

The *Æðelen of Engle*: Constructing Ethnic and Regional Identities in *Laȝamon's Brut*

At the beginning of *Laȝamon's Brut*, the author makes a striking point of identifying himself by telling us his name and that of his father Leovenath. This strong statement of identity—an oddity for a vernacular writer of the late twelfth or early thirteenth century—sets up ethnic and national tensions that permeate the rest of the poem.¹ To some readers, *Laȝamon's* Scandinavian name and his father's Anglo-Saxon one may have suggested that the author was of mixed ancestry.² Whether or not this was the case, the names serve as a reminder of the multiple origins of *Laȝamon's* countrymen, foreshadowing the ethnic ambiguities that problematise his attempt to

¹ See Lesley Johnson and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, "National, World and Women's History: Writers and Readers in Post-Conquest England," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 92-121 at p. 96. For the dating of the *Brut*, see Françoise Le Saux, *Laȝamon's Brut: The Poem and its Sources* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1989), p. 10.

² The word *lagamaðr* or *lögmaðr* originally applied to a judicial office in Scandinavia or regions settled by Scandinavians but passed from a title to a personal name as early as the eleventh century; however, it may still have been a marker of Scandinavian heritage one or two hundred years later. See J.S.P. Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain: Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae and Its Early Vernacular Versions* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1950), p. 513. Tatlock hesitantly speculated on the basis of this and other evidence that *Laȝamon* may have been the son of a Worcestershire adventurer in Ireland who married an Irishwoman of Norse descent (p. 529). To my knowledge, his theory has not been pursued. Rosamund Allen discusses the possibility that *Laȝamon* was a legal expert and that the name may have been an honorary title but concludes that "it must have acquired the familiarity of a personal name or 'Lawman' would not have asked for prayers for his soul under this name;" see *Lawman, Brut*, trans. Rosamund Allen (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1992), pp. xxiv.

tell the history “of Engle þa æðelæn” (of England’s outstanding men) (line 7).³ Other readers, upon learning that Laȝamon was a priest at Areley Kings in Worcestershire (line 3), may simply have been struck by the incongruity of his possession of a name that was rare in the West Midlands.⁴ We have no way of knowing whether Laȝamon had grown up locally or had moved to Areley Kings from elsewhere, but the following lines, in which he tells of his pleasure in reading near Redstone Rock upon the banks of the Severn (lines 5-10), leave no doubt as to his affection for his region. He tells us that his reading inspires him to compose the *Brut*, for which he travels “wide ȝond þas leode” (line 14) in search of exemplars for the *Brut*. This charming image diverts further speculation about his origins, ethnic or regional, and instead paints a

³ All quotations from the *Brut* are taken from Laȝamon, *Brut*, ed. G.L. Brooke and R.F. Leslie, EETS 250, 277 (London: Oxford University Press, 1963-1978); however, I have supplied modern punctuation. Translations are my own, although I am greatly indebted to those published previously by Rosamund Allen, Donald G. Bzdyl, *Laȝamon’s Brut: A History of the Britons* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1989), and the partial translation by W.R.J. Barron and S.C. Weinberg, *Laȝamon’s Arthur: The Arthurian section of Laȝamon’s Brut (Lines 9229-14297)* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989). I adopt Allen’s translation for “of Engle þa æðelæn,” although the phrase has been variously interpreted as “the noble origins of the English” (Barron and Weinberg) and “the glorious history of England” (Bzdyl). For a recent discussion of this issue, see Lesley Johnson, “Reading the Past in Laȝamon’s *Brut*,” in *The Text and Tradition of Laȝamon’s Brut*, ed. Françoise Le Saux (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1994), pp. 141-160, at p. 142, n. 3.

⁴ Tatlock finds that by the thirteenth century, the name Laȝamon was still largely restricted to the former Danelaw counties, whereas his father’s name Leovenath had just the opposite distribution. See Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain*, pp. 510-511 and p. 514. Frankis concludes that in the West Midlands the presence of the name Laȝamon seems “to mark a deliberate, even demonstrative, attitude that is best explained in terms of a family-tradition deriving from a Scandinavian ancestor, though the influence of godparents can probably not be excluded.” See “Lawman and the Scandinavian Connection,” p. 84.

picture in which his love for his country appears to flow seamlessly from region to nation. The discussion below will consider this transition in closer detail to determine how Laȝamon's regional affiliations interact with the tensions between ethnic and national identity present in the *Brut*.

Although Laȝamon claims to have compiled material from an "Englisca boc þa makede Seint Beda" and a Latin one "þe makede seinte Albin / & þe faire Austin" (lines 16-17), his primary source is Wace's *Roman de Brut*.⁵ This he strikingly renders in a form of English poetry consciously reminiscent of the poetry of the Anglo-Saxon past.⁶ For many readers, Laȝamon's use of material taken from Wace in combination with his archaistic style creates a troubling inconsistency. As Daniel Donoghue puts it, "He praises Celtic warriors in a poetic medium directly derived from their enemies, the Anglo-Saxon descendants of Hengest."⁷ The apparent irony of this inconsistency has tended to focus critical attention on the depiction and significance of the passage of dominion between the Britons and the Saxons in the *Brut*. Some readers have tried to reconcile this irony by assuming that Laȝamon blurs ethnic distinctions out of forgetfulness or confusion about his original plan to write about the English, or else out of a sort

⁵ See Wace's *Roman de Brut: A History of the British*, ed. and trans. Judith Weiss (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999), hereafter cited as RB. For discussion of Laȝamon's acknowledged sources, see Le Saux, *Laȝamon's Brut: The Poem and its Sources*, ch. 2.

⁶ Laȝamon's archaistic style is discussed by E.G. Stanley, "Laȝamon's Antiquarian Sentiments," *Medium Ævum* 38 (1969): 23-37; see also Daniel Donoghue, "Laȝamon's Ambivalence," *Speculum* 65 (1990): 537-63, especially pp. 538-544.

⁷ Donoghue, "Laȝamon's Ambivalence," p. 554.

of nationalist amnesia arising from his attempt to chronicle the history of England.⁸ Donoghue, by contrast, argues that the opposition between style and content is a product of Laȝamon's ambivalence about both his Anglo-Saxon heritage and the current Norman regime. The narrative of the passage of dominion, like the archaic style in which it is told, directs attention to an important historical analogy: "just as the Britons had been punished for their wickedness by the invasions of the Anglo-Saxons, so the Anglo-Saxons were punished by the Norman Conquest".⁹

In this essay, I will attempt to relocate the debate by focusing on Laȝamon's portrayal of an ethnic group that did not gain dominion over Britain: the Scandinavians who settled in eastern England in the three centuries before the Norman Conquest. Although the *Brut* does not relate the events of this period in history, Scandinavians figure prominently in its narrative, providing many opportunities for reflection on the significance of their presence in England. Laȝamon's own name was one legacy of this presence. Whether or not he was aware of its origin, Laȝamon repeatedly shows an interest in Scandinavian contributions to British history, and the striking ways in which his portrayal of the Scandinavians departs from that of his source material suggest that these contributions were relevant to his purpose in writing the *Brut*. In part, Laȝamon's

⁸ For the view that Laȝamon "forgot about his promise to the reader," see R.S. Loomis, "Laȝamon's *Brut*," in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. R.S. Loomis (Oxford, 1959), p. 105, and for a description of the *Brut* as a national history, see Michael Swanton, *English Literature Before Chaucer* (London: Longman, 1987), p. 176.

⁹ Donoghue, "Laȝamon's Ambivalence," p. 558. More recently, Michelle Warren has suggested that Laȝamon's narrative is a history of the land itself, and that the continuity of the land is the principle by which Laȝamon reconciles the competing sympathies in the *Brut*. Hence, according to Warren, the impulse to see irony or ambivalence in the *Brut* disregards the "fragmented, partial, or temporary identifications that nonetheless assume the immutability of the *kunde londe*." See Michelle R. Warren, *History on the Edge: Excalibur and the Borders of Britain 1100-1300*, (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 129.

depiction of the Scandinavians addresses the difficulty of asserting a unifying principle of Englishness from an ethnically diverse past. Whilst Laȝamon provides a model for the smooth assimilation of the Scandinavians into the ranks of the English “æðelen”, he rejects distinctly eastern social structures associated with their presence.¹⁰ In challenging the legitimacy of those structures, Laȝamon reveals the impact of his regional identity on the *Brut* and demonstrates the complex relationship between regionalism and the other competing cultural affiliations of his time.

Critics have tended to see the intellectual context of the *Brut* as one in which, after the “cultural trauma” produced by the Norman Conquest, “both dominant and dominated groups defended their collective identities and sought therapeutic cures for alienation in history”.¹¹ Such an approach is in line with postmodern intellectual trends like postcolonialism and new historicism, which resist the urge to view society at a given time as culturally homogeneous.¹² An approach that examines the place of regional identities in Laȝamon’s poem similarly resists

¹⁰ At least one early reader of the *Brut* seems to have recognised the importance of accounting for the Scandinavians’ assimilation into the English people, for a thirteenth-century glossator copied into the margin annalistic material telling how King Athelstan gave his sister in marriage to the Norse king Sihtric and then annexed the kingdom of Northumbria after Sihtric’s death. As a result, Athelstan became the first king to reign over all of England. For the sources of this gloss in the exemplar of the Caligula MS and earlier, see Carole Weinberg, ‘The Latin marginal glosses in the Caligula manuscript of Laȝamon’s *Brut*’ in Le Saux, *The Text and Tradition of Laȝamon’s Brut*, pp. 103-120, at pp. 108-109, 114.

