THE IDEOLOGY OF WAR
IN EARLY MEDIEVAL ENGLAND:
THREE CASE STUDIES IN ANGLO-SAXON LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims at enhancing current understanding of the ideological dimension of war in early medieval England by investigating how war is represented and discussed in a number of Anglo-Saxon literary texts. In order to highlight how ideas and attitudes towards war evolved through time, this study comprises of three case studies arranged in chronological order. Chapter One considers the perception and representation of war in the Old English biblical poems *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Judith*, showing how the Old Testament ideology of war was highly popular and influential throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. Chapter Two investigates ideas and attitudes towards war in a number of ninth-century texts produced in the context of King Alfred's programme for the revival of literature and learning. This case study highlights how the coming of the Vikings prompted the 'intellectual community' operating under Alfred's aegis to develop articulate and unprecedented reflection on the issue of war. Chapter Three focuses on the second Viking Age and explores how two notable late Anglo-Saxon authors, namely Ælfric of Eynsham and Wulfstan of York, responded to the violent return of the Scandinavian raiders.

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others. In Chapter One, section two ('The reception of the Old Testament ideology of war in Anglo-Saxon England: the Old English poems *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Judith*') I have developed and extended some arguments that were first presented in my MA dissertation. A version of my discussion of the representation of war in the *Old English Orosius* (Chapter Two, pp. 90-108) will appear in the forthcoming article 'Reading Orosius in the Viking Age: an Influential Yet Problematic Model', to be published in the collection of essays edited by P. LENDINARA, *La prosa Anglosassone / Old English Prose*, Filologia Germanica – Germanic Philology 5 (Milano: Prometheus, forthcoming 2014).

ABBREVIATIONS

ASC	*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. For reasons that will be outlined below,[1] all references to and quotations from the *Chronicle*, unless otherwise stated, are from MS A. All translations are drawn from M. SWANTON (ed. and trans.)*, The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000).
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
Ch.	Chapter
EETS	Early English Text Society
o.s.	original series
s.s.	supplementary series
EHD	*English Historical Documents, c. 550-1042*, ed. and trans. by D. Whitelock (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1968).
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
Capit.	Capitularia
Conc.	Concilia
Epp.	Epistolae
SS rer. Germ.	Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi
nt.	note
SEM	Studies in the Early Middle Ages
s.	*sub*
s.a.	*sub anno*

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[1] See below, Ch. 2, p. 134.

NOTES

The Bible

As clearly illustrated by Richard Marsden,[2] no standard version of the Bible existed during the early Middle Ages. In the present study, all references to and quotations from the biblical text are drawn from R. WEBER *ET AL.* (eds.), *Biblia Sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem* (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1969). Abbreviations of the biblical books – used to refer to direct quotations from the Bible – are also taken from this edition. All translations are from the Douay-Rheims Bible, and specifically from R. CHALLONER (ed. and trans.), *The Holy Bible, Translated from the Latin Vulgate, Diligently Compared with the Hebrew, Greek, and Other Editions in Divers Languages* (Rockford, Ill.: Tan Books and Publishers, 1989).

Primary Sources

Throughout the thesis, details of the edition used are given under the first reference to each primary source. In a number of instances, homilies, prayers and documents have been cited from the same edited volume (e.g. Ælfric's homilies from W.W. Skeat's edition of the *Lives of Saints*). In these cases, each text is identified by the title given to it by its editor. For the sake of brevity, however, these primary sources are not listed separately in the bibliography, but only the main edition is quoted.

Translations

Throughout the present study, published translations have been used whenever possible. Details of the translation used are given under the first reference to each text. Translations are my own when not otherwise stated.

Spelling

Individual Old English words, mentioned without reference to any specific text or texts, are spelled according to the entries of the *Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, ed. by J.R. Clark Hall, 4th edn. (Toronto; London: University of Toronto Press, 1960).

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[2] R. MARSDEN, 'Wrestling with the Bible: Textual Problems for the Scholar and the Student', in *The Christian Tradition in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by P. Cavill (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), pp. 69-90.

INTRODUCTION

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling. There is a river, the streams shall make glad the City of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. God is in the midst of Her. She shall not be moved: God shall help Her, just at the break of dawn. The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved, He uttered his voice, the earth melted. The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge. Come, behold the works of the Lord, who has made desolations in the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth, He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two. He burns the chariot in fire. Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge."

On 11 September 2011, U.S. President Barack Obama opened the solemn ceremonies for the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the attack on the Twin Towers with a recitation of Psalm 46, quoted *in extenso* above. Later that day, he delivered a compelling speech at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC which relied just as deeply on Old Testament discourse.[1] Although Christian rhetoric is a commonplace in American politics, both addresses were followed by a heated debate in the media concerning President Obama's pervasive use of the Bible ― and of the Old Testament in particular — and the reasons underlying such a choice.[2] In fact, many people welcomed Obama's overt biblical references by arguing, for example, that 'a verse […]

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[1] B. OBAMA, *Remarks by the President at 'A Concert for Hope'*, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/09/11/remarks-president-concert-hope> [accessed 15 May 2013].

[2] See, for example, the online article 'Psalm 46: Obama's 9/11 Speech References Biblical Passage', *The Huffington Post*, 12 September 2011, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/09/12/psalm-46-obamas-911-speech_n_958954.html> [accessed 15 May 2013] and the many comments posted by other users at its foot.

makes you feel better about the lives lost',[3] while an official statement from the White House explained that Psalm 46 was selected because it speaks about 'persevering through very difficult challenges and emerging from those challenges stronger'.[4] A small minority of the public, however, did not agree with the clarifications advanced by the White House and strongly questioned whether a psalm was appropriate for this memorial service.[5]

Indeed, for these people both Psalm 46 and the speech at the Kennedy Center were less about the commemoration of the dead or the trials and tribulations of the American people, than about a powerful, stern warning to all those entertaining ideas of striking against the U.S. again that the retribution for such act would be equally as swift and relentless as the wrath of the Old Testament God. In other words, President Obama wished to remind the citizens of the United States and the whole world that, just as in the historical books of the Bible, no act against the people of God will go unpunished.

Moreover, Obama's frequent references to the 'ultimate sacrifice' of countless American soldiers in Afghanistan can not but stress the fact that the 9/11 anniversary fell at the end of a decade during which two million Americans had left their families and country to engage in the much-debated war against terrorism.[6] Two million people, too many of whom, as President Obama himself admits, 'will never come home'.[7] It was therefore entirely natural for Obama to make use of the 9/11 anniversary to reassert the rightness of America's disputable military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, but also as a means to justify the subsequent loss of so many lives in those distant lands.

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[3] ?, 'Was it Inappropriate for Obama to Read Psalm 46 at the 9/11 Memorial Ceremony this Morning?', in *Yahoo! Answers*, <http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20110911151631AADTGg6> [accessed 15 May 2013].

[4] J. Earnest, *Gaggle by Principal Deputy Press Secretary Josh Earnest Aboard Air Force One en route Pittsburgh, PA*, <http://m.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/09/11/gaggle-principal-deputy-press-secretary-josh-earnest-aboard-air-force-on> [accessed 15 May 2013].

[5] ?, 'Was it Inappropriate?'.

[6] Obama, *Remarks*.

[7] *Ibid*.

What might have passed unnoticed is that the concepts, themes and scriptural passages utilized by the American President to further his arguments belong not only to current political rhetoric, but also to a nearly forgotten tradition rooted in the Middle Ages, the main aim of which was to inform ideologically each and every aspect of one of the most constant elements of human history, that is to say, war.

Identification of research field and chronology

In his seminal study on war in the Middle Ages, Philippe Contamine points out that 'perhaps more than any other human activity war, by its very nature, introduces into every society in which it occurs a series of juridical and moral considerations which are often complex and equivocal. […] It [war] exists enveloped in (and also masked by) a total conceptual system springing from custom, law, morality and religion — an apparatus designed in principle to tame, orientate and channel it'.[8] In other words, war is a very complex phenomenon, by no means limited to the armed hostilities between two parties, but also involving an elaborate ideological and theoretical structure aimed at guiding and regulating the actual practice.[9] Depending on the historical period, this cultural construct can take the form of diverse and unrelated ideas, attitudes and opinions often in opposition to each other, or it may reach a level of elaboration and standardization which meets the traditional definition of ideology, that is to say a coherent system of abstract thoughts elaborated by a specific sector of a given society and subsequently proposed to all members of that society for the purpose of orientating and controlling popular beliefs and public behaviours.[10]

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[8] P. CONTAMINE, *War in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), p. 260.

[9] As R.P. ABELS ['Cultural Representation and the Practice of War in the Middle Ages', *Journal of Medieval Military History*, 6 (2008): 1-31 at 1] explains, 'war is a cultural activity: the reasons why societies engage in war and the methods by which they fight them are defined by the particular norms, values, institutions, and mentalities of a society passed on from one generation to the next'.

[10] The *Oxford English Dictionary* [ed. by J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon

In the classical world, the practice of war was framed within a fully developed, highly sophisticated ideology which, however, was first significantly challenged by the advent of Christianity and then finally dispelled by the collapse of the Roman Empire. As a consequence, the early medieval period constitutes a true melting pot which saw the gradual elaboration of an entirely new ideological framework growing out of very different premises and which was to dominate western culture for many centuries to come. Of course, this conceptual system did not arise suddenly, but emerged from a lengthy process beginning in late Antiquity and culminating only during the age of the Crusades, when its frame of reference and core assumptions became fixed and widely known and accepted throughout European society.

Yet, despite the rising interest in the medieval ideology of war on the part of both the scholarly community and the general public (especially in the wake of recent, violent conflict between the western world and Islamic terrorists),[11] the stages whereby this body of concepts was slowly elaborated and defined through the early Middle Ages remain mostly unexplored. In particular, no extensive study of the ideological dimension of war in the early Middle Ages has been undertaken thus far, while general works on medieval warfare tend to pay little attention to the early centuries, which have in the past been seen as a 'dark age' characterized by blind violence and by the absence of any tactical or intellectual sophistication.[12] Likewise, notwithstanding a few notable

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Press, 1989), s. ideology, 4], defines ideology as 'a systematic scheme of ideas, usually relating to politics or society, or to the conduct of a class or group, and regarded as justifying actions, especially one that is held implicitly or adopted as a whole and maintained regardless of the course of events'.

[11] See, for instance, the increasing number of university modules dedicated to the Crusades, the exponential growth of scholarly and especially non-academic publications on the same subject, as well as various TV programmes and films such as Ridley Scott's *Kingdom of Heaven*.

[12] See, for example, G. HUBRECHT ['La juste guerre dans la doctrine chrétienne, des origines au milieu du XVIe siècle', in *La Paix*, 2 vols, Recueils de la Société Jean Bodin pour l'histoire comparative des insitutions 14 and 15 (Bruxelles: Éditions de la Librairie Encyclopédique, 1961-1962), II, pp. 107-123 at 112] who, after discussing the concept of war in the works of Isidore of Seville, states: 'Ensuite, se déroulent de long siècles où il n'y a plus de doctrine sur la licéité de la guerre pour une raison bien simple, à savoir qu'en cette période barbare, le raisonnement doctrinal a pratiquement disparu en toute matière'.

exceptions,[13] comprehensive publications on the ideology of the Crusades tend to focus on the works of early Christian writers (for example, Saint Augustine, bishop of Hippo) and then move directly to the end of the eleventh century and to later authors such as Thomas Aquinas and Gratian.[14]

Nevertheless, it is precisely the exacerbation of post Cold War conflicts and the attempt on the part of many of the contenders to use religiously oriented discourse to motivate acts of violence — be it terrorist attacks or pre-emptive wars — which strongly calls for an in-depth examination of the development of those forms of ideological manipulation which surround the practice of war and which serve to explain and make sense of tragic events such as defeat, to render something as dreadful as killing fellow creatures acceptable, and to inform our perception of and relationship with the opposing faction.

An exhaustive investigation of the evolution of ideas and attitudes towards war throughout the early medieval period would, however, be far too vast a topic for a three-year project, especially as this process did not take place uniformly in the western European world, but evolved as a series of individual responses to specific historical, social and cultural circumstances. Consequently, the present study focuses specifically on the elaboration and development of attitudes towards war in Anglo-Saxon England. This choice has been prompted by the relative paucity of recent and detailed studies on the topic, and by the particularly antiquated and one-sided approach to, and understanding of, the ideological dimension of war in Anglo-Saxon times.

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[13]   In particular, C. ERDMANN, *The Origin of the Idea of Crusade*, translated from German by M.W. Baldwin and W. Goffart (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), first published as *Die Entstehung des Kreuzzugsgedankens*, Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Geistesgeschichte 6 (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1935). See also D.S. BACHRACH, *Religion and the Conduct of War, c. 300-1215* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003).

[14]   See, for example, F.H. RUSSELL, *The Just War in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

In particular, when addressing issues of warfare, current scholarship too often remains influenced by a stereotypical and outdated image of the Anglo-Saxons as a barbarian people composed of heroic yet insubordinate and fiery warriors whose greatest desire was to die bravely alongside their lord. Indeed, even though most commentators expressly reject traditional notions, the very fact that even quite recent academic studies concentrate almost exclusively on the various aspects and implications of the so-called *comitatus* can not but reinforce the prejudice according to which the Anglo-Saxons were too naïve or unlearned to develop a more complex and 'philosophical' reflection on war.[15]

However, recent work on various facets of Anglo-Saxon society, including the practice of war, strongly suggests that this view needs to be revised. For instance, historians such as Richard Abels, Guy Halsall and, most recently, Ryan Lavelle have thoroughly investigated the structure, composition and organization of early English armies, so that the idea of their material and tactical backwardness can now be definitively rejected.[16] At the same time, other historical studies have established the sophistication of Anglo-Saxon politics and legal culture, especially from the ninth century onwards.[17] Likewise, literary experts have completely overturned traditional preconceptions concerning the cultural gap separating early medieval England from the rest of Europe, demonstrating how the Anglo-Saxons could rival their continental

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[15] See, for example, R. WOOLF, 'The Ideal of Men Dying with Their Lord in the *Germania* and in *The Battle of Maldon*', *Anglo-Saxon England* 5 (1976): 63-81; K. O' BRIEN O' KEEFFE, 'Heroic Values and Christian Ethics', in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. by M. Godden and M. Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 107-125; S.S. EVANS, *The Lords of Battle: Image and Reality of the Comitatus in Dark-Age Britain* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1997); J.M. HILL, *The Anglo-Saxon Warrior Ethic: Reconstructing Lordship in Early English Literature* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000).

[16] R.P. ABELS, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); G. HALSALL, *Warfare and Society in the Barbarian West, 450-900* (London: Routledge, 2003); R. LAVELLE, *Alfred's Wars: Sources and Interpretations of Anglo-Saxon Warfare in the Viking Age* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010).

[17] See, among others, the much-debated milestone by P. WORMALD, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).

counterparts in their knowledge of classical and late antique texts, as well as in the composition of original works.[18] Finally, new and remarkable archaeological discoveries, most notably the Staffordshire Hoard, not only remind us of the central role played by war in the the political and cultural life of Anglo-Saxon England, but also reveal how incomplete our apprehension of this subject still is.

Yet, as mentioned above, the assumption that the ideological dimension of war in early medieval England did not go beyond the ethic of the *comitatus* is still profoundly ingrained, just as is scholars' general disregard for this subject. In fact, until the late 1990s only one academic publication considered the ideology of war in Anglo-Saxon England in a wider perspective, namely J.E. Cross' 1971 article 'The Ethic of War in Old English'.[19] Fortunately, over the past decade Cross' seminal study has eventually been followed by a number of creditable works which, however, have only scratched the surface of a much wider remit.[20] Accordingly, a new, more comprehensive and systematic examination of the cultural discourse surrounding the practice of war in pre-Conquest England is much needed, and this is precisely what the present study seeks to offer.

Before proceeding to consider the sources and structure of this thesis, it is necessary to address the question of what 'war' actually was during the period covered by the

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[18]   The number of studies concerning the influence of classical, late antique and patristic literature on Anglo-Saxon culture is almost endless. It would therefore suffice to refer to two 'classics' which, through the study of manuscripts, now allow us to have a more thorough knowledge of the literary culture of Anglo-Saxon England: H. GNEUSS, *Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: a List of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2001) and M. LAPIDGE, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[19]   J.E. CROSS, 'The Ethic of War in Old English', in *England Before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, ed. by P. Clemoes and K. Hughes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 269-282. Mention should also be made of the 1981 article by J. HILL concerning the figure of the *miles Christi* in Old English literature ['The Soldier of Christ in Old English Prose and Poetry', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 12 (1981): 57-80] which, however, does not directly relate to the ideology of war.

[20]   Most notably J.E. DAMON, *Soldier Saints and Holy Warriors: Warfare and Sanctity in the Literature of Early England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003). See also below, nt. 40, p. 13.

present inquiry. The first major difficulty when trying to define war in the early medieval period is to draw a clear distinction between 'war' and the more general concept of 'violence'.[21] Although these two elements are so tightly intertwined that the former is substantially inseparable from the latter, it is also true that they neither are nor were perceived as the same thing. Recent works have in fact demonstrated that early medieval communities had a very clear, although not always definable, perception of the various scales and levels of violence, and that each of them had different origins, aims and rules of conduct governing it.[22]

Of course, the most obvious solution would be to adopt a modern definition of war as 'hostile contention by means of armed forces, carried on between nations, states, or rulers, or between parties in the same nation or state',[23] and to consider war as the widest and most severe level of violence between, or within, communities. Nevertheless, it should be underlined that early medieval warfare differed significantly from modern armed conflicts for a number of reasons. Firstly, in the early Middle Ages armies were relatively small, numbering between 1,000 and 5,000 men at most.[24] Accordingly, both the outcome and the consequences of war were also quite limited, with a comparatively low number of casualties and only very circumscribed territorial areas being involved in the hostilities. Furthermore, most military campaigns were not carried out through

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[21] Violence in the early medieval world has attracted considerable scholarly attention in the last few decades. See, for example, the collection of essays edited by G. HALSALL, *Violence and Society in the Early Medieval West* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998) and the unpublished PhD thesis by A. COWEN, 'Writing Fire and the Sword: the Perception and Representation of Violence in Viking Age England' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of York, 2004).

[22] G. HALSALL, 'Anthropology and the Study of Pre-Conquest Warfare and Society: the Ritual War in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Weapons and Warfare in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by S. Chadwick Hawkes (Oxford: Oxford University Committee for Archaeology, 1989), pp. 155-177. See also G. HALSALL, 'Violence and Society in the Early Medieval West: an Introductory Survey', in *Violence and Society*, pp. 1-45 and *Warfare and Society*, pp. 14-16 and 134-143.

[23] SIMPSON and WEINER, *Oxford English Dictionary*, s. war, I.1.a.

[24] On the hotly-debated subject of the size of early medieval armies see T. REUTER, 'The Recruitment of Armies in the Early Middle Ages: What Can We Know?', in *Military Aspects of Scandinavian Society in a European Perspective, AD 1-1300*, ed. by A. Nørgård Jørgensen and B.L. Clausen (Copenhagen: National Museum, 1997), pp. 32-37 and HALSALL, *Warfare and Society*, pp. 119-133.

sieges and pitched battles between armies, but by harrying and plundering the enemy territory.[25] Consequently, as far as the early Middle Ages are concerned, it is quite difficult to distinguish between 'war' and other forms of armed violence as, for instance, a feud between two aristocratic families,[26] since such conflict would probably have entailed the mobilization of a quantity of men and other resources equal to a 'war' between petty kingdoms.

A more fruitful perspective on this problem is offered in Guy Halsall's 1989 article 'Anthropology and the Study of Pre-Conquest Warfare and Society', which applies anthropological models drawn from the study of violence in pre-industrial societies to Anglo-Saxon warfare.[27] Halsall concludes that early medieval conflicts can be subdivided into 'ritual' (or 'endemic') and 'non-ritual' warfare.[28] The former entailed frequent, small scale military actions aimed at the acquisition of loot, while the latter consisted of 'periodic outbursts of serious, large scale conflict' with significant outcomes as, for example, 'change in the political balance, major redistribution of land and/or people [and] sometimes complete conquest, absorption or annihilation of weaker group by stronger'.[29]

More importantly for the present purpose, the distinction between 'ritual' and 'non-ritual' warfare advanced by Halsall helps us to pinpoint a key premise underlying the inquiry undertaken here, namely that ideas and attitudes towards war not only developed gradually over several centuries, but emerged and evolved in response to conflicts of exceptional severity. For example, in her valuable article 'Violence in the Carolingian World and the Ritualization of Ninth-Century Warfare', Janet Nelson

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[25] Halsall, *Warfare and Society*, pp. 135 and 140.
[26] On feud see Halsall, 'Violence and Society'.
[27] Halsall, 'Anthropology'.
[28] See also Halsall, *Warfare and Society*, pp. 134-135 and 142-143.
[29] Halsall, 'Anthropology', p. 161.

convincingly demonstrates how the civil wars among the heirs of Charlemagne during the second half of the ninth century gave new impetus to the already well-developed Carolingian ideology of war by prompting the elaboration of a new and complex cultural apparatus which could justify and legitimate acts of belligerence within the same kingdom — an activity which, understandably, raised stronger moral concerns than the practice of war against foreign enemies such as Avars and Saxons.[30]

A completely different scenario is offered by early medieval England, where the frequent, often brutal, armed conflicts between the kingdoms of the Heptarchy seem not to have implied any ethical problems. In fact, while the Carolingian aristocracy was conscious of belonging to the same polity, a unified English kingdom did not emerge before the middle of the tenth century. The effects of this territorial and political fragmentation on the ideological dimension of war are clearly seen, for example, in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, where the disputes among the members of the English Church appear to be the only conflict deeply troubling the Northumbrian monk. Moreover, the *Historia ecclesiastica* also witnesses to a more general absence of an ongoing discourse on the question of war, and to the marginality of this topic for contemporaneous authors.[31]

It is indeed my contention that it was the coming of the Vikings at the end of the eighth century which marked the dawn of a reflection on the issue of war in Anglo-Saxon England, on its causes and its ideological implications, precisely because of the strong and, more importantly, unprecedented impact of the Scandinavian invasions on early English society, politics, culture and military organization. In fact, notwithstanding Peter Sawyer's infamous argument that 'once the prejudices and exaggerations of the

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[30] J. NELSON, 'Violence in the Carolingian World and the Ritualization of Ninth-Century Warfare', in *Violence and Society*, pp. 90-107.
[31] See below, Ch. 2, pp. 124-125.

primary sources are recognized the raids can be seen not as unprecedented and inexplicable cataclysm, but as an extension of normal Dark Age activity made possible and profitable by special circumstances',[32] some characteristics of the Northmen, and of their methods of waging war, significantly distinguished them from any other opponents previously faced by Anglo-Saxon warriors and intellectuals alike.

For example, the Viking wars of the ninth century constitute without doubt a case of 'non-ritual' warfare. Although the initial target of the Scandinavian warbands was the acquisition of booty through plunder, their repeated crushing victories soon led to the outright 'conquest' of the whole of northern England, and to the subsequent displacement of the existing forms of government in favour of the Vikings, who were able to place vast areas of the English territory under their direct control.[33] Moreover, the fact that Viking 'armies' were actually constituted of autonomous warbands which could attack different parts of the island simultaneously created a condition of 'total war' involving the whole of Anglo-Saxon England. This strongly differentiates Viking warfare from previous armed conflicts both within and between the kingdoms of the Heptarchy, where military campaigns, even the most significant ones, did not affect more than individual, local areas.[34] It is therefore not impossible to argue that the only precedent to the tragic events of the ninth century was, as noted by Alcuin,[35] the conquest and colonization of England by the Angles, Saxons and Jutes.

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[32] P. SAWYER, *The Age of the Vikings* (London: Edward Arnold, 1962), pp. 202-203.

[33] S. KEYNES, 'The Vikings in England, c. 790-1016', in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings*, ed. by P. Sawyer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 48-82 at 54.

[34] Furthermore, according to the data gathered and analysed by G. Halsall ['Anthropology', pp. 163-173], from AD 650 to 850 'non-ritual' warfare between neighbouring Anglo-Saxon kingdoms took place only once every twenty years.

[35] In his letter to King Ethelred of Northumbria about the sack of Lindisfarne (793) [E. DÜMMLER (ed.), *Epistolae Karolini aevi*, II, MGH Epp. 4 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1895), no. 16, pp. 42-44, ll. 34-37, p. 42; translation in *EHD*, no. 193, pp. 842-844], Alcuin states that 'ecce trecentis et quinquaginta ferme annis, quod nos nostrique patres huius pulcherrime patrie incole fuimus, et numquam talis terror prius apparuit in Brittannia, veluti modo a pagana gente perpessi sumus' [it is nearly 350 years that we and our fathers have inhabited this most lovely land, and never before has such terror appeared in Britain as we have now suffered from a pagan race].

The Scandinavian raiders, however, proved to be deeply problematic opponents not merely from a military perspective, since the Viking wars also raised pressing ideological questions, such as why the Anglo-Saxons were afflicted by that scourge. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that, throughout the ninth century, Vikings were pagan. As a consequence, churchmen, men of letters and 'thinkers' of the time were called not only to motivate and explain contemporary events — in particular why pagan armies so often proved victorious over Christian populations — but also to suggest how such a difficult situation could be overcome. In its turn, this stimulated a cultural renewal and, more importantly, an in-depth meditation on the issue of war.

When Scandinavian attacks resumed at the end of the tenth century, both England and the Vikings were much changed, but the latter still constituted a serious threat to the very existence of an English kingdom and a great intellectual challenge to its culture, which once again had to evolve in order to answer the new ideological difficulties posed by the Scandinavian raiders. For these reasons, the present study considers the development of ideas and attitudes towards war specifically in the context of the two Viking experiences.

Sources and methodology

Ideas and attitudes towards war find expression in numerous 'spheres', among which are, for example, religious practices, public ceremonies and the liberal arts. Although the liturgy and other material customs might be more immediately revealing of the perception of war in a given historical context, in the 1930s Carl Erdmann, the celebrated historian of the Crusades, had already called attention to the importance of literature as a critical source for the study of ideology of war in the early Middle Ages.[36]

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[36] ERDMANN, *The Origin*, pp. 283-286.

Therefore, the present study is concerned, first and foremost, with the perception and representation of war in Anglo-Saxon literature, an element which strongly marks my approach as original.

Traditionally, literature has played an ambiguous role in the study of war in early medieval England. On the one hand, literary texts have often been relegated as ancillary source material to be 'consulted' in order to support or challenge the data emerging from other evidence[37] — despite the fact that the paucity of details in contemporaneous accounts, often lamented by many commentators, makes it quite difficult to derive exhaustive and reliable information concerning military organization, tactics and similar, as well as presenting challenges in reconstructing a given battle or campaign.[38] Instead, literary texts constitute the main focus here. Furthermore, they are taken into consideration not to gain further details on weaponry, fighting practices or battle strategies, but to tackle the cultural question of the ideology of war in the Anglo-Saxon period. In this respect, my research builds on and complements recent publications in the *Journal of Medieval Military History* on the relationship between 'historical' warfare and its representation in early medieval sources,[39] as well as the extensive work over the past decade addressing ideas and attitudes towards war in Anglo-Saxon hagiographic texts, which are therefore excluded from the present analysis.[40]

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[37] See the critique of this method by R. FRANK, '*Beowulf* and Sutton Hoo: the Odd Couple', in *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England: Basic Readings*, ed. by C.E. Karkov (New York: Garland, 1999), pp. 317-338, first published in *Voyage to the Other World: the Legacy of Sutton Hoo*, ed. by C.B. Kendall and P.S. Wells, Medieval Studies at Minnesota 5 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), pp. 47-64.

[38] See, for example, HALSALL, *Warfare and Society*, pp. 1-6 and T. REUTER, 'Carolingian and Ottonian Warfare', in *Medieval Warfare: a History*, ed. by M. Keen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.13-35 at 19-21.

[39] See, for example, ABELS, 'Cultural Representation' and R.P. ABELS and S. MORILLO, 'A Lying Legacy? A Preliminary Discussion of Images of Antiquity and Altered Reality in Medieval Military History', *Journal of Medieval Military History* 3 (2005): 1-13.

[40] J.W. EARL, 'Violence and Non-Violence in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric's *Passion of St. Edmund*', *Philological Quarterly* 78 (1999): 125-49; K.G. HARE, 'Apparitions and War in Anglo-Saxon England', in *The Circle of War in the Middle Ages: Essays on Medieval Military and Naval History*, ed. by D.J. Kagay and L.J.A. Villalon (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999), pp. 75-85; H. MAGENNIS, 'Warrior Saints, Warfare and the Hagiography of Ælfric of Eynsham', *Traditio* 56 (2001): 27-51; J.E.

On the other hand, much of our distorted picture of the ideological dimension of war in Anglo-Saxon England is due precisely to the fact that historians and literary critics alike have tended to derive most of their information and ideas from Old English heroic poetry. Although poems such as *Beowulf* and the *Battle of Maldon* admittedly centre on tales of arms and were in all likelihood composed and received by the Anglo-Saxon warrior aristocracy,[41] war and battles are indeed quite common throughout the literary production of early medieval England. As a consequence, heroic verse will not be taken into consideration in the present study, in favour of other texts both in prose and verse, in Latin and Old English, which have been mostly overlooked by previous scholarship. By considering a wider typology of literary texts, my thesis intends to show how the Old Testament, the literature of late Antiquity and early medieval continental culture had an essential role in shaping ideas and attitudes about war in pre-Conquest England, as well as the representation of armed conflicts in contemporaneous texts. Similarly, Chapter One will discuss how these non-heroic models can be brought into dialogue with the closely studied 'Germanic' legacy.

It is, however, important to stress that no texts specifically and exclusively devoted to the 'art of war' were composed in the early Middle Ages, similar to the classical epitome *De re militari* by Vegetius or to late medieval chivalric 'manuals'. Consequently, this thesis looks at how war is represented and interpreted in a number of literary works whose main topic is not war itself. A primarily literary approach is therefore fundamental to uncovering and appreciating ideas about war which could otherwise be easily overlooked or misunderstood without a thorough knowledge of the

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DAMON, 'Sanctifying Anglo-Saxon Ealdormen: Lay Sainthood and the Rise of the Crusading Ideal', in *Via Crucis: Essays in Early Medieval Sources and Ideas in Memory of J.E. Cross*, ed. by T.N. Hall, T.D. Hill and C.D. Wright (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2002), pp. 185-209 and *Soldier Saints*.

[41] See below, p. 36.

sources, conventions and characteristics of Anglo-Saxon literature.

As for methodology, my investigation follows two differing, yet closely intertwined, lines of enquiry. On the one hand, I consider how war is interpreted and understood in a selected number of Anglo-Saxon literary texts. On the other, considerable attention will also be paid to the way in which wars and battles are portrayed in those work, since the 'form' of a given text, along with its stylistic and rhetorical choices, is strongly revealing of the notions and ideas the text wishes to convey, as well as of its author's agenda and interests. In particular, ideas about war — and the stage of their development and gradual sophistication — are eloquently mirrored by the way in which, for example, historical engagements are recorded and described. In other words, the fact that a medieval chronicler may or may not specify that a battle was won (or lost) *divino iudicio* [by God's judgement] evidences not only a stylistic choice by the author (possibly prompted by an identifiable tradition or a specific source or set of sources), but also whether and to what extent war was placed within a wider ideological framework. Moreover, paying attention to genre and literary conventions will help to disprove popular preconceptions, beginning with the idea that Anglo-Saxon writers were not interested in the question of war.

However, it is precisely the literary character of the present study which provides certain limitations to its range. Firstly, my analysis can provide only a partial picture of the undoubtedly wider ideological system — or system*s* — surrounding the practice of war in Anglo-Saxon England, since the Church and its members had a fundamental role in the composition, transmission and preservation of nearly all the written texts surviving to this day. In other words, the fact that most of the extant written sources were produced and preserved in the context of Christian religious learning makes it difficult to gain access to any alternative, and possibly dissenting, points of view on the

subject of war. Consequently, it is possible that the investigation of different bodies of evidence which are outside of the scope of this study (for example, archaeological finds) could offer a substantially different picture from the one presented here.

A second, major consequence of clerical involvement with written culture during the early medieval period is that a significant part of my enquiry will necessarily concern the complex relationship between Christianity and war. Thus, in the present study we will often encounter those elements, ideas and concepts which, at the end of the eleventh century, would evolve into the ideology of the Crusades. It is therefore immediately important to stress that my enquiry does not seek to trace the 'seeds' of the later ideology of the Crusades in pre-Conquest England, but simply to investigate how reflection on the issue of war emerged in early medieval English culture, regardless of its later developments. Theories and studies on the Crusades will, however, be used to understand more fully how the perception and representation of war evolved during the Anglo-Saxon period and in relation to continental culture.

Structure of the thesis

Given the limits of space and time imposed by doctoral research, my analysis centres on three case studies, arranged in chronological order. The main aim of this structure is to highlight how attitudes towards war developed over time, and how this transformation was strongly influenced by key historical events such as the Viking invasions. At the same time, a case-study approach will also allow me to carry out an in-depth analysis of a meaningful sample of Anglo-Saxon literary texts, of their sources, context of composition and reception.

Chapter One provides the foundation for the subsequent chapters. It firstly discusses the development of ideas about war from Roman times to the early medieval period and

highlights how the Old Testament had a central role in shaping early Christian attitudes towards war. I will then investigate the reception of the Old Testament ideology of war in Anglo-Saxon England through a detailed analysis of the perception and representation of war in the Old English biblical poems *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Judith*. Chapter Two focuses on the literary production of the Alfredian period, where the origins of reflection on war in Anglo-Saxon England can be traced. In particular, I will take into consideration two undoubtedly 'Alfredian' translations, that is the *Old English Orosius* and the vernacular rendering of the first section of the Book of Psalms, and then contrast them with the *Old English Bede*, a roughly contemporaneous work composed outside Alfred's circle. Chapter Two concludes with two closely connected historical works, namely the earliest recension of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Asser's *Vita Alfredi*. The third and last case study of the thesis is concerned with the literature of the second Viking Age, and in particular with the works of Ælfric of Eynsham and Wulfstan of York, that is to say the two foremost ecclesiastical writers of late Anglo-Saxon England. Specifically, I will address the question of how warlike activity by and against the Scandinavian raiders was perceived prior to the accession of Cnut to the English throne, after which the relationships between Anglo-Saxons and Vikings were — albeit symbolically — altered forever.

CHAPTER ONE

Foundations:
the Old Testament ideology of war, the late antique tradition
and their reception in Anglo-Saxon England

During the many centuries of its rule over the western world, Roman culture had developed an extremely complex and sophisticated 'structure' surrounding the actual practice of war. This ideology, which was mostly based on the longstanding religious and philosophical tradition of ancient Greece, remained at its core unchanged from the Republican era to the second century AD. Late Antiquity, in contrast, saw the origin of a process which was to reshape ideas and attitudes towards war completely following severe and radical transformations of western society, and in particular the conversion to Christianity.

The first section of this chapter will therefore be devoted to a summary of the development of ideas about war in late Antiquity. My aim is not to offer a detailed discussion of this topic, already the subject of various studies,[1] but to isolate those concepts and beliefs which constitute the foundations of early medieval attitudes to war and which had a significant role in shaping the perception of armed conflicts in Anglo-Saxon England. The most authoritative legacy of late Antiquity, it will be argued, is the complex ideology of war arising from the Old Testament, and further substantiated by early Christian writers of the calibre of Saint Augustine. In the second part of this chapter I will therefore investigate how this influential biblical tradition was received in early English culture by examining the perception and representation of war in *Genesis*,

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[1] See, for example, the useful study by R.H. BAINTON, 'The Early Church and War', *The Harvard Theological Review* 39.3 (1946): 189-212.

Exodus and *Judith*, three Old English poems based on Old Testament events. I will then consider a number of non-scriptural sources which may lay behind the distinctive reading of war emerging from the three vernacular poems. Finally, I will discuss how Christian and late antique models relate to the infamous 'Germanic' ethos.

The inception of a Christian ideology of war and its development in late Antiquity

In Republican times (traditionally from 509 BC to AD 31), armies were mainly comprised of Roman citizens who, together with allied Italic tribes, engaged in various campaigns to expand their rule firstly over territories in close proximity to Rome itself, and then over increasingly distant areas of the Mediterranean Basin and Continental Europe.[2] At the advent of the Empire, Roman military forces were radically reorganized and transformed from an essentially 'peasant army' into a body of highly specialized professional soldiers which soon became a completely discrete entity within the Roman state, totally separate and independent from civil society. Sole ruler of both the army and the civilian population of an impressively vast geographical area, extending from Britain to Asia Minor, was the emperor, whose pre-eminent position and cohesive function was promoted and continually reasserted in every corner of the Roman world through a complex system of monuments, works of art and public ceremonies.[3]

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[2] For a detailed discussion of the many aspects of Roman military organization and its development from the Republic to late Antiquity see the seminal collection of essays edited by P. ERDKAMP, *A Companion to the Roman Army* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007). On the late Roman army see G. HALSALL, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 101-110 and B.D. SHAW, 'War and Violence', in *Interpreting Late Antiquity: Essays on the Postclassical World*, ed. by G.W. Bowersock, P. Brown and O. Grabar (Cambridge, MA; London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), pp. 130-169. Concerning the transition from the late Roman army to the military organization of the early medieval period see HALSALL, *Warfare and Society*, pp. 40-70.

[3] T. HÖLSCHER, 'The Transformation of Victory into Power: from Event to Structure', in *Representations of War in Ancient Rome*, ed. by S. Dillon and K.E. Welch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 27-48. See also O. HECKSTER, 'The Roman Army and Propaganda', in *A Companion to the Roman Army*, pp. 339-358.

Central to all representations of the emperor was his role as successful military leader, variously expressed by well-defined symbols and conventional images, such as the depiction of vanquished enemies. As a consequence, the deeds of Roman armies, and war in a more general sense, were firmly placed within a wider and powerful ideology which, in its turn, significantly contributed to the shaping of attitudes and ideas towards war in Roman society. At the same time, imperial propaganda — particularly religious ceremonies and public celebrations like triumphs — allowed the whole Roman population to become involved, albeit indirectly, in the progressively more distant military campaigns of its armies.

This sophisticated ideological structure slowly began to deteriorate during the so-called 'crisis of the third century',[4] when incessant civil wars between the emperor and various usurpers irreparably undermined his role as the cohesive element of Roman society. Furthermore, the constant need for manpower employed in these struggles forced both the emperor and his opponents to recruit an increasing number of soldiers from the 'Germanic' tribes settled within, or not far from, the Roman *limes*.[5]

The weakening of the imperial figure and the so-called 'barbarization' of Roman armies were two of the main causes which led to the gradual disintegration of the classical ideology of war. On the one hand, 'barbarian' warbands were structurally different from regular Roman armies, since they consisted of people of heterogeneous ethnic backgrounds who joined forces under a single leader for a limited amount of time only (e.g. a specific campaign), being therefore unable to develop a shared identity. On the other hand, the decline of imperial authority deeply affected Roman legions

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[4]   On the changes involving the Roman army during the third century see K. STROBEL, 'Strategy and Army Structure Between Septimus Severus and Constantine the Great', in *A Companion to the Roman Army*, pp. 267-285.
[5]   On the 'barbarization' of the late Roman army see T. STRIKLER, 'The *Foederati*', in *A Companion to the Roman Army*, pp. 495-514.

themselves, where mid- and low-ranking officers soon became the almost unique source of their soldiers' identity and sense of unity.[6]

Thus, new and direct personal relationships between soldiers and their immediate superiors started to replace the abstract concept of 'State' (and the emperor as its representative) while, in wider Roman society, the complex ideology of war centring on a single unifying element slowly disappeared. At the same time, however, the foundations of a new ethos were established, elaborated and promoted by the only 'institution' to survive the collapse of the Empire and to replace it as the sole ecumenical entity in the western world — the Christian Church.

The principal source from which early Christians developed their reflection on war was, unsurprisingly, the Bible. However, this process was significantly complicated by the fact that the Old and the New Testaments offer two diametrically opposed approaches to the question of war. Since a detailed analysis of the scriptural treatment of war lies beyond the scope of this study, for the present purpose it is sufficient to note that the Old Testament is consistently concerned with war, and in particular with the minute accounts of the many battles which allowed the Israelites to conquer the Promised Land with God's support.[7]

More importantly, the Old Testament presents a well-defined ideology of war which, as will be noted many times in the course of the present study, exerted an enormous influence on the understanding of war in early medieval Europe in general, and in Anglo-Saxon England in particular. The Old Testament ideology of war revolves around two key concepts, which also had a great impact on medieval culture.[8] Firstly, victory in

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6 W. LIEBESCHUETZ, 'Warlords and Landlords', in *A Companion to the Roman Army*, pp. 479-494 at 483.
7 See, for example, Joshua 8, 10, 11, 12. See also I and II Maccabees, narrating the revolt of the tribes of Judea against the Seleucid Empire.
8 For a useful and concise discussion of the ideology of war in the Old Testament see P. JENSON, *The Problem of War in the Old Testament*, Grove Biblical Series 25 (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2002).

war is granted only and exclusively by God, independently of the size of the forces deployed on the battlefield. God can therefore direct His power in favour of the Chosen People, enabling them to triumph over all enemies, even if superior in number. For example, in Deuteronomy 20, a chapter devoted entirely to laws concerning war, it is clearly prescribed that:

> si exieris ad bellum contra hostes tuos / et videris equitatum et currus / et maiorem quam tu habes adversarii exercitus multitudinem / non timebis eos quia Dominus Deus tuus tecum est […] audi Israhel vos hodie contra inimicos vestros pugnam committitis / non pertimescat cor vestrum / nolite metuere nolite cedere nec formidetis eos / quia Dominus Deus vester in medio vestri est / et pro vobis contra adversarios dimicabit / ut eruat vos de periculo. (Dt. 20. 1-3, 4)
>
> [If thou go out to war against thy enemies, and see horsemen and chariots, and the numbers of the enemy's army greater than thine, thou shalt not fear them: because the Lord thy God is with thee … Hear, O Israel, you join battle this day against your enemies, let not your heart be dismayed, be not afraid, do not give back, fear ye them not: because the Lord your God is in the midst of you, and will fight for you against your enemies, to deliver you from danger.]

The second key concept is that God shall keep His covenant to deliver the Israelites from their foes only and exclusively if the Chosen People obey His commandments. Otherwise, He will 'reddens odientibus se statim ita ut disperdat eos et ultra non differat protinus eis restituens quod merentur' [repay forthwith them that hate him, so as to destroy them, without further delay immediately rendering to them what they deserve].[9] The principal means through which divine punishment is inflicted upon the people of Israel is, in fact, military defeat at the hands of enemy tribes, which usually do not worship the God of Abraham. This mechanism is illustrated, for example, in the Book of Joshua, when the eponymous Hebrew leader, after conquering Jericho, sends his armies to capture the city of Hai, defended only by a very small force.[10] As soon as the three

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[9] Dt. 7. 10.
[10] Joshua 7. 2-3.

thousand Israelites reach the battlefield, however,

> statim terga vertentes percussi sunt a viribus urbis Ahi / et corruerunt ex eis
> triginta et sex homines / persecutique sunt eos adversarii de porta usque
> Sabarim / et ceciderunt per prona fugientes / pertimuitque cor populi et
> instar aquae liquefactum est. (Ios. 7. 4-5)
>
> [they immediately turned their backs, and were defeated by the men of the city of
> Hai, and there fell of them six and thirty men: and the enemies pursued them from
> the gate as far as Sabarim, and they slew them as they fled by the descent: and the
> heart of the people was struck with fear, and melted like water.]

The causes of such a debacle lie in the fact that, as God Himself explains to Joshua, 'peccavit Israhel et praevaricatus est pactum meum' [Israel hath sinned, and transgressed my covenant].[11] Accordingly, Joshua identifies the sinners among his people and, after punishing them, sends a new army against Hai, which is now easily conquered. The interpretation of military defeats as divine punishment exemplified in this episode, as in many others throughout the Old Testament,[12] is of particular importance to the present inquiry, since it played a crucial role in shaping medieval perceptions of 'historical' unsuccessful campaigns and battles, as well as in informing and prompting religious practices of prayer and penance aimed at obtaining divine favour.

Lastly, it is important to underline that the whole of the Old Testament is pervaded by markedly violent imagery and by gory, detailed descriptions of how the people of God mercilessly slaughtered their enemies, including women and children.[13] These episodes, which doubtlessly go against the modern sense of the proper conduct of war, also profoundly troubled early Christian thinkers because of the sharp contrast with the gentler teachings of the New Testament. This is certainly not the place to enter the

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[11]   Ios. 7. 11.

[12]   See, for example, Judges 3-4 and Jeremiah 21.

[13]   See, for example, Numbers 31. 14-18 and the extremely gory scene of the murder of King Eglon by the Hebrew leader Aod in Judges 3. 21-22.

debate on the 'pacifism' of the Gospels but, in general, it is possible to observe that the Evangelists make almost no reference to war, while Christ's teachings, just as his own personal example, strongly advocate against any form of violence. This attitude is clearly manifested, for instance, in the oft-quoted *Sermon on the Mount*, where Christ states that 'beati pacifici quoniam filii Dei vocabuntur' [blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God],[14] and then advises his followers with these words:

> audistis quia dictum est / oculum pro oculo et dentem pro dente / ego autem dico vobis non resistere malo / Sed si quis te percusserit in dextera maxilla tua praebe illi et alteram […] audistis quia dictum est / diliges proximum tuum et odio habebis inimicum tuum / Ego autem dico vobis / diligite inimicos vestros / benefacite his qui oderunt vos / et orate pro persequentibus et calumniantibus vos. (Mt. 5. 38-39, 43-44)
>
> [You have heard that it hath been said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you not to resist evil: but if one strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him also the other … . You have heard that it hath been said, thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thy enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies: do good to them that hate you: and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you.]

Throughout the Middle Ages and beyond, Christian intellectuals struggled to reconcile the conflicting prescriptions of the two testaments of the Bible. For example, early Church Fathers such as Tertullian, Origen and Lactantius repeatedly addressed the problem of the divergent perspectives of the Scripture concerning war and violence,[15] focussing in particular on the question of whether it was acceptable for Christians to be involved in armed conflicts or, faithfully abiding with the teaching of the Gospels, they should instead refuse to serve as soldiers in the Roman army.[16] The wavering attitude of the early Church towards war was, however, to be radically modified by the conversion

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[14]   Mt. 5. 9.
[15]   See the detailed summary by BAINTON, 'The Early Church and War'.
[16]   See, in particular, Luke 3. 14, where John the Baptist advises soldiers to 'neminem concutiatis neque calumniam faciatis / et contenti estote stipendiis vestris' [do violence to no man; neither calumniate any man; and be content with your pay].

of Emperor Constantine in AD 312, and by the subsequent elevation of Christianity to the state religion under Theodosius in 380.

Under the new dispensation, Roman society and the Christian community, previously separate and mutually alien, came to coincide with each other, while the Empire was now identified with the Church of God[17] — an ideological overlap mirrored in actual fact by the Church's territorial organization into dioceses according to the Roman administrative subdivision. More importantly, in Christian thinking the Empire soon came to be regarded as a divinely sanctioned institution, whose advancement and preservation constituted a primary duty for all good Christians.[18]

Consequently, the need arose to reconcile the necessary participation of Christians in Roman wars with the New Testament position against violence. As Georges Hubrecht puts it, 'il n'y a plus de problème de licéité du service militaire, mais seulement celui, de nature plus trascendantale, de la licéité de la guerre'.[19] This long and complex process, the aim of which was to make violence ideologically acceptable to Christians, revolved around two key tenets.

Firstly, a clear distinction between clerics and laymen was established: whereas the latter were to enjoy fully both the rights and obligations of Roman citizenship, the former should dedicate their lives exclusively to God and, following Christ's example, should abstain from all violent behaviour and worldly activities and engagements, including marriage. As we shall see, this boundary was often crossed, while discouraging clerical involvement in war became one of the major preoccupations of

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[17] C. TYERMAN, *God's War: a New History of the Crusades* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), p. 33.
[18] On the identification between Christianity and the Roman Empire in the works of Eusebius see RUSSELL, *The Just War*, p. 12. With regard to Ambrose of Milan on the same subject see M. FUMAGALLI BEONIO BROCCHIERI, *Cristiani in armi: da Sant'Agostino a Papa Wojtila* (Roma; Bari: GLF Editori Laterza, 2006), pp. 19-22.
[19] HUBRECHT, 'La juste guerre', p. 110.

medieval thinkers.[20]

Secondly, a new and sophisticated ideology of war began to be elaborated, initiating an ethic which was to put an end to the debate about the legitimacy of war once and for all. The major contribution to this transformation was undoubtedly offered by one of the most influential figures of early Christian thinking, namely Saint Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430). Central to Augustine's views was the concept that war is both a consequence of and a remedy to sin.[21] After the Fall, the human soul, deprived of innocence and of the *plenitudo* of the garden of Eden, became subject to what Augustine, following his predecessor Ambrose, defines as *libido dominandi*, an overwhelming craving to dominate other men whose most natural expression is war itself. In Frederick Russell's words, 'the vice of restless ambition and the desire for earthly glory made warfare endemic in human society'.[22]

Moreover, Augustine believed that wars were the instrument through which God punished His people for their sins — a concept which, as argued above, has its roots in the Old Testament. As a consequence, the practice of war was not merely just, but also honourable, since it was a means of fulfilling God's judgement. When performing their divinely sanctioned duty, however, Christians should not be moved by hatred or lust for bloodshed (all sinful manifestations of *libido dominandi*) but, as a father may severely punish his own son, they should rather be prompted by love for their enemies and by the desire to prevent them from doing further wrong, as well as to offer their foes a chance to redeem themselves. In this case, Augustine based his interpretation of war and killing as acts of love on New Testament doctrine, by claiming that, for example, the statements

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[20] See below, Ch. 3, pp. 165-171 and 201-202.
[21] RUSSELL, *The Just War*, p. 16.
[22] F.H. RUSSELL, 'Love and Hate in Medieval Warfare: the Contribution of Saint Augustine', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 31 (1987): 108-124 at 110.

of the *Sermon on the Mount* should not be read in general terms, but specifically as referring to the inner disposition, or *praeparatio cordis*, of the warrior.

Another major contribution of Augustine to the medieval ideology of war is the elaboration of the Christian concept of the just war. According to Augustine, a war was considered just if it had a legitimate objective, a legitimate form and, above all, a legitimate cause.[23] Augustine based his notion of the just cause for war on Cicero's concept of *rebus repetitis*, that is to say the legal right of a given polity to resort to violence in order to restore its rights when violated by a second party.[24] Augustine, however, added a specifically religious implication to this classical definition by arguing that, since the order of the world is determined by God, its violation is not only an offence against the rights of other men, but a sin against God himself. Therefore, culprits are liable to the total annihilation which is so often described in the Old Testament,[25] while the enforcers of such punishment act rightly according to God's will.

The Augustinian theory of just war, however, was not immediately received in medieval culture, but only gradually gained ground in the early centuries of the Middle Ages, during which Augustine's initial conception was further elaborated, more closely defined, and bolstered with more solid scriptural background and new examples. As a consequence, the Christian notion of the just war reached its full development and a certain degree of standardization only in the final decades of the eleventh century with the launch of the First Crusade, when it became a commonplace in European culture. Modern commentators should therefore be very careful not to employ this term

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[23] HUBRECHT, 'La juste guerre', pp. 111-112. With regard to the objective, the target of military actions should always be the restoration of peace and order, not the acquisition of power or land and booty. Secondly, just wars should be waged only under the command of a public official with legitimate authority, a fact which strongly precludes the exercise of private violence which, according to Augustine, is irremediably marked by *libido dominandi*.

[24] On the Ciceronian concept of the just war see RUSSELL, *The Just War*, pp. 4-7.

