaining poem begins with the feast in which Holofernes, the main antagonist, becomes intoxicated, enabling Judith to behead him. Although the narrative broadly follows the biblical version set in the Middle East, there are clearly features of the poem that portray both the Assyrians and Bethulians as Germanic rather than Mesopotamian.[435] Holofernes is described as summoning his 'yldestan ðegnas' (most senior thegns), and is referred to as 'swiðmod sinces brytta' (arrogant treasure-giver).[436] The Bethulians are described as 'hæleð higerofe' (brave heroes), who 'scildburh scæron' (cut the shield wall) of their opponents.[437] These phrases reflect an Anglo-Saxon, heroic outlook, as Holofernes, his army and the Bethulians are both portrayed as Germanic figures rather

[433] Tracey-Anne Cooper, "Judith in Late Anglo-Saxon England", in Elena Ciletti and Henrike Lähnemann Kevin R. Brine (ed.), *The Sword of Judith: Judith Studies Across the Disciplines* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 171.
[434] Scholars have taken extremely different positions, e.g. Kevin Kiernan, "The Reformed Nowell Codex and the Beowulf Manuscript", *Anglo-Saxon England,* 46 (2017); Peter Lucas, "The Place of Judith in the Beowulf-Manuscript", *The Review of English Studies,* 41.164 (1990)
[435] 'Germanic' is here intended as a broad term to mean tropes that are characteristic of northern European, rather than classical or biblical, tradition, including Anglo-Saxon and Norse. See Roberta Frank, "Germanic legend in Old English literature", in Lapidge, *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, pp. 86, 89.
[436] "The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: A Collective Edition." (1993): accessed 26/08/2020, , p. 1094, line 10 and 1095, line 30.
[437] Ibid., pp. 1110-1111, lines 302 and 304.

than in any way true to their Assyrian or Jewish origins.[438] The image of the king surrounded by his loyal thegns and giving rings is a traditional Anglo-Saxon motif, as seen in *Beowulf*, and its use to represent Holofernes contradicts his biblical identity as an Assyrian army general, who were not known for treasure-giving.[439] His army are shown to form a shield wall, and this imagery is also used in the *Battle of Maldon* poem.[440] The shield wall is again a Germanic feature, presumably familiar as a military tactic to tenth- and eleventh-century Anglo-Saxons as there is no explanation of it in the *Battle of Maldon*, an approximately contemporary poem with the extant version of *Judith*, in which it functions as a plot device. *Judith*, then, contains military techniques that the Anglo-Saxons would have recognised as their own and which were depicted in a poem about the Anglo-Saxons themselves. The use of motifs familiar to the Anglo-Saxons could be dismissed as simply being a practical way of making the poem intelligible to its audience, but the substantial changes to the narrative suggest that there was a desire to portray the Bethulians as Anglo-Saxons. In the biblical Book of Judith the Bethulians do not fight the Assyrians – instead the Assyrian army disperses after Holofernes is killed – but in the *OE Judith*, the Bethulians go into battle as 'hæleð higerofe' (brave heroes).[441] This change is necessary in order for the Anglo-Saxons to be able to identify with the Bethulians, because, as Paul de Lacy notes, Anglo-Saxon heroic sensibilities meant they could not respect a group which did not fight.[442] The simple dispersal of the Assyrians would not be enough to relate the poem to the Anglo-Saxons' own position given the repeated invasions by the Scandinavians, but a heroic and emphatic victory against a heathen force would certainly have been an enticing prospect. The description of the Bethulians as 'þa ðe hwile ær / elðeodigra edwit þoledon, / hæðenra hosp' (those who had for a time before suffered the reproach of foreign people, heathen insult) would surely have been resoundingly familiar and extremely relatable to the Anglo-Saxons at the turn of the millennium.[443] Additionally, 'elðeodigra' (foreign) and 'hæðenra' (heathen) would certainly be how the Anglo-Saxons would have identified the Scandinavian invaders, and is used by Wulfstan to refer to them in his *Sermo*.[444] Similarly, the epithet 'landbuende' (land-dwellers, or perhaps native) to describe the Bethulians and referring to an 'ealde æfðoncan' (old quarrel) with the Assyrians firmly links the poem to the Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian conflict.[445]

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[438] Judith Kaup notes briefly the use of conventional Anglo-Saxon warrior terminology to describe the Assyrians, and the sophisticated integration of Christian and heroic ideas: Judith Kaup, *The Old English Judith: A Study of Poetic Style, Theological Tradition,and Anglo-Saxon Christian Concepts* (Lewiston, 2013), pp. 135, 343.
[439] Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe, "Values and ethics in heroic literature", in Lapidge, *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, pp. 101-102.
[440] "The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: A Collective Edition", p. 1540, line 242.
[441] Ibid., p. 1110, line 302.
[442] Paul de Lacy, "Aspects of Christianisation and Cultural Adaptation in the Old English 'Judith'", *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen,* 97.4 (1996), p. 393-410.
[443] "The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: A Collective Edition", p. 1106, lines 214-216.
[444] Lemke, "Fear-Mongering", p. 764.
[445] "The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: A Collective Edition", p. 1107-1108, lines 226 and 265.

The Assyrians and Bethulians have only a short immediate history of conflict within the biblical narrative, while the Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavian groups had been in conflict throughout Æthelred's reign and intermittently for centuries preceding. The portrayal in the poem of a native, godly people defending their home with military prowess against an invading heathen, foreign army after an extended and humiliating conflict matches more closely the situation between the Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians than between the biblical description of the Bethulians and Assyrians. Most significantly, it places the Anglo-Saxons in the role of God's chosen people.

In the context of the early eleventh century, the poem not only equated the Anglo-Saxons' experience to that of God's chosen people, but also demonstrated how a chosen people could achieve victory against an invader. Military success is inextricably linked to God's favour in the poem. Judith attributes her own martial prowess in beheading Holofernes to God's help and suggests that God has already condemned the Assyrians to die.[446] However, in the OE poem God's favour requires military action from the Bethulians, as already mentioned. God's facilitation of Judith's murder of Holofernes does not cause the Assyrians to flee and subsequently end the Bethulians' troubles, rather it gives the Bethulians the upper hand in the ensuing battle and the courage to make the attacks. It is a sign of God's favour and a call to arms, but the Bethulians must still heed the call to arms, articulated by Judith, and be brave in battle. These events create a narrative that could and, I argue, should be mapped directly onto the Anglo-Saxons' situation. When God's favoured people are besieged by invading heathens, they are required to fight to defend their homeland, and while God has already ordained their victory, the heathen army is 'fæge' (doomed to die), victory still requires military action.[447] It is clear that the poem is a call for the Anglo-Saxons to fight the invading Scandinavians, or at least could have been interpreted that way at the time it was copied into its extant manuscript. The poem also requires the Anglo-Saxons to construct their identity in certain ways. In order for the Anglo-Saxons to be successful against the Scandinavians not only must they actually fight but they must also be God's chosen people. These are the two attributes that a group must possess to be victorious against invaders, according to the logic of the poem. This not only encourages piety, but also makes a claim about the very nature of the Anglo-Saxons. They are not simply a pious Christian people like any other, but a people chosen by God. The *Judith* poet has altered the biblical material not only to make it more relatable to a Christian Anglo-Saxon audience, what de Lacy calls 'Christianisation and cultural adaptation', but also to reinforce the characterisation of the Anglo-Saxons as God's chosen people in the specific

[446] "The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: A Collective Edition", p. 1105, lines 185-195.
[447] Ibid., p. 1105, line 195.

context of the Scandinavian invasions, and to make clear the practical, military advantage of such an identity.[448]

Ælfric's homily on Judith, approximately contemporary with the extant copy of the poem, is significant in this context in that it apparently has a slightly different emphasis. An examination of this text sheds light on how the Judith narrative was interpreted in the period, in spite of the differences between the two versions. Ælfric's commentary at the end of the text suggests it was intended for an audience of nuns and focuses on chastity.[449] The Judith narrative, however, appears not particularly suited to his own interpretation, as Mary Clayton points out, because Ælfric does not quite manage to remove from the text the fact that Judith overcomes Holofernes by seducing him.[450] He offers a different comment on the narrative in a letter to Sigeweard, in which he uses the stories of both Judith and the Maccabees to illustrate the need for armed resistance to the Scandinavian invasions.[451] Clayton suggests this is a more appropriate commentary on the Judith text itself, and it certainly appears to be more fitting than the attached commentary, which seems oddly disconnected from the narrative text.[452] However, while Ælfric's version of Judith does show the Bethulians picking up arms and preparing to fight the Assyrians, his homily, like the Book of Judith, has the Assyrians fleeing following Holofernes' death and does not contain a battle as the *OE Judith* does.[453] Does this text then support the logic of the *OE Judith*, that the Anglo-Saxons must be both God's chosen people and brave in battle to defeat the Scandinavians? I would argue that it does, but that the emphasis in this text falls more on the piety required to be God's chosen people, and less on the actual violence of war. This emphasis is perhaps unsurprising, as Ælfric was a man of God. We still see the same equation, a pious chosen people of God + military valour + a heathen enemy = victory, though there is an emphasis on the first element of the equation in Ælfric's homily and the second in the *OE Judith*.

The emphasis in the homily on the importance of being God's chosen people is clear from the inclusion of Achior, a character from the biblical Judith that is omitted from the *OE Judith*.[454] Achior is a member of Holofernes' army, but he is familiar with the Jewish people and in Ælfric's

[448] Lacy, "Aspects of Christianisation", p. 393.
[449] Hugh Magennis, "Contrasting Narrative Emphasis in the Old English Poem Judith and Ælfric's Paraphrase of the Book of Judith", *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen,* 96.1 (1995), pp. 61-66.
[450] Mary Clayton, "Ælfric's *Judith*: Manipulative or Manipulated?", *Anglo-Saxon England,* 23 (1994), pp. 215-227.
[451] Ibid., pp. 217-218.
[452] Ibid., p. 225.
[453] Stuart D. Lee, *Ælfric's Homilies on Judith, Esther, and the Maccabees* (Oxford, 1999), <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~stuart/kings/main.htm> accessed 29/7/2020, line 310-321.
[454] Magennis, "Contrasting Narrative Emphasis", p. 61. Although the character may appear in the part of the poem that is now lost, as he is usually found in the beginning of the narrative.

version he gives a long speech about their piety and the favour they enjoy from God, as well as discussing their history and the times they had strayed from God and been punished.[455] Hugh Magennis suggests that Ælfric increased this character's importance in his text from the biblical version, and included his long speech even though he cut many of the other speeches.[456] This inclusion allowed Ælfric to dwell on the way the Jewish people would 'to hospe gewordene þurh hæðene leoda' (come to insult through heathen peoples), but then 'gecyrdon mid soðre dædbote eft to heora Gode' (turned back with true atonement again to their God) and so God 'gedyde hi sona mihtige ⁊ strange to wiðstandenne heora feondum' (made them immediately mighty and strong to withstand their enemies).[457] This is an important point because it engages with the motif presented by writers such as Wulfstan, that impiety causes God's wrath in the form of heathen invasion, but that piety can regain God's favour, particularly for his chosen people, and bring victory. Indeed, Achior's character makes the point twice, reiterating in the next section:

> þa þa misheoldon þone heofonlican God, hi wurdon gehergode, ⁊ sume ofslagene, ⁊ sume gelædde to fyrlenum landum, on hæftnede wunigende, oððæt hi wendon eft to þam heofonlican Gode þe hi on gelyfað; ⁊ hi habbað nu eft heora eard gebogod ⁊ þa burh Hierusalem, þær bið heora haligdom.[458]
> (when they ill-held their heavenly God, they were harried, and some killed and some brought to distant lands, staying in captivity, until they turned again to the heavenly God that they believed in; and they have now again inhabited their land and the city of Jerusalem, where their temple is.)

This section of the text articulates clearly not only the Old Testament situation of the Jews, but also the ecclesiastical position that Anglo-Saxon, and earlier, writers had taken concerning invasions of Britain. Bede, drawing on Gildas, had criticised the Britons for their impiety, and the fact that the Britons had conclusively lost against the invading Anglo-Saxon groups was seen as not only proof that the Britons had been sinful but that God did not want them to have possession of the land.[459] The Anglo-Saxons had suffered raiding and invasion by the Scandinavians, they were certainly 'gehergode' (harried) and some even 'gelædde to fyrlenum landum' (brought to distant lands) by Scandinavian slaving, and this was depicted as the result of sinfulness among the Anglo-Saxons. However, following the example of the Jews in *Judith*, the Anglo-Saxons could win back God's favour by showing piety and devotion because they, like the Jewish people of the Old Testament, were God's chosen. This elevated position separated the Anglo-Saxons from the

[455] Lee, *Ælfric's Homilies*, lines 70-123.
[456] Magennis, "Contrasting Narrative Emphasis", pp. 61-63.
[457] Lee, *Ælfric's Homilies*, lines 107-109.
[458] Ibid., lines 111-116.
[459] See above, pp. 30-38.

Britons and from other Christian groups, who did not enjoy this heavenly favour, and allowed them to maintain a stable identity even in the face of the massive disruption caused by the renewed Scandinavian raiding and subsequent invasion.

The emphasis throughout the homily is on the necessity of piety, but this does not mean that military victory is not also the focus. Judith is extremely pious, refusing to eat Assyrian food and, Ælfric is clear, not lusting after Holofernes despite the fact she is seducing him.[460] Her bravery and piety inspire the rest of her people to resist the invaders and to renew their faith in God, as shown by their leader, Ozias, leading a blessing attributing Judith's success to God.[461] Judith's qualities also inspire faith in Achior, who as an Assyrian presumably did not worship the Hebrew God, although he recognises the power that God can give the Hebrew people.[462] Seeing Judith's success, he 'gelyfde siððan on þone lyfigendan God, æfter Moyses æ, þæs mæran heretogan' (believed afterwards in the living God, after Moses' law, that famous leader).[463] However, Ælfric makes clear that it is not the violence that Judith perpetrates that saves and inspires her people, but rather her piety and chastity. He puts this explanation in the mouth of Joachim, the Bethulians' elder, 'forþan þe þu wunodest æfter þinum were wiflice on clænnysse, ⁊ God þe gestrangode for þære clænnesse, ⁊ forðan þu sylf bist gebletsod on worulde!' (because after your husband you stayed a woman in cleanness, and God strengthened you for your cleanness, and so you yourself will be blessed in the world!). Ælfric makes a definite link here between chastity and martial success, which must surely be designed to show readers that in order to succeed against the invading 'heathens' chastity and piety were not only as important as military bravery but were in fact weapons against the enemy.

In this light, we might reconsider some of the conclusions drawn by scholars concerning the suitability of the commentary attached to the Judith homily, and from this how the Judith texts were understood by contemporaries. Clayton argues that the very nature of the Judith narrative makes it unsuitable as a homily on chastity, because Judith seduces Holofernes to kill him.[464] This is certainly true to some extent: the seduction section of the text is rather awkwardly handled, and Ælfric's assertions that Judith herself was not lustful only goes so far to offset the rather salacious content. However, the later part of the text is more suited to the chastity commentary, as it shows

[460] Lee, *Ælfric's Homilies*, lines 227 and 242.
[461] Ibid., lines 279-283.
[462] Ibid., lines 120-123.
[463] Ibid., lines 290-291.
[464] Clayton, "Ælfric's *Judith*", p. 222.

the power of chastity in an invasion. Chastity is after all a form of piety, and group piety strengthened the Anglo-Saxons' relationship with God and also strengthened them against their enemies, as also demonstrated by Wulfstan's instructions for thorough fasting for all and for every priest to say a prayer for the king and all his people apparently in response to the Scandinavian 'great army' arriving in England.[465] In this context, the chastity of a group of nuns played as important a role in the security of the country against invasion as the military actions of men such as Sigeweard. This analysis favours Ian Pringle's interpretation of the homily, as he views the text as a call for both military action and chastity to defend England from the Scandinavians.[466] Magennis suggests that Ælfric's two apparently competing commentaries were directed at different audiences, with no overarching interpretation on Ælfric's part, so there is no need to synthesise a single interpretation for the text. Clearly Ælfric's comments to Sigeweard are tailored to a different audience than his commentary for the nuns, but a single concern, the salvation of the country, can be seen in both. Sigeweard and the nuns whom Ælfric is presumably addressing both have roles to play in this salvation. Sigeweard must take up arms and encourage others to do so, the nuns must stay chaste and ensure that God's chosen people retain God's favour. Read in this way, the commentary is not as ill-fitted to the text as Clayton suggests. Ælfric's concern when writing the homily on Judith was not just to showcase chastity, but to demonstrate the various ways in which a people of God could defend themselves against a heathen invader. If anything, the text more successfully shows how chastity can be used to defend a city than military power, given the absence of a battle in Ælfric's version. We can therefore conclude that Ælfric has similar concerns to the poet of the *OE Judith* in writing the commentary. He just as firmly equates the Anglo-Saxons with the Jewish people of Judith as the poem does and, by showing how the Bethulians need to be pious to secure God's favour, he references all of the contemporary texts that call for Anglo-Saxon piety to defeat the Scandinavian invaders.[467] This conclusion demonstrates the need to understand how a group characterises its identity in order to fully understand the texts it produces, as Ælfric's commentary has been seen as ill-suited to the homily by previous scholars but with a full grasp on Anglo-Saxon identity in this period its significance becomes clear. Around the millennium, when the Judith homily and the poem were written, the Anglo-Saxons clearly expressed an identity as God's chosen people and these texts show an intention to govern group behaviour through this religious identity.

[465] Lieberman, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, p. 262.
[466] Ian Pringle, "'Judith': The Homily and the Poem", *Traditio,* 31 (1975), p. 90.
[467] Ibid., p. 91.