¹¹ Warren, *History on the Edge*, p. xi.

¹² Those in the theoretical vanguard of such trends do not always resist this urge. As Warren notes, “The pre-colonial, pre-national Middle Ages imagined by postcolonial critics reinscribes the cultural homogeneity that colonial discourse analysis seeks to dismantle” (p. xi).

this urge in ways that usefully avoid the homogenising tendencies of nationalist or typological views of history sometimes associated with the *Brut*.¹³ In the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, technological barriers to the geographical movement of people and information in fact limited the degree of cultural homogeneity across England. The Anglo-Norman dominated ruling class and clerisy—what Ernest Gellner calls the horizontal strata of an agricultural society—were the main avenues of cultural continuity across the vertical strata of strictly local cultures.¹⁴ Hence Donoghue argues that nationalism—“a sentiment that follows the shift of loyalties from the family, local community, or religious group to the state”—had not yet replaced “narrower and often competing loyalties” in the early thirteenth century.¹⁵ As Warren points out, Lazamon’s own word for the nation, *leod*, is a notoriously ambiguous term that “collocates ethnicity, political association, land, and language.”¹⁶ In effect, to read such nationalist sentiment into the *Brut* would be to diminish the significance of the cultural pluralities still operating in Lazamon’s time.

Donoghue’s argument that the *Brut* expresses a typological view of history in which ethnic conquests are the consequence of divine punishment is at first glance an attractive

¹³ Lesley Johnson points out that much work remains to be done on the historical contexts in which the *Brut* was produced and received, and she calls for an “analysis of the regional significance of its production,” of which this essay can form only a small part. See Johnson, “Reading the Past,” p. 143.

¹⁴ See Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 10.

¹⁵ Donoghue, “Lazamon’s Ambivalence,” pp. 555-556.

¹⁶ Warren, p. 89. Note that a region can be a geographical entity, a political entity, or both. When Lazamon says that he travelled “wide 3ond þas leode,” it is not entirely clear whether this extends beyond the confines of Worcestershire; see Le Saux, *Lazamon’s Brut: The Poem and its Sources*, p. 15. See also Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain*, pp. 500-502.

alternative, especially as *Lazamon* pays lip service to the prototypical example of the wrath of God, the Biblical Flood (lines 8-11).¹⁷ However, whilst this approach focuses attention on historical ethnic distinctions, it does not really allow for their simultaneous existence in a single society; instead, it examines how each replaces the other. Like the nationalist view, the typological view of history is schematically intolerant of synchronous cultural diversity. Both tend to minimise the social complexities that arose through the passage of dominion and efface the co-existing cultural affiliations that resulted from such historical forces. In a multicultural society, the writer faces the difficulty of understanding how each of the facets of cultural plurality he experiences can co-exist. This difficulty may well give rise to a degree of cultural ambivalence, but it may also produce more innovative responses. In such a climate, cultural affiliations like ethnicity can be fluid and easily overlaid on other categories of communal identity such as regionalism.

In addition, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw sufficient movement of people and texts around the country to realise a certain amount of shared cultural infrastructure, even if it was mostly limited to the horizontal strata of the social hierarchy.¹⁸ It may be anachronistic to associate these conditions with the rise of nationalism, but it is perhaps useful to think in terms of the co-existence of regionally specific conditions alongside “trans-regional” conditions. Since *Lazamon* places himself within the clerical stratum by naming himself a priest, he would have

¹⁷ For discussion of the typological or cyclical view of history and its use by early British historiographers, see Donoghue, “*Lazamon’s Ambivalence*,” pp. 558-559.

¹⁸ According to Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), by the mid thirteenth century, “the nation had a territory, a history, a set of cultural traditions, a body of legal practices expressed in the Common Law, a single economy with a common coinage and taxation, and some concept of shared rights, even if that did not extend very far down the social scale” (p. 8).

experienced both regional and “trans-regional” cultural conditions. His reading of the past and his ideas about Englishness, whether truly nationalist or not, would therefore reflect cultural assumptions and chauvinisms shaped by both. Hence, by incorporating regionalism into our reading of the *Brut*, we may gain greater insight into the complex ways in which regional identities in Laȝamon’s England interacted with “trans-regional” forms of identification such as race and social hierarchy.

These complex relationships are particularly apparent when we look at the intimate connections between Scandinavian ethnicity and eastern regional identity in Laȝamon’s time. The legacy of Scandinavian settlement helped establish the regional character of eastern England in the form of distinct dialect features, names for people and places, legal and administrative terms, and patterns of social organisation. Scandinavian-derived literary and folk traditions, such as the legend of Havelok the Dane, continued to flourish after the Norman Conquest, probably aided by the opportunities for cultural exchange afforded by the flourishing mercantile relationship between Scandinavia and eastern England.¹⁹ The region also boasted an extraordinarily large proportion of freemen, although historians have recently disputed the connection between free status and Danish descent.²⁰ Nevertheless, I agree with Dawn Hadley’s

¹⁹ Henry Goddard Leach, *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia*, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 6 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921), ch. 2.

²⁰ The debate has been summarised recently by Dawn Hadley, “‘Cockle amongst the Wheat’: The Scandinavian Settlement of England,” in William O. Frazer and Andrew Tyrell (eds.), *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain* (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 2000), pp. 111-136. Scholarship on the regional distribution of free status is summarised by H.E. Hallam, ‘England before the Norman Conquest’, in *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, Volume II: 1042-1350, ed. H.E. Hallam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), ch. 1, pp. 10-19.

conclusion that by the eleventh century this population was frequently identified as “Danish”—regardless of the truth of the matter—because of its “perceived social composition.”²¹ In other words, the Danish identity of eastern England had as much to do with the social peculiarities of the region as with the actual Scandinavian heritage of some of its inhabitants.

Indeed, the cultural distinctiveness of eastern England seems to have been as much the product of post-conquest period as of the actual period of Scandinavian colonisation. For instance, in the 1130s the Lincolnshire-based Geffrei Gaimar has Cnut invoke precedents for Danish rule in England prior to the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons.²² By at least the 1170s, the tradition that the Danes had historically had some kind of sovereignty in England had already gained a certain amount of acceptance, as we see from Richard FitzNigel’s comment that the Danes had invaded England during the Anglo-Saxon period not only for plunder but because they claimed an ancient legal right to the kingdom.²³ This tradition was influential enough to be

²¹ Hadley, “‘Cockle amongst the Wheat’,” pp. 115-116. Hadley’s conclusion seems to be confirmed by the *Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester*, which, as Turville-Petre points out, indicates that the descendants of Scandinavian settlers might not be considered fully integrated even as late as the 1290s (p. 149). See *The Metrical Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester*, ed. W.A. Wright, 2 vols (Rolls Series, 1887), line 52.

²² See Alexander Bell, ‘Gaimar’s early “Danish” kings’, *PMLA* 65 (1950): 601-40. The story of Havelok the Dane first found in Gaimar’s *Estoire* reappears at the Middle English poem of that name at turn of the fourteenth century, attesting to the extent and duration of these traditions. The story that the Danes, like the Britons, were the descendants of Trojan exiles through Antenor, was known to Orderic Vitalis, but, although Gaimar has Cnut invoke the a king Dan who had earlier ruled in Britain, the story was not generally pursued in Laȝamon’s source material. For the Trojan origin of the Danes, see Book IV of *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, ed. Marjorie Chibnall, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), II.275.

²³ Richard FitzNigel, *Dialogus de Scaccario: The Course of the Exchequer*, ed. and trans. Charles Johnson with corrections by F.E.L. Carter and D.E. Greenway (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 55. FitzNigel gives his source

revived in 1183 by Philip Augustus of France when he married Ingeborg, the daughter of Cnut VI, demanding as dowry the ancient right of the King of the Danes in the English kingdom and the use of Danish armies for a year.²⁴ But for the population of eastern England, there could be little hope of restoring a Danish monarchy, and the tendency in the region to plant early Danish roots more likely served to raise their sense of self esteem and to legitimise distinctly Anglo-Danish cultural institutions. Hence, the myth of Danish sovereignty grew up amongst writers like Gaimar to address the broader political concerns of people in the eastern part of England.

Scandinavian Ethnicity in Historiography before *Lazamon*

The eastern myth of Danish sovereignty was only one response to a wider debate about the Scandinavian presence in Britain taking place in twelfth-century historiography, including some of *Lazamon*'s primary source material. In a recent examination of *Lazamon*'s knowledge of the Scandinavian world, Frankis finds evidence that *Lazamon* had an awareness of the historical role of the Danes in renaming many English place-names, as well as some knowledge of

as a *historia Britonum*, which Gillingham suggests may have been Gaimar's lost history of the Britons. See John Gillingham, *The English in the Twelfth Century* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000), p. 119.

²⁴ See *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I*, ed. Richard Howlett, 4 vols (London: Rolls Series, 188-1889), *Volume I: Containing the First Four Books of the Historia Rerum Anglicarum of William of Newburgh*, pp. 368-370, at p. 368. Philip did not get the dowry he wanted, and he tried and failed to divorce Ingeborg, eventually imprisoning her for twenty years. But in 1213, when Innocent III declared King John unfit to rule in England, Philip brought her out again and gave her an honoured place as his queen. As Le Saux dates the *Brut* to 1185-1216, the threat of a potential alliance between Denmark and France was present within five years or so of both the *terminus a quo* and the *terminus ad quem* for *Lazamon*'s composition of the poem. See Françoise Le Saux, *Lazamon's Brut: The Poem and its Sources*, p. 10.