[25] See, for example, the episode of the Golden Calf in Exodus 32.

anachronistically, and should exercise caution when discussing just war theories in the context of early medieval culture in general and of Anglo-Saxon culture in particular, as shall be demonstrated in the final chapter of the present study.[26]

Augustine's most lasting legacy, however, was that by grounding his ideology in both the Old and the New Testaments,[27] he also inevitably and finally sanctioned the legitimacy of Old Testament violence. Thus relieved of all moral bias, the Old Testament became an extremely influential repertoire of incontestably legitimate *exempla* which, in turn, offered a powerful framework through which historical wars and armed conflicts could be understood well beyond late Antiquity.[28] In fact, as will be discussed in detail in subsequent chapters, the typological reading of the Holy Scriptures made it possible for Old Testament episodes and their morals to be applied to all temporal and spatial contexts, therefore making the oldest part of the Bible into an extremely flexible model, suitable both to the late Roman world, when Augustine first used it, and to later centuries, after the Empire had collapsed under the pressure of the so-called 'barbarian invasions'.[29]

Both recent and earlier scholarship has often focussed on how, in the new political and cultural context of post-Roman Europe, Augustinian and, more broadly, Christian ideas on war 'had to be mediated […] to an audience permeated with the Germanic warrior ethos of competition and aggression and vengeance'.[30] This view, though dating to more than twenty years ago, is still the starting point of most academic studies on the

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[26] See below, Ch. 3, pp. 190-192. See also Ch. 2, p. 149.

[27] According to F.H. Russell ['Love and Hate', p. 116], Augustine skilfully articulated an ideology of war in which 'criteria of cause, intention, authority and obedience were all based on the Old Testament examples of punishment in war, on to which were grafted the New Testament doctrine of love and purity'.

[28] RUSSELL, *The Just War*, p. 26.

[29] On the problem of the 'decline and fall' of the Roman Empire see the effective summary by HALSALL, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 19-22 and 34.

[30] RUSSELL, 'Love and Hate', p. 119.

ideology of war in the early Middle Ages in general and in Anglo-Saxon England in particular. It is in fact widespread opinion that, in the 'barbaric' kingdoms which flowered in western Europe after the Empire's demise, but especially in England throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, the practice of war was seen and understood through a framework originating from 'Germanic' ancestral culture, variously known as the '*comitatus*-ideal' or 'heroic ethos'.[31] This code, first described by the Roman ethnographer and historian Tacitus in his *Germania* (or *De origine et situ Germanorum*),[32] allegedly revolved around a strong personal relationship binding a warrior to his lord, from which sprang a series of momentous obligations effectively summarized by Mitchell and Robinson:

> […] the Germanic tribes who settled in England in the fifth century brought with them the Germanic heroic code. What we learn of it from Old English literature generally confirms the observations of Tacitus in his *Germania*. The Germanic warrior was a member of a *comitatus*, a warrior-band. […] A warrior brought up in this tradition would show a reckless disregard for his life. […] This is the spirit which inspired the code of the *comitatus*. While his lord lived, the warrior owed him loyalty unto death. If his lord were killed, the warrior had to avenge him or die in the attempt. The lord in his turn had the duty of protecting his warriors.[33]

It is, however, important to note that the concept of 'Germanic', understood as a homogeneous mentality shared by all populations speaking Germanic languages which settled in Europe between late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages,[34] is in itself extremely problematic. As Guy Halsall effectively points out, 'that the peoples from the

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[31] See, for example, HILL, *The Anglo-Saxon Warrior Ethic*; EVANS, *The Lords of Battle* and WOOLF, 'The Ideal of Men Dying with Their Lord'.

[32] TACITUS, *Germania*, ed. and trans. by H.W. Benario (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1999), Ch. 14.

[33] B. MITCHELL and F.C. ROBINSON (eds.), *A Guide to Old English*, 5th edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 135-136. A similar definition if offered by WOOLF, 'The Ideal of Men Dying with Their Lord', p. 72. For a detailed analysis of the mutual obligations of lords and warriors see EVANS, *The Lords of Battle*, pp. 56-73.

[34] HALSALL, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 23 and 458-459.

Frisians in the west to the Goths in the east spoke Germanic languages does not create a fundamental unity amongst them any more than the fact that people from Portugal to Romania speak Romance languages permits us to treat them interchangeably'.[35] In fact, 'Germanic' peoples as, for example, Goths, Lombards and Franks, were not 'a racially and culturally homogeneous group sharing a common descent and destiny'.[36] On the contrary, they should rather be considered as a 'federation' of people of diverse origins, where ethnic identities were not fixed, but were actively and constantly renegotiated according to changing circumstances of place and time.[37] As a consequence, if there was no 'pan-barbaric' identity shared by all speakers of Germanic languages,[38] we should be extremely careful when identifying an authentic 'Germanic' ethic of war, which appears equally unlikely.

Moreover, it should not be forgotten that the Roman world itself played a fundamental role in creating and defining the 'barbarian' and 'Germanic' identity of the populations settled around its *limes*, as well as our understanding of those people. As previously noted, it was the military policy of *foederatio* which prompted warriors of heterogeneous ethnic backgrounds to unite under 'Germanic' leaders holding official posts within the late Roman army, while 'fear of the Romans and their allies drove anti-Roman factions into large, unstable, but occasionally mighty confederations'[39] — both of which came to constitute the core of the post-Roman 'barbaric' kingdoms.[40]

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[35] *Ibid.*, p. 23.
[36] W. POHL, 'Conceptions of Ethnicity in Early Medieval Studies', in *Debating the Middle Ages: Issues and Readings*, ed. by L.K. Little and B.H. Rosenwein (Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), pp. 15-24 at 15.
[37] On ethnic identity among the 'barbarian' populations see HALSALL, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 35-62 and P.J. GEARY, 'Barbarians and Ethnicity', in *Interpreting Late Antiquity*, pp. 107-129.
[38] HALSALL, *Barbarian Migrations*, p. 58.
[39] GEARY, 'Barbarians and Ethnicity', p. 110.
[40] As Guy Halsall [*Warfare and Society*, p. 41] explains, 'as the western Empire fell apart, from the end of the fourth century, the barbarian or 'barbarised' units and field armies became the focus for new provincial identities. Generals of barbarian origin, commanding 'barbarised' armies, became kings of people, and settled their followers in the territories they governed'.

Furthermore, the first and most influential 'reporter' of the customs of war among the *Germani* is, as already mentioned, the Roman historian Tacitus, whose objectivity is open to question. Indeed, despite the ostensibly scientific tone of the *Germania*, Tacitus did not derive his information from direct observation, since he had never travelled that far from Rome.[41] Moreover, his representation of the uses and customs of the Germanic-speaking tribes surrounding the Empire, and especially his description of their warrior tradition, was deeply influenced by the author's own political agenda. In fact, it is important to remember that the *Germani* were never the real object of Tacitus' apparently scientific study, but a simple pretext to analyse Roman society and its many flaws indirectly.[42]

Furthermore, the *Germania* is deeply embedded in the conventions of classical ethnography, which saw 'barbarians' as completely ahistorical. In other words, to Roman eyes, the ethnic identity of those people lying outside *romanitas* never changed through time, nor did their social structure, political organization and customs.[43] In my opinion, the same flawed assumption marks the approach of many modern historians and literary critics who still consider the *comitatus* as the sole ideological apparatus concerning the practice of war throughout the seven centuries of Anglo-Saxon England. I would argue that not only is this view limited, it also fails to acknowledge either the richness and sophistication of Anglo-Saxon culture, or its development from the fifth to eleventh century.

In addition, I would propose that, in Anglo-Saxon England, the *comitatus*-ideal (if there ever was such a thing) was accompanied by a more 'transcendental' reflection on

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[41] M.J. TOSWELL, 'Tacitus, Old English Heroic Poetry, and Ethnographic Preconceptions', in *Studies in Old English Language and Literature: 'Doubt Wisely'. Papers in Honour of E.G. Stanley*, ed. by M.J. Toswell and E.M. Tyler (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 493-507 at 493 and 495.
[42] *Ibid*., pp. 496-501.
[43] GEARY, 'Barbarians and Ethnicity', pp. 107-108.

war which, as I contend, was based mainly on Old Testament models, but also owed much to the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures developed during late Antiquity. Therefore, in the following pages I will substantiate my argument by considering the perception and representation of war in the Old English biblical poems *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Judith*.

The reception of the Old Testament ideology of war in Anglo-Saxon England: the Old English poems *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Judith*

Genesis, *Exodus* and *Judith*,[44] usually designated as 'biblical epics', are vernacular metrical adaptations of the eponymous books of the Old Testament and represent three of the most celebrated constituents of the substantial corpus of Old English religious verse.[45] *Genesis* is by far the longest of the three poems, numbering nearly 3,000 lines and occupying the opening section of the Junius manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 11), where *Genesis'* only extant copy is interspersed with a number of beautiful illustrations. The poem accurately recounts the events of the Book of Genesis from the Creation to the Binding of Isaac.[46] In fact, in most of his work the anonymous

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[44] A.N. DOANE (ed.), *Genesis A: a New Edition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980); P.J. LUCAS (ed.), *Exodus*, rev. edn. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994); M. GRIFFITH (ed.), *Judith* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997). Translations of *Genesis A* are taken from L. MASON (trans.), *An Anglo-Saxon Genesis: Genesis A* (Lampeter: Llanerch, 1990), while translations of *Exodus* and *Judith* are from S.A.J. BRADLEY (ed. and trans.), *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London: J.M. Dent; North Clarendon, VT: Tuttle Publishing, 1995), pp. 49-65 and 495-504 respectively.

[45] For all three poems, 'it is impossible to be sure which text, or texts, of the biblical story were known to the poet' [GRIFFITH, *Judith*, p. 47], for there is evidence that all three authors were acquainted with both the Vulgate and the Old Latin Bible. For a detailed study of the different versions of the Old Testament known in Anglo-Saxon England see R. MARSDEN, *The Text of the Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). General studies on the Old English biblical epics include I. HERBISON, 'The Idea of the 'Christian Epic': Towards a History of an Old English Poetic Genre', in *Studies in Old English Language*, pp. 342-361 and P.G. REMLEY, *Old English Biblical Verse: Studies in Exodus, Genesis and Daniel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[46] The episodes of the fall of the angels and the fall of man (ll. 235-851) are in fact the Old English translation of an Old Saxon poem, which was inserted in an earlier manuscript than the Junius, probably to replace a *lacuna* of the original Anglo-Saxon text.

Anglo-Saxon author tends to offer a relatively faithful paraphrase of the biblical text and to copy the straightforward style of the Latin original closely by reducing the rhetorical devices and inflated language typical of Old English poetic expression to a minimum.[47]

Nevertheless, in a few instances the poet abruptly abandons his paraphrastic approach and, instead, greatly expands on his scriptural source in order to develop a specific theme or a given scriptural episode. One of these cases is the so-called 'War of the Kings', narrated in Genesis 14, concerning the sack of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by foreign rulers and the subsequent retaliation led by Abraham. This section of the poem, which constitutes the main object of our analysis, is much longer than the original and marked by a decidedly more complex style of writing, presenting all the traditional themes and literary artifices of Old English heroic poetry.

Following *Genesis* in the Junius manuscript is *Exodus*, a poem which, despite the common Old Testament subject matter, is nevertheless very different from the preceding text. *Exodus* is not only shorter than *Genesis*,[48] but concentrates solely on a single episode of the biblical book, namely the crossing of the Red Sea. *Exodus* also diverges from *Genesis* as far as the rendering of the respective sources is concerned, since the *Exodus*-poet does not aim to produce a paraphrase of the sacred text, but rather exploits the selected scriptural episode as 'the formal means for presenting a specific doctrine [...] which does not explicitly appear in the original text'.[49] Finally, *Exodus* is characterized by an extreme stylistic complexity, which finds expression in elaborate syntactic structures, evocative compound words, sophisticated metaphors and, above all, in the condensing of complex concepts into single words or short sentences, thus

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[47] On the style of *Genesis* see DOANE, *Genesis A*, pp. 70-96.
[48] *Exodus* is only 590 lines long.
[49] DOANE, *Genesis A*, p. 49.

constituting veritable riddles which the audience must solve in order to appreciate the true meaning of the poem.[50]

Lastly, the only extant copy of *Judith* is found in the Beowulf manuscript (London, British Museum, MS Cotton Vitellius A. xv), where a missing leaf or leaves have caused the opening section of the poem to be lost forever. The surviving 349 lines of the Old English *Judith* focus on the events of the second half of the apocryphal Book of Judith, and in particular on the killing of Holofernes and the subsequent overthrow of his army by the people of Bethulia. Concerning the poem's relation to its biblical source, Mark Griffith notes that 'somewhat in the the fashion of the poet of *Exodus*, the poet concentrates on the key dramatic event and makes consistent changes to the source, which show that he has his own coherent interpretation of it'.[51] However, *Judith* does not share with *Exodus* the same thematic and stylistic richness, since the author's modification of the scriptural text is aimed at eliminating, rather than adding, potentially confusing details and sub-themes, in an attempt to make the work less complex than the original — a choice reinforced by a not particularly creative use of poetic conventions.[52]

None of the 'biblical epics' is securely datable. Although the only copies of *Genesis* and *Exodus* to survive to this day were transcribed in the Junius manuscript around the year 1000,[53] both poems undoubtedly have an earlier origin. In particular, syntactical and lexical parallels between *Genesis*, *Exodus* and other Old English poems such as *Beowulf* and *Daniel* suggest that the two biblical epics were originally composed during the eighth century.[54] On the other hand, the section of the *codex* containing *Judith* seems

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[50] On the style of *Exodus* see LUCAS, *Exodus*, pp. 43-51.
[51] GRIFFITH, *Judith*, pp. 51-52.
[52] For a detailed analysis of the Anglo-Saxon poet's selective treatment of the Book of Judith see GRIFFITH, *Judith*, pp. 47-61.
[53] See LUCAS, *Exodus*, p. 1 and REMLEY, *Old English Biblical Verse*, p. 2. However, Doane [*Genesis A*, p. 18] suggests 1025 as a possible date for the compilation of the Junius manuscript.
[54] DOANE, *Genesis A*, p. 37. See also LUCAS, *Exodus*, p. 69-72.

to have been committed to writing around the same time as the Junius manuscript, that is to say between 975 and 1025.[55] As with *Genesis* and *Exodus*, it is impossible to establish when *Judith* was first composed with any certainty as, after a careful analysis of the linguistic and stylistic features of the text, Mark Griffith can only conclude that some of these characteristics 'are consistent with the poem being late ninth or tenth century in date, but the tentativeness of this conclusion must be admitted'.[56] In short, it appears that both *Genesis* and *Exodus* are quite early, possibly eighth-century poems, while *Judith* can be dated to approximately a century later. Conversely, the two manuscripts containing these texts were almost certainly copied around the turn of the millennium.

The inclusion of these texts within an historically contextualized investigation of ideas and attitudes towards war may, at first sight, appear unexpected, if not thoroughly inappropriate. There are, nevertheless, very good reasons to include *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Judith* within the present survey, which I will now examine. First of all, *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Judith* bear witness to the reception of the Old Testament ideology of war in Anglo-Saxon England. What is more, they show how ideas and models drawn from the Old Testament, and further elaborated during the early centuries of Christianity, were not only received but also actively used and skilfully adapted to the cultural context and literary tradition of early medieval England. Lastly, they evidence the continued importance and vitality of Old Testament teachings about war throughout the period covered by the present inquiry. Indeed, the fact that the biblical epics continued to be transmitted, transcribed and 'enjoyed' throughout the extensive period of time between their earliest composition and the beginning of the eleventh century, when the only

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[55] Griffith, *Judith*, p. 1.
[56] *Ibid.*, p. 47.

surviving copies of these poems were realized, testifies to a persisting interest in the message they conveyed and, possibly, to their both effective and entertaining presentation of the Old Testament ideology of war.

There are of course other texts such as biblical commentaries, homilies and prose translations of the Holy Scriptures that could have been used to appraise the influence of the Old Testament on the perception of war in early English culture. Nevertheless, *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Judith* have been chosen primarily because religious verse in general, and the biblical epics in particular, had a much wider audience than other works — an audience which may have included laymen involved in the practice of war. In the introduction to the present study it has been shown how scholars have often limited their investigation of the ideological dimension of war to heroic poems such as *Beowulf*, the *Battle of Maldon* and the *Battle of Brunanburh*. One of the reasons behind this extreme selectiveness lies in the assumption, advanced in 1978 by Patrick Wormald, that since these works were 'about, for, and even by, the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy', they constitute 'a window on the mentality of a warrior-aristocracy, whose existence and whose importance is reflected by other sources, historical, legal and archaeological, but whose preoccupations do not seem to be described elsewhere'.[57] Wormald's basic argument, that heroic poetry was concerned with a social elite and was produced and received within this social class, is undoubtedly correct.

Nevertheless, evidence suggests that Old English biblical poetry may also have enjoyed lay audiences throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. For example, Asser tells us that King Alfred of Wessex was very fond of 'Saxonica poemata' [English poems],

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[57] P. WORMALD, 'Bede, *Beowulf* and the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy', in *Bede and Anglo-Saxon England: Papers in Honour of the 1300th Anniversary of the Birth of Bede, Given at Cornell University in 1973 and 1974*, ed. by R.T. Farrell, British Archaeological Reports, British Series 46 (Oxford: British Arachaeological Reports, 1978), pp. 32-95 at 35 and 36.

which he eagerly listened to 'die noctuque' [by day and night], and also learned by heart.[58] Although Asser does not specify which kind of vernacular poetry elicited the enthusiasm of his lord and patron, it is not impossible to suppose that it was indeed religious verse. This hypothesis is corroborated by the fact that the 'Saxonicum poematicae artis librum' [book of English poetry][59] Alfred received as a gift from his mother was most likely a high-status manuscript, probably very similar to the Junius codex, where *Genesis* and *Exodus* are contained together with other biblical poems. In fact, Asser relates that the young Alfred was 'pulchritudine principalis litterae illius libri illectus' [attracted by the beauty of the initial letter of the book].[60] However, only the Junius manuscript of the four surviving codices containing Old English poetry displays decorated initials, while the vast majority of illustrated books dating to the Anglo-Saxon period transmit either the Gospels or other religious texts.[61] Here I certainly do not wish to suggest that Alfred had access to an archetype of the Junius manuscript, nor that the Junius itself was intended for lay readership, but only to emphasize that poems such as *Genesis* and *Exodus* might have circulated in lay elite circles. As for *Judith*, the only surviving copy of the poem is found beside no less than *Beowulf*, the most celebrated of Old English heroic poems — further demonstrating that there was likely no abyss separating vernacular Old Testament poetry from more 'worldly' verse, and that *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Judith* constitute as ideal a ground as any other heroic poem to investigate ideas and attitudes towards war.

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[58] ASSER, *Asser's Life of King Alfred, Together with the Annals of St. Neots Erroneously Ascribed to Asser*, ed. by W.H. Stevenson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), Ch. 22, l. 13. All translations from Asser's *Vita Alfredi* are taken from S. KEYNES and M. LAPIDGE (trans.), *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983). *Vita Alfredi* will henceforth be abbreviated as *VA* when referring to specific passages of and direct quotations from the original text.

[59] *VA*, Ch. 23, ll. 3-4.

[60] *VA*, Ch. 23, ll. 6-7.

[61] S. LERER, *Literacy and Power in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), pp. 66-68.

Moreover, the possible lay reception of biblical verse, together with other characteristics of *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Judith* which will be discussed shortly, make these works particularly suited to frame the complex relationship between heroic culture and biblical models, as well as to highlight the prominent role played by these models in shaping the perception and representation of war within these three texts apparently dominated by the 'heroic ethos'.[62] In particular, despite the fact that *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Judith* markedly differ from each other in their date of composition, their treatment of the respective scriptural sources, and their stylistic features, they nevertheless show many analogies, including the fact that all three poems deal extensively with war, although this subject is treated only marginally (or not at all) in the Old Testament originals. The representation of battles in the biblical epics is characterized by highly traditional language, images and themes which recur throughout Old English war poetry as, for example, the so-called 'beasts of battle', the detailed description of weapons and battle formations, and the almost ritualized collection of the spoils of the vanquished foes — all of which have been surveyed and discussed in great detail by previous studies.[63] For instance, the author of the Old English *Genesis* describes the outset of battle between the foreign kings and the warriors of Sodom and Gomorrah, expanding and altering the rather laconic and stereotyped biblical account:[64]

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[62] On the different attitudes of the scholarly community towards the Old English biblical epics see J. HILL, 'Confronting *Germania Latina*: Changing Responses to Old English Biblical Verse', in *Latin Culture and Medieval Germanic Europe: Proceedings of the First 'Germania Latina' Conference Held at the University of Groningen, 26 May 1989*, ed. by R. North and T. Hofstra (Groningen: E. Forsten, 1992), pp. 71-88.

[63] See, for example, M. GRIFFITH, 'Convention and Originality in the 'Beasts of Battle' Typescene', *Anglo-Saxon England* 22 (1993): 179-199.

[64] The biblical text [Gn. 14. 8-10] describes the battle as follows: 'et egressi sunt rex Sodomorum et rex Gomorrae / rexque Adamae et rex Seboim / necnon et rex Balae quae est Segor / et direxerunt contra eos aciem in valle Silvestri / scilicet adversum Chodorlahomor regem Aelamitarum / et Thadal regem Gentium / et Amrafel regem Sennaar / et Arioch regem Ponti / quattuor reges adversus quinque / vallis autem Silvestris habebat puteos multos bituminis / itaque rex Sodomorum et Gomorrae terga verterunt cecideruntque ibi / et qui remanserant fugerunt ad montem' [and the king of Sodom, and the king of Gomorrha, and the king of Adama, and the king of Seboim, and the king of Bala, which is Segor, went out: and they set themselves against them in battle array in the woodland vale: To wit, against

> foron þa tosomne.   francan wæron hlude,
>
> wraðe wælherigas.   sang se wanna fugel
>
> under deoreðsceaftum,   deawigfeðera,
>
> hræs on wenan.   hæleð onetton
>
> on mægencorðrum,   modum þrydge
>
> oð þæt folcgetrume   gefaren hæfdon
>
> sid tosomne   suðan and norðan,
>
> helmum þeahte.
>
> (*Genesis*, ll. 1982-1989a)

[In rage the slaughter-hordes came together: the javelins were loud; the dark fowl sang among the flying weapons, the dewy-feathered (raven) looked for the slain. The warriors rushed on in cohorts with unfaltering courage, until the nations' armies had come together widely, from south and north, protected by helmets.]

Moreover, all of the biblical epics present certain thematic elements which modern commentators have connected to the ethics of the Germanic *comitatus*. In *Judith*, for example, Holofernes is ironically represented according to the topoi of the 'good lord' as described in many Anglo-Saxon texts,[65] while in *Genesis* Abraham's allies swear that 'hie his torn mid him / gewræcon on wraðum   oððe on wæl feallan' [they would avenge his injury upon his foes, with him, or else fall in battle].[66] Indeed, although many scholars belonging to different 'schools of thought' have allowed us to improve our understanding greatly of the biblical epics since the late nineteenth century, and to move away from the idea that these texts constitute 'evidence of a persistent Germanic spirit surfacing in defiance of the Christian subject matter',[67] present-day academics still tend to consider the representation of war in *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Judith* as closely

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Chodorlahomor king of the Elamites, and Thadal king of nations, and Amraphel king of Sennaar, and Arioch king of Pontus: four kings against five. Now the woodland vale had many pits of slime. And the king of Sodom, and the king of Gomorrha turned their backs and were overthrown there: and they that remained fled to the mountain].

[65] See, for instance, GRIFFITH, *Judith*, pp. 65-67.

[66] *Genesis*, ll. 2037b-2038.

[67] HILL, 'Confronting *Germania Latina*', pp. 75-76.

connected to the Germanic *comitatus* — even to the point of referring to Tacitus' *Germania* as a means to shed light on some characteristics of these texts or on some supposedly obscure passage concerning war.[68]

Nonetheless, I would argue that a closer reading of *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Judith* reveals that these poems do promote a coherent and articulate ideology of war which, however, unquestionably relies not on some allegedly 'Germanic' heroic ideal, but on Old Testament models. Specifically, through a detailed analysis of these poetic texts, I propose firstly to demonstrate that the Old English biblical epics present a well-defined view of war as being determined by God, which finds expression in the two key concepts constituting the basis of the Old Testament ideology of war described above — namely the interpretation of war as divine punishment and God's undisputed power in determining the outcome of battles in favour of those who respect his teachings. Secondly, I will disclose how the authors of *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Judith* shape their narration of armed conflicts according to the same formal pattern characterizing the account of many wars in the Old Testament. Lastly, my analysis will reveal that all three poems not only present a very similar interpretation of war drawn from the Old Testament, but that they also articulate it through analogous images, expressions and vocabulary.

Genesis

As previously noted, the first key concept defining the Old Testament ideology of war is the interpretation of military failures as divine punishment. Similarly, as emerges from the episode in the Book of Joshua quoted above, Old Testament wars usually begin with the defeat of God's Chosen People in battle. This structure, together with the

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[68] See, for example, LUCAS, *Exodus*, nt. 12-14, p. 76 and nt. 233-246, p. 109.

aforementioned reading of the fortunes of war, transpires most clearly in *Genesis*, where the 'War of the Kings' opens with the attack of King Chodorlahomor of the Elamites and his allies on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. This onslaught, despite the resoluteness of the defenders, quickly concludes with their utter defeat and the ensuing sack of Sodom and Gomorrah, during which the Elamites capture and enslave many of the cities' inhabitants, including Lot, Abraham's nephew.

Although the poet does not explicitly state that such a grave defeat of the people of God should be ascribed to their sinfulness, he nevertheless introduces the 'War of the Kings' with a long description of the many vices and iniquitous customs of the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah, thereby suggesting a strong causal relationship between the two. In fact, the passage concludes with the following telling lines, which in a way foreshadow the sinners' defeat at the hands of the four kings:

> wæron sodomisc cynn   synnum þriste,
> dædum gedwolene,   drugon heora selfra
> ecne unræd.
> (*Genesis*, ll. 1935-1937a)

[The people of Sodom were bold in sin, shameful in their deeds: they brought upon themselves eternal woe.]

In accordance with Old Testament tradition, the *Genesis* author therefore construes the raiding of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the overthrow of their armies in battle, as a punishment inflicted by God on His people because of their sins — a notion which, as will emerge in the following pages, had aroused the interest of the authors of *Exodus* and *Judith*, who also expound it to their respective audiences, although less openly than in *Genesis*.

If, on the one hand, God chastises the Israelites through defeat in battle, He nonetheless would not grant enduring victory to their foreign enemies, since the aim of

His punishment through war is surely not to condemn the Chosen People to death or perpetual bondage, but rather to prompt them vehemently to acknowledge and expiate their mistakes. Consequently, as soon as the Israelites have rejected iniquity, God quickly delivers them from their foes. It is, however, worth noting that, in many Old Testament episodes, the people of God often need to be 'pointed in the right direction' either by God Himself or, more frequently, by a prophet or other person anointed by the Lord, who intervenes to explain the meaning of the unlucky events just passed and to advise the Israelites on their best course of action in regaining God's favour. In *Genesis*, however, the people of Sodom and Gomorrah are so errant, both morally and militarily, that wise words are utterly useless and their only hope of salvation rests on the armed intervention of more virtuous members of the same Hebrew tribe who, precisely in order to avoid the misdeeds of their fellows, had abandoned Sodom and Gomorrah and relocated elsewhere.

At the head of the rescue party is no less than Abraham who, upon learning of the fate of his nephew Lot, immediately leaves his dwelling place in the land of the Chananites and sets out with a few trusted companions to rescue his kinsman and redeem the two cities. According to the conventions of Old English poetry, Abraham is presented to the audience of *Genesis* as a powerful, quasi-heroic warrior. Even so, the poet adds a biblical 'twist' to the traditional depiction of his leading character by describing Abraham as a 'wærfæst hæleð' [*wǣrfæst* man/warrior].[69] The literal meaning of the compound adjective *wǣrfæst* is in fact 'true to a promise'[70] and, in my opinion, serves here the purpose of underlining Abraham's compliance with God's teachings as

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[69] *Genesis*, l. 2026a.

[70] The suggested translation for *wærfæst* in Bosworth and Toller's *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* [J. BOSWORTH and T.N. TOLLER (eds.), *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898), s. wǣr-fæst, p. 1157] is 'faithful'.

opposed to the sinfulness of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah — a virtue which, in the Old Testament as well as in all three biblical epics, is crucial to obtaining success on the battlefield.

However, even Abraham has to resort to his oratorical skills to encourage his small group of followers who, on the eve of battle, tremble at the idea of meeting the superior and intimidating force which had just destroyed the powerful armies of Sodom and Gomorrah.[71] Abraham, on the other hand, secure in his unshakeable faith, is absolutely certain that his fate against the Elamites will prove very different, and therefore strives to inspire this same confidence in his men:

> [...].   Þa he [Abraham] his frumgaran,
>
> wishydig wer,   wordum sægde,
>
> þares afera   – him wæs þearf micel –
>
> þæt hie   on twa healfe
>
> grimme guðgemot   gystum eowdon
>
> heardne handplegan.   cwæð þæt him se halga,
>
> ece drihten,   eað mihte
>
> æt þam spereniðe   spede lænan.
>
> (*Genesis*, ll. 2052b-2059)

[Then the prudent man, the son of Thare, spoke to his war-leaders in these words, (great was his/their need!), that they should advance on the enemy in two divisions with grim conflict and hard swordplay: said (further) that the Holy Lord Everlasting might easily give him/them success in the spear-fight.][72]

These lines are particularly important, since here the poet clearly spells out the second key theme of Old Testament ideology of war — which we will find again in both *Exodus* and *Judith* — that those who are faithful to the Lord and respect His teachings

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[71]   While the four kings 'gewiton [...] þrymme micle' [departed … with a great multitude], Abraham's army is constituted by only '*eahtatyne* and *þreohund*' [318] warriors (*Genesis*, ll. 1964a-1965 and 2041b-2042a).

[72]   The alternative translation of *him* as 'to them' has been added to Mason's version [*An Anglo-Saxon Genesis*, p. 85], since it is possible that the poet deliberately meant to maintain a certain ambiguity through the use of the personal pronoun *him*, which could refer to Abraham, to his men, or to both.

need not be afraid to face any foe, because God will protect them and grant success in battle. Moreover, the lines quoted above also underline how warriors are prompted to overcome their fears and to meet the enemy courageously in battle through the security of enjoying divine favour and support, which will grant them certain victory.

Subsequently, Abraham and his men finally reach the camp of the Elamites and engage in strenuous combat. The Israelites, relates the poet, fight with great courage, but that would not have been sufficient to defeat the army of Chodorlahomor if God Himself had not joined Abraham on the battlefield, leading him and his warriors to victory:

> [...]. him on fultum grap
> heofonrices weard. hergas wurdon
> feower on fleame, folccyningas,
> leode ræswan.
> (*Genesis*, ll. 2072b-2075a)

[… to aid him, the Guardian of the heavenly kingdom took (a part in the fray). The four armies were put to flight, (with) the kings and leaders of the people.]

Drawing on the wider Old Testament tradition where God or his angels frequently descend among the living to execute God's judgement, the poet not only adds this particular detail which is completely absent from the biblical text, but seeks further to emphasize the 'concreteness' of God's intervention in the fight through the use of the verb *gripan*[73] and, especially, through the phrase *on fultum* [in support of], employed twice in the preceding lines to describe the martial support provided by unequivocally human allies.[74]

By virtue of Abraham's vigorous offensive and divine intercession in his favour, the army of the Elamites is put to flight and Abraham is allowed to rescue his kinsman and

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[73] 'To grasp, seize, lay hold of' [BOSWORTH and TOLLER, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, s. grīpan, p. 490].
[74] *Genesis*, ll. 1964a and 2025b.

the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Chapter XVIIII of the Old English *Genesis* ends

with the following passage which, even if prompted by the biblical text, is not expressed

in these terms in the Bible:[75]

> [...].   næfre mon ealra
>
> lifigendra her   lytle werede
>
> þon wurðlicor   wigsið ateah
>
> þara þe wið swa miclum   mægne geræsde.
>
> (*Genesis*, ll. 2092b-2095)

> [Of all men living here (on earth), no one ever achieved a more worthy
> military expedition with a small force which was attacking so great a
> multitude.]

By emphasizing the exceptional nature of Abraham's deed, the Old English poet once

again puts the accent on the central role of God, without whose help no man could have

defeated so many and mighty enemies. In fact, the Anglo-Saxon author here rehearses a

well-known literary topos, that of the 'few against the many'.[76] This narrative

commonplace, which was already quite popular in classical literature,[77] entered the

medieval repertoire not only through the influence of Greek and Latin authors, but

particularly through its central role in the representation of the Israelites' wars in the Old

Testament. Thereafter, the theme of the 'few against the many' has characterized

accounts of battles and wars up to the present day,[78] but always with the same function

of celebrating the extraordinary accomplishment of the victors and, to some extent, the

rightfulness of their cause.

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[75]   The biblical text [Gn. 14. 14], just as the Old English poet, clearly indicates that Abraham can count on the support of only 'trecentos decem et octo' [318] chosen warriors.

[76]   To my knowledge, no comprehensive academic study exists specifically devoted to the 'few against the many' theme.

[77]   See, for example, Herodotus' renowned account of the battle of Thermopylae (480 BC), where King Leonidas and 300 Spartan warriors faced an immense Persian army.

[78]   See, for instance, J. MURRAY, 'Few Against Many: the Reception of the Battle of Thermopylae in Popular Culture, South Africa and Children's Literature' (unpublished MA thesis, University of KwaZulu Natal, 2009), examining the use of this literary topos in the poetry of the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879.

Moreover, the passage quoted immediately above is particularly noteworthy because its lines are marked by a straightforward syntactic structure and by the absence of formulas and verbal repetition, both of which contribute to rendering their content particularly explicit and unambiguous. Moreover, it provides a sort of 'summary' of both the events and the main moral of the section of the text preceding it. However, none of these features (also found in *Exodus*) are characteristic in either the Latin Bible or Old English poetic tradition. Although the origin of these stylistic elements is beyond the scope of the present study, I would argue that they were employed by the poets of *Genesis* and *Exodus* with the specific aim of expounding the Old Testament ideology of war in a selected number of passages in an unmistakably clear manner to their audience.

It is also worth noting that, whereas the episode of the 'War of the Kings' unquestionably revolves around a fact of war, the original biblical account is particularly concise, not explicitly spelling out the wider ideological implications, which are instead thoroughly and extensively explicated in many other Old Testament episodes, such as the passage from Deuteronomy quoted above. The previous analysis has instead demonstrated how the Anglo-Saxon author consistently seeks to add this ideological dimension to his rendering of the 'War of the Kings', which emerges even more clearly in the concluding section of the episode in the Old English *Genesis*.

On his triumphal return to Sodom, Abraham is welcomed by Melchisedech, *bisceop* of the city,[79] with these words:

> "wæs ðu gewurðod   on wera rime
> for þæs eagum   þe ðe æsca tir
> æt guðe forgeaf.   þæt is god selfa
> se ðe hettendra   herga þrymmas
> on geweald gebræc   and þe wæpnum læt

---

[79] 'Sacerdos Dei altissimi' [the priest of the most high God] in the Old Testament [Gn. 14. 18].

> rancstræte forð   rume wyrcan,
>
> huðe ahreddan   and hæleð fyllan.
>
> on swaðe sæton.   ne meahton siðwerod
>
> guðe spowan   ac hie god flymde.
>
> se ðe æt feohtan   mid frumgarum
>
> wið ofermægnes   egsan sceolde
>
> handum sinum   [...]."
>
> (*Genesis*, ll. 2107-2118a)

["Highly wert thou exalted among the number of heroes before the eyes of Him who gave thee the glory of the ash-spear in battle: that is God himself, who mightily destroyed the forces of the hostile armies and let thee with thy weapons hew out bloody paths broadly (through the foe), regain the booty, and fell the warriors. They were encamped by the way: nor could the withdrawing army prevail in hand-to-hand conflict, but God put it to flight, who with His own hands preserved thee with thy warriors in the fight, against the terror of superior numbers".]

The poet's rendering of Melchisedech's speech is a revealing example of the representation of war in the biblical epics. Although these lines are naturally filled with images and expressions of Old English poetry, the author employs these conventions to emphasize and reassert the primary role played by God in the achievement of victory against the Elamites. Whereas in the Book of Genesis Melchisedech confines himself to saying 'benedictus Abram Deo excelso qui creavit caelum et terram / et benedictus Deus excelsus quo protegente hostes in manibus tuis sunt' [blessed be Abraham by the most high God, who created heaven and earth. And blessed be the most high God, by whose protection the enemies are in thy hands],[80] in the Old English text the concrete role of God in the battle is stated through four different formulations in only five lines (2109b-2013), while the poet also reintroduces the 'few against the many' theme.

The episode of the 'War of the Kings' in the Old English *Genesis* concludes with the words pronounced by God Himself to Abraham. Although, in this case, the content of

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[80]   Gn. 14. 19-20.

God's discourse is not significantly altered with respect to the biblical original,[81] the poet nevertheless includes it at the end of Chapter XXX instead of the beginning of the following one, as in the Old Testament.[82] In this way, the Lord's words come to constitute a 'summary' and a further statement of the author's interpretation of the whole episode very similar to that of lines 2092b-2095, since in the only hypermetric verses in this section of the poem God again straightforwardly states that whoever follows His teachings will be protected against every foe:

> "Meda syndon micla þina.   ne læt þu þe þin mod asealcan
> wærfæst willan mines   ne þearft þu þe wiht ondrædan
> þenden þu mine lare læstest   ac ic þe lifigende her
> wið weana gehwam   wreo and scylde
> folmum minum   ne þearft þu forht wesan."
> (*Genesis*, ll. 2168-2172)

["Great are thy rewards. Let not now thy heart grow idle, thou steadfast (doer) of my will. Nor needst thou fear anyone, while thou heedest my commandment, for with my own hands will I shelter and shield thee during thy life-time here against every woe: thou needst not be fearful".]

Thus, from the analysis of the episode of the 'War of the Kings' it emerges that the author of the Old English *Genesis* was well acquainted with the interpretation of war expounded in the Old Testament, which he chooses to submit to his audience in spite of its omission from the specific biblical episode he is treating. Moreover, this interpretation of the Old Testament source is expressed in numerous passages throughout Chapters XXVIII-XXX of the Old English *Genesis*, which are not characterized by elaborate syntactic structures and style, but by the particular straightforwardness of the meaning they convey. As a result, these sections and the

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[81] Genesis 15. 1. However, the Old English poet significantly elaborates the original statement 'noli timere Abram / ego protector tuus sum et merces tua magna nimis' [fear not, Abraham, I am thy protector, and thy reward exceeding great].

[82] Of course, a later scribe might well be responsible for this alteration of the text's subdivision. However, the very fact that God's words were, at some point, perceived as belonging to Chapter XXX, rather than to the following one, is extremely significant.

theme they illustrate come to the attention of the audience through the rest of the battle scene, narrated by means of the traditional and more complex conventions of Old English poetics. Lastly, our investigation of the Old English rendering of the 'War of the Kings' highlights how the Anglo-Saxon poet follows a well-defined narrative structure, which characterizes the recording of most Old Testament wars. In particular, this formal pattern is arranged in three main phases: a military and/or moral crisis of the people of God, constituting the staring point of the narrative action; the subsequent intervention of God Himself or of one of His 'representatives' on earth, exhorting the Israelites to redress their wrongs; and, finally, God-sanctioned (if not God-procured) success of the newly cleansed Chosen People against the enemies threatening them.

Exodus

The same narrative structure, and a very similar ideology of war also characterize *Exodus* which, however, is not concerned with an actual battle, but rather with the journey of the Israelites through the desert and the crossing of the Red Sea. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Moses and his followers are repeatedly described not as a people flying from bondage, but as a powerful and courageous army marching towards battle.[83] In fact, from the very beginning of the text, the poet frames the whole episode in terms of a violent confrontation between Moses and the Israelites on the one hand, and Pharaoh and his followers on the other, whom the poet describes not only as the enemies of the Chosen People, but as opponents of God Himself.[84] The anonymous Anglo-Saxon author, however, leaves his audience in no doubt about what will be the outcome of the strife as, immediately after introducing the two parties, he declares that:

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[83] See, for example, ll. 54-55 and 98-103a.
[84] At l. 15a, the Anglo-Saxon poet indicates Pharaoh as 'Godes andsacan' [God's adversary].

> Heah wæs þæt handlean   ond him hold Frea,
>
> gesealde wæpna geweald   wið wraðra gryre;
>
> ofercom mid þy campe   cneomaga fela,
>
> feonda folcriht.
>
> (*Exodus*, ll. 19-22a)

[Divine was the retribution of his (Moses') hand and loyal his Lord: he granted him supremacy of arms against the violence of raging foes, and by this means he vanquished in battle the sovereignty of many tribes, his enemies.]

Therefore, the author of *Exodus* at once introduces the theme of God's power in granting success in battle to His people against numerous enemies. It is particularly interesting to observe how the wording of this passage resembles that of *Genesis*, where exactly the same theme is developed at lines 2095 ('wið swa miclum mægne' [against so great a multitude]), 2117 ('wið ofermægnes egsan' [against the terror of superior numbers]) and 2168a ('meda syndon micla þina' [great are thy rewards]). Furthermore, the above-quoted passage also presents a very simple structure, markedly different from the complex style of the poem, which prevents the audience from misunderstanding its meaning.

The Israelites' courage is, however, soon put to the test when they receive news of Pharaoh's pursuit (ll. 135-137a) and see the Egyptian army suddenly appearing at the shores of the Red Sea. The poet describes the approach of Pharaoh's forces with outstanding poetic skill in a dramatic sequence which concludes with these words:

> Swa þær eorp werod,   ecan læddon,
> lað æfter laðum,   leodmægnes worn
> þusendmælum;   þider wæron fuse.
> Hæfdon hie gemynted   to þam mægenheapum
> to þam ærdæge   Israhela cynn
> billum abreotan   on hyra broðorgyld.
> (*Exodus*, ll. 194-199)

[Thus they (the Egyptians) led there a dark army, reinforcements, foe upon foe, a multitude of the nation's might in their thousands: they were eager to get there. They had resolved, as regards those mighty hordes, to destroy the Israelite people with swords at dawn, out of vengeance for their brethren.]

At the sight of such a terrifying scene, the Israelites are seized by panic and despair:

> Forþon wæs in wicum   wop up ahafen,
>
> atol æfenleoð,   egesan stodon,
>
> weredon wælnet;   þa se woma cwom,
>
> flugon frecne spel.
>
> (*Exodus*, ll. 200-203a)

[That was why in the encampments the sound of weeping was raised, hideous vespers; fears loomed whose deadly meshes hampered them. When the alarm came, brave speeches fled.]

Although such a reaction on the part of the people of God might appear legitimate, comparison with other Old Testament episodes such as that of the distribution of manna[85] make it possible to advance an alternative reading of these lines. Specifically, I would argue that the *Exodus*-poet viewed the anxiety overwhelming the Israelites as something so reprehensible as to verge almost on sinfulness, since it arose not so much from the sight of the enemy host, as from a want of confidence in God and in His power to protect them. The Israelites' lack of faith becomes even more manifest when the Angel of the Lord and the pillar of cloud and fire, which had guided the tribes of Israel through the desert, suddenly move in front of Pharaoh's army, temporarily stopping his advance (ll. 204b-207). However, not even such an obvious sign of God's might and His favour towards the Israelites relieves Moses' followers who, instead, sink even more deeply into despair:

> Wæron orwenan   eðelrihtes,
>
> sæton æfter beorgum   in blacum reafum
>
> wean on wenum;   wæccende bad
>
> eall seo sibgedriht   somod ætgædere

---

85   Exodus 16. 1-36.

maran mægenes, [...].

(*Exodus*, ll. 211-215a)

[They had given up hoping for the homeland due to them. They sat about among the hills in sombre garments anticipating misery. Watchful, the whole company of kinsfolk assembled together and awaited the superior military force.]

These lines are so evocative of the hopelessness of the situation in the eyes of the Israelites that it almost seems as if they are actually going to suffer the terrible fate Pharaoh intends for them,[86] despite the poet having clearly declared that the Egyptians would fulfil their intent only 'þær him mihtig God / on ðam spildsiðe spede forgefeʾ [if mighty God granted them success in their mission of destruction].[87] The author is suggesting here that such a weak faith on the part of the Chosen People could easily rouse the wrath of God, who would chastise them accordingly by allowing their enemies to overcome them, just as happened to the Sodomites and Gomorrahites in *Genesis*. If this were the correct interpretation of the author's meaning, it would demonstrate not only that the *Exodus*-poet was interested in the relationship between war and sin, but that, by accenting the unfavourable situation of the people of God, he also respected the narrative structure of Old Testament wars.

However, just like Abraham in the Old English *Genesis* and many other God-anointed leaders throughout the Old Testament, Moses intervenes to rescue his followers from their own fears and lack of faith. At dawn, he addresses the Israelites with these words:

"Ne beoð ge þy forhtran, þeah þe Faraon brohte
sweordwigendra side hergas,
eorla unrim. Him eallum wile
mihtig Drihten þurh mine hand

---

[86] Lucas, *Exodus*, nt. 151-3, p. 99.
[87] *Exodus*, ll. 152b-153.

> to dæge þissum   dædlean gyfan,
>
> þæt hie lifigende   leng ne moton
>
> ægnian mid yrmðum   Israhela cyn.
>
> Ne willað eow andrædan   deade feðan,
>
> fæge ferhðlocan,   fyrst is æt ende
>
> lænes lifes.   Eow is lar Godes
>
> abroden of breostum.   Ic on beteran ræd,
>
> þæt ge gewurðien   wuldres Aldor,
>
> and eow Liffrean   lissa bidde,
>
> sigora gesynto,   þær ge siðien.
>
> Þis is se ecea   Abrahames God,
>
> frumsceafta Frea,   se ðas fyrd wereð,
>
> modig ond mægenrof,   mid þære miclan hand."
>
> (*Exodus*, ll. 259-275)

["Do not be more frightened for it even if Pharaoh should bring vast armies of sword-warriors, a tally untold of men. The mighty Lord by my hand wills this day to give them all their deeds' reward, so that they shall be allowed no longer to survive and scourge the people of Israel with miseries. You will not fear dead foot-soldiers, dying bodies: the span of their fleeting life is at an end. God's teachings have been wrenched from your breasts: I give you better advice, that you worship the Prince of glory and pray for the grace of the Lord of life upon you and for the salvation of victories as you set forth. This is the everlasting God of Abraham, the Lord of things created, who, valiant and renowned of strength, will guard this army with that mighty hand".][88]

This passage presents remarkable similarities to the concluding paragraph of the episode of the 'War of the Kings' in the Old English *Genesis*, where God speaks to Abraham (ll. 2168b-2172). Firstly, at l. 275b, Moses encourages his followers not to fear the numerous enemies surrounding them, by means of the image — also found in *Genesis* (l. 2172a) — of God's hand protecting the armies of Israel. Secondly, whereas in *Genesis* (l. 2170a) God Himself exhorts Abraham to obey 'mine lare' in order to be protected from every foe, Moses strongly rebukes the Israelites for having 'lar Godes

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[88]   *Lar Godes* has been translated as 'God's teachings' instead of 'God's counsel' as in BRADLEY, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, p. 57.

abroden of breostum' [God's teachings wrenched from (your) breasts],[89] and urges his followers to turn heartily to God, so that He will grant them salvation from Pharaoh.

Therefore, in both *Genesis* and *Exodus* the recurring concept can be observed of God protecting all those who respect His precepts, and severely punishing with defeat in war those who disregard His commandments. However, while in *Exodus* the theme of divine punishment is only implied, the message of lines 259-275 concerning God's aid for those who are faithful to Him is stated directly through a plain syntactic structure and an intelligible style, both of which stand in sharp contrast to the complexity characterizing the poem as a whole. In particular, while in many passages of *Exodus* the audience is required to meditate on the poet's words in order to appreciate their often multiple meanings,[90] the lines quoted above appear to have been expressly structured to leave no room for further analysis or misunderstanding. The poet's view is absolutely clear, unequivocal, and somehow indisputable. As in *Genesis*, this stylistic variation can be explained in terms of the poet's wish to convey his own specific interpretation of the Old Testament source concerning the role of God in warfare in a comprehensible manner — a notion which, in this case too, is absent from the biblical original.

Following Moses' intervention, the Israelites recover their confidence and seem ready to resist Pharaoh by force of arms (ll. 215b-248a), but the waters of the Red Sea slowly begin to open and the Israelites find safety between the parted waves. Once again, it is interesting to note that the poet continues his military metaphor by describing the Hebrew tribes advancing onto the dry sea floor as companies of brave warriors marching towards battle (ll. 310-353a), and by openly praising the 'Germanic' courage

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[89] *Exodus*, ll. 268b-269a.
[90] See, for example, R. FRANK, 'What Kind of Poetry is *Exodus*?', in *Germania: Comparative Studies in the Old Germanic Languages and Literatures*, ed. by D.G. Calder and T. Craig Christy (Wolfeboro, NH: D.S. Brewer, 1988), pp. 191-205 at 192-193.

of the first man to venture into the sea (ll. 310-318).

After a *lacuna* probably due to the loss of a leaf in the Junius manuscript, *Exodus* resumes with the dramatic account of the drowning of the Egyptian army, which the poet again describes as an actual, violent battle. This section of the poem (ll. 447-515) is both extensive and extremely complex, but its aim, in my opinion, goes beyond indulging in mere poetic flourishing to entertain the audience. On the contrary, just like the topos of the 'few against the many' in *Genesis*, the purpose of such vivid and detailed description of the total annihilation of an army, formerly so intimidating and invincible to the eyes of the Israelites, is to demonstrate and emphasize the supremacy of God, who has the power to overcome any foe of the Chosen People, even the most powerful, utterly and completely. The 'celebratory' function of the elaborate passage concerning the drowning of Pharaoh and his host is confirmed by the following concluding lines, where the poet maintains that no human force can hope to succeed in war against the will of God, who is the ultimate arbiter of armed conflicts:

> [...].   Mægen eall gedreas,
> ða þe gedrecte,   dugoð Egypta,
> Faraon mid his folcum.   He onfond hraðe,
> siððan grund gestah,   Godes andsaca,
> þæt wæs mihtigra   mereflodes Weard –
> wolde heorufæðmum   hilde gesceadan,
> yrre and egesfull.   Egyptum wearð
> þæs dægweorces   deop lean gesceod,
> forðam þæs heriges   ham eft ne com
> ealles ungrundes   ænig to lafe,
> [...].   Se ðe sped ahte
> ageat gylp wera.   Hie wið God wunnon.
> (*Exodus*, ll. 500b-509, 514b-515)

[Their whole force perished when the hosts of the Egyptians were drowned — Pharaoh along with his people. God's adversary quickly found, when he sank into the abyss, that the Guardian Lord of the ocean was the greater in might. Wrathful and terrible, he had meant to determine the battle by the power of the sword: overwhelming was the reward assigned to the Egyptians for that day's work, for of that quite unfathomable army none came back home as a survivor … . He who possessed the power voided the boast of those men. They had been contending against God.]

As already remarked in the analysis of the 'War of the Kings' in *Genesis*, these lines provide a sort of summary of the events and morals of the whole episode. It is once again possible to observe how their very presence, as well as their style and syntactic structure, differ significantly from the overall characteristics of the poem. As a consequence, this passage becomes easily distinguishable from the rest of the text, so that the meaning it conveys can easily reach the attention of the audience. Likewise, as the Old English *Exodus* draws to an end, Moses explicitly stresses one final time that God shall protect His people in battle against any foe, but only on the condition that they respect His *halig lar*:

> "[...] gif ge gehealdað   halige lare,
>
> þæt ge feonda gehwone   forð ofergangað,
>
> gesittað sigerice   be sæm tweonum,
>
> beorselas beorna: bið eower blæd micel"
>
> (*Exodus*, ll. 561-564)

["… if you keep his holy precepts you shall henceforth overrun each one of your enemies and occupy a victorious realm amidst the oceans, and the banquet-halls of warriors. Great shall be your glory".]