Legitimacy

While it is often difficult to discern the real-world effects of acts of collective identification, the success of King Cnut's reign in England is an example of the use to which the established religious characterisation of Anglo-Saxon identity could be put by the elite. By the 1010s, the Anglo-Saxon intellectual and political elite had clearly developed an identity that characterised them as a chosen people of God, pitted against heathen invaders and needing to maintain their piety to retain God's favour. In this cultural milieu, it seems implausible that a Scandinavian king could establish himself as the legitimate ruler of England. However, when Cnut succeeded in defeating Edmund Ironside in 1016 and securing kingship of first half and then all of England on Edmund's death, this was the challenge with which he was faced. As shown above, the invading Scandinavians were portrayed in much tenth- and eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon writing as heathen enemies, and occurrences such as the murder of Bishop Ælfheah in 1013 by Scandinavian soldiers compounded this view, despite the fact that Cnut himself was Christian. There were a number of ways by which Cnut sought to establish legitimacy for himself, and the fact that many of them were religious demonstrates the significance of religion as a characteristic of Anglo-Saxon identity.

Cnut successfully established himself as legitimate king of England and Edmund Ironside's heir, situating himself in the West Saxon line of succession and preventing his reign being challenged by Æthelræd's sons. He did this through extravagant and ostentatious religious behaviour of a kind that won him the approval of the Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastic elite.[468] This included the translation of a number of bodies for burial outside London, and the foundation of the minster at Assandun. Cnut removed Ælfheah's body from London in spite, or perhaps because, a cult venerating him had developed there, and enshrined it in Canterbury.[469] This allowed Cnut to involve himself in the cult of the popular martyr and to mitigate some of the negative association Scandinavians had with the martyrdom, while also shifting Ælfheah's relics away from his most dense support base, which may have been expected to lessen interest in his cult.[470] Cnut similarly moved the bodies of his predecessors, Æthelræd Unræd and Edmund Ironside, out of London to Canterbury and Glastonbury respectively. This had a similar purpose to the translation of Ælfheah's remains in neutralising the possible political and spiritual rallying point they represented.[471] It also demonstrated to his subjects that he was respectful of his West Saxon predecessors, suggesting

[468] M K Lawson, *Cnut: The Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century* (Harlow, 1993), pp. 133-140; 159; Elaine Treharne, *Living through the Conquest: the Politics of Early English 1020-1220* (Oxford, 2012), p. 40.
[469] Nicole Marafioti, *The King's Body: Burial and Succession in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto, 2014), pp. 193-194.
[470] Ibid., pp. 194-195; Lawson, *Cnut*, p. 141.
[471] Marafioti, *The King's Body*., p. 197.

continuity rather than usurpation.[472] Nicole Marafioti has argued that the foundation of the minster at Assandun, on the site of Cnut's victory over Edmund, was a way of both showing his piety and mitigating the political impact of the Scandinavian invasion.[473] Rather than being a place of mourning, Assandun would be a reminder of the new king's devoutness. Jacob Hobson has similarly made the case that the entries in the *ASC* for Cnut's reign present him as not only a protector of the country, but an ideal Christian king.[474] This is emphasised in the *ASC* by the recording of Cnut's pilgrimage to Rome and his translation of Ælfheah's relics.[475] These examples demonstrate that Cnut was engaging in Anglo-Saxon religious culture in order to secure political legitimacy, presenting himself as the devout king of a chosen people.

This engagement with the native culture is perhaps an unusual approach for the victorious conqueror to take, so it is necessary to consider why Cnut found it so effective. Marafioti has described Cnut's approach as one of 'reconciliation' rather than dominance, and I would go as far as to suggest that Cnut was assimilating himself into the culture of the people he had conquered in a reversal of the usual conquest outcome.[476] Elaine Treharne has suggested that Cnut was disingenuous in his apparent piety and regard for his Anglo-Saxon subjects, because Norse texts such as the *Knútsdrápr* appear to revel in the Scandinavian king's conquest of England.[477] It is probably true that Cnut's interest in good, Christian kingship was self-interested, but his motives do not alter the effect of his actions. Rather than replacing the extant system of government and the elite strata of society with one of his own choosing, Cnut engaged with the existing institution and worked through it to establish himself as a legitimate ruler on the terms of the people he had conquered.[478] This was facilitated by shared religion: Cnut knew the ways that religious practice could legitimise a king, and was able to manipulate it to seem, as Hobson notes, 'the paragon of a successful English king'.[479] However, it also meant that Anglo-Saxon identity remained stable even in the face of conquest. Hobson sees no change in the way events were assimilated by the writers of the *ASC* following Cnut's accession, and argues that texts from the period represent a negotiation between Cnut's kingship and the existing framework of Anglo-Saxon identity in the same way they had for previous kings.[480] The decision to portray Cnut as a *de facto* member of the

[472] Lawson, *Cnut*, p. 139.
[473] Marafioti, *The King's Body*, p. 212.
[474] Jacob Hobson, "National–Ethnic Narratives in Eleventh-Century Literary Representations of Cnut", *Anglo-Saxon England,* 43 (2014), p. 275
[475] *MS. C*, p. 104.
[476] Marafioti, *The King's Body*, p. 212.
[477] Treharne, *Living through the Conquest*, p. 44.
[478] See below, pp. 128-133.
[479] Hobson, "National–Ethnic Narratives", p. 275.
[480] Ibid., p. 271.

West Saxon dynasty rather than a victorious invader meant that he had to be integrated and integrate himself into Anglo-Saxon identity rather than creating an independent identity. There may have been practical reasons for this decision. Buying into the Anglo-Saxon framework for legitimacy helped to stabilise the tumultuous political situation that Cnut inherited. Cnut also had interests abroad: he became king of Denmark just two years after he was crowned in England, and he campaigned in Norway and Sweden. Ruling England as an Anglo-Saxon king rather than a Scandinavian invader may have been a less labour-intensive and disruptive way of governing and therefore have suited both Cnut and the Anglo-Saxon people well. Treharne describes this as 'pragmatic ethnicity', but however pragmatic, Cnut's actions had real consequences for Anglo-Saxon identity because ethnicity is maintained by a constant process of identifications.[481] The Anglo-Saxons could maintain the integrity of their identity by having a king who conformed to their own ideals of Christian kingship and Cnut could invest in political propaganda, parsed as religious virtue, rather than military intervention.

Cnut's decision to engage with Anglo-Saxon identity through religion allowed the Anglo-Saxons to survive the military defeat against the 'heathen' Scandinavians with their identity as God's chosen people intact. Even though the rhetoric during the late tenth and early eleventh centuries from writers such as Wulfstan and Ælfric was that the Scandinavian invaders were heathens who could only be defeated by the piety of the Anglo-Saxons, the performative piety of Cnut's translation of relics, foundation of the Assandun minster and refoundation of Bury St Edmunds could comfort Anglo-Saxons that they had not been overrun by heathens.[482] Indeed, Wulfstan, who had given such dire warning in his *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* concerning a Scandinavian invasion, appears to have fulfilled a similar role in Cnut's court as he had in Æthelræd's, writing laws that provided continuity with both Wulfstan's own earlier work and with the corpus of Anglo-Saxon law that proceeded it.[483] It is important to note that Wulfstan proposed that the main danger from the Scandinavian invasion was religious, and after Cnut's conquest this danger was not realised. If anything, as Hobson suggests, Cnut is presented as a better Christian king than his predecessor Æthelræd.[484] In terms of collective Anglo-Saxon identity, religious acts of identification continued much as they had before Cnut's conquest. Through this, Cnut showed the Anglo-Saxon elite that their identity had not altered, forestalling resistance, and he took control of the way this identity was shaped in the same way the West Saxon kings had, providing legitimacy in a non-disruptive

[481] Treharne, *Living through the Conquest*, p. 17.
[482] Marafioti, *The King's Body*, p. 208.
[483] See below, pp. 128-133.
[484] Hobson, "National–Ethnic Narratives", p. 274.

way. His ability to do this through religion demonstrates the key role religion played in the representation of Anglo-Saxon identity by the end of the Anglo-Saxon period.

Iceland

Christianity came to Iceland far later than England, and so it was a more recently adopted religion in the period under consideration. Perhaps as a result of this, the Icelanders viewed Christianity in far more pragmatic terms and at first glance there appears to have been a more favourable and knowledgeable relationship with remembered paganism than in England.[485] 'Remembered paganism' here does not necessarily mean an accurate memory of pre-conversion practices, but rather it is a reconstructed and Christianised memory of the religion practised before conversion. While there is no suggestion that the Icelanders were any less devout than any other Christian group in this period, they seem to have represented their conversion in an unusual way, presenting it as a legal act rather than a religious one.[486] The moment of conversion is an important instance of shared history for any medieval Christian group, so its characterisation is significant evidence of collective self-representation. Additionally, although the Icelanders had a fully functioning ecclesiastical system by the mid-eleventh century, with an Icelandic episcopal see and the complete integration of the Church into the system of governance, remembered pagan activity was still referred to in saga, skaldic and eddic literature in the thirteenth century.[487] As in Anglo-Saxon England, Christianity was a fact of life in medieval Iceland, and so culture and behaviour was heavily influenced by Christianity. Nevertheless, many Icelandic texts appear to preserve the memory of pagan practice, and this gives the impression to modern readers that paganism had continued cultural significance in medieval Iceland. Christianity was also integrated at an institutional level. It has been suggested by scholars such as Orri Vésteinsson that Christianity became necessary for the legitimacy of Iceland's ruling elite, the *goðar*, and that many of the *goðar* were priests and controlled ecclesiastical institutions as well as secular.[488] However, the ostentatious piety of Anglo-Saxon England does not seem to have been matched in Iceland in this period. Indeed, in Iceland, Christianity was simply another way for the already elite families of the island to maintain their control rather than an alternative means by which legitimacy could be developed; for example most of the first bishops were drawn from the already powerful Haukdœlir family and

[485] 'Remembered paganism' does not necessarily mean an accurate memory of pre-conversion practices, but rather it is a reconstructed and Christianised memory of the religion practice before conversion.
[486] William Ian Miller, "Of Outlaws, Christians, Horsemeat, and Writing: Uniform Laws and Saga Iceland", *Michigan Law Review,* 89.8 (1991), p. 2087.
[487] Vésteinsson, "The Christianisation of Iceland", pp. 294, 304.
[488] Ibid., p. 304.

their associates.[489] Therefore, the acts of identification considered here that pertain to the conversion narrative, as preserved in *Íslendingabók* and later texts, and remembered pagan belief in Christian-era texts demonstrate the significance of law and literature to Icelandic identity, not religion.

Conversion History

As in England, there is a lack of contemporary sources to illuminate the exact events of Icelandic conversion. The narrative told by Ari in *Íslendingabók* is regarded as accurate in the broadest of terms, but it is as much a product of its twelfth-century context as the conversion period.[490] There are no other sources remotely independent from Ari's account with which to clarify or verify the events, but there are also no contradictory accounts.[491] *Íslendingabók* was written in approximately the 1120s by Ari Þorgilsson, a member of the influential Haukdœlir family.[492] The Haukdœlir family were heavily involved in the establishment of the early Church institutions, and Ari was taught by Teitr Ísleifsson, the son of Iceland's first bishop.[493] He was therefore deeply rooted in the existing church hierarchy, but he also had access to the information he needed to compile his history, particularly in relation to the conversion, because it appears Ari was acquainted with people who were close to the conversion themselves from his education in Haukadalr.[494] It is therefore probable that Ari's motive in his presentation of the conversion was to present it in a way that suited the existing church hierarchy rather than to challenge the status quo in any way. As far as it is possible to ascertain the motives of a historical figure like Ari, the pre-eminence of the Haukdœlir family in ecclesiastical matters was to the benefit of Ari and his associates, so his work is likely a representation of establishment views. It therefore seems sensible to read *Íslendingabók*'s account of the conversion as an act of identification representing the way the twelfth-century Icelandic elite wished to present their shared conversion history.

The *Íslendingabók* chapter on conversion begins by attributing the introduction of Christianity into Iceland to King Óláfr Tryggvasonr of Norway, and this is significant in terms of the Icelanders' representation of their own independent identity.[495] Óláfr sent a missionary called

[489] Ibid., p. 52.
[490] Jenny Jochens, "Late and Peaceful: Iceland's Conversion Through Arbitration in 1000", *Speculum,* 74.3 (1999), p. 652.
[491] Vésteinsson, "The Christianisation of Iceland", p. 51.
[492] Grønlie, *Íslendingabók - Kristni Saga*, ed. Grønlie, pp. x-xi, xiii.
[493] Ibid., p. xiv.
[494] Jochens, "Late and Peaceful", pp. 625-626.
[495] Benediktsson, *Íslendingabók; Landnámabók*, p. 14.

Þangbrandr to Iceland, but although he reportedly converted a few people, including Gizurr *hvíti*, Þangbrandr failed in his effort and appears to have had some trouble in Iceland, as he left after killing a few men for libel and told King Óláfr that the conversion of Iceland was impossible.[496] This is significant because it makes clear that while the conversion was the original initiative of the Norwegian king, external influence was not enough to convert Iceland and 'þeir váru þó fleiri, es í gegn mæltu ok neittu' (there were yet more who spoke against [conversion] and refused it).[497] Clearly there is some tension in this part of the narrative, because to a Christian writer resisting conversion is nothing to be commended, and it is unsurprising that Gizurr *hvíti*, who was the grandfather of Teitr Ísleifsson, was named as one of the first to convert. However, Ari is clear that Norway's attempt to convert Iceland was not met with any widespread success. As the narrative progresses it becomes clear that conversion requires an internal Icelandic decision, rather than external pressure. Icelanders are not only responsible for the conversion, but also for preserving peaceful relations with King Óláfr, who was angered to the point of taking Icelandic hostages by the Icelanders' treatment of Þangbrandr.[498] Gizurr *hvíti* and Hjalti Skeggjasonr were responsible for both of these things, being the key proponents of Christianity in Iceland following Þangbrandr's departure and negotiating the release of the hostage Icelanders.[499] It is unclear from the text exactly how they came to terms with Óláfr, but they appear to have undertaken to convert Iceland in return for the release of the hostages. It is therefore still the case that there was some external pressure on the Icelanders to convert, but the responsibility for conversion was shifted firmly onto the Icelanders themselves.

Icelandic independence in making the choice is emphasised in the narrative. Þangbrandr may have converted some individuals, but he caused unrest in Iceland and could not bring about mass conversion through legal or peaceful means. It takes certain foresighted individuals to do this, and these individuals had to be Icelandic because they were required to operate through Icelandic systems, particularly the *Alþing*. We see a theme developing that is common in later Icelandic texts: Icelanders mitigate Norwegian control by acceding to it, but present the results as Icelandic. The Icelandic laws were adapted from Norwegian law, and sagas such as *Egils saga*, *Njáls saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða* have episodes in which Icelanders go to Norway and the events there with the Norwegian king have repercussions in Iceland.[500] The power the Norwegian king held is clear, not only because of the strength he wielded to reach into Iceland, but also because there were Icelanders in Norway

[496] Ibid., pp. 14-15.
[497] Ibid., p. 14.
[498] Ibid., p. 15.
[499] Ibid., p. 15.
[500] See below, p. 135.

and poor relations between Norway and Iceland affected them. The full tension of this situation is realised in the conversion narrative; King Óláfr makes the decision that both Norway and Iceland should convert, but his Norwegian agents cannot act effectively in Iceland, *Íslendingabók* implies, and so he visits his anger on the Icelanders in Norway and Iceland is forced capitulate, but does so on what are presented as its own terms.[501] This way of approaching Norwegian influence on Iceland is integrated into their shared history through the conversion narrative.

The second act of the conversion narrative is a legal drama, emphasising the significance of law as a characteristic of Icelandic identity. In spite of Gizurr and Hjalti's confidence in their dealings with the Norwegian king, when they actually raise their case at the *Alþing* they are met with fierce opposition.[502] The two sides almost come to blows, and *Íslendingabók* seems to suggest that, in spite of Þangbrandr's failure, there was a substantial number of men on the Christian as well as the pagan side. Gizurr and Hjalti are able to call on 'frændr' (kinsmen) and 'vinir' (friends), although perhaps this was not the large number that Jochens suggests, as Jochens' argument that there was a significant Christian population in Iceland prior to the formal conversion due to Irish settlement and therefore a large Christian 'party' is supposition and unsupported by the sources.[503] The sources do not tell us whether the people who settled Iceland from the British Isles were British and Irish natives or members of the Scandinavian communities there. In any case, the moment of danger for the Icelanders is not this threat of violence but the legal impasse that follows as both sides 'nefndi… vátta' (named witnesses), presumably meaning that, as both sides had witnesses and weight of witness testimony was the usual way in which legal disputes were resolved, there was no obvious resolution.[504] This impasse meant 'sǫgðusk hvárir ýr lǫgum við aðra' (each said their law against the other), and that the Christians appear to have tried to elect Hallr of Síða as their own lawspeaker, but he declined in favour of the lawspeaker Þorgeirr.[505] That each side declared their own law and lawspeaker suggests a complete breakdown in the unified Icelandic legal system, which relied on everyone being governed by a single law. [506] After a day and night of deliberation under his cloak, *Íslendingabók* records Þorgeirr as entreating both sides to agree to be governed by the same law because 'es vér slítum í sundr lǫgin, at vér monum slíta ok friðinn' (if we break apart the law, we also break the peace).[507] Þorgeirr ensured that both the Christians and pagans had agreed

[501] Benediktsson, *Íslendingabók; Landnámabók*, p. 15.
[502] Ibid., p. 15.
[503] Ibid., p. 16; Jochens, "Late and Peaceful", p. 653.
[504] Benediktsson, *Íslendingabók; Landnámabók*, p. 16; Andrew Dennis, *Laws of Early Iceland I*, pp. 54-56.
[505] Benediktsson, *Íslendingabók; Landnámabók*, p. 16.
[506] Vésteinsson, "The Christianisation of Iceland", p. 51.
[507] Benediktsson, *Íslendingabók; Landnámabók*, p. 17.

to this principle before making his ruling, which was of course that Christianity would be Iceland's religion, with a few allowances for pagan practice.[508] This is a record of the triumph of the Icelandic legal system, which faced the threat of disintegration but was able to bring about a peaceful resolution through the mass consent of the Icelanders. It demonstrates the power of the legal institution through the Icelanders' shared history.[509] The Icelandic legal system was central to representations of an independent Icelandic identity because it was how they arbitrated disagreements and kept the peace without a king.[510] The manner of the Icelandic conversion fits in with this overall emphasis on the power of law in Icelandic society, particularly the importance given to maintaining a single law among the Icelandic people.