Scandinavian affairs in his own day.²⁵ He could have acquired the latter through the wide travels he claims to have made or from general hearsay based on the travels of others. For the history of the Danes in England, Laȝamon would have had easy access to a variety of sources of information in nearby Worcester, such as the D version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Archbishop Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*. By the end of the twelfth century, the influential histories of William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon were widely available. Laȝamon may also have had access to Geffrei Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis*, since it accompanies his immediate source, Wace's *Roman de Brut*, in all four extant manuscripts (the earliest of which dates to the early thirteenth century).²⁶ Finally, Laȝamon appears to have known Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* independently of Wace's translation.²⁷

Attitudes towards the Scandinavian invasions in these sources varied. The dominant view of the Danes in English history—largely derived from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*—was of the Viking invaders who plundered the countryside and destroyed English churches. For some

²⁵ John Frankis, "Lawman and the Scandinavian Connection," *Leeds Studies in English* 31 (2000): 81-113, at pp. 103-104. Frankis finds only "meagre evidence" for Laȝamon's knowledge of Scandinavian oral or literary traditions (p. 104).

²⁶ See *L'Estoire des Engleis*, ed. Alexander Bell, Anglo-Norman Text Society 14-16 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1960), pp. xv-xviii. Frankis, "Lawman and the Scandinavian Connection," asks, "What kind of poem Lawman might have written if he had been given a copy of Gaimar instead of Wace" (p. 104), but, if he had access to both, aspects of the *Brut* might be seen as responses to Gaimar.

²⁷ For Laȝamon's knowledge of the Latin *Historia*, see Françoise Le Saux, *Laȝamon's Brut: The Poem and its Sources*, ch. 5. Le Saux concludes: "It is probable that Laȝamon's first written encounter with the Arthurian legend was through Geoffrey's Latin 'chronicle', which he endeavoured to complete by additional readings; and, having inwardly digested his material, he proceeded to translate into English the most skilful rendering of it available at the time: the French version of the *Historia*, written in verse by a cleric named Wace" (p. 117).

writers, the period of Danish rule in the eleventh century was still accessible through living memory. For instance, we learn from Henry of Huntingdon that he heard old men tell of the massacre of the Danes on St Brice's day in 1002 some ninety years after the event.²⁸ The presence of Danish kings on the English throne marked the eleventh century as distinct from the earlier Viking period and led to a variety of responses by later writers.²⁹ Although a wide survey of historical writing during this period would no doubt show complex variations in the way the Scandinavians were depicted, such a survey is beyond the scope of this discussion. Instead, I will illustrate such variations by examining the attitudes of two early historians of the "English" nation, William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon, and then turn to Lazamon's source material in the works of Geoffrey of Monmouth and Wace.³⁰

William of Malmesbury was born around 1095 of mixed Norman and English parentage, which along with other factors gave him a decidedly ambivalent attitude towards the Anglo-Saxons, in contrast with the Normans towards to whom he is rather more generous.³¹ In his *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, completed in its unrevised form around 1125, William indicates that the Danes' first intent was colonisation and compares their impact on Northumbria to that of the

²⁸ Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum: The History of the English People*, ed. and trans. Diana Greenway (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), vi.2, hereafter cited as HH.

²⁹ Pace Turville-Petre, who gives a somewhat simplified picture by stating that the English viewed Cnut and his sons as "foreign kings ruling as a consequence of English treachery" (p. 151). Turville-Petre's primary interest is in works of a somewhat later period (the thirteenth-century *Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester* and the fourteenth-century *Chronicle of Robert Mannyng of Brunne*).

³⁰ For discussion of Geoffrey of Monmouth's relationship with these two authors, see Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain*, p. 5.

³¹ Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c. 550 to c. 1307* (Ithaca, NY: 1974), p. 173.

Normans.³² He frequently calls the Danes *barbari* and continues to refer to their barbarous habits even after their conversion to Christianity. For instance, when King Alfred secures the baptism of King Guthrum, he comments that “non mutabit Ethiops pellem suam” (“the Ethiopian cannot change his skin”).³³ William stereotypes the Danes as heavy drinkers in a list of immoral behaviours acquired by the English due to the presence of foreigners at King Edgar’s court, and he refuses to name the counties the Danes have ravaged because of their “barbariem linguae” (“barbarous forms”).³⁴ When relating the election of Harold Harefoot by the Danes and the citizens of London, he mentions that the Londoners had adopted “barbarorum mores” (“barbarian ways”) through frequent contacts with the Danes.³⁵ William thus sees the return of English rule as a rejection of foreign barbarism, for “Edward the Simple” dismisses the possibility of ruling in Denmark as “laboriosum et barbarum” (“toilsome and barbarous”).³⁶ Later, he points out that King William is forced to fortify the coast against invasions by King Cnut VI, whom he sees as the only obstacle between the King William and peace and happiness.³⁷

³² William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum: The History of the English Kings*, ed. R.A.B. Mynors, R.M. Thomson, and M. Winterbottom, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 43.2, 54.2, hereafter cited as WM.

³³ WM c. 121.6.

³⁴ WM cc. 165.5-6. The stereotypical Danish habit of taking “long drawn-out potations” (*continuationem potuum*) recurs when William gives a list of peoples who must abandon their barbaric ways to combat the Saracens in the 1080s (348.2). William similarly stereotypes Norwegians as eaters of raw fish.

³⁵ Perhaps the same conclusion could be drawn from William’s story of Godwine’s gift of a ship with eighty soldiers bearing Danish axes to King Cnut (188.6).

³⁶ WM c. 259.2. William further refers to the rebellion of Magnus of Norway against Swein as the events “in ea barbarie” (“of those barbarous days”).

³⁷ WM c. 262.1.

William's attitude is thus strongly anti-Danish, and he considers the Danes, Christian or not, to be uncivilised. Nevertheless, his comments reveal a certain acceptance of the integration, social and familial, which had taken place between the two peoples. He notes the beginning of this process as early as the tenth century in the context of King Edward's conquest of the West and East Angles and the Northumbrians by stating that these peoples "cum Danis iam in unam gentem coaluerant" ("had already grown into one nation with the Danes").³⁸ Yet the Danes are not sufficiently integrated for William to experience any sense of common identity with them. A good example of William's attitude towards the Danes is his account of their massacre at the order of King Æthelred on St Brice's Day. Conceding that the king's order was based on flimsy suspicions, he adds that it was a pitiful sight when the English were compelled to betray those whom they had taken as guests and relatives.³⁹ Whilst this statement shows an acknowledgement of the degree to which the English and Danes had become integrated, it also shows that William is primarily concerned with the immoral behaviour of the English rather than with expressing sympathy for the Danes. If anything, the presence of the Danes in English society has left a taint for so long that the English are now capable of the barbarism of turning on their own family and friends.

Henry of Huntingdon takes a somewhat different approach to Danish activity in England in his *Historia Anglorum*, the relevant portions of which were completed around 1130. For Henry, the Danes are one of five plagues on Britain brought on by the moral lapses by its

³⁸ WM c. 125.1. To this William adds that the older Danes were either wiped out or spared and called English ("uel perempti uel sub nomine Anglorum reseruati") (125.2).

³⁹ WM c. 166.12: "Ubi fuit uidere miseriam dum quisque carissimos hospites, quos etiam arctissima necessitudo dultiores effecerat, cogeretur prodere et amplexus gladio deturbare."

inhabitants; but the consequences are very different for each.⁴⁰ He devotes his entire Book Five to the Danish wars, beginning with the claim that “the Danes swooped and rushed upon the land from all directions very frequently and over a long period, not aiming to possess it but rather to plunder it, and desiring not to govern but rather to destroy everything.”⁴¹ The Normans, by contrast, “suddenly and quickly subduing the land to themselves, by right of kingship granted to the conquered their life, liberty, and ancient laws.”⁴² Like William of Malmesbury, Henry occasionally describes the Danes in terms of ethnic stereotypes of cruelty, ferocity, and drunkenness. Amongst the atrocities of the earlier Danes, he includes rape and child impalement, and he tells us that, because of English corruption, “Almighty God sent down upon them the most cruel of peoples, like swarms of bees, who spare neither age nor sex.”⁴³ The Danes’ stereotypical drunkenness appears when they murder Ælfheah, archbishop of Canterbury, in 1012 after getting drunk on wine that had come up from the south.⁴⁴ Ending his book on the Danish Wars in the year 1001, Henry draws attention to the militaristic nature of the Danes, “cum ducibus solitis Marte et Wlcano” (“with their usual commanders, Mars and Vulcan”), and concludes that their large size matches their importance.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ HH I.4.

⁴¹ HH V.prologue: “Daci uero terram undique creberrime diutissime insilientes et assilientes, eam non optinere sed predari studebant, et omnia destruere non dominare cupiebant.”

⁴² HH V.prologue: “Normanni cito et breuiter terram sibi subdentes, uictis uitam et libertatem legesque antiquas regni iure concesserunt.”

⁴³ HH V.prologue: “Dominus omnipotens, uelut examina apium, gentes crudelissimas, que nec etati nec sexui parcerent.”

⁴⁴ HH VI.8.

⁴⁵ HH V.30: “Sed iam liber hic Dacorum magnitudinis sue meritis termino donandus est.”