To sum up, a close reading of the Old English *Exodus* reveals how the biblical episode of the crossing of the Red Sea is transformed into a complex metaphor of the workings of war according to Old Testament tradition. In particular, the power of God to determine the outcome of battles becomes one of the central meanings of the poem, while great emphasis is also placed on the necessity for the Chosen People to remain firm in their faith and in their respect of the Lord's precepts, on pain of the terrible

slaughter so vividly projected to the Israelites by the Anglo-Saxon poet. As previously argued, the same ideology pervades the vernacular rendering of the episode of the 'War of the Kings' in *Genesis*, with which *Exodus* also shares many features at a linguistic and stylistic level.

Judith

We now address *Judith*, the last of the Old English biblical poems to be considered in the present study. Before proceeding with the analysis of the text itself, it is necessary to note a major characteristic of its biblical source which strongly differentiates *Judith* from both *Genesis* and *Exodus*. Despite the tendency of medieval and modern commentators alike to emphasize its moral teachings (to which we will subsequently return), the biblical story of Judith is, first and foremost, about war. In particular, the first seven chapters of the Book of Judith relate Holofernes' unstoppable advance in the land of Judah — a devastating campaign which witnessed the capitulation of all Hebrew tribes who had tried to resist him — and the brutal siege of the Assyrians' next objective, the city of Bethulia. Faced with such a redoubtable opponent, the warriors and leading men of Bethulia would rather starve or peacefully surrender to Holofernes than meet the besieging army in battle, especially without having first received a sign of God's favour showing that they would not experience the same catastrophe as other victims of the general's power.

Therefore, unlike the Books of Genesis and Exodus, the biblical source of the Old English *Judith* already incorporates the key concepts of the Old Testament ideology of war. For example, in Chapter 5, Holofernes questions one of his subordinates by the name of Achior, leader of a nation which had long ago succumbed to the Assyrians,

about the military power of the Israelites, 'quae et quales et quantae sint civitates eorum / quae etiam sit virtus eorum aut quae sit multitudo eorum / vel quis rex militiae illorum' [what are their cities, of what sort, and how great: also what is their power, or what is their multitude: or who is the king over their warfare].[91] Achior's answer constitutes a veritable 'summary' of the Old Testament ideology of war, replying as follows:

> ubicumque ingressi sunt sine arcu et sagitta et absque scuta et gladio / Deus eorum pro eis pugnavit et vicit / et non fuit qui insultaret populo isti / nisi quando recessit a cultura Domini Dei sui / quotienscumque autem praeter ipsum Deum suum alterum coluerunt / dati sunt in praedam et in gladium et in obprobrium / quotienscumque autem paenituerunt se recessisse a cultura Dei sui / dedit eis Deus caeli virtutem resistendi […] nunc ergo meus domine perquire / si est aliqua iniquitas eorum in conspectu Dei eorum / ascendamus ad illos quoniam tradens tradet illos Deus eorum tibi / et subiugati erunt sub iugo potentiae tuae / si autem non est offensio populi huius coram Deo suo / non poterimus resistere illis / quoniam Deus eorum defendet illos / et erimus in obprobrium universae terrae. (Idt. 5. 16-19, 24-25)

[Wheresoever they (the Israelites) went in without bow and arrow, and without shield and sword, their God fought for them and overcame. And there was no one that triumphed over this people, but when they departed from the worship of the Lord their God. But as often as beside their own God, they worshipped any other, they were given to spoil, and to the sword, and to reproach. And as often as they were penitent for having revolted from the worship of their God, the God of heaven gave them power to resist. … Now therefore, my lord, search if there be any iniquity of theirs in the sight of their God: let us go up to them, because their God will surely deliver them to thee, and they shall be brought under the yoke of thy power: but if there be no offence of this people in the sight of their God, we cannot resist them, because their God will defend them: and we shall be a reproach to the whole earth.]

As a consequence, whereas the poets of both *Genesis* and *Exodus* had to modify and expand on the respective Old Testament sources to make war and its interpretation in terms of the covenant between Israel and God a central topic of their works, the role of

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[91] Idt. 5. 3.

God as dispenser of victory (or defeat) in battle is already one of the main morals of the Book of Judith.

Unfortunately, the incompleteness of the only surviving copy of the Old English poem renders any speculation on the author's treatment of the first half of the biblical book extremely difficult, if not entirely impossible. Nonetheless, the extant section of the text indicates that the *Judith*-poet was doubtlessly interested in the question of war, since he meticulously retains all details concerning this subject while eliminating many other themes, characters and events of the biblical original.[92] For example, the Anglo-Saxon author, following the Old Testament, portrays the people of Bethulia as transfixed by fear and uncertainty, and locked in a stalemate which only Judith, blessed by God, can break by providing the heavenly sign they were waiting for. In order to fulfil her purpose, Judith travels to the Assyrian headquarters, kills Holofernes, and returns to Bethulia bearing the general's severed head, whose display before the city's inhabitants Judith accompanies with these words:

"[...]. Ic eow secgan mæg
þoncwyrðe þing, þæt ge ne þyrfen leng
*mu*rnan on mode: eow ys metod blið*e*,
cyninga wuldor; þæt gecyðed wearð
geond woruld wide, þæt eow ys wuldorblæd
torhtlic toweard ond tir gifeðe
þara læðða þe ge lange drugon.
[...]. Nu ic gumena gehwæne
þyssa burgleoda biddan wylle,
randwiggendra, þæt ge recene eow
fysan to gefeohte, [...].
[...]. Fynd syndon eowere
gedemed to deaðe ond ge dóm agon,

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[92] GRIFFITH, *Judith*, pp. 52-61.

> tír æt tohtan,   swa eow getacnod hafað
>
> mihtig dryhten   þurh mine | (h)and."
>
> (*Judith*, ll. 152b-158, 186b-189a, 195b-198)

["I can tell you something worthy of thanksgiving: that you need no longer grieve in spirit. The ordaining Lord, the Glory of kings, is gracious to you. It has been revealed abroad through the world that dazzling and glorious success is impending for you and triumph is granted you over those injuries which you long have suffered. ... Now I want to urge each man among these citizens, each shield-wielding soldier, that you immediately get yourselves ready for battle. ... Your enemies are sentenced to death and you shall have honour and glory in the fight according as the mighty Lord has signified to you by my hand".]

There has been much debate concerning Judith's uneasy role as the true hero of the Old English poem.[93] Even though I do not intend to rehearse such controversy here, I would nevertheless suggest that, in the light of what has been identified as the key role of God's anointed ones in *Genesis* and *Exodus*, just as in the Old Testament as a whole, Judith's actual contribution to the salvation of Bethulia is not limited to the heroic decapitation of Holofernes, but also includes her ability to dissuade the city's inhabitants from a self-inflicted doom. Like Abraham and Moses, Judith exhorts the warriors of Bethulia to attack their fated opponents without fear, since God is on their side and will grant them success on the battlefield, just as He had made it possible for her, a woman, to kill Holofernes, whom no army had previously been able to defeat. In fact, the decapitation of the Assyrian general, and his very head shown to the population of Bethulia, are not only a sign of divine favour towards the Israelites, but the extraordinary, tangible proof of the unchallenged power of God to defend those who place their trust in Him, similar to the drowning of Pharaoh's army.

Prompted by Judith's words, the warriors of Bethulia storm the camp of the

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[93] See, among others, R.E. KASKE, '*Sapientia* et *Fortitudo* in the Old English *Judith*', in *The Wisdom of Poetry: Essays in Early English Literature in Honour of Morton W. Bloomfield*, ed. by L.D. Benson and S. Wenzel (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1982), pp. 13-29; H. DAMICO, 'The Valkyrie Reflex in Old English Literature', in *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, ed. by H. Damico and A. Hennessey Olsen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 176-190; P.J. LUCAS, '*Judith* and the Woman Hero', *Yearbook of English Studies* 22 (1992): 17-27.

Assyrians who, taken by surprise, 'hogedon [...] awe*cc*(an) / (hy)ra winedryhten' [thought ... to awaken their lord and friend], but 'him wiht ne speow' [they succeeded not at all].[94] The panic seizing Holofernes' warriors at the discovery of their general's death has often been interpreted in terms of the *comitatus*-ideal.[95] It is, however, possible to suggest that the real reason behind the Assyrians' unseemly reaction is not so much the loss of their 'lord and friend', as the certainty that some powerful, supernatural entity is at work against them.[96] In other words, just as the decapitation of Holofernes was perceived by the Hebrews as proof that God was on their side, for the Assyrians the assassination of their renowned leader by a woman can only forebode their own impending annihilation. This reading, which the poet surely derived from the Old Testament original, is confirmed by the desperate words of the soldier who discovers the corpse of Holofernes:

> "Her ys geswutelod   ure sylfra forwyrd,
>
> toweard getacnod,   þæt þære tide ys
>
> mid niðum neah geðrungen,   þe (we) sculon nu losian,
>
> somod æt sæcce forweorðan.   Her lið sweorde geheawen,
>
> beheafdod healde*n*(d) ure."
>
> (*Judith*, ll. 285-289a)

["Here is made manifest our own perdition, and here it is imminently signalled that the time is drawn near, along with its tribulations, when we must perish and be destroyed together in the strife. Here, hacked by the sword, lies our lord".]

As a consequence, the Assyrian warriors throw down their weapons and flee, but the men of Bethulia give chase, determined to kill them all. Although the poet narrates the slaughter of Holofernes' army strictly according to the conventions of Old English war

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[94]   Judith, ll. 273b-274.
[95]   See, for example, M. GODDEN, 'Biblical Literature: the Old Testament', in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. by M. Godden and M. Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 206-226 at 220-221.
[96]   GRIFFITH, *Judith*, p. 67.

poetry, including beasts of battle and the like, he nevertheless departs from both vernacular tradition and his biblical source to state:

> [...].   Him feng dryhten god
> fægre on ful(t)u(m),   frea ælmihtig.
> (*Judith*, ll. 299b-300)

[The Lord God, the almighty Lord, came handsomely to their aid.][97]

As in *Genesis*, where God joins Abraham in his fight against the Elamites, *Judith*'s author describes divine intervention in favour of the people of Bethulia with the phrase *on fultum* which, as already noted, underlines the materiality of God's involvement as opposed to indirect influence.[98] The very same expression is also found in line 186a, where the poet maintains that Judith could decapitate Holofernes only 'þurh godes fultum' [through God's help].

The Assyrian army having been defeated, the people of Bethulia return to their city carrying the rich treasures of their enemies (ll. 301-341a). Instead of closely following the Old Testament as in many of the preceding passages concerning war, the Old English poet summarizes the long 'song of Judith'[99] with these words, which conclude the poem:

> [...].   Ealles ðæs Iudith sægde
> wuldor weroda dryhtne,   þe hyre weorðmynde geaf,
> mærðe on moldan rice,   swylce eac mede on heofonum,
> sigorlean | (in) sweg*l*es wuldre,   þæs ðe heo ahte soðne geleafan
> to ða(m) ælmihtigan.
> (*Judith*, ll. 341b-345a)

[For all this Judith gave glory to the Lord of hosts who granted her esteem and renown in the realm of earth and likewise too a reward in heaven, the prize of victory in the glory of the sky because she had true faith in the Almighty.]

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[97] Bradley [*Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, p. 503] translates *feng* as a pluperfect ('had come').
[98] See above, p. 44.
[99] Judith 9.

By stating that Judith earned glory both in Heaven and on earth because 'heo ahte soðne geleafan to ða(m) ælmihtigan' [she had true faith in the Almighty], the poet, like the authors of *Genesis* and *Exodus*, draws the attention of his audience to the terms of the covenant between God and His people, and to the strong causal connection between true faith and the aid of the Almighty, who always and promptly comes to the aid of whoever calls to Him with a truthful heart. The same concept is more clearly expressed at the beginning of the surviving poem, where Judith, after being taken to the tent of the Assyrian commander, calls to the Lord for help, being suddenly 'mid sorgum gedrefed' [afflicted with anxieties]:[100]

> "[...].   Forgif me, swegles ealdor,
> sigor ond soðne geleafan,   þæt ic mid þys sweorde mote
> geheawan þysne morðres bryttan.   [...]"
> [...].   Hi ða se hehsta dema
> ædre mid elne onbryrde,   swa he deð anra gehwylcne
> herbuendra   þe hyne him to helpe seceð
> mid ræde ond mid rihte geleafan.
> (*Judith*, ll. 88b-90a, 94b-97a)

["Give me, Lord of heaven, victory and true faith so that with this sword I may hew down this dispenser of violent death". … Then the supreme Judge at once inspired her with courage — as he does every single man dwelling here who looks to him for help with resolve and with true faith.]

It is therefore possible to conclude that the surviving portion of the Old English *Judith*, despite being much later than *Genesis* and *Exodus*, also coherently and accurately presents the Old Testament ideology of war by focussing in particular on how God will always grant success to those who are faithful to Him. Moreover, *Judith*'s poet follows the same narrative structure of Old Testament wars highlighted in both *Genesis* and *Exodus*.

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[100] *Judith*, l. 88a.

**Some considerations concerning the sources of the reading of war
in *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Judith***

As noted above, whereas the role of God in warfare is one of the keynotes of the Book of Judith, war and its ideological implications are thoroughly absent from the biblical account of the crossing of the Red Sea, while the episode of the 'War of the Kings' in the Book of Genesis is also lacking any explicit discussion of these topics. In turn, this introduces the complex question of whether the authors of *Genesis* and *Exodus* developed their interpretation of war from the Old Testament itself, or rather derived it from some other identifiable source, whether a single work, a family of texts or a wider interpretative tradition. The investigation of this issue is important not only better to appraise the literary and cultural background of the authors of *Genesis* and *Exodus*, but especially to shed light on many unanswered questions concerning the ideological dimension of war in Anglo-Saxon England and its presentation in all the Old English biblical epics. In particular, this line of enquiry will allow us to develop a more comprehensive picture of the cultural and ideological context out of which *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Judith*, and the distinctive ideology of war they present, originated. Secondly, it will contribute to determining whether and to what extent the Old Testament ideology of war was known and influential in early medieval England. Finally, it will provide an original perspective on the so-called 'heroic ideal' and its representation in Old English biblical poetry.

The late antique connection

The first family of sources I set out to investigate are the so-called 'late antique biblical epics', that is to say Latin metrical adaptations of various parts of the Bible

composed in the course of the fifth century by late Roman authors such as Arator, Sedulius and Avitus.[101] These texts, dealing with both the Old and the New Testaments, and being significantly diverse in their content, style and audience, are of special interest for a number of reasons. Firstly, these Latin poems have been almost totally ignored by recent scholarship on Old English biblical verse. Particularly revealing in this sense is the fact that, for example, it is extremely difficult to locate any reference to these Latin works in any of the most recent critical editions of *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Judith*, despite the substantial number of pages devoted to the survey of sources known and exploited by the Anglo-Saxon authors. Indeed, if any passing reference to late antique biblical verse is made, it is only to rule out any connection with the Old English poems. We may consider, for instance, Peter Lucas' decisive statement regarding the literary sources of *Exodus*:

> The poem has no known single literary source. In the last century it was thought that *Exodus* owed much to a Latin poem, *De Transitu Maris Rubri*, by Avitus, bishop of Vienne (d. 518), but this view was demolished by Moore, who cited parallels from other texts for all the features supposed to be uniquely common to Avitus' poem and *Exodus*.[102]

As clearly emerges from this passage, Samuel Moore's article 'On the Sources of the Old English *Exodus*'[103] was so convincing in its dismissal of a possible relationship between the Old English biblical epics and their Latin counterparts that no other academic study has approached this topic since 1911. Nevertheless, recent developments in the field of Anglo-Saxon studies strongly point to the necessity for a

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[101] For a brief, though extremely useful, introduction to the late antique biblical epics see J. McClure, 'The Biblical Epic and its Audience in Late Antiquity', in *Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar* 3, ed. by F. Cairns (Liverpool: F. Cairns, 1981), pp. 305-321.

[102] Lucas, *Exodus*, p. 53.

[103] S. Moore, 'On the Sources of the Old English *Exodus*', *Modern Philology* 9.1 (1911): 83-108.

new and detailed investigation of the relationship between the late antique biblical poems and the Old English *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Judith*. In particular, Michael Lapidge has recently published an illuminating article on the versification of the Bible in the Middle Ages, where he convincingly argues that biblical poems of the late Roman authors Juvencus, Arator, Sedulius and Avitus were in fact widely known in early medieval England, since they 'formed the core of the Anglo-Saxon school curriculum, at least down to the time of the Norman Conquest'.[104]

As a consequence, in the following pages I will consider the rendering of the 'War of the Kings' and of the crossing of the Red Sea in two of the late antique epics, namely Claudius Marius Victorius' *Alethia* and Avitus' *De spiritalis historia gestis*. These texts have been selected on the grounds that they are the only ones among the Latin biblical poems known in Anglo-Saxon England which cover the episodes from the Books of Genesis and Exodus analysed in detail above, and which present immediate and significant parallels with their Old English rendering.[105] It is nevertheless quite likely that a close investigation of the perception and representation of war throughout the whole corpus of late antique biblical poetry, which has been impossible here for reasons of both space and time, might reveal interesting cues for future research.

Claudius Marius Victorius, 'Alethia'[106]

Composed in the third decade of the fifth century, the *Alethia* is a verse paraphrase of

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[104] M. LAPIDGE, 'Versifying the Bible in the Middle Ages', in *The Text in the Community: Essays on Medieval Works, Manuscripts, Authors and Readers*, ed. by J. Mann and M. Nolan (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), pp. 11-40 at 24.

[105] According to LAPIDGE [*Anglo-Saxon Library*, pp. 292 and 298 respectively], Avitus' *De spiritalis historiae gestis* was quoted by Aldhelm, Bede and Alcuin, while Claudius Marius Victorius' *Alethia* was probably known to Bede. It should be noted, however, that it is extremely difficult to determine how a given Latin work became known in the Middle Ages, whether through the circulation of copies and/or fragments of it or, rather, via a number of 'intermediaries' (e.g. references to or quotations from that work made by other writers, often without any allusion to the original text).

[106] CLAUDIUS MARIUS VICTORIUS, *Alethia*, ed. by P.F. Hoving, CCSL 128 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1960).

selected episodes from the Book of Genesis. This work belongs to that body of Christian literature — including Augustine's *De civitate Dei* and Orosius' *Historiarum adversus paganos* — which originated in the aftermath of the Gothic sack of Rome in AD 410. As shall be illustrated in detail in the subsequent chapter, this unprecedented and tragic event profoundly undermined the confidence in the power of the Christian God of many recently converted Romans, and many authors were forced to engage in the difficult task of explaining what had happened from a Christian perspective, as well as of disclosing God's future plans to their contemporaries.[107]

Surprisingly, however, the only section of the *Alethia* dealing specifically with an armed conflict is precisely the 'War of the Kings', on which the Old English *Genesis* also focuses. As we have seen, one of the main features which characterizes *Genesis*' rendering of this biblical episode is that the Anglo-Saxon poet clearly interprets the defeat of the armies of Sodom and Gomorrah as punishment inflicted by God on His people because of their sins. In contrast, Claudius Marius Victorius conspicuously downplays this interpretation of the 'War of the Kings', despite the fact that it would have had great resonance at the time of the 'barbarian invasions'.

Therefore, Claudius Marius Victorius does not show any interest in the Old Testament ideology of war, but his rendering of the episode of the 'War of the Kings' is still particularly interesting from our point of view, because the late Roman author significantly expands on his biblical source to describe in detail the two main battles between Chodorlahomor and the armies of Israel. Whereas the author of *Genesis*, as we have seen, chants the martial deeds of Abraham through the conventions of Old English heroic poetry, Claudius Marius Victorius must come to terms with another deeply rooted epic tradition, that of Virgil's *Aeneid*. We could compare, as an example among many,

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[107] See below, Ch. 2, pp. 93-94.

the passage quoted above from the Old English *Genesis*,[108] describing the battle of Chodorlahomor against Sodom and Gormorrah, with Claudius Marius Victorius' rendering of the same event — pervaded, in this case, by Virgilian overtones:[109]

Interea magno circum turbante tumultu

hostis adest auidus, uaria quem dote referta

sollicitat tellus ; campis inlisa resultat

ungula et effusis errat populator habenishabenis.

Loth cum rege simul portis erumpit apertis

et uicina manus regum socia arma ferentum ;

secum equites peditesque trahunt, distenditur agmen,

confligunt acies, pariter sternuntque caduntque.

[…] sed turpi Sodomae luxu emollita iuuentus,

ut rursum exarsit repetitus clamor in iras,

uertunt terga metu : rapido pars moenia cursu,

pars montes siluasque petunt, pars saepta cateruis

porrigit ignauas ad tristia uincula palmas.

(*Alethia*, III, ll. 415-422, 426-430)

[In the meantime, a great tumult is raised nearby, a greedy enemy appears, attracted by a land full of resources. Hooves, beaten on the fields, resound and the plunderer wanders, his reins slackened. The gates having been opened, Lot jumps forth together with the king and the armies of the allied kings. They lead foot-soldiers and riders, the troop spreads out, the armies clash, they kill and are killed at the same time. … But, as soon as the war-cry breaks out again in wrath, the young men of Sodom, softened by shameful lewdness, turn their backs out of fear. A group reaches for the city walls running quickly, a group makes for the mountains and woods, another group, surrounded by the enemy troops, cowardly proffers hands to sorrowful chains.]

This short quotation is sufficient to highlight that the impulse of turning the Bible into heroic verse, and of adapting the often stereotyped scriptural accounts of wars and battles to the conventions of the epic genre, is certainly not restricted to 'Germanic' populations. Indeed, as soon as the Bible entered late Roman culture, many

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[108] See above, p. 39.

[109] The similarities between this passage and Virgil's *Aeneid* are pinpointed in HOVING's edition at pp. 180-181.

commentators repeatedly criticised its somehow flat, repetitive and unsophisticated style, while a number of Latin writers, including the authors of the biblical epics, engaged in the difficult task of elevating the sacred text of Christianity to the high standards of the classical literary tradition as expressed by the works of Virgil and Cicero.[110] As Michael Roberts has exhaustively demonstrated, this aim was accomplished through the paraphrastic technique, a rhetorical exercise which had been taught and practised in grammar schools since classical times.[111] Therefore, the fifth-century Latin epics offer an interesting comparison with their Old English counterparts, since all these texts arise precisely from the same desire to adapt a fundamental text such as the Bible to 'indigenous' literary traditions and tastes. At the same time, as shall be discussed shortly, the fact that heroic poems based on Holy Scripture are not unique to 'Germanic' culture should contribute to reversing traditional assumptions concerning the Anglo-Saxons' 'heroic ideal'.

Avitus, 'De spiritalis historiae gestis'[112]

The major poetical work of Alcimus Ecidius Avitus, bishop of Vienne from around 490, is comprised of five books dealing, respectively, with the Creation (*De initio mundi*), Original Sin (*De originali peccato*), the Fall of Man (*De sententia Dei*), the Flood (*De diluvio mundi*) and the Crossing of the Red Sea (*De transitu Maris Rubri*). Since Avitus' narration of the events of the Book of Genesis does not extend to the episode of the 'War of the Kings', I have concentrated exclusively on the final book of

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[110] McClure, 'The Biblical Epic', pp. 307-308.

[111] For a detailed analysis of the practice of the paraphrase in classical times and its development in late Antiquity see M. Roberts, *Biblical Epic and Rhetorical Paraphrase in Late Antiquity* (Liverpool: F. Cairns, 1985), pp. 5-74.

[112] Alcimus Ecdicius Avitus, *Avit de Vienne: Histoire Spirituelle*, ed. by N. Hecquet-Noti, 2 vols. (Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 1999-2005). Translations are taken from G.W. Shea (trans.), *The Poems of Alcimus Ecdicius Avitus* (Tempe, Ariz.: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1997).

the *De spiritalis historiae gestis*. A close reading of *De transitu Maris Rubri* has revealed some interesting textual and lexical parallels with the Old English *Exodus*.

From our point of view, the most interesting of these similarities is that both *Exodus* and *De transitu* are pervaded by a military imagery, according to which the Israelites are described as an army actually fighting their way out of Pharaoh's grasp. As already mentioned, the first Hebrew tribe to venture onto the dry floor of the Red Sea in the Old English *Exodus* seems to be faced with an invisible hostile force.[113] Similarly, Avitus describes the Israelites' departure from the land of Egypt in a way that might lead the audience to believe that Moses and his followers were to engage in a battle against the Egyptians:

> Primo conspicuus fulgebat in ordine ductor
> legifer adiuncto praecedens agmina fratre.
> Post quos belliferae disponunt arma cohortes
> ducunt et ualidas instructo robore turmas.
> Arma ferunt humeris, enses per cingula laeuo
> dependent lateri, presso tum uertice cassis
> fulget et albenti certat lux ferrea lunae.
> Nituntur iaculis alii clipeosque sinistris
> uoluunt et rapido meditantur bella rotatu.
> Gaudet pars etiam pharetris uolucresque sagittas
> hostis in occursum mittendis mortibus aptat,
> aut si forte uirum fugientia terga sequatur,
> ut pinnata leues transmittant spicula uentos.
>
> (*De spiritalis historiae gestis*, V, ll. 371-383)

[In clear view in the first rank, their commander and lawgiver was radiant as he led their column with his brother at his side. Behind them the line of warriors fell into battle order and marched in front of the troops of horse, mighty in their own strong formations. They bore their arms on their shoulders, and their blades hung from their belts on the left side. Their heads were helmeted and blazed with a metallic glow that challenged the white light of the moon. Others leaned on javelins or spun shields in their left

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[113] *Exodus*, ll. 215b-248a. See above, pp. 54-55.

hands, thinking on war as the shields ran swiftly round and round. Another
unit took joy in its quivers, and fit into them winged arrows for dispatching
death against the attacking enemy or for sending winged shafts on the light
wind whenever they happened to be pursuing the backs of a fleeing foe.]

In the latest edition of Avitus' poem, realized by Nicole Hecquet-Noti, no specific

explanation is offered for these elements. However, as far as *Exodus* is concerned, J.E.

Cross and S.I. Tucker have persuasively argued that the Old English poem's bellicose

portrayal of the crossing of the Red Sea, and especially the battle apparently fought by

the Israelites on the sea floor, should be understood in the context of a widespread

allegorical tradition interpreting the crossing of the Red Sea as a *figura* of baptism,

where the person to be baptised must symbolically defeat sin before being allowed into

the Christian community.[114] The very same figural interpretation of the crossing, and of

the drowning of Pharaoh and his men, is advanced by Avitus, who clearly states:

> Inclitus egregium sollemni carmine ductor
>
> describit factum, toto quod psallitur orbe,
>
> cum purgata sacris deletur culpa fluentis
>
> emittitque nouam parientis lympha lauacri
>
> prolem post ueteres, quos edidit Eua, reatus.
>
> (*De spiritalis historiae gestis*, V, ll. 704-708)

[The renowned leader of the Hebrews described this remarkable event in that
hymn of celebration which is now recited throughout the world, when guilt
is purged and washed away by baptism and the waters that bring life-giving
cleansing produce new offspring to replace the guilty men of old whom Eve
bore.]

Here I certainly do not wish to argue that Avitus was the direct source of the *Exodus*-

poet since, as convincingly shown by Moore, there were many other texts which could

have informed the Anglo-Saxon author's interpretation of the crossing of the Red Sea.[115]

What is instead more plausible is that both *De spiritalis* and *Exodus* were embedded in

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[114] J.E. CROSS and S.I. TUCKER, 'Allegorical Tradition and the Old English *Exodus*', *Neophilologus* 44
(1960): 122-127. See also J.F. VICKREY, '*Exodus* and the Battle in the Sea', *Traditio* 28 (1972): 119-
140.
[115] MOORE, 'On the Sources', pp. 14-15.

the same allegorical tradition — a tradition which remained popular from late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages.

The same principle seems to lie behind a further detail shared by both *Exodus* and *De spiritalis*, namely that the Egyptian army is described as 'dark'.[116] This feature of Pharaoh's men is not mentioned in the Bible but, according to F.C. Robinson, it derived from patristic etymology, which equated the name *Ægyptus* with the Latin *tenebrae*.[117] This interpretation is first attested in the writing of early Church Fathers such as Augustine and Jerome, but continued to be rehearsed during the early Middle Ages by Bede, Alcuin and Rabanus.[118] This once again highlights the great influence exerted by late antique and early medieval interpretations of the Scripture on the rendering of these episodes in both the Latin epics and, more importantly for the present purpose, in the Old English biblical poems.

Overall, however, Avitus does not display the same interest in the Old Testament ideology of war which is characteristic of the Old English biblical poems. In fact, the late Roman author makes only two passing references to the role played by God in the confrontation between Pharaoh and the escaping Israelites.[119] In contrast, as highlighted above, this is one of the keynotes of the Old English rendering of the crossing of the Red Sea. It is therefore possible to conclude that whereas *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Judith* resemble the Latin epics in attempting to bring the Holy Scriptures closer to a different literary tradition, and in promoting a specific argument or reading of given biblical episodes through the versification of selected passages of the Bible, the overall disregard by the late Roman poets Avitus and Claudius Marius Victorius of the Old

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[116] Specifically, the Egyptians are called 'niger agmen' [dark troop] in *De spiritalis historiae gestis* (V, l. 641) and 'eorp werod' [dark army] in *Exodus* (l. 194).

[117] F.C. ROBINSON, 'The Significance of Names in Old English Literature', *Anglia* 86 (1968): 14-58 at 26-27.

[118] *Ibid.*, nt. 36, p. 26.

[119] *De spiritalis historiae gestis*, V, ll. 497-500 and 671-675.

Testament ideology of war suggests that the sources of the reading of war in *Genesis*, *Exodus* and, to a lesser extent, *Judith* have to be located elsewhere. However, the influence of late antique interpretations of the Old Testament on the Old English biblical epics, highlighted by the comparison between *Exodus* and *De spiritalis historiae gestis*, indicates that the perception and representation of war in the early English poems may have their basis in a still unrecognised tradition of late antique origin subsequently received in early medieval culture.

But before advancing some more concrete hypotheses concerning the origin and content of such tradition, it is important to emphasize (as have Cross and Tucker) that many commentators from late Antiquity onwards have overlooked the teachings of the Old English biblical poems and of their Old Testament sources concerning 'real' war in favour of more allegorical readings of the same texts.[120] For example, in one of the masterpieces of late antique literary culture, namely Prudentius' *Psychomachia*,[121] the biblical character of Judith is portrayed as a *figura* of *Pudicitia* overcoming *Libido*, impersonated by Holofernes.[122] Similarly, Prudentius interprets the drowning of Pharaoh among the waves of the Red Sea as an *expugnatio vitiorum*, while also recommending the episode of the 'War of the Kings' as a valuable epitome of how men should defend their souls against sin.[123]

However, it should be remembered that allegory, that is to say a rhetorical and exegetical process whereby a text (or an image) expresses a hidden meaning which is

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[120] Notable representatives of the 'allegorical school', which 'assumes a patristic context for both poet and audience and thus advocates a panallegorical exegetical reading' for every aspect of the Old English biblical epics [HILL, 'Confronting *Germania Latina*', p. 71] are B.F. HUPPÉ, *Doctrine and Poetry: Augustine's Influence on Old English Poetry* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1959) and J.P. HERMANN, *Allegories of War: Language and Violence in Old English Poetry* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989).

[121] PRUDENTIUS, *Psychomachia*, ed. by B. Basile (Bologna: Carocci, 2007).

[122] *Psychomachia*, ll. 58-65.

[123] *Psychomachia*, ll. 650-664 (esp. l. 663) and ll. 50-55.

different from the literal one, made it possible for the Holy Scriptures to be read at multiple levels, and for medieval authors to choose whether to favour only one particular view or, as did the poets of *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Judith*, deliberately to leave their works open to different interpretations. It is therefore important to understand that one reading does not necessarily exclude the others, but that all of them can coexist within the same text, just as the same biblical passage can be read in many ways, all of which are quite valid in their own right.[124] As a consequence, more 'spiritual' interpretations of the events of the Old Testament books of *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Judith*, which remove their message from any relation to 'real' war, neither rule out nor undermine my own analysis of the biblical epics, which on the contrary highlights how the Old English poems offered valuable models for the understanding of both worldly and spiritual warfare. I take this opportunity to underline that, although great attention will be paid to the instances in which these two levels of interpretation overlap, the present study focuses primarily on models for actual war — models which, although still widely unresearched by current scholarship, were nevertheless extremely popular and influential during the Middle Ages.

An important, yet still unacknowledged, background

As noted above, it has so far been impossible to identify the non-scriptural sources of the interpretation of war evidenced by *Genesis* and *Exodus*. I would argue that the Old English rendering of the 'War of the Kings' and of the crossing of the Red Sea derives from a well-defined and well-known tradition which developed during late Antiquity and remained in use until the beginning of the eleventh century, and which saw these specific episodes from the books of Genesis and Exodus precisely as *the* key biblical

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[124] GODDEN, 'Biblical Literature', pp. 208-209.

exempla of the functioning of war.

For example, in the *Psychomachia,* composed around AD 405, Prudentius opens his vivid and violent account of the allegorical battle between personified virtues and vices for the possession of the human soul with a brief summary of the episode of the 'War of the Kings'.[125] In particular, Prudentius suggests that the events narrated in the fourteenth chapter of the Book of Genesis should be read as a revealing example of how every Christian man should always be vigilant and ready to rescue his own soul with the help of true faith, should it fall prey to sin — just as Abraham, trusting in God, fearlessly came to the rescue of Lot when abducted by the foreign kings:

> Haec ad figuram praenotata est linea
>
> quam nostra recto vita resculpat pede:
>
> vigilandum in armis pectorum fidelium
>
> omnemque nostri portionem corporis
>
> quae capta foedae serviat libidini
>
> domi coactis liberandam viribus, […].
>
> (*Psychomachia*, ll. 50-55)

[This picture has been drawn beforehand as a model for our life to trace out again with true measure: we must be watchful, equipped with the weapons of faithful hearts, and every part of our body which has fallen into the slavery of a vile passion must be set free by the forces gathered in our house.]

Even though in these lines Prudentius clearly produces an allegorical reading of the biblical text, referring to spiritual, rather than actual war, it is nevertheless particularly significant that he selects precisely the episode of the 'War of the Kings' as an example of war, despite the wide repertoire offered by the Old Testament. I certainly do not wish to suggest that the *Psychomachia* was the direct source of the reading of war in the Old English *Genesis,* since Prudentius' work was surely not the only text to interpret this episode in such a way, as we will discuss shortly. However, the fact that the

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[125] *Psychomachia*, ll. 15-58.

Psychomachia was well known in Anglo-Saxon England demonstrates how this late antique interpretation of the 'War of the Kings' might easily have reached England and spread throughout it during the early centuries of the Middle Ages.[126]

My hypothesis is confirmed by the fact that in a much later Anglo-Saxon liturgical text know as the Leofric Missal (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 579),[127] dating in all likelihood to the ninth century,[128] we find a *missa contra paganos* — a special intercessory service specifically aimed at securing divine support in a battle or campaign against foreign, pagan enemies — where God is asked to free His Christian people from their enemies 'sicut liberasti filios israhel de manibus aegiptiorum' [just as you delivered the children of Israel from the hands of the Egyptians].[129] It is therefore possible to see how, in ninth-century England, the crossing of the Red Sea was not only placed in a military context, but considered as a valuable and powerful example of God's power to deliver the Chosen People from the oppression of mighty enemies — the very same reading emerging from the Old English poem.

Moreover, the Leofric Missal belongs to a family of liturgical texts which has its origin in the high-status sacramentaries produced on the Continent during Charlemagne's reign. Two of these manuscripts, the Sacramentary of Gellone and the Sacramentary of Angoulême,[130] are particularly interesting from our point of view because they offer an interpretation of the episodes of the 'War of the Kings' and of the crossing of the Red Sea very similar to the one found in the Old English biblical epics.

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[126] According to the survey carried out by LAPIDGE [*Anglo-Saxon Library*, p. 331], Prudentius' *Psychomachia* is preserved in at least twelve English manuscripts, ranging in date from the late ninth century to the eleventh.

[127] N. ORCHARD (ed.), *The Leofric Missal*, 2 vols, Henry Bradshaw Society 113 and 114 (London: Henry Bradshaw Society, 2002).

[128] The Leofric Missal was assembled in three distinct phases: the earliest section of the manuscript, dating to the late ninth century, was subsequently expanded in Canterbury between 920 and 1000 and then in Exeter during the second half of the eleventh century.

[129] ORCHARD, *Missa contra paganos*, in *Leofric Missal*, II, pp. 341-342, 2042.

[130] A. DUMAS (ed.), *Liber sacramentorum Gellonensis*, CCSL 159-159A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1981); P. SAINT-ROCH (ed.), *Liber sacramentorum Engolismensis*, CCSL 159C (Turnhout: Brepols, 1987).

In particular, the *missa pro rege in die belli contra paganos* contained in the Sacramentary of Angoulême not only reports the very same invocation quoted above from the Leofric Missal,[131] but also refers to our episode from the Book of Genesis:

> […] ut sicut fuisti auxiliator Abraham seruo tuo super quattuor reges in uallem siluestri, ita praestare digneris auxilium famulo tuo *illo* cum omni exercitu suo contra gentes perfidas […]. (*Missa pro rege*, 2309, ll. 1-4)
>
> [… so that just as you were the helper of Abraham your servant over four kings in the wooded valley, likewise you may give help to your servant with all his army against the wicked people.]

On the other hand, the richly decorated liturgical manuscript from Gellone, dating to the last decade of the eighth century,[132] records a *missa in profectionem hostium eontibus in prohelium* which again alludes to the crossing of the Red Sea.[133] In this case, however, the usual invocation is expanded and, like the Old English *Exodus*, the pillar of cloud and fire is pinpointed as the visible proof of God's favour towards the Israelites during their journey out of the land of Egypt:

> Prębe domine exercitui tuo ęonti in tenebris claritatem, proficiendi augeas uoluntatem, et sicut israheli properanti | ex ęgypto securitatis prebuisti munimen, ita tuo predistinato eunti in prelio populo lucis auctore<m> adicias angelum, ut diem adque noctem qui nubis ignisque claritatis tuę columnę non deserat. (*Missa in profectionem hostium*, 2750, ll. 1-6)
>
> [Grant light, oh Lord, to your army advancing into darkness, so that you may increase the will of those who are marching forward, and just as you granted the protection of security to Israel hastening out of Egypt, thus place an angel, giver of light, over your Chosen People going into battle, so that he would not depart from (them) either by day or night thanks to the brightness of your column of clouds and fire.]

It is therefore possible to surmise that, just as the *Exodus*-poet, as we have seen, was influenced by late antique and early medieval interpretations of the Holy Scriptures, the

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[131] Saint-Roch (ed.), *Missa pro rege in die belli contra paganos*, in *Liber Engolismensis*, no. CI, pp. 358-359, 2037, l. 4.

[132] Dumas, *Liber Gellonensis*, p. 430.

[133] Dumas (ed.), M*issa in profectionem hostium eontibus in prohelium*, in *Liber Gellonensis*, no. 430, pp. 431-433.

authors of *Genesis* and *Exodus* derived their understanding of the episodes of the 'War of the Kings' and of the crossing of the Red Sea from a comparable tradition and, accordingly, transformed the events narrated in their poems into staple examples of how war is waged following Old Testament principles.

This tradition, like the biblical epics themselves, enjoyed great popularity throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, and specifically in the historical and cultural contexts considered in the following chapters. For example, the oldest section of the Leofric Missal, containing the *missa contra paganos* mentioned above, belonged in all likelihood to Plegmund, a prominent member of the 'intellectual community' gathered by King Alfred at his West-Saxon court and who later became archbishop of Canterbury.[134] After a few decades, the Leofric Missal came into the possession of Dunstan, one of the major promoters of the Benedictine Reform in England and mentor of none other than the renown homilist Ælfric.[135] In Ælfric's homily on the Maccabees,[136] Judas Maccabeus encourages his followers with these words:

> "Beoð gemyndige hu mihtiglice he ahredde
> ure fæderas íu . wið pharaó þone kyning
> on ðære readan sǽ on þære ðe he besanc to grunde;
> Uton clypian to heofonum *þæt* god ure helpe .
> and to-brýte þisne here . *þæt* þa hæðenan to-cnawon
> *þæt* nis nan oðer god þe israhel alyse ."
> (*PSM*, ll. 346-351)

["Be ye mindful how mightily He delivered our fathers formerly against Pharao the king in the Red Sea, wherein he sank to the bottom. Let us call to the heavens, that God may help us, and destroy this army, that the heathen may acknowledge that there is no other God that may deliver Israel."]

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[134] ORCHARD, *Leofric Missal*, I, p. 131.

[135] *Ibid.*, pp. 203-205.

[136] ÆLFRIC OF EYNSHAM, *Passio Sanctorum Machabeorum*, in *Ælfric's Lives of Saints: Being a Set of Sermons on Saints' Days Formerly Observed by the English Church*, ed. and trans. by W.W. Skeat, 2 vols., EETS, o.s. 76 and 82 (London: N. Trübner & Co., 1881-1900), II, no. XXV, pp. 66-121. *Passio Sanctorum Machabeorum* will henceforth be abbreviated as *PSM* when referring to direct quotations from the original text.

Around the turn of the millennium, Wulfstan of York included the celebration of *missae contra paganos* among the various initiatives to take place throughout England on the eve of Michaelmas in 1009.[137] Therefore, far from being unique in the cultural panorama of early medieval England, *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Judith*, with their effective presentation of the Old Testament ideology of war, participate in a wider tradition which not only runs throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, but which firmly connects these poetic works, and the solid ideology of war they present, to all the main historical contexts and literary works treated in the present study.

It's the end of the *comitatus* as we know it

In the final section of the present chapter I will briefly take into consideration how the Old Testament ideology of war highlighted by my analysis of *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Judith* relates to the 'Germanic' heroic code portrayed in some passages of the biblical epics themselves, but particularly in other Old English poems such as *Beowulf* or *The Battle of Maldon*.[138] The customary explanation offered by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholarship was that despite the great influence of Latin religious learning on early English society and culture, the Anglo-Saxons still favoured the 'heroic-epic' ethos of their Germanic ancestors when going into battle, while the powerful descriptions of the clashing of spears and shields, of bloodshed and brave deeds in *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Judith* prove beyond all doubt that the Anglo-Saxons, even when dealing with the Bible itself, could not resist their fondness for Germanic

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[137] The 'programme' of this initiative is carefully set out in a royal document known as the *Edict of Bath* [F. LIEBERMANN (ed.), *VII Æthelred: zu Bath*, in *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen: Herausgegeben im Auftrage der Savigny-Stiftung*, 4 vols, repr. 1916 edn. (Aalen: Scientia, 1960), I, pp. 260-262. Translation from *EHD*, no. 45, pp. 447-448].

[138] The so-called 'heroic code' transpires also from Old English prose texts, most notably from the Cynewulf and Cyneheard episode in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (s.a. 755).

heroism.[139]

It is, however, worth noting that daring actions, heroic deaths, unshakable loyalties and the like are by no means a monopoly of Germanic culture. Indeed, from Homer to Virgil, from the *chansons de geste* to Gerard Butler's *300*, a long heroic tradition has continued to expound values similar to those of the *comitatus* which, completely unrelated to any specific culture or historical reality, still continue to be rehearsed and appreciated even to the present day. At the same time, comparison with other cultures' heroic traditions accentuates the central role played by the epic genre in shaping the narration of wars and battles.

For example, the similarly 'inflated' rendering of the opening battle of the 'War of the Kings' in the Old English *Genesis* and in Claudius Marius Victorius' *Alethia* demonstrates how both works are deeply embedded in the conventions of the epic genre, whose standard aim is precisely to narrate the deeds of great men, especially in a military context.[140] A clear distinction should therefore be drawn between the epic genre and its conventions on the one hand and, on the other, the ideas about war which the texts written in this style are seeking to convey. Accordingly, I propose that the *comitatus*-ideal described in many early English texts should be regarded, first and foremost, as a literary convention rather than as a genuine expression of current ideas about war in Anglo-Saxon England.

The 'conventional' nature of the *comitatus*-ideal would also explain why references to it are found equally in a (probably) eighth-century poem such as *Beowulf*, as well as in *The Battle of Maldon*, composed shortly after 991. Whereas personal relationships

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[139] HILL, 'Confronting *Germania Latina*', pp. 75-76.

[140] Joyce HILL [*The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by M. Lapidge *et al*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), s. HEROIC POETRY, p. 236] defines heroic poetry as a 'tradition of narrative poetry in many ancient, medieval and modern cultures, which celebrates the mighty deeds of heroes, whose socially determined code of honour is tested in circumstances commonly involving physical risk'.

might have been at the core of the small bands of Angles, Saxons and Jutes who conquered England during the fifth century, Alfredian and late Anglo-Saxon armies were profoundly different, much larger and composed of individuals of mixed social and cultural backgrounds recruited from among the population of wide areas of land.[141] Therefore, even if local interests and solidarities were most likely still paramount, it is very difficult to imagine that tenth-century English warriors would have had, if only because of their augmented numbers, the same close relationship binding Beowulf with his dozen followers.

Nevertheless, if our fascination with the heroic code should not blind us to all other ideas about war in Anglo-Saxon England, likewise I do not wish to argue that the *comitatus* was only a meaningless, empty convention. Indeed, over the past twenty years or so, scholars have extensively and convincingly demonstrated that, although Old English poetic conventions were extremely long-lived and continued to be employed even when the customs and historical reality they originally described were long gone, archaic formulas and other stylistic elements could be used creatively to convey new meanings.[142] Furthermore, critics have emphasized that, if a given topos remained popular for a long period of time, the underlying values it conveyed were to some extent still meaningful to the text's audience.[143] For example, although Anglo-Saxon armies around the year 1000 were no longer small warbands tied by strong personal relationships, the *Battle of Maldon* still presents the armed force which met the Scandinavian raiders in 991 in these terms, possibly because the idea of endless loyalty to one's lord promoted by the *comitatus* would have had great resonance at a time when

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[141] On the recruitment of armies in later Anglo-Saxon England see LAVELLE, *Alfred's Wars*, pp. 47-106.

[142] See, for instance, E.M. TYLER, *Old English Poetics: the Aesthetics of the Familiar in Anglo-Saxon England* (York: York Medieval Press, 2006); 'Poetics of the Past: Making History with Old English Poetry', in *Narrative and History in the Early Medieval West*, ed. by E.M. Tyler and R. Balzaretti, SEM 16 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), pp. 225-250.

[143] For example, O' BRIEN O' KEEFFE, 'Heroic Values'.

many Anglo-Saxon warriors preferred to join the Vikings instead of fighting against them.[144]

It is, however, important to underline that the values implicitly promoted by the manifold expressions of the literary convention of the *comitatus* acted on a completely different level with respect to the ideology presented by *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Judith*. In fact, while the heroic ideal provided a sort of 'code of behaviour' which defined the proper conduct in war and battle — what should be considered brave and what instead brought eternal shame — the ideology emerging from the biblical epics answered more complex questions such as why wars happened, what non-material actions could prevent defeat and bring about victory, as well as providing ideological means to legitimize the act of killing. In its turn, this distinction allows us to go beyond the infamous dichotomy between heroic values and Christian ethics, so popular in late twentieth-century scholarship,[145] and to broaden our perspective as far as the sources of our knowledge of ideas and attitudes towards war in early medieval England are concerned.

Conclusions

This chapter has investigated the influence of the Old Testament ideology of war on early Christian thinking and the reception of this ideology in Anglo-Saxon England. The detailed analysis of the biblical poems *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Judith* — and of their respective sources — has revealed that the Old Testament ideology of war incorporated in and promoted by the Old English epics was known, popular and influential in England as early as the eighth century, and continued to permeate Anglo-Saxon culture

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[144] See below, Ch. 3.

[145] See, among others, J.E. CROSS, 'Oswald and Byrhtnoth: A Christian Saint and a Hero who is Christian', *English Studies* 46 (1965): 93-109; M.D. CHERNISS, *Ingeld and Christ: Heroic Concepts and Values in Old English Christian Poetry* (The Hague: Mouton, 1972); O' BRIEN O' KEEFFE, 'Heroic Values'.

at least until the early eleventh century. As a consequence, despite the fact that the Old Testament ideology of war is not as conspicuous in surviving sources as is, for example, the *comitatus*-ideal, it should nevertheless be considered as a veritable — albeit still unrecognised — ideological backdrop to ideas about war throughout the Anglo-Saxon period.

The following chapters will demonstrate even further how the Old Testament offered an extremely flexible, and therefore invaluable, framework which could satisfactorily make sense of even the toughest debacles and military crises such as the one experienced by the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah, or those of Bethulia; which could suggest numerous ways out of such crises even when the odds and sheer numbers were against any hope of success; and which could also inform both lay and religious leaders of their duties to guide their own people to both military victory and moral salvation just as Abraham, Moses and Judith did. These are issues which would surely have been foremost in Alfred's mind, when he found himself faced with saving his kingdom from the terror of the Vikings, as shall be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

Inception:

Alfredian literature and the first Viking Age

The Vikings made their appearance in Anglo-Saxon England in June 793, when 'earmlice heðenra manna hergung adiligode Godes cyrican in Lindisfarena þurh reaflac 7 man sleht' [the raiding of heathen men miserably devastated God's church in Lindisfarne by looting and slaughter].[1] Although the attack on the renowned Northumbrian monastery had almost certainly been heralded by other sporadic incursions,[2] the people of the time immediately identified this unprecedented and tragic event as the starting point of the Scandinavian invasions.[3] These early raids, however, did not constitute a serious threat either to the security of the population of England, or to the four surviving Anglo-Saxon kingdoms (Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia and Wessex) until at least 865, when a 'mycel hæðen here' [great pagan army][4] landed on the East Anglian coast.

Despite their name, however, Viking *hergas* were not actual armies, but were instead temporary and extremely unstable coalitions of smaller and independent warbands under the command of a number of different leaders.[5] As a consequence, each of these warrior-groups could and did separate at will from the main body of the *here* to storm

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[1] *ASC*, s.a. 793. This piece of information is not recorded in MS A, but in MS E [S. Irvine (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. MS E: a Semi-Diplomatic Edition with Introduction and Indices*, The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: a Collaborative Edition 7 (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004)]. Useful summaries of Viking activity in England during the first Viking Age are provided by Keynes, 'The Vikings in England', pp. 50-63 and P. Wormald, 'The Ninth Century', in *The Anglo-Saxons*, ed. by J. Campbell, E. John and P. Wormald (London: Penguin Books, 1991), pp. 132-157.

[2] *ASC*, s.a. 787.

[3] See, for example, Alcuin's letter to King Ethelred of Northumbria concerning the sack of Lindisfarne [Dümmler, *Epistolae Karolini aevi*, no. 16].

[4] *ASC*, s.a. 866.

[5] Keynes, 'The Vikings in England', p. 51.

multiple objectives simultaneously, making it very difficult for the defenders to organise suitable countermeasures. For this reason — and for many others — the impact of the Vikings on Anglo-Saxon England was devastating. In less than ten years, the 'Great Army' collected an almost countless number of successes and completely subjugated the whole of Northumbria, East Anglia and Mercia, where many of the raiders also began to settle permanently.