The conversion chapter of *Íslendingabók* is a twelfth-century representation of the Icelanders preserving their identity through their established infrastructure in the face of the destabilising influence of an outside force. Iceland's conversion was not caused by internal piety, in fact there is a notable lack of pious motivation in Ari's conversion narrative.[511] The motivation was to keep the peace with a powerful foreign king, and to maintain the integrity of the Icelandic legal institution. This gives Icelandic Christianity a distinctly Icelandic identity, making it part of the narrative of Icelandic-Norwegian interaction and a crowning glory in the success of the Free State's legal system. The description of King Óláfr's decision to bring Christianity to both Norway and Iceland suggests that Iceland may not have had as much independence in practice as is suggested elsewhere in *Íslendingabók* and in other texts. Óláfr's imposition of Christianity in Iceland appears to have been regarded in the same way as his conversion of Norway. Rather than presenting an effort to convert a foreign country, *Íslendingabók* reads, 'Óláfr 'kom kristini í Norveg ok á Ísland' (brought Christianity to Norway and to Iceland).[512] It is hard to determine how much political influence Norway had in Iceland, but this chapter of *Íslendingabók* suggests that the Norwegian king expected to have enough power in Iceland to affect conversion. The Icelanders' response to this was not to resist but rather to placate the king and work to facilitate the necessary change in Iceland in a way that was acceptable to the Icelanders. This narrative therefore reveals Icelandic identity to be not only based in a rather pragmatic approach to Christianity, with more faith shown in the Icelandic legal system than in the Christian God, but also its ongoing relationship with Norwegian power. The narrative reflects a belief, which may well have been current among Ari's contemporaries, that the Icelanders were able to negotiate with Norway

[508] Dag Strömbäck, *The Conversion of Iceland: A Survey,* trans. Peter Foote (London, 1975), pp. 28-29.
[509] Ibid., p. 28.
[510] See below, p. 136.
[511] Vésteinsson, "The Christianisation of Iceland", p. 51.
[512] Benediktsson, *Íslendingabók; Landnámabók*, p. 14.

through the use of traditional Icelandic infrastructure, that is, legal unity as represented by the lawspeaker and the *Alþing*.

Kristni saga, a later account of the conversion, demonstrates similar themes to *Íslendingabók*, but retells the narrative in a mid-thirteenth-century context.[513] Although written a century after *Íslendingabók*, it contains a considerably more detailed account of the conversion, including more direct speech, and the origin of these additions is unclear. Orri Vésteinsson attributes some of *Kristni Saga*'s additions to and deviations from *Íslendingabók* to information taken from *Jóns saga helga*, and Siân Grønlie also includes Oddr's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, *Vatnsdæla saga*, *Laxdæla saga* and *Heimskringla*, but others cannot be accounted for.[514] It is possible that these additions, as with some elements of *Íslendingabók*, come either from remembered traditions or from the author's own imagination. This shows that the tradition concerning conversion was still very much active and being expanded over a century after *Íslendingabók* provided an apparently definitive account. *Kristni saga* extends the conversion narrative, adding in earlier, unsuccessful conversion attempts by foreign bishops and Christian Icelanders alike, so emphasising the achievement of Gizurr *hvíti* and Hjalti Skeggjasonr in managing to convert the Icelanders. *Kristni saga* does not particularly introduce any new themes into the conversion narrative that are pertinent to the discussion of identity, but it does show that the themes that were current in the early twelfth century, those of Icelandic Christianity as a product of legal arbitration, and negotiation with Norwegian power, were still current in the mid thirteenth century. Indeed, the narrative deviates from its possible source *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* in its emphasis on the legal disputes brought about by conversion attempts and in its disinterest in King Óláfr's actions.[515] It is significant that even when using sources that present an alternative view of the conversion, the Icelandic account still maintained its focus on the themes of the narrative that are important to Icelandic identity. The putative timing of *Kristni saga*'s composition is also significant. While *Íslendingabók*'s composition context suggests that it was written with an eye to securing the established ecclesiastical structure and formally recording the extant relationship with Norway, *Kristni saga*'s composition context falls following the 1215-1220 trade disputes with Norway and immediately preceding the 1264 submission to Norway.[516] This was a time of crisis for Icelandic identity as the political and legal system they saw as definitive of their identity was failing under the increased pressure from Norway and the internal pressure of the powerful Haukdœlir and Sturlungar families. The narrative of *Kristni saga* was then

[513] Vésteinsson, "The Christianisation of Iceland", p. 20.
[514] Ibid., p. 19; Siân Grønlie, "Kristni Saga and Medieval Conversion History", *Gripla,* 16 (2005), p. 147.
[515] Grønlie, "Kristni Saga", pp. 155-156.
[516] Njördur Njardvík, *Birth of a Nation: The Story of the Icelandic Commonwealth* (Reykjavík, 1973), p. 81.

particularly relevant because it championed if not Icelandic independence from Norway, at least their ability to mediate Norwegian control, and Iceland's ability to solve problems with the potential to destroy the Icelandic Free State through internal arbitration rather than external interference. In this way, similar representations of Icelandic identity can be seen over the course of a century, expressed through shared conversion history and reiterated at a period of significant pressure on Icelandic identity.

Remembered Paganism

Christianity is not the only religion that appears to have been significant to Icelandic identity. In medieval Iceland, unlike in many other medieval Christian countries, there was a tradition of remembered paganism that included the details of specific deities and the deeds associated with them.[517] This tradition had developed over several centuries between conversion to Christianity and the texts that record it, so it is unknown how far the details had been adapted, but it was still significant to Icelandic identity. There is little detailed information about non-classical paganism preserved in sources from the medieval period. As discussed above, Anglo-Saxon England records a few names in genealogies that were associated with pre-Christian worship, and there are also stories such as *Beowulf*, a few place names, and a few artefacts that preserve pre-Christian stories such as that of Weland the smith, but no texts that remember the pre-Christian gods as deities. Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda* is unusual in that, although it euhemerises the Norse gods as ancient Trojans and warns against pagan belief, it records the deeds of these gods as a somewhat coherent mythology. The resemblance this may have had to actual pre-Christian belief has been the subject of much scholarly debate, with some elements of the mythology singled out as Snorri's own inventions and others viewed as possible traditional oral mythology.[518] For the purposes of this thesis, the mythology held in the *Prose Edda* will be treated as having some loose basis in traditional mythology, augmented by Snorri as he saw fit. This mythology was clearly not created from scratch by Snorri, it is used elsewhere Icelandic literature, such as in skaldic poetry, but it is also unlikely that it survived unchanged over the two centuries since conversion.[519] It is not the specifics of pagan belief that I argue affected Icelandic identity, but rather the treatment of paganism in the Christian era. Many Icelandic texts do mention paganism in passing, including the sagas that include pre-Christian supernatural beliefs such as witchcraft and *draugar*, but I will be chiefly considering the *Prose Edda* due to its unparalleled focus on pre-Christian mythology. While in other

[517] Jonas Wellendorf, *Gods and Humans in Medieval Scandinavia: Retying the Bonds* (Berkeley, 2018), p. 23.
[518] Wanner, *Snorri Sturluson and the Edda*, p. 137.
[519] Gade, "Poetry and its changing importance in medieval Icelandic culture", p. 64.

texts the reference to potentially pagan motifs is fleeting, the *Prose Edda* is an act of identification that offers a comprehensive shared history for the Icelanders that appears to draw on pre-Christian mythology.

Significantly, the *Edda*, a purported record of pre-Christian belief, was created in the thirteenth century, well after Christianity was established within Icelandic culture. The purpose of this text may have had far more to do with responding to this thirteenth-century context than recording pre-Christian mythology. There are problems in studying the *Edda* as a thirteenth-century text in that the manuscript tradition is uncertain. All of the surviving manuscripts are late and offer an unclear picture of the text as Snorri would have written it. However, some version of the *Edda* existed in the period in question, so this allows some analysis to be done.[520] Although the mythology is set in a frame that insists upon the fallacy of pagan belief, there is a wealth of detail present in the narratives that suggests at least some popularity of remembered pagan knowledge, if not belief, several centuries after the conversion. This popularity is unlikely to be uniquely Icelandic; we have no real way of assessing how remembered pagan tradition survived orally in medieval cultures, but it is improbable that it died out everywhere except Iceland. The unusual existence of the *Prose Edda* is not, in my opinion, evidence that the Icelanders had an exceptional love of their pagan past, but rather due to the particular use they made of it. Snorri's motive for writing the text is uncertain, but while many scholars have assumed an antiquarian interest, Kevin Wanner has instead suggested that Snorri's choice to compile pagan tradition was born of a fairly self-serving desire to preserve the necessary knowledge to understand skaldic poetry, an important characteristic the Icelandic elite wished to represent to other groups.[521] Wanner contends that Snorri wished to gain social capital by exporting his skaldic poetry to the Norwegian court as poets of the heroic past had purportedly done.[522] It make sense that if the knowledge needed to understand the pre-Christian references in skaldic poetry was lost, then the poetry itself would lose its attraction. For example, the third part of the *Edda*, *Skáldskaparmál*, contains a long explanation for why various kennings are used for people and things. The kennings for gold are described thus:

> Hvernig skal kenna gull? Sva at kalla þat eld Ægis ok barr Glasis, haddr Sifjar, hǫfuðband Fullu, grátr Freyju, munntal ok rǫdd ok orð jǫtna, dropa Draupnis ok regn eða skúr Draupnis eða augna Freyju, otrgjǫld, slǫggjald Ásanna, sáð Fýrisvalla, haugþak Hǫlga, eldr allra vatna ok handar, grjót ok sker eða blik handar.[523]

[520] Anthony Faulkes, (ed.), *Edda: Prologue and* Gylfaginning (Exeter, 2005), pp. xxviii-xxx.
[521] [521] Gade, "Poetry and its changing importance in medieval Icelandic culture", p. 69; Wanner, *Snorri Sturluson and the Edda*, pp. 6-8.
[522] Wanner, *Snorri Sturluson and the Edda*, p. 72
[523] Anthony Faulkes, (ed.), *Edda:* Skáldskaparmál (Exeter, 2007), p. 40.

> (What should gold be called? It can be called like this: Æger's fire and Glaser's foliage, Sif's hair, Fulla's headband, Freyja's tears, mouth-tale and voice and word of giants, Draupnir's drop and tears or shower of Draupnir or Freyja's eyes, the otter-payment, blow-payment of the Æsir, seed of Fýrisvellir, Hǫlgi's mound-roof, fire of all waters and hand, rock and skerry or gleam in the hand.)

These ways of referring to gold make complex use of mythology, and the poetry that uses them would be incomprehensible without an idea of who, for example, Freyja, Sif or Hǫlgi are and why their tears, hair or roof would be synonymous with gold. *Skáldskaparmál* not only lists these kennings but explains them, sometimes narrating a long story to clarify why a kenning exists, such as the story of Loki's wager with the dwarves that explains why 'Sif's hair' is a kenning for gold.[524] The *Prose Edda* therefore appears to be designed to give readers a comprehensive understanding of the mythology needed to write and read skaldic poetry. This knowledge is not presented in the abstract, but rather interlaced with examples of skaldic poetry from named skalds, such as the inclusion of Einarr Skúlason's verse that uses the kenning 'Freyja's tears' for gold.[525] The integration of explanation and examples demonstrates that the text was intended to enable a thirteenth-century audience to continue to read earlier Icelandic poetry.[526] There is clearly a desire expressed in the *Edda* to preserve the tools needed to maintain an active skaldic culture; to remember the shared history of skaldic poetry, but also to keep the knowledge of this mythology current for contemporary use. When considered in conjunction with Snorri'ss exploits abroad, it seems likely that the *Edda* was not designed to promote skaldic traditions only in Iceland, but also abroad, where it had been so successful in the eleventh and twelfth century.[527] Snorri himself went to the Norwegian court for some time and apparently composed poetry there as a way to influence Icelandic relations with Norway.[528] The *Prose Edda* may therefore have been an attempt to recreate both an appetite for skaldic poetry and a means by which it could be understood. Snorri's efforts may not have been successful, since he never seems to have developed the kind of relationship with King Hákon Hákonarson that he may have desired, but the creation of the *Prose Edda* for this purpose is significant in terms of Icelandic identity.[529] It demonstrated that skaldic poetry was an important characteristic of Icelandic identity and an important part of the way they represented

[524] Ibid., pp. 41-43.
[525] Ibid., p. 43.
[526] Margaret Clunies Ross, "Snorri's *Edda* as Narrative", in Hans Fix (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson: Beiträge zu Werkund Rezeption* (Berlin, 2012), p. 9.
[527] Sørensen, "Social institutions and belief systems of medieval Iceland (c. 870-1400) and their relations to literary production", pp. 11-12.
[528] Wanner, *Snorri Sturluson and the Edda*, p. 21.
[529] Ibid., p. 79.

themselves externally, but not necessarily that remembered paganism itself was important to Icelandic identity.

The skaldic poetry that Snorri and other Icelandic elite wished to advance at home and abroad was itself a product of remembered pagan culture, showing what Guðrún Nordal has described as an 'appreciation' for pagan mythology.[530] However, this does not necessarily indicate any broader significance of remembered paganism in Icelandic culture. To play a significant role in Icelandic identity, this appreciation would need to be seen elsewhere in Icelandic texts. Iceland has a wealth of saga literature produced in the Christian period but set in the pre-Christian settlement era. If there were a reverence for remembered pagan tradition throughout Icelandic writing, rather than simply a respect for its place in skaldic verse, we could expect to see similar interest in pagan mythology shown in the sagas. Saga literature was often set in a period that was understood to have been non-Christian in nature, but the affection with which this heroic period was regarded by the Icelanders does not mean it was the memory of paganism that was important to Icelandic identity. Paul Schach has argued that, far from glorifying what he describes as the 'pagan-heroic', as is sometimes suggested, saga literature is in fact strongly anti-pagan.[531] Characters that exhibit strongly pagan sentiment, such as Eiríkr in *Eiríks saga rauða*, are punished for it with misfortune and portrayed as inferior to Christians.[532] The conversion is portrayed as a traumatic but positive break with the follies of the past.[533] However, the picture that saga literature presents is not as uniform as Schach suggests. It is, for example, hard in some cases to determine whether a character is designed to be seen in a positive or negative light. Egill Skallagrímsson performs a presumably pagan ritual in cursing King Eiríkr, and in spite of his contact with many Christians abroad remains apparently pagan.[534] He appears to be a fairly unpleasant character to modern eyes, vomiting into his host's face after drinking too much and killing men with his bare hands. However, he always prevails in the face of crushing odds, so it may be incorrect to view him as presented as an inferior character. He certainly seems less pleasant than other saga characters, and this may correlate with his paganism, but it is simply impossible to be sure that this is how medieval Icelanders would have viewed the character. Nevertheless, I agree with Schach in his overall assertion that the sagas do not hold paganism in high regard. Although there are many references in the sagas, *Íslendingabók* and other texts to practices that may have been pagan, such as the high

[530] Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, p. 309.
[531] Paul Schach, "The Theme of the Reluctant Christian in the Icelandic Sagas", *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology,* 81.2 (1982), p. 202.
[532] Paul Schach, "Antipagan Sentiment in the Sagas of Icelanders", *Gripla,* (1975), pp. 124, 106.
[533] Ibid., pp. 127, 123.
[534] See above, p. 72.

seat pillar tradition in the settlement stories, and the use of spells and witchcraft, the texts that preserve their memory do not explain the belief system behind these practices and could even have been preserved dislocated from the full understanding of their pagan origins. These episodes show no greater understanding or love of paganism than can be found in *Beowulf* or other Anglo-Saxon texts, even though references to remembered paganism are more frequent. There are in fact no other Icelandic texts from this period that expand the picture given by skaldic poetry and the *Prose Edda* of the status of remembered paganism in Iceland. Remembered paganism was not characteristic of Icelandic identity, it was a feature of the skaldic poetry that was a valuable cultural commodity in itself. It does not show a deep memory of pagan mythology from the earliest period, but rather a complex system of cultural references utilised by a flourishing intellectual elite in the thirteenth century.

However, the remembered paganism in Snorri's *Edda* did present a shared history for the group, one that was not only a potential origin myth for Icelanders, but provided international links for them. The prologue describes a history of the world in which the *Æsir*, the Norse gods, were ancient Trojans who migrated to Scandinavia and founded some of the major dynasties there.[535] This Trojan migration myth is told in both the prologue and the final section of *Gylfaginning*. It has been argued by some scholars that the prologue was written by a different author from the rest of the *Edda* because it depicts a naturally formed religion that can only be a mono-theistic precursor to Christianity, and could not be followed by *Gylfaginning*, which describes pagan religion.[536] However, the opposition between the two sections of the text is not as great as sometimes suggested, because *Gylfaginning* presents a theology that in places seems to have a monotheistic single god responsible for creation, described as the 'œztr eða elztr' (highest and eldest) of all the gods, while also naming the gods of the pagan pantheon.[537] The contradiction, then, is not between the prologue and *Gylfaginning*, but within *Gylfaginning* itself, and so I will be treating the prologue and final paragraph of *Gylfaginning*, both of which refer to the Trojan migratory myth, as part of Snorri's *Edda*. The Trojan migration myth is a well-known motif in medieval writing, with many groups taking their origin from a mythical migration from Troy.[538] Snorri was not the first Icelander to apply this motif to Iceland, but it is told in the *Edda* in the most detail, as a fully realised pseudo-history drawing on both classical and Norse themes.[539] The

[535] Faulkes, *Edda*, pp. 4-5.
[536] Klaus von See, "Snorri Sturluson and the Creation of a Norse Cultural Ideology", *Viking Society for Northern Research,* xxv (1998), pp. 370-371.
[537] (Faulkes, *Edda*, p. 8, line 27; pp. 8-9).
[538] Ibid., pp. xxii-xxiv.
[539] Ibid., p. xxiii.

significance of this Trojan migratory myth to Icelandic identity is in some ways hard to gauge. The Icelanders had their own migration origin narrative revolving around their voyages from Norway to Iceland.[540] The Trojan myth told in the prologue is a narrative applicable to all of Scandinavia, and even some of the rest of Europe, as Óðinn is reported to have placed his sons as kings of France, Saxony and Westphalia as well as Scandinavian countries.[541] It was clearly not intended to be a solely Icelandic origin myth, but its inclusion alongside purported Norse mythology is significant in that it situates Iceland squarely in European classical history.[542] This is in line with Icelandic attempts to mix indigenous and classical traditions in their grammatical texts, including elsewhere in the *Edda*.[543] It is hard to determine how much currency Snorri's world mythology had among his Icelandic contemporaries. The Trojan story is nowhere near as well attested as the Icelanders' own migratory origin myth, which appears in *Íslendingabók*, *Landnámabók* and at the beginning of many sagas. However, it is significant that in order to create a potential shared history for the Icelanders, Snorri drew on European and classical tradition. The use of these texts in the *Edda* to develop a shared history suggests that in the mid thirteenth century there was a desire to engage with European culture and for the Icelanders to represent themselves as heirs to classical learning along with other European groups. This correlates with the Icelanders' desire to export their culture internationally and demonstrates the importance of international relations to Icelandic shared culture and identity.