Unlike William of Malmesbury, Henry attaches a great deal of importance to the Danes' paganism, frequently referring to them as *pagani*, *wicingi*, and *infideles*.⁴⁶ However, the later Danes associated with the eleventh century appear in a very different guise once they have converted to Christianity. In contrast to William of Malmesbury, Henry has no trouble expressing sympathy for the Danes massacred on St Brice's Day, calling the event a "crime" (*scelus*).⁴⁷ Henry's greater sympathy for the Danes of the later period may reflect the fact that he lived in the former Danelaw and wrote frequently with affection for his home of Lincoln.⁴⁸ In fact, he draws attention to English and Danish cooperation through a remarkable story of the battle between King Cnut and Edmund Ironside. In the midst of combat, Cnut calls a truce, saying, "Simus fratres adoptiui, regnumque partiamur, imperemusque ego rebus in tuis tuque in meis. Dacia quoque tuo disponatur imperio" ("Let us be brothers by adoption, and share the kingdom, and let us rule, I in your affairs and you in mine. Let Denmark also be governed by your imperial rule").⁴⁹ This extraordinary statement is striking in its vision of a combined kingdom in which the English king extends his influence into the Danish kingdom. Henry

⁴⁶ Henry seems to favour different terms at different points in history. His use of *wicingi* seems confined to the reign of Alfred, whereas during the reigns of Edward and Æthelstan, he uses *infideles*. The switch to a word with the meaning "unfaithful" may be ironic word play on the title *hold* "faithful" given to several of the Danes killed in battles with Edward at that point in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. See *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, ed. David Dumville and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Brewer, 1983-) (hereafter cited as ASC), s.a. 905, MS D 911.

⁴⁷ HH VI.2. Henry adds: "Millesimo tercio anno, ira Daci exarserunt digna, sicut ignis quem sagimine uelit aliquis extinguere" ("In the year 1003, the Danes were inflamed with justifiable anger, like a fire which someone had tried to extinguish with fat.")

⁴⁸ For discussion of Henry's affection for Lincoln, see Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, pp. 195-6.

⁴⁹ HH VI.14.

reinforces this vision with a story about Godwine's attack against the Wends on an expedition to Denmark, through which Cnut learns to esteem the English as highly as the Danes.⁵⁰ Although the two peoples retain their separate identities, without religion as a dividing factor, their government and national character can now coalesce.

Whilst *Lazamon* would probably have known historical accounts of the Scandinavians like those of William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon, his more immediate source is the fanciful and anachronistic Scandinavians inserted by Geoffrey of Monmouth at key points in the *Historia Regum Britanniae*.⁵¹ Geoffrey's Scandinavians are fictional, but his depiction of them probably reflects the same pool of twelfth-century attitudes and stereotypes we find in William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon. He appears to have conceived of the Scandinavian world as consisting of Iceland, Gotland, Orkney, Norway, and Denmark, which along with Ireland, formed the six neighbouring "islands" surrounding Britain.⁵² In the *Historia*, the Scandinavians are for the most part represented by Danes and Norwegians who accompany the Picts and Scots in attacking the Britons.⁵³ The various Scandinavian peoples generally appear

⁵⁰ HH VI.15.

⁵¹ See *The "Historia Regum Britanniae" of Geoffrey of Monmouth*, ed. Neil Wright, 5 vols (Cambridge: Brewer, 1985-91), hereafter referred to as HRB. Citations are taken from Wright's edition and the translation by Lewis Thorpe, trans., *The History of the Kings of Britain* (London: Penguin, 1966).

⁵² For discussion of Geoffrey's Scandinavian countries, see Frankis, "Lawman and the Scandinavian Connection," pp. 89-90.

⁵³ The connections between the Picts, Scots, Danes and Norwegians are best indicated by the episode of Melga and Wanis discussed below, as well as by Vortigern's threat to King Constans that the Picts are about to invade with Norwegian and Danish allies (HRB c. 95; Thorpe, vi.7), and by Geoffrey's comment that the geographical position of Northumbria left it especially vulnerable to invasion by the Picts, the Scots, the Danes, and Norwegians (HRB c. 120; Thorpe, viii.3).

in passing references as mere foreign ravagers, largely undifferentiated from each other, or from the Picts, Scots, Irish, and occasionally Huns or Saxons. Like Henry of Huntingdon, Geoffrey had the patronage of Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln, and Diana Greenway has suggested that the bishop's support for both Celtic and Anglo-Saxon history stems from an interest in "cross-cultural understanding."⁵⁴ Hence, it is possible that Geoffrey's choice to include the Scandinavians in his *Historia* is a response to the ethnic complexity of the territory under the auspices of the enormous bishopric of Lincoln. However, it is equally possible that his choice reflects his orientation towards the Celtic world to the west, where Norwegian mercenary activity and colonisation of uninhabited islands continued into the twelfth century.⁵⁵ Regardless, his perspective on the Scandinavians is coloured in part by his focus on the Britons and hence also by his own Celtic ethnicity.

Geoffrey's motives for describing relations between Britain and Scandinavia at such an early period are hinted at by a few episodes in which he develops the Scandinavian impact on British history in greater detail. During the reign of King Belinus, the king's brother Brennius marries the daughter of King Elsingius of Norway in order to secure an alliance for an invasion of Britain. He is attacked at sea by the Norwegian princess' lover, King Ginchtalacus of Denmark, who is then shipwrecked, captured by Belinus, and eventually released in return for tribute. Later, the Danes refuse to pay this tribute to Belinus' son Gurguint Barbtruc, who

⁵⁴ Greenway, *Historia Anglorum*, p. lviii.

⁵⁵ As Tatlock points out, "It was usual for Welsh princes, when in trouble with other Welsh or the Normans, to summon to their aid the easily accessible Danes and Irish of Dublin or Waterford, who found their account in it by savage plundering and carrying off the Welsh as slaves for the Irish market" (*The Legendary History of Britain*, p. 109). For a discussion of Geoffrey's Welsh interests and a summary of arguments regarding his ethnic sympathies, see Gillingham, *The English in the Twelfth Century*, ch. 2.

responds with a savage invasion of Denmark to enforce his authority. Apart from establishing the questionable loyalty of the Danes, the episode seems designed to reduce Denmark to a tributary kingdom almost from the beginning of British history. Geoffrey repeats the motif later when the Danes are again forced to accept British rule under Arthur. According to Tatlock, “Arthur’s vast Scandinavian domains seem like an antecedent *revanche* for the Scandinavian rule throughout the British Isles centuries later.”⁵⁶ However, such a desire for revenge seems unmotivated some fifty years or so after the last Danish attempt to take back the English throne. More likely, Geoffrey was reacting to the growth of an Anglo-Danish ethnocentrism in eastern England combined with the increasingly influential place of English churchmen in Denmark.⁵⁷

The colonialist discourse implied by the latter interpretation is expressed through the participation of the Scandinavian kings in the Arthurian expansionist enterprise. Not only are they accepted as full members of Arthur’s international court, but they also support Arthur

⁵⁶ Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain*, p. 308. Tatlock goes further in suggesting that “the career of Cnut may have been one of the conscious precedents for Arthur’s,” in which case Geoffrey would have further undermined Danish imperialist history by appropriating it to the Britons.

⁵⁷ See Leach, *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia*, ch. 3. Geoffrey may have taken the names of some of his “Scandinavian” kings (e.g. Godbold and Sichelm) from Scandinavian bishops of English origin as a result of the close relationships between the English and Scandinavian churches; see Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain*, p. 143-6. Norwegians are thrice represented as threats to British political stability or expansionism when King Elsingius marries his daughter to Brennius, when King Gunbert harbours Trahern, and when Riculf resists Arthur’s attempts to install Loth as King of Norway. Geoffrey’s seeming animosity towards Norwegians may reflect the continuing Norse impact on the Celtic world, which would be unlikely to escape the attention of one so devoted to Welsh affairs.

against the Romans and against Mordred.⁵⁸ Their integration into Arthur's empire is so great that Arthur feels confident in recalling the wars the Britons waged against the Danes and Norwegians without offending his troops.⁵⁹ This blurs their ethnicity, allowing the Scandinavian kings to be seen as British leaders within Arthur's British empire and enhancing the colonialist discourse through which the British extend their leadership over foreign nations.⁶⁰ King Arthur's rule over Scandinavia is thus based on ethnic ambiguity as well as on conquest and feudal service.

However, Arthur's rule is made possible through the setting up of puppet kings to govern the Scandinavian population. As a result, support for British rule is largely a personal affair, and it collapses after his death. Eventually, British gains on the continent are lost, and King Malgo is forced to rule a smaller North Sea empire, but only "after bloodthirsty wars."⁶¹

On the whole, Geoffrey's interest appears to be in establishing a British imperialist domination over the Scandinavians. He seems to suggest that whilst there is strong British rule the Scandinavians are acceptable, if reluctant allies. However, their inherent untrustworthiness makes them the first to turn on the Britons in hard times. Since Geoffrey never portrays the Scandinavians as settlers of Britain, he appears to conceive of them merely as transient invaders.

⁵⁸ In particular, Loth and Aschillus are given commands at the battle of Saussy (HRB c. 168; Thorpe x.6) and Aschillus and the Norwegian king (now mysteriously called Olbericus, Odbrict in Thorpe's translation) are killed at the Battle of Camblam (HRB c. 178; Thorpe xi.2).

⁵⁹ HRB c. 169; Thorpe x.7.

⁶⁰ Tatlock points out that the kings listed as present at King Arthur's court—Malvasius of Iceland, Doldavius of Gotland, Gunvasius of Orkney, Loth of Norway, and Aschillus of Denmark—are, with the exception of Aschillus, all of Celtic origin and therefore technically misapplied to Scandinavians (*The Legendary History of Britain*, pp. 141-44); this may have reinforced their ethnic ambiguity still further.