The only Anglo-Saxon kingdom to offer strong resistance against the Scandinavian hordes was Wessex. The first major offensive against south-western England was launched at the beginning of 871, led — among others — by a Viking warlord named Guthrum.[6] In the same year, Alfred succeeded his last surviving brother to the West-Saxon throne. The young king immediately gave a good account of both his political and military skills by striking a temporary peace agreement with the Viking *here* on the payment of a substantial sum of money. After only a few years, however, Guthrum resumed his activity against Wessex, and this time he was stopped far short of succeeding. Caught off guard by a surprise attack on his residence at Chippenham in 878, Alfred was forced to flee Wessex's heartlands and take refuge in the Somerset marshes, where he nevertheless managed to muster what remained of his army and win an overwhelming victory against Guthrum at the battle of Edington.

Following such a crushing defeat, Guthrum was forced to make peace with Alfred, and withdrew from Wessex forever to settle in East Anglia, where he became king with Alfred's blessing. The terms of the agreement between Guthrum and the West-Saxon king are recorded in an important document known as the *Alfred-Guthrum Treaty* where, among other things, a formal subdivision is established between the areas of England under the control of the Vikings and those 'belonging' to the crown of Wessex.[7] Even

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[6] *Ibid.*, p. 55.
[7] *EHD*, no. 34, pp. 416-417.

though the boundaries set out in the *Treaty* have little to do with our modern notion of what constitutes borders between two states,[8] at the end of the ninth century England was *de facto* cut in two. To the North, the so-called Danelaw stretched from Northumbria to East Anglia and northern Mercia. To the South, Alfred took advantage of the power vacuum left by the Scandinavian invasions by placing the whole of southern England under his rule, including southern Mercia and London, which he freed from the Vikings in 886 and annexed to his kingdom.

In the years following the success against Guthrum, Alfred was able to exploit the temporary deferment of the Viking threat fully to usher in a number of initiatives aimed at protecting his newly created *Engla lond* from further Scandinavian attacks. First of all, in order to prevent Viking warbands from penetrating into the heartlands of Wessex, Alfred had a network of stone fortifications built throughout his domain.[9] He also ensured that his *burhs* would be manned, repaired and preserved through an *ad hoc* administrative act known as the *Burghal Hidage*.[10] Secondly, Alfred undertook a major reorganization of English armed forces. He created a regular army ingeniously organized so that half of the men suitable for military service formed a movable force which could be employed on campaign wherever necessary, while the rest remained at home defending people and land from the prospective incursions of other Viking warbands.[11]

The measures devised by Alfred were soon put to the test and proved extremely

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[8] P. KERSHAW, 'The Alfred-Guthrum Treaty: Scripting Accommodation and Interaction in Viking-Age England', in *Cultures in Contact: Scandinavian Settlement in England in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries*, ed. by D.M. Hadley and J.D. Richards, SEM 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 43-59, especially at 45-46.

[9] Concerning the system of fortifications devised by Alfred after the end of the hostilities with Guthrum, see the volume edited by D. HILL and A.R. RUMBLE, *The Defence of Wessex: the Burghal Hidage and Anglo-Saxon Fortifications* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996).

[10] A.R. RUMBLE (ed. and trans.), 'An Edition and Translation of the Burghal Hidage, Together with Recension C of the Tribal Hidage', in *The Defence of Wessex*, pp. 14-35.

[11] *ASC*, s.a. 893. On the organization of Alfred's army see HALSALL, *Warfare and Society*, pp. 104-105.

effective. When a new Scandinavian *here* eventually moved to England in 892 after overrunning the Continent for several years, it could not stream into Wessex but was quickly stopped and driven back by Alfred's forces. This unsuccessful invasion of Wessex, followed shortly afterwards by Alfred's own death in 899, marks the end of what scholars usually define as the first Viking Age. As briefly mentioned above, the coming of the Vikings in the ninth century had detrimental effects (to say the least) on the political, cultural and religious life of most of Anglo-Saxon England.[12] Nonetheless, Alfred not only laid the foundations of a unified English kingdom, which was to be realised by his successors in the following century, but also ushered in a veritable golden age of Anglo-Saxon literature through his programme for the revival of learning.

The 'Alfredian canon', its constituents and characteristics are without doubt one of the most hotly debated subjects in recent Anglo-Saxon literary scholarship, overshadowed only by the heated debate about Alfred's authorship.[13] Since a detailed examination of these issues is not relevant to the present discussion, it suffices to note that, despite their fundamental differences, most commentators seem nevertheless to concur on a number of points. Firstly, the texts whose composition can be securely ascribed either to Alfred himself or to his court can be grouped into translations and adaptations of 'old' Latin works, and new creations. The former comprise the vernacular renderings of Gregory the Great's *Regula pastoralis* and *Dialogi*, of Augustine's *Soliloquia*, of Boethius' *De consolatione philosophiae*, of Orosius' *Historiarum adversus paganos*, and of the first fifty Psalms. Instead, the latter include the earliest

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[12] Concerning the consequences of the ninth-century Scandinavian raids on the English Church, especially in comparison with the second Viking Age, see below, Ch. 3, pp. 185-186.

[13] The dispute about the authorship of the 'Alfredian' texts, which is far too complex to be rehearsed in full here, has its primary initiator in Malcolm GODDEN, who first questioned the king's participation in the translation programme which carries his name in the ground-breaking article 'Did King Alfred Write Anything?', *Medium Ævum* 76.1 (2007): 1-23. Leader of the opposing side, defending Alfred and his canon, is Janet BATELY, whose latest contribution to the debate is 'Did King Alfred Actually Translate Anything? The Integrity of the Alfredian Canon Revisited', *Medium Ævum* 78.2 (2009): 189-215.

recension of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Asser's *Vita Alfredi* and a royal law-code.[14]

Secondly, other prose works were composed in ninth or early tenth-century England independently from, but possibly in response to, Alfred's renaissance, most notably the *Old English Bede* and the *Old English Martyrology*.[15] Thirdly, regardless of whether Alfred was the actual author of at least some of the vernacular translations listed above, all the constituents of the 'Alfredian canon', as well as the king's programme for the revival of literature and learning as a whole, were the product not of a single man but of a wider 'intellectual community' which revolved around the West-Saxon court and which was comprised of lay and, especially, religious scholars coming from different countries, speaking various languages and with a wide-ranging cultural background.

Lastly, although it is extremely difficult to evaluate the extent to which the Alfredian literary production was the result of a carefully designed plan,[16] all the surviving texts display common preoccupations, interests and aims which, conversely, do not characterize other ninth-century works. Accordingly, this suggests that the Alfredian texts all participated in the same ongoing discourse if not in a shared 'masterminded' design.

Given the exceptionally difficult circumstances outlined above, it should not be surprising to discover that the Vikings, and war in more general terms, are two of the

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[14] A classic survey of Alfredian literature is offered by D. WHITELOCK in 'The Prose of Alfred's Reign', in *Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature*, ed. by E.G. Stanley (London: Nelson, 1966), pp. 67-103. More recent, albeit not as comprehensive reappraisals of the literary production of ninth-century England include S.B. GREENFIELD and D.G. CALDER, *A New Critical History of Old English Literature* (New York; London: New York University Press, 1986), Ch. 2 ('The Alfredian Translations and Related Ninth-Century Texts'), pp. 38-67 and S. IRVINE, 'Religious Context: Pre-Benedictine Reform Period', in *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. by P. Pulsiano and E. Treharne (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 135-150.

[15] On the dating of the *Old English Bede*, and its relationship with Alfred's programme, see below pp. 121-124. On the *Old English Martyrology* see the new edition by C. RAUER (ed. and trans.), *The Old English Martyrology: Edition, Translation and Commentary*, Anglo-Saxon Texts 10 (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2013).

[16] See, *inter alios*, A.J. FRANTZEN, 'The Form and Function of the Preface in the Poetry and Prose of Alfred's Reign', in *Alfred the Great: Papers From the Eleventh-Centenary Conferences*, ed. by T. Reuter (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 121-136 at 136.

most frequently recurring issues in the Alfredian literary production. Indeed, as remarked by many commentators, 'new books' such as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* almost obsessively record the unremitting attacks of the Scandinavian raiders, while Alfred's translation programme also tends to centre upon 'old books' which somehow mirror the contemporary situation by describing the sufferings of a righteous, Christian party at the hands of evil, pagan and barbarian opponents. Moreover, the Viking invasions might well be the ultimate raison d'être of the Alfredian renaissance since, as clearly emerges from the well-known prose preface to Gregory the Great's *Regula pastoralis*, the raiders were perceived as a retribution inflicted by God on the English people for their cultural and moral decline:

> Forðam ic ðe bebeode ðæt ðu doo swa ic gelife ðæt ðu wille, ðæt ðu ðe þissa woruldðinga to þæm geæmettige swa ðu oftost mæge, ðæt ðu ðone wisdom þe ðe God sealde ðær ðær ðu hine befæstan mæge, befæste. Geðene hwelc witu us þa becomon for ðisse worulde, þa þa we hit nohwæðer ne selfe ne lufedon ne eac oðrum monnum ne lifdon [...].[17]
>
> [Therefore I beseech you to do as I believe you are willing to do: as often as you can, free yourself from worldly affairs so that you may apply that wisdom which God gave you wherever you can. Remember what punishment befell us in this world when we ourselves did not cherish learning nor transmit it to other men.]

Even though these observations are undoubtedly correct, I propose to consider the recurring preoccupation with war and the Vikings emerging from the Alfredian literary production in a wider perspective, and in particular as evidence of something more — that is to say the inception of an absolutely unprecedented, albeit not thoroughly self-conscious, reflection on the issue of war. As outlined in the Introduction, such reflection was aimed, in the first place, at identifying suitable models which could explain and make sense of contemporary events; secondly, at pinpointing relevant precedents which

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[17] H. SWEET (ed.), *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, 2 vols., EETS, o.s. 45 and 50 (London: N. Trübner & Co., 1871-1872), I, Cotton MSS, p. 4, ll. 1-6. Translation by KEYNES and LAPIDGE, *Alfred the Great*, p. 125.

could suggest how the Vikings could be dealt with and, eventually, overcome; thirdly, at developing new linguistic and rhetorical means to recount something as unheard of as the Scandinavian invasions; and, lastly, at articulating internal dissent in a cultural context where the assertion of the unity of the *Engla lond*, with King Alfred's at its head, was paramount.

Since it is impossible to subject all of the texts in the Alfredian canon — let alone other ninth-century works — to detailed scrutiny in the scope of this thesis, I shall confine myself to a number of case studies. In particular, in the first part of this chapter, I will take into consideration three adaptations of 'old books', namely the *Old English Orosius*, the *Old English Prose Psalms* and the *Old English Bede*. By introducing and contrasting the very different models offered by Orosius, on the one hand, and by the Old Testament, on the other, I will highlight how Alfred and his associates were presented with a variety of frameworks through which war could be understood, each characterized by strengths and weaknesses. Then, through the analysis of the *Old English Bede*, believed to be produced outside the West-Saxon court, I will show how the interest in the question of war displayed by the Alfredian texts is unique in the cultural panorama of ninth-century England. In the final section of the present chapter I will instead focus on two 'new books', namely the so-called 'Common Stock' of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Asser's *Vita Alfredi*, in order to investigate how contemporary wars were recorded and described in two closely connected, yet very different texts.

The *Old English Orosius*

One of the most distinctive features of the vernacular prose production of the

Alfredian period is that the extant corpus is chiefly constituted by translations and adaptations of 'old books', while even those texts which, like the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, were composed *ex novo* at the time are also very much concerned with the past and rely heavily on older historical and literary works. In turn, this fascination with the past, which dominates Old English prose in the second half of the ninth century, raises the question of what models these texts 'nidbeðyrfesta […] eallum monnum to witanne' [most necessary for all men to know][18] might have offered, what lessons they might have taught the English people, deprived of both *wela* [wealth] and *wisdom* [knowledge/wisdom].[19]

Yet, scholars have seldom focussed on the representation of the past in early West-Saxon prose,[20] their attention being instead mainly devoted to the figure of Alfred, in order to explore the reasons which could have prompted the king to select a given Latin text to be translated, to identify the practical advice and moral precepts Alfred drew from such work both as a man and as a king, and to discuss how the ensuing vernacular translations mirror the intents and preoccupations of the royal mind. However, the recent controversy about Alfred's direct involvement in the drafting of those texts traditionally attributed to him[21] prompts us to broaden our perspective and consider the looser Alfredian translations from the point of view of their wider audience — namely the West-Saxon court, where these works probably originated from the collaboration between a number of intellectuals operating under Alfred's aegis, and the kingdom's lay

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[18] *King Alfred's Pastoral Care*, I, p. 6, l. 7.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 4, l. 17.

[20] Notable exceptions are the recent publications by M. GODDEN, 'The Anglo-Saxons and the Goths: Rewriting the Sack of Rome', *Anglo-Saxon England* 31 (2002): 47-68 and *The Translations of Alfred and His Circle, and the Misappropriation of the Past*, H.M. Chadwick Memorial Lectures 14 (Cambridge: Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, 2003). See also S. IRVINE, 'Wrestling with Hercules: King Alfred and the Classical Past', in *Court Culture in the Early Middle Ages: the Proceedings of the First Alcuin Conference*, ed. by C. Cubitt, SEM 3 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), pp. 171-188.

[21] See above, pp. 87-88.

and ecclesiastical elite, that is to say the most likely target of the royal cultural programme.[22]

As one of the major translations of Alfred's programme, the *Old English Orosius*[23] represents a fundamental source bearing witness to the process through which late antique models were examined and evaluated in order to elaborate new and coherent ideas about war. Nevertheless, this text has so far tended to attract little scholarly interest when compared to the other constituents of the Alfredian canon, even though its Latin source, that is to say Orosius' *Historiarum adversus paganos libri septem*,[24] was not only the primary source of information about ancient history in the early Middle Ages,[25] but also had a pivotal role in shaping European culture and historiography from the Carolingian renaissance to the fifteenth century.[26] As a consequence, the importance of the vernacular adaptation of the *Historiae* should not be dismissed by Anglo-Saxon scholarship, nor its potential to open new perspectives on the influence of models from the past on the perception and representation of war in early medieval England.

In particular, recent commentators have failed to address specifically and fully the

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[22] The system through which manuscripts of the Alfredian translations were circulated from the West-Saxon court to the major ecclesiastical and monastic centres of southern England can be glimpsed in the prose preface to the translation of Gregory the Great's *Regula pastoralis* (*King Alfred's Pastoral Care*, pp. 2-9), together with the importance for the laity to benefit equally from the lessons taught by 'old books'.

[23] J. BATELY, *The Old English Orosius*, EETS, s.s. 6 (London: Oxford University Press, 1980). All quotations and textual references from the Old English text (hereafter indicated through the abbreviation *OE Or.*, followed by book and chapter number) are from this edition.

[24] OROSIUS, *Historiarum adversus paganos libri septem*, ed. by A. Lippold, 2 vols (Milano: A. Modadori, 1976). Further quotations and textual references (hereafter marked as *H.* and followed by the number of book, chapter and sentence) are from this edition.

[25] According to the survey carried out by Lars B. MORTENSEN ['The Diffusion of Roman Histories in the Middle Ages. A List of Orosius, Eutropius, Paulus Diaconus and Landolfus Sagax Manuscripts', *Filologia Mediolatina* 6/7 (1999-2000): 101-200], there are twelve extant manuscripts of Orosius' *Historiae* dating before 800 and as many as nineteen dating to the ninth century. The other major Latin history of the Roman Empire, the *Historia Romana* by Eutropius (continued and expanded by Paulus Diaconus in the sixth century), numbers only six manuscripts before 900. As far as Anglo-Saxon England is concerned, Michael Lapidge [*Anglo-Saxon Library*, p. 323] lists only one surviving undoubtedly English manuscript containing fragments of the *Historiae* dating to the second half of the eighth century (Düsseldorf, Nordrhein-Westfälisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Z II/I), while Aldhelm, Bede and Alcuin also appear to be acquainted with Orosius' work.

[26] For a list of studies surveying the use of Orosius and other classical historians at different times throughout the Middle Ages, see MORTENSEN, 'The Diffusion of Roman Histories', pp. 101-102, nt. 1.

question of how the events described in the *Historiae*, as well as the work's overall argument, might have been understood in the context of the Viking invasions, when the Anglo-Saxons, just like fifth-century Romans, were heavily oppressed by barbarian enemies. Therefore, in the following pages I intend to redress this imbalance and consider how war in general as well as specific historical engagements are represented in the vernacular paraphrase of the *Historiae* in order to discuss the many and often contradictory models offered by the *Old English Orosius* to its late ninth-century audience.[27]

Specifically, after a concise presentation of Orosius' original Latin work and its Old English adaptation, I will firstly identify at least some of what the *Historiae* could have taught to their ninth-century English audience concerning war. Then, through a close reading of selected passages from the Old English text, I will show how the translator modified, expanded and complemented his source in order to develop his own independent reflection on war. Lastly, I will concentrate on the episode of the sack of Rome in 410, which constitutes a focal point in both Latin and Old English texts alike, and examine the inherent problems which the translator's rendering of this specific event could have raised at the time when the *Historiae* were translated into the vernacular. My aim is to demonstrate how, in the historical context of Alfredian England, Orosius' work was in fact deeply problematic, even though it provided many examples through which war could be understood.

In August 410, an army of Goths led by Alaric entered the city of Rome and ravaged it for three days. Although the sack had very limited consequences on both the political

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[27] Since the aim of the present analysis is to consider the models offered by the *Historiae* to its ninth-century audience concerning war, my investigation will be limited to the Anglo-Saxon author's rendering of Orosius' original Latin work and will exclude the interpolated ninth-century account of the travels of Ohthere and Wulfstan (*OE Or.*, I.i), thoroughly examined by Irmeli VALTONEN in *The North in the Old English Orosius: a Geographical Narrative in Context*, Mémoires de la Société Néophilologique de Helsinki 73 (Helsinki: Société Néophilologique, 2008).

stability of the Empire and the city itself, news of the event profoundly shook the entire Roman world, as many saw the Gothic attack on the Eternal City as a punishment inflicted by the pagan gods on those who had abandoned ancient customs in favour of the new Christian religion. These views promptly resulted in a widespread revival of classical paganism, especially among members of the senatorial class. In order to combat the restoration of pagan beliefs and practices, Augustine of Hippo decided to undertake the compilation of the *De civitate Dei contra paganos*, a complex and intellectually demanding apology of Christianity as opposed to Roman paganism.

After a few years, when half of the twenty-two volumes of the *De civitate Dei* had been completed, Augustine realized that his *oeuvre* needed to be complemented by a more easily accessible work, aimed at a wider, less educated and lay audience. He entrusted this new literary undertaking to a Spanish cleric under the name of Paulus Orosius, who composed the *Historiarum adversus paganos libri septem*, a history of the world from the Creation to AD 418. Orosius' primary objective was to refute the assumption that conversion to Christianity was the cause of many misfortunes (including the sack of Rome), and he pursued his aim by describing in the greatest detail the countless pestilences, horrors and, above all, wars of ancient times which, in his opinion, were far worse than those of the Christian era. Although Augustine reserved a rather tepid welcome for the work of his pupil,[28] the *Historiae* soon became one of the most popular and influential books of the Middle Ages,[29] mainly because they constituted a vast repertoire of unfamiliar and exotic information on history and geography, as well as a detailed account of events in Antiquity from a Christian perspective.[30]

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[28] OROSIUS, *Historiarum*, I, pp. xl-xliii.
[29] See MORTENSEN, 'The Diffusion of Roman Histories'.
[30] OROSIUS, *Historiarum*, I, pp. xliii-xlvii.

Anglo-Saxon culture was likewise not immune to this fascination with Orosius' work and, during the last quarter of the ninth century,[31] the *Historiae* were translated, or rather paraphrased, into Old English. Following an approach very similar to the one characterizing the vernacular translations of Boethius' *De consolatione philosophiae* and Augustine's *Soliloquia*, the author of the *Old English Orosius* did not produce a word-for-word rendering of the Latin text, but rather, heavily modified his source by significantly abridging the seven books of the *Historiae*, by adding explanations and comments, and by rewriting various passages, while at the same time showing a certain fidelity to both the general layout and the key argument of Orosius' work.[32]

After completion, the *Old English Orosius* reached a presumably rather limited audience — a group of people who, like most of the population of England, lived surrounded by war, continuously under attack by Scandinavian raiders. Given these tragic circumstances, and the prominent place occupied by war in the *Historiae*, it is not impossible to suppose that the readers (and hearers) of the *Old English Orosius* would have been both willing and able to learn something about this subject from one of the monuments of late antique literature, now that it had been made available in the vernacular.

First of all, it should be noted that Orosius' *Historiae* appear as a veritable catalogue of armed conflicts, an endless series of raids, sieges and battles marking the rise and fall of the great characters of the past and of the four empires which, according to the early Christian tradition, put the whole world under their rule one after the other. Thus, for an Anglo-Saxon reader interested in the question of war, Orosius' *Historiae* constituted,

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[31] According to Janet BATELY [*Old English Orosius*, pp. lxxxvi-xciii], the composition of the *Old English Orosius* can be dated with some certainty between 889 (since the translator makes a passing reference to the Hungarians, who first appeared at the western borders of Continental Europe only in that year) and 899 (the date of Alfred's death).

[32] For a detailed description of the translator's treatment of Orosius' Latin text, see *inter alios*, BATELY, *Old English Orosius*, pp. xciii-c.

first and foremost, a huge repertoire of examples of how and why people fought in the past, a collection of 'case studies' illustrating the causes, characteristics and effects of different types of conflict, from civil wars to wars of conquest, from *guerrilla* activity to barbarian invasions.

Moreover, the *Historiae* offered a series of models of how to talk and write about war. It has long been noted that early medieval sources in general, and Old English literary production in particular, seldom linger on the details of battles, campaigns and military strategy.[33] However, Orosius' translator often retains the many descriptions of armed conflicts and deeds of arms found in the Latin text, showing particular interest in the stratagems through which warriors and commanders of the past managed to defeat their opponents.[34] For example, the lengthy account of the conquest of Greece by Philip of Macedonia is reported thoroughly in the Old English text,[35] including the following episode concerning how Philip was able to gain victory against the Scythians:

> […] 7 siþþan for an Sciþþie mid Alexandre his suna, […] . Ac hie þa landleode wið þæt gewarnedon 7 him mid firde angean foran. Þa þæt þa Philippus geacsade, þa sende he æfter maran fultume to ðæm þe þa burg ymbseten hæfdon 7 mid ealle mægene an hie for. Þeh þe Sciþþie hæfdon maran monmenie 7 self hwætran wæron, hie þeh Philippus besirede mid his lotwrencum, mid [þæm] þæt he his heres þriddan dæl gehydde 7 him self mid wæs, 7 þæm twam dælum bebead, swa hie feohtan angunnen, þæt hie wið his flugen, þæt he siþþan mid þæm ðriddan dæle hie beswican mehte, þonne hie tofarene wæron. Þær wearð Sciþþia xx m ofslagen 7 gefangen wifmonna 7 wæpnedmonna, 7 þær wæs xx m horsa gefangen, þeh hie ðær nan licgende feoh ne metten, swa hie ær bewuna wæron þonne hie wælstowe geweald ahton. (*OE Or.*, III.7)

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[33] See, for example, HALSALL, *Warfare and Society*, pp. 177-180.

[34] BATELY, *Old English Orosius*, p. xcix; W.A. KRETZSCHMAR, 'Adaptation and *Anweald* in the *Old English Orosius*', *Anglo-Saxon England* 16 (1987): 127-145 at 134-135.

[35] See *H.*, III.12-14 and *OE Or.*, III.7.

[… and afterwards he marched with his son Alexander into Scythia, … . Although the Scythians had a greater multitude of people and were themselves braver, Philip nevertheless entrapped them by his wiles, when he hid the third part of his army — he himself was with (them) — and ordered the two (remaining) parts to flee towards him as soon as they began to fight, so that he might then overcome them with the third part, when they had scattered. Twenty thousand Scythians were slain there, and women and men were taken, and twenty thousand horses were taken there, although they did not discover any hoard there, as they were accustomed to before when they gained possession of the place of slaughter.]

In 1987, William A. Kretzschmar argued that this attention to military strategy on the part of the medieval translator derived from the fact that a good number of the *manoeuvres* and *ruses de guerre* described in the *Historiae* could have been put into practice by Anglo-Saxon warriors, who could then have used Orosius' paraphrase as a sort of tactical manual when planning how to face their enemies on the battlefield.[36] Nevertheless, recent studies in early medieval warfare strongly discourage this interpretation, because the lack of continuity between the military organisation and practice of war of late Antiquity and those of the Alfredian period would have made most of these strategies either impossible or useless.[37]

Instead, I would suggest that this distinctive stylistic feature of the *Old English Orosius* participates in a wider process of appropriation by medieval authors of classical vocabulary, themes and conventions in the description of wars and battles, which were themselves mostly absent from vernacular tradition and language. In the passage quoted above, the translator introduces one of the most popular topoi of Latin 'war literature', namely the subdivision of an army into three parts in order to overcome a superior opponent.[38] At the same time, however, the prose of these lines is characterized by a

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[36] KRETZSCHMAR, 'Adaptation and *Anweald*', p. 135.

[37] See, for example, ABELS and MORILLO, 'A Lying Legacy?'.

[38] It should be pointed out that the account of how Philip divided his army into three parts is absent from the *Historiae* and has therefore to be regarded as an addition of the Anglo-Saxon translator, who probably derived such detail from Frontius' *Stratagemata* [J. BATELY, 'The Classical Additions in the *Old English Orosius*', in *England Before the Conquest*, pp. 237-251 at 244-245]. In fact, the author of the *Old English Orosius* appears to be unusually fond of this particular tactic, which he mentions in two further passages, but always as an expansion of the Latin text: *OE Or.*, I.12 (*H.*, I.19.viii), an addition possibly prompted by Justinus [BATELY, *Old English Orosius*, p. 224, nt. 33/15-19] and *OE Or.*, II.4 (*H.*, II.7.ii), where the translator elaborates on a statement found in Orosius [*ibid.*, p. 236, nt.

high degree of verbal repetition, a chief component of Old English poetic style, and the episode concludes with the phrase *wælstōwe geweald āgan* [to have possession of the place of slaughter], a key formula which recurs frequently in battle narrations throughout Old English literature.[39] In this way, by combining Latin models with expressions and rhetorical devices derived from his own vernacular linguistic and literary background, the Alfredian translator is able to create a new and specifically Anglo-Saxon way of talking about war.

Meanwhile, the fact that in the *Historiae* the countless battles and campaigns of ancient times were narrated more or less chronologically within the framework of a history of the world would have allowed and prompted both the medieval translator and his public to see war not merely as a series of violent engagements, but as a complex phenomenon, whose origins, meaning and central role within the progress of human history required further meditation. As a matter of fact, the Anglo-Saxon author seems to be particularly interested in exploring and discussing the origin of war, which he traces back to the Fall of Man. As this theme is virtually absent from the *Historiae*, the translator repeatedly modifies and expands his Latin source in order to present his views on the matter, and skilfully exploits many of the historical events narrated by Orosius to support his argument. We could consider, as an example among many, the vernacular rendering of the opening lines of the second book of the *Historiae*, where Orosius explains how famines are the direct result of sin:

44/32-3].

[39] According to the *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus* [ed. by A. DIPAOLO HEALEY, <http://ets.umdl.umich.edu/o/oec>, 1997 - (accessed 3 November 2012)], the formula *wælstōwe geweald āgan* occurs forty-two times in the Old English corpus, thirty-six of which refer to the Danish invaders and to the battles fought (and often lost) by the English against them: *GenA,B* 2003; *Be.o* 2041, 2982; *Mald* 9; *Or3* 7.64.23; *ChronA* (Bately) 904.12, 993.1, 1001.1, 1001.19; *ChronF* (Baker) 833.1, 840.1, 999.3, 1010.1, 1025.1; *ChronC* (O'Brien O'Keeffe) 833.1, 837.3, 841.1, 861.3, 872.5, 872.20, 872.28, 905.1.18, 982.8, 999.1, 1010.8, 1066.46; *ChronD* (Cubbin) 833.1, 837.1, 840.1, 860.4, 871.31, 905.21, 1066.29, 1066.49; *ChronE* (Irvine) 833.1, 837.3, 840.1, 860.2, 871.4, 871.26, 999.5, 1010.8 — exceptions being *GenA,B* 2003; *Beo* 2041, 2982; *Or3* 7.64.23; *ChronC* (O'Brien O'Keeffe) 982.8; *ChronD* (Cubbin) 1066.49.

Neminem iam esse hominum arbitror, quem latere possit, quia hominem in hoc mundo Deus fecerit. Unde etiam peccante homine mundus arguitur ac propter nostram intemperatiam conprimendam terra haec, in qua vivimus, defectu ceterorum animalium et sterilitate suorum fructuum castigatur. (*H.*, II.1.i)

[I believe that there is no man now who is unaware of the fact that God made mankind in this world. Hence, whenever man sins, the world also becomes subject to censure and, owing to our failure to control our passions, this earth in which we live is punished by the lack of other animals and by sterility of its fruits.]

On the other hand, the Old English version is much more specific, focussing in particular on the sin of Adam and how all his descendants were subsequently punished for it through war:

[…] God þone ærestan monn ryhtne 7 godne gesceop, 7 eal monncynn mid him. Ond for þon þe he þæt god forlet þe him geseald wæs 7 wyrse geceas, hit God siþþan longsumlice wrecende wæs, ærest on him selfum 7 siþþan on his bearnum gind ealne þisne middangeard mid monigfealdum brocum 7 gewinnum, […]. (*OE Or.*, II.1)

[… God created the first man just and good, and all mankind with him. And because he forsook the good, which had been given to him, and chose the worse, God avenged it for a long time afterwards, first on (Adam) himself and afterwards on his children, with manifold miseries and wars throughout all this world …]

Resting on this notion that war was one of the outcomes of original sin, the translator is further able to develop a wider and independent reflection on the causes and the very nature of war — a nature which, according to the author of the *Old English Orosius*, reaches its turning point with the birth of Christ. As the translator explains, if war was a punishment inflicted by God on all mankind following the sin of Adam, Christ's sacrifice on the Cross atones for that sin, therefore overcoming war itself:

Nu ic hæbbe gesæd, cwæð Orosius, from frymþe þisses middangeard[es] hu eall moncyn angeald þæs ærestan monnes synna mid miclum teonum 7 witum. Nu ic wille eac forþ gesecgan hwelc mildsung 7 hwelc geþwærnes siþþan wæs siþþan [se] cristendom wæs, gelicost þæm þe monna heortan

awende wurden, for þon þe þa ærran þing agoldene wæron. (*OE Or.*, V.15)

["Now", said Orosius, "I have told how, from the beginning of this world, all mankind paid for the sin of the first man with great pains and torments. Now I also wish to say further what mercy and what concord there has been afterwards since Christianity (came) to be — just as if the hearts of men were changed, because former things were atoned for."]

Therefore, wars after the coming of Christ are no longer indiscriminate calamities, but 'targeted punishments' for specific acts against God as, for example, the persecution of early Christians.[40] Accordingly, when narrating events taking place after the Crucifixion, the translator always explicitly underlines which sins were the cause of any outbreak of war, as well as repeatedly pointing out how the love of Christ also prevented many unjustified military actions.[41] Likewise, this interpretation of war as divine punishment supplies the translator and his audience with a powerful template which could motivate and explain the workings of war in the age of Christianity.

The altered nature of war in Christian times, and the rhetoric aimed at emphasizing this transformation, are exemplified most clearly in the episode which concludes both the *Historiae* and their vernacular adaptation, namely the sack of Rome of 410. The Old English account of this central event is much shorter and less detailed than the Latin original, but the Anglo-Saxon writer agrees with his source on the three key points which characterize Orosius' reconstruction and which are effectively summarized in the following passage:

Æfter þæm þe Romeburg getimbred wæs m wintra 7 c [7] iiii 7 siextegum, God gedyde his miltsunge on Romanum, þa þa he hiora misdæda wrecan let, þæt hit þeh dyde Alarica se cristena cyning 7 se mildesta, 7 he mid swa

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40 BATELY, *Old English Orosius*, p. xcv.
41 See, for example, *OE Or.*, VI.4. According to Alice Cowen ['Writing Fire and the Sword', pp. 30-40], the radical changes brought about by Christ are reflected by a perceptible stylistic variation. Wars of the early ages of the world are described in a very 'dense' style, characterized by parataxis and by a profusion of adjectives, adverbs, comments and gory details, all aimed at creating a 'cumulative effect' which could mirror and accentuate the unrestrained violence and utter chaos of those times. On the contrary, accounts of wars and battles in the second half of the *Old English Orosius* are markedly simpler, shorter and deprived of descriptive colouring, in order to convey a sense of order at a time when wars no longer happen at random but according to a well-defined divine scheme.

lytle niþe abræc Romeburg þæt he bebead þæt mon nænne mon ne sloge, 7

eac þæt man nanhut ne wanade ne ne yfelade þæs þe on þæm ciricum wære,

7 sona þæs on þæm þriddan dæge hie aforan ut of þære byrig hiora agnum

willan, swa þær ne wearð nan hus hiora willum forbærned. (*OE Or.*, VI.38)

[1164 years after Rome was built, God showed his mercy to the Romans, when he allowed their misdeeds to be avenged, and yet Alaric did it, the Christian king and the mildest (of all). And he stormed Rome with so little hostility that he ordered that no man was to be slain and also that those (things) which were in the churches should not have been taken away nor damaged. Soon after that, on the third day, they went out of the city on their own accord, so (that) by their order not a single house was burned there.]

First of all, the translator explains, the causes of the sack lie in the fact that the Romans, as so often previously, had fallen so irretrievably into sin that in the end God sent the Goths to avenge His wrath on the Eternal City. Secondly, the fact that the Goths had converted to Christianity[42] some decades before storming Rome prevented them from committing violent acts against the population and the city. Lastly, both Orosius and his translator repeatedly state that the Gothic sack was only a passing incident, through which the power of Rome remained unscathed.[43]

But whereas Orosius' interpretation of this shocking event would have sounded perfectly convincing and reassuring to a contemporary reader, the *de facto* consistent description of the sack of Rome in the *Old English Orosius* would have looked awkward and confusing, if not thoroughly unsettling, in the historical context of late ninth-century England. It should be borne in mind that, as pointed out by Malcolm Godden,[44] Anglo-Saxon historiography often considered the sack of 410 as an extremely serious event, which saw the end of Roman rule in Britain as well as the collapse of the Empire itself. [45] However, from a comparison between the passage just quoted and the

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[42] It is worth noting, however, that the Goths were in fact Arians, but the Anglo-Saxon translator makes no mention of this fact, as if the doctrinal difference between the Romans and their attackers was of no interest, or relevance, to him any more.

[43] See, for example, *OE Or.*, II.1.

[44] GODDEN, 'Anglo-Saxons and Goths'.

[45] See, for example, the entry recording the events of 410 in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* [s.a. 410], which reads: 'Her Gotan abræcan Romeburh, 7 næfre syððan Romane ne rixodan on Brytene' [in this year

Latin original,[46] it clearly emerges that the Old English translation not only closely follows its source, but further downplays the consequences of the sack. If Orosius' purpose in minimizing the seriousness of the event was to demonstrate how Christian times were better than pagan ones, it is very difficult to see the point of the Anglo-Saxon writer in sustaining, and even emphasizing, Orosius' reading.

Furthermore, throughout the Old English text, the translator faithfully retains Orosius' many statements concerning the soundness of Roman rule over the western world, despite the fact that, by the time the vernacular version of the *Historiae* was composed, Orosius' optimistic predictions had clearly proven quite wrong, as new Gothic tribes had invaded Italy, and the Roman Empire had eventually fallen. This has no little bearing on the author's reading of war in general, and of the sack of Rome in particular, because if the Goths were indeed instruments of God, meant to chastise the Romans and cleanse them from their sins so that they could continue to rule the Empire in a Christian fashion, historical events irreparably undermine the translator's ideological framework.[47] Was the audience of the *Old English Orosius* to assume that the Romans had relapsed into their old habits and that this saw the end of the Empire? Were they also to think that the Vikings, who had been racking the whole of England for nearly a century, were a form of divine punishment too? The author makes no remarks

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the Goths broke into the city of Rome and never afterwards did the Romans rule in Britain].

[46] 'Anno itaque ab Urbe condita MCLXIIII inruptio Urbis per Alaricum facta est: cuius rei quamvis recens memoria sit, tamen si quis ipsius populi Romani et multitudinem videat et vocem audiat, nihil factum, sicut etiam ipsi fatentur, arbitrabitur, nisi aliquantis adhuc existentibus ex incendio ruinis forte doceatur' (*H.*, VII.40.i) [in the 1164th year since the foundation of the City, Rome was invaded by Alaric: although the memory of the event is still fresh, if anyone saw the great multitude of the people of Rome and listened to them talk, he would think that nothing had happened — as they themselves also admit — unless by chance he was made aware (of it) by some ruins from the fire which are still lying around].

[47] Despite their different perspective, both William A. Kretzschmar ['Adaptation and *Anweald*'] and Stephen J. HARRIS ['The Alfredian *World History* and Anglo-Saxon Identity', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 100.4 (2001): 482-510] do not consider the translator's rendering of the sack and his insistence on the survival of the Empire as problematic, as they see the author's choices as functional for placing the newly-constructed Alfredian England among the successors of the Roman Empire, especially as far as the relationship with God is concerned.

on the subject and seems altogether uninterested in exploring this issue, even though the Vikings would certainly have been a major concern for all his readers.[48]

Indeed, it should be remembered that, since the last decade of the eighth century, Britain and Ireland were repeatedly stormed by Viking armies which, by the mid-ninth century, had managed to conquer most of northern England and had brought Alfred's own kingdom to the brink of annihilation. And if we contrast contemporary evidence of the Viking raids with the above-quoted passage from the *Old English Orosius* about the sack of Rome, we immediately realise how the situation described there is completely and utterly opposite to the reality of Alfred's own times, when the Vikings and their leaders were neither Christian nor mild, monasteries and churches were one of their main targets, many people were usually killed during their raids, and houses and other buildings were certainly burned to the ground.[49]

If, therefore, the political and military situation of ninth-century England stood as a sombre *controcanto*, a counterpoint, to Orosius' work and, more significantly, to its Old English translation, how could these texts have served as a model for Alfred's Anglo-Saxons to understand contemporary events and to learn how to deal with Vikings both philosophically and physically? Assuredly, both the *Historiae* and their paraphrase put the accent on how the adoption of Christianity on the part of the barbarian invaders could prevent or limit violence, lead to peaceful settlement and, eventually, to pacific coexistence.

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[48] The author's reluctance to apply the morals drawn from the episode of the sack of Rome explicitly to his own times stands in sharp contrast with the account of the travels of Ohthere and Wulfstan, where the translator expands Orosius' summary of the world's geography with a contemporary description of Scandinavia, allegedly made by two *norðmenn* to King Alfred himself. Therefore, the Anglo-Saxon translator appears conspicuously selective in his choice to update Orosius' text to the reality of ninth-century England. For a detailed consideration of Ohthere and Wulfstan's 'geographical narrative' in the context of Alfredian England see VALTONEN, *The North*, especially at pp. 480-564.

[49] Concerning the often devastating effects of the Viking invasions throughout north-western Europe, and the representation of the raids in contemporary sources, see the classic article by P. WORMALD, 'Viking Studies: Whence and Whither?', in *The Vikings*, ed. by R.T. Farrell, London: Phillimore, 1982, pp. 128-153.

Indeed, while the *Historiae* conclude with the account of how the Goths, after 'gently' sacking Rome, were chased out of Italy and then definitively vanquished by the armies of Honorius,[50] the Anglo-Saxon author sensibly modifies his version of events by relating that Alaric and his men remained to live within Roman territory with the emperor's consent.[51] This emphasis on the positive outcomes of conversion acquires special significance when related to other evidence from Alfred's reign and in particular to the peace agreement struck between the West-Saxon king and the Viking leader Guthrum. One of the binding terms of the deal, allowing Guthrum and his men to settle in East Anglia and Northumbria, was that they all had to convert to Christianity first. There are therefore good reasons to suppose not only that Alfred and his advisers were well aware that a common religion between two enemies, just as described by Orosius, could prove extremely beneficial but, consequently, that our translator would have wished contemporary audiences to appreciate Alfred's policy towards the Vikings.

On the other hand, if we accept the hypothesis that the *Historiae* were translated in the relatively peaceful years after the battle of Edington (878),[52] the contradictory statements on the Empire's survival could be read as a sort of warning to the Anglo-Saxons not to rest on their laurels and indulge in sinful behaviours, lest they should suffer utter destruction as happened to the Romans. Of course, it is not impossible to assume that the author of the *Old English Orosius* aimed at exhorting his contemporaries not only to 'be on the watch', but to support and get actively involved in Alfred's projects to defend his kingdom from further Viking raids.

Even so, the representation of war in the *Old English Orosius* remains on the whole extremely problematic. I would argue, however, that this was not at all due to the

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[50] *H.*, VII.42-43.
[51] *OE Or.*, VI.38.
[52] See above, nt. 31, p. 95.

translator's incompetence, but to the fact that the *Historiae*, because of their intrinsic characteristics, were unsuitable to constitute an appropriate, or rather unproblematic basis to develop a coherent conceptual system which could make sense of the 'functioning' of war in the eyes of a later audience. First of all, it is important to stress once again that the *Historiae* are almost overwhelmed by the huge amount of factual information which constitutes their core, to the point that Orosius' own arguments often get lost in the Latin text — perhaps the very reason for Augustine's discontent.[53] As a consequence, anyone wishing to tackle the whole of Orosius' work while investigating specific themes such as kingship — or, in our case, war — must struggle against this overload of information, making any argument very difficult to follow throughout the text.

In the *Old English Orosius*, the translator goes to great lengths to select and organise this host of data coherently, and to connect as many events as possible to a single paradigm which could help him to address and understand salient aspects of war as a phenomenon. The result, however, is that the only episode which stands out from the endless names, numbers and dates of the many wars and battles of ancient times, which pile up without a true underlying ideological theme, is the sack of Rome because, being Orosius' central focus, it is frequently reiterated throughout the text. It is an episode which, as we have seen, leaves both the translator and his audience to confront pressing and complex questions about defeat, fate and God's punishment.

The problem is not that the author was unable to elaborate a more satisfactory adaptation of his source, but the source itself was the wrong one altogether. In order to clarify this point, it would be worth making a brief digression. In a recent keynote lecture on the political and epistemological transformations in early seventh-century

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[53] OROSIUS, *Historiarum*, I, pp. xl-xliii.

Continental Europe,[54] Guy Halsall highlighted a remarkable shift in the conception of history between the end of the Roman world and the beginning of the Middle Ages — a change which is also mirrored in the choice of different historiographical models. In the *Historiae*, Orosius viewed history as a perpetual succession of events where, according to a principle of cause and effect, each and every happening was the result of the one before and, at the same time, the source of the following one. Closely connected to this linear interpretation of history was the theory whereby the world had been dominated by four empires (Babylonian, Greek, Carthaginian and Roman), the last of which was blessed by the birth of Christ — a fact which Orosius and many others interpreted as a sign that the Roman Empire was to last forever, just as the rule of the Christian God.

Writing approximately 150 years after Orosius, when the Empire was long gone, Gregory of Tours was faced with the same problem as the author of the *Old English Orosius*, namely that the model of the four empires, which had dominated early Christian historiography and the perception of the past for many centuries, was also gone, together with a linear vision of history. As a consequence, when composing the *Historia Francorum*, Gregory had to turn to 'another source of fixed points and underpinnings'[55] ― the Bible and, in particular, the Old Testament. The great advantage of this choice was that, besides being a book on the history of the people of Israel, the Old Testament could be read typologically, so that every episode narrated in the biblical text could be seen as prefiguring others that were to come. In this way, Gregory was able to compare contemporary events freely with selected *exempla* from the Bible which, as the name suggests, are not real historical events but signs, completely unrelated to what actually came before and after and, therefore, always valid, because

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[54]   G. HALSALL, 'Changing Minds Around 600', <http://600transformer.blogspot.it/2012/02/changing-minds-around-600.html>, 2012 [accessed 18 September 2012].
[55]   *Ibid.*.

indissolubly bound to the theological truth of God rather than a cause-effect logic or the fleeting fortunes of history.

It is my contention that a very similar process is at work in late ninth-century England, where many learned men — possibly including King Alfred himself — looked back to the past in order to find a reason for and a solution to the Scandinavian invasions. Throughout the literary production of the Alfredian renaissance, historical and literary models of bygone ages were carefully examined and evaluated in order to elaborate new and coherent ideas about war, then put to the test of those troubled times. As we have seen, Orosius and his *magnum opus* failed that test.

For the Anglo-Saxons, and for many other writers and readers throughout the Middle Ages, the *Historiae* remained an inexhaustible source of information and 'good stories' about the deeds of ancient heroes like Alexander the Great, a valuable *epitome* of the stylistic models and topoi of battle-narration according to the classical canon, and a collection of examples later authors could have used to develop and further their ideas on war, as well as on many other topics. Yet, the *Historiae* as a whole were not suitable to answer complex questions on the workings of war in relation to God and divine punishment, because the text, deeply rooted in a unique 'juncture', was difficult to adapt to other circumstances, and because Orosius' faith in the perpetuity of the Empire invalidated the universal value of his model. The only way for a medieval writer to 'round' these problems and come to terms with the inherent complexities (and indeed contradictions) of his source would have been either to extrapolate only selected episodes from the *Historiae* or to radically alter the work's architectonics. The Anglo-Saxon translator was evidently unwilling to pay this price,[56] even though this impaired

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[56] According to Malcolm Godden [*The Translations*], the reading and re-telling of events of Antiquity in the *Old English Orosius* is heavily influenced not only by the translator's own agenda but also by his attention to, and respect for, the original text's authority and context of composition — a 'tension' which characterizes all of the three major literary undertakings of the Alfredian circle: 'on the one

his efforts to turn Orosius' influential *oeuvre* into a valuable model for helping the newly constructed 'English people' to understand and face the Scandinavian raids. Luckily, Alfred's subjects could resort to the *Old English Prose Psalms* for that.

The *Old English Prose Psalms*

According to William of Malmesbury, the last literary accomplishment of Alfred of Wessex was the vernacular translation of the Book of Psalms, which he undertook during the final years of his life and which he was unable to complete because of his untimely death.[57] The work described by William has been subsequently identified with the so-called *Old English Prose Psalms*,[58] a prose rendering of Psalms 1-50 whose only extant copy is found in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Fonds latin 8824, a *codex* dating to the first half of the eleventh century usually known under the name of the Paris Psalter.

Although the Old English text presents significant similarities with the style and vocabulary of the key constituents of the Alfredian canon,[59] which corroborate William's dubious allegation, the *Prose Psalms* have always been regarded as a private, rather than public translation, a 'personal handbook', according to Keynes and Lapidge's definition, used by Alfred for 'consolation and guidance in times of

hand, the Alfredian authors appropriate to their own purposes the texts which they are supposedly translating, making them say and mean new things […]; on the other, they work hard at developing the identity of the original author within the text, in ways which seem to lend the authority of Orosius, Boethius and Augustine to the Old English texts but also keep reminding Anglo-Saxon readers that these are the products of a particular time and situation in the past and that much water has passed under the bridge since then' [*ibid*., p. 26].

57 WILLIAM OF MALMESBURY, *Willelmi Malmesbiriensis Monachi De Gestis Regum Anglorum Libri Quinque; Historiae Novelle Libri Tres*, ed. by W. Stubbs, 2 vols., Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi scriptores 90, repr. 1887-1889 edn. (Millwood: Kraus Reprint, 1964), II, Ch. 123.

58 P.P. O'NEILL (ed.), *King Alfred's Old English Prose Translation of the First Fifty Psalms* (Cambridge, MA: The Medieval Academy of America, 2001). Further quotations and textual references (hereafter marked as *OE Ps*.) are from this edition.

59 See, in particular, J. BATELY, 'Lexical Evidence for the Authorship of the *Prose Psalms* in the Paris Psalter', *Anglo-Saxon England* 10 (1982): 69-95 and O'NEILL, *King Alfred's Prose Translation*, pp. 73-96.

affliction'.[60] However, the current debate concerning Alfred's authorship strongly calls for caution in assuming not only the king's personal contribution to the translation of the *Prose Psalms*, but particularly his private use of the text. In the light of recent scholarship it is instead possible to favour the hypothesis that the *Prose Psalms* were only commissioned by Alfred from one or more intellectuals working at his court, and then copied and circulated among the West-Saxon elite — as the transmission history of the text also seems to indicate.[61]

Therefore, starting from the assumption that the *Prose Psalms* were an integral part of Alfred's political and cultural programme aimed at the *Engla lond* as a whole, I suggest that this vernacular translation of the Book of Psalms should be considered as a key source for the study of early English ideology of war, as it may constitute an invaluable witness to the very first development of the so-called 'liturgies of war' in Anglo-Saxon England.[62]

The term 'liturgies of war' designates a complex system of public ceremonies, religious services and specific prayers, hymns, litanies and sermons connected to military activity, whose primary aim was to plead for divine aid in a battle or campaign about to be undertaken. These rituals, which originated in the Classical world,[63] were quickly appropriated by Christianity in the course of late Antiquity and, as such,

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[60] Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, pp. 31-32. See also O'Neill, *King Alfred's Prose Translation*, pp. 95-96.

[61] D. Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 261. The hypothesis according to which the *Prose Psalms* were circulated in multiple copies is supported by the fact that the text's only extant witness is contained in a much later, eleventh-century manuscript, while the vernacular 'prefaces' accompanying the translation of the psalms [see below, pp. 113-114] are found also in the margins of the so-called Vitellius Psalter (London, British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius E. xviii), written at Winchester around 1060 [O'Neill, *King Alfred's Prose Translation*, p. 28].

[62] On the early medieval liturgies of war see M. McCormick, 'The Liturgy of War in the Early Middle Ages: Crisis, Litanies, and the Carolingian Monarchy', *Viator* 15 (1984): 1-23; *Eternal Victory: Triumphant Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 328-387 and Bachrach, *Religion and the Conduct of War*, pp. 32-63.

[63] Concerning victory celebrations and rituals of war in the Roman world see Hölscher, 'The Transformation of Victory into Power' and Heckster, 'The Roman Army and Propaganda'.

continued to be practised in the Byzantine East throughout the Middle Ages. In contrast, liturgies of war quickly fell into disuse in the West after the collapse of the Roman Empire, and it was only in the second half of the eighth century that they were revived by the newly established Carolingian dynasty, which soon transformed them into one of the central elements of their imperial programme.[64]

The link between these special ceremonies of intercession and the *Prose Psalms* rests on the central role of the Psalter within the liturgies of war of the Carolingian period, where the biblical book served both as model for, and as an integral part of, the liturgy itself. For example, in a capitulary probably dating to 792, Charlemagne urged all the bishops of the *Regnum Francorum* to undertake a series of spiritual measures to support his campaign against the Avars.[65] Among these, 'unusquisque episcopus tres missas et psalteria tria cantet, unam pro domno rege, alteram pro exercitu Francorum, tertiam pro presenti tribulatione' [every bishop should sing three Psalters and three masses, one for (our) lord the king, the other for the army of the Franks, the third one for present trouble(s)], while 'presbiteri vero unusquisque missas tres, monachi et monachae et canonici unusquisque psalteria tria' [every priest (should) instead (sing) three masses, (and) every monk, nun and canon three Psalters].[66]

In 805, another document was circulated among the Frankish clergy, setting out a nine-day initiative in favour of Charlmagne's army, faced with pagan enemies at the borders of the Empire.[67] The programme, carefully outlined by the royal chancellery, established that the entire population of the kingdom was to gather for a procession to

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[64] McCormick, 'Liturgy of War', pp. 22-23.

[65] A. Werminghoff (ed.), *Concilium in Francia habitum*, in *Concilia aevi Karolini*, MGH Conc. 2.1 (Hannover; Leipzig: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1906), no. 18, pp. 108-109. Both the editor [p. 108] and D.S. Bachrach [*Religion and the Conduct of War*, p. 33] date this document to 780, but Michael McCormick ['The Liturgy of War', pp. 9-10] convincingly argues for 792-93.