Conclusion

The way religion is used to represent identity in these two groups demonstrates the importance of context to ethnic identification. Both these groups responded to their contemporary context by giving significance to their shared religious history through acts of identification. Conversion history is of particular interest here because it was common to both groups, but they each used it to express different characteristics. The Anglo-Saxon elite, to whom the piety of their society was very important, used conversion history to show their connection to Rome and the papacy. The Icelanders, on the other hand, used it to demonstrate their ability to mitigate Norwegian influence through their legal system, showing the importance of their legal system as a unifying feature of the group. Remembered pre-Christian history was also significant to the collective identity of these two groups, not in a religious sense but in the cultural depth that it provided. Again, the groups

[540] See above, pp. 46-52.
[541] Faulkes, *Edda*, pp. 5-6.
[542] Ibid., p. xxiv.
[543] See above, p. 72.

used it differently, with the Icelanders preserving their memory of it in what was presented as a faithful mythology while the Anglo-Saxons integrated it into Old Testament history. These different uses were responses to the different experiences of the group. The Icelanders were attempting to recapture the prestige of their skaldic culture, while the Anglo-Saxons were drawing together strands of shared history from its constituent parts to create an inclusive Christian history for the whole groups. It does not appear that religion was as significant a characteristic of Icelandic ethnicity as it was of Anglo-Saxon ethnicity. For the Icelanders, even in matters of religion the focus of identification was on law and literature. The success of the conversion in the face of Norwegian aggression was a legal triumph, not a religious one. This demonstrated unity within the group, they converted to preserve their single law, and also difference from other groups. By providing a model for the ongoing relationship with Norway the Icelanders demonstrated that, if they could not escape Norwegian influence, they could maintain their own identity in the face of it. In stark contrast, the Anglo-Saxons presented religion as perhaps the most important characteristic of their identity, particularly in the later period. This characteristic promoted unity in the group through shared history, especially in the Alfredian period, and it provided a basis on which to relate to hostile external groups such as the invading Scandinavians at the turn of the millennium. Through religion, then, groups could express complex ideas of shared and differentiating characteristics that bolstered confidence in collective identity in contextually significant ways.

Law

Law is the most overt way that groups articulate and control the characteristics of their members, and groups were often identified with their laws in the medieval period.[544] Many laws are of course practical as much as ideological, such as those concerning theft, murder and property, and having laws on these issues is common to many groups. However, laws are also acts of identification that articulate how the elite who create them wish the group to view itself and be viewed. The acts of identification studied here will largely be law codes, with the inclusion of a few additional sources that can shed light on the role law played in ethnic identity. In general in this thesis, it has not been considered necessary for a text to have had practical results in order to be considered an act of identification, but this is worth reiterating here because a law code by its nature makes claims about enforceability. Law codes contain rules and penalties, and this suggests that they were written with the intention of being imposed upon the population. However, in any society this imposition requires far more than just intention, it requires infrastructure, and determining whether this infrastructure existed in either Anglo-Saxon England or medieval Iceland is challenging. How far law codes are representative of the way law was actually made and practised in this period is unclear, but the recording of the law in this way is significant to the representation of identity.[545] Indeed, the act of writing down law was itself ideological and symbolic, as both the Anglo-Saxons and Icelanders were previously subject to oral legal traditions.[546] That this symbolism was in part concerned with ethnic identity is unsurprising given that laws by necessity defined the group that they governed and characterised that group in terms of behaviour. Legal acts of identification characterised the groups by the way they were governed, the way they related to foreign groups, and their legal history, but these processes had different results in the two groups. The Anglo-Saxons once again are shown to represent shared history and religion as significant characteristics of identity even in their legal texts, while the Icelanders represented law as their defining characteristic of identity.

England

A relatively large number of law codes survive from Anglo-Saxon England. The geographical area that was considered the Kingdom of the Angles and Saxons expanded steadily in the first half of

[544] Geary, "Ethnic Identity as a Situational Construct in the Early Middle Ages", pp. 20-21.
[545] Patrick Wormald, *Legal Culture in the Early Medieval West: Law as Text, Image and Experience* (London, 1999), p. 25.
[546] Ibid., p. 25.

the tenth century from a relatively small kingdom in the south of Britain to its full extent under Eadred, before once again contracting in the face of Scandinavian invasion at the end of the century.[547] When I refer to the Anglo-Saxon group in this chapter, I am referring to the group that was under the control of what had been the West Saxon court, not all those in Britain who might now be called Anglo-Saxon. The laws do not tend to respond to this changing territory in their rhetoric, nor do they acknowledge the fact that there were people who might consider themselves or be considered *Angelcynn* or *gens Anglorum* outside the kingdom, such as in Northumbria, which was only sporadically under Anglo-Saxon control in the tenth century.[548] Rather, the law codes are acts of identification that characterise the group not by its territory but by its shared history and religion, and by the way in which it was governed by the West Saxon king and his *witan*. The first law code written in the period considered here was Alfred's *domboc*. Alfred's code drew on earlier laws from the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms: the extant version includes the laws of Ine as an addendum, but these earlier laws were revised to be suitable for his new kingdom.[549] Subsequently, law codes were issued by West Saxon kings including Edward the Elder, Æthelstan, Edmund, Edgar and Æthelræd, each drawing on Alfred's code and addressing new legal issues.[550] All of these law codes present a process of law-making that relied on the authority of the king, the authority of earlier law, and the advice of the king's *witan*. Anglo-Saxon legal tradition culminated in Cnut's legal codes in the early eleventh century. These texts were still largely in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, in spite of the fact that Cnut was a Scandinavian king. While the representation of group identity that the Anglo-Saxons made through their laws had ideological themes, it also had practical motivations in reinforcing the legitimacy of Anglo-Saxon kingship. That Cnut chose to utilise the same format and tradition as earlier Anglo-Saxon kings suggests the success of these law codes as a vehicle for legitimacy and an expression of identity.

The Expanding Anglo-Saxon Kingdom

The process of representing a unified Anglo-Saxon identity under West Saxon rule began as soon as Alfred gained a secure territorial position against the Scandinavians. In its two extant legal texts, the Alfredian elite drew on themes of consensus, history and religion to identify their people and give their laws and rule legitimacy. This is demonstrated by his Treaty with Guðrum, which shows

[547] Molyneaux, *Formation of the English Kingdom*, pp. 32-33.
[548] Ibid., pp. 31-33.
[549] Wormald, *Legal Culture in the Early Medieval West*, p. 11.
[550] Carole Hough, "Naming and Royal Authority in Anglo-Saxon Law", in Gale Owen-Crocker and Brian Schneider, (ed.), *Kingship, Legislation and Power in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2013), pp. 201-202.

a nascent sense of what would become important to Anglo-Saxon identity in legal texts. The Treaty describes the parties thus: 'Alfred cyninc ⁊ Gyðrum cyning ⁊ ealles Angelcynnes witan ⁊ eal seo ðeod ðe on Eastænglum beoð' (King Alfred and King Guðrum and the *witan* of all *Angelcynn* and all the people who live in East Anglia).[551] Most obviously, this passage is significant because it describes the Anglo-Saxon group as *Angelcynn*, which gives a collective name to the people Alfred now ruled, who would previously have been members of a number of groups, including West Saxons and Mercians. Furthermore, the *Angelcynn* are closely associated with Alfred's kingship. This may appear obvious, but while a broad common identity between the various Anglo-Saxon groups had been suggested before by texts such as Bede's *Historia Ecclesiatica Gentis Anglorum* under the term 'Angle', associating this with political unity under a single king was novel.[552] In direct opposition and contrast to Alfred and the *Angelcynn* is Guðrum and the 'eal seo ðeod ðe on Eastænglum beoð' (all those people who live in East Anglia). These are 'seo ðeod' (that people), but they are not 'a people' with their own name or other identifying characteristics. They are not unified by a group identity, they are simply defined by the fact that they live in territory controlled by Guðrum. In this period of invasion and unrest such a binary distinction between groups would probably have been a significant simplification of the true situation, but there is a clear ideology expressed by presenting this in the Treaty. As an act of identification, the Treaty characterises anyone who wishes to be *Angelcynn*, or who does not wish to be under Danish rule, as under Alfred's rule, the West Saxon king. This text does not suggest the possibility of alternative Anglo-Saxon identities, although in reality many members of what had been the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms did not live in Alfred's territory. The Treaty of Alfred and Guðrum helped create a representation of the Anglo-Saxons that linked their identity intrinsically to Alfred's kingship.

As well as linking group identity to West Saxon kingship, the Treaty also represents the Anglo-Saxon group as a single people represented by a *witan*. This *witan*, referred to frequently in Anglo-Saxon law, has been viewed by historians as everything from the precursor to modern British representative democracy to a mere echo chamber for the views of the king.[553] It is clear that whatever the Anglo-Saxon *witan* was, it was not anything we would now understand as truly representative, but neither did it simply rubberstamp the king's decisions.[554] I will therefore be using Levi Roach's broad definition of *witan* when discussing it in this chapter: 'any large-scale gathering in the king's name (and generally in his presence) which might in principle book land or

[551] Lieberman, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, p. 126.
[552] Foot, "The Making of *Angelcynn*", p. 29.
[553] Levi Roach, *Kingship and Consent in Anglo-Saxon England, 871–978* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 3.
[554] Ibid., pp. 151-152.

make law (though by no means should it be presumed that all meetings of the witan performed these tasks).'[555] Due to the complexity of this term's definition I will be using the term *witan* rather than an English translation which might limit the meaning. The Treaty presents the way the Anglo-Saxons are governed as fundamentally different from the way the people under Guðrum's rule are, because it includes them under the representation of their *witan* rather than an entity of their own. This could be dismissed as mere stylistic convention, as earlier West Saxon codes such as Ine's includes reference to the king taking counsel from his advisors.[556] However, the particular construction used in the Treaty, 'ealles Angelcynnes witan' (the *witan* of all the *Angelcynn*), is semantically different from the concept of a king accepting counsel. Rather, it implies that there is some kind of consensus created among the newly coalescing Anglo-Saxon group, embodied by a *witan* drawn from all the Anglo-Saxons. This is again presented in opposition to the situation experienced by those living in East Anglia. Those people are defined solely by their location, and they have no collective identity beyond that. The Anglo-Saxons not only have a name that identifies and defines them, but they also have a representative body that speaks for them in an official capacity. To what extent this *witan* was representative, or whether the majority of the people who found themselves in the newly formed Anglo-Saxon group knew that they were being represented thus, is unclear. The *witan* would most probably have been comprised of the elite of the realm and their decisions made in a way that represented that elite with deference to the king's wishes. However, in terms of collective identity, this does not mean that the language of the Treaty that described the Anglo-Saxons in this way was empty rhetoric, because the elite were responsible for shaping these self-representations of ethnicity.

Inclusive rhetoric is not only found in the Treaty of Alfred and Guðrum, it is also found in Alfred's *domboc* and subsequent Anglo-Saxon law codes. Alfred introduced his law code with a long prologue on Christian law, and concludes in this way:

> Ic ða Ælfred cyning þas togædere gegaderode ⁊ awritan het, monege þara þe ure foegengan heoldan, ða ðe me licodon; ⁊ manege þara ðe me ne licodon ic áwearp mid minra witena geðeahte, ⁊ on oðre wisan bebead to healdanna. Forðam ic ne dorste geðristlæcan þara minra awuht fela on gewrit settan, forðam me wæs uncuð, hwæt þæs ðam lician wolde ðe æfter ús wæren. Ac ða ðe ic gemette awðer oðde on Ines dæge, mines mæges, oðde on Offa Mercna cyninges oðde on Æþelbryhtes, þe ærest fulluhte onfeng on Angelcynne, þa ðe me ryhtoste ðuhton, ic þa heron gegaderode, ⁊ þa oðre forlét.

[555] Ibid., p. 25.
[556] Lieberman, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, p. 88.

> Ic ða Ælfred Westseaxna cyning eallum minum witum þas geeowde, ⁊ hie ða cwædon, þæt him þæt licode eallum to healdanne.[557]
>
> (Now I, King Alfred, have gathered these together and ordered them to be written, many of those that our predecessors kept, and which pleased me. And many of those that did not please me I have rejected with the advice of my *witan*, and in other ways I have ordered hold fast. For I have not dared to presume to set down in writing anything much of my own, for it was unknown to me, what would please those that were after us. But those that I found either in Ine's day, my kinsman, or of Offa king of the Mercians, or Æthelberht's, who was the first to receive baptism of the *Angelcynne*, that which seemed to me most right, I gathered them here, and left the others.
>
> I, then, Alfred, King of the West Saxons, have shown these to all my *witan*, and they said that it pleased them all to hold them.)

There are a number of themes here that need consideration. The *witan* is mentioned twice, both times in the role of advising the king. The first time, it is advising the king that certain old laws can be rejected, and the second time approving all the laws that Alfred has laid out. Unlike in the Treaty of Alfred and Guðrum, the *witan* is not described as representing the *Angelcynn*, but rather as belonging to Alfred. However, this law code prescribes a role for the *witan* that exceeds simply being a sounding board for the king. Rather, it offers not only counsel but approval, and again this creates an impression of consensus. It is clear from the above passage that Alfred felt a need to make a strong case for the legitimacy of his laws, and the *witan* was an important part of this. It may be significant that the *witan*'s blanket acceptance of all the laws immediately follows Alfred's identification of himself as king of the West Saxons. The *domboc* was written at a time when Alfred was using the title King of the Anglo-Saxons, and most probably after the Treaty of Alfred and Guðrum in which Alfred describes his people as *Angelcynn*, but Alfred still used the title *Westseaxna cyning* to describe himself.[558] Why exactly Alfred chose to use this more modest title is unclear, Patrick Wormald ascribes it to his desire to keep this law code traditional and conservative in its scope, and not intervene in Kentish or Mercian law.[559] Certainly his inclusion of his West Saxon predecessor Ine's code as an addendum suggests an intended West Saxon audience. However, in the same phrase Alfred stresses that this code has been approved by 'eallum minum witum' (all my *witan*), and this may imply a wider reach than just Wessex, as by this time Alfred's *witan* would have included secular and church elite from beyond Wessex. Roach's careful study of witness lists has indicated that during Alfred's reign the *witan* was smaller than under either his predecessors or successors, perhaps for practical reasons in this time of invasion.[560] This throws further doubt on how representative the *witan* might be considered to have been in real terms, but again it does not

[557] Ibid., p. 46, 49.9-49.10.
[558] Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, pp. 281, 286.
[559] Ibid., p. 281.
[560] Roach, *Kingship and Consent*, pp. 30-31.

diminish the ideological importance of such rhetoric. The reference to *all* the *witan* may have been intended to imply that Alfred had gained approval and consensus from a broader base than just his native West Saxons, contrasting with his own identification as *Westseaxna cyning*, and that these laws were legitimate due to this broader consensus. The final sentence quoted above represents both the conservative scope that Wormald ascribes to Alfred, rooting his kingship in firm ground, and the future of Anglo-Saxon rulership that relied on a level of agreement among the entire Anglo-Saxon elite.

The desire to include more than just the West Saxons in this law code is also visible in the use of earlier law codes described in the prologue. Again, the *witan* is significant here in legitimising Alfred's choice to reject some of the earlier laws. His choice to include the *witan* here specifically demonstrates a certain anxiety about overruling previous law codes. Clearly, the weight of tradition that these earlier codes held was necessary to lend legitimacy to the laws Alfred wished to lay down.[561] The earlier codes he mentions as models for his own are those of Ine, a West Saxon king; those of Offa, a Mercian king; and those of Æthelberht, a Kentish king. These are celebrated kings of three of the main constituent groups of Alfred's new kingdom, so while he only refers to himself as king of the West Saxons, he is clearly making claims on the history of these other groups. The question arises as to why, as Alfred identified himself as the West Saxon king, he chose to emphasise his use of non-West Saxon precursors. This question is compounded by the fact that in the body of the legal text Alfred did not in fact reproduce much that can be identified as of Offa or Æthelberht's laws, and does not differentiate between the traditional laws he has chosen to keep and those that he has altered or created himself.[562] Clearly, then, there is an ideological purpose at work in this statement. The effect of the statement is double. Firstly, it reinforced the impression of consensus generated by the mention of the *witan*. Alfred had not only consulted the wisest of his contemporaries, but he had also drawn broadly on legal precedent, not limited to the West Saxons. This law code is therefore relevant to the newly emerging Anglo-Saxon kingdom, even though it is conservative in its claims concerning Alfred's influence. Alfred may be the West Saxon King, but he is making laws that could be relevant to the whole Anglo-Saxon group. Secondly, this statement concerning the use of older codes demonstrates the importance of history to legitimacy in Alfredian England. The creation of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom was not portrayed by Alfred and his court as a break from the past, but rather a continuation of their history. Alfred himself did not claim to be creating entirely new law, but mostly editing older laws, although this may not have

[561] Wormald, *Legal Culture in the Early Medieval West*, p. 11.
[562] Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, pp. 279-281; Wormald, *Legal Culture in the Early Medieval West*, p. 11.

actually been the case. The rhetoric of the *domboc* demonstrated to the Anglo-Saxon people that their earlier, separate traditions could be reconciled into a single, shared code that gained the approval of all.