⁶¹ HRB c. 183; Thorpe, xi.7.

Without a context for their conversion to Christianity and sustained habitation in Britain, he is unable to treat them sympathetically. Although Geoffrey does not directly accuse the Scandinavians of barbarism, he believes that it is natural for them to be governed through more civilised “British” institutions, whether king or church. Thus, if his ethnically ambiguous “Scandinavian” kings mirror the English churchmen who worked in Scandinavia in Geoffrey’s time, the British *imperium* of the past may be seen as a forerunner of the expansion of the English church into the Scandinavian world during the twelfth century.

Whilst most of Wace’s changes to the Scandinavians in Geoffrey’s narrative consist of minor and inconsequential differences in detail, most likely byproducts of the process of translation and versification, a few seem to reflect more systematic modifications.⁶² On the whole, they tend to undermine the sense of Scandinavian participation in a British empire created by Geoffrey. For instance, he replaces Geoffrey’s list of Arthur’s supporters who die at Camblam—which had included King Aschillus—with the vaguer comment that the flower of youth which Arthur had gathered from around the world perished (lines 13266-70). Wace’s omission inevitably weakens the dramatic dissolution of Arthur’s multi-national empire, which Geoffrey’s list of people who fall with Arthur had served to reinforce. Moreover, unlike Geoffrey, Wace specifies that Modred has Danes and Norwegians amongst his supporters (lines

⁶² Examples of Wace’s minor modification include the omission of the names of the Scandinavian countries subjugated by King Malgo (line 13359) and the name of the king of Orkney slain by King Cadwallo (HRB c. 197; Thorpe xii.8; RB line 14413-14). His addition of Wenelande (line 9710)—probably to be equated with the land of the Slavic Wends in the Southern Baltic—with its King Rummaret to the list of countries subdued by Arthur may be motivated by nothing other than a desire to provide a complete list of Scandinavian countries. Wace may have been aware that Denmark in the 1140s was undergoing a period of implosion and was itself under attack by the Wends; see Palle Lauring, *A History of the Kingdom of Denmark*, trans. David Hohnen (Copenhagen: Høst, 1960), p. 70.

13227-8), implying that for some reason the peoples of these countries had betrayed Arthur.

Whereas in Geoffrey's narrative King Aschillus first appears as a full member of Arthur's court,

Wace adds a description of the Danish king's submission to Arthur:⁶³

Ne se volt laissier damagier
 Ne sa bone terre empeirer,
 Sun or ne sun argent despendre,
 Sa gent ocire, ses turs rendre.
 Tant dist, tant fist, tant purchaça
 E tant pramist e tant preia,
 Al rei Artur se concorda;
 Feelté fist, sis huem devint,
 Sun regne ot tut, d'Artur le tint.

He did not want to let himself be harmed, nor his good land lost, his gold nor his silver spent, nor his people killed, nor his towers surrendered. He said so much, he did so much, he strove so much, and promised so much, and begged so much that he reached an agreement with King Arthur; he did homage, became his man, and held his whole kingdom from King Arthur. (lines 9876-9886)

Aschil's decision may be a wise one, but the manner of his submission appears rather cowardly and grovelling and is hardly a ringing endorsement for his continued loyalty. Wace did not need

⁶³ HRB c. 156; Thorpe, ix.12.

to add such suggestions about the earlier Danish king Guthlac (Geoffrey's Ginchtalacus) since Geoffrey's account of Gurguint Barbruc's invasion already implied that the Danes were treacherous.

Wace's reliance on this stereotype may derive from a tendency to associate the Scandinavian pagans of the past with the Saracen pagans with whom western Europeans were becoming increasingly familiar through the crusades.⁶⁴ Such associations may already be apparent in William of Malmesbury's comparison of Guthrum to an Ethiopian. They may also lie behind Henry of Huntingdon's response to the story of the appearance of crosses on articles of clothing in the year 786. Uncertain about the meaning of this miracle, Henry asks, "Did this occur to signal the expedition to Jerusalem, in which crosses were taken and which took place 311 years later, in the time of William II? Or rather did it occur for the reformation of the nations, so that being reformed they might not suffer the Danish plague, which followed immediately after?"⁶⁵ The association between Scandinavian and Saracen worked its way from historiography to romance and back, and the interplay between the two probably underlies Geoffrey of Monmouth's Gormundus the African, who owes much to the historical Danelaw King Guthrum.⁶⁶ By the thirteenth-century, the identification between Scandinavians and

⁶⁴ For other examples of Wace's tendency to recast the conflicts between the Britons and their enemies as battles between Christianity and paganism, see Weiss, *Wace's Roman de Brut*, p. xxiii.

⁶⁵ HH IV.25: "Factumne igitur fuit ad demonstrationem motionis Ierosolimitane, cum crucibus assumptis, que facta est post trecentos et undecim annos, tempore iunioris Willehlmi? An potius factum est ad correctionem gentium, ne plagam Dacorum, que proxime secuta est, correcti perferrent?"

⁶⁶ HRB c. 168; Thorpe x.6. For the relation between Gormund and the historical king Guthrum, see Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain*, pp. 136-7, and the valuable discussion in Bell's introduction to Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis*, pp. lxiv-lxvi.

Saracens could be almost complete in the popular imagination, as Diane Speed has demonstrated in her discussion of the relationship between the two in *King Horn*.⁶⁷ If these developments lie behind Wace's modifications of the Scandinavians in Geoffrey's *Historia*, they leave the general impression that Wace wrote with relative insensitivity towards ethnic and regional significance of Scandinavian identity in England, a country that he only visited.⁶⁸

Although the observations above can only serve to demonstrate some variation in the interpretation of Scandinavian activity in English history by writers in the twelfth century, we can assume that they reflect a complex range of attitudes in wider fields of social expression. The above writers appear to have had in common a sense of Scandinavian ethnicity, although they differ in their interpretations of its characteristics or significance for British history. Writers such as William of Malmesbury, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and Wace tend to exploit stereotypes of the Scandinavians as culturally inferior or barbaric, either to impose an imperialistic model of assimilation or to resist it altogether. Others, such as Gaimar and Henry of Huntingdon, seem to be influenced by regional sympathies in addressing the assimilation of Scandinavians into the greater English community.

The Scandinavians in *Lazamon's Brut*

Lazamon's portrayal of the Scandinavians diverges significantly from his source material and appears to be more than a recycling of stereotypical attitudes found elsewhere in the historiography of his time. His special interest in this subject matter is clear from his condensation of the campaigns against Rome by Belin and Arthur and his expansion of their

⁶⁷ Diane Speed, 'The Saracens of *King Horn*', *Speculum* 65 (1990): 564-95.

⁶⁸ Weiss, *Wace's Roman de Brut*, p. xii.

northern campaigns.⁶⁹ Surprisingly, *Laȝamon* does not pursue the stereotypes of Scandinavians he found in *Wace*; instead, he places great emphasis on feudal relationships between the Scandinavian and British kings and portrays the Danish kings as well versed in courtly culture. In the earlier episode, the Norwegian princess, here named *Delgan*, sends *Guthlac* a letter and a gold ring (a pledge of love that she is presumably either bestowing or returning). In place of *Guthlac*'s less than gallant response to the news of her marriage in *Wace*—"Il l'eüst, ceo diseit, eüe, / Se par lui ne l'eüst perdue" ("He would have had her, he said, if he had not, through [Brennes], lost her") (line 2450)—*Laȝamon* provides a scene appropriate to a hero in a romance:

Pa Godlac isæh þis, wa him wes ful iwis.

Stille he wes iswoȝen on his kine-stole.

Me warp on his nebbe cold welle-watere.

When *Guthlac* saw this, he was full of woe indeed. Silently he fell into a swoon on his throne. They threw onto his face cold well-water. (lines 2238-2240)

Wace describes the rescue of the Norwegian princess as an acquisition of booty ("eschec") (line 2475), an expression which seems to be intended to imply that *Guthlac* is little more than a pirate. His immediate imprisonment by the Britons suggests that they also assume the worst about him. *Laȝamon* translates *Wace*'s "eschec" as "garsume" (line 2276), but he quickly

⁶⁹ Le Saux reveals that the section on Arthur's northern campaign is 353.6% longer than *Wace*'s account, the largest of *Laȝamon*'s expansions (*Laȝamon's Brut: The Poem and its Sources*, p. 30).

undermines any impropriety by portraying the Danish king as a great captain of men, heroically trying to save his ship:

Godlac hauede a god scip, na gomedede him to-wiht;
 he hine bi ðohte weht he don mihten.
 He igrap ane wi-æxe, muchele and swiðe scerpe;
 he for-heow tonne mæst a-two riht amiddden.
 He lette seil and þon mæst liðen mid vðen.
 Thus seide Goðlac, sare him gromede:
 “Euer-ælc æhte mon, help þat we libben,
 That we comen to londe, ne recche we on wulche leoden!”

Guthlac had a good ship, but this did not give him joy; he thought what he might do. He grabbed a battle-axe, massive and very sharp; he hewed the mast in two pieces in the middle. He let the sail and mast lie there on the waves. Thus Guthlac spoke as he grieved sorely: “Every able-bodied man help us to survive so that we can come to land, no matter now which country!” (lines 2238-2258)

In the *Brut*, Guthlac’s arrival is reminiscent of the measured pace of Beowulf’s approach to Hrothgar’s court. First, the coastguards accost Guthlac and his men and enquire about their business. Guthlac responds to their hostility with a polite request to be brought to the king. Once before the king, he “wisliche” (lines 2312) tells how he came to be on British soil, giving Belin news about his brother’s activities as surety of the truth of his account. After Belin drives off

Brennes and his Norwegian allies, he holds a council at York to decide on the Danish king's fate. We learn that Guthlac has previously requested his freedom through the intermediary of a wise man.