[66] *Concilium in Francia habitum*, ll. 29-30, p. 108 and ll. 1-2, p. 109.

[67] A. Boretius (ed.), *Karoli ad Ghaerbaldum episcopum epistola*, in *Capitularia regum Francorum*, MGH Capit. 1 (Hannover: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1883), no. 124, pp. 244-246.

their local church, while every priest was to say mass, and the rest of the clergy must

sing fifty psalms.[68]

The absence of virtually any reference to these practices in Anglo-Saxon sources

suggests that, unlike in Charlemagne's territories, liturgies of war were nearly unknown

in Alfredian England.[69] Only Asser, the royal 'biographer', relates that the young Alfred

had to stand alone against a massive Viking army at the battle of Ashdown (AD 871)

because Æthelred, his elder brother and king of Wessex, 'erat enim adhuc […] in

tentorio in oratione positus, audiens missam, et nimium affirmans se inde vivum non

discessurum antequam sacerdos missam finiret' [was indeed still ... in (his) tent at

prayer, hearing Mass and declaring firmly that he would not leave that place alive

before the priest had finished Mass].[70] Although, as shall be discussed below,[71] this

passage might very well be a masterly cover-up of a diplomatic incident, Asser's words

still portray the king's devotion as being contrary to both common sense and usual

practice — therefore reinforcing the impression that, at least in the second half of the

ninth century, liturgies of war were not usually performed in England.

Nonetheless, it should not be forgotten that Alfred had close political and cultural

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[68] *Ibid.*, ll. 19-22, 25-27, p. 245: 'Hora autem nona omnes generaliter ad ecclesias vicina, ubi eis denuntiatur, devota mente occurrant et, si aura vel locus permiserit, aliquo spatioso loco letania procedant atque, psallendo ecclesiam intrantes, cum onmi devotione missam audiant. […] Et unusquisque presbyterorum missam cantet, et alterius ordinis clericus vel monachus sive Deo sacrata, qui psalmos didicit, L psalmos similiter cantet […]' [moreover, at the ninth hour of the day, let everyone proceed with a devout mind to nearby churches, where they have been directed to and, if weather and space allow it, let them advance towards some large space (singing) litanies and, entering the church singing psalms, let everyone hear mass with all (possible) devotion … . And every priest should sing mass, and those clerics, or monks belonging to other orders, or (nuns) consecrated to God who know the Psalms, should likewise sing fifty psalms].

[69] As discussed above [Ch. 1, p. 76], the Leofric Missal indeed records a *missa contra paganos,* a special intercessory prayer traditionally associated with the liturgies of war. Nevertheless, contemporary legislation bears no witness of special religious events being organized to support Anglo-Saxon armies, while the 'historical' sources from Alfred's reign make no mention of specific rituals being performed before battle. This suggests that, on the whole, liturgies of war did not enjoy the same popularity in ninth-century England.

[70] *VA*, Ch. 37, ll. 15-18.

[71] See below, pp. 143-144.

connections with the Continent, and in particular with the court of Charles the Bald.[72] In fact, Alfred himself visited the Carolingian court on his way back from Rome in 856, on which occasion his own father also married Charles' daughter Judith. Moreover, two of Alfred's closest advisers, John and Grimbald, were recruited in continental monasteries,[73] where they probably had first-hand experience of rituals such as the ones described earlier, since similar liturgical forms were still widely practised on the Continent in the ninth century.[74]

For these reasons, I believe that liturgies of war should not be overlooked when considering the genesis and the meaning of the *Prose Psalms*. In particular, I would argue that although it is impossible to prove a forthright connection between these rituals and the Alfredian text, the cultural context just outlined is so significant that it very likely influenced, albeit indirectly, the understanding of the Psalms among Anglo-Saxon intellectuals, and played a central role in shaping their translation into the vernacular.

First of all, it is important to note the prominent part played by Charlemagne and his successors in organising and promoting liturgies of war in Continental Europe — and the reasons underlying to their effort. According to Michael McCormick, it was precisely the third Carolingian king who, after witnessing rituals performed by the Byzantine armies in southern Italy, decided to introduce them in his own kingdom in order to pursue a primarily political objective.[75] Indeed, as clearly emerges from the 792 capitulary mentioned above, liturgies of war were not exclusively aimed at entreating

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[72] On Alfred's continental connections see the seminal series of articles by J. NELSON, 'England and the Continent', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser. 12-15 (2002-2005).

[73] KEYNES and LAPIDGE, *Alfred the Great*, pp. 26-27.

[74] See, for example, the mass contained in the ninth-century Paris, B.N., MS lat. 2812 and edited by M. MCCORMICK in 'A New Ninth-Century Witness to the Carolingian Mass Against the Pagans (Paris, B.N., lat. 2812)', *Revue bénédictine* 97.1-2 (1987): 68-86.

[75] MCCORMICK, *Eternal Victory*, pp. 353-354.

divine help, since they often involved the celebration of special masses specifically dedicated to the king who, in this way, was put at the centre of his subjects' attention and concern, as Michael McCormick explains:

> for their very nature and content, these services focused the attention of small, isolated, rural communities on the distant yet commanding figure of the Carolingian king and warlord […]. The general performance of litanies would have been a unique vehicle for fostering some sense of loyalty and community of interest between the isolated hamlets of Francia and their far-off ruler.[76]

Although the political situation of ninth-century England was very different from that of eighth-century Continental Europe, Alfred himself was also set on fostering unity and a sense of belonging among his subjects, and especially in those areas of southern England which had only recently fallen under Wessex's rule. It is therefore not surprising that Alfred and his advisers selected the Book of Psalms to complete the king's translation programme, as the biblical text was particularly effective in answering to Alfred's needs. David Pratt has recently argued that the main purpose of the *Prose Psalms* was exactly to establish and promote a relationship between the characters of David and Alfred, and between the sufferings of ancient Israel and those of the Anglo-Saxons at the hands of the Vikings.[77] In this way, as God's Chosen People and its ruler worked together to protect the Promised Land from their enemies, the men and women of England were urged to support their own king in the communal strife against Scandinavian invaders.[78]

This 'political' use of the Old Testament book, very similar to the spirit which animated the Carolingian liturgies of war, is particularly evident in the so-called

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[76]   McCormick, 'Liturgy of War', p. 22.
[77]   Pratt, *The Political Thought*, pp. 262-263.
[78]   *Ibid*.

'prefaces' (or 'introductions') to the *Prose Psalms*, where the translator expands and complements the Latin *tituli*, that is, short verses which introduce the central theme of each psalm and its circumstance of composition.[79] According to the exegetical tradition of the Latin West, the Psalms, like the Old Testament as a whole, were open to four different levels of interpretation, each one entailing a different situation and a different *persona*: the historical interpretation elucidated the events of David's life, in response to which each psalm was originally delivered; the allegorical (or mystical) one connected 'the words of the psalmist to those events of the life of Christ which will come to pass';[80] the tropological (or moral) sense defined the context where any righteous man should sing the psalm in question; while the anagogical one finally projected the theme of the psalm in an eschatological perspective.

In the *Prose Psalms*, the Alfredian author not only faithfully translates the original biblical *tituli* into Old English but, in the so-called 'prefaces', indicates four different interpretations for each psalm. Significantly, however, the translator substitutes the anagogical sense with the description of a second historical context, usually another Old Testament event taking place after David's rule. This is particularly interesting from our viewpoint because, in many a preface, the translator favours a biblical episode involving deeds of arms as the second historical interpretation — an interpretation which, it is worth noting, the translator did not copy verbatim from a single source, but freely collated from multiple texts at his disposal.[81] We could consider, for example, the preface to psalm 19:

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[79] On the style, function and sources of the prefaces to the *Prose Psalms* see P.P. O'NEILL, 'The Old English Introductions to the *Prose Psalms* of the Paris Psalter: Sources, Structure and Composition', *Studies in Philology* 78.5 (1981): 20-38. On the relationship between the Parisian introductions and those of the Vitellius Psalter see P. PULSIANO, 'The Old English Introductions in the Vitellius Psalter', *Studia Neophilologica* 63.1 (1991): 13-35.

[80] *Ibid.*, p. 27.

[81] O'NEILL, *King Alfred's Prose Translation*, pp. 34-44.

> David sang þysne nigonteoðan sealm, and sæde on ðæm sealme hu his folc
> him fore gebæde on his earfoðum; and eac Ezechias folc gebæd for hine, þa
> he wæs beseten mid his feondum on þære byrig; and swa doð ealle
> Creistene men þe þysne sealm singað: hy hine singað for heora kyningas;
> and eac þa Apostolas hine sungon be Criste, þa hine man lædde to rode. (*OE Ps*., 19, 1°-3°)

[David sang this nineteenth psalm, and in that psalm he said how his people had prayed for him in his hardships; and Hezekiah's people also prayed for him, when he was surrounded by his enemies in the city (of Jerusalem); and all the Christian men who sing this psalm do likewise: they sing it for their kings; and the Apostles too sang it for Christ, when He was taken to the Cross.]

Here the Anglo-Saxon author expands on the Latin *titulus* 'victori canticum David' [a psalm for the triumphant David][82] by specifying that David's subjects prayed to God in order for their king to be relieved of hardship. Then, through the second historical interpretation, the translator further defines the strictly military character of this affliction by referring to Hezekiah, a pious and righteous king of Israel who nevertheless had to endure a long siege in the city of Jerusalem after refusing to submit to an Assyrian army, which ultimately was annihilated by God himself.[83] At the same time, the translator also envisages a concrete context in which every Christian man could resort to this psalm to support his own king — a 'real' situation which, it should be emphasized, would certainly have recalled Viking warfare to the text's audience. It is therefore possible to see how this preface, as many others throughout the *Prose Psalms*, creates a 'meeting-place' where the history of Israel and that of the Anglo-Saxons merge, as well the figures of David and Alfred — in whose favour readers, like David's subjects, are prompted to take action through the recitation of the following psalm.

A further look at continental sources connected to the tradition of the liturgies of war could help shed light on another controversial topic, namely why the Book of Psalms

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[82] Ps. 19. 1.
[83] II Kings 18-19; Isaiah 36-39.

was turned into Old English. In fact, unlike most works translated by Alfred's circle, the Psalter was one of the best-known texts of the time, since it was an integral part of everyday services for religious and lay communities alike, and was also widely used as a 'textbook' for learning Latin.[84] Why, then, was it translated into the vernacular? The reasons behind the composition of the *Prose Psalms* are certainly multiple, but one of them is of particular interest to us, as it once again binds together Old Testament tradition and the practice of war.

As discussed in Chapter One, the key biblical *exempla* usually quoted throughout early medieval culture to illustrate armed conflicts from a religious perspective were the episode of the 'War of the Kings' from Genesis 14 and the crossing of the Red Sea. As clearly emerges from the preface to psalm 19, however, the introductions to the *Prose Psalms*, through their creative collation of Old Testament events, greatly expand the repertoire of facts and characters which prove God's martial achievements in defence of His Chosen People throughout the history of ancient Israel.

In other words, I argue that one of the major aims of the Alfredian translation was to present its audience with a wider set of biblical models, besides those of Abraham and Moses, through which war could be understood, as well as God's role in protecting His people in times of crisis similar to the one England was experiencing because of the Vikings. In this context, the use of the vernacular gains central importance, since it would have allowed a lay audience little conversant with both Latin and the Old Testament to understand references to less well-known biblical episodes easily.

It is also worth noting that the Old English prefaces which offer a second historical interpretation focussing on deeds of arms are often matched with a translation of the

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[84] G.H. Brown, 'The Psalms as the Foundation of Anglo-Saxon Learning', in *The Place of the Psalms in the Intellectual Culture of the Middle Ages*, ed. by N. Van Deusen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 1-24.

respective psalm which diverges significantly from the biblical text — a characteristic

standing in sharp contrast with the overall style of the Alfredian text, mostly very

similar to its Latin source. In these instances, the translator seems to be interested in

giving more prominence to God's key role in securing the success of His warriors, as

well as emphasizing the analogies between the history of Israel and his own times. This

clearly emerges, for example, from the vernacular adaptation of Psalm 45, where the

Anglo-Saxon author substitutes the rather obscure *titulus* 'victori filiorum Core pro

iuventutibus canticum' [literally 'a psalm of the triumphant sons of Core for youth'][85]

with the account of a completely different biblical episode drawn from the second Book

of Chronicles:[86]

> Dauid sang þysne fif and feowertigoþan sealm, þanciende Gode þæt he hine
> oft alysde of manegum earfoðum; and eac he witgode þæt þæt ylce sceoldon
> don þa men, þa þe twa Scira [beoð] (þæt ys, Iude and Beniamin), þæt hy
> sceoldon þam Gode þancian þe hy gefriðode fram þære ymbsetennesse and
> fram þære her[eg]unge[87] þara twega kynincga, *Facces*, Rumeles suna, and
> Rasses, Syria cyncges — næs þæt na gedon for þæs cynincges geearnuncga
> Achats, ac for Godes mildheortnesse and for his yldrena gewyrhtum hit
> gewearð þæt þa twegen kyningas wæron adrifene fram Assyria cynge; (*OE
> Ps.*, 45, 1°-3°)

> [David sang this forty-fifth psalm, thanking God that He had often released him
> from his many afflictions; and he also prophesied that the men who belong to the
> two tribes, namely Judah and Benjamin, should do likewise, that they should thank
> God that He protected them from the siege and from the raid of the two kings,
> Phacee, son of Romelia, and Rasin, king of Syria — it was not done through the
> merits of King Achaz, but through God's mercy and the merits of the elders (the
> prophets), it happened that the two kings were driven out by the King of the
> Assyrians.]

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[85] Ps. 45. 1.

[86] II Chronicles 28.

[87] In a recent article ['Viking Invasions and Marginal Annotations in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College
162', *Anglo-Saxon England* 37 (2008): 151-171] Kathryn POWELL has convincingly argued that the
term *heregang/heregung*, which recurs rather frequently throughout the Old English corpus, is often
used specifically to indicate the coming and going of Viking armies on English territory. It is therefore
possible that the author of the *Prose Psalms* purposefully chose to describe the attack of Phacee and
Rasin as *heregang* in order to underline the likeness between the activity of the enemies of Israel and
those of the Anglo-Saxons.

Even though the choice of this specific episode was without doubt prompted by his sources,[88] the Anglo-Saxon author independently remarks that Achaz's salvation (and, it might be added, of the city of Jerusalem and house of David) is to be ascribed only to God, and not to the king's Assyrian ally. The theme of God's superior strength over foreign enemies, presented in the introduction, is further reinforced within the translation of the psalm itself, especially in verse 3, where the biblical 'ideo non timebimus cum fuerit translata terra et concussi sunt montes in corde maris / sonantibus et intumescentibus gurgitibus eius et agitatis montibus in potentia eius' [therefore we will not fear, when the earth shall be troubled; and the mountains shall be removed into the heart of the sea: their waters roared and were troubled, the mountains were troubled with his strength][89] is thoroughly reinterpreted with reference to war:

> '*ure* fynd coman swa egeslice to us þæt us ðuhte for þam geþune þæt sio eorþe eall cwacode; and hy wæron, þeah, sona afærde fram Gode swyþor þonne we, and þa *uphafenan* kynincgas swa þær muntas wæron eac gedrefede for þæs Godes strenge' (*OE Ps.*, 45. 3).
>
> [our enemies came upon us so terribly that it seemed to us from the noise that all the earth trembled; and nevertheless they were soon frightened by God more greatly than we, and (their) kings, lifted up like mountains there, were also oppressed by God's might]

In this passage, the translator strongly suggests a link between the psalmist and the audience of the Alfredian text through the use of the possessive *ure* [our] and of the impersonal construction *us ðuhte þæt* [it seemed to us that], which contributes to the description of the enemies' arrival making an even greater impression on the reader.

This 'militarization' of the psalm's text and message is also found in verse 5, where the Latin impersonal statement 'conturbatae sunt gentes, inclinata sunt regna, dedit vocem suam mota est terra' [nations were troubled, and kingdoms were bowed down: he

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[88] O'NEILL, *King Alfred's Prose Translation*, p. 259.
[89] Ps. 45. 3-4.

uttered his voice, the earth trembled][90] is significantly modified as follows:

> And gedrefed wæron þa elðeodgan folc, and hiora rice wæs gehnæged; se
>
> hyhsta sende his word, and gehwyrfed wæs ure land and ure folc to beteran,
>
> and hi and heora land to wyrsan. (*OE Ps.*, 45. 5)
>
> [And the foreign peoples were afflicted, and their might was vanquished; the
> Almighty sent His word, and our land and our people were changed for the better,
> and they and their land for the worse]

Here too, the repetition of the possessive *ure* not only supports the identification
between the people of Israel and the audience of the *Prose Psalms*, but the opposition of
this term to *hire* [their], also repeated twice, highlights the contrast between the fate of
the Hebrews/Anglo-Saxons and that of their enemies. Moreover, it is interesting to note
how the author, as in verse 9 further on, substitutes the general Latin term *gentes* with
the much more specific *elþeódig folc* [*foreign* people]. A similar process of
'contextualization' can also be detected in verse 8, where the *bella* [wars] that God had
to stop 'usque ad finem terrae' [even to the end of the earth][91] are transformed into the
'gefeoht [...] ura feonda' [attacks of our enemies] that God 'afierð fram *us* [...] ut ofer
ure landgemæru' [drives away from us ... far away beyond our borders].[92]

To conclude, even though historical sources indicate that Alfred and his circle never
organized special ceremonies on the occasion of wars and battles, the evidence
discussed above does show that the *Prose Psalms* present a reading of the biblical book
which is remarkably similar to the meaning and function of the Psalter within the
context of liturgies of war of Continental Europe. In both cases, the Book of Psalms was
used to bring together contemporary military events and a biblical model which served
not only to help understand the current situation but, potentially, to influence it.
Therefore, a further and more detailed investigation of the liturgical books and religious

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[90]   Ps. 45. 7.
[91]   Ps. 45. 10.
[92]   *OE Ps.*, 45. 8. It is interesting to note that the verb of this sentence is in the present tense.

practices of ninth-century England will prove fundamental, first of all, to a better understanding of the context in which the vernacular translation of the Psalter was undertaken. Secondly, it would allow the addition of a new element to the complex picture of the cultural interchange between the Carolingian world and Alfred's court.

Last but not least, it would help to shed light on the development of the 'religion of war' in the Anglo-Saxon world, a question which has become particularly important in the light of the recent discovery of the Staffordshire Hoard. In fact, one of the items recovered in the summer of 2009 is a thin strip of gold bearing a Latin inscription from Psalm 67. 2,[93] which reads 'surge Domine et dissipentur inimici tui et fugiant qui oderunt te a facie tua' [rise up, oh Lord, and may your enemies be dispersed and those who hate you be driven from your face].[94] This golden strip and two crosses stand out as the only non-martial objects of a hoard otherwise comprising sword-hilts, fragments of helmets and other weapon fittings. Nonetheless, Kevin Leahy has suggested that at least one of the crosses might have been used in processions.[95] As we have seen, processions were an integral part of those large-scale religious ceremonies performed by non-combatants on behalf of their warriors, and there are many references throughout early medieval literature to crosses being paraded before armies on the battlefield.

If future scholarship will be able to prove a similar liturgical use for the inscribed golden strip, as the two rivets placed at its ends seem to indicate, this remarkable archaeological find would testify to a long tradition of using the Book of Psalms in connection to war, running through the Anglo-Saxon period from the seventh century, when the Staffordshire Hoard was buried, to the so-called *Edict of Bath*. According to

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[93] K. LEAHY, 'The Staffordshire Hoard: Discovery and Initial Assessment', <http://www.staffordshirehoard.org.uk/artefacts/>, 2010 [accessed 10 November 2010].

[94] E. OKASHA, 'Report on Inscription', <http://www.staffordshirehoard.org.uk/artefacts/>, 2010 [accessed 10 November 2010].

[95] LEAHY, 'The Staffordshire Hoard', p. 4.

this document, promulgated by Æthelred the Unready in 1009, every man, woman and child of the kingdom was to fast for three days before Michaelmas, walk barefoot to church, and 'æt ælcan tídsange eal hired aþenedu*m* limu*m* ætforan Godes weofode singe þone sealm: 'D*omi*ne, quid multiplicati sunt' [at each of the canonical hours the whole community, prostrate before God's altar, is to sing the psalm 'Why, oh Lord, are they multiplied'].[96] A tradition which, as I hope to have demonstrated in these pages, has as one of its cornerstones the Alfredian *Old English Prose Psalms*.

The *Old English Bede*

After its completion in 731, Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum* immediately became one of the most influential books in the cultural panorama of Anglo-Saxon England, significantly shaping how the inhabitants of Britain understood themselves, their history and their relationship with other people far and near.[97] Proof of the continuing popularity of the *Historia ecclesiastica* beyond the context of its composition is a vernacular translation of the whole text, realized about a century and a half after Bede's death.[98] The genesis, purpose, authority and exact date of the *Old*

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[96] *Edict of Bath*, 6.3. The development of liturgies of war in late Anglo-Saxon England is discussed in great detail by Simon KEYNES in 'An Abbot, an Archbishop, and the Viking Raids of 1006-7 and 1009-12', *Anglo-Saxon England* 36 (2007): 151-220 at 179-189.

[97] BEDE, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. by B. Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969). All quotations, translations and textual references to Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* (hereafter signalled in abbreviated form as *HE*) are from this edition. Concerning the influence of the *Historia ecclesiastica* in the rise of Anglo-Saxon identity see, for example, P. WORMALD, 'Bede, the *Bretwaldas* and the Origins of the *Gens Anglorum*', in *The Times of Bede: Studies in Early English Christian Society and its Historian*, ed. by P. Wormald and S. Baxter (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 106-134, first published in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies Presented to J.M. Wallace-Hadrill*, ed. by P. Wormald, D. Bullough and R. Collins (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), pp. 99-129 and the very recent PhD thesis by Windy A. McKINNEY, 'Creating a *Gens Anglorum*: Social and Ethnic Identity in Anglo-Saxon England Through the Lens of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of York, 2011).

[98] T. MILLER (ed. and trans.), *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 2 vols. in 4, EETS, o.s. 95-6 and 110-11 (London: Trübner & Co, 1890-98). Sharon Rowley and Gregory Waite are currently working on a much needed new edition of the *Old English Bede*. *Old English Bede* will hereby be abbreviated as *OEB* when referring to quotations and specific passages from the the Old English text.

English Bede remain, however, widely unknown, as our knowledge of these elements depends solely on the palaeographical and codicological analysis of the five extant witnesses of the text. From these studies, it emerges that the earliest surviving copy of the *Old English Bede*, probably realized between 899 and 930, is at least two removes from the exemplar, therefore pointing to the second half of the ninth century as a possible date of composition of the text.[99]

Even a superficial survey of the Old English translation is sufficient to reveal that Bede's account of the history of Britain has been considerably abbreviated: the vast majority of the documents and poems cited in the *Historia ecclesiastica* is omitted, as well as Bede's lengthy discussions of the Pelagian heresy and the eighth-century controversy on the dating of Easter. Most historical events and characters not directly related to Britain are also excised (including many non-English saints), together with the geographical descriptions and careful recordings of dates and etymologies. On the other hand, what the translator does retain of his source, he faithfully transposes into Old English, without adding any information or developing specific arguments. These elements have often been considered as an indication of the translator's inferiority to Bede both as writer and historian,[100] but recent scholarship has 'redeemed' the work of

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[99] N.R. KER [*A Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon*, repr. with suppl. 1957 edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), no. 351] and R. GAMESON ['The Decoration of the Tanner Bede', *Anglo-Saxon England* 21 (1992): 115-159] argue that the 'Tanner Bede' (Bodleian Library, MS Tanner 10) was probably copied during the reign of Edward the Elder (899-924). The fragmentary witness known as Zu (London, British Library Cotton Domitian A.IX, fol. 11) is instead dated by D. DUMVILLE ['English Square Minuscule Script: the Background and Earliest Phases', *Anglo-Saxon England* 16 (1985): 147-179] to a window between 883 and 930. On the temporal gap separating the archetype from the earliest surviving copy of the *Old English Bede* see D. WHITELOCK, 'The List of Chapter-Headings in the *Old English Bede*', in *Bede to Alfred: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature and History*, Collected Studies 121 (London: Variorum Reprints, 1980), pp. 263-284 at 266-268, first published in *Old English Studies in Honour of John C. Pope*, ed. by R.B. Burlin and E.B. Irving Jr. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), pp. 263-284. Despite readily agreeing on the dating of the earliest witnesses of the *Old English Bede*, Sharon M. ROWLEY [*The Old English Version of Bede's 'Historia Ecclesiastica'* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2011), pp. 15-35] still sets the composition of the text within this temporal window. However, Rowley [*ibid.*, pp. 46-54] does recognize that the *Old English Bede* was composed in the aftermath of the Viking wars, and possibly following the settlement of Scandinavian communities in England.

[100] D. WHITELOCK, 'The *Old English Bede*', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 48 (1962): 57-90 at 74.

the anonymous author by showing that he carefully and cleverly re-shaped Bede's narrative according to a very specific purpose, while maintaining the style and authority of his source. In a recent article, George Molyneaux suggested that the *Old English Bede* was designed as an educational text, aimed at providing multiple examples of proper Christian behaviour.[101] This, according to Molyneaux, most clearly emerges in the Old English preface, where the translator, working independently from his source, repeatedly emphasizes King Ceolwulf's God-given duty to provide for the instruction of his people, a goal also to be pursued by having the *Historia ecclesiastica* taught to his subjects.[102]

Although this figure of a teacher-king could have both applied and appealed to Alfred, at the end of the nineteenth century Thomas Miller convincingly demonstrated that the *Old English Bede* was originally composed in a Mercian dialect, and only subsequently modified according to West-Saxon spelling and grammar by the scribes who copied the later witnesses of the anonymous translation.[103] Therefore, notwithstanding the longstanding tradition attributing the *Old English Bede* to the pen of the king of Wessex, there are in fact no solid grounds to connect the vernacular version of the *Historia ecclesiastica* with Alfred and his translation programme, except for the fact that Bede's work could fit Alfred's definition of a book 'nidbeðyrfesta […] eallum monnum to witanne' [most necessary for all men to know].[104] In the following pages, I will consider how the wars of the *Historia ecclesiastica* were transposed in the ninth-century adaptation of Bede's text, and further highlight the enormous gap

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[101] G. MOLYNEAUX, 'The *Old English Bede*: English Ideology or Christian Instruction?', *English Historical Review* 124.4 (2009): 1289-1323 at 1307-1316. The didactic purpose of the *Old English Bede* seems to be confirmed by the later reception of the text and use of the manuscripts, as discussed by ROWLEY, *The Old English Version*, pp. 156-173.

[102] For a detailed comparison of the Latin and Old English prefaces see MOLYNEAUX, 'The *Old English Bede*', pp. 1307-1310.

[103] MILLER, *The Old English Version*, I, pp. xxvi-lix .

[104] J. BATELY, 'Old English Prose Before and During the Reign of Alfred', *Anglo-Saxon England* 17 (1988): 93-138 at 104.

separating the *Old English Bede* from the West-Saxon translations as far as the perception and representation of war are concerned.

In her 1983 article 'Bede's Old Testament Kings', Judith McClure argued that the interpretation and rendering of historical events in the *Historia ecclesiastica* were deeply influenced by the Old Testament, and in particular by the first Book of Samuel, on which the Northumbrian scholar had composed a commentary.[105] As a consequence, the many wars and battles recorded in the *Historia ecclesiastica* are portrayed in a very 'factual' manner and construed as judgements of God, whereby sinners are punished at the hands of their enemies according to the will of the Lord. However, on no occasion does Bede go beyond this dry rendering of events by addressing or further elaborating any issues that could have been raised by his account. For example, in the second book of the *Historia ecclesiastica*, Bede relates the slaughter of as many as 1,200 monks of Bangor, who had come to accompany an army which was to face the pagan English king Æthelfrith at Chester 'ad exorandum Deum pro milite bellum agente' [to pray to God on behalf of the soldiers taking part in the fight].[106] In Bede's view, the brothers of the Welsh monastery were guilty of refusing Augustine's decrees on the Easter controversy and were therefore chastised by the 'gentiles' for their wilfulness in remaining in sin, just like great numbers of the Chosen People in the Old Testament. As a consequence, Bede did not feel the need to comment on the death of unarmed churchmen, nor to state explicitly why they suffered such a fate, allowing his audience to draw the parallel between this episode and its biblical antecedents.

According to Judith McClure, the meticulous recording of the military activities of kings and rulers was, in fact, a key element of Old Testament historiography,[107] and

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[105] J. MCCLURE, 'Bede's Old Testament Kings', in *Ideal and Reality*, pp. 76-98.
[106] *HE*, II. 2.
[107] MCCLURE, 'Bede's Old Testament Kings', pp. 87-88.

should therefore be regarded as an indication of the influence of biblical models on Bede's work, rather than as a real interest in the issue of war on the part of the Northumbrian scholar. On the other hand, the translator of the *Old English Bede* seems to be even less concerned with this matter, as he often strips meaningful details from Bede's accounts of wars and battles, or omits significant episodes in their entirety. A few examples among the many dotted through the *Historia ecclesiastica* and its translation will suffice to illustrate this point.

For instance, in the episode just mentioned, the author of the *Old English Bede* fails to indicate that the churchmen assembled on the battlefield at Chester were the same monks of Bangor who had opposed Augustine in the Easter controversy,[108] therefore 'severing the direct causal link between their failure to recognise Augustine's superiority of faith and Æthelfrith's retribution'.[109] Moreover, the Mercian translator also passes over the fact that the monks 'habentes defensorem nomine Brocmailum, qui eos intentos precibus a barbarorum gladiis protegeret' [had a guard named Brocmail, whose duty it was to protect them against the barbarians' swords while they were praying], an armed guardian who, however, 'ad primum hostium aduentum cum suis terga uertens' [turned his back at the first enemy attack together with his men], leaving the poor brothers 'inermes ac nudos ferientibus gladiis' [unharmed and helpless before the swords].[110] It would of course be possible to ascribe the translator's omission to his desire to stress the inherent threat posed by praying, though utterly defenceless, monks. However, the fact that throughout the *Old English Bede* its author shows no apparent

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[108] Instead of reproducing the Latin explicit statement 'erant autem plurimi eorum de monasterio Bancor' [most of them were from the monastery of Bangor] (*HE*, II. 2), the Old English translator opts for a more general description, specifically the 'sacerdas 7 biscopas 7 munecas' [priest and bishops and monks] of the Britons [*OEB*, II. 2].

[109] MCKINNEY, 'Creating a *Gens Anglorum*', p. 34. I am very grateful to Miss McKinney for letting me read her thesis before submission and for greatly facilitating my work.

[110] *HE*, II. 2.

interest in spiritual warfare strongly challenges this interpretation. For example, Bede dedicates two chapters of the first book of his *Historia ecclesiastica* to the *bella spiritalia* waged by Saint Germanus of Auxerre against a sea-storm and an army of Saxons and Picts.[111] In the *Old English Bede*, however, these two episodes are fully excised together with the account of the Pelagian heresy discussed in the neighbouring chapters, despite the fact that these stories were tightly connected to the moral of the battle of Chester, and could have constituted significant examples of God's power against 'hostibus uel inuisibilibus uel carne' [foes visible and invisible].[112]

Another interesting question emerging from the account of the battle of Chester is whether, and to what extent, the translator of the *Historia ecclesiastica* understood Bede's indebtedness to the Old Testament in his description and interpretation of wars and battles. While this specific episode does not provide conclusive evidence in either sense, other episodes favour the hypothesis that the Mercian author did recognize Bede's biblical references. We can consider, for example, the chapter dedicated to the death of King Edwin of Northumbria at the hands of Penda of Mercia and Cædwalla, king of the Britons, respectively described by both Bede and his translator as a 'hæðen' [pagan] and as 'þæm hædnum reðra 7 grimra, forðon þe he elreordig wæs' [more furious and cruel than the heathen, being a barbarian].[113] The adjective *el-reord(ig)*, translating the Latin *barbarus*, is relatively rare in the Old English corpus and it is particularly interesting to note that, apart from the *Old English Bede*, it is attested almost exclusively in translations and glosses of the Old Testament.[114] The same

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[111] *HE*, I. 17 and 20.

[112] *HE*, I. 20.

[113] *OEB*, II. 16; *HE*, II. 20.

[114] In the *Old English Web Corpus* [accessed 1 April 2012], the adjective *el-reord(ig)* has only eighteen matches. Except for the *Old English Bede*, this term appears in the Paris Psalter and in three Psalter glosses [*PsGlC* (Wildhagen), *PsGlA* (Kuhn) and *PsGlB* (Brenner)] to translate Psalm 113.1. The other occurrences are: *Mart* 5 (Kotzor) Jy 25, A. 11; *Alex* 23.2, 24.24, 33.1, 41.1.

peculiarity characterizes the noun *dēofol-gield* [idolatry/Devil-worship],[115] also found in the description of the death of Edwin as a substitute for the Latin expression 'gente idolis deditus' [people devoted to idolatry].[116] *Dēofol-gield* has a much larger record than *el-reord(ig)*, but often recurs in Psalter glosses, in the Old English translation of the *Heptateuch* and even in poetic texts based on the Old Testament.[117]

Another example is the adjective *ārlēas* [wicked/impious],[118] which appears in the well-known account of the battle of Heavenfield, where King Oswald defeated the 'unmæt weorod' [monstrous host] of Cædwalla 'mid medmicle weorode ac mid Cristes geleafan getrymede' [with a small army but strengthened with the faith of Christ].[119] In Chapter One of this thesis we have seen that the defeat of vast armies of unbelievers by a small troop supported by God is a topos of Old Testament battle narration, and the choice of the adjective *med-micel* [not great/small],[120] also often found in Psalter glosses,[121] once again suggests that the author of the *Old English Bede* had not only identified Bede's source, but also that he was quite familiar with the biblical text, both in Latin and, possibly, in a translated or glossed version.

Nonetheless, the same conclusion cannot be drawn with respect to the audience of the *Old English Bede*. In fact, in various passages throughout the vernacular adaptation, the translator must expand on his source in order to provide explanatory information

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[115] BOSWORTH and TOLLER, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, s. deófol-gild, p. 200.

[116] *HE*, II. 20.

[117] Tellingly, the adjective *dēfol-gield* is used in *Exodus* (l. 46), *Solomon and Saturn* (25.2), the Paris Psalter (143.15), the Old English *Heptateuch* (Leviticus 23.60 and Epilogue 36) and numerous Psalter glosses [*Old English Web Corpus* (accessed 1 April 2012)].

[118] BOSWORTH and TOLLER, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, s. ār-*leás, I, p. 50. Ār-lēas* appears in verse adaptations of the Old Testament such as *Genesis* (ll. 1018, 1383, 1933, 2476 and 2548), *Exodus* (l. 164) and the Paris Psalter (54.22 and 57.9), but also in other Christian poems (*Andreas*, *Sould and Body*, *Elene*, *Guthlac*, *Juliana*, *Judgement Day* II), in the Old English *Heptateuch* (Exodus 9.27, Leviticus 26.41, Deuteronomy 9.4 and 9.27, Judges 5.1) and Psalter glosses [*Old English Web Corpus* (accessed 1 April 2012)].

[119] *OEB*, III. 1; *HE*, III. 1-2.

[120] BOSWORTH and TOLLER, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, s. med-micel, I, p. 675.

[121] Although *med-micel* has a less coherent record than the other terms discussed above, it is repeatedly used in Psalter glosses [*Old English Web Corpus* (accessed 1 April 2012)].

concerning biblical episodes and characters referred to by Bede, even very 'basic' ones.[122] For example, the Mercian author felt the need to point out that Genesis was the first book of Moses[123] and that 'se mæsta cempa 7 se hehsta þæs heofonlican weorodes' [the most mighty and exalted champion of the the heavenly host], as described by Bede, was in fact St. Paul.[124] It is therefore very difficult to see how an Anglo-Saxon audience who needed to be reminded that Genesis was the first book of the Old Testament could have been able to perceive the analogy between, for example, the undertaking of Oswald and his small army at Heavenfield and the many biblical leaders who had achieved the same accomplishment. It is also worth noting that even though the translator most likely understood Bede's allusions to the Old Testament, he deliberately failed to point them out to his less learned audience.

On the other hand, by stripping away all the allusions to the Old Testament, Bede's translator further proves his indifference not only to the issue of war but, even more importantly, to the exemplary value of Bede's accounts of these violent events. In other words, the manifold episodes of war in the *Historia ecclesiastica* appear not to have raised the interest of the Mercian translator, who possibly perceived them as irrelevant to his own experience and that of his audience, despite the fact that many of them could have recalled the struggles of ninth-century Anglo-Saxons against the Vikings. For example, many battles in the *Historia ecclesiastica* see the opposition between the armies of Christian Northumbria, Wessex and East Anglia and the pagan king Penda of Mercia, phrased by Bede in terms very similar to those adopted by Asser, for example, to describe the conflict between Anglo-Saxons and Vikings.[125] In the *Old English Bede*,

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[122] WHITELOCK, 'The *Old English Bede*', p. 75.
[123] *OEB*, VI, 25
[124] *OEB*, Interrogationes, IX; *HE*, I. 27.
[125] See, for example, *HE*, III. 24. Concerning Asser's representation of the Viking wars see below, pp. 149-150.

however, the translator always fails to emphasize the 'religious' dimension of the fight, despite substantially retaining Bede's original description and moreover, in some cases he eliminates it completely as, for example, in the story of Sigberht.[126]

In this episode, the king of the East Angles forces his predecessor Sigberht, who had retired to a monastery, to join him on the battlefield against Penda, in the hope that 'heora compweorodes mód þy unforhtre beon sceolde, 7 þy læs fluge for his andweardnesse; forðon he wæs ær se fromesta heretoga' [the spirit of their troops would be higher, and that they would be less disposed to fly because of his presence; for he had formerly been a most active general].[127] In the end, Bede reports, Sigberht 'occisus est una cum rege Ecgrice, et cunctus eorum insistentibus paganis caesus siue dispersus exercitus' [was killed together with King Ecgric, and the whole army was either slain or scattered by the heathen attacks].[128] However, in the corresponding passage in the vernacular adaptation, one significant detail is omitted: 'he wæs ofslegen mid Ecgrice þam cyninge, 7 eall heora weorod oðþe geslegen oððe geflymed wæs' [he was slain with King Ecgric, and all their soldiers were either killed or put to flight].[129] Here the translator, by underplaying the antithesis between pagan and Christian, not only loses Bede's subtle allusion to spiritual warfare, but also minimises the potential for an identification of the events described in the text and the reality of ninth-century warfare.

In her still unpublished article 'Vernacular Angels', Sharon Rowley argues that the Mercian author erased the account of the Pelagian heresy from his translation because, according to Bede, the sinfulness of the Britons in favouring the teachings of Pelagius was the final cause which determined the loss of the island to the Anglo-Saxons.[130] This

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[126] *HE*, III. 18; *OEB* III. 14.
[127] *OEB*, III. 14.
[128] *HE*, III. 18.
[129] *OEB*, III. 14.
[130] S.M. ROWLEY, 'Vernacular Angels' (forthcoming), pp. 29-30.

'presented a problem for the ninth century translator(s)', who did not wish to envisage another conquest of England by new sea-borne invaders because of the sins of his audience.[131] This reading of the excision of the Pelagian heresy, albeit open to question,[132] seems to be confirmed by the translator's treatment of Bede's account of the Anglo-Saxon conquest of Britain, where he never emphasizes Bede's depiction of the sinfulness of the Britons. In Book I, Bede defines the Britons as a people weakened by sloth which, in the end:

> […] sicut enim agni a feris, ita miseri ciues discerpuntur ab hostibus; unde a mansionibus ac possessiunculis suis eiecti, inminens sibi famis periculum latrocinio ac rapacitate mutua temperabant, augentes externas domesticis motibus clades, donec omnis regio totius cibi sustentaculo, excepto uenandi solacio, uacuaretur. (*HE*, I. 12)
>
> [… were torn in pieces by their enemies like lambs by wild beasts. They were driven from their dwellings and their poor estates; they tried to save themselves from the starvation which threatened them by robbing and plundering each other. Thus they increased their external calamities by internal strife until the whole land was left without food and destitute except for such relief as hunting brought.]

In contrast, the Anglo-Saxon translator makes no mention of the Britons' sloth, while the passage quoted above also reads very differently in the Old English, as every reference to internal strife is erased:

> Forðon swa swa sceap fro*m* wulfu*m* 7 wildeoru*m* beoð fornumene, swa þa earman ceasterwaran toslitene 7 fornumene wæron fra*m* heora feondu*m*, 7 heora æthu*m* benémde 7 to hungre gesette. (*OEB*, I. 9)
>
> [… for as sheep are destroyed by wolves and wild beasts, so the poor townsmen were rent and destroyed by their foes, being stripped of their possessions and left to starve.]

By 'concealing' the faults which led to the defeat of the Britons, the Mercian translator fails to put forward past events as a model for understanding contemporary ones — a

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[131] *Ibid.*.

[132] See, for instance, Dorothy WHITELOCK's rather different reading of the translator's treatment of the Easter controversy and of the Pelagian heresy ['The *Old English Bede*', pp. 62-63].

strategy employed, for example, by the author of the *Old English Prose Psalms.*

This is why the *Old English Bede* differs markedly from the 'Alfredian' translations. As we have seen, both the *Old English Orosius* and the *Old English Prose Psalms*, produced in connection with Alfred and his circle, present a strong interest in what 'old books' could teach about war and, more generally, about the contemporary situation.[133] In other words, 'Alfredian' authors noticeably modified their sources, engaging in a dialogue with them and seizing every opportunity to 'question' the Latin texts about war and the Vikings. Conversely, the *Old English Bede* clearly does not conform to this pattern, as the translator takes great care to minimize every element which evokes the historical reality of ninth-century England. In order to appreciate this gap it suffices to compare the *Old English Bede* with the original treatment of Orosius' *Historiae*, an historical work very similar to the *Historia ecclesiastica* in its pivotal role in the cultural landscape of the early Middle Ages. Both texts lend themselves to being easily adapted, but it is only in the *Old English Orosius* that the wars between a longstanding Christian community and invading pagan armies stand out, as well as the struggle of the translator to make sense of his source, its message and teachings.

To sum up, the analysis of the *Old English Bede* points to two interesting conclusions. Firstly, the rendering of the wars of the *Historia ecclesiastica* into the vernacular very much favours the hypothesis that the composition of the *Old English Bede* was in no way connected to Alfred's court. Secondly, it indicates that while the West-Saxon programme for the revival of literature and learning promoted an early reflection on the issue of war, by virtue of its intense 'dialogue' with classical sources and continental realities, other areas of Anglo-Saxon England remained excluded from

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[133] According to Nicole G. DISCENZA ['The *Old English Bede* and the Construction of Anglo-Saxon Authority', *Anglo-Saxon England* 31 (2002): 69-80], the anonymous translator's rendering of Bede's own voice in the *Old English Bede* shows how, in the late ninth or early tenth century, the Northumbrian scholar was already considered as an *auctoritas*.

this process for a long time.

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Asser's *Vita Alfredi*

The last section of this chapter will consider two texts, namely the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Asser's *Vita Alfredi*, which stand apart from the other Alfredian works previously discussed because they do not constitute a translation of 'old books', but are substantially 'new' compositions realized at the West-Saxon court. As well, both the *Chronicle* and Asser's *Vita* centre on contemporary rather than remote events, and therefore prove particularly interesting for exploring attitudes towards war and the Vikings. Because of these similarities, in the following pages the two texts will be examined together, even though each of them would have deserved an individual and more detailed treatment had time and space allowed. However, it should be noted that Asser based most of his account of Alfred's youth and early 'career' on the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* itself and, as shall be discussed below, the different rendering of key military events in these two texts is revealing not only of the plurality of ideas about war at the time, but also of the role played by literary form in displaying these ideas. In fact, Alfred's 'biography' and the *Chronicle* embody the two main forms of historical writing in the early Middle Ages,[134] thus offering a comprehensive perspective on the many wars of ninth-century England.

In order to pursue the analysis of these texts within the limits of the present study, we shall compare the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* with the *Annales Bertiniani*, a contemporary

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[134] According to Sarah FOOT ['Finding the Meaning of Form: Narrative in Annals and Chronicles', in *Writing Medieval History*, ed. by N. Partner (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), pp. 88-108 at 89] 'medieval writers differentiated writings about the past that were arranged chronologically from those that reshaped events with rhetorical skill to convey particular meanings. Chronicles (variously termed *chronicon, chronica, chronicae*) and annals (*annales*) were together distinguished from texts that sough to offer more expansive or moralizing interpretations of the past, *historia*'.

chronicle composed on the Continent.[135] The aim of this original approach is to identify the analogies and the differences between the two traditions in order to pinpoint efficiently the defining characteristics of ninth-century English representations of war in 'historical' sources, and the ideas underlying such accounts. At the same time, Asser's *Vita Alfredi* will be taken into consideration to investigate how the king's biographer used, complemented and modified *Chronicle*-material to record Alfred's military enterprises in the wider context of his God-given role as the first king of all England.

The text (or texts) usually known under the name of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is a 'complex body of vernacular annalistic material'[136] first composed in the late ninth century under the patronage of King Alfred of Wessex and his 'intellectual circle'. This original compilation was based on a variety of historical sources including Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* and earlier sets of annals which are no longer extant. After its completion in 890 or 892, the 'archetype' of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, often designated as 'Common Stock', was circulated throughout the newly constructed Alfredian England, leading to it being copied and continued in different places at various times under quite disparate historical, cultural and political circumstances.[137] As

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[135] G. WAITZ (ed.), *Annales Bertiniani*, MGH SS rer. Germ. 5 (Hannover: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1883). All quotes from the *Annales Bertiniani* (henceforth marked in abbreviated form as *AB*) are drawn from this edition, while translations are from J. NELSON (trans.), *The Annals of St-Bertin*, Ninth-Century Histories 1 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991). The *Annales Bertiniani* constitute the West-Frankish continuation of the *Annales Regni Francorum*, which were first composed at the court of Charlemagne in the 780s and abruptly interrupted in 829, when the royal chapel (or chancery) was dispersed following a rebellion against Louis the Pious. One copy of the royal annals was then continued until 882 by at least two different authors: Prudentius, a member of Louis' entourage who became bishop of Troyes around 843 and Hincmar, archbishop of Rheims, who acquired the original manuscript of the *Annales Bertiniani* — or a copy of it — at Prudentius' death in 861. For a detailed description of the content and history of the *Annales Bertiniani* see J. NELSON, 'The *Annals of St. Bertin*', in *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. by J. Nelson (London: Ambledon Press, 1986), pp. 173-194, first published in *Charles the Bald: Court and Kingdom. Papers Based on a Colloquium Held in London in April 1979*, ed. by M. Gibson, J. Nelson and D. Ganz, British Archaeological Reports, International Series 101 (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1981), pp. 15-36 and *Annals of St-Bertin*, pp. 1-19.

[136] A. JORGENSEN, 'Introduction: Reading the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*', in *Reading the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: Language, Literature and History*, ed. by A. Jorgensen, SEM 23 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), pp. 1-28 at 4.

[137] On the debate concerning the exact extent of the 'Common Stock' see below pp. 150-151.

a result, the extant witnesses of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* vary significantly in form, content and representation of the same events, while *Chronicle*-material was also included in a number of Latin historical works — the first of which is Asser's *Vita*.[138] Today, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is preserved in seven manuscripts conventionally labelled from A to G, the earliest of which is Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 173, usually known as the Parker Chronicle.[139] As this manuscript originated, possibly in Winchester, between the end of the ninth century and the beginning of the tenth, it is unanimously regarded as the primary witness of the Alfredian 'Common Stock', and will therefore be used as the basis for the present discussion.[140] It has long been acknowledged that the earliest section of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* was designed to promote a sense of unity among Alfred's subjects by placing contemporary events within a fictional past shared by all the people of the *Engla lond* — a past shaped by Christianity, by the relationship with Rome and by the West-Saxon royal family, on whose deeds and providential role in the history of 'England' the 'Common Stock' also focuses frequently.[141]

The *Vita Ælfredi regis Angul Saxonum*, composed around 893 by the Welshman Asser, is one of the earliest surviving examples of biographical writing of the medieval period, as it centres on the life and deeds of Alfred, king of Wessex.[142] We unfortunately

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[138] Other Latin historical works which translate and/or include material drawn from one or more versions of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle are, for example, Æthelweard's tenth-century *Chronicon* [*The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. and trans. by A. Campbell (London: Nelson, 1962)] and the anonymous *Annals of St. Neots* [D. DUMVILLE and M. LAPIDGE (eds.), *The Annals of St. Neots, with Vita Prima Sancti Neoti*, The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: a Collaborative Edition 17 (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1985)].

[139] J. BATELY (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. MS A: a Semi-Diplomatic Edition with Introduction and Indices*, The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: a Collaborative Edition 3 (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1986). For a useful summary of the material contained in each manuscript see JORGENSEN, 'Introduction', pp. 6-7.

[140] On the date and origin of the Parker Chronicle see BATELY, *MS A*, pp. lxxv-lxxviii.

[141] On the construction of an 'English' identity in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and in other Alfredian texts see, *inter alios*, S. FOOT, 'The Making of *Angelcynn*: English Identity Before the Norman Conquest', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser. 7 (1996): 25-49.

[142] The authenticity of the *Vita Alfredi* has been repeatedly put into question. Most recently, for example, Alfred P. SMYTH [*King Alfred the Great* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) and *The Medieval Life of King Alfred the Great: A Translation and Commentary on the Text Attributed to Asser*

know very little not only about Asser himself, but also about the original purpose and prospective audience of his text, since the only extant version of the *Vita* appears to be no more than a draft of a wider work that the Welsh author was never able to complete.[143] In the opinion of many commentators, the *Vita Alfredi* was originally intended for Welsh readers and listeners, in order to acquaint them with their new overlord.[144] However, it is important to remember that Asser contributed both directly and indirectly to Alfred's translation programme[145] and, more importantly for the present argument, the *Vita Alfredi* relies heavily on the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Consequently, as the *Vita Alfredi* cannot be considered in isolation from the cultural milieu of the royal court nor from the wider Alfredian canon, the possibility of a West-Saxon audience will also not be ruled out in the following discussion.

In truth, it would be fair to describe the *Vita Alfredi* as a Latin translation of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* up to 878, interspersed with and supplemented by fragmentary accounts of selected episodes of Alfred's family history and what we would now anachronistically define as 'private life'.[146] As a result, the whole text is dominated by

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(Houndsmill: Palgrave, 2002)] has extensively argued that the *Vita Alfredi* constitutes a forgery realized around the year 1000 by Byrhtferth of Ramsey in the context of the Benedictine Reform and under the influence of the works of notable continental intellectuals such as Abbo of Fleury. As Smyth's theses have been widely rejected [see, for example, S. KEYNES' review of Smyth's 1995 book: 'On the Authenticity of Asser's *Life of King Alfred*', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 47.3 (1996): 529-551], in the present study the *Vita Alfredi* will be considered as a genuine work by Asser, composed during the last decade of the ninth century at — or in close connection with — Alfred's court.

[143] KEYNES and LAPIDGE, *Alfred the Great*, pp. 56-57. There are no extant manuscripts of the *Vita Alfredi*, as the only copy that reached modern times (MS Otho A. xii, probably written c. 1000) was lost in the 1731 fire of the Cotton library. As a consequence, our knowledge of Asser's work rests solely on two modern transcripts of the above-mentioned manuscript, two editions of the same and various extracts from the *Vita* incorporated in other medieval works. However, the absence of further witnesses suggests that Alfred's biography never enjoyed wide circulation in the medieval period.

[144] *Ibid*., p. 56.