Alongside inclusivity, Christianity is an important theme throughout Alfred's *domboc*, an act of identification that gave significance to Christianity as a characteristic of Anglo-Saxon identity. The reference to Æthelberht in the prologue emphasises Anglo-Saxon shared religious history, particularly as he is referred to as the first of the *Angelcynn* to convert, while the other kings mentioned, Offa and Ine, are referred to in terms of the kingdom they rule.[563] More significantly, Alfred's prologue lays out the biblical history of law-making from Moses through to Christ, and how this should be applied in England.[564] Furthermore, the *domboc* is organised into 120 chapters, which has a dual religious significance as the age at which Moses died and ten times the number of apostles upon whom the holy ghost descends at Pentecost.[565] The reference to Moses of course places Alfred in the position of Moses, as a law-giver, but it is significant to more than just Alfred's identity.[566] The section creates a Christian legal history that stretches back to the earliest time, in much the same way as Alfred's Preface to *Pastoral Care* creates a history for the translation of ecclesiastical texts.[567] This, by virtue of the Anglo-Saxons' Christian faith, created a shared history for them. The act of law-making was passed from Moses to Christ, and then to the Anglo-Saxon people, Æthelberht, Ine, Offa and Alfred. Just as the Anglo-Saxons were the heirs of Christian learning through their translation project, so they were the heirs to law by the creation of the *domboc*. This linking of the biblical and Anglo-Saxon past also made the act of making and enforcing law a Christian act, capitalising on the dual legitimacy of historical tradition and Christian morality it offered.[568] The use of biblical history further resolved the problem of the Anglo-Saxons' history as separate kingdoms, because they could all associate themselves with this earlier history. As with *Pastoral Care*, Alfred's *domboc* provided not only a narrative of shared history, but a high-profile one. Presenting these laws as the successors of the laws that Moses was given by God, mediated by Christ's teachings, was powerful. It gave the *domboc* legitimacy and also made being governed by it attractive, aligning those who fell under these laws with those governed by God's laws in the Old and New Testaments. The invocation of Moses in this introduction has been seen by historians such as Wormald and A. E. Redgate as proof that the Anglo-Saxons already identified themselves

[563] Lieberman, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, p. 46, 49.9.
[564] Ibid., pp. 42-46, 49-49.10.
[565] Wormald, *Legal Culture in the Early Medieval West*, p. 34.
[566] Redgate, *Religion, Politics and Society in Britain*, p. 69.
[567] See above, p. 62.
[568] Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, p. 429.

with the biblical Israelites.[569] It may be that this was the case, but most of the evidence for the Anglo-Saxons seeing themselves in this light comes from the late tenth century, and it should also be noted that when establishing a legal history, Moses was the obvious place for Alfred to start because he received the law from God in Exodus. To begin with Moses and to quote Exodus creates an impression of completeness in the account of the history of law, but in itself it does not necessarily mean that Alfred intended to imply that the Anglo-Saxons were a chosen people of God. An account of the origins of law in the Christian tradition could not start anywhere else. However, it certainly could have been interpreted in this way later, when the Anglo-Saxons began to associate themselves with the Israelites in earnest.[570] The use of Moses and Exodus in the *domboc* is therefore significant to the representation of Anglo-Saxon identity, but most significantly in terms of creating an illustrious shared history that stretched far into the past. The prologue of the *domboc* in its totality is an exercise in demonstrating the collective history of the Anglo-Saxons, the ability for this history to be preserved in the new kingdom, and the broad consensus that Alfred had gained for these laws.

Alfred's successors drew extensively on his *domboc* and continued to represent the Anglo-Saxons as a people unified under West Saxon rule. Although Alfred initiated a unified Anglo-Saxon kingdom, it was Edward the Elder (r. 899-824), Æthelstan (r. 924-927) and Edmund (r. 939-946) who succeeded in expanding this to England as we now understand it, and wrote laws that were explicitly aimed at all the Anglo-Saxons. Edward's first law code begins: 'Eadwerd cyning byt ðam gerefum eallum, ðæt ge deman swa rihte domas swa ge rihtoste cunnon, ⁊ hit on ðære dombec stande.' (King Edward commands all his reeves, that you judge such right laws as you know best, and it stands in the *domboc*.)[571] This was clearly intended to demonstrate that Edward's laws built upon the tradition that Alfred had established. Edward's laws also built on Alfred's in terms of content, style and theme.[572] This is significant because the West Saxon dynasty were still fairly new as kings of the Anglo-Saxons, and therefore Edward's conspicuous use of his father's codes demonstrated an intention to continue along the lines that Alfred had established rather than diverge in any conspicuous way. Æthelstan and Edmund also drew on Alfred's traditions of law-making, returning to the formula of invoking the *witan* to generate a sense of consensus for their laws.[573] *V Æthelstan* opens with a rationale for the new law code that reprimands the people for

[569] Wormald, *Legal Culture in the Early Medieval West*, p. 32; Redgate, *Religion, Politics and Society in Britain*, p. 69.
[570] Redgate, *Religion, Politics and Society in Britain*, p. 68.
[571] Lieberman, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, p. 138.
[572] Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, pp. 288-290.
[573] Eg. *V Æthelstan* and *II Edmund* (Lieberman, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, pp. 166, 186).

not keeping the peace in line with previous laws. Significantly, Æthelstan does not portray this reprimand as instigated by him, but rather suggests that his *witan* informed him that he had suffered the misbehaviour of his people for too long.[574] This is a rather passive way for a king to begin a law code, but the impression it creates, as with Alfred's invocation of the *witan*, is one of consensus. It was not Æthelstan's opinion that the peace was not being kept, it was the opinion of the entire *witan*. The solution also comes through consensus. This time Æthelstan is active, asserting that the new laws were decided by him with the advice of a specific *witan* who gathered at a meeting in Exeter.[575] It may be significant that the *witan* was invoked for this specific code, which claims to have been precipitated by a general lack of obedience to the law. If greater respect for the law needed to be engendered, then presenting the laws as receiving general consensus, and disobedience as receiving general disapprobation, was efficient in generating that respect. This was not necessarily a new characterisation of identity, but rather demonstrates the success that Alfred's earlier definition of the Anglo-Saxons as a people who were ruled by a king sensitive to the various backgrounds represented by the *witan*. Roach has established that the *witan* would have comprised 'Northumbrians, Danes, Mercians and West Saxons' at various times, although its exact composition would have varied between meetings, and he has suggested that this composition would have contributed to the sense of unity within the group.[576] Although the scant evidence for the exact function of the *witan* makes studying the circumstances behind each invocation of it in a law code difficult, even when the meeting is given, it certainly seems that *V Æthelstan* called on the sense of unity the *witan* generated to overcome a perceived problem. Additionally, Wormald has established that over the course of Edward's, Æthelstan's and Edmund's reigns, the king was increasingly strongly associated with law and peace.[577] This began with Alfred's association of himself and the *Angelcynn* in the Treaty of Alfred and Guðrum, and his positioning of himself as the next in a line of great law-givers in the prologue of the *domboc*. By the mid tenth century, West Saxon rule was an integral part of Anglo-Saxon identity. What emerges from a consideration of law codes from the first half of the tenth century is an intensification of the identifications made by Alfred to impart legitimacy to his laws, specifically history and inclusivity.

The other function of law in the representation of ethnicity is to control the definition and treatment of other groups, and there is some limited evidence for the ways this was done in the early Anglo-Saxon kingdom. There were a number of non-Anglo-Saxon groups in Britain in the

[574] Lieberman, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, p. 166.
[575] Ibid., p. 166.
[576] Roach, *Kingship and Consent*, p. 213.
[577] Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, p. 312.

ninth and tenth centuries, including the Britons and Scandinavians. As discussed above, Alfred defined *Angelcynn* in opposition to those under the rule of Guðrum, which in turn also defined the non-Anglo-Saxon group as those under Scandinavian control, although they were not portrayed in the Treaty as a cohesive group. Further mention in the law codes of non-Anglo-Saxon groups in Britain is rare. One instance is in *IV Edgar*, which contains this section: 'Sy þeahhwæðere þes ræd gemæne eallum leodscipe, ægðer ge Anglum ge Denum ge Bryttum, on ælcum ende mines anwealdes, to ðy þæt earm ⁊ eadig mote ágan þæt hy mid rihte gestrynað' (Moreover this judgement is common to all people, either Angles or Danes or Britons, in each end of my jurisdiction, to that the poor and prosperous might own that which they gain by right).[578] This is significant because it shows that there were distinct groups that fell under Edgar's *anweald* (power), and it implies that other laws made by Edgar, perhaps even those in the same code, may not have applied to all these groups. This suggests that a more complex ideology than is demonstrated by Alfred's Treaty had evolved in the intervening decades. In the Treaty the groups are presented as the *Angelcynn* under Alfred's rule and everyone else living under Guðrum's rule. In *IV Edgar*, on the other hand, Edgar appears to claim the ability to legislate for Angles, Danes and Britons, although presumably he only regularly legislated for the Angles. Wormald and Nelson have both suggested that this demonstrates an 'imperialism' that can be found in Anglo-Saxon political ideology from Æthelstan onwards.[579] However, while the relationship between the Anglo-Saxon king and the Scandinavians in the east of England may have been imperial, it clearly also respected the separate customs of the Scandinavians. Further in *IV Edgar* is the section: 'Þonne wille ic, þæt stande mid Denum swa gode laga swa hy betste geceosen, ⁊ ic heom á geþafode ⁊ geþafian wille, swa lange swa me lif gelæst, for eowrum hyldum, þe ge me symble cyddon.'[580] (Then I wish, that such good laws stand with the Danes as they best choose, and I ever permitted and I will permit them, so long as my life lasts, for your loyalty, that you have always told me). Who the 'Danes' in this law code are and how law might have functioned in the Danelaw have been subject to some discussion, but the language of the code clearly indicates that there was a distinct group in England that was called Danish and known to have their own laws.[581] Edgar even refers to Scandinavian laws using the Norse word 'laga'.[582] *IV Edgar* therefore presents a confusing picture of how the Anglo-Saxons related to non-Anglo-Saxon groups in Britain in the latter half of the tenth century. Clearly, it was understood that other groups would have their own law, and Edgar encouraged this. However, it

[578] Lieberman, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, p. 210.
[579] Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, pp. 443-444; Nelson, *Politics and ritual*, p. 302.
[580] Lieberman, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, p. 212.
[581] Lesley Abrams, "King Edgar and the Men of the Danelaw", in Donald Scragg (ed.), *Edgar, King of the English 959–975: New Interpretations* (Woodbridge, 2008), pp. 176-179.
[582] Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, p. 319.

is also clear that the Anglo-Saxons expressed expectations of control over the laws of other groups, namely the Danes and Britons, and that Edgar felt able to 'geþafian' (permit) the Danes to keep their own laws in return for their loyalty. However this legal arrangement worked in practice, the ideological implication of this code is that the Anglo-Saxons of this period understood that other groups were characterised by their own laws, just as the Anglo-Saxons were characterised by theirs, and that when the Anglo-Saxons wished to impose Anglo-Saxon law on other groups, this had to be stated explicitly. This supports Nelson's assertions that if Edgar had imperial power, it was in the *ducatas* style, not conquering and subsuming other groups but still exercising control over them.[583] The lack of further evidence makes it difficult to draw a more complete picture of how the Anglo-Saxons viewed other groups in legal terms, but *IV Edgar* suggests that the law was used to control the Anglo-Saxon relationship with other groups and create a hierarchy of groups with the Anglo-Saxons at the top, which nevertheless allowed other groups to retain their own identity.

Æthelræd, Wulfstan and Cnut

Scholarship on Anglo-Saxon law frequently breaks pre-Conquest legal tradition into the period before and the period after Archbishop Wulfstan began writing royal law codes, due to the substantial change in tone and content brought about by Wulfstan.[584] However, all of the ways in which law codes represented Anglo-Saxon ethnicity discussed above were maintained by Wulfstan's legal texts, even those written for the first non-West-Saxon king of England to issue law codes, Cnut. Wulfstan did not discard the representation of shared history and consensus that had made earlier law codes such effective acts of identification, but he did augment these themes with novel concepts of who the Anglo-Saxons should be that emerged in the late tenth century. In particular, Wulfstan characterised the Anglo-Saxons as God's chosen people in many of the texts attributed to him, and this was a theme that gained traction in numerous acts of identification in the late tenth and early eleventh century.[585] How representative Wulfstan's writing was of Anglo-Saxon collective identity may be questioned, as he is only a single individual, but I join Wormald in seeing Wulfstan as embedded firmly enough in the elite establishment to be considered representative of it.[586]

583 Nelson, *Politics and ritual*, p. 302.
584 Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, p. 449.
585 See above, pp. 45, 99.
586 Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, p. 451.

The codes that Wulfstan wrote for Æthelræd in the first decades of the eleventh century were not a serious departure from tradition in terms of formula, in spite of the feuding and invasion that England had experienced in this period. They continued to characterise the Anglo-Saxon group as a people united by the rule of king and *witan*, and the role of the *witan* may even be emphasised by the rhetoric of these codes. *V Æthelræd*, the first code for which Wulfstan is known to have been responsible, opens in much the same way as Æthelræd's earlier codes: 'Ðis is seo gerædnes, þe Engla cyng ⁊ ægðer ge gehadode ge læwede witan gecuran and geræddan.' (This is the decree, that the king of the Angles and both the religious and secular *witan* have chosen and advised).[587] Many of the clauses then start: 'ꝟ ures hlafordes gerædnes ⁊ his witena is' (and the decree of our lord and his *witan* is).[588] This is reinforced in *VI Æthelræd*, which is titled 'Be witena gerædnessan' (the decrees of the *witan*), and begins: 'Þis syndan þa gerædnessa, þe Engla rædgifan gecuran ⁊ gecwædan ⁊ geornlice lærdan, þæt man scolde healdan.' (These are the decrees, that councillors of the English chose and ordered and earnestly advise, that man should hold them).[589] Here the term *witan* has been replaced by 'rædgifan' (councillors), but several subsequent clauses begin: 'ꝟ witena gerædnes is' (and the decree of the *witan* is).[590] These codes emphasise the place of the *witan*, and in fact *VI Æthelræd* does so to such an extent that the king is not mentioned alongside them.

It may not be a coincidence that these codes, written around 1008, come from a period of unrest and internal dissent during which rivalry among the elite made governing and organising resistance to the Scandinavian incursions difficult.[591] The *witan* and its chosen decrees may have been emphasised so repeatedly in *V* and *VI Æthelræd* in order to create an impression of consensus that was in reality lacking, particularly if the King was struggling to control his most powerful subjects. Indeed, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records that in the year 1014, after Swein's death, Æthelræd was recalled to be king on the condition that 'he hi rihtlicor healdan wolde þonne he ær dyde' (he would rule them more justly than he did before).[592] Although, as Simon Keynes notes, the *ASC* was written with the benefit of hindsight, it still suggests a certain discord between the *witan* and the king prior to his exile that may explain the over-emphasis of the consensus at the

[587] Ibid., p. 341; Lieberman, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, p. 236.
[588] Lieberman, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, p. 238.
[589] Ibid., p. 246.
[590] Ibid., p. 246.
[591] Simon Keynes, "A Tale of Two Kings: Alfred the Great and Æthelred the Unready", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society,* 36 (1986), pp. 206-208.
[592] *MS. C*, p. 98; Pauline Stafford, "The Laws of Cnut and the History of Anglo-Saxon Royal Promises", *Anglo-Saxon England,* 10 (1981), p. 181.

witan in *V* and *VI Æthelræd*.[593] These codes of course follow the traditional West Saxon formula used by Alfred in opening by establishing the *witan*'s role in making the law, and this has a significance in reinforcing Anglo-Saxon identity as a group whose legal history stretches to Alfred and through him to Moses.[594] However, the *witan* is particularly emphasised in *V* and *VI Æthelræd*, utilising established aspects of Anglo-Saxon legal identity to respond to the fragile political situation. Wulfstan went further in drawing on Anglo-Saxon legal history to respond to contemporary events by fabricating the *Laws of Edward and Guðrum*, as will be discussed further below. This was written prior to the 1008 law codes, and it has been suggested by Dorothy Whitelock and subsequently Nicholas Schwarz that the purpose of the forgery was to create precedents for specific legal principles Wulfstan wished to introduce.[595] It seems likely that this was Wulfstan's intention, because he then used some of the novel legal principles he had established in the Laws in his later law codes, such as the introduction of *lahslit* (a fine), and Whitelock has only identified two chapters of the *Laws* that do not have close parallels with Wulfstan's codes for Æthelræd.[596] This demonstrates that history was an extremely important part of creating legitimacy for Anglo-Saxon law, to the extent that Wulfstan fabricated it when what he needed did not exist. The result was that Wulfstan could alter the Anglo-Saxons' perceptions of their own shared history and so their beliefs about their collective identity to suit his own agenda and the politics of the early eleventh century.