For Gudlac sende word bi ane wise monne.
 þat he wolde his mon beon mid alle his mon-ueorde,
 & he him wolde 3euen al þat gold þe he haueden i Denemark lond.
 & ælcche 3ere him senden þreo þusund punden;
 her-to him wolden finden 3isel of his gilde.
 wih þon þe he lette sckere hine & his ifere,
 & his leoue-men swa deore, to Denemark leoden.

For Guthlac had sent word through a wise man that he would be his man, with all his vassals, and he would give all the gold that he had in the land of Denmark and each year send three thousand pounds. He would also give up to him hostages of his men as soon as he let him and his companions, and his dear beloved one, return to the country of Denmark. (lines 2379-2390)

Lazamon thus emphasises the wise, courtly, and heroic qualities of Guthlac's character. Guthlac's proactive nature not only helps disguise the fact that he is entirely in Belin's power but also does much to commend him to the king. His offer of allegiance to Belin before specifying the financial transactions that will secure his freedom begins a new relationship with the British

king, one that resembles feudal vassalage much more than the tribute of the conquered.⁷⁰ Lazamon is here picking up on feudal vocabulary in Wace, the imposition of “homage” (line 2591) as a condition of Gudlac’s freedom. But Lazamon adds a demonstration of Guthlac’s loyalty by telling us that King Guthlac, “þe god wes to neode” (“who was good at need”) (line 2781), participates in Belin’s invasion of Rome, a detail not found in Geoffrey or Wace. In fact, Lazamon specifies that Belin’s army consists of “Bruttes & Wailsce, Scottes & Densce” (line 2780). The ethnic make-up of Belin’s armies anachronistically separates Britons and Welsh (and somewhat surprisingly includes the Scots), suggesting that Lazamon may have had more contemporary conditions in mind and was thinking of the range of ethnic groups inhabiting Britain in his own day.⁷¹ Whether or not this is the case, the inclusion of Danes in Belin’s army shows that Lazamon, more than either of his predecessors, envisions them as an integrated part of a greater British empire built on feudal custom. What Lazamon offers us in King Guthlac is an individual Dane who through strength of character and exceptional loyalty manages to win over the Britons despite their suspicions about the piratical nature of the Danes. This emphasis on the relationship between individual qualities and ethnic ones is apparent from Lazamon’s version of

⁷⁰ Jane Roberts has recently pointed out that Lazamon represents Arthur’s relationship with some of the northern kings in terms of courtly largesse. She suggests that the yearly payments of the northern kings are given out of love and generosity, as indicated by Ælcus of Iceland’s promise of “zifles þingen” (line 11280), which she argues convincingly should be interpreted as “deeds of gift.” See Jane Roberts, “Two Notes on Lazamon’s *Brut*,” in *New Perspectives on Middle English Texts: A Festschrift for R.A. Waldron*, ed. Susan Powell and Jeremy J. Smith (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer 2000), pp.75-85, at p. 81.

⁷¹ The Normans, of course, would have been an unacceptably anachronistic inclusion, but the separation of Britons from Welsh allows the former term to stand in for the inhabitants of England. The Danes would then represent those people in England who were of, or were perceived to be of, Danish ethnic extraction.

the subsequent invasion by Gurguint Barbruc. Unlike Geoffrey and Wace, Laȝamon clearly points out that the rebellious Danish king is not Guthlac, but Guthlac's son, who says, "3if mi fæder dude his wille nulle ich hit naht iwurðen" ("If my father did his will, I will not honour it") (line 3055). Hence, Guthlac's character is not individually compromised, although his son's behaviour begs the question of whether the character of the Danish nation remains stereotypically dishonest.

In the Arthurian section, Laȝamon approaches the virtues of the Danish king Aescil from a different angle. Doubling the length of Wace's account of Aschil's attempts to make peace with Arthur, Laȝamon stresses the Danish king's astute command of political realities and his ability to work them to his advantage.

He sende gretinge to Arðure kinge,
 hundes & hauekes, & swiðe gode horsses,
 seoluer and ræd gold, mid ræh-fulle worden.
 & 3et dude mare Æscil þe mære ;
 he sende to þan hæxten of Arðures hireden,
 and bad heom arndien him to hæh3en þan kingen
 þat he moste his mon bicumen & to 3isle bitæchen his sune
 and ælche 3ere him senden gael of his londe:
 ænne bæt mid isunde from breorde to grunde,
 of golde & of gær]sume & of godliche pallen.
 and seoððen he wolde swerien swiken þat he nalden.

He sent his good wishes to Arthur the king, hounds and hawks and very good horses,
 silver and red gold, with very prudent words. And Aescil the great did still more: he sent
 to the highest in Arthur's entourage, and asked them to intercede for him with the noble
 king so that he could become his man and give up his son as a hostage and each year send
 him tribute from his land: a boat solidly filled from gunwale to bilge with gold and
 treasure and with gorgeous garments, and then he would swear that he would not betray
 him. (lines 11630-40)

The key word here is the compound "ræh-fulle" (line 11632). The first element probably comes
 from Old English "ræce," meaning "care" or "attention," and, in my view, Allen's translation of
 "prudent" is probably the correct one.⁷² This is confirmed by Arthur's response.

Wel worþe þane man þat folweþ wisdom
 and bi-winneþ loue and griþ and freondsipe holdeþ.
 Wane he sicþ þat he his mid strengþe ibunde
 and wendeþ al to lose leoue his freondes,
 mid slepþe he mot slakie loþe his bendes.

The man who follows wisdom will do well and gain love and peace and lasting
 friendship; when he can see how he is bound with strength and is going to lose all his
 dear friends, with forethought he may loosen his loathsome bonds. (lines 11646-11650)

⁷² Barron and Weinberg translate it as "brave" and Bzdyl as "gracious." The Otho manuscript reads "red-folle,"
 which probably has Old English "ræd," or "counsel," as its first element.

The proverbial sounding “leoue his freondes...lope his bendes” encapsulates the theme raised earlier by the submission of Guthlac that freedom from bondage is to be gained through wisdom or astute politics. What is especially crucial to this formula is feudal loyalty. Hence, Aescil agrees to become Arthur’s “mon” (line 11636) and fights on Arthur’s behalf in his invasion of Rome, just as Guthlac does for Belin. The parallels between the heroic Guthlac and the prudent Aescil reveal the two halves of a chivalric basis for English nationhood: personal valour and political vassalage. Laȝamon’s desire for the assimilation of the Scandinavians into such a chivalric nation is further attested by his removal of Wace’s implication of the Danes and Norwegians in Modred’s rebellion against Arthur (lines 14217-22 in the *Brut*).⁷³ Laȝamon’s changes seem to draw less attention to ethnic stereotypes about the Danes than to provide a model for their participation within the wider British political sphere.

It is therefore no coincidence that the one place where Laȝamon actively vilifies the Scandinavians is when the infrastructure of the Roman-British state is on the brink of collapse. The defeat of the Britons takes place at the hands of the pagan kings Melga and Wanis, the murderers of St Ursula and her maidens, who invade Britain with the help of Scandinavian allies.⁷⁴ Initially, Geoffrey characterises Wanius as king of the Huns and Melga as king of the

⁷³ This conclusion must be qualified by the observation that the passage may not be attributable to Laȝamon with complete certainty; both the Caligula and the Otho scribes appear to have had considerable difficulty with the text at this point and attempt metrical alterations.

⁷⁴ HRB cc. 88-91; Thorpe, v.16-vi.3.

Picts.⁷⁵ Wace changes Wanis to a king of Hungary and Melga to a king of Scythia, which may have prompted Laȝamon to rethink their origins.⁷⁶ He gives his readers a lengthy biography in which he calls Wanis and Melga Norwegian earls who had been declared “vt-laȝen” (outlaws) in both Norway and Denmark and now roamed the seashores after conducting raids on Hungary and Scythia (lines 5993-6001). There can be no mistake that Laȝamon has in mind the Vikings. He conceives of these Norwegian outlaws as pagans, having Wanis invoke the god Apollo (line 6019) and threaten to put to death their victims “& heo ne beon of ure laȝen” (“if they be not of our laws”) (line 6021).⁷⁷ Wanis’ speech has an irony to it. These Scandinavians are doubly outlaws themselves, both criminals and outside of Christian law. Thus Laȝamon shows a great interest in bringing them to justice. In Geoffrey’s account, Wanius and Melga mysteriously disappear during their third invasion; when the Breton Constantine becomes next king of the Britons, Geoffrey tells us only that he defeats “the enemy.”⁷⁸ Laȝamon, on the other hand, continues to refer to them, reviving the list of their allies (Picts, Scots, men from Denmark, Norway, Galloway, and Ireland), and their heathenism. Furthermore, he adds a small passage in which Constantine sends men to secure the ports whilst others watch a “gomen” (game) in which

⁷⁵ HRB c. 88; Thorpe, v.16. Elsewhere he refers to Wanius and Melga as “Ambrones,” a term he also applies to the Scots, Picts, and Huns, and Saxons. The word “ambrones” was apparently thought to refer to barbaric and sinful customs; for a full discussion of its meaning, see Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain*, p. 118.

⁷⁶ Wace’s change may have been prompted by Geoffrey’s tale of the Scythian origin of the Picts. See HRB c. 70; Thorpe iv.17; see also Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, I.i.