[145] See *VA*, Ch. 81 and 88. Also, in the prose preface to the Old English translation of Gregory the Great's *Regula pastoralis* [*King Alfred's Pastoral Care*, I, p. 7], Alfred claims that he was supported in his task by 'Assere minum biscepe' [my bishop Asser].

[146] Concerning the possible 'private life' of another renowned early medieval ruler see J. NELSON, 'Did Charlemagne Have a Private Life?', in *Writing Medieval Biography, 750-1250: Essays in Honour of Professor Frank Barlow*, ed. by D. Bates, J. Crick and S. Hamilton (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006), pp. 15-28.

an alternation not only of *Chronicle*-material and Asser's own observations, but of the chaos and violence of the Viking wars, and the peace of what appears to be the very limited time Alfred could spend away from the battlefield. This strongly suggests that Asser saw military activity by and against the Scandinavian raiders as a fundamental constituent of Alfred's 'story', equalled only by the king's programme for the revival of literature and learning.[147] In fact, Alfred's existence is so closely intertwined with the Vikings in the *Vita* that, at the very beginning of the text, the recording of Alfred's birth and the description of his genealogy are immediately followed by the account of an engagement between the West Saxons and a Scandinavian warband.[148]

Similarly, even a superficial reading of the 'Common Stock' is sufficient to note that the Vikings, their raids and the often unsuccessful attempts to resist them constitute one of the main focuses of the text. Another element, which stands out obviously when considering how military activity by and against the Vikings is represented in the 'Common Stock', is that its entries do not provide a detailed description of the actual battles, but limit their accounts to dry facts, namely the indication of when and where the Scandinavians attacked, followed by an often repetitive list of their marauding activities (e.g. rape, pillage and burning) and by a short record of the defenders' counter-offensive — if there was any! For example, this is how the anonymous English chronicler describes an engagement between King Egbert and a Viking force in 833:

> Her gefeaht Ecgbryht cyning wiþ .xxxv. sciphlæsta æt Carrum, 7 þær wearþ micel węl geslægen, 7 þa Denescan ahton węlstowe gewald. (*ASC*, s.a. 833)
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> [In this year King Egbert fought against 35 ship-loads at Carhampton; and a great slaughter was made there, and the Danish had possession of the place of slaughter.]

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[147] The relationship between *wig* and *wisdom* in Alfredian sources has been thoroughly investigated in many scholarly works. For example, Alice Cowen devotes the first chapter of her PhD thesis ['Writing Fire', pp. 19-69] to the representation of violence within this framework.

[148] *VA*, Ch. 1-3.

In her unpublished doctoral thesis, Alice Cowen has shown that the representation of armed conflicts in the Alfredian section of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is shaped by a well-defined rhetorical structure arising from 'a conjunction of formulaic vocabulary and structural repetition', each of which 'conforms to a flexible but recurring pattern, selecting from a small range of predictable ingredients'.[149] In other words, accounts of the Viking wars in the 'Common Stock' are constructed by combining a number of thematic and linguistic elements drawn from a very limited repertoire.

These stylistic choices are certainly not unique to the author of the 'Common Stock', but they are indeed shared by most early medieval chroniclers. We could consider, as an example among many, the particularly concise report of a Viking incursion into Paris in 845, found in the *Annales Bertiniani*:

> Nordomannorum naves centum viginti mense Martio per Sequanam hinc et abinde cuncta vastantes, Loticiam Parisiorum, nullo penitus obsistente, pervadunt. Quibus cum Karolus occurrere moliretur, sed praevalere suos nullatenus posse prospiceret, quibusdam pactionibus, et munere septem milium librarum eis exhibito, a progrediendo compescuit ac redire persuasit. (*AB*, s.a. 845)

> [In March, 120 ships of the Northmen sailed up the Seine to Paris, laying waste everything on either side and meeting not the least bit of opposition. Charles made efforts to offer some resistance, but realised that his men could not possibly win. So he made a deal with them: by handing over to them 7,000 lb (of silver) as a bribe, he restrained them from advancing further and persuaded them to go away.]

Throughout the present study, we have repeatedly noted how an accusation frequently made by modern historians about early medieval authors is that they 'do not write in detail about war',[150] stubbornly refusing to describe the various phases of a given battle, paying very little attention to technicalities such as the number of men involved, their fighting abilities and equipment, and so on. This tendency has been

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[149] COWEN, 'Writing Fire', p. 48.
[150] HALSALL, *Warfare and Society*, p. 2.

variously ascribed to one of the following factors (or a combination of the three): most writers were churchmen, and therefore incapable of understanding the art of war; they were too unsophisticated to realize the importance of accurately reporting facts and figures, or including tactical considerations; and they were too unlearned to do otherwise. However, a close comparison between the *Chronicle* and Asser's *Vita* strongly refutes these assumptions.

Despite its many shortcomings, Alfred P. Smyth's disputed new translation of the *Vita Alfredi* has the great merit of facilitating a comparison between Asser's work and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, since those passages that the Welsh author (or, in Smyth's opinion, Byrhtferth of Ramsey) translated verbatim from his source are printed in italics. This allows us immediately to visualize how Asser supplemented *Chronicle*-material to create a more detailed and articulate account of the Viking wars. We could consider, for instance, Asser's rendering of the battle following the sack of Winchester in 860:

> *During his* [Æthelbald's] *days, a great army* of pagans, *coming by sea,* aggressively *attacked* the city of *Winchester* and sacked it. When they were returning to their ships with great booty, *Osric, ealdorman of Hampshire with his men, and Ealdorman Æthelwulf with the men of Berkshire* valiantly *intercepted them*. Battle was truly joined. *The pagans were* everywhere *cut to pieces* and when they were no longer able to resist, they fled like women, *and the Christians were masters of the place of slaughter*.[151]

In this passage, Asser expands the epigrammatic entry of the *Chronicle* by adding circumstantial details about the context in which battle was joined (while the Vikings

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[151] SMYTH, *The Medieval Life*, p. 12. 'In cuius diebus magnus paganorum exercitus, de mari adveniens, Wintoniam civitatem hostiliter invadens depopulatus est. Cui, cum ad naves cum ingenti praeda reverterentur, Osric, Hamtunensium comes, cum suis, et Æthelwulf comes, cum Bearrocensibus, viriliter obviaverunt, consertoque proelio *oppido* pagani passim trucidantur, et, cum diutius resistere non possent, muliebriter fugam arripiunt, et Christiani loco funeris dominati sunt' (*VA*, Ch. 18, ll. 6-15).

were on the way back to their ships), by qualifying the actions of the defenders (who valiantly resisted the raiders) and by offering a more extensive (although admittedly still quite concise) description of the fight. Asser's richer rendering of this battle with respect to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, composed in the very same milieu, therefore demonstrates that chroniclers and 'history-writers' of the early Middle Ages were perfectly capable of adding a great deal more to their records, but actively and consciously chose not to do so, rather than being unable because of some kind of cultural backwardness, especially with respect to the classical period. In particular, Asser was indeed a monk and a bishop who had probably never held a sword in his hand,[152] but he spent a considerable amount of time at court and in the company of Alfred himself. As a consequence, it was impossible that he only possessed peripheral information about the Viking wars, since at Alfred's 'headquarters' he would have been able to gather precise knowledge of contemporary military events and first-hand accounts of those which took place before his coming to Wessex, or to meet experienced warriors willing to elucidate the complexities of the art of war in order to supplement the information he derived from the *Chronicle*. Similarly, there is no reason to believe that the situation of the anonymous author of the 'Common Stock' would have been very different from Asser's. Why, then, are their accounts so concise?

I would propose that both writers, far from being unsophisticated, deliberately and skilfully measured out the amount of information and literary flourishes in their accounts in order to respond to a complex combination of stylistic and argumentative requirements. Over the past ten years, numerous publications have drawn our attention to the pivotal role of conventions and literary models in governing and shaping the

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[152] Even though there are no reasons to suppose that Asser ever infringed the Church's prohibition to carry weapons and to be involved in armed conflicts, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* does record Bishop Heahmund among the casualties of the battle of *Meretun* in 871.

recording of events in medieval historiography.[153] In the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, it was the literary form of chronicle-writing which left no room for 'conditions, concessions or speculations',[154] rather than the inability of its author who, on the contrary, carefully elaborated a highly artificial narration where descriptive elements of all kinds were wilfully and meticulously omitted.[155] Nevertheless, Alice Cowen has convincingly demonstrated that, despite the limits imposed by the very nature of his text, the author of the 'Common Stock' was able to construct an extremely sophisticated and ideologically oriented portrayal of the Viking wars by deploying formulaic language and structures in such a way as to assert continuously West-Saxon supremacy over their enemies, regardless of the actual outcome of the various engagements.[156]

If, therefore, the representation of the Viking wars in the 'Common Stock' was shaped by the conventions of chronicle-writing and their limited allowances, the *Vita Alfredi* was clearly influenced by a longstanding literary tradition dating back to the classical world. The *Vita* indeed displays a surprisingly 'excellent command of the technical Latin terminology for war and battle',[157] which suggests that Asser had a quite good, although not at all exceptional, knowledge of Roman and late antique authors. According to Michael Lapidge, the king's biographer derived his knowledge of classical military vocabulary from Latin poets like Virgil and Lucan, and from compendia of Roman history such as Orosius' *Historiae*, a text certainly known at Alfred's court.[158] Furthermore, the *De re militari* by Vegetius, a bulky summary of antique military culture regarded by medieval writers and modern military historians alike as the 'Sacred

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[153] See, in particular, the collection of essays edited by E.M. TYLER and R. BALZARETTI, *Narrative and History*.
[154] C. CLARK, 'The Narrative Mode of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* before the Conquest', in *England Before the Conquest*, pp. 215-235 at 220.
[155] *Ibid*., p. 218.
[156] COWEN, 'Writing Fire', pp. 54-62.
[157] M. LAPIDGE, 'Asser's Reading', in *Alfred the Great*, pp. 27-47 at 29.
[158] *Ibid*., pp. 29-31.

Book' of the art of war, was so popular in ninth-century Francia that no fewer than a dozen manuscripts survive to this day.[159] Although it has so far been impossible to discover an English manuscript of the *De re militari* pre-dating the eleventh century,[160] or to identify direct textual borrowings in the *Vita Alfredi*, it can still be wondered whether Vegetius' work was ever known at Alfred's court, perhaps through the king's continental connections.[161]

This evidence shows, first of all, that Asser was by no means lacking in celebrated classical examples of how to talk about war. More importantly, instead of being 'overwhelmed' by his models of military historians, he was able to select only those elements of the 'Roman' tradition which met his needs. He adopted archaic and anachronistic terminology to describe 'troop deployment and *maneuvre*, encampment, attack and defence',[162] possibly in order to compensate for the lack of such nomenclature in the ecclesiastical Latin he had most likely studied but, overall, he preferred to remain close to his vernacular annalistic source, also revealing a remarkable understanding and appreciation of its conventions. It is interesting to note that the phrase concluding the passage quoted above ('loco funeris dominati sunt' [they were masters of the place of slaughter]) is an exact rendering of the Old English formulaic expression *wælstōwe geweald āgan*. In fact, Asser not only translates this phrase every

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[159] C. ALLMAND, 'The *De Re Militari* of Vegetius in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance', in *Writing War: Medieval Literary Responses to Warfare*, ed. by C. Saunders, F. Le Saux and N. Thomas (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), pp. 15-28 at16.

[160] The earliest surviving manuscript of the *De re militari* found in England is London, BL, MS Cotton Cleopatra D.i.

[161] A further investigation of the relationship between the *Vita Alfredi* and Vegetius' *De re militari* would certainly prove worthwhile, since Christopher Allmand ['The *De Re Militari*', pp. 17-18] has convincingly argued that Vegetius' *epitome* had such a significant impact throughout the Medieval period not because it offered practical advice on how to wage actual wars, but because it focussed on the fundamental role played by rulers in securing the success of their armies. It would therefore be interesting to ask whether and how this classical compendium could have informed and/or influenced Alfred's understanding of his role as king and military leader.

[162] LAPIDGE, 'Asser's Reading', p. 29. For example, in the account of the battle of Ashdown, Asser uses (or rather, as Richard Abels and Stephen Morillo point out, mis-uses) the classical word *testudo* to describe 'something quite different from Roman practice, a shield-wall' [ABELS and MORILLO, 'A Lying Legacy?', p. 12]. See also Asser's use of terms such as *turma* and *moenia*.

time it occurs in his source but, on at least two occasions, adds it to his text even though absent from the *Chronicle*.[163] Being a native speaker of Welsh with a Latin background, Asser would have been at a loss to recognize such a specific convention of an oral-formulaic culture very different from his own, had he not become part of a thriving multicultural and multilingual community at the West-Saxon court, where it is quite likely that he developed a good command of Old English.[164]

Asser was also strongly influenced by the work of another eminent royal biographer: Einhard, who composed a reasonably concise Latin life of Charlemagne some fifteen or twenty years after the death of his king and patron (814).[165] In turn, Einhard had based his account of the wars, political affairs and 'private life' of the Carolingian monarch on Suetonius' *De vita Caesarum*, a collection of the biographies of twelve Roman emperors from Julius Cesar to Domitian.[166] Each life in Suetonius' work is structured according to a very strict pattern: a schematic account of each emperor's family background and early career, a sketch of his martial achievements and character, and a description of his death. It is here interesting to note that, even though it is beyond doubt that war did play a very important role in the life and popular image of each Roman emperor, their battles and campaigns were not examined in any detail in the *De vita Caesarum*. Similarly, Einhard devoted a whole section of his *Vita Karoli* to Charlemagne's military exploits, but its content is no more than a quasi-annalistic record of the king's major struggles mainly against foreign enemies.[167] The relative conciseness of battle narration in the *Vita Alfredi* is therefore not surprising, as it is a stylistic feature Asser was confronted with both in his vernacular source and in his

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[163] *VA*, Ch. 5 and 40.

[164] See, KEYNES and LAPIDGE, *Alfred the Great*, p. 55.

[165] EINHARD, *Vita Karoli Magni*, ed. by G.H. Pertz and G. Waitz, MGH SS rer. Germ. 25 (Hannover: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1911).

[166] SUETONIUS, *De vita caesarum libri VIII*, ed. by M. Ihm (Leipzig: Teubner, 1908).

[167] EINHARD, *Vita Karoli*, Ch. 5-14.

literary models.

This testifies once again to a general as well as author-specific sophistication and cultural richness, very far from the image of a 'dark age' of the discourse on war advanced by modern scholarship. This sophistication is also clearly seen in that Asser, unlike Orosius and his Old English translator, did not allow factual information about war to obscure the overall purpose of his work, but instead, he operated a careful and systematic selection of the considerable data doubtlessly available to him to create a fictional reconstruction of events which perfectly corresponded to his agenda. A revealing example in this sense is Asser's rendering of the battle of Ashdown, where the forces of Wessex, facing an unusually vast Viking army, were split into two sections, led respectively by King Æthelred and Alfred, his younger brother and *secondarius*. When, however, the time to fight came, Alfred somehow preceded the king onto the battlefield and, at least for some time, confronted the entire Viking force on his own because, as Asser tells us,

> […] erat enim adhuc frater suus Æthered rex in tentorio in oratione positus, audiens missam, et nimium affirmans se inde *vivum* non discessurum antequam sacerdos missam finiret, et divinum pro humano nolle deserere servitium; et ita fecit. Quae regis Christiani fides multum apud Dominum valuit, sicut in sequentibus apertius declarabitur. (*VA*, Ch. 37, ll. 15-22)

> [… his brother, King Æthelred, was still in his tent at prayer, hearing Mass and declaring firmly that he would not leave that place alive before the priest had finished Mass, and that he would not forsake divine service for that of men; and he did what he said. The faith of the Christian king counted for much with the Lord, as shall be shown more clearly in what follows.]

Although we will never be able to determine what really happened on the field of Ashdown, the impression we gather from the text is that Asser is here describing a sort of 'diplomatic incident' which could, or had actually caused, some political unrest in ninth-century Wessex. Because of this, Asser meticulously records the various phases of

the fight, offering an account which is altogether more exhaustive and notably longer than all others in the *Vita*, even when the battles in question were more crucial for the fate of Alfred and his kingdom.[168]

This episode may illuminate another particularly controversial topic, that is to say the prospective audience of Asser's *Vita*. It is in fact quite difficult to see how such a reconstruction of the battle of Ashdown may have raised the interest of a Welsh audience. It instead appears more plausible that it was orchestrated for the benefit of a specific group of West-Saxon noblemen and high-ranking personalities who, as shall be discussed below, probably challenged Alfred's succession to the throne against Æthelred's son. This again demonstrates that the representation of wars and battles in the *Vita Alfredi*, as well as in many other medieval works, was not defined by the necessity of recording what actually happened, but by the desire to create a fictional 'story' which could serve the author's argument — an author who was also very conscious of the rhetorical devices to achieve his purpose.

What is also particularly interesting from our point of view is that, in his account of this episode, Asser is able to smooth away the potentially dangerous implications of the event by skilfully deploying a model connected to the developing Christian ideology of war. Alfred is portrayed as a practical man and a good warlord, whose military exploits, although by no means respectful of his brother's role as king, are nonetheless just since, as Asser specifies, Alfred was acting 'divino fretus consilio et adiutorio fultus'

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[168] The account of the battle of Ashdown occupies three chapters of the *Vita Alfredi* (no. 37, 38 and 39) and one and a half page in Keynes and Lapidge's edition [pp. 78-80], while the battle of Edington takes only half a chapter in the original (no. 56) and no more than nine lines in the edition. Nevertheless, Alfred's success at Edington was significantly more momentous, as it allowed the king to leave his hiding-place in the Somerset marshes and regain control over his kingdom, while Guthrum was forced to accept baptism and leave Wessex forever. On the consequences of the battle of Edington see D. WHITELOCK, 'The Importance of the Battle of Edington', in *From Bede to Alfred*, pp. 6-15, first published in *Report of the Society of Friends of the Priory Church of Edington, Wiltshire* (1975-77): 6-15.

[supported by divine counsel and strengthened by divine help].[169] On the other hand, Æthelred's temporary absence from the battlefield is convincingly explained by assigning him a different, although equally fundamental role in securing victory through prayer. In this way, Asser not only accommodates a political *impasse* and secures the 'reputation' of all parties involved but, by underlining the importance of both physical and spiritual resistance against the Vikings, he also draws a clear distinction between the role of the laity and that of the clergy with respect to war.

Conversely, the religious dimension of war is conspicuously absent from the 'Common Stock', although this situation seems not to derive from the conventions of the annalistic *genre*. In contrast, the religious is clearly seen in the *Annales Bertiniani*, where historical conflicts are set within a supernatural world ruled by God — demonstrated by the fact that, despite the general briefness of the entries in the *Annales*, its authors spill a lot of ink in describing how events of war in the real world relate to the wider cosmos of the Christian God. For instance, the *Annales Bertiniani* are interspersed with the account of unusual natural phenomena, visions and inexplicable events which precede, follow, or, even more interestingly, mimic an act of war.[170] The entry for 846, for example, records that:

> Pyratae Danorum Fresiam adeuntes, recepto pro libitu censu, pugnando quoque victores effecti, tota pene provincia potiuntur. Ventus aquilo per totam hiemem usque ad ipsa fere Maii mensis initia acerrimus segetibus et vineis incumbit. Luporum incursio inferiorum Galliae partium homines audentissime devorat, sed et in partibus Aquitaniae in modum exercitus usque ad trecentos ferme conglobati et per viam facto agmine gradientes, volentibusque resistere fortiter unanimiterque contrastare feruntur. (*AB*, s.a. 846)

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[169] *VA*, Ch. 38, ll. 14-15.
[170] *AB*, s.aa. 839, 840, 846, 857, 858, 859, 860, 861, 873.

[Danish pirates went to Frisia, extracted as large a tribute as they wanted and then fought a battle which they won. As a result they gained control of nearly the whole province. A terribly fierce north wind lashed the crops and vines during the whole winter almost up to the beginning of May. Wolves attacked and devoured with complete audacity the inhabitants of the western parts of Gaul. Indeed in some parts of Aquitaine they are said to have gathered together in groups of up to 300, just like army detachments, formed a sort of battle-line and marched along the road, boldly charging *en masse* all who tried to resist them.]

This entry is, to my knowledge, completely unparalleled in early medieval literature, save only for the Old English poetic tradition, where Vikings are sometimes compared to, or described as wolves in the context of the 'beasts of battle' typescene.[171] Conversely, as already mentioned, supernatural or extraordinary events related to war are almost totally absent from the 'Common Stock', with only a sole mention of a solar eclipse in 879, of a 'steorra þe mon on boclæden hæt cometa' [star which in Latin is called *cometa*] in 892 and that, in 773, 'oþiewde read Cristesmęl on hefenum æfter sunnan setlgonge. 7 þy geare gefuhton Mierce 7 Cantware æt Ottanforda, 7 wu`n´derleca nędran wæron gesewene on Suþseaxna londe' [a red sign of Christ appeared in the heavens after the sun's setting. And that year the Mercians and the inhabitants of Kent fought at Otford; and snakes were seen extraordinarily in the land of the South Saxons].[172]

Furthermore, in the *Annales Bertiniani*, wars — particularly those against 'external' enemies — are repeatedly interpreted in terms of divine punishment.[173] The most dramatic, although not unique example of this religious reading of war, is the frightful vision of an English priest which, according to the *Annales*, was related to Louis the Pious by envoys specially sent by Æthelwulf of Wessex in 839.[174] In the vision, the priest is led by a stranger to an unknown land where, in a building resembling a church,

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[171] See, for example, GRIFFITH, 'Convention and Originality'.

[172] *ASC*, s.aa. 879, 891 and 773 respectively.

[173] *AB*, s.aa. 865, 869, 876, 881.

[174] *AB*, s.a. 839. If the West-Saxon king did indeed go through such pains in order to warn the Carolingian emperor to mind Christian precepts, there is no record of such an event in Anglo-Saxon sources.

many boys are reading books written in letters of blood, which represent 'diversa hominum christianorum peccata' [all the various sins of Christian people].[175] This vision, the priest's guide explains, is a warning to the people of Francia, that they should redress their wrongs, otherwise

> […] cito super eos maximum et intolerabile periculum veniet: videlicet tribus diebus et noctibus super terram illorum *nebula* spississima expandetur, et statim homines pagani cum inmensa multitudine navium super illos venient et maximam partem populi et terrae christianorum cum omnibus quae possident igni ferroque devastabunt. Sed tamen, si adhuc veram poenitentiam agere volunt et peccata illorum iuxta praeceptum Domini in ieiunio et oratione atque elemosinis emendare studuerint, tunc has poenas et pericula per intercessionem sanctorum evadere poterunt'. (*AB*, s.a. 839)

> [… a great and crushing disaster will swiftly come upon them: for three days and nights a very dense fog will spread over their land, and then all of a sudden pagan men will lay waste with fire and sword most of the people and land of the Christians along with all they possess. But if instead they are willing to do true penance immediately and carefully atone for their sins according to the Lord's command with fasting, prayer and alms-giving, then they may still escape those punishments and disasters through the intercession of the saints.]

Whereas this passage threatens the sinful Franks with destruction at the hand of their enemies, at the same time the *Annales* also frequently portray divine intervention in favour of the Carolingians or other Christian people.[176] Throughout the text, the chronicler often specifies that a given battle was won 'auxilio domini nostri Iesu Christi' [with the help of our Lord Jesus Christ],[177] while also describing many instances in which God acted against the enemies of His people in a more 'substantial' way, as in the case of a Viking army sailing along the Seine in 845:

> […], cum a quodam monasterio direpto incensoque oneratis navibus repedarent, ita divino iudicio vel tenebris caecati vel insania sunt perculsi, ut

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[175] *AB*, s.a. 839.
[176] *AB*, s.aa. 853, 865, 866, 868, 881, 882.
[177] *AB*, s.a. 848. See also the entries for 839, 843, 845, 850, 866, 868, 879.

vix perpauci evaderent, qui Dei omnipotentis iram ceteris nunciarent. (*AB*, s.a. 845)

[… when they (the Vikings) were going away in ships loaded with booty from a certain monastery which they had sacked and burned, they were struck down by divine judgement either with blindness or insanity, so severely that only a very few escaped to tell the rest about the might of God.]

From this passage the last key element characterising the representation of war against the Vikings in the *Annales Bertiniani* emerges, namely the 'polarization' of conflict against the 'pagans'. In other words, in these annals the Vikings are recurrently named *pagani* in order to underline and enhance the divide between the Christian community and those outside it, as well as to transpose the Viking wars into the context of a wider religious conflict between Christendom and the forces of evil. This is why, as suggested by Simon Coupland, the authors of the *Annales Bertiniani* (as many other Carolingian writers) portray the Scandinavian invaders in terms reminiscent of the Devil, with whom they are associated or identified.[178] This can be observed in the above-quoted passage concerning the apparition of armies of wolves, in which the band of Vikings pillaging Frisia is juxtaposed to an unusual northern wind, as a clear reference to Jeremiah 1. 14 'ab aquilone pandetur malum super omnes habitatores terrae' [from the north shall an evil break forth upon all the inhabitants of the earth].

Conversely, in the 'Common Stock' the term *hæðen* is employed only seven times with reference to the Vikings,[179] who are instead usually designated with less 'polarizing' words such as *þa Deniscan* or, more simply, *here*. According to Carl Erdmann, and to many other notable historians of the Crusades, the consistent use of terms such as *pagani* and *Christiani* to indicate opposing factions in a war, as well as

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[178] S. COUPLAND, 'The Vikings on the Continent in Myth and History', *History: the Journal of the Historical Association* 88.290 (2003): 186-203. Concerning the perception and representation of the Viking raids in a wider range of continental sources see S. COUPLAND, 'The Rod of God's Wrath or the People of God's Wrath? The Carolingian Theology of the Viking Invasions', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 42.4 (1991): 535-554.

[179] *ASC*, s.aa. 832, 838, 851(twice), 853, 855, 865.

the emergence of heavenly signs, prodigies and apparitions of supernatural beings participating in 'real' warfare in the historical sources of the Middle Ages, constitute the first key manifestations of that process of 'Christianization of war' which will evolve into the ideology of the Crusades at the end of the eleventh century.[180] Even though, as illustrated in the Introduction, a teleological study of the development of ideas and attitudes about war in Anglo-Saxon England is not within the scope of the present work, it is nevertheless significant that the author of the 'Common Stock' did not wish to confer an openly religious overtone either to war in general or to the confrontation between Anglo-Saxons and Vikings.

In contrast, this is instead precisely the light in which Asser intended to present such conflict, as he consistently refers to the Anglo-Saxons as *Christiani* and to the Vikings as *pagani* throughout his work.[181] Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge claim that Asser 'present[s] the struggle between them as a holy war' in order to 'enabl[e] the Welsh to identify themselves more readily with Alfred's cause'.[182] However suggestive, this argument remains questionable, both because Asser's audience can not be identified with certainty and because the concept of 'holy war' is, as repeatedly discussed, anachronistic when applied to ninth-century England.[183] This 'religious' definition of the opposing forces should instead be considered in the wider context of the representation and interpretation of war in the *Vita Alfredi*, which is much more similar to the one observed in the *Annales Bertiniani*. In fact, unlike the *Chronicle*-author, Asser is

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[180] ERDMANN, *The Origin*, pp. 26-27. See also HARE, 'Apparitions and War'.

[181] Surprisingly, Keynes and Lapidge prefer to translate the Latin word *pagani* as 'Vikings'. See *Alfred the Great*, nt. 12, pp. 230-231. This misleading translation is not reproduced here.

[182] KEYNES and LAPIDGE, *Alfred the Great*, p. 42.

[183] As argued by Christopher TYERMAN [*God's War*, p. 45], the concept of 'holy war' was 'a development only of the twenty years before Urban II's ideological coup of 1095'. Concerning the difference between just and holy wars, Tyerman [*ibid.*, p. 35] further explains that 'a just war was not necessarily a holy war, although all holy wars were, to their adherents, just. While holy war depended on God's will, constituted a religious act, was directed by clergy or divinely sanctioned lay rulers, and offered spiritual rewards, just war formed a legal category justified by secular necessity, conduct and aim'.

interested in the repeated emphasis, not only of the religious dimension of the conflict between 'English' forces and the Scandinavian raiders, but also of the role and workings of God in matters of war, which are clearly described in eight episodes throughout the *Vita*, including the battle of Ashdown.[184] For instance, Asser summarizes the battle of Edington with these words:

> Inde sequenti mane *illucescente* vexilla commovens ad locum, qui dicitur Ethandun, venit, et contra universum paganorum exercitum cum densa testudine atrociter belligerans, animoseque diu persistens, divino nutu, tandem victoria potitus, […]. (*VA*, Ch. 56, ll. 1-5)
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> [When the next morning dawned he (Alfred) moved his forces and came to a place called Edington, and fighting fiercely with a compact *testudo* against the entire pagan army, he persevered resolutely for a long time; at length he gained the victory through God's will.][185]

As has been frequently noted, the sources for this reading of war could be manifold, ranging, in this case, from the Old Testament to, perhaps, even Grimbald of St. Bertin, the Flemish monk who became a member of Alfred's household at the same time as Asser and who may have brought from the Continent some books that our author is likely to have consulted.[186] Whatever the case, the evidence discussed so far strongly indicates that, despite the likely close collaboration between members of Alfred's entourage, and despite the tendency of all the Alfredian texts to be conspicuously uniform in addressing and promoting the same topics and arguments, views about war and the Vikings were still quite hetereogeneous and very far from a proper ideology. Further corroboration of this picture emerges from the fact that, in what appears to be the very first continuation of the Parker Chronicle, extending from 893 to 896 and

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[184] *VA*, Ch. 12, 27, 38, 42, 54, 56, 69, 82.
[185] Keynes and Lapidge [*Alfred the Great*, p. 84] translate *testudo* as 'shield-wall'. I have nevertheless retained the original Latin term in order to better reproduce the mock-classical style of Asser's text.
[186] KEYNES and LAPIDGE, *Alfred the Great*, p. 28. According to Alfred P. SMYTH [*King Alfred*, p. 178], Asser had direct access to a copy of the *Annales Bertiniani*. Although there is no manuscript evidence to support Smyth's argument, it is not impossible that Grimbald instructed Asser concerning the style and content of the annals he himself had probably consulted at Rheims, as shall be discussed shortly.

composed at the same time or shortly after the events described, the conflict against the Scandinavian raiders is effectively defined in religious terms, as the English themselves are referred to as *þa cristnan*. Interestingly, the entry for 896 also presents the only explicit reference in the ninth-century *Chronicle* to a religious reading of war, as the anonymous author remarks that 'næfde se here, Godes þonces, Angelcyn ealles forswiðe gebrocod' [the raiding-army, by the grace of God, had not altogether utterly crushed the English race].[187]

Even though we know too little about the compositive process of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* during Alfred's reign to advance a demonstrable argument, it is nevertheless tempting to suggest that the author of these entries could be Asser himself or even Grimbald of St. Bertin. In fact, the annals for 893-896 are significantly longer than the preceding ones and offer an unusually accurate (and somewhat redundant) account of Alfred's campaign against two Viking armies, which closely resembles the narrative strategy of the *Annales Bertiniani*.[188] Moreover, these entries present a quite distinctive style, dominated by the absence of the formulaic expressions recurring throughout the main body of the 'Common Stock' as, for example, the notably alliterative phrase *wælstōwe geweald āgan* [to have possession of the place of slaughter].[189] This may indicate that the author of this section of the *Chronicle* was not a native speaker of Old English. But given that Asser was demonstrably acquainted with — if not fond of — this specific formula, the balance swings in favour of Grimbald. Although the *Annales*

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[187] *ASC*, s.a. 896. Both these elements support Keynes and Lapidge's argument [*Alfred the Great*, p. 279] that the annals from 893 to 896 were written by a different chronicler from the one responsible for the compilation of the 'Common Stock' up to 892. See further *ibid*., pp. 278-280 for a useful summary of the different hypotheses concerning the exact extent of the 'Common Stock'.

[188] See, for example, the meticulous description of the complex naval battle which took place off the West-Saxon coast in 896 [*ASC*, s.a. 896], which closely resembles Charles the Fat's offensive against a group of Viking ships sailing up the Marne in 862 [*AB*, s.a. 862].

[189] Concerning the changing prose style of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* see the illuminating article by CLARK, 'The Narrative Mode', pp. 215-224.

Bertiniani were not composed at St. Bertin, as their name erroneously suggests,[190] they were compiled in their last instalment by the renowned Frankish archbishop Hincmar of Rheims, whose successor Fulk 'dispatched' Grimbald to Alfred.[191] Moreover, Grimbald himself sojourned at Rheims for some time before travelling to England, which makes it possible to speculate that he could have actually seen and read Hincmar's manuscript during his stay.[192]

Beyond these intriguing, yet admittedly flimsy conjectures, what is certain is that, as far as war against the Vikings was concerned, in the cultural milieu of Alfred's court there was extensive room for discussion and even for dissenting views, since different ideas and modes of representation of that conflict were not mutually exclusive, but could instead freely coexist not only within the same 'intellectual circle', but within the same text. What instead had absolutely no opportunity for debate was the subject of civil war. A comparison with contemporary continental sources again proves fruitful. Discussing the representation of inter-Carolingian warfare in any detail is beyond the scope of the present study, but it will suffice to underline that the frequent shedding of blood among the numerous magnates, counts and noblemen of the decaying Carolingian Empire, especially among members of the royal family, profoundly troubled the redactors of the *Annales*, who felt the need to explain carefully the rightful cause behind each and every one of these confrontations, in order to render them acceptable within Carolingian society. Likewise, one of the major historians of the ninth century, Nithard, composed the first two books of his *Historiae* (or *De dissensionibus filiorum Ludovici*

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[190] The *Annales Bertiniani* owe their name to the fact that their only and oldest complete copy (Saint-Omer, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 706), compiled in the eleventh century, was preserved for a long time in the library of the abbey of St-Bertin [NELSON, *Annals of St-Bertin*, pp. 2 and 16].

[191] See the letter sent by Fulk, archbishop of Rheims, to Alfred, informing the king of Grimbald's imminent arrival in England [D. WHITELOCK, M. BRETT and C.N.L. BROOKE (eds.), *Councils and Synods: with Other Documents Relating to the English Church, I: A.D. 871-1204* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), no. 4, pp. 6-12].

[192] NELSON, 'The *Annals*', p. 192.

pii)[193] precisely to provide a minute reconstruction of the struggles among the heirs of Louis the Pious which could justify the military intervention of Charles the Bald, his lord and patron, against fellow Franks in the wake of the battle of Fontenoy (AD 841).[194]

In turning to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, it is instead surprising to note that, in the annals covering Alfred's reign, absolutely no mention is made of any dissension within Wessex, or of any outbreak of war between the West Saxons and the neighbouring Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. The silence of the *Chronicle* on this subject is particularly conspicuous, since it clearly emerges from other sources that the political situation in the second half of the ninth century was far from peaceful. For example, we know from Asser that Æthebald, Alfred's eldest surviving brother, plotted a major rebellion against his father in 855, which could have rivalled the 830 uprising of the sons of Louis the Pious.[195] Moreover, it appears that many Anglo-Saxons — from both Wessex and especially from those areas of England where Alfred planned to expand his dominion — willingly and readily sided with the Vikings.[196] One of these 'traitors' was none other than Alfred's own disaffected nephew, *ætheling* Æthelwold, son of the king's elder brother Æthelred, who had died in 871. Although Æthelwold was too young to be crowned king of Wessex at his father's death, he still had a strong claim to the throne and, it appears, caused Alfred many troubles, especially in view of his own succession.[197]

Nevertheless, absolutely no mention of any of these events is made by the author of the 'Common Stock', who instead completely wipes them out of the historical record

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[193] NITHARD, *Libri Historiarum IV*, ed. by E. Müller, MGH SS rer. Germ. 44 (Hannover; Leipzig: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1907).

[194] J. NELSON, 'Public *Histories* and Private History in the Work of Nithard', *Speculum* 60.2 (1985): 251-293 at 256 and 262-264.

[195] *VA*, Ch. 12.

[196] WORMALD, 'The Ninth Century', pp. 154-155.

[197] R. LAVELLE, 'The Politics of Rebellion: the *Ætheling* Æthelwold and West Saxon Royal Succession, 899-902', in *Challenging the Boundaries of Medieval History: the Legacy of Timothy Reuter*, ed. by P. Skinner, SEM 22 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), pp. 51-80.

while, at the same time, pointing out to his audience the evil consequences of internal

strife in kingdoms other than Wessex.[198] Asser's treatment of the matter of civil war

seems, at first sight, quite different form the *Chronicle*'s, since despite displaying a

particularly strong dislike for internecine struggles because of their inherent

dangerousness, Asser is happy to discuss the subject in more detail. For example, at the

beginning of Chapter 27, he describes the 866 Northumbrian dynastic controversy:

> Eo tempore maxima inter Northanhymbros discordia diabolico instinctu orta
> fuerat, sicut semper populo, qui odium incurrerit *Dei*, evenire solet. (*VA*, Ch.
> 27, ll. 1-3)
>
> [At that time a great dispute, fomented by the devil, had arisen among the
> Northumbrians, as always happens to a people which has incurred the wrath of
> God.]

Here Asser unequivocally defines civil war as a consequence of sin and as the

product of the workings of the Devil, according to the popular assumption that no good

man would willingly harm a fellow Christian unless prompted by the Devil himself, the

sower of discord *par excellence*. In many ninth-century continental sources, this

interpretation is often accompanied by a specific rhetoric whereby wars between

members of the same polity, or between two Christian communities, are represented as a

clear-cut clash between righteous and virtuous Christians, and an opposing faction

which is invariably described as evil.[199] This 'demonization' of Christian enemies is

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[198] In the entry for 867, the anonymous chronicler emphasises how Northumbria was easily conquered by the Vikings because 'þær wæs micel un`ge´þuærnes þære þeode betweo`x´ him selfum, 7 hie hæfdun hiera cyning aworpenne Osbryht 7 ungecyndne cyning underfengon Ęllan' [there was great discord of the nation among themselves; and they had thrown down their king Osberht and accepted Ælla, an unnatural king]. Similarly, after recording the death of Charles the Fat in 887 and the subsequent subdivision of his kingdom into no less than five parts, the author [*ASC*, s.a. 887] points out that Charles' heirs 'þæt heoldun mid micelre unsibbe 7 tu folcgefeoht gefuhton 7 þæt lond oft 7 gelome forhergodon, 7 æghwęþer oþerne oftrędlice ut dræfde' [held that (Charles' kingdom) in great discord, and fought two national fights, and over and again ravaged that land, and each regularly drove out the other].

[199] See, for example, Nithard's detailed reconstruction of the negotiations preceding the battle of Fontenoy, where the author puts the accent on Charles' and Louis' repeated efforts to bring their brother Lothar to a peaceful settlement of their dispute — efforts which, according to the *Historiae*, were frustrated by Lothar's cussedness and treacherous nature, which soon earned him defeat in battle [NELSON, 'Violence in the Carolingian World', pp. 98-99].

extensively exploited in *Annales Bertiniani* where, for example, the deposition of Louis the Pious by his three sons in 833-834 is summarized as follows:

> [...] annis prioribus idem religiosissimus imperator malivolorum Deoque adversantium tergiversatione inmerito depositus [...] fuerat; tandemque ab omnibus concorditer atque unanimiter inventum atque firmatum [est], ut, illorum factionibus divino auxilio cassatis, [...] deinceps fidelissima firmissimaque oboedientia et subiectione imperator et dominus ab omnibus haberetur. (*AB*, s.a. 835)
>
> [... in the year immediately preceding, the most devout Emperor had been deposed undeservedly, through the treachery of evildoers and enemies of God ...; then after some time it had been decided and confirmed by everyone in concord and unanimity that since the evildoers' factions had been destroyed by God's help, ... he should be acknowledged by all in the most loyal and unswerving obedience and subjection as emperor and lord.]

Asser devotes Chapters 12 and 13 of the *Vita Alfredi* to the account of how Æthelbald, Alfred's eldest surviving brother, plotted to prevent the return of Æthelwulf, their father and rightful king, from a pilgrimage to Rome in 856. Although the truthfulness of Asser's account has often been questioned,[200] his rendering of this affair is nevertheless especially interesting, since it presents many similarities to the passage from the *Annales Bertiniani* just quoted, as the Welsh author states that the incident is an 'infamia contra morem omnium Christianorum' [contrary to the practice of all Christian men] and 'inauditum omnibus seculis ante' [unheard of in all previous ages],[201] perpetrated by a man who is far from being a good Christian. Just as Louis' sons were malevolent enemies of God, Æthelbald is described as 'iniquus et pertinax' [iniquitous and grasping],[202] and so perverse in his wickedness to decide, after his father's death, to marry his stepmother Judith 'contra Dei interdictum et Christianorum dignitatem'

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[200] For example, Alfred P. SMYTH [*The Medieval Life*, p. 198] argues that this episode, mentioned neither in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* nor in any other contemporary source, could derive from a 'wilful confusion of King Æthelbald of Wessex with his royal namesake, King Æthelbald of Mercia, who was castigated by St. Boniface in *c*. 747 for a life of fornication'.

[201] *VA*, Ch. 12, ll. 2-3 and 9-10. It is interesting to note that, in ecclesiastical writings, the adjective *inauditus* is often associated with the evil consequences of the Devil's actions, or those of his minions.

[202] *VA*, Ch. 12, ll. 30.

[against God's prohibition and Christian dignity].[203] In this way, Asser places the rebellious Æthelbald, as well as all his allies, outside the Christian community and, consequently, beyond those moral issues that the practice of war against fellow Christians usually entailed. In fact, the primary aim of this process of 'demonization' of Christian opponents, which we have seen at work both in the *Annales Bertiniani* and in Asser's *Vita*, was to justify and therefore 'facilitate' military action against them and, in this case, even against one's own family.

Fortunately, however, Æthelbald's rebellion did not end in bloodshed because God, just as in the case of Louis the Pious, 'quod nec […] ita fieri permisit' [did not allow it to happen][204] — and because King Æthelwulf, after long negotiations, agreed to let his son rule the western part of his realm,

> […], ne irremedicabile Saxoniae periculum, belligerante patre et filio, quin immo tota cum gente ambobus rebellante, atrocius et crudelis per dies singulos quasi clades intestina augeretur […]. (*VA*, Ch. 12, ll. 22-25)
>
> [… in order that the irremediable danger to the Saxon land — civil strife, as it were, with father and son at war, or indeed with the whole people rebelling against both of them — might not become more horrible and cruel as each day passed … .]

Asser's description of the king's good will and of the major efforts on the part of what was in fact the wronged party to find a peaceful solution for the common good constitutes yet another convention of civil war narration, also found in the *Annales Bertiniani* and other continental writings, the purpose of which was to strengthen the claim of one faction against the opposing one, which appears by contrast as unfair, violent and not at all peace-loving. We can therefore see how Asser's interpretation and representation of internal strife is very much in line with the current ideology motivating and accommodating violent dissension among members of the same

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[203] *VA*, Ch. 17, ll. 2-3.
[204] *VA*, Ch. 12, ll. 21-22.

community.

If, however, we move beyond the episodes just discussed to consider the *Vita Alfredi* as a whole, we realize that, in fact, Asser's attitude is not so very dissimilar from that of the anonymous author of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, since the royal biographer also makes no mention of the many other circumstances where Alfred's rule over Wessex and other areas of England was challenged. In fact, it almost seems as if Asser is willing to mention the issue of civil war only when it is securely placed at a temporally or geographically 'safe distance' from Alfred's reign, whose internal harmony stands out even more prominently when contrasted with the turbulent events of the previous generation. Indeed, I would argue that the silence on the subject of civil war, observed in both the *Chronicle* and in Asser's *Vita*, should be understood in the context of one of the main objectives of the Alfredian literary production as a whole, that is to say the creation of a single, united Anglo-Saxon England. According to Simon Keynes, the 'Common Stock' was first composed during the Viking invasions precisely in order to 'create an image of the past which might help to draw people together in resistance to the common enemy'.[205] And, one might add, to promote the image of a king out of the ordinary who, unlike many previous and contemporary rulers, could protect his people against enemies both outside and inside the kingdom. Tellingly, in the entry for 899, Alfred's death is immediately followed by the recording of the eruption of that family feud which, despite the chronicler's silence, had threatened the royal house since Alfred's ascent to the West-Saxon throne.[206]

Lastly, I would like to draw attention to the fact that, as far as Alfred's dispute with his nephew Æthelwold over the West-Saxon royal succession is concerned, both the *Vita Alfredi* and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* markedly diverge from the continental

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[205] KEYNES *ET AL.*, *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia*, s. *ANGLO-SAXON CHRONICLE*, p. 35.
[206] On *ætheling* Æthelwold's rebellion in 899 see LAVELLE, 'The Politics of Rebellion'.

tradition, where the celebration of the claimants' martial supremacy over internal as well as external enemies was essential to asserting and proving their right to the throne. For example, after the death of Louis the Pious, the tension between his three sons for the control of their father's kingdom culminated in the Battle of Fontenoy, one of the bloodiest military encounters of the early medieval period. This tragic event, which resulted in the death of a considerable portion of Frankish nobility, is reported in many contemporary sources, including the *Annales Bertiniani* and Nithard's *Historiae*. In all these works, Fontenoy is portrayed as a judgement of God, where victory in battle became the visible proof of the righteousness of the claims of Charles and Louis who, through this trial of war, gained the unquestioned right to rule the Empire.[207] Conversely, Alfredian sources do not exploit this powerful theme, focussing solely on the king's superiority against the Vikings and a fabricated picture of a pacified England under Alfred's rule. Although Asser did spill a lot of ink in supporting Alfred's right to the crown of Wessex (and of England as a whole) by emphasizing the king's special relationship with God and his providential role in Anglo-Saxon history, the threat of sedition remained severe.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have taken into consideration how war is represented and discussed in a number of ninth-century texts, all except one belonging to the literary corpus which originated in the context of the so-called 'Alfredian renaissance'. My investigation has revealed the key role played by Alfred and his 'intellectual circle' in the earliest

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[207] It should be noted that the battle of Fontenoy is discussed extensively only in texts that were produced at the request of — or in close connection with — the two victors. This possibly gives us a biased interpretation of the event. On the battle of Fontenoy as a judgement of God see NELSON, 'Violence in the Carolingian World'.

development of consistent reflection on the issue of war in Anglo-Saxon England. In particular, the Alfredian texts constitute an 'imagined setting'[208] where different ideas about war are explored and debated, as well as different interpretative frameworks and rhetorical traditions. It has also been highlighted how this variety of ideological and verbal approaches to the question of war arose not only from ancient authorities (including the Old Testament), but also from the varied cultural, linguistic and literary background of the numerous intellectuals gathered at Alfred's court. Moreover, the present analysis has shown that although continental literary and interpretative models exerted a strong influence on the perception and representation of war in ninth-century England, these models were not passively received but creatively reshaped in order to suit a completely different context — that of a comparatively 'young' and small kingdom, instead of a declining empire.

Finally, concerning the wider picture of the development of ideas about war in the Anglo-Saxon period, it is possible to conclude that no proper ideology of war existed in ninth-century England. Specifically, the fact that different and sometimes conflicting models, ideas and representations of war could coexist within the same 'intellectual community' demonstrates that the age of Alfred constitutes only the first stage of a much longer process. In the end, only one of the interpretative frameworks explored by Alfred and his associates survived to dominate the more complex discourse on war which started to gain ground in late Anglo-Saxon England — an ideological structure which was not based on late antique models such as Orosius' *Historiae*, but on a different, less problematic, sounder and, at the same time, more flexible authority: the Old Testament.

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[208] GODDEN, *The Translations*, p. 27.

CHAPTER THREE

Consolidation?:
Ælfric, Wulfstan and the second Viking Age

In AD 991, ninety-three Viking ships landed on the shores of present-day Essex.[1] Shortly afterwards, this massive Scandinavian host inflicted a heavy defeat to English forces at the battle of Maldon, immortalized in the lines of the eponymous Old English poem.[2] Judging from its outset, the second Viking Age would appear to be very similar to the previous phase of sustained Viking activity in England during the ninth century. There are, however, notable differences between the two. Firstly, England itself had changed beyond recognition since the age of Alfred. During the tenth century, the heirs of the West-Saxon king had enormously expanded the boundaries of the *Engla lond* by slowly (re)gaining control of the Danelaw, where the descendants of the early raiders had by that time become completely assimilated with the local population.[3] England was therefore a unified kingdom. At the same time, the tenth century had also witnessed significant changes in the territorial and political organization of Scandinavia, where the petty kingdoms of the first Viking Age had evolved into stable and increasingly vast realms ruled by veritable royal dynasties.[4]

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[1]   *ASC*, s.a. 991. Classic studies on the second Viking Age include E. JOHN, 'The Return of the Vikings', in *The Anglo-Saxons*, pp. 192-213 and KEYNES, 'The Vikings in England', pp. 73-82.

[2]   S. KEYNES, 'The Historical Context of The Battle of Maldon', in *The Battle of Maldon, AD 991*, ed. by D. Scragg (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 81-112.

[3]   Concerning English expansion in the Danelaw during the tenth century, and the consolidation of the English kingdom see, for instance, E. JOHN, 'The Age of Edgar', in *The Anglo-Saxons*, pp. 160-189. On the settlement of Scandinavian communities in northern England, see the two collections of essays HADLEY and RICHARDS, *Cultures in Contact* and J. GRAHAM-CAMPBELL *ET AL.* (eds.), *Vikings and the Danelaw: Select Papers from the Proceedings of the Thirteenth Viking Congress, Nottingham and York, 20-21 August 1997* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2001).

[4]   A useful overview of the process of political unification of the Scandinavian peninsula during the early Middle Ages is offered by T. LINDKVIST, 'Early Political Organisation: Introductory Survey', in *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia: Prehistory to 1520*, ed. by K. Helle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 160-167. On the kingdom of Norway see C. KRAG, 'The Early

Moreover, Scandinavian raids during the second Viking Age were directed exclusively against England, since the presence of powerful polities in north-western Continental Europe — most notably the duchy of Normandy and the Ottonian Empire — discouraged Viking *hergas* from attacking those areas.[5] In contrast, a succession dispute among the sons of King Edgar (d. 975) had seriously undermined the English monarchy. Upon the Vikings' arrival in 991, King Æthelred II, later known as *unræd* (or 'Unready'),[6] had recently succeeded his half-brother Edward the Martyr, murdered in 978. The reasons underlying this dynastic crisis are manifold, ranging from regional rivalries to the hostility of some noblemen towards the Benedictine Reform — which had enjoyed a true golden age under Edgar thanks to the determined efforts of notable English reformers such as Dunstan, Æthelwold and Oswald.[7] Its most immediate consequences, however, were that England's ruling class was deeply torn, and that Æthelred could rely only on a small part of it. Thus deprived of the military as well as political support of many of his nobles, Æthelred was at a loss to organise an effective resistance against the raiders. It should, however, be emphasized that, despite his later reputation, Æthelred did try to repel the enemy with every means at his disposal,

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Unification of Norway', in *Cambridge History of Scandinavia*, pp. 184-201. On Denmark see N. Lund, 'The Danish Empire and the End of the Viking Age', in *Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings*, pp. 156-181.

[5] John, 'The Return of the Vikings', p. 194.

[6] On the origin of Æthelred's nickname, and on his difficult career as king of England, see S. Keynes, 'The Declining Reputation of King Æthelred the Unready', in *Anglo-Saxon History: Basic Readings*, ed. by D.A.E. Pelteret (New York: Garland, 2000), pp. 157-190, first published in *Ethelred the Unready: Papers from the Millenary Conference*, ed. by D. Hill, British Archaeological Reports, British Series 59 (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1978), pp. 227-253.