Cnut also maintained Anglo-Saxon tradition in the rhetoric of his law codes, and this is perhaps more significant, as he was not an Anglo-Saxon. The prologues to *I and II Cnut* match the formula of earlier Anglo-Saxon codes in describing the laws as a result of agreement between the king and the *witan*, except that in *I Cnut*, Cnut is described as the Danish king as well as Anglo-Saxon king, and in one copy the Norwegian king as well.[597] These simple statements at the start of I and II Cnut disguise what must have been quite a delicate process of negotiation, as the foreign invader became established as the Anglo-Saxon monarch and, in order to prevent further unrest, needed the acceptance and support of the Anglo-Saxon elite represented by the *witan*. The *ASC* records meetings at Oxford and Cirencester in 1018 and 1020 respectively, and *I Cnut* mentions

[593] Keynes, "A Tale of Two Kings", p. 201.
[594] Roach, *Kingship and Consent*, p. 236.
[595] Dorothy Whitelock, "Wulfstan and the So–Called Laws of Edward and Guthrum", *English Historical Review,* LVI.CCXXI (1941), pp. 18-19; Nicholas P. Schwarz, "Wulfstan the Forger: The 'Laws of Edward and Guthrum'", *Anglo-Saxon England,* 47 (2018), p. 223.
[596] Schwarz, "Wulfstan the Forger", pp. 223-227; Whitelock, "Wulfstan and the So–Called Laws of Edward and Guthrum", p. 5.
[597] Lieberman, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, p. 278.

an additional meeting at Winchester sometime prior to the code being issued in 1020.[598] At the 1018 Oxford *witan*, 'Dene ⁊ Engle wurdon sammæle' (the Danes and English were in agreement), which implies that Anglo-Saxons were still very much involved with the *witan*.[599] This traditional formula once again attained new significance, then, in suggesting not only consensus within the Anglo-Saxon elite, but also with the new Scandinavian elite. Cnut and Wulfstan went further than mere rhetoric in continuing Anglo-Saxon legal tradition. One copy of the *ASC* records that at the *witan* in 1018 it was agreed to follow Edgar's law; this intention is also expressed in one copy of *I and II Cnut* and a letter by Cnut from 1020.[600] This may have been a general term for Anglo-Saxon common law, but the invocation of Edgar, rather than Cnut's immediate predecessor Æthelræd, is significant.[601] The law codes, once issued, did indeed largely follow Edgar's codes, although *VIII Æthelræd* was also an important source for *I Cnut*, and they were in large part a compendium of previous Anglo-Saxon law rather than an imposition of new law.[602] There is clearly a practical purpose in this, as it would have been undesirable for Cnut, as a foreign king with dominions elsewhere, to impose large swathes of new laws. It was far easier and presumably more popular to maintain the *status quo*. But this *status quo* was based on an ideology that had developed over the period since Alfred's reign. The importance of using older law codes and developing a legal history had been established by Alfred and continued by his successors. This was then available for Cnut and his administrative establishment to capitalise on. He referenced a return to Edgar's laws and so linked himself to a prestigious Anglo-Saxon legal tradition; Æthelræd was deliberately omitted. It is possible that Edgar garnered more respect as a king than Æthelræd in their own lifetimes and that Cnut was merely responding to this, but it seems clear that Cnut took deliberate steps to diminish Æthelræd's reputation and so promote his own position as rightful king.[603] Publicly announcing a return to Edgar's law demonstrates a selective engagement with Anglo-Saxon legal tradition that utilised Anglo-Saxon identity in a way that suited the new elite.

In addition to using established Anglo-Saxon legal tradition, Wulfstan also innovated in his representation of the Anglo-Saxons in his legal writing. Wormald has established through a consideration of Wulfstan's contribution to Anglo-Saxon law that the outcome of this innovation was a more prescriptively pious Christian society.[604] *I Cnut* in particular, as Cnut's religious code,

[598] *MS. C*, p. 104; Lieberman, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, p. 278.
[599] *MS. C*, p. 104.
[600] Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, p. 346; A. G. Kennedy, "Cnut's Law Code of 1018", *Anglo-Saxon England,* 11 (1983), pp. 62-64; Treharne, *Living through the Conquest*, p. 21.
[601] Stafford, "The Laws of Cnut", p. 180.
[602] Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, p. 355-361; Stafford, "The Laws of Cnut", p. 180.
[603] Stafford, "The Laws of Cnut", p. 183.
[604] Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, p. 363.

set out strict regulation in the ecclesiastical sphere.[605] Wormald suggests that Wulfstan was driven, perhaps by fears of the millennium or by the Scandinavian invasion, to create the legal basis for a kingdom of God in England.[606] While Wulfstan may well have been influenced by the millennium and the accompanying scholarship from across Europe, it is unclear how much urgency that would have engendered in him after the millennium had passed. The Scandinavian invasion, on the other hand, was a pressing concern throughout Æthelræd's reign and Wulfstan's earlier writing. It is certainly the case that Wulfstan's writing, both legal and religious, expressed a desire to make Anglo-Saxon society more pious. In his *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, written in or shortly before 1014, Wulfstan makes clear that the sins of the Anglo-Saxons were being punished by God with the invading Scandinavians, who were 'heathen' just as the Anglo-Saxons had been when they invaded Britain and overpowered the Christian Britons.[607] Andreas Lemke has argued convincingly that this text is a call for the Anglo-Saxons to behave more piously in order to retain God's favour as his chosen people.[608] This spiritual call to arms fits in with the similar ideologies found in the Old English *Exodus* and Old English *Judith*, both of which were copied into their extant manuscript versions in the late tenth or early eleventh centuries.[609] The ideology demonstrated by Wulfstan's pre-invasion texts did not stop after the Scandinavian invasion was successful. The need for the Anglo-Saxons to live up to the high standards of piety required to retain God's favour was codified into law in Wulfstan's codes for Æthelræd, but most notably in *I* and *II Cnut*. Wulfstan's codes for Cnut demonstrate a fully realised template for the ideal society for a chosen people of God.[610] Although Wulfstan's ideology is therefore clearly a response to Scandinavian invasion and the accumulated ecclesiastical scholarship of the late tenth century, Wulfstan's ideology about what Anglo-Saxon identity should be clearly outlasted the pressure point of the turn of the millennium. This represents not only a personal ambition on Wulfstan's part to lay out his intellectual achievements, but also the success of this coalescence of Anglo-Saxon identity around the ideology of being God's chosen people. Lemke suggests that the *Sermo* was not only a call to resist the Scandinavians, but also a way to preserve Anglo-Saxon identity if the invasion were successful.[611] While this is not entirely convincing, it certainly seems to be the case that following Cnut's accession, the *Sermo* and the ideology behind it offered a template by which Cnut could naturalise his rule. Promoting ideal Christian behaviour in his law codes and demonstrating personal piety

[605] Stafford, "The Laws of Cnut", pp. 174-175.
[606] Ibid., pp. 464-465.
[607] Dorothy Bethurum, *The Homilies of Wulfstan* (Oxford, 1957), pp. 22-23, 256; Lemke, "Fear-Mongering", pp. 762-765.
[608] Ibid., p. 770.
[609] See above, pp. 45, 99.
[610] Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, p. 365; Wormald, *Legal Culture in the Early Medieval West*, pp. 245-246.
[611] Lemke, "Fear-Mongering", p. 770.

allowed Cnut to rule as an Anglo-Saxon king without disrupting Anglo-Saxon identity.[612] What Wulfstan and the educated elite of early-eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon England secured was an identification of the Anglo-Saxons as God's chosen people, ordained as such by their history, and maintained as such by their behaviour.

It is not only Wulfstan's law codes that shed light on his contribution to Anglo-Saxon legal identity. As discussed, Wulfstan falsified the *Laws of Edward and Guðrum* in order to create a legal precedent for his subsequent codes, demonstrating the importance of history to law making. However, introducing this new law into the legal canon, particularly a law that affected Anglo-Saxon relations with another group, altered the character of the Anglo-Saxons' shared history. Schwarz argues that Wulfstan's aim in producing this treaty was, in addition to bolstering his own legal position, to remind Æthelræd of Alfred's strongly Christian kingship and to perhaps reform Æthelræd's violent ways.[613] Schwarz's interpretation emphasises the fact that while this treaty is conventionally called the *Laws of Edward and Guðrum*, the prologue to the law itself describes it as the laws that Alfred and Guðrum had agreed, and that Edward and Guðrum had later confirmed, although of course Edward's involvement is chronologically impossible due to Guðrum's death in 890.[614] This treaty is therefore as much, if not more, to do with Alfred as with Edward. This is significant because Alfred was responsible for much of the Anglo-Saxon legal identity that developed in the early Anglo-Saxon kingdom. Altering the Alfredian legal canon changed the shared history of the eleventh-century Anglo-Saxons. The additional treaty with Guðrum was far more religious in tone and content than the original Treaty of Alfred and Guðrum. While the original treaty contained the usual appeal for God's favour in the prologue, and was presumably facilitated by Guðrum's conversion to Christianity, it contained no specifically religious clauses. Rather, the clauses presented practical ways of managing trade and criminal activity across the border.[615] Wulfstan's version, however, claimed that both sides would 'ælcne hæþendom georne aworpen' (eagerly cast off all heathenism), and the subsequent clauses were almost entirely ecclesiastical in nature.[616] This fundamentally altered the way in which the Anglo-Saxons related to the Scandinavians, or perhaps more significantly, it altered the way the eleventh-century Anglo-Saxons believed they had related to the Scandinavians in the late ninth century. Alfred's own texts of course confirm that he took Christian kingship seriously, but the Treaty of Alfred and Guðrum does not suggest that Alfred was particularly concerned with policing Scandinavian religious

612 See above, pp. 100-104.
613 Schwarz, "Wulfstan the Forger", pp. 245-246.
614 Lieberman, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, pp. 128, *Prol.* 1-2.
615 Ibid., pp. 126-128, 1-5.
616 Ibid., pp. 128-134.

practice. This is perhaps not surprising given how chaotic the situation must have been prior to the Treaty being agreed. A practical treaty that allowed some level of cooperation across the border would probably have been the most the elite of either group could hope for. Wulfstan recasts this to present the Anglo-Saxons as a Christian group only prepared to cooperate with other Christian groups, and he also separates the Scandinavians led by Guðrum from the Scandinavians led by Sweyn. The legal basis of the Danelaw in the late ninth century was, by Wulfstan's account, common Christian faith. The invading Scandinavians of the early eleventh century were, Wulfstan claimed in the *Sermo*, heathens. The Laws of Edward and Guðrum did not therefore remind Æthelræd how Christian Alfred was as much as they dictated to Æthelræd and the Anglo-Saxon people the terms on which an accord could be reached with the Scandinavians and the terms on which it could not. This fits with Wulfstan's overarching aim to solidify Anglo-Saxon identity as a chosen people of God, who would be challenged by heathen peoples as God's biblical chosen people, the Israelites, had been, and could only prevail through piety and faith. In the past a peaceful resolution had been reached with the Scandinavians because they had committed to Christianity; this time the Anglo-Saxons had to oppose the Scandinavians because of their alleged heathenism. This opposition could be military, but it could also be through creation of a more pious Christian society. The *Laws of Edward and Guðrum* recast Anglo-Saxon shared history to represent the Anglo-Saxons as a more pious society.

This need to maintain a pious society is also expressed in the *Promissio regis*. This text contains what purports to be the exact oath Archbishop Dunstan gave to a king to read at his coronation, translated into the vernacular, followed by two paragraphs of commentary.[617] The king in question was most probably Æthelræd given the years Dunstan was Archbishop, meaning that this oath would have been read in 979.[618] However, it is clear from the text that the *Promissio regis* was written retrospectively at some point during Æthelræd's reign, possibly as an address to king and people, and that though Dunstan is mentioned he is not named as the author of the commentary.[619] Mary Clayton proposes that Wulfstan may be the author, and while this cannot be proven, there are many thematic similarities between this text and Wulfstan's work.[620] The commentary on the oath focuses on Christian kingship, and it also contains themes on the promise a Christian king makes to God and the results of impiety on society. Significantly, the oath itself has the king say, 'Ic þreo þing behate cristenum folce. and me underðeoddum' (I promise three

[617] Mary Clayton, "The Old English *Promissio Regis*", *Anglo-Saxon England,* 37 (2008), p.
[618] Ibid., pp. 92-95.
[619] Ibid., pp. 130-131.
[620] Ibid., p. 143.

things to the Christian people who are subject to me), but in the commentary afterwards, this promise is to God.[621] The commentary reads: 'Gif he þonne þæt awægð. þæt gode wæs behaten. þonne sceal hit syððan. wyrsian swyðe. sóna on his þeode' (If [the king] fails to fulfil that which he promised to God, then within a very short time after that things will grow worse among his people).[622] A change in emphasis has occurred between the composition of the oath and the commentary being written. Whereas the oath was made to the people, with Christian identity and God important themes, in the commentary the relationship is between the king and God, with the safety of the people at stake. If this commentary was written by Wulfstan around 1014, as Clayton suggests, or written around this time by someone sharing Wulfstan's ideology, the significance of the promise motif may be the reason for this change.[623] The Anglo-Saxons' identity as God's chosen people meant that they were involved in a covenant with God, as articulated in *Judith* and *Exodus*, and their part in this covenant was faith and piety, in exchange for which they received God's favour and protection.[624] The commentary suggests that if the king fails to fulfil his coronation oath, which is that his people will preserve true peace, not behave sinfully (*unriht*), and that he himself will be merciful, then he has broken his promise to God, not to his people, and his people will suffer.[625] In effect the king has made a promise to God that his people will behave piously, and if they fail then they will all lose God's favour. The message of this is therefore fundamentally the same as that of the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*. It creates the same relationship with God as the *Sermo* and presents the same identity for the Anglo-Saxons as God's chosen people. In fact, in the same way as the Laws of Edward and Guðrum was a recasting of the Treaty of Alfred and Guðrum, the commentary of the *Promissio regis* reinterpreted a coronation oath that had already been taken by the king in question to suit the ideology of the author. The laws of the early eleventh century were designed to promote behaviour that fulfilled the Anglo-Saxon side of their relationship with God, and so confirmed their identity. Wulfstan may not have introduced this identity as God's chosen people to the Anglo-Saxons, it may have already been a facet of Anglo-Saxon identity, but Wulfstan and his contemporary elite curated Anglo-Saxon shared history and behaviour to promote this as the defining characteristic of Anglo-Saxon identity in the early eleventh century and to imply that it always had been.

[621] Ibid., p. 148. Translation is Clayton's, p. 149.
[622] Ibid., p. 148. Translation is Clayton's, p. 149.
[623] Ibid., pp. 146-147.
[624] See above, pp. 45, 99.
[625] Clayton, "*Promissio Regis*", p. 148.

Iceland

The importance of law in medieval Iceland is well established, and its cultural significance is well attested.[626] William Ian Miller describes Iceland as 'a distinctly oversanctioned society', and this is certainly the impression given by their extant law code, which has extensive and detailed legislation on everything from dog bites to whale salvaging.[627] At odds with this assessment, however, is the distinct lack of sources that can illuminate what Icelandic law was and how it functioned.[628] The only extant law code from before the submission to Norway is the *Grágás*, the Grey Goose Laws, which survive in two manuscripts from 1260 and 1280.[629] These codes are often treated as a record of the laws that governed Iceland from the early twelfth century, but there is no additional information to substantiate this assumption. Common sense would suggest that they were not invented from scratch in 1260, but they may not represent accurately how law was practised in the twelfth century. While we lack further law codes, there are other sources that can shed light on Icelandic law. *Íslendingabók* has a short section on how the laws were brought to Iceland and how they were recorded. As this text is significantly older than the *Grágás* manuscript, it can offer some impression of how these laws developed over time. The sagas also contain some information about the law, as many of the plots revolve around legal disputes, particularly feuds and property disputes. These sagas have to be studied for what they are, works of literature recounting supposed events from an earlier period, so they too may not be accurate accounts of how law operated in Iceland, but nonetheless they do give some clues to Icelandic ideology concerning law.[630] For the Icelanders, law was the most significant characteristic to their identity because it allowed their society to function without a monarchy and it symbolised their independence from Norwegian control. However, this sense of independence developed over time; it is less apparent in earlier acts of identification that tend to look towards Norway for their legitimacy. As Norwegian control became more of a threat, Icelandic identifications became focused on law as an independent entity. Law also allowed the Icelanders to control what significance the characteristics they shared with other groups, such as language and lineage, had to their identity and so further mediate their relationship with Norway.

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626 Hastrup, "Establishing an Ethnicity", p. 142; Leonard, *Language, Society and Identity*, p. 96; William Ian Miller, *Bloodtaking and peacemaking: feud, law, and society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago, 1990), p. 223; Stefan Brink, "The Creation of a Scandinavian Provincial Law: How Was it Done?", *Historical Research,* 86.233 (2013), p. 434.
627 Miller, *Bloodtaking and peacemaking*, p. 223; *Grágás: Konungsbók* (Odense, 1974), pp. 187, 125.
628 Miller, *Bloodtaking and peacemaking*, p. 43.
629 Andrew Dennis, *Laws of Early Iceland I*, pp. 13-14.
630 Miller, *Bloodtaking and peacemaking*, pp. 44-45.

Íslendingabók

Law is one of the themes that runs through *Íslendingabók*, and this record of how the laws of Iceland were decided demonstrates how the Icelanders wished to represent their shared legal history. As in Anglo-Saxon England, the Icelandic laws were not portrayed as novel inventions but were apparently based on earlier laws. By necessity these earlier laws came from Norway, linking Icelandic legal identity to their Norwegian history. Immediately after describing the initial settlement of Iceland, *Íslendingabók* indicates that the laws that governed Iceland were brought from Norway by ÚlfLjótrr, who went to Norway with that specific intention.[631] *Íslendingabók* also indicates that these Norwegian laws, originally from the *Gulaþing*, were changed to suit the situation in Iceland under the guidance of Þorleifr the Wise.[632] This narrative is significant not only in demonstrating how the Icelanders viewed their origin and shared history, but also how they legitimised their laws, establishing the power structure of the group. Iceland was in a singular situation in this period in that it did not have a king, and therefore the usual systems of legitimacy in western Europe, where the king predominantly chose and imposed the laws, did not apply.[633] Although this was an unusual situation, the solution the Icelanders reached was not particularly novel. They took a body of laws with the weight of history behind them and altered them to suit their contemporary purpose, which was fundamentally little different from what Alfred had claimed to do in late-ninth-century England. The differences were that the Icelanders used Norwegian law, which might be viewed as foreign law, because they had none of their own, and that rather than a king, the laws were altered by Þorleifr the Wise. This demonstrates the importance of history in legitimising laws. They could not be generated from nothing, or even reconstituted from memory, they had to be retrieved from the nearest touchstone of tradition, Norway. However, the *Íslendingabók* narrative also demonstrates important features of how the Icelanders related to their origin. Clearly in the early twelfth century, when *Íslendingabók* was written, Norway was an important part of Icelanders' shared legal history, and there was no trace of the traumatic escape from Norwegian control told in later narratives.[634] Indeed, it seems hard to believe that if Ari and his contemporaries had felt the kind of enmity towards the Norwegian establishment that is demonstrated in the later sagas, they would have emphasised the role of Norwegian law in the founding of Icelandic law in the way found in *Íslendingabók*. That the Norwegian laws were subsequently altered to suit Iceland by a prominent Icelander offers the

631 Benediktsson, *Íslendingabók; Landnámabók*, p. 7.
632 Ibid., p. 7.
633 Miller, *Bloodtaking and peacemaking*, p. 224.
634 Long, *Iceland's Relationship with Norway*, p. 127. See above, pp. 54-55.

perfect bridge from the Icelanders' past to their present. Ann-Marie Long has suggested that this use of Norwegian law served to demonstrate to the rest of Europe that the kingless Iceland had as much tradition and sophistication as any other European country, and certainly *Íslendingabók* demonstrates this.[635] However, the Icelanders made no effort, at least in the extant texts, to go further than this and create the kind of complete legal history demonstrated by Alfred's *domboc*. Rather, the Icelanders demonstrated to themselves, and perhaps outside observers, that their laws were based in a tradition that had a validity beyond just the Icelandic group and linked themselves to Norway to do this. Icelandic shared legal history, like their origin myth also told in *Íslendingabók*, represented the group as having a close connection to Norway.