⁷⁷ For the use of classical gods for the pagan gods of the Scandinavians, see also Henry of Huntingdon’s reference to Mars and Vulcan, mentioned above.

⁷⁸ HRB c. 93; Thorpe, vi.5. Wace is apparently uncomfortable with Geoffrey’s brevity and seems to try to hide it with a “que vus fereie jo lunc plait” (“why should I make long speech of it”) (line 6433).

the British women avenge Ursula and her maidens by killing the followers of Melga, tearing them to pieces, and praying that their souls never have mercy (lines 6417-27).

Frankis suggests that “the potential anti-Scandinavianism implicit in Lawman’s making Wanis and Melga Norwegians is modified by making them outlaws,” exiles from their own community.⁷⁹ However, this misses the larger context in which Laȝamon deliberately emphasises their Scandinavian heathenism as a cause of the collapse of the Romano-British state. This is particularly noticeable in the final invasion of Melga and Wanis, where Laȝamon omits the usual list of invading peoples and instead states that fifty-two hundred Britons fell in the attack on the Antonine Wall, not counting the Scots and the Danes (lines 6283-6285). Since Melga, Wanis, and their allies effectively disappear at this point in Geoffrey and Wace, Laȝamon appears to have taken the opportunity to switch the ethnic emphasis surreptitiously to one more in line with his contemporary conditions. By narrowing the opponents of the Britons, at least by implication, to the Scots and the Danes, he is perhaps portraying those most likely to be viewed as a threat to the English nation in his own time. He thus sets up an analogy between the threats to the ancient Romano-British state and the Angevin-ruled England of the late twelfth or early thirteenth century.⁸⁰ England was not officially at war with the Scots for most of the period in which the *Brut* was probably composed, but there was a continuing question over the sovereignty of Scotland.⁸¹ No such tension existed between England and the Scandinavian countries, and it

⁷⁹ Frankis, “Lawman and the Scandinavian Connection,” p. 92.

⁸⁰ For a similar view of the Danes and the Scots as treacherous, see Henry of Huntingdon’s reference to the “gentem perfidam Dacorum, et infidam Scotorum” (“the perfidious nation of the Danes and the treacherous nation of the Scots”) of Æthelstan’s day (HH V.18).

⁸¹ For a summary of Anglo-Scottish relations during the period, see K.J. Strigger, *Earl David of Huntingdon: A Study in Anglo-Scottish History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985), pp. 1-7.

seems unlikely that Laȝamon's surprising recourse to ethnic stereotyping is intended to combat Philip Augustus' attempts to make use of the ancient Danish claim to the English throne. Since he rewards the Danes elsewhere for their participation in Anglo-Norman feudal and courtly customs, it is more likely that he is taking on a rival model for their integration. Such a rival model existed in eastern England, where earlier Scandinavian occupation was invoked as the basis for the inheritance free status.

Since Laȝamon rewards the Danes elsewhere for their participation in Anglo-Norman feudal and courtly customs, it is more likely that here he is taking on the rival ideology invoked in eastern England that claimed freedom as an inherited status provided for by historical institutions created by earlier Scandinavian occupation. By drawing on stereotypes of Scandinavian "law" as criminal and heathen, Laȝamon suggests that the threat to the Roman-British state is more than just piracy; it is a direct result of the Scandinavian raiders' attempt to impose their own law. In doing so, he implicates the regional social structures supposed to have Scandinavian origins.

Ethnicity, Regionalism, and Social Hierarchy

Laȝamon attacks eastern social structures more directly in his account of the murder of King Gratien by two freemen from East Anglia called Ethelbald and Alfwald. In Geoffrey of Monmouth's version, Gracianus is a Roman "municeps," or freedman, who is sent with two legions to drive off Wanius and Melga but then seizes the kingdom of the Britons for himself. However, his assassination at the hands of the *plebs* prompts another barbarian invasion, after which the Romans withdraw from Britain altogether.⁸² Geoffrey is apparently interested in class

⁸² HRB cc. 88-91; Thorpe, v.16-vi.3.

politics at this point, since Gracianus rises up from the *plebs* only to be murdered by them.⁸³ Likewise, when Archbishop Guithelinus announces the Roman withdrawal, he uses the language of social hierarchy to implore the commoners to become soldiers and defend themselves: “Hac ergo consuetudine quamuis unus ab altero procedat, non existimo esse quod est hominis amittere” (“Given the possibility of one caste being born from another, I find it hard to believe that people are such that they can actually lose their manhood”).⁸⁴ Geoffrey’s commentary suggests that he is deeply sceptical of easy movement across social divides: “Set facilius est accipitrem ex miluo fieri quam ex rustico subitum eruditum. Et qui profundam doctrinam ei diffundit idem facit acsi margaritam inter porcos spargeret” (“However, it is easier for a kite to be made to act like a sparrow-hawk than for a wise man to be fashioned at short notice from a peasant. He who offers any depth of wisdom to such a person is acting as though he were throwing a pearl among swine”).⁸⁵ For Geoffrey, the common people are unreliable, and the pagan invasions of Britain primarily indicate the need for a strong native military elite. Wace, on the other hand, does not seem to be interested in this point. He substitutes Guithelinus’ speech with that of a Roman wise man who castigates the Britons for their wickedness and ingratitude. During the subsequent invasion, knights as well as peasants are slaughtered (line 6300). For Wace moral character rather than social class is the reason for the Britons’ downfall.

Lazamon’s version follows that of Wace, but the Roman wise man is now “þæ wisseste of Rome” (“the wisest men of Rome”), and they send aid only grudgingly because of the slaying of Gratien (lines 6184-5). Lazamon creates a new Roman general called Febus, who likewise

⁸³ Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain*, states that Geoffrey mentions the lower classes “seldom, vaguely and without sympathy” (p. 203) but does not notice this episode.

⁸⁴ HRB c. 90; Thorpe, vi.2.

⁸⁵ HRB c. 91; Thorpe, vi.3.

calls attention to the criminality of Gratien's murder (line 6230). Febus calls a "hustinge," and Laȝamon tells us that "moni cniht, moni eorl, moni þein, moni cheorl, / moni riche burh-mon þer wende beon bliðe anan" ("many a knight, many an earl, many a thane, many a churl, many a rich burgess there expected to be happy soon") (lines 6027-8). The emphasis on social inclusiveness may or may not derive from Laȝamon's acquaintance with Geoffrey's version, but his account of Gratien's murder by two freemen suggests that he was interested in going further in examining this theme. Laȝamon is at his creative best when narrating this episode. He tells us that the Roman Emperor Maximien "dude ut of bende. Gracien þene hende" ("released from bondage Gratien the courteous"), which is something of a verbal conundrum since we do not know if Gratien's courtesy precedes or follows his free status.⁸⁶ The elaborate oath-swearing ceremony in which Maximien invites Gratien to "bicum mi mon" (line 6064) emphasises Gratien's feudal vassalage, and Laȝamon's comment that "þe aðes weoren isworene & æft heo weoren forlorene" ("the oaths were sworn, and afterwards they were forgotten") (line 6073), suggests that Gratien's observance of feudal loyalty is dubious.

It is appropriate that the infidelity of this courteous commoner is rewarded by his assassination by two characters with equally ambiguous social status: the freemen from East Anglia. The account of Gratien's death at the hands of these two is unique to the *Brut*, prompting C.S. Lewis to speculate that Laȝamon was "in touch with an English, not British, tradition of

⁸⁶ There are certain textual difficulties in interpreting this passage. Geoffrey has both a "Gratianus municeps" (the freedman) and the Emperor Gratianus, who enlists Wanius and Melga in their fight against Maximianus. Wace collapses these into one, imperfectly, since he now refers to this Gratien as a knight (line 6110-6111). For discussion, see Weiss, *Wace's Roman de Brut*, p. 155, n. 3. Laȝamon, however, must have known—either from Geoffrey or from Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, I.xi—that the passage referred to a commoner called Gratianus, since he restores the idea that Gratien is in bondage.

some later revolt, perhaps against the Danes, or even Normans.”⁸⁷ To my knowledge, the names Æthelbald and Ælfwald, although relatively common in Anglo-Saxon England, occur in close proximity in only one place in extant literature: the entry for the year 778 in the D and E versions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.⁸⁸ The entry, an insertion from a now lost set of Northumbrian annals, tells how the murder of three “hea gerefan” (“high reeves”) by the earls Æthelbald and Heardberht led to a coup d’état against King Æthelred and his replacement by King Ælfwald.⁸⁹ As this history bears only slight resemblance to the account of the twin brothers in the *Brut*, Laȝamon could only have encountered it after it had undergone considerable modification, perhaps through oral tradition. This is not impossible: the final chapters of the *Historia* contain a large amount of material about Northumbrian history in an equally modified form, and it is possible that Laȝamon drew from similar traditions.⁹⁰ Laȝamon may have come to associate

⁸⁷ See Lewis’ introduction to G.L. Brook, ed., *Selections from Laȝamon’s Brut* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. xi.

⁸⁸ We cannot entirely rule out the possibility that Laȝamon’s names, if not his story, derive in some way from Felix’s *Life of St Guthlac*, which was dedicated to King Ælfwald of East Anglia and tells of the exile of Guthlac’s kinsman King Æthelbald of Mercia. See J.P. Frankis, “Laȝamon’s English Sources,” in *J.R.R. Tolkien, Scholar and Story Teller: Essays in Memoriam*, ed. Mary Salu and Robert T. Farrell (London and Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), pp. 64-75, at p. 70.