[7] On the origins of the dynastic crisis which culminated with the murder of Edward the Martyr in 978 see John, 'The Return of the Vikings', pp. 192-193. Studies on the Benedictine Reform and its impact on the religious, cultural and political life of tenth and eleventh-century England are far too many to be mentioned in full here. It would therefore suffice to point out some 'classics' such as P. Wormald, 'Æthelwold and His Continental Counterparts: Contact, Comparison, Contrast', in *The Times of Bede*, pp. 169-206, first published in *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, ed. by B. Yorke (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1988), pp. 13-42 and C. Cubitt, 'The Tenth-Century Benedictine Reform in England', *Early Medieval Europe* 6.1 (1997): 77-94. For a more recent summary of the literary works produced in the context the Benedictine Reform see J. Hill, 'The Benedictine Reform and Beyond', in *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature*, pp. 151-169.

including the much criticized and much debated policy of paying the Vikings off with increasingly substantial sums of money.[8] Unfortunately, all of King Æthelred's efforts eventually came to nothing, to some extent because the ranks of the Vikings were constantly swollen by rebellious Englishmen.

The 991 campaign was followed by two further, massive onslaughts in 1006 and 1012. Unlike the Viking warbands of the ninth century, the armies which attacked England around the turn of the millennium responded more or less uniformly to the orders and schemes of a few commanders, most of which, like Sven Forkbeard and Olaf Tryggvason, were notable figures of the political and dynastic scene of their Scandinavian homelands. These Viking leaders, however, did not confine themselves to looting and gaining control of limited areas of English territory but, by the 1010s, they were aspiring to seize the throne of England itself.[9] In 1013, Sven Forkbeard forced Æthelred and the entire royal family to flee to Normandy, where the English king was welcomed by Duke Richard II, brother of Æthelred's second wife Emma.

Sven died the following year, and his North Sea 'empire', comprising Denmark, Norway and England, was divided between his two sons, the youngest of whom, Cnut, was entrusted with England. Cnut's position in his newly acquired kingdom was nevertheless so precarious that he was soon put to flight by Æthelred's return. Æthelred, however, died at the beginning of 1016, soon followed by his oldest son Edmund Ironside. England was therefore left kingless and helpless before Cnut, who was now able to take hold of the throne definitively by defeating all of his major opponents, by marrying Æthelred's widow (1017) and by exiling Æthelred's heirs.[10] As king, Cnut

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[8] Critical literature on the payment of *gafol* [tribute] to the Vikings is particularly vast. An useful summary of the main issues connected to Æthelred's policy is offered by KEYNES, 'The Historical Context', pp. 99-102.

[9] KEYNES, 'The Vikings in England', p. 76.

[10] On Cnut's early years as king of England see M.K. LAWSON, *Cnut: the Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century* (London; New York: Longman, 1993), pp. 82-89.

capitalized on his Scandinavian connections and put an end to more than twenty years of almost unremitting warfare, bloodshed and interecine struggles which had profoundly traumatized and exhausted English society.[11]

This calamitous and violent era, however, saw the rise of the two foremost literary personalities of late Anglo-Saxon England, that is to say the renown homilist Ælfric and Wulfstan, archbishop of York and close collaborator of both Æthelred and Cnut. The works of these extremely prolific writers — on which the present chapter concentrates — constitute a unique vantage point for exploring contemporary attitudes towards the Vikings in general, and towards war in more general terms. As shall be discussed in detail below, Ælfric had close ties with an aristocratic family whose members were personally involved in the defence of England against the raiders, while Wulfstan was himself at the centre of the political life of the time. As a consequence, these true 'insiders' will enable us to investigate how late Anglo-Saxon culture responded to the new and terrible challenges posed by the Scandinavian invasions.

Ælfric of Eynsham

Over the past ten years there has been a growing interest in the perception and representation of war in the works of one of the major authors of late Anglo-Saxon England — Ælfric, abbot of Eynsham from 1005 to his death in *c*. 1010. The increasing popularity of the aforementioned topic is clearly demonstrated by the number of recent publications dedicated to it, ranging from literary criticism to historical studies on the development of 'just war' theories in pre-Crusade Europe.[12] Yet, it should be pointed out

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[11] Concerning the impact of the second Viking Age on English collective memory, evidenced in particular by the Old English poem *The Battle of Maldon*, see the classic work by J.D. Niles, 'Maldon and Mythopoesis', *Mediaevalia* 17 (1994 for 1991): 89-121 and Cowen, 'Writing Fire', pp. 105-133.

[12] Earl, 'Violence and Non-Violence'; Magennis, 'Warrior Saints'; Damon, 'Sanctifying Anglo-Saxon Ealdormen' and *Soldier Saints*, pp. 192-246 .

that current research has been conducted almost exclusively on Ælfric's hagiographic works and on the related question of the complex relationship between violence and sanctity and, by extension, between war, the Church and its members. As a consequence, I contend that a substantial portion of Ælfric's wider ideological system relating to war still remains to be uncovered. The following pages will therefore be devoted to providing a more comprehensive and hopefully new understanding of the author's views on the subject.

In order to accomplish this, I will draw on a less 'favoured' set of Ælfrician texts which, despite repeatedly addressing the question of war, have seldom caught scholars' attention. In fact, Ælfric devoted a remarkable share of his vast and varied literary production to the translation and adaptation of the Bible into Old English, displaying a particular interest in the historical books of the Old Testament. This substantial corpus of vernacular biblical material comprises four sermons (three of which are contained in the Second Series of the *Catholic Homilies*), three homilies on the Books of Exodus, Kings and I-II Maccabees respectively (all included in the *Lives of Saints*), an Old English paraphrase of the apocryphal Books of Esther and Judith, the translation of Genesis 1-22 and of other sections of the mostly anonymous *Old English Heptateuch* (including a semi-homiletic rendering of the Book of Judges), plus a summary of both the Old and New Testament known as the *Letter to Sigeweard* (or *Libellus de Veteri Testamenti et Novo*).[13] Given its considerable volume, it will be impossible to treat the

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[13] For a detailed discussion of Ælfric's Old Testament material see M. McC. GATCH, 'The Office in Late Anglo-Saxon Monasticism', in *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. by M. Lapidge and H. Gneuss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 341-362 and R. ANDERSON, 'The Old Testament Homily: Ælfric as Biblical Translator', in *The Old English Homily: Precedent, Practice and Appropriation*, ed. by A.J. Kleist, SEM 17 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp. 121-142. On the date of composition of these works, and on their place within Ælfric's wider literary production, see the fundamental work by P. CLEMOES, 'The Chronology of Ælfric's Works', in *Old English Prose: Basic Readings*, ed. by P. Szarmach (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), pp. 29-72, first published in *The Anglo-Saxons: Studies in Some Aspects of their History and Culture Presented to Bruce Dickins*, ed. by P. Clemoes (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1959), pp. 212-247. A recent, useful reappraisal of

whole of Ælfric's Old Testament material fully and systematically within the limits of the present study. The following analysis will therefore turn on a single text, namely the *Passio Sanctorum Machabeorum* which, in my opinion, should rightly be considered the centrepiece of Ælfric's reflection on war.

Conflicting models for clergy and laity

The apocryphal Books of I and II Maccabees occupy a prominent place within Christian tradition because they relate the persecution inflicted by Antiochus IV, ruler of the Seleucid Empire, on the Jews of Judea in the second century BC, an event which prefigured the trials of the early Christians at the hands of the Romans. Accordingly, Ælfric's reading for 1 August[14] opens with the account of the violent death of an elderly scribe and of a family of seven brothers together with their mother during the Antiochian persecution, when the inhabitants of Judea were forced to abandon their religion and worship pagan idols on pain of death. Faced by such a demanding choice, Ælfric tells us, 'manega gebugon to ðam manfullan hæðengilde . / and eac fela wiðcwædon þæs cyninges hæsum . / and woldon heora lif forlætan ærþan ðe heora geleafan' [many bowed down to the wicked idol, and also many spoke against the king's commands, and would lose their lives rather than their belief, and would not defile themselves with the foul heathendom],[15] a course of action which earned the latter veneration as saints, even though they suffered martyrdom before the coming of Christ.

However, after just 204 lines out of more than 800, the strictly hagiographic narrative of the passion of the Jewish protomartyrs comes to an end, while Ælfric continues his

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Ælfric's career as writer and churchman is offered by J. HILL,'Ælfric: his Life and Works', in *A Companion to Ælfric*, ed. by H. Magennis and M. Swan, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition 18 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 35-65.

[14] During the Middle Ages, the victims of the Seleucid king were commemorated on 1 August.

[15] *PSM*, ll. 27-29.

paraphrase of the biblical text to relate 'hu þæt gewinn ge-endode' [how that contest ended].[16] In fact, the Seleucids' forcible hellenization of Judea resulted in a long and bloody revolt, sparked by a Jewish priest under the name of Mattathias Maccabeus and led for the following twenty years by his five sons, to whose military exploits Ælfric devotes approximately three quarters of his homily. By juxtaposing the protomartyrdom of the seven Jewish brothers with a lengthy account of the Maccabean rebellion, Ælfric is able to explore two diametrically opposed approaches to life-threatening situations: non-violence and death on the one hand, and resistance by force of arms on the other — a pivotal difference which was of prime importance both in the author's own day, when England was unceasingly stormed by Viking raiders, and in the author's works, where Ælfric repeatedly ponders on how to respond effectively to the violence of the Scandinavian warriors.

This topic has been thoroughly investigated by J.E. Damon in his 2003 book *Soldier Saints and Holy Warriors*.[17] Here Damon correctly argues that the two conflicting models outlined in the homily on the Maccabees were actually aimed at two distinct recipients. Specifically, the scribe Eleazar and the seven brothers were to serve as an example to the clergy, who should completely renounce the use of force whatever the consequences, while the deeds of the Maccabees were to encourage resolute armed resistance against the Vikings on the part of Anglo-Saxon lay aristocrats, who were the primary audience of the *Live of Saints*.[18] However, Damon also repeatedly contends that

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[16] *PSM*, l. 205.

[17] DAMON, *Soldier Saints*, pp. 193-246.

[18] *Ibid*., pp. 219-231. Ælfric dedicated the *Lives of Saints* to two Anglo-Saxon noblemen, Æthelweard and Æthelmær, as emerges from the work's preface [*Lives of Saints*, I, p. 4, ll. 35-39], where Ælfric states: 'Ælfric gret eadmodice Æþelwerd ealdorman and ic secge þe leof . þæt ic hæbbe nu gegaderod on þyssere béc þæra halgena þrowunga þe me to onhagode on englisc to awendene . for þan þe ðu leof swiðost and æðelmær swylcera gewrita me bædon' [Ælfric humbly greets ealdorman Æthelweard, and I say to you, my friend, that I have now gathered in this book the saints' passions that I have been able to translate into English, since you, my friend, and Æthelmær, fervently requested me for such writings]. On the career of these noblemen, and on their relationship with Ælfric, see C. CUBITT, 'Ælfric's Lay Patrons', in *A Companion to Ælfric*, pp. 165-192 at 171-184.

the *Passio Sanctorum Machabeorum*, like the whole Ælfrician corpus, strongly 'reflect(s) […] Ælfric's confusion and insecurity about the moral and theological status of war'.[19] This view has been met with general consensus, since most commentators agree with Damon in portraying Ælfric as a sort of pacifist *ante litteram*, a holy man who abhorred war and violence but was compelled to come to terms with both under the pressure of constant Scandinavian attacks.[20] I would instead propose that this is a conspicuously partial reading of Ælfric's attitude towards war, arising precisely from the tendency to consider this matter in the light of a single literary genre, that is to say Ælfric's hagiography.

In fact, saints' lives constitute an exceptionally and inevitably controversial and 'dangerous' ground, since any early medieval author wishing to commemorate the life and deeds of a holy man who was — or had been — a soldier would have had to contrive a suitable justification to explain how the said man was able to gain sainthood despite transgressing one of the ten commandments. In other words, a work composed within the limits and conventions of the hagiographic genre, particularly in a historical period when the concept of 'holy war' was only just dawning,[21] would have been very unlikely to contain a clear-cut stance either for or against the use of force, regardless of the author's personal views on the matter. It is therefore not surprising that Ælfric, like many of his predecessors, was not 'at ease' when detailing the story of a soldier saint, and that he sometimes fell into the unavoidable moral pitfalls dotting his hagiographic narratives. Moreover, saints' lives did not provide suitable, or rather unproblematic,

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[19] DAMON, *Soldier Saints*, p. 220.
[20] See, for example, EARL, 'Violence and Non-Violence'. On a similar note, Hugh MAGENNIS ['Warrior Saints', p. 42] agues that 'Ælfric was opposed to unethical warfare and would have been in agreement with the doctrine, reflected in penitential literature, that those who shed blood even in legitimate conflict incurred in some guilt. But […] he clarifies the duty of the Anglo-Saxon *bellatores* to defend their country against invaders […]. It is clear that Ælfric had a respectful and supportive attitude towards his countrymen involved in this enterprise'.
[21] See above, p. 149.

models for early medieval warriors, at least as far as the practice of their 'profession' was concerned.

However, despite being included in a collection comprised mostly of saints' lives, the *Passio Sanctorum Machabeorum* is only peripherally concerned with sainthood, focussing instead on military encounters and deeds of arms drawn from an Old Testament story. This reveals that Ælfric was very much aware not only of the inherent complexities of hagiography, but also of the need to contemplate different and less controversial literary traditions in order to offer his lay patrons more fitting role models and useful examples of how to be good Christian soldiers.

Before proceeding to consider in detail the issues connected to the practice of war by the laity as delineated in the *Passio Sanctorum Machabeorum*, a few words are in order on Ælfric's views concerning the clergy. As mentioned above,[22] Ælfric saw a clear-cut distinction between churchmen and laymen with regard to war — a differentiation closely related to the subdivision of society into three orders (*oratores*, *bellatores* and *laboratores*),[23] which Ælfric discusses thoroughly in the *Item Alia* appended to the *Passio Sanctorum Machabeorum*. Here the author asserts that, despite being forbidden the use of physical violence, men of God can still engage in a good fight of a different kind:

> *bellatores* synd þa ðe ure burga healdað .
> and urne eard be-weriað wið onwinnendne here .
> […] and se godes þeowa sceall symle for us gebiddan .
> and feohtan gastlice . wið þa ungesewenlican fynd .
> (*PSM*, ll. 817-818, 821-822)

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[22]   See above, p. 166.
[23]   On the topos of the three orders of society, and its development in pre-Conquest England, see T.E. POWELL, 'The 'Three Orders' of Society in Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England* 23 (1994): 103-132.

[*Soldiers* are they who protect our towns, and defend our soil against an invading army. … and the servant of God must always pray for us, and fight spiritually against invisible enemies.]

By combining the increasingly popular theory of the tripartite structure of society with the longstanding tradition of the spiritual struggle, Ælfric manages to carve out an *ad hoc* militant function for clerics, namely the defence of men's souls — a task which, in the author's opinion, is equally, if not more important than that of the physical warriors'. These concepts are further exemplified in the *De oratione Moysi*, another Ælfrician homily drawing on Old Testament material.[24] In this text, Ælfric paraphrases an episode from Exodus 17, where the people of Israel, after crossing the Red Sea, are attacked by the warriors of King Amalek. While Joshua sets out with a company of chosen men to meet the assailing army in battle, Moses retreats to a nearby mountain-top and, raising his hands, begs God for help. And, as Ælfric points out:

Swa oft swa moyses ahefde his handa on gebedum

swa hæfde Iosue heofonlicne fultu*m* .

and sona swa his earmas for unmihte aslacodon .

sona sloh amalech . and sige hæfde on him.

(*DoM*, ll. 19-22)

[As often as Moses raised his hands in prayer, so often had Joshua heavenly succour; and as soon as his arms slackened from weakness, immediately Amalek smote, and had victory over them.]

Through this biblical *exemplum*, Ælfric not only reaffirms the 'division of duties' between clergy and laity, but also clearly declares the pivotal role of the former in the achievement of victory by the latter.

Later in the same homily, Ælfric clarifies in what ways 'spiritual support' of the *oratores* is an unavoidable necessity for succeeding in earthly struggles. First of all, Ælfric tells us,

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[24] ÆLFRIC OF EYNSHAM, *De oratione Moysi*, in *Lives of Saints*, I, no. XIII, pp. 283-307. Quotes from the text will be referred to as *DoM*.

Iosue þa hæfde heofonlicne fultum .

and afligde amalech and his folc mid wæpnum .

Be þisum we magon tocnawen *þæt* we cristene sceolan

on ælcere earfoðnisse æfre to gode clypian .

and his fultumes biddan mid fullum geleafan.

(*DoM*, ll. 28-32)

[Joshua then had heavenly succour, and put to flight Amalek and his people with weapons. By this we may learn that we Christians should in every distress, ever cry to God, and entreat His aid, with full faith.]

It is however particularly significant that Joshua does not actually cry to God himself, but it is Moses who, acting as an intermediary, intercedes in favour of the Hebrew army. In this way, Ælfric openly claims for the Church a quite unprecedented role, that of ultimate and sole means through which all wars, both *gāstlic* [spiritual] and *līchamlic* [physical] can be won.

Secondly, Ælfric argues that an additional positive outcome of the spiritual struggle led by ecclesiastics is the restraint of and remedy to people's sins. Indeed, Ælfric not only believed that success against one's enemies could be gained exclusively with divine support (to be secured, in its turn, through prayer), but that defeat in battle, as well as wars in general, were a form of punishment inflicted by God for transgressing His laws, on a par with pestilence and famines.[25] Consequently, the *oratores'* intercession is fundamental not only in the event of impending conflict, but as a form of 'prophylaxis' against wars in their entirety, as Ælfric himself explains:

gif he ðonne nele his fultum us dón

ne ure bene gehyran . þonne bið hit swutol

Þæt we mid yfelum dædum hine ær gegremedon .

ac we ne sceolon swaðeah geswican þære bene .

oðþæt se mild-heorta god us mildelice ahredde .

(*DoM*, ll. 33-37)

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[25]   *DoM*, ll. 157-174.

[If He then will not give us His aid, nor hear our prayer, then will it be manifest, that we have before angered Him by evil deeds; but nevertheless we should not desist from that prayer, until the compassionate God mercifully delivers us.]

This particular emphasis on the role of the Church should, however, not lead us to believe that the *Passio Sanctorum Machabeorum* and the *De oratione* were aimed at a clerical audience. There are, on the contrary, very good reasons to suppose that the audience of the *Lives of Saints* were powerful and wealthy noblemen. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the very same men were not only engaged in the defence of the kingdom against the Vikings, but also spent a great deal of their time and money in founding and maintaining monasteries, enriching churches and supporting notable ecclesiastical figures like Ælfric himself.[26] It is therefore more than likely that, in his literary works composed for a lay public, Ælfric would have wished to clarify repeatedly the different nature of churchmen's involvement in war — and to promote the non-physical approach as much as possible, especially at a time when victory was seldom seen on English battlefields.

To sum up, we can now begin to glimpse the complex ideological structure designed by Ælfric to 'embrace' the practice of war in his own days, a structure in which the Church and its members, as we have seen, stood as supporting pillars. However, Ælfric insists, earthly battles should be waged exclusively by laymen, to whose instruction on the subject the late Anglo-Saxon author dedicates most of his homily on the Maccabees — an aspect which, it should again be noted, has not yet received sufficient attention in scholarship.

Pagan, Christian, Viking

The impression which immediately seizes the reader even on a cursory examination

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[26] CUBITT, 'Ælfric's Lay Patrons'.

of the *Passio Sanctorum Machabeorum* is that the whole homily is permeated by an overwhelming preoccupation with the morality of war. In his book on warfare and sanctity, J.E. Damon suggests that Ælfric's uneasiness derived from the fact that killing in the course of war may prevent earthly warriors from 'gain[ing] heavenly life and be[ing] numbered among the saints'.[27] However, although war did raise strong moral concerns in the minds of both Ælfric and his audience, and despite the fact that one of the primary aims of the *Passio*, and of the *Lives of Saints* as a whole, was indeed 'to reassure these men [Ælfric's patrons] that God did not forbid their participation in war, and that their actions on behalf of their kingdom and society were acceptable to Him',[28] previous scholarship has so far failed to pinpoint exactly why the practice of war by the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy was so highly problematic. A first clue to uncovering the key issue behind Ælfric's concerns can be obtained from considering the terms employed in the *Passio Sanctorum Machabeorum* to designate the Maccabees' opponents who, in the vernacular rendering, are first and foremost pagans.

In fact, the adjective *hæðen* [pagan] and the related noun form are so frequently used to characterize the Seleucid rulers and their men that, in Chapter V, the aforementioned appellation is repeated as many as fifteen times, that is to say once every four and a half lines.[29] In Chapter VII, on the other hand, Ælfric chooses the phrase *onwinnende here* [assailing army] to indicate the army of Antiochus' son,[30] an expression also found in the appendix to the *Passio Sanctorum Machabeorum*, describing the enemy forces the *bellatores* 'ure burga healdað . / and urne eard be-weriað wið' [protect our towns, and

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[27]   DAMON, *Soldier Saints*, p. 231.
[28]   *Ibid.*, p. 194.
[29]   *PSM*, ll. 385, 391, 395, 402, 405, 408, 412, 414, 421, 423, 428, 429, 434, 449, 456. *Hæðen* is used another eleven times throughout the *Passio* at ll. 241, 244, 269, 278, 338, 350, 371, 496, 574, 577, 719.
[30]   *PSM*, l. 589.

defend our soil against],[31] and in the *Letter to Sigeweard*,[32] where Ælfric states that he undertook the translation of the Book of Judith into Old English 'eow mannum to bysne þæt ge eowerne eard mid wæmnum bewerian wið onwinnendne here' [as an example to you men, that you may defend your land with weapons against the assailing army].[33] In both cases, the present tense of the verbs and the possessives *ūre* [our] and *ēower* [your] underline that the *here* in question, paralleled in the Old Testament by the Seleucids and Holofernes, is by no means a generic army, but specifically the one the Anglo-Saxon warriors met on the battlefield day after day. In turn, this shows that even though Ælfric tended to attribute the epithet *hæðen* to a variety of people and behaviours, making it very difficult to identify a single meaning of this word in his writings,[34] the late Anglo-Saxon author was indeed particularly consistent in seeing and portraying a parallel between the pagan enemies of Ancient Israel and the enemies of the English people, as well as between the wars of the Old Testament and those of his own time.

Therefore, to return to the *Passio Sanctorum Machabeorum*, if Ælfric wanted his readers to identify themselves with the Maccabees, and to see Vikings as the eleventh-century embodiment of Antiochus and his successors, then we may suppose that the systematic repetition of the word *hæðen* throughout the text had in fact the purpose of indirectly yet firmly portraying the Scandinavian raiders as pagans. In other words, a careful reading of the homily on the Maccabees suggests that Ælfric productively made use of his Old Testament source to place the Vikings effectively and irrevocably outside

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[31]   *PSM*, ll. 817-818.

[32]   ÆLFRIC OF EYNSHAM, *Letter to Sigeweard*, in *The Old English Heptateuch and Ælfric's Libellus de Veteri Testamento et Novo*, ed. by R. Marsden, EETS, o.s. 330 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 201-230.

[33]   *Ibid.*, ll. 465-467.

[34]   According to the *Old English Web Corpus* [accessed 2 May 2013], Ælfric uses the term *hæðen* to indicate non-Hebrew biblical characters and people (e.g. *ÆCHom* II, 33, B1.2.35, 252.98), the Romans (e.g. *ÆLS* (Alban) B1.3.20, 1), non-Christians in general (e.g. *ÆLS* (Oswald) B1.3.26, 119), unbaptized children (*ÆLet* 1 (Wulfsige X a), B1.8.1, 71) and secular songs (*ibid.*, l. 112). See further below, pp. 177-180.

Christendom.

This distinctive representation of the northern invaders as pagans is by no means restricted to the *Passio*, since Ælfric repeatedly turns to this rhetoric throughout his biblical adaptations.[35] The only notable exceptions are the two later Old Testament pieces on the Books of Esther and Judith.[36] In the former, Ælfric makes no mention of the fact that Haman, the king's evil counsellor, and the whole Persian court did not worship the God of Abraham, unlike the heroine Esther and Mordechai, her tutor. Similarly, in *Judith*, the author seldom describes Holofernes and his men as pagans. In these texts, therefore, Ælfric appears little interested in exploiting the potential of the biblical stories in terms of an opposition between Jews/English and Gentiles/Vikings.

Nonetheless, this lack of emphasis on the paganism of the Chosen People's antagonists, so very different from that of the *Passio Sanctorum Machabeorum*, could be explained by turning once again to the said homily, in order to note how this specific feature of the Seleucids is introduced only in the second half of the text, whereas in the opening section, when the passion of the protomartyrs is the main focus of the narration, the persecutors of the Jews are described as *ārlēas* [wicked, impious], *mānful* [evil, wicked] and *for-cūð* [bad, perverse],[37] all terms which can be ascribed to the semantic

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[35] See, for example, a further example from the *Letter to Sigeweard* [ll. 241-245, 250-252], where Ælfric summarizes the Book of Judges as follows: 'seo boc us segð swutollice be þam folce þæt hi on sibbe wunedon swa lange swa hi wurðodon þone heofonlican God on his bigengum georne, and swa oft swa hi forleton þone lifiendan God, þonne wurdon hi gehergode and to hospe gedonne fram hæðenum leodum þe him abutan eardodon. […] Ic þohte þæt ge woldon þurh ða wundorlican race eower mod awendan to Godes willan on eornost' [this book tells us clearly about that people (the Israelites) who dwelt in peace as long as they eagerly worshipped the heavenly God in his services, and as often as they neglected the living God, then they were plundered and put to shame by the heathen people who lived around them. … I thought that you might have wished to turn your hearts earnestly towards God's will thanks to that remarkable account]. See also the passage from *De oratione Moysi* quoted below at pp. 199-200.

[36] Ælfric's homilies of the Books of Judith and Esther have been edited online in 1999 by S.D. LEE (ed.), *Ælfric's Homilies on 'Judith', 'Esther' and the 'Maccabees'*, <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~stuart/kings/main.htm> [accessed 24 June 2013].

[37] BOSWORTH and TOLLER, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, s. ār-leás, I, p. 50; mān-full, p. 667; for-cúþ, pp. 303-304.

area of wickedness, a character typically attributed to the Devil. It is therefore possible to contend that Ælfric extended the differentiation between spiritual struggle and worldly wars to the enemies as well as the defenders, so that the adversaries of the saints and martyrs are the Devil and his evil human minions, while the foes of the earthly warriors are, perhaps surprisingly, the pagans.

The interpretation of Ælfric's vernacular rendering of the Book of Judith has always been particularly controversial, because whereas two passages within both of our surviving copies suggest that the text was addressed to a community of nuns, for whom Judith stood as an example of chastity against the devilish temptations of the flesh represented by Holofernes,[38] the statement quoted above from the *Letter to Sigeweard* seems instead to indicate that the author intended his translation of the biblical book to serve as a model for Anglo-Saxon warriors in their combat against the Vikings.[39] If the second option is favoured, then we would expect to find the same considerable insistence on the Assyrians' paganism as observed in the *Passio Sanctorum Machabeorum*, and which tellingly also characterizes the *Letter to Sigeweard*. However, Holofernes and his warriors are described as wicked, rather than pagan, and contrasted with the virtuous Judith, whose beheading of the Assyrian general represents the successful conclusion of a spiritual struggle according to the *psychomachia* tradition. In turn, this might explain why, in the extant variant of the text, the heathenism of Judith's nemesis is overshadowed, while the spiritual dimension comes to the fore, just as in the first part of the homily on the Maccabees. At the same time, it is safe to assume that, if there were indeed multiple versions of Ælfric's *Judith* addressed to different audiences,

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[38] On the reception of the extant version of Ælfric's homily on the Book of Judith see M. CLAYTON, 'Ælfric's *Judith*: Manipulative or Manipulated?', *Anglo-Saxon England* 23 (1994): 215-227 and H. MAGENNIS, 'Contrastive Narrative Emphases in the Old English Poem *Judith* and Ælfric's Paraphrase of the Book of Judith', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 96 (1995): 61-67.

[39] See above, p. 173.

as current scholarship contends,[40] the one aimed at warriors would have contained a clear representation of the antagonism between the pagans and the people of God, just as in the second half of the *Passio Sanctorum Machabeorum*.

Over the years, various suggestions have also been advanced concerning the message and intended audience of Ælfric's *Esther*, the most convincing of which is Mary Clayton's argument that the late Anglo-Saxon homilist composed this biblical paraphrase as a *speculum reginae* for Emma of Normandy, the newly wedded wife of Æthelred the Unready.[41] In particular, Clayton contends that Ælfric wished to advise the young queen with regard to the so-called 'St. Brice's Day massacre' (1002), when Æthelred allegedly ordered all Danes on English soil to be killed.[42] Clayton's reading could therefore explain the absence of any reference to the non-belief of the Persians, because if Ælfric really sought to exhort Emma to stay her husband's hand in order to protect people who shared the same Scandinavian ancestry as she did — even as Esther convinced the Persian king to recall the execution of all the Jews in his kingdom — insisting on the paganism of the latter would simply have been confusing. Consequently, Ælfric decided to cut the religious dimension out of his text and offer a completely different, yet much more 'functional', angle on the biblical story.

To sum up, *Esther* and *Judith* show that Ælfric was able to complement his subdivision between spiritual and worldly warriors with a precise definition of their respective enemies, and that he consistently extended this pattern to all his Old Testament pieces where he also exploited the very same biblical framework to portray the Vikings as pagans. It is, however, very interesting to note the paucity of such

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[40] LEE, *Ælfric's Homilies*, VIII, 1b.
[41] M. CLAYTON, 'Ælfric's *Esther*: a *Speculum Reginae*?', in *Text and Gloss: Studies in Insular Learning and Literature Presented to Joseph Donovan Pheifer*, ed. by H. Conrad O'Briain, A.M. D'Arcy and J. Scattergood (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999), pp. 89-101.
[42] See below, pp. 208-209.

specific representation of the Scandinavian invaders in written production of late Anglo-Saxon England. For example, in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the use of the adjective *hæðen* with reference to the northern raiders is limited almost exclusively to the years between 851 and 865,[43] while in later entries concerning the second Viking Age the authors of all the surviving manuscripts opt for more 'ethnic' terms such as *dene* [Dane], *wicing* [Viking] or *norðmann* [northman].

I have therefore conducted a wide-ranging enquiry into a variety of written sources (including non-literary texts such as charters and law codes) dating from the 990s to 1016, in order to identify the terms most commonly employed in naming the Scandinavian invaders, as well as analysing the distribution of the word *hæðen* and its Latin counterpart *paganus*.[44] This survey has revealed that, as previously noted concerning Ælfric's own writings, there was no single accepted use of the term *hæðen*/*paganus*, which was used indiscriminately for many things, including unbaptized children, unorthodox religious, social and sexual practices, prehistoric earthworks, pirates and raiders.[45] Secondly, it has shown that, whereas in ninth- and early tenth-century texts the epithet *hæðen*/*paganus* was regularly 'attached' to the Vikings, around

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[43] See above, nt. 179, p. 148.

[44] This survey has been made possible by the *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus* and the *Electronic Sawyer* website [<http://www.esawyer.org.uk/about/index.html> (accessed 4 June 2013)]. I have also referred to R. DiNapoli, *An Index of Theme and Image to the Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church: Comprising the Homilies of Ælfric, Wulfstan, and the Blickling and Vercelli Codices* (Hockwold cum Wilton: Anglo-Saxon Books, 1995), s. THE HEATHEN, p. 48, VIKINGS, pp. 90-91 and WAR, p. 92. It should however be noted that my enquiry is far from comprehensive, if only for the fact that the *Old English Web Corpus* comprises texts in Old English only. Moreover, I have considered the use of *hæðen*/*paganus* with special reference to the Vikings, while it would be both interesting and useful to explore in greater detail how other contemporary pagans (e.g. Saracens) are described in early English sources.

[45] The occurrences of *hæðen*/*paganus* in the literary corpus covered by the databases mentioned above are of course too many to be recorded in full here. For unbaptized children see, for instance, *Conf* 1.1 (Spindler), B11.1.1, 66. For prehistoric earthworks, which are often mentioned as recognizable landmarks in charters, see, among others, S 143 and S 586. As for unorthodox practices, see A.L. Meaney's study of the of the concept of 'heathenism' in the works of Wulfstan of York ['*And we forbeodað eornostlice ælcne hæðenscipe*: Wulfstan and Late Anglo-Saxon and Norse 'Heathenism'', in *Wulfstan, Archbishop of York: the Proceedings of the Second Alcuin Conference*, ed. by M. Townend, SEM 10 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), pp. 461-500].

the year 1000 this combination tends to present itself with less frequency. In fact, the northern raiders appear to be systematically defined as pagans in only a limited number of texts which, tellingly, all present strong connections with the military aristocracy of Æthelred's reign.

For example, the only late tenth-century work where the term *pagani* is consistently used to indicate the Vikings is the Latin translation of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* composed by none other than Ælfric's own patron, ealdorman Æthelweard.[46] Although the English nobleman uses a variety of words to describe the raiders who had been harrying the British Isles since the end of the eighth century, some of which display an overtly classical undertone like *barbarus*, his frequent choice of *pagani* is particularly significant because, as previously mentioned, it is virtually absent from the Old English source and, moreover, does not belong to the secular Latin vocabulary Æthelweard apparently preferred. In addition, while discussing the mythical ancestors of various people Æthelweard clearly states that Woden is worshipped 'usque in hodiernam diem' [to the present day] by 'Dani, Northmanni quoque, et Sueui' [the Danes, the Norwegians too, and by the Svebi].[47] A very similar consideration is indeed made by Ælfric in his sermon *De Falsis Diis*, composed some time between 992 and 1002.[48] Here the homilist introduces the Roman pantheon and explains how the same deities, albeit under different names, are still worshipped by northern pagans in his own days.

It is further interesting to note that one of the few other texts giving a significant religious undertone to the conflict between English and Vikings is a charter by the famous ealdorman Byrthnoth who, 'iturus contra paganos ad bellum' [setting off to war

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[46] Æthelweard, *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*.
[47] *Ibid.*, I, Ch. 4.
[48] Ælfric of Eynsham, *De falsis diis*, in *Homilies of Ælfric: a Supplementary Collection*, ed. by J.C. Pope, 2 vols., EETS, o.s. 259 and 260 (London: Oxford University Press, 1967-1968), II, no. XXI, pp. 676-712. On the dating of *De falsis diis* see Clemoes, *The Chronology*, p. 56.

against the pagans] in 991, granted a piece of land to Christ Church, Canterbury.[49] Tellingly, the poem narrating Byrthnoth's heroic death at Maldon also portrays the battle as a judgement of God, where the Christian English were called to face the *hæðen* Vikings.

Wulfstan, on the other hand, appears more cautious than his distinguished colleague about openly declaring the paganism of the Vikings, opting instead for portraying the Scandinavian raiders more subtly, yet just as effectively, as 'others' with respect to Christian society. For example, in his well-known *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*,[50] Wulfstan describes the questionable habit of many of his fellow countrymen in running off to join the Vikings in terms of the abandonment of their religion:

> Ðeh þræla hwylc hlaforde æthleape 7 of cristendome to wicinge weorþe, 7 hit æfter þam eft geweorþe þæt wæpngewrixl weorðe gemæne þegene 7 þræle, gif þræl þæne þegen fullice afylle, licge ægylde ealre his mægðe; […]. (*Sermo Lupi*, ll. 104-107)
>
> [If any slave escapes from his lord and, (abandoning) Christendom, becomes a Viking, and afterwards it happens that an armed encounter takes place between the thane and the slave, if the slave kills the thane outright, he (the thane) shall lie without wergild (being paid) to any of his family.]

Similarly, in the homily for the sixth Sunday after Pentecost,[51] Ælfric contends:

> Swa fela manna gebugað mid ðam gecorenum
> to Cristes geleafan on his Gelaðunge,
> þæt hy sume yfele eft ut abrecað,
> and hy on gedwyldum adreogað heora líf,
> swa swa þa Engliscan men doð þe to ðam Deniscum gebugað,
> and mearciað hy deofle to his mannrædene,
> and his weorc wyrcað, hym sylfum to forwyrde,

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and heora agene leode be(læwað) to deaðe.[52]

> [So many people submit along with the chosen ones to Christ's faith in his Church, that later some of them break out in an evil manner. And they spend their lives in error and brand themselves to the Devil and his service — as do those Englishmen who submit to the Danes. And they perform his work to the destruction of themselves, and they betray their own people to death.]

To conclude, this survey, although admittedly neither comprehensive nor conclusive (the results have been presented only briefly here), seems therefore to point to the existence of a well-defined group of texts connected to a well-defined group of authors and patrons, which go to great lengths in portraying the Vikings in a very specific way, while other contemporaneous written sources tendentially assign little relevance to the Vikings' religion. However, the representation of the Vikings as pagans is strongly anachronistic, since the tenth century had witnessed significant social and political changes within Scandinavian society and, above all, the beginning of the process of Christianization. The conversion of northern Europe is without doubt one of the most controversial areas of both past and present Scandinavian studies, but the importance of the subject for the present discussion calls for a brief, yet careful examination of the same.

The Christianization of Scandinavia[53]

The first mission aimed at the conversion of Scandinavia dates to the first half of the ninth century when Anskar, a monk from Corvey, was allowed to accompany a Danish petty king under the name of Harald back to his lands, after this ruler had been baptised before Louis the Pious in 826. The relatively late outset of missionary activity in

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[52] *Ibid.*, ll. 128-135.

[53] General studies on the conversion of Scandinavia include L. ABRAMS, 'Eleventh-Century Missions and the Early Stages of Ecclesiastical Organisation in Scandinavia', in *Anglo-Norman Studies* 17 (Proceedings of the Battle-Conference 1994), ed. by C. Harper-Bill (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995), pp. 21-40; P. MEULENGRACHT SØRENSEN, 'Religions Old and New', in *Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings*, pp. 202-224; B. SAWYER and P. SAWYER, 'Scandinavia Enters Christian Europe', in *Cambridge History of Scandinavia*, pp. 147-159.

Scandinavia is, however, not surprising, since it was only at the beginning of the ninth

century that the Carolingian kings, after managing to extend their rule to the southern

boundaries of Jutland, took an interest in spreading the Word of God among their new,

pagan neighbours.[54] After some initial difficulties, Anskar's mission proved very

successful and the monk was soon named archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen, a newly

established ecclesiastical see which had been entrusted with the evangelization of

Scandinavia.[55] After Anskar's death in 865, no further 'official' missions were launched

for more than a century, but it appears that Christianity continued to gain ground

through the favour of local petty rulers and the strenuous efforts of men and women,

whose names are not recorded in existing sources, acting outside a specific

ecclesiastical authority.[56]

The positive outcomes of this earliest phase of missionary activity in southern

Scandinavia are attested, for example, by the stunning funerary site at Jelling, created in

the second half of the ninth century by Harald Bluetooth.[57] Here, a well-known runic

inscription records that 'King Harald ordered these monuments to be made in honour of

his father, Gorm, and his mother, Tyre — that Harald who won for himself all Denmark,

and Norway, and made the Danes Christian'.[58] Although it is quite unlikely that Harald

managed to convert all of his subjects to the new religion, the rune stone at Jelling

highlights that Christianity was not only adopted, but was endorsed and actively

promoted by a powerful dynasty, which had succeeded in defeating the neighbouring

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[54] MEULENGRACHT SØRENSEN, 'Religions', p. 218; SAWYER and SAWYER, 'Scandinavia Enters Christian Europe', p. 147.

[55] SAWYER and SAWYER, 'Scandinavia Enters Christian Europe', p. 148.

[56] L. ABRAMS, 'The Anglo-Saxons and the Christianization of Scandinavia', *Anglo-Saxon England* 24 (1995): 213-149.

[57] For a detailed description of the Jelling monuments see, among others, K.J. KROGH, 'The Royal Viking-Age Monuments at Jelling in the Light of Recent Archaeological Excavations', *Acta Archaeologica* 53 (1982): 183-216.

[58] L. SKOVGAARD-PETERSEN, 'The Making of the Danish Kingdom', in *Cambridge History of Scandinavia*, pp. 168-183 at 168.

rulers and in establishing its supremacy over Jutland and the southern Scandinavian peninsula.

In contrast, Christianity did not reach northern and western Norway before the first half of the tenth century. Moreover, according to Lesley Abrams, its conversion was not led by the Carolingian church, as in Denmark, but by English missionaries, whose presence in the area was seemingly so significant as to cause serious concerns and irritation to the archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen at least until the middle of the eleventh century.[59] Despite the dire shortage of contemporary and reliable sources, it appears that Anglo-Saxon England played a crucial role in the Christianization of Scandinavia in general, and of Norway in particular, not only through evangelism 'in the field', but also through fostering some of its foremost leaders. In fact, the three Norwegian 'missionary kings', Hákon the Good (r. 934-61), Olaf Tryggvason (r. 995-1000) and Olaf Haraldsson (r. 1015-28, canonized in 1030) all became acquainted with Christianity in England and then proceeded to spread the new faith across their native country with such zeal (and, sometimes, open violence) to deserve the aforementioned epithet. Specifically, according to the sagas, Hákon, son of Harald Finehair, was raised and baptised at the court of King Æthelstan (r. 924-39), who also stood as his sponsor.[60] Æthelred the Unready forced Olaf Tryggvason to embrace Christianity as part of the peace agreements signed in 994, while Olaf Haraldsson first followed Æthelred during his exile into Normandy, and was then allowed to rule in Norway for twelve years by the very Christian king Cnut.[61]

These examples, together with that of Harald Bluetooth, show how conversion to

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[59] ABRAMS, 'The Anglo-Saxons'.
[60] R.I. PAGE, 'The Audience of *Beowulf* and the Vikings', in *The Dating of Beowulf*, ed. by C. Chase (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), pp. 113-122.
[61] KRAG, 'The Early Unification', pp. 193-194.

Christianity was not necessarily a purely spiritual matter, since it often became a key element in the complex and bloody process of territorial and political unification of the Scandinavian kingdoms.[62] In particular, the Christian faith was imposed by force of arms in northern Norway, where Olaf Tryggvason led a particularly brutal campaign to bring the petty rulers of Trøndelag and Hálogaland into submission. The violent history of conversion in these areas is testified, for instance, by the archaeological excavations at Borg in Lofoten, which have revealed how the wealthy local chieftain's longhouse was suddenly razed to the ground at the end of the tenth century, when Olaf Tryggvason finally defeated a large coalition of northern noblemen around 995.[63] Only a few years later, a new longhouse was built at Borg together with a wooden church, which was to supplant the well-attested pagan cults practised at the site up to that time.[64]

It is, however, no wonder that those rulers who wished to extend their domains and become 'kings' saw conversion as a powerful ally. First of all, Christianity promoted a notion of kingship based on the supremacy of a sole God-anointed leader standing at the top of a highly hierarchical social structure, whereas traditional early Scandinavian society revolved around the interaction between familial groups of equal status.[65] Moreover, conversion allowed the new Scandinavian kings to enter the exclusive circle of European nobility and to receive its political support, as demonstrated, for example, by the presence of King Cnut at the coronation of Holy Roman Emperor Conrad II in 1027.[66]

Lastly, it is important to underline that the spread of Christianity was greatly

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[62] ABRAMS, 'The Anglo-Saxons', pp. 220-221.
[63] F. HERSCHEND and D.K. MIKKELSEN, 'The Main Building at Borg (I:1)', in *Borg in Lofoten: a Chieftain's Farm in North Norway*, ed. by G.S. Munch, O.S. Johansen and E. Roesdahl (Trondheim: Tapir Academic Press, 2003), pp. 41-76.
[64] G.S. MUNCH, 'Borg as a Pagan Centre', in *Borg in Lofoten*, pp. 253-263.
[65] ABRAMS, 'Eleventh-Century Missions', p. 21.
[66] *Ibid.*.

hindered by the noticeable geographical extension of the Scandinavian peninsula, as well as by its political fragmentation. Because of all the elements just reviewed, it is difficult to establish the actual depth of the conversion of leading men and 'common people' alike, a problem exacerbated by the paucity of written evidence on the matter. Archaeological finds, however, show that in the coastal regions of southern and western Norway (where the Norwegian kings had their main power base and Anglo-Saxon missionaries were more active), pagan burials marked by the deposition of grave goods quickly fell into disuse around the middle of the tenth century.[67] Moreover, we have positive proof that the Scandinavian communities which had settled in northern England during the first Viking Age had soon assimilated with the local population and thoroughly converted to Christianity.[68] In fact, some of the leading ecclesiastical figures of late Anglo-Saxon England were of Scandinavian descent, as possibly were many of those missionaries who travelled to their ancestral lands to convert the remaining Vikings to the Word of God.[69]

To sum up, the Christianization of Scandinavia was a long and complex *process* (rather than an *event*), which took place in various places at different times, and which can not be considered as fully concluded until the beginning of the twelfth century. It is therefore likely that during the second Viking Age, that is to say between the end of the tenth and the beginning of the eleventh century, Christianity and pagan practices walked hand in hand, presumably through the addition of the Christian Trinity to the pagan pantheon.[70] However, as Preben Meulengracht Sørensen underlines, conversion was not only a matter of religion, but also involved a deep cultural change.[71]

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[67] SAWYER and SAWYER, 'Scandinavia Enters Christian Europe', p. 152.
[68] ABRAMS, 'The Anglo-Saxons', p. 216.
[69] *Ibid.*.
[70] MEULENGRACHT SØRENSEN, 'Religions', pp. 204-205.
[71] *Ibid.*, p. 222.

This observation is particularly important in illuminating the relationship between Anglo-Saxons and Vikings during the reign of Æthelred and, consequently, to fully understanding the representation of the Scandinavian raiders in Ælfric's works. In his 1992 article 'Playing by Whose Rules? A Further Look at Viking Atrocity in the Ninth Century', Guy Halsall argued that relations between the Vikings and their victims in the ninth century, and the portrayal of the former in written sources of the time, were negatively influenced by the fact that the Scandinavian raiders were totally unfamiliar with the rules of conduct which governed armed conflicts between European populations — a still unwritten but widely accepted code of behaviour arising from, and based on, Christian precepts.[72] But whereas Halsall's model is absolutely valid when applied to the first Viking Age, the same cannot be said for the later phase of Scandinavian activity in England. In fact, even though it is impossible to ascertain the individual religious beliefs of the Viking warriors who landed on English coasts from the 990s onwards, we can indeed be certain that Christianity, its precepts and institutions were certainly well known to them, together with more general cultural norms, including the still unwritten code of behaviour regulating armed conflicts in south-western Europe.

This situation is proven by the fact that, although the Viking wars of the eleventh century had devastating effects on the military, political and economic life of Anglo-Saxon England, religious institutions were left almost untouched. In fact, the reigns of Æthelred and Cnut saw an unprecedented flourishing of the English Church, which was also able to acquire a significant political role with both kings. Moreover, the eleventh century was a true golden age of Anglo-Saxon literature, thanks to the works of Ælfric

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[72] G. HALLSALL, 'Playing by Whose Rules? A Further Look at Viking Atrocity in the Ninth Century', *Medieval History* 2.2 (1992): 2-12.

and Wulfstan and the collection into manuscript form of most of the Old English poetic corpus. In contrast, the ninth-century Scandinavian invasions and subsequent settlement of Norse communities in the Danelaw had caused the disappearance of all the episcopal sees of north-west England apart from York and Lindisfarne,[73] while monasteries and churches were indiscriminately pillaged and burnt, with the ensuing destruction of the libraries which had made northern England famous throughout Europe at the times of Bede and Alcuin.[74]

At the same time, if the Vikings had become aware of English society, religion and culture, they themselves were no longer the 'inconsuetum et inauditum malum' [unaccustomed and unheard-of evil][75] which had shocked and terrorized Europe during the first Viking Age since, as discussed above, there had been repeated political, diplomatic and religious contacts between northern Europe and the British Isles at every level of society, further promoted by the Scandinavian communities of the Danelaw. Lastly, it should be borne in mind that the political and cultural elite of Æthelred's reign which elaborated and promoted the representation of the Vikings as pagans had constant, personal relations with the Viking leaders active on English soil. In particular, Wulfstan and Ælfric themselves were no terrified monks writing about the horrors of the outside world from the segregation of the cloister, but high-ranking members of Anglo-Saxon society and close collaborators of what could be defined as the 'ruling class' of Æthelred's reign.[76] As such, they probably had many opportunities to interact directly

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[73] On the detrimental effects of the Viking raids on the English church during the ninth century see, among others, S. Foot, 'Remembering, Forgetting and Inventing: Attitudes to the Past in England at the End of the First Viking Age', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser. 9 (1999): 185-200 and C. Cubitt, 'Rape, Pillage and Exaggeration', in *Not Angels but Anglicans: a History of Christianity in the British Isles*, ed. by H. Chadwick (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2000), pp. 33-39.

[74] Wormald, 'Viking Studies', pp. 138-139.

[75] Dümmler, *Epistolae Karolini aevi*, no. 16, ll. 6-7, p. 43.

[76] On Æthelweard and Æthelmær's role in the politics of Æthelred's reign see Cubitt, 'Ælfric's Lay Patrons', pp. 167-184.

with individuals coming from Scandinavia and to hear first-hand, reliable reports, as their knowledge of Norse religion, mythology and language also seems to suggest.[77] In particular, it is not unlikely to suppose that Wulfstan, as one of Æthelred's closest advisers, attended at least one of the many peace negotiations with the Viking leaders recorded in our sources,[78] while Ælfric, who seemingly led a much more retired life than his illustrious colleague, was surely able to hear a great deal about the *flotmen* from his patrons, Æthelweard and Æthelmær, who also led negotiations with Scandinavian warriors like Olaf Tryggvason, for example.[79]

In short, despite the tendency of current scholarship to overlook these crucial facts and to take the image of the Vikings emerging from only a few, albeit influential, eleventh-century texts at face value, the Scandinavian warriors who fought at Maldon in 991 were indeed profoundly different from those faced by King Alfred at Edington more than a century earlier, and whom Asser correctly described as *pagani*. Nevertheless, as previously contended, a well-defined group of late Anglo-Saxon authors, whose leading figure was Ælfric himself, still presented the raiders in a way that did not mirror the substantial cultural and religious changes just mentioned, which are instead duly recorded in other contemporary sources. So, if ignorance cannot be

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[77] MEANEY, '*And we forbeodað*', pp. 470-471.

[78] Although no positive proof exists that Wulfstan ever attended a negotiation with Viking leaders in person, other notable Anglo-Saxon churchmen, like archbishop Sigeric of Canterbury, certainly did play a central role in striking peace agreements with the raiders [see nt. below].

[79] According to the text of the peace treaty concluded in 994 between Æthelred and the Viking army led by Olaf Tryggvason [ed. and trans. by KEYNES, 'The Historical Context', pp. 103-107], archbishop Sigeric of Canterbury and ealdorman Æthelweard — together with another ealdorman named Ælfric — were entrusted by the king with the task of settling the terms of the Vikings' retreat against the payment of tribute, which was collected by Sigeric, Æthelweard and Ælfric in the king's name [I, p. 104]. On the diplomatic contacts between the Vikings and a number of English noblemen, including Æthelweard and Æthelmær, see J.E. DAMON, 'Advisors for Peace in the Reign of Æthelred *Unræd*', in *Peace and Negotiation: Strategies for Coexistence in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. by D. Wolfthal, Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages and Renaissance 4 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 57-78. I however strongly disagree with Damon's argument that 'members of Æthelred's *witan* advised him to buy peace with tribute money; this policy formed part of a general 'peace plan' related to an ongoing concern in Anglo-Saxon society about the morality of warfare' [p. 58].

counted as an excuse (since, as we have seen, Ælfric doubtlessly 'knew his Vikings'), why did he choose to offer a representation so much at odds with historical reality?