Íslendingabók offers further information concerning significant events in Icelandic legal history that demonstrate the evolving significance of law as a characteristic of identity. The Icelandic conversion to Christianity is described as having had a legal basis, rather than a particularly religious one.[636] The conversion narrative presented in *Íslendingabók* demonstrates how successful the Icelanders' importation of Norwegian law to establish an independent legitimacy for their own law was. Specifically, the conversion narrative rests on the premise that if Icelandic law was split into Christian and non-Christian, and so there was not a single law for the Icelanders, then the group itself would disintegrate. Þorgeirrr, the lawspeaker appointed to arbitrate between the groups, says, 'es vér slítum í sundr lǫgin, at vér monum slíta ok friðinn' (if we break apart the law, we also break the peace).[637] This demonstrates that the Icelanders had, at least by the time Ari wrote *Íslendingabók*, begun to give the law its own status within society.[638] In general, the maintenance of law in a medieval society without a king and the associated structure to enforce order would be a challenge. Wormald writes of Anglo-Saxon England in the tenth century, 'The peace is the king's'.[639] Whose should the peace be in Iceland, where there was no king? In the conversion narrative, the peace, and the authority associated with it, is shown to belong to the law. In the absence of a monarchy to give the group a stability and structure, the law was elevated to be the means by which Icelandic society was stabilised. The expertise brought to bear by Þorleifr is clearly respected by Ari, as he is included in *Íslendingabók*, but neither he nor ÚlfLjótrr come to be symbols of legal legitimacy in the way a king might. By the early twelfth century, Icelandic law was being presented in the abstract, rather than rooted in temporal power. There is still a memory

635 Ibid., p. 141.
636 Miller, "Of Outlaws, Christians, Horsemeat, and Writing", p. 2087. See above, p. 106.
637 Benediktsson, *Íslendingabók; Landnámabók*, p. 17.
638 Miller, *Bloodtaking and peacemaking*, p. 229.
639 Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, p. 312.

in *Íslendingabók* of where these laws came from historically, but other forms of legitimacy were also starting to be established. The Icelanders would come to be a people who were characterised by a law code that stood on its own validity, and the ideology necessary to maintain that positioned law at the centre of Icelandic identity.

The *Grágás*

The ideology of an autonomous law that symbolised Icelandic identity is fully visible in the *Grágás*. The formula that is most commonly used to introduce a law is, 'Þat er mælt at…' (it is said/prescribed that).[640] No individual takes credit or responsibility for these laws but rather the *Grágás* maintain the impression of an impersonal body of law. There were well-known individuals who were associated with making the laws, including ÚlfLjótrr and Þorleifr at the first inception of Icelandic law, Þorgeirrr, who was lawspeaker at the conversion, and Bergþórr, who decided that the laws should be written down around 1117.[641] None of these individuals is mentioned in the *Grágás*. Indeed, even at the opening of the Christian laws, which proclaims that all people in the land must be Christian, nothing is said about the men who were responsible for the conversion.[642] The statement enshrining Christianity in law simply begins, 'Þat er upphaf laga vara' (this is the start of our law).[643] Again, the law is presented as a self-supporting institution, requiring no legitimacy from any individual. The only point at which this rhetoric of anonymity is not used is law 248, in which the legal rights of Icelanders in Norway are recorded, which concludes, 'Þan rett oc þav lög gaf olafr hin hælgi konungr islendingom' (King Óláfr the Saint gave Icelanders these rights and these laws).[644] Law 248 is also sworn to by nine notable Icelanders, and they swear not that they negotiated the law, but that Bishop Isleifr negotiated it with King Óláfr.[645] It is significant that this law required so much support where other laws did not. This law is really a record of Norwegian law, or the Norwegian commitments in a law agreed between Norway and Iceland, so it makes sense that it would be presented in a different manner. Indeed, this highlights the differences between Icelandic and Norwegian law; Norwegian law was given by a king, Icelandic law simply existed.[646] This was not only a practical way to deal with the lack of an Icelandic

[640] Andrew Dennis, *Laws of Early Iceland I*, p. 13. Eg. *Grágás I*, pp. 38, 112, 144 etc.
[641] Benediktsson, *Íslendingabók; Landnámabók*, p. 24; Grønlie, *Íslendingabók - Kristni Saga*, ed. Grønlie, p. xlvii. This early law code, if it did indeed exist, has not survived.
[642] *Grágás I*, p. 3.
[643] Ibid., p. 3.
[644] Ibid., p. 197.
[645] Ibid., p. 197.
[646] Laurence Marcellus Larson, *The earliest Norwegian laws: being the Gulathing law and the Frostathing law* (New York, 1935), p. 35.

monarchy, it differentiated the Icelanders from their Norwegian cousins, and also assumed a cultural significance.[647] The lack of any legitimising authority other than the law itself creates an impression of timelessness to these laws, in spite of the fact that they are very much rooted in the mid thirteenth century. Where law might ordinarily rely on a sense of history, as it does in *Íslendingabók*, the *Grágás*' legitimacy relies on a lack of temporal context.

Through the *Grágás*, the Icelanders also represented their relationships with foreign groups, and through this described ways that foreign groups could be closer to or further from Icelandic identity. In spite of the observation in *Íslendingabók* that the Icelandic laws were based largely on the Norwegian *Gulaþing*, the *Grágás* are far more concerned with foreigners in Iceland than the *Gulaþing* is with foreigners in Norway.[648] Nichole Sterling theorises that this may be because Iceland was a land of immigrants, and so defining which immigrants now belonged to the group and which did not was of immediate importance to the nascent society.[649] The process of *landnám* may have fundamentally affected the priorities of law-making, but this occurred several centuries before the *Grágás* were recorded. By the thirteenth century, the ongoing relationship with the rest of Scandinavia was likely a more significant factor in their law-making. This relationship caused the Icelanders to differentiate between different groups of foreigners, drawing a distinction between those who spoke Norse or were from Scandinavia and those who did not. This engendered a certain hierarchy of foreign groups, not in terms of status but in terms of nearness to the Icelanders, with Norse speakers seen as closer to the Icelanders.[650] Sterling suggests this differentiation is due to simple pragmatism, as it is easier for people who speak the same language as the Icelanders and share cultural and kin links to operate under similar laws.[651] Pragya Vohra, on the other hand, has argued that the shared language and kinship ties were shared markers of identity.[652] This reading suggests a more ideological reason for viewing those who share a language as less foreign. It seems likely that both are true, since sharing a language makes it pragmatically easier to deal with foreigners, making them seem less foreign. However, pragmatism does not account entirely for the privilege given to Norse speakers, for example in the case of law 97, concerning the event of foreigners killed in Iceland. This law allows all kinsmen, to a fourth cousin, of the dead man who are in Iceland to prosecute the case if the dead man is Danish, Swedish or

[647] Miller, *Bloodtaking and peacemaking*, p. 227.
[648] Sterling, "The Other Inside", p. 64.
[649] Ibid., p. 64.
[650] Ibid., p. 67.
[651] Ibid., p. 69.
[652] P. Vohra, "One of Us? Negotiating Multiple Legal Identities Across the Viking Diaspora", *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* 39.2 (2016), p. 211.

Norwegian, but only the father, son or brother of the dead man to prosecute it if they are from other countries. Additionally, the father, brother or son must have been acknowledged as kin of the dead man prior to his death.[653] Significantly, the non-Norse countries are described as 'öllum londom öðrum en af þeim tungom' (all other lands than of those tongues).[654] Clearly the ideas of group identity and language are elided here. This law strongly suggests that the reason that Norwegians, Swedes and Danes were held under the law as closer to Icelanders than other groups was shared language. However, it also suggests that the Scandinavian groups are more known to Icelanders than other groups, because of their language and also because of their kin ties to the Icelanders. This is demonstrated by the fact that for kin of a deceased person from other foreign groups to bring a case, they had to have already been known in Iceland as kin, whereas Scandinavians, or Norse speakers, apparently did not. Perhaps this was because there was an assumption that if a foreign Scandinavian was killed in Iceland, their kin would already be known, or that shared language would make the process of determining who could rightfully bring a case more manageable. Whatever the practical concern, viewing foreign groups in this way has implications for the representation of Icelandic identity. The Icelanders did not consider there to be two categories of people, Icelanders and non-Icelanders, but rather they saw Icelanders and a selection of groups who were closer to or further from Icelandic identity. Some characteristics that the Icelanders saw as significant to their identity were not exclusive to the Icelanders, and acts of collective identification responded to this by representing groups with similar characteristics to the Icelanders as nearer to Icelandic identity.

As laws were (at least theoretically) designed to be applied, it is hard to pull apart practical and ideological concerns. In fact, it is possible that pragmatic concerns may have become ideological as they became part of Icelandic behaviour. An example of this may be found in law 20, concerning who is entitled to join an assembly in Iceland, which does not allow a man who did not learn Norse as a child to take part in Icelandic assemblies until he had been in Iceland for three years.[655] Again, there are pragmatic concerns demonstrated here, as it would be hard for someone who was not familiar with the language to take part in an assembly efficiently, but this had ideological implications. Engaging in law meant engaging with Icelandic behaviour and culture. Language was a prerequisite for this, so native Norse speakers were closer to Icelandic identity. Those who could not speak Norse had to learn it before they could begin to engage with this identity. This potentially offers an insight into how an individual could gain access to Icelandic

[653] *Grágás I*, p. 172.
[654] Ibid., p. 172.
[655] Ibid., p. 38.

identity and integrate into Icelandic society. The individual in question is not described as an 'utlendr' (foreigner), as the individual described to be from further afield than Scandinavia in law 97 is, but rather they are simply a man who did not learn Norse as a child.[656] This suspends their identity as either Icelandic or foreign until such a time as they can learn Norse and engage with an Icelandic identity. Icelandic identity is not therefore represented to be closed off to outsiders, but rather strongly connected to other groups through language, and perhaps even achievable through language and behaviour. However, this openness was still shown to be heavily regulated by Icelandic law.

The *Grágás* do not only legislate for foreigners in Iceland, but also for Icelanders abroad, and this can also illuminate how Icelanders related to other groups. Law 248 governs the rights of Icelanders in Norway, which were apparently guaranteed by King Óláfr, presumably in the early eleventh century.[657] This law apparently gave Icelanders the rank of *hauldr* and allowed them to inherit from their kin in Norway.[658] It also prevented Icelanders having their property seized and prevented them from being kept in Norway against their will. It is interesting to consider this against *Íslendingabók's* account of the earlier Óláfr Tryggvasson's taking of Icelandic hostages to persuade Iceland to convert.[659] This law again demonstrates a closeness between the Icelandic and Norwegian groups, particularly in the designation of a Norwegian rank for Icelanders. The law implies that Icelanders could slot easily into Norwegian society if they chose, and somewhat blurs the distinction between Icelandic and Norwegian identity. It is hard to judge how far this is representative of the actual experience of Icelandic identity. The sagas are often used to gauge how the law actually functioned in Iceland, although this approach has some drawbacks as the sagas are later sources describing an earlier period and are not believed to be factual.[660] However, sagas such as *Egils saga*, recorded in the mid-thirteenth century like the *Grágás*, can shed light on contemporary legal concerns. Much of the action of *Egils saga* revolves around a legal dispute Egill pursues in Norway that involves claiming his wife's inheritance there. Although this would have theoretically happened before King Óláfr agreed the rights of the Icelanders with Bishop Ísleifr, as Egill supposedly had dealings with King Eirikr Bloodaxe several decades earlier, Egill appears to have expectations that he and his wife's legal rights will be respected in much the same way as is set out in law 248. When cautioned that claiming the inheritance will be difficult, Egill responds,

656 Ibid., pp. 172, 38.
657 *Grágás II*, pp. 195-197.
658 Ibid., p. 195; Peter Foote and Richard Perkins Andrew Dennis, *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás II* (Winnipeg, 2000), p. 211.
659 See above, p. 105.
660 Miller, *Bloodtaking and peacemaking*, pp. 44-45.

'Konungr mun oss láta ná lǫgum ok réttindum á máli þessu' (the king will allow us law and justice in this matter).[661] Egill seems to anticipate that even though he is Icelandic, his rights will be respected, just as Icelanders in the mid thirteenth century would have done according to the *Grágás*. However, this is not what happens. Although the case is brought and Egill and his brother-in-law make their arguments and call witnesses as is appropriate, when it appears that Egill is winning Queen Gunnhilda uses her influence to disrupt the assembly and King Eirikr ends up vowing to kill Egill.[662] This is a clear example of the existence of a monarchy disrupting justice and, whether or not it is representative of law in the tenth century, it certainly articulates concerns of the mid-thirteenth century. The *Grágás* present Icelandic law as designed to function in a certain way, and the intervention of royal power was seen as a disruptive force, as demonstrated by the stories that were told about Norway. The many individuals mentioned in law 248 as guaranteeing the law may be a symptom of this concern that law in Norway was less impartial than in Iceland. *Egils saga* presents Icelandic legal identity as very different from Norway's, even though Icelanders apparently had legal rights. Iceland may have leant towards Norway in many ways, and the level of interaction between the two groups was high, but the Icelanders of the thirteenth century were keen to emphasise the most significant difference between the two groups, the monarchy.

As is becoming clear, it was the events of the period preceding the Icelandic submission to Norway that gave the *Grágás* their significance. The mid thirteenth century was a context in which it was important for the Icelanders to express difference from Norway and, in particular, independence from the Norwegian monarchy. The earliest extant copy was written in the manuscript known as *Konungsbók* in 1260, just as Norway fully exerted its control over Iceland.[663] This may not have been the first time that laws were written, and indeed the procedure set out in the *Grágás* for the eventuality of different versions of the law implies that it was not, but evidently a choice was made around 1260 to write a singularly comprehensive law code.[664] Immediately preceding this, the Icelanders had experienced a period of internal unrest as powerful families competed for power, and this had culminated in 1247 with these families appealing to the Norwegian king, Hákon, for his judgement on who should rule Iceland. It was this involvement of the Norwegian king in Icelandic legal affairs that brought about the end of Icelandic independence.[665] The implication of the timing of the *Grágás* is that the Icelanders felt a need to

[661] Einarsson, *Egill's Saga*, p. 87.
[662] Ibid., pp. 88-91.
[663] Andrew Dennis, *Laws of Early Iceland I*, p. 13.
[664] Brink, "Scandinavian Provincial Law", p. 436; Miller, *Bloodtaking and peacemaking*, p. 222.
[665] Jakobsson, "The Process of State-Formation", pp. 166-167.

record the laws that governed them when they were about to be changed by an external force.[666] They were recording the laws that had facilitated their independence from royal control at a time when the desire for royal arbitration had ended Icelandic independence. The customs and behaviour that characterised Icelandic identity are thoroughly expounded upon in the *Grágás*; that they were written at a time when they were about to be lost suggests that there was an effort being made to preserve them.[667] In the face of Norwegian control, these laws were written down and designed to epitomise what it was to be Icelandic, and what was most Icelandic was the centrality of an abstract, self-sustaining law. The forthright phrase 'Þat er mælt at' (it is prescribed/said that), which prefaces many of the edicts, suggests a rigid set of laws that had not changed and would not be changed in the future. The reality of this was unimportant when set against the statement it made. Laws such as 117, which order an annual law council to be held at *alþing*, always at the same place where it 'lengi hefir verit' (long has been), show a belief in the immutability of Icelandic law, which seems unrealistic in the face of the encroaching Norwegian control.[668] It does, however, exemplify the ideology of Icelandic law, which seems to have been designed to be eternal. The *Grágás* set out a more codified relationship with Norway and other foreign groups than *Íslendingabók* had. Where *Íslendingabók* had leant heavily on Norway to establish the legitimacy of the law, the *Grágás* stood on their own legitimacy and firmly governed the relationship with Norway. The closeness generated by shared language and potential kin connections was now heavily regulated and brought under Icelandic control by the law that was so important to Icelandic culture.[669] The fact that these laws were apparently recorded retrospectively may make it difficult to judge how law actually functioned in medieval Iceland, but it emphasises their role as an act of identification. They were not written to be a functional guide to law and order in Iceland, they were written to make a statement about Icelandic identity. This statement presented Icelandic identity as heavily reliant on the legal institution as an authority in itself, as recognising a certain flexibility at the borders of the Icelandic group caused by the closeness of other Scandinavian groups, which nevertheless was restricted by the legal institution, and as suspicious of anything that might disrupt the functioning of this legal institution, such as royal power.

[666] Andrew Dennis, *Laws of Early Iceland I*, p. 14.
[667] Miller, *Bloodtaking and peacemaking*, p. 43.
[668] *Grágás I*, p. 211.
[669] Vohra, "One of Us?", p. 220.