⁸⁹ ASC, s.a. MS D 778. The murders were apparently done on behalf of the king because the “reeves” opposed his rule. See F.M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 93.

⁹⁰ Such traditions may have contained parallels to Laȝamon’s own story, such as the murder of King Æthelred “fram his agenre þeode” “by his own nation” (ASC E) in 790. Since the entry also occurs right around the beginnings of the Scandinavian invasions described in the entries for 787 and 793, it may be that Laȝamon turned to a tradition about the imminent collapse of Anglo-Saxon Northumbria for his account of the same development in Roman Britain.

these names from Northumbrian history with East Anglia based on some version of the entry circulating in that region, but it is equally possible that Laȝamon failed to distinguish the regions.⁹¹

Regardless of his source, Laȝamon's introduction of the story of Ethelbald and Alfwald seems designed to counter easterners' claims to have inherited free status.⁹² He describes Ethelbald and Alfwald as "aðele iborene cheorles" "noble-born churls" (line 6114), a deliberate oxymoron since a churl was by definition not noble.⁹³ Unlike Gratien, who has been made free (and thus ennobled) through his feudal service, the two East Anglians are born free, yet are still churls. Laȝamon may have referred back to Geoffrey's narrative at this point, since he restores the notion that Britain is left in the hands of the *plebs*. But Laȝamon's account of the social confusion that follows Gratien's death places much greater emphasis on the transgressive implications of the murder:

Pa wes æuer-ælc cheorl al swa bald alse an eorl,

⁹¹ That Laȝamon is capable of confusing the regions of early Anglo-Saxon England is shown by his correct identification of King Æthelberht with Kent in lines 14731, 14853, and 14876, but his mistaken reference to Æthelberht as king of East Anglia in line 14870.

⁹² Le Saux attributes Laȝamon's use of Saxon names for an episode before the arrival of the Saxons on British shores to the fact that he had "no compunction in mixing cultural references" (*Laȝamon's Brut: The Poem and its Sources*, p. 255), but it may still seem surprising that his names are not Scandinavian. Perhaps he wished to avoid self-implication because of his own Scandinavian-derived name, but it is also possible that he did not wish to suggest that East Anglians were Scandinavian even before the end of Roman rule.

⁹³ Allen's translation of "freemen of good family" and Bzdyl's of "free-born churls" probably accurately represent the social class of Ethelbald and Alfwald but disguise the oxymoronic flavour of Laȝamon's choice of words.

& alle þa gadelinges also heo weoren sunen kinges.

Then every churl was as bold as an earl, and all the peasants acted as if they were the sons of kings. (lines 6161-55)

The blurring of class divisions instigated by the freemen from East Anglia must refer to the particular social dynamics of the region.⁹⁴ By calling attention to the role of East Anglian freemen in the death of Gratien and the subsequent Roman withdrawal, *Lazamon* portrays them as criminals and threats to the fabric of the nation. Furthermore, this transgressive behaviour leaves Britain open to foreign attacks. *Lazamon* makes a direct link between the possession of the land by churls and the subsequent conquest of Northumberland by Wanis and Melga, who, upon hearing that the kingdom is “iset a cheorlene hond” (6161), invade with an army from Scandinavia, Ireland, and Scotland:

& swa heo gunnen wenden ut to Norð-humber-londe;
 ahten heo nomen, folc heo þer slo3en,
 castles heo ararden, & ahneden þa arde.
 þa burh3en heo nomen & al þat heo neh comen.

⁹⁴ Although it is possible that *Lazamon* distinguishes between East Anglia and the rest of the counties that made up the former Danelaw, I assume that he uses the term more or less synonymously with eastern England.

And so they travelled out to Northumberland; they seized booty; they slew the folk there; they built castles, and conquered the land. They captured the burghs and all that they came near. (lines 6170-73)

The suggestion that possession of British land and its assets passed to the invaders by conquest implicates the East Anglians more fully than simply the crime of murdering its king. Their crime of social transgression is also a betrayal of the nation itself. *Lazamon* juxtaposes two discourses about Scandinavians here: the pagan Vikings who threaten the nation from without and the not fully integrated Anglo-Danes who threaten it from within.

The murder of King Constantine by a treacherous Pict named Cadal serves as a fitting coda for *Lazamon*'s account of the social upheaval that accompanies the end of Roman rule. *Lazamon* describes Cadal as a skilled and brave knight who was like a brother to the king (lines 6453-55). In effect, Cadal occupies a position in British society which, as a member of the ethnic other, he cannot fail to abuse. However, *Lazamon* carefully states that Cadal's treachery stems from his advancement to a position "vniliche" his companions (line 6456). Although Cadal's ethnicity is less ambiguous than that of Ethelbald and Alfwald, he resembles them in committing regicide because he is out of place in the social hierarchy. With the demise of Roman influence, the Britons are not only unable to drive out other ethnic groups but also unable to produce a model for integrating them by conquest such as they had done under Belin and will do again under Arthur. The blurring of ethnicity and social class in the story of Cadal thus exposes difficulties of racial and class integration similar to those created by the problematic status of eastern regional culture.

Lazamon's account of the internal and external forces that lead to the destruction of the British kingdom similarly juxtapose ethnicity and social structure. For Lazamon, the free status traced by easterners to Scandinavian precedents granted an ambiguous status between aristocracy and peasantry. Lazamon clearly considered this ambiguity to be dangerous because it provided an avenue for social advancement by means other than the ethnically neutral feudal institutions which he associates with national honour and stability. In his social model, the feudal service he illustrates through the vassalage of Guthlac and Aescil are the only routes to preferment in the community, rather than through traditional adherence to past legal rights. He thus addresses the purported Scandinavian origins of eastern social structures not by countering East Anglian assertions about Danish sovereignty in Britain, as Geoffrey of Monmouth does, but by implicating them on both ethnic and social grounds in the cataclysmic events surrounding the Roman withdrawal.

Cultural Assimilation and English Identity in the *Brut*

Lazamon's hostility towards the culture of eastern England may be attributable to his own regional affiliations. Here we can return to the implications of the opening lines of the *Brut*. Lazamon's self-identification opens questions about his ethnic and regional origins which, although ultimately unanswerable, serve to set the tone for his representation of Scandinavians and easterners. Although Lazamon does not entirely separate Scandinavian ethnic identity from eastern regional identity, he differs from earlier writers in diminishing negative stereotypes about the former and amplifying them about the latter. Unlike the efforts of easterners like Gaimar, Lazamon produces a model for the ethnic assimilation of the Scandinavians which does not justify the existence of regional social freedoms. Instead of trying to assert an ethnic precedence

through historic precedents, he makes the case that the Scandinavians were amongst the “æðelen” of “English” history by shifting the emphasis onto the enduring institutional characteristics of the nation. In his view, the Anglo-Scandinavians of eastern England, like their “ancestors,” could either participate in the shared institutions of the nation or bring about their destruction by asserting their own laws.

Even if we cannot deduce ethnic or regional affiliations from *Lazamon*’s name, the authorial construct of the prologue does turn out to be a “lawman” of a sort by adjudicating the legitimacy of the social institutions contributed by the diverse cultures of English history. Grappling with contrary ethnic and regional claims, and with their associate correlates in the social hierarchy, *Lazamon* emerges as a champion of a chivalric model of English identity over an ethnic one. For him, the story of the passage of dominion between the Britons and the Saxons turns out to be the story of the historical process by which multiple cultures contributed to the making of the cultural melting pot of his own day. His model for the cultural assimilation of the various peoples of Britain is radically different from that of eastern writers like *Gaimar*. *Lazamon*’s melting pot—in which the various peoples merge into a homogeneous “soup”—denies the possibility of a distinct culture existing within the greater population. By contrast, attitudes towards assimilation in eastern England are better captured by modern metaphors like the “tossed salad” or “mosaic,” which conceive of heterogeneity within the whole as the outcome of cultural assimilation.

Lazamon’s model for the assimilation of the Scandinavians indicates that his interest in history is not driven by the desire to define a notion of Englishness based on a pre-Norman identity so much as by the desire to find (or create) from history a basis for identifying the legitimacy of the diverse cultural institutions of his own day. Thus we should hesitate to claim

that Laȝamon identifies with any of the various historical ethnicities in the British past; but we should also hesitate to accuse him of blurring the distinctions between them. Rather, he identifies with specific cultural traditions with which he is familiar and of which he approves, blending them together in his account of the history of the nation. Hence, just as Laȝamon's English nation receives its glorious past with the promise of its renewal from the Britons and a body of romance literature and feudal social structures from the Anglo-Normans, so for him it also receives a language and poetic technique derived from the Anglo-Saxons. His inability to find a similar cultural tradition of Scandinavian origin is a reflection of his identification with the western rather than the eastern English culture milieu.

This last point may have implications for how we interpret Laȝamon's emulation of Anglo-Saxon language and poetic style. If ethnic identity was not the only, or the foremost, issue in Laȝamon's mind when composing the *Brut*, then his archaistic style, and even his use of the English language, need not be intended to associate English identity with an ethnically "Anglo-Saxon" past. Since features of Anglo-Saxon literature experienced some continuity as a written medium in Worcester and the West Midlands after the Norman Conquest, we must accept the possibility that his choice of language and poetic style arose from his exposure to Anglo-Saxon literature or its derivatives available to him locally.⁹⁵ Despite his claim to have travelled "wide ȝond þas leode" in search of source material, his primary inspiration and literary models may have been no further away than the literature he tells us he was fond of reading by the banks of the Severn. In this case, we need not read Laȝamon's archaic style in terms of irony or

⁹