A special kind of war

My hypothesis is that Ælfric knowingly and willingly represents the Vikings as pagans in his Old Testament paraphrases, and that this rhetoric is specifically connected to the ideology of war which had been developing throughout the early medieval period and which was soon to culminate in the Crusading ideal. In Chapter Two it has been noted how, already during the ninth century, the killing of pagan enemies entailed few moral considerations, while the practice of war against fellow Christians raised strong ethical problems, which could be overcome only by the elaboration of a complex cultural apparatus aimed at justifying and legitimating such a necessity. I would therefore argue that, although there is no positive proof of a 'special treatment' of war depending on the religious beliefs of opponents,[80] late Anglo-Saxon intellectuals and their audience were indeed profoundly troubled by the necessity, on the one hand, to promote a resolute armed resistance against the Vikings and, on the other, by the knowledge that their enemies were no longer alien to Christendom. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that, during Æthelred's reign, a significant and ever increasing number of Anglo-Saxons, noblemen and 'commoners' alike, joined the various Viking armies fighting on English soil, turning their weapons against their own countrymen.

In order to solve both these problems, Ælfric elaborates a specific representation of the Vikings as pagans which could justify unrestrained violent action against both them

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[80] As thoroughly discussed by D.S. BACHRACH [*Religion and the Conduct of War*, pp. 98-107], penitential practices on the Continent show that, by the early eleventh century, killing a pagan enemy was no longer perceived as a sin, since soldiers were not required to do any penance for such act. A detailed investigation of late Anglo-Saxon penitential literature and practices could therefore help us to better understand the representation of the Vikings in Ælfric's works.

and their English allies — whom, as we have seen, both Ælfric and Wulfstan emphatically identify with the Scandinavian raiders. That image of the Viking warriors and their associates was then promoted among the military aristocracy which was to face the raiders on the battlefield, as suggested by the fact that Æthlweard, his son Æthelmaer and Sigeweard (the three noblemen to whom Ælfric addresses his main Old Testament pieces) were all personally involved in the defence against the Vikings.[81] It is also possible to assume that these men would have circulated the notions gathered from Ælfric's works (or from actual conversations with the writer) among their families and ample retinues.

At the same time, we can now fully appreciate that it was not the practice of war in general that burdened Ælfric's conscience in his homily on the Maccabees, but the fact that the Vikings were in truth culturally and religiously very similar to the Anglo-Saxons. To overcome this *impasse*, Ælfric decided to insert the chief review of his ideas about war within an Old Testament context, enabling him to liken the Vikings to the Seleucids, who represent the nemesis of the People of God. On the other hand, Ælfric also repeatedly states that warfare against the pagans was no threat for the souls of the heroic Maccabees/Anglo-Saxons. For example, at the end of Chapter V, Ælfric relates how Judas Machabeus had to gather a substantial offering in silver coins to release the souls of some of his men who had died in battle.[82] However, the sin for which these warriors were facing damnation had nothing to do with shedding blood in the course of war, but was because they had previously stolen part of the war-booty 'ongean godes . æ' [against God's law].[83] Clearly, God's law did not forbid taking a pagan man's life.

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[81] As ealdormen, the primary duty of both Æthelweard and Æthelmær was to raise and lead an army in the territorial areas under their control, and to defend those areas from any attack [CUBITT, 'Ælfric's Lay Patrons', p. 168-169]. Sigeweard's activities are less documented in surviving sources, but it appears that he was a thegn [*ibid.*, p. 186] and therefore liable to military service.

[82] *PSM*, ll. 455-471.

[83] *PSM*, l. 463.

We should nevertheless be very careful to draw a clear distinction between salvation on the one hand and elevation to sainthood on the other. The former is usually conceived as the deliverance of the soul from sin and its consequences, an end all good men could aim for, provided that they abstain from sinning or atone for wrongful actions they have committed. The latter is instead a path that only a few, especially elevated souls can tread, often at the end of a holy life completely out of the ordinary. Blurring this distinction in Ælfric's homily on the Maccabees could prompt readers and commentators alike to mistake Ælfric's attempt to instruct his audience on how to lead a good Christian life in order to gain salvation as an example of 'holy war' ideology, where killing a given enemy in a well-defined context is not only acceptable, but an action which positively distinguished its maker in the eyes of God, therefore elevating him (or her) to sainthood.[84] Although some theories connected to the concept of 'holy war' were already circulating at the beginning of the eleventh century, it is rather unlikely that Ælfric was familiar with them and, consequently, his rendering of the Books of the Maccabees (and of other hagiographic texts and traditions in the *Lives of Saints*) should be understood exclusively in terms of the author's attempt to reassure his audience on the morality of a violent solution to the 'Viking problem'.

Similarly, caution should be applied when considering the oft-quoted passage from the *Passio Sanctorum Machabeorum* where Ælfric expounds the classical distinction between four types of war:

> Secgað swa-þeah lareowas þ*æt* synd feower cynna gefeoht .
> *iustum* . þ*æt* is rihtlic . *iniustum* . unrihtlic .
> *ciuile* . betwux ceaster-gewaru*m* . *Plusqua*m *ciuile* . betwux siblingum
> *Iustum bellum* . is rihtlic gefeoht wið ða reðan flot-menn .
> oþþe wið oðre þeoda þe eard willað fordón .

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[84] See above, nt. 183, p. 149.

(*PSM*, ll. 705-709)

> [Nevertheless teachers say that there are four kinds of war; *justum*, that is, just; *injustum*, that is, unjust; *civile*, between citizens; *plusquam civile*, between relatives. *Justum bellum* is just war against the cruel seamen, or against other people that wish to destroy (our) land.]

These lines have often been considered as evidence of the earliest development of 'just war' theories in medieval England.[85] In fact, the words quoted above do represent the first 'appearance' of Isidore of Seville's definition of the four kinds of war in Anglo-Saxon literature, and it is also true that Ælfric employs these classical concepts in an imaginative yet appropriate way, applying them to the events of his own day. However, Ælfric's understanding of and interest in the ideology of the 'just war' should not be overestimated, because neither in the *Passio* nor in any other of his works does the author significantly elaborate or expand on Isidore's bare words by, for instance, explaining why the war against the *reðan flot-menn* should be considered just.

Furthermore, if these lines are considered not in isolation, but in the specific context of a text whose primary aim was to persuade Anglo-Saxon warriors that the conflict against the Vikings did not entail any moral dangers, it appears much more likely that Ælfric might have referred to the authority of Isidore simply to buttress his overall argument, as the opening sentence also seems to indicate.[86] I certainly do not wish to downplay Ælfric's paramount importance in the evolution of the ideology of war in Anglo-Saxon England. However, acknowledging the limits of Ælfric's elaboration without anachronistically identifying it with later cultural constructions allows us

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[85] See, for example, C. TYERMAN, *England and the Crusades, 1095-1588*, paperback edn. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 10.

[86] Ælfric's recourse to the authority of *lareowas* [teachers] in this passage matches the author's practice of overtly referring to ancient but also more recent *auctoritates* in order to validate his own assertions, as thoroughly discussed in various publications by Joyce HILL. See, among others, 'Translating the Tradition: Manuscripts, Models and Methodologies in the Composition of Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies*', in *Textual and Material Culture in Anglo-Saxon England: Thomas Northcote Toller and the Toller Memorial Lecture*s, ed. by D. Scragg, Publications of the Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies 1 (Cambridge; Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2003), pp. 241-259, first published in *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 79.1 (1997): 43-65.

properly to recognize and appreciate the true originality and significance of the author's contribution.

By way of a conclusion

The present analysis of the *Passio Sanctorum Machabeorum* and of other Ælfrician biblical paraphrases disproves one of the major assumptions concerning the late Anglo-Saxon author, namely that he represents an early example of pacifism. Ælfric was indeed concerned by the morality of war. He did not believe it proper for members of the Church to take part in bloodshed and went to great lengths to promote this point throughout his works. He also felt that the practice of war by the laity entailed serious moral problems, especially when the foes in question belonged to the same cultural and religious 'dimension' as the Anglo-Saxons. However, instead of emphasizing the 'affinity' between the two enemies and arguing in favour of pursuing alternative, less violent means to stop the Scandinavian marauders from conquering England, he elaborates a specific and ultimately fictitious representation of the Vikings as pagan 'others'. In short, Ælfric was no pacifist, but a practical man who resolutely provides a persuasive literary model to make unrestrained violence against the raiders morally acceptable.

Wulfstan of York

We have now come to the final case study of the present work, which will focus on one of the most celebrated figures of late Anglo-Saxon England, namely Wulfstan of York. A native of the east of England,[87] Wulfstan is believed to have begun his career as

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[87] WHITELOCK, *Sermo Lupi*, pp. 7-8.

a preacher, an activity which not only brought him considerable popularity, but possibly prepared the ground for his election as bishop of London in 996. It was probably during his time in London that Wulfstan met the young King Æthelred and soon became one of his closest and more trusted advisers — a role he was bound to maintain for the following twenty years. As the king's counsellor, Wulfstan attended many royal councils and meetings of the *witan*, witnessed a number of charters and, rather unprecedentedly, also drafted all of Æthelred's law codes after 1008. Probably on account of his prominent position at court, Wulfstan simultaneously became bishop of Worcester and archbishop of York in 1002. When Æthelred died in 1016, Wulfstan not only retained his post as Archbishop of York, but King Cnut welcomed him as his own adviser. As such, Wulfstan continued to compose laws and other documents in the king's name until his own death in 1023.

However, neither his pressing engagements in politics and Church administration, nor his frequent travels, nor even the final defeat of the English armies and the accession of a Viking king to the Anglo-Saxon throne were able to distract Wulfstan from his lifelong interest in preaching and literary composition — a vocation testified by the substantial body of Wulfstanian material surviving to this day, comprising some letters, about thirty sermons in Latin and Old English, law codes and other legal texts, several additional prose works and, last but not least, a number of manuscripts compiled under the archbishop's direction and containing a considerable selection of early medieval texts.[88]

As a consequence, Wulfstan well deserves to rival his illustrious contemporary and

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[88] On the collection of manuscripts assembled by the archbishop of York, usually known as *Wulfstan's Commonplace Book*, see H. SAUER, 'The Transmission and Structure of Archbishop Wulfstan's Commonplace Book', in *Old English Prose: Basic Readings*, pp. 339-393, first published in German as 'Zur Überlieferung und Anlage von Erzbischof Wulfstans *Handbuch*', *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 36 (1980): 341-384.

'colleague' Ælfric, whose ideas and works had great influence on the archbishop. Although recent studies suggest that direct, personal contact between the two authors might have been more tenuous than previously believed,[89] the fact remains that many of Wulfstan's sermons rely heavily on Ælfric's homilies, which the archbishop reworked and rewrote in his own characteristic style. Therefore, in the following pages it will be interesting to investigate whether the two most prominent literary personalities of the period — who witnessed the same tragic times, had equally strong connections with Æthelred's court, and whose works were also closely related — developed similar ideas about war in general, a similar attitude towards the Vikings, and suggested to their respective audiences similar responses to the invaders. These questions are fundamental not only in appreciating the distinctive features of these writers' characters, opinions and literary production, but also in determining whether an actual, at least partially standardized ideology of war was developing in late Anglo-Saxon England, or whether Ælfric and Wulfstan instead represent two contrasting voices in an ongoing debate.

Before proceeding to consider Wulfstan's attitudes towards war in detail, however, it should be noted that our investigation is hampered by the impossibility of isolating a single text which, like Ælfric's *Passio Sanctorum Machabeorum*, summarizes all the main aspects of the author's views on the matter. These views have instead to be reconstructed from a number of passages and 'hints' scattered throughout the substantial volume of material described above, including Wulfstan's own writings, where similar ideas are picked up several times in texts belonging to different genres, and the sometimes obscure works by other authors collected in Wulfstanian manuscripts.[90] Moreover, the archbishop continuously rewrote, amended and modified his own works

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[89] M. GODDEN, 'The Relations of Wulfstan and Ælfric: a Reassessment', in *Wulfstan, Archbishop*, pp. 353-374.

[90] A. ORCHARD, 'Wulfstan as Reader, Writer and Rewriter', in *The Old English Homily*, pp. 311-341.

throughout his long career, occasionally in response to identifiable events, but more often following complex processes of accretion which are impossible to reconstruct with any certainty.[91] As a consequence, the present discussion will necessarily depart from the methodology followed so far, insomuch as it will not be based on the close reading of an individual text, but will offer a more general overview of Wulfstan's treatment of the question of war derived from an analysis of the various references to this topic in the archbishop's writings, which will nevertheless be impossible to consider individually or in great detail.

Nonetheless, the first thing to strike an attentive reader reviewing the bulk of Wulfstanian material is that, on the whole, war is not conspicuous as a major theme in the archbishop's writings, nor do the Vikings occupy a prominent role as, for example, in the literary production of his contemporary Ælfric. The only notable exception is of course the 1014 version of the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, on which scholars' attention has therefore tended to concentrate. In particular, previous studies have underlined how, in this text, Wulfstan interpreted the Scandinavian raids which were laying the whole of England waste before his eyes as a punishment inflicted by God on the Anglo-Saxons because of their many sins, which the archbishop vividly describes on several occasions.[92] This reading of the Vikings as instruments of divine wrath most clearly emerges from the following well-known passage where, after enumerating the offences of the English people against each other, against the Church and its members, and against God himself, Wulfstan states:

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[91] *Ibid.*.
[92] See, for example, M. GODDEN, 'Apocalypse and Invasion in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in *From Anglo-Saxon to Early Middle English: Studies Presented to E.G. Stanley*, ed. by M. Godden, D. Gray and T. Hoad (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 130-162 at 142-156 and A. COWEN, '*Byrstas* and *Bysmeras*: the Wounds of Sin in the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*', in *Wulfstan, Archbishop*, pp. 397-411.

7 fela ungelimpa gelimpð þysse þeode oft 7 gelome. Ne dohte hit nu lange
inne ne ute, ac wæs here 7 hete on gewelhwilcan ende oft 7 gelome, 7 Engle
nu lange eal sigelease 7 to swyþe geyrigde þurh Godes yrre; 7 flotmen swa
strange þurh Godes þafunge þæt oft on gefeohte an feseð tyne, 7 hwilum
læs, hwilum ma, eal for urum synnum. […] Wala þære yrmðe 7 wala þære
woroldscame þe nu habbað Engle, eal þurh Godes yrre! […]; hy hergiað 7
hy bærnað, rypaþ 7 reafiað 7 to scipe lædað; 7 la, hwæt is ænig oðer on
eallum þam gelimpum butan Godes yrre ofer þas þeode swutol 7 gesæne?
(*Sermo Lupi*, ll. 110-116, 122-123, 129-132)

[And many misfortunes befall this nation again and again. Things have not
prospered for a long time now either inside or outside (this land), but there has
been warfare and hate in every corner again and again, and the English have been
entirely without victory for a long time now, and too greatly intimidated through
the anger of God; and the seamen (have become) so strong through God's consent
that often in battle one puts ten to flight, and sometimes less sometimes more, all
because of our sins. … Alas for the misery and alas for the worldly shame that the
English now have, entirely because of the anger of God. …; they ravage and they
burn, rob and plunder and carry (away) to (their) ship; and lo, what else is there in
all these events but the anger of God evident and manifest over this nation?]

If the Vikings had indeed been sent by God to chastise the English nation, then the
remedy according to Wulfstan lay in redressing those sinful behaviours which, in his
view, had elicited divine displeasure in the first place. Accordingly, Wulfstan spent most
of his career not only as preacher, but also as royal counsellor and legislator,
reproaching, admonishing and exhorting his fellow Englishmen, condemning their
contempt for God's law and forcefully prompting them to rectify their ways so that they
might be freed from the Scandinavian scourge.[93] The most revealing example of
Wulfstan's 'multilateral' efforts in this sense is without doubt the so-called *Edict of
Bath*,[94] a royal document drafted by the archbishop himself, prescribing three days of
fasting, almsgiving and prayer to take place throughout England on the eve of

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[93] P. WORMALD, 'Archbishop Wulfstan and the Holiness of Society', in *Legal Culture in the Early
Medieval West: Law as Text, Image and Experience*, ed. by P. Wormald (London: Hambledon Press,
1999), pp. 225-251.

[94] The *Edict of Bath* has been extensively commented on by KEYNES in 'An Abbot, an Archbishop', pp.
179-189.

Michaelmas in September 1009, when the entire population of the kingdom had to fast on 'hlafe 7 wirtu*m* 7 wætere' [bread, vegetables and water], walk barefoot to church to attend mass, and pay substantial sums of money clearly set out in the text.[95] According to the Old English version of the *Edict*, the primary aim of this stunning and substantially unprecedented initiative of public penance, which has captivated modern commentators even as the *Sermo Lupi*, was especially to 'Godes miltse 7 his mildheortnesse habban' [obtain God's mercy and his compassion], so that the Anglo-Saxons might then 'þurh his fultu*m* […] feondu*m* wiðstandan' [withstand (their) enemies through His help], and in particular a *micel here* which had just landed on English shores.[96]

It has been repeatedly argued that both the interpretation of war as divine punishment and all the liturgical and semi-liturgical forms connected to military activity have their ultimate source in the historical books of the Bible. It is therefore not surprising to discover that the only further references to war in the whole of Wulfstan's homiletic production are contained in three sermons on the Old Testament.[97] In all three instances, Wulfstan rather unimaginatively rehearses the key points of the biblical ideology of war, as we have identified them in many other texts discussed in the present study: God is both willing and able to protect His people from all enemies, but if they should disobey His laws, the Almighty will turn those enemies against them to their utter destruction. For example, in Bethurum homily number XIX (*Be godcundre warnunge*), Wulfstan focuses on the twenty-sixth chapter of the Book of Leviticus, spelling out the fundamental terms of the covenant between God and the Chosen People as expounded

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[95] *Edict of Bath*, 1, 2, 3.

[96] *Edict of Bath, Prologue*.

[97] Wulfstan, *Incipiunt sermones Lupi episcopi*, in *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, ed. by D. Bethurum (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), no. VI, pp. 142-156; *Incipit de visione Isaie prophete quam vidit super Iudam et Hierusalem*, in *The Homilies*, no. XI, pp. 211-220; *Be godcundre warnunge*, in *The Homilies*, no. XIX, pp. 251-254.

by God Himself to Moses during the Israelites' journey through the desert. Among the many promises and warnings given by God to the people of Israel, some relate directly to war:

> And ic welan 7 wista gife eow genoge, 7 ge orsorge wuniaþ on lande on griðe 7 on friðe under minre munde. And ic eow awerige wið hearma gehwylcne þæt eow bite ne slite, here ne hunger, ne feonda mægen ahwar ne geswenceþ. Eac ic siges mihte 7 mægenstrengðe swa micle eow sylle þæt ge eow to gamene feonda afyllað oððe tofesiaþ swa fela swa ge reccað. […] And gif ge þonne fram me hwyrfað eowre heortan 7 lara 7 laga mine forgymað oððe oferhogiað, þonne sceal eow sona weaxan to hearme wædl 7 wawa, sacu 7 wracu, here 7 hunger; 7 scylan eowre heortan eargian swiþe 7 eowra feonda mægen strangian þearle, 7 ge tofesede swyþe afyrhte oft lytel werod earhlice forbugað. And eow unwæstm þurh unweder gelome gelimpeð, 7 stalu 7 steorfa swyþe gehyneþ, 7 ge beoð gesealde feondum to gewealde, þa eow geyrmað 7 swyþe geswencað. Land hy awestað 7 burga forbærnað 7 æhta forspillað, 7 eard hy amyrrað.[98]

> [And I shall give you much prosperity and food, and you shall dwell safely in (your) land, in peace and in security under my hand. And I shall protect you against any harm, (so) that neither bite nor wound, neither army nor hunger, nor the power of enemies will oppress you anywhere. I shall also give you the power of victory and a force so great that you shall kill or drive away at your pleasure as many enemies as you desire. … And if you will then turn your hearts from me, and transgress or despise my teachings and my laws, then poverty and misery, war and persecution, warfare and hunger shall soon grow to afflict you; and your hearts shall turn exceedingly coward and the power of your enemies shall grow much stronger and often you will shamefully run away, greatly terrified by a small force. And failure of crops shall frequently befall you because of bad weather, and robbery and pestilence shall greatly afflict you, and you will be sold to the power of your enemies, who shall vex and and greatly afflict you. They will lay waste your land and burn your dwellings, disperse your wealth, and spoil your country.]

On the basis of the elements presented so far, which constitute the bulk of previous scholarship on the matter, it would therefore seem possible to conclude that Wulfstan's representation of the Vikings and his reading of war in more general terms are very much in line with the longstanding, Old Testament-based tradition which had

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[98] *Be godcundre*, ll. 49-55, 59-68.

characterized early medieval Christian culture and the interpretative discourse on the Scandinavian invasions since the raiders' very first appearance at the end of the eighth century.[99] I would argue, however, that a closer reading of Wulfstan's works, including texts other than the *Sermo Lupi* and the *Edict of Bath* and, above all, a more careful analysis of the archbishop's use of Old Testament models (especially in proportion to Ælfric) not only reveal that Wulfstan's ideology of war was completely different from that of his predecessors and contemporary authors, but also disclose a distinctive and somehow more 'Christian' attitude of the archbishop towards the invaders.

A first, telling example of Wulfstan's original perspective on war can be drawn from contrasting the aforementioned sermon *Be godcundre warnunge* with Ælfric's homily *De oratione Moysi*. Although there appears to be no direct connection between these texts, both of them centre on the same chapter from the Book of Leviticus (no. 26), and can therefore effectively illustrate the different agendas in their authors' minds. The first factor to emerge from even a superficial reading of these homilies is that, whereas Wulfstan confines himself to offering a faithful and rather flat translation of the biblical Latin text, Ælfric greatly expands upon it in order to explain and clarify to his audience how the biblical message relates to present circumstances. We may compare, for instance, the passage from *Be godcundre warnunge* quoted above with Ælfric's more liberal rendering of the same verse:

> Wel we magon geðencan hu wel hit ferde mid ús .
> þaða þis igland wæs wunigende on sibbe . [...]
> Hu wæs hit ða siððan ða þa man towearp munuc-lif .
> and godes biggengas to bysmore hæfde . [...]
> and siððan hæðen here us hæfde to bysmre .
> Be þysum cwæð se ælmihtiga god . to moyse on þa*m* wæstene .

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99 COUPLAND, 'The Rod'.

Gif ge on minum bebodum farað . and mine beboda healdað .

[...] ic forgife sibbe and gesehtnysse eow . [...]

Gif ge þonne me forseoð and mine gesetnyssa awurpað .

ic eac swyðe hrædlice on eow hit gewrece . [...]

ic sende eow swurd to and eow sleað eowre fynd .

and hi þonne awestað wælhreowlice eower land . [...]

and eowre burga beoð to-brocene and aweste .

Ic asende eac yrhðe Into eowrum heortum .

þæt eower nan ne dear eowrum feondum wið-standan .

Þus spræc god gefyrn be þam folce israhel .

hit is swa ðeah swa gedón swyðe neah mid us .

nu on niwum dagum and undigollice.

(*DoM*, ll. 147-177)

[Well may we think how well it fared with us when this island was dwelling in peace … . How was it then afterwards when men rejected monastic life and held God's services in contempt … and afterwards the heathen army had us in reproach? Concerning this spoke the Almighty God to Moses in the wilderness: "If you walk in my statutes and keep my commandments, … I will give you peace and reconciliation … If you then despise me, and cast away my laws, I will also very speedily wreak it upon you; … I will send the sword to you, and your enemies shall slay you, and then they shall cruelly lay waste your land, and your cities shall be broken down and wasted. I will also send cowardice into your hearts, so that none of you dare withstand your enemies". Thus spoke God, of old, concerning the people of Israel; it is nevertheless very nigh thus accomplished in us, now in these late days, and notoriously.]

Although Ælfric omits and significantly summarizes two sentences of the biblical text specifically concerning war, which Wulfstan conversely includes,[100] the overall effect of this passage is nevertheless decidedly more compelling, since Ælfric encloses the direct quotation from the Old Testament between two sentences aiming to make unmistakably clear how God's prophetic words, spoken in a forgotten past about the

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[100] 'Dabo pacem in finibus vestris / dormietis et non erit qui exterreat' […] / persequemini inimicos vestros et corruent coram vobis / persequentur quinque de vestris centum alienos / et centum ex vobis decem milia / cadent inimici vestri in conspectu vestro gladio' [I will give peace at your borders: you shall sleep, and there shall be none to make you afraid. You shall pursue your enemies, and they shall fall before you. Five of you shall pursue a hundred others, and a hundred of you ten thousand: your enemies shall fall before you by the sword] (Lv. 26. 7-8).

sins of the Israelites and ensuing divine retribution, still very much apply 'nu on niwum dagum and undigollice' [now in these late days, and notoriously], and specifically to the Viking invasions. In fact, even if both the Bible and Ælfric's introduction mention many misfortunes other than war, the Vikings, emphatically named as *hæðen here*, still stand out as the most serious and most immediate threat. On the other hand, although it is quite likely that the whole audience of *Be godcundre warnunge* would have associated the term *here* (accompanied by no qualifying adjective) and the other vexing circumstances described in the Old Testament with the Viking raids and the various calamities of their own times, Wulfstan clearly did not wish to make such connection explicit in any way.

Another distinctive feature of Ælfric's homily on Leviticus 26 is that the text opens with a rather lengthy account of an episode from the Book of Exodus, relating in some detail the battle between the Amalekites and the people of Israel in the desert, where the latter had been ambushed.[101] Although, as previously noted,[102] Wulfstan probably never had access to Ælfric's *De oratione Moysi*, it is nevertheless interesting to note that the very same episode is mentioned in the collection of canon law known as the *Excerptiones Pseudo-Ecgberti*.[103] The origin and transmission history of this text remain obscure to this day, but various elements suggest that, by the early eleventh century, both Ælfric and Wulfstan were acquainted with the *Excerptiones*, which therefore constitute a positive point of contact between the two authors.[104] In recension B of the *Excerptiones*, copied in two Wulfstanian manuscripts, a section bearing the heading *De*

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[101] Exodus 17.
[102] See above, p. 199.
[103] J.E. CROSS and A. HAMER (eds. and trans.), *Wulfstan's Canon Law Collection*, Anglo-Saxon Texts 1 (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999). The *Excerptiones* are otherwise known as Wulfstan's *Canon Law Collection*.
[104] Ælfric quotes extensively from the *Excerptiones* in his letters to Wulfstan. See CROSS and HAMER, *Wulfstan's Canon Law Collection*, pp. 17-22.

Militia animatedly forbids clerics to bear arms and supports such a ban by quoting several scriptural examples, including the episode from Exodus chosen by Ælfric for *De oratione*:

> De libro quoque Exodi utile habemus exemplum, scilicet *dum pugnaret Iosue aduersum Amaleh, Moyses non armis pugnabat, sed extensis* palmis ad celum *Deum orabat, et uincebat Israeliticus populus; ut autem remittebat manus, inualescebat Amalech. His et aliis multis declarantur exemplis episcopum, presbiterum, diaconum uel monachum*, nulla portare arma in prelio *nisi tantum ea de quibus legitur.* (*Excerptiones*, B, no. 165)

> [We have a relevant example also from the book of Exodus: undoubtedly, while Joshua was fighting against Amalech, Moses did not carry weapons, but with his hands outstretched towards heaven prayed to God, and the Israelite people prevailed; as he lowered his hands, however, Amalech became strong. By these and many other examples it is made clear that bishops, priests, deacons or monks, are not to bear any arms in battle, except only those concerning which it is read (those of the faith).]

Although Ælfric excises this last *exemplum* when quoting substantial passages from the *Excerptiones* in one of his letters to Wulfstan (2a),[105] he nevertheless hastens to submit it to his audience when discussing clerical involvement in war in *De oratione*. The absence of any reference to this episode in Wulfstan's own writings is therefore particularly noteworthy, because the archbishop was significantly involved in countering the participation of members of the Church in armed conflicts, as testified by the many prescriptions against it found in nearly all the law codes drafted by Wulfstan.[106] Nevertheless, Wulfstan deliberately chose not to take advantage of an effective and evocative Old Testament *exemplum* which, at some point, was clearly available to him. As will become clear later on,[107] this is but one of the many instances

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[105] ÆLFRIC OF EYNSHAM, *Letter from Ælfric to Wulfstan, Archbishop of York*, in *Councils and Synods*, no. 45, pp. 242-255.

[106] See, for example, the so-called *Laws of Edward and Guthrum* [*Councils and Synods*, no. 47, pp. 302-312, 3], where it is prescribed that 'gyf gehadod man gestalie oððe gefehte […] gebete þæt be þam þe seo dæd sy, swa be were swa be wite swa be lahslitte' [if a man in orders steals or fights … he is to pay compensation in proportion to the deed, either by wergild or fine or *lahslit*].

[107] See below, pp. 205-207.

where Wulfstan resisted the influence of several popular and authoritative sources at his disposal which could have left a significant mark on the archbishop's ideas about war, but were instead discarded in favour of a more personal and independent conception.

The most interesting aspect of Wulsftan's writings concerning war, however, is his selective rendering of the traditional Old Testament framework. Over the course of the present study, we have been able to appreciate how war in the Old Testament 'functions' according to a well-defined pattern: as long as the Chosen People respect God's teachings, they will have success in battle against all enemies, no matter how powerful. If, on the contrary, they fall into sin, then they will soon become oppressed by (usually foreign) enemies and remain absolutely unable to resist them until a prophet (or some other pious individual acting in God's name) comes forward to remind the sinners of their covenant with God and persuades them to repent. When heartfelt repentance has been duly performed and sins have been atoned for, the people of God are now able to take up arms again and face the enemy hordes, which are immediately and thoroughly annihilated thanks to divine aid. However, this last phase of the biblical model is consistently missing in Wulfstan's works, as the author tends to concentrate almost exclusively on the relationship between war and sin.

For example, in the second version[108] of the *Sermo Lupi* Wulfstan effectively explains, in accordance with Old Testament tradition, how the sins of the English have brought about a military crisis so severe that 'oft twegen sæmæn, oððe þry hwilum, drifað þa drafe cristenra manna fram sæ to sæ, ut þurh þas þeode, gewelede togædere, us eallum to woruldscame' [often two seamen, or sometimes three, drive the companies of

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[108] GODDEN, 'Apocalypse', pp. 148-149. The dating of the various versions of the *Sermo Lupi* has been discussed by many scholars including Dorothy Whitelock [*Sermo Lupi*, p. 6], Malcolm Godden ['Apocalypse', pp. 143-162] and, more recently, J. WILCOX in 'Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* as Political Performance: 16 February 1014 and Beyond', in *Wulfstan, Archbishop,* pp. 375-396.

Christian men from sea to sea, out through this nation, huddled together, a worldly shame to us all].[109] He then, assuming the role played by the prophets of the Old Testament, encourages his contemporaries to 'don swa us þearf is, gebugan to rihte 7 be suman dæle unriht forlætan, 7 betan swyþe georne þæt we ær bræcan; 7 utan God lufian 7 Godes lagum fylgean' [do as it is necessary for us, submit to law and abandon wrongdoing to some degree, and very eagerly atone for what we formerly transgressed; and let us love God and follow God's laws].[110] At this point, however, the homily concludes, and Wulfstan entirely passes over the probably immediate consequences of the atonement he so vehemently calls for, leaving his audience free to speculate on the fate awaiting the Vikings — a dire end which is instead reported with an abundance of details in many Old Testament passages. Wulfstan's silence on this subject is so obstinate that even the text of the *Edict of Bath* bears no mention to it, despite the fact that the *missae contra paganos* whose celebration was prescribed in the document would have been quite likely to describe, or at least to touch upon, the violent destruction of the enemies of God — as, for example, in the mass against the pagans included in the Leofric Missal.[111]

This peculiar presentation of the standard Old Testament model of war is matched by the fact that Wulfstan never openly exhorts the Anglo-Saxons to take up arms against the Vikings — unlike Ælfric who, despite not going into detail on the subject in *De oratione Moysi*, devotes an entire homily to the vivid account of how the Maccabees, supported by God's help, were able not only to withstand but also to massacre the armies of the Seleucid Empire. In this homily, it should be noted, Ælfric explicitly encourages the English to act accordingly when faced with the Scandinavian raiders.

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[109] *Sermo Lupi*, ll. 123-126.
[110] *Sermo Lupi*, ll. 199-202.
[111] ORCHARD, *Missa contra paganos*, 2042, II, p. 341.

Understanding Wulfstan's motivations is very difficult, especially when considering that, at least on several occasions, the main audience of his works might in fact have comprised the leaders of the English army.[112] Certainly it can not be ascribed to a want of models. Apart from the Old Testament itself, the archbishop presided over one of the largest English libraries of the time in Worcester, where he also had access to an unprecedented number of continental — and especially Carolingian — sources, some of which were included in manuscripts connected with Wulfstan.[113]

In particular, one of the manuscripts of the so-called *Commonplace Book*, Copenhagen, Royal Library, Gamle Kongelike Samlungen, MS 1595, contains a copy of a sermon by Abbo of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, annotated in Wulfstan's own handwriting.[114] According to J.E. Cross and Alan Brown, Abbo's sermon was one of the primary sources of the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, as well as influencing other works by Wulfstan, including a passage concerning war in one of the archbishop's Old Testament homilies.[115] What is interesting about Abbo's text, composed between the end of the ninth century and the beginning of the tenth, while northern France was ravaged by Scandinavian raids, is that not only does it insist on the responsibility of the Franks in bringing about the Viking invasions by quoting several examples from the Bible,[116] but it also very much emphasizes how repentance will allow the Franks to obtain 'totam victoriam … contra paganos' [total victory against the heathens].[117] Moreover, the

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[112] Wilcox, 'Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi*'.

[113] C.A. Jones, 'Wulfstan's Liturgical Interests', in *Wulfstan, Archbishop*, pp. 325-352. On the influence of Carolingian models on Wulfstan's legislation see Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, pp. 330-345 and 456-465.

[114] J.E. Cross and A. Brown (eds. and trans.), *Sermo ad Milites*, in 'Literary Impetus for Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi*', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 20 (1989): 271-291 at 281-287.

[115] According to Cross and Brown ['Literary Impetus', pp. 276-277], the *Sermo ad Milites* also influenced Wulfstan's sermon *Incipiunt sermones Lupi episcopi* (Bethurum no. VI).

[116] Abbo refers, for example, to the story of Zacchaeus, a tax collector who, according to the Gospel of Luke (19. 1-10), suddenly became very generous towards other people after meeting Jesus in Jericho. According to Abbo, this biblical episode shows how laymen should not take advantage of the Church's property, if they want to receive God's support in battle [*Sermo ad Milites*, ll. 27-37].

[117] *Sermo ad Milites*, l. 52.

sermon concludes with a vehement call to arms which foreshadows the ideology of the Crusades:

> O Francia, custodi temetipsam! Nolite uestros inimicos multiplicare et crescere sed, sicut commendat scriptura, pugnate pro patria vestra; nolite timere mori in bello dei. Certe si ibi mortui fueritis, sancti martyres eritis. Et scitote ueraciter quia nullus homo morietur usque ad suum terminum a deo prescitum. Inter omnes gladios non potest homo occidi si suus finis non est. […] Et propterea intrate securi in bellum domini dei; et cum uos intratis in bellum dei, clamate omnes uoce magna: Christus uincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat. Et in ipsa hora fugiet princeps paganorum diabolus cum audierit tam terribilem uocem Christianorum, et deinde fugient ipsi pagani post suum principem diabolum. Et sic uos, qui habetis deum regem et principem, accipietis uictoriam, donante domino nosto Iesu Christo […].
> (*Sermo ad Milites*, ll. 72-76, 77-84)

[France, defend yourself! Do not multiply and increase your enemies, but as scripture commands, fight for your fatherland; do not fear to die in God's battle. Surely, if you are killed in it, you will be holy martyrs. And learn truly that no man will die until the term foreknown by God. Among all swords no man can be slain, if it is not his own end. … And so, go safe into the Lord God's battle; and when you enter into God's battle, all cry out with a great voice, "Christ conquers, Christ rules, Christ reigns". And at that moment the Devil, the leader of the heathens, will flee upon hearing such a terrifying shout from the Christians, and then those heathens will flee after their leader the Devil. And so you, who have God as your king and leader, will gain the victory, by the gift of Our Lord Jesus Christ … .]

As already mentioned, Wulfstan made extensive use of many of the ideas presented in Abbo's sermon, and also annotated several passages in his copy of the text,[118] suggesting that he attentively read this source and meditated on its message. However, none of the violent ideology discussed in the latter part of the sermon found its way into Wulfstan's writings, while a similarly aggressive attitude towards the Vikings can instead be traced in the works of Wulfstan's contemporary Ælfric. This situation strongly suggests that Wulfstan did develop his interpretation of war as divine punishment from a time-honoured and still popular model based on the Old Testament,

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[118] Wulfstan's additions are quoted by Cross and Brown, *Sermo ad Milites*.

but independently decided to omit a specific part of this wider framework which was evidently incompatible with his own ideas on the matter.

In order to understand the archbishop's perspective, it should be borne in mind that, whereas Ælfric saw the Vikings as a problem in its own right, the Scandinavian raiders were for Wulfstan but tangible manifestations of God's wrath of the same standard as famine, pestilence, the breaking-down of social order and many other misfortunes, all brought about, in his view, by the sins of the English. This perspective clearly emerges, for example, from the profound difference separating the representation of the Vikings offered by Wulfstan and the one emerging from Ælfric's writings. Whereas, as we have seen, Ælfric bestows depth and personality on the raiders by identifying them with the Old Testament enemies of Israel (in particular the Seleucids), Wulfstan favours a much more impersonal representation of the Viking warriors who, for example, are seldom characterized by qualifying adjectives in the archbishop's writings — an absence even more conspicuous in view of Wulfstan's fondness for adjectives and adverbs. If, therefore, in Wulfstan's work the Vikings appear not as vivid, living figures but as mere signs of the sinfulness of the English — as extensively and convincingly argued by Alice Cowen[119] — this may partly explain the exclusion of the last part of the biblical model. In fact, exhorting English warriors to face the Vikings in battle would have required Wulfstan to divert the attention of these men and of the whole population of England from what he believed to be really necessary, namely to fight sin forcefully, in favour of a useless effort to oppose its consequences, be it foreign armies, adverse weather or anything else.

I would argue, however, there may be another underlying reason, namely that Wulfstan may simply not have approved of the idea of exterminating the Vikings. I

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[119] COWEN, 'Byrstas and Bysmeras'.

certainly do not wish to suggest that Wulfstan was some sort of medieval pacifist, who opposed any form of violence, even against the Scandinavian invaders. Wulfstan was a practical man, a counsellor of kings, and suggesting he was so naïve as to believe that the Vikings could be vanquished through mere penance and prayer definitely does not do him justice.

A clue to a more correct understanding of Wulfstan's attitudes towards violence in general, and towards war against the Vikings in particular, may be drawn from a closer analysis of one of the most infamous events of Æthelred's reign, that is to say the St. Brice's Day massacre. According to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, in 1002 'se cyng het oflean ealle ða Deniscan men þe on Angelcynne wæron on Bricius messedæg. Forþon þam cynge wæs gecydd þæt hi woldon hine beswerian æt his life. 7 syððan ealle his witan. 7 habban syþðan his rice' [the king ordered all the Danish men who were among the English race to be killed on Brice's Day, because it was made known to the king that they wanted to ensnare his life — and afterwards all his councillors — and have his kingdom afterwards].[120] Although there is no positive evidence of Wulfstan's direct involvement in the planning of this pogrom, it appears that this course of action was contrived by mutual agreement between the king and his *witan*, an assembly of the leading men of the kingdom to which Wulfstan doubtlessly belonged. It therefore appears that, at least formally, he had a role in the *witan*'s decision to ruthlessly execute 'ealle ða Deniscan men þe on Angelcynne wæron' [all the Danish men who were among the English race].

Here it is important to underline that, in all probability, the act of retaliation described by the *Chronicle* and other documents was not directed against those communities of Scandinavian descent which had settled in the Danelaw during the tenth

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[120] *ASC*, s.a. 1002. This piece of information is recorded only in MS E [IRVINE].

century, but its most likely targets were specific groups of warriors, including both Vikings and time-serving Anglo-Saxons, who had been paid by the crown to cease all hostilities and possibly to help Æthelred's armies defend England from other Scandinavian warbands.[121] This fact, I believe, is the key to understanding Wulfstan's attitude towards the St. Brice's Day massacre. Throughout his life, the archbishop repeatedly stressed the importance of correcting wrongs and the necessity on the part of both lay and ecclesiastical authorities to enforce God's law on all members of society — a duty which also included the painful task of violently punishing all those who were thoroughly unwilling to rectify their sinful ways.[122] In short, Wulfstan saw physical violence as a last resort in defending the entire Christian society from dangerous people beyond redemption — a necessary evil, it should be noted, which entailed no moral consequences for those who performed it, as a clause in the *Excerptiones* explains:

> Item Hierunimus dicit
>
> *Homicidas et sacrilegos punire, non est effusio sanguinis sed legum ministerium. Nocet itaque bonis qui parcet malis.* (*Excerptiones*, B, no. 90)
>
> [Jerome also says: to punish murderers and violators of the sacred is not a shedding of blood but the administration of the laws. Consequently, he arms good men who spares wicked ones.]

In the light of what has been said so far, I would maintain that Wulfstan acquiesced to the pogrom on St. Brice's Day because it targeted a well-defined group of people whom Wulfstan might well have considered as 'serial offenders', guilty of treachery, perjury (since oaths were usually sworn on sacred objects and before God) and, according to the *Chronicle*, also of making an attempt on the king's life — a particularly serious crime, as it targeted the head of the Christian nation in England.[123] However, if

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[121] KEYNES, 'The Vikings in England', pp. 77-78. Of a different opinion is J. WILCOX, 'The St. Brice's Day Massacre and Archbishop Wulfstan', in *Peace and Negotiation*, pp. 79-91 at 79-86.

[122] GODDEN, 'The Relations', pp. 361-362.

[123] On the importance attached by Wulfstan to the role of the earthly king, see the author's treatise known as the *Institutes of Polity* [WULFSTAN, *Die 'Institutes of Polity, Civil and Ecclesiastical': ein Werk Erzbischof Wulfstans von York*, ed. by K. Jost, Swiss Studies in English 47 (Bern: Francke, 1959)].

the Vikings executed during the massacre on St. Brice's Day were apparently beyond redemption, it does not necessarily mean that Wulfstan regarded *all* Scandinavian warriors as just as hopeless, and therefore liable to the same fate. Indeed it is my contention that Wulfstan may have considered the vast majority of the raiders as prospective good Christians who, when no longer acting against England as instruments of divine wrath, should be given the opportunity of joining the community of the faithful, just as Wulfstan thought all sinners should have a chance to redeem themselves.

It should be remembered that Wulfstan's family had its roots in East Anglia, where a century of pacific coexistence between the Anglo-Saxon community and the heirs of ninth-century Vikings had demonstrated beyond all doubt that the latter were not irredeemable devils, but could in fact become decent members of a Christian society where different ancestries did not count for much — the very same situation Wulfstan had witnessed in those areas of northern England where his archiepiscopal see lay. Accordingly, when he found himself faced with a Scandinavian Christian king who strongly wished to disprove the deep-rooted image of a pagan marauder, Wulfstan saw the end of Anglo-Saxon rule in England not as a demise but as a favourable opportunity, first of all, to bring peace to a country devastated by thirty years of ceaseless bloodshed, and secondly, to succeed in finally creating a Christian society under the leadership of a wise earthly monarch.[124]

This was a king who, on his part, found himself unable to replace the entire leading class of his new dominion as soon as he seized the throne, but was forced to rely, at least temporarily, on his predecessor's 'personnel', especially as far as ecclesiastical authorities were concerned.[125] Even so, it is very difficult to see how Cnut could have

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[124] P. WORMALD, 'Archbishop Wulfstan: Eleventh-Century State-Builder', in *Wulfstan, Archbishop*, pp. 9-27 at 23.

[125] LAWSON, *Cnut: the Danes*, p. 158.

trusted and collaborated with someone like Ælfric, whereas Wulfstan's conciliatory and non-destructive approach towards Cnut's fellow countrymen doubtlessly made him more attractive than any other member of Æthelred's establishment. Thus, it was possible for the archbishop to go beyond merely keeping his post to becoming the king's personal adviser, playing a fundamental role in leading the transition to the new *régime* and becoming the author of a complex legislation which united all the inhabitants of England, both Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians, under the Christian God.[126]

Conclusions

In this chapter I have examined how Ælfric and Wulfstan responded to the Viking raids which affected England around the turn of the millennium. A close reading of some of the texts composed by these prolific writers has shown that it is still impossible to speak of a true ideology of war in late Anglo-Saxon England, since the two major authors of the time were separated by a huge divide concerning, first of all, their use of biblical models. Although the Old Testament did constitute the dominant frame of reference of both Ælfric and Wulfstan, the former asked complex questions of the biblical text concerning war, and then attempted to promote his views among his lay patrons — who were personally engaged in the fight against the Vikings — precisely thanks to those biblical models. On the other hand, the three Old Testament homilies in which Wulfstan refers to war are in reality more comprehensive investigations of the various sins committed by the Israelites and their pernicious consequences on that community, which included — but were not limited to — harassment by foreign

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[126] For a detailed discussion of Wulfstan's legislation under Cnut see WORMALD, *The Making of English Law*, pp. 345-366.

enemies.[127]

It is therefore possible to conclude that Wulfstan relied on the Old Testament in order to inform his understanding of a much wider subject than war, namely the nature and the terms of the alliance binding God and His people — a study probably undertaken in an attempt to identify which specific wrongful acts, according to the Book, had resulted in the many hardships suffered by the English people. This is why in Wulfstan's works in general, and in his Old Testament homilies in particular, war does not emerge as a key theme of the author's reflection, but fades into the background, merging into other signs of divine wrath. Lastly, Old Testament readings and *exempla* served primarily for Wulfstan's own, 'personal' use, as the absence of frequent, explicit references to the biblical text in the archbishop's writings suggests that he was not interested in promoting Old Testament models among the wider public — or in using them to support his own arguments. Instead, Wulfstan thoroughly extrapolated the ideas drawn from the biblical book from their original context, and favoured contemporary, newly created examples, rather than those dictated by Old Testament authority.

Wulfstan's independence from pre-existing models allowed him to abandon one of their key constituents, which was conversely the true mainstay of Ælfric's representation of war and the Vikings. It has been argued that Wulfstan's perspective could be ascribed to his belief in the latent 'goodness' of the raiders — a necessarily tentative argument because it is very difficult to discern how much of Wulfstan's position was prompted by personal opinion and how much was the result of later revision when Cnut came to the throne. What is certain, however, is that our analysis

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[127] In her 1957 edition of Wulfstan's homilies, Dorothy Bethurum argued that sermon XI (*Incipit de visione Isaie prophete*) and, I would suggest, also *Be godcundre warnunge*, were probably never aimed at being preached publicly, but rather constitute preparatory material which offered Wulfstan 'both a subject in which he was interested and an opportunity for an exercise in rhytmical composition' [p. 332].

disproves another popular scholarly commonplace concerning Ælfric and Wulfstan. According to modern commentators, there was a deep difference in character between the two men: where Ælfric appears as polite, peaceable and even shy, Wulfstan stands out in comparison as thunderous, fiery, clever and cunning — in short, to use Malcolm Godden's words, 'the cardinal Richelieu of his day'.[128]

It seems to me, however, that our perception of Wulfstan has more to do with his undoubtedly stronger and more enthralling style of writing, full of newly created alliterative adjectives and of infamous lists of the accursed sins of the English people. If, however, the differences of style are excluded and a closer look is taken at the content of their writings, it is possible to see that, contrary to popular belief, the archbishop of York may in fact have been much less 'bloodthirsty' than his colleague Ælfric. The latter elaborated an Old Testament view of a Christian society which, in order to survive, had to annihilate all those who stood outside it, while the former, following a more 'missionary' approach, argued in favour of a New Testament idea of Christendom as a place open to all men of good will.

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[128] GODDEN, 'The Relations', p. 353.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has sought to trace the emergence and earliest development of an ideology of war in Anglo-Saxon England through a close and historically contextualized analysis of a selection of literary texts, ranging in date from the eighth century to the eleventh. Such enquiry has shown, in the first place, that the Old Testament was by far the most important and influential model through which war was understood, explained and even promoted throughout the period covered by the present study. Chapter One has shown how the Old Testament ideology of war, mediated through the culture of late Antiquity, was received in Anglo-Saxon England. Chapters Two and Three have demonstrated not only that the Old Testament ideology of war became increasingly popular and influential as centuries went by, but also that the biblical text provided a suitable framework through which historical wars like the Viking invasions could be understood.

Secondly, the present work has revealed that the Old Testament was complemented by other ideological frameworks and literary models emerging from the epic tradition — as argued in Chapter One — early Christian literature and, above all, continental culture. The analysis of Alfredian literature and of the works of Ælfric and Wulfstan has nevertheless underlined that these models were never passively received but actively, creatively and critically revised to match the specific historical and cultural context of Anglo-Saxon England.

Thirdly, this study has brought to light how the violent confrontation — but also frequent interaction — with the Scandinavian raiders in the ninth and eleventh centuries prompted the ideological framework surrounding the practice of war to arise and evolve. Reflection on the issue of war, it has been shown, was developed by Anglo-

Saxon intellectuals who had very close contacts — be it armed, diplomatic or peaceful — with the raiders. My analysis has also disproved a popular notion, namely that ideas about war in the early Middle Ages were elaborated primarily by members of the Church and then popularized among aristocratic warriors. In contrast, the examples of Alfred's 'intellectual community' and Wulfstan (but also, to some extent, Ælfric) indicate that, in Anglo-Saxon England, the discourse on war emerged from an active dialogue between lay and ecclesiastical elite circles — a dialogue which took place on equal terms.

Last but not least, I concluded that a veritable ideology of war never saw the light in Anglo-Saxon England. In particular, the fact that Ælfric and Wulfstan, despite operating within a similar social and cultural context, offered two very different responses to the Viking invasions demonstrates that, at least until the first quarter of the eleventh century, ideas about war were not at all standardised, but there was instead ample room for debate and dissent concerning key issues relating to war. Moreover, comparison with continental texts and practices has highlighted that ideas about war in England were not in line with the ideology characterizing the rest of western Europe.

In short, this thesis has emphasized how much more remains to be uncovered concerning the ideological dimension of war in Anglo-Saxon England. For this reason, I do hope that this study may constitute a valuable starting point for future research. Although the facets of this complex topic requiring further consideration are far too many to be listed in full here, I will nevertheless point out at least some of the areas on which future studies may focus. Firstly, the texts considered in this thesis represent but a small sample of a much wider corpus of Anglo-Saxon literature dealing with facts of arms and war in more general terms. Furthermore, as noted several times, literary texts do not constitute the only sources which express ideas about war. It would therefore be

extremely interesting to widen the range of source material in order to examine what other bodies of evidence (e.g. coins, weapon decorations, sculpture and also manuscript illuminations such as those of the Junius MS) can reveal about early English attitudes towards war. A similar line of enquiry would involve the study of the development of the discourse on war in early medieval England through the lens of liturgical practices connected to military activity. Lastly, it would be fruitful to expand the temporal boundaries within which my research has moved and explore how the accession of Cnut to the English throne changed the perception of the Vikings and the discourse on war. Moreover, the fact that Ælfric and Wulfstan were writing only a few decades before the outset of the First Crusade raises the question of how the ideas we have seen at work in early eleventh-century England developed into the ideology of the Crusades, and of whether and to what extent the Norman conquest of 1066 influence and/or accelerated this process.

To conclude, I would like to go back to the speech delivered by President Obama on the tenth anniversary of the attack on the Twin Towers quoted at the very beginning of this thesis, in order to underline once again that the study of ideologies of war through time and space does not only contribute to improve our knowledge of the cultures and historical periods in which they developed, but might also help us to better understand the wars of the twenty-first century.

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