Conclusion

As acts of identification, law codes gave significance to the shared history and system of governance of these two groups. For the Anglo-Saxons, this shared history was the separate legal traditions of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and the history constructed by Alfred that stretched back to the Old Testament. As the Anglo-Saxon kingdom expanded and developed, subsequent kings made use of Alfred's legal tradition to give weight to their own laws. In Iceland, shared history initially showed a link to Norway through which the legitimacy of the law was established. As this reliance on Norway for legitimacy became less attractive, the shared history that underpinned it fell out of favour and was not mentioned in the *Grágás*. Instead of shared history, the law itself became characteristic of Icelandic ethnicity. *Egils saga* and the conversion narrative in *Íslendingabók* demonstrate that Icelandic law was seen to stand on its own legitimacy without the need for history or a monarchy and emphasise the centrality of this law to Icelandic identity. Anglo-Saxon law, on the other hand, relied on the system of governance for its legitimacy, both the West Saxon king and the *witan*, and the presentation of this in the law code made it a characteristic of Anglo-Saxon identity. However, it does not seem as though law in itself was as important to Anglo-Saxon identity as it was to Icelandic identity. The Anglo-Saxon elite used the law to express unity but also to express the importance of religion to collective identity. Alfred's law code established this precedent by incorporating Anglo-Saxon law into Old Testament legal tradition, and it reached its fullest expression in the early eleventh century when Wulfstan used the law codes to characterise the Anglo-Saxons as having a covenant with God. Where the Icelanders used religion to express their legal identity, the Anglo-Saxons used law to express their religious identity. This was informed by context: for the Icelanders their lack of a monarchy was something that set them apart from their neighbours, so it was a significant shared characteristic, while the Anglo-Saxons responded to repeated Scandinavian invasion and the potential for internal instability. These contexts determined the way their legal texts represented the relationships between these groups and foreign groups. The Icelanders had had many characteristics in common with other groups and their laws had to take a pragmatic approach to this by allowing a certain flexibility at the group's boundaries. The Anglo-Saxons had to negotiate with the other groups present in Britain and we see a suggestion of imperialism developing in their law codes as the groups gained territory and power. As the law was inherently political, acts of identification in legal texts were particularly responsive to the political context and can give insight into the concerns of the elite in these two societies.

Conclusion: Tools of Representation – History, Context, Culture

Although ethnic identity was represented in contextually relevant ways, the Anglo-Saxon and Icelandic elites did not and could not choose any expedient characteristic to represent as significant to ethnicity. The history of the groups played a central role in determining which characteristics became significant to ethnicity. However, this was not a passive process of history causing identity, but rather the elites of the groups played an active role in promoting certain aspects of the group's history in order to influence their contemporary identity. The contemporary events that the groups experienced played as important a role as their history, as the elites responded to circumstance in their representations of collective identity. The characteristics that these groups presented as significant to their identity were only made significant by context, there are no characteristics that are objectively significant to ethnicity, and therefore it is impossible to separate the process of ethnic identification from the group's context. However, it is not the purpose of this thesis to entirely explain every aspect of Anglo-Saxon and Icelandic representations of identity as the product of history and context. The lasting significance of some characteristics cannot be explained completely by these two factors, and instead seem to have been popular among the elite in their own right. As ethnicity is generated by belief in the existence of the group, it makes sense that the significance of certain characteristics could be sustained in part because they were popular. We might call this factor in the representation of ethnicity, for want of a more specific term, culture. The elite drew on all three of these factors – history, context and culture – when they created texts that were collective identifications of ethnicity.

The importance of history to ethnic identifications is perhaps unsurprising given that ethnicity is a matter of belief, as discussed in Chapter 1. The knowledge of a shared history, real or imagined, helped to foster the belief in shared identity. Shared origin was the most fundamental way that these groups established identity, but the representations of this origin altered to suit the changing circumstances of the group. The Icelanders in particular developed their origin myth to reflect their developing relationship with Norway. Earlier texts such as *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók* emphasised the Norwegian origin of the Icelanders and used this to give legitimacy to the group's position in Iceland. Later texts suggested a contentious relationship with Norway and in particular the Norwegian king. This was a selective use of the group's history. The Icelanders had never been entirely Norwegian, but this origin was important for the unity and status of the group. The later choice to represent the Icelandic migration as a flight from Norwegian kingship was again selected to express thirteenth-century anxieties about the influence of the Norwegian

crown in Iceland. The Anglo-Saxons also refined their origin myth to emphasise the shared history of the Germanic groups who formed the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and the religious identity of the Anglo-Saxons through links between the migration and the Old Testament exodus of the Jews. The origin myth presented in the late ninth century by the *Old English Historia Ecclesiastica* (*OEHE*) emphasised the shared origin of the Anglo-Saxons. The Old English *Exodus* emphasises a different aspect of the origin myth, presenting the migration as evidence that that Anglo-Saxons had been given Britain as their homeland by God. Both groups drew on history when representing characteristics of their identity through origin myths, but at different stages used history to emphasise the significance of different characteristics depending on the context.

Origin myths were not the only use these groups made of shared history. Conversion history was presented as a particularly significant event by both these groups, but for different reasons. The Icelanders presented their conversion as an example of the success of Icelandic law in the face of Norwegian aggression. The conversion narrative did not necessarily represent religious characteristics of the group, but rather characterised the Icelanders through their legal identity. Shared history was used in other legal contexts, such as the story of the bringing of the law to Iceland from Norway in *Íslendingabók*, and it also played a role in cementing the importance of skaldic poetry to Icelandic identity, as a time in which the Icelanders were renowned and respected in Scandinavia for their poetic abilities was a part of the groups' shared history. However, in the thirteenth century, the *Grágás* presented Icelandic law as divorced from any historical basis, suggesting that this link to Norway was no longer deemed desirable. The Anglo-Saxons, on the other hand, presented their conversion history as evidence for their special religious identity, as it demonstrated how they had been converted by Pope Gregory. Furthermore, they built on their own history and connected it to Old Testament history. This was particularly true in the Alfredian period, during which a number of texts that show a desire to insert the Anglo-Saxons in Old Testament history in a variety of ways were written. The West Saxon genealogy creates an ark-born ancestor the Anglo-Saxons, the *domboc* casts Alfred as Moses, the *OEHE*, building on Bede, portrays the Anglo-Saxons as the Chaldeans, and the Preface to *Pastoral Care* presents the Anglo-Saxons as the inheritors of Old Testament learning through translation. These identifications do not provide a single representation of Anglo-Saxon identity, but rather they suggest a number of characterisations of the Anglo-Saxons that all have the same aim, to situate them in Christian history. Over the course of the tenth century some of these characterisations were retained and built upon, while others appear to have had only short-lived significance to identity. Scyld, the ark-born son of Noah, does not appear to have been used in identifications from the late tenth or early

eleventh centuries. Likewise, the metaphor of the Chaldeans does not appear to have been taken up in later texts, despite Bede's use of it and its retention in the *OEHE*. Rather the representation of the Anglo-Saxons that was used in the eleventh century was as God's chosen people, akin to the Israelites of the Old Testament, and this characterisation was one that was reliant on the Anglo-Saxons' shared history of migration. Shared history was central to the identifications made by the Anglo-Saxons and Icelanders, but how this history was used by the elite depended on context.

Context was a crucial factor in every representation of collective identity, and this means that every source used to study the identification process must be contextualised. The contextual reasons for certain choices concerning ethnic representation are obvious. The Anglo-Saxons did not extend their identification with the Chaldeans because the Anglo-Saxons were Christian and the Chaldeans were a non-Christian group. The Icelanders allowed greater legal rights to other Scandinavians in Iceland because they could communicate and had kin ties with them. These conclusions are unsurprising, but context also played a more nuanced role in collective identification. Alfred and his circle may have constructed a history that integrated Anglo-Saxon and Old Testament history in three important texts of the period, the Preface to *Pastoral Care*, the prologue to the *domboc*, and the West Saxon genealogy in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, because it overcame the problem of the separate histories of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. These texts represent the Anglo-Saxons as having a literary, legal and genealogical tradition that incorporates aspects of pre-unification Anglo-Saxon history from all the kingdoms and also encompasses all of Christian history. The reasons for this choice of representation may not have been solely practical, but there is certainly a unifying ideology visible in the promotion of this characterisation of the Anglo-Saxons that would have suited the aims of Alfred's elite in bringing together the new kingdom. In the late tenth century, when it was not necessarily disunity between the old kingdoms that was of concern to the Anglo-Saxon elite but the threat of invasion and factionalism, a slightly different religious identity was represented that characterised the Anglo-Saxons as God's chosen people. The texts that express this identification, some of which appear to be versions of earlier works, include the Old English *Exodus*, the Old English *Judith*, Ælfric's Judith homily, Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, the laws from the period, particularly *I Cnut*, and the commentary on the *Promissio regis*. The theme of all of these texts is the covenant between the Anglo-Saxons and God, and a particular emphasis of many is the importance of the Anglo-Saxons' part of this covenant, their faith and piety. *Exodus* and *Judith* were part of larger compilation manuscripts, the texts of which do not necessarily all express the same theme, but it seems clear from the number of other contemporary texts that do contain the theme of covenant that these texts would have been

understood as expressions of that ideology. Such a clear focus on this facet of identity in the late Anglo-Saxon period was in all likelihood practically enabled by the strength of the administrative system that had developed over the previous century, and certainly reflects Wulfstan's personal beliefs, but it was also the result of the pressure of invasion and internal discord that threatened the integrity of the group. In the face of this threat, the Anglo-Saxons represented themselves as a people who had God's favour and who could influence their own fate through their actions to retain it.

The Icelanders also represented their ethnicity in ways that responded to their context. Their initial representation of close ties to Norway in *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók* was a reaction to the lack of systems of legitimacy in Iceland. These texts describe in detail the migration and land-taking process because this demonstrated to Icelanders and outsiders alike that they had a legitimate claim to the land. It is only in the sagas from the mid thirteenth century onwards that the migration is presented as a flight from Haraldr Finehair's oppressive rule, and this is more likely to represent attitudes in this later period than the migration period, as the thirteenth century was a time in which the Norwegian monarchy was imposing its control in Iceland. *Íslendingabók* also describes how the law was brought from Norway to Iceland because it was understood that law needed a claim to legitimacy in order to function, and the Icelanders struggled to establish this without a monarch. The later presentation in the *Grágás* of law as having legitimacy in its own right, removed from Norwegian influence, may have been a response to the fact that prominent Icelanders were undermining the Icelandic system of governance by resorting to the Norwegian king for justice, rather than representing any fact about how the laws actually functioned. The representation of skaldic poetry as significant to Icelandic identity may also have been in part a reaction to the decline in Icelandic autonomy in the thirteenth century, as skaldic poetry had apparently been a way in which the Icelanders had exerted influence at foreign courts. The close links between ethnic identifications and contemporary context suggest that for both of these groups, representations of ethnicity were an important part of the group's response to the events they experienced, particularly events that threatened the survival of the group. At times when the groups were under pressure from internal or external threats, they made acts of identification that represented ethnicity in ways that responded to that threat. This seems to be equally true in both of these case studies, suggesting that other societies in which acts of identification are less well attested also may have linked their identity closely to their political and social contexts. It is therefore particularly important to be rigorous about contextualising evidence for acts of identification when studying ethnicity in pre-modern groups.

The Anglo-Saxons and the Icelanders both had distinctive cultures that at times have been seen as exceptional by scholars, but they were, as with any culture, the products of a process of identification that occurred in both groups.[670] This process was built on the shared history of the groups and could be used to respond to context in a nuanced manner. However, even a detailed, contextualised study of the acts of identification examined in this thesis cannot answer every question as to why these identities formed in the ways they did. In Iceland, representations of identity used law and literature as defining characteristics. This is somewhat explicable by history and context, as discussed above, but not entirely. While there were practical reasons for the elite to represent Icelandic identity in this way, the acts of identification made concerning these characteristics suggest they had a lasting significance to Icelandic identity that went beyond expedience. The conversion narrative in *Íslendingabók* suggests that law was an embedded characteristic of Icelandic identity even in the twelfth century, and the fact that it is a more significant theme in the conversion narrative than religion itself cannot be due only to expediency. The reasons for skaldic poetry assuming such a high status in Icelandic society and enduring significance to Icelandic identity are also unlikely to be purely practical. It is unlikely that the processes that generated this significance can ever be fully reconstructed. The Anglo-Saxon elite gave a great deal of significance to religious characteristics in their representations of ethnicity from the very beginning of the period considered here. This again had advantages under the circumstances, and it had historical foundations upon which it could be based, but exactly why it caught the Anglo-Saxon imagination so strongly is unclear. Wormald attributes the Anglo-Saxons' religious identity to Alfred's use of Bede, and clearly the existence of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* is a factor in the Anglo-Saxons presenting themselves as a particularly Christian people.[671] However, not every religious identification made in late-ninth-century texts uses Bede's conception of the Anglo-Saxons, and as discussed above there was a multiplicity of religious identifications made in the Alfredian period. The significance of religion to Anglo-Saxon identity continued throughout the Anglo-Saxon period and representations were refined, suggesting that it was a well-embedded characteristic. In all likelihood, religion became significant to Anglo-Saxon identity for a variety of reasons now lost to us, including the choices of individuals such as Alfred and Wulfstan. Studying collective representations cannot, then, tell us everything about the process of ethnicity formation in these two groups, but it can shed light on how belief in shared characteristics within the group and different characteristics between groups was generated and

[670] Molyneaux, *Formation of the English Kingdom*, pp. 1-14; Sørensen, "Social institutions and belief systems of medieval Iceland", pp. 9-14.
[671] Wormald, "*Engla Lond*".

perpetuated in these two societies. It can also intervene in certain debates about the identities of these two groups through its detailed analysis of their acts of identification. Where Wormald and Lemke have argued that the Anglo-Saxons viewed themselves as God's chosen people from the Alfredian period, and Molyneaux and Rowley have argued against such an interpretation, this thesis has suggested a middle ground.[672] The Anglo-Saxons did present a strong religious identity from Alfred's reign on, but this only crystallised into a representation of the Anglo-Saxons as God's chosen people around the turn of the millennium. This thesis also offers a check on the theory of a Scandinavian diaspora by demonstrating that the Icelanders did not begin to conceive of their migration from Norway as traumatic until well after the Viking Age. This does not disprove Abrams' suggestion of a shared culture in the Viking Age, but it does problematise Jesch's assertions of traumatic dispersal as a feature of the diaspora.[673] This thesis demonstrates the process by which some of the most enduring representations of ethnicity in these two groups came to be, places these representations in their appropriate context and perhaps explains why we continue to have certain preconceptions about the identities of these groups.

It remains to consider whether the approach of examing acts of identification to aid the study of ethnicity and of a group's history more broadly could be applied outside of these two case studies or use evidence other than textual sources. Almost any medieval group could theoretically be taken as a case study, provided they produced enough texts. It is tempting to consider applying the approach taken by this thesis to locations in which more obviously complex processes of ethnic development and interaction were occurring, such as Normandy, Sicily or Iberia.[674] However, this thesis has demonstrated that studying acts of identification can only give real insight into the ethnicity of the dominant group, who control text production. It is therefore not possible to gain a complete picture of the ways that different groups interreacted and ethnicity developed from this interaction. This has been shown by the scant references to Britons or the Danelaw in Anglo-Saxon sources and the near silence concerning Irish settlers in Icelandic sources. This approach can clearly not tell us everything we would like to know about a group's ethnicity, and so applying it to more complex situations may turn out to give only a flat impression of the processes of ethnic identification if not augmented by other methodologies. That is not to say that this approach would be fruitless in other case studies, but groups that were in more complex situations, such as having

[672] Ibid.; Lemke, *The Old English Translation of Bede's HE*, p. 386; Rowley, *The Old English Version of Bede's 'Historia Ecclesiastica'*, pp. 57-70; George Molyneaux, "Did the English Really Think They Were God's Elect in the Anglo-Saxon Period?", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History,* 65.4 (2014).
[673] Abrams, "Diaspora and Identity"; Jesch, *The Viking Diaspora*, p. 71.
[674] Katherine Cross has taken a similar, though not identical, approach in her study of Scandinavian identity in Normandy (Cross, *Heirs of the Vikings*).

a newly arrived foreign elite, may benefit from a blended approach. If a methodology can be developed that allows for greater understanding of individual identifications, perhaps through archaeology, it may be possible to gain a true picture of how ethnicity developed in a variety of medieval groups. This leads us to consider whether the approach of studying acts of identification could be applied to other forms of evidence. Archaeological evidence such as jewellery is often used by scholars of ethnogenesis, but this raises problems of how to know that the use of certain objects was significant to ethnicity. These problems are compounded when looking at objects as acts of identification. Any characteristic can in theory be made significant to ethnicity through acts of identification: burial practice, art, palaeography, music, food, dress, agriculture and industry are all possible characteristics that may be recoverable to some extent. However, history and context are the factors that contribute to characteristics being seen as significant to ethnicity, and grasping how these factors affected material culture is challenging. While texts tend to explain themselves to some degree, material culture rarely does. If we wish to say that the creation or use of material culture was an act of ethnic identification, we would need to establish that this characteristic was significant to ethnicity and understand the historical or contextual reasons for that significance. Scandinavian-style jewellery may have been worn in the Danelaw to demonstrate a link to Scandinavia, or Vernacular Miniscule may have been used for Old English texts in the tenth century to express the status of Anglo-Saxon vernacular literature, but how can we be sure that these were acts of identification rather than choices made for other reasons?[675] A broad approach that views material culture as a means by which identity was formed can be taken, as Jane Kershaw does in her study of Scandinavian jewellery in England, but this does not allow for the close links between acts of identification and specific events experienced by the group that have been made in this thesis.[676] On the other hand, material culture and archaeological evidence does have the capacity to give insight into the daily lives of individuals in a way that texts produced by the elite do not. If a careful approach were taken to the use of archaeological evidence then it may be possible to study individual identifications, something that has not been possible here. It may be possible to take a holistic approach that utilises both written and archaeological evidence to ascertain what can be considered an act of ethnic identification, although only where there are sufficient textual sources. Further investigation may offer alternatives where no texts are extant. Any future study in this area would require a rigorous approach to ensure that every ethnic characteristic attributed to a group was examined to establish its significance.

[675] Jane Kershaw, *Viking Identities: Scandinavian Jewellery in England* (Oxford, 2013), p. 249; Rebecca Rushforth, "Latin Script in England c. 900-1000: English Caroline Miniscule", in Richard Gameson (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain Volume 1: c.400–1100* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 199.
[676] Kershaw, *Viking Identities*, pp. 10-11.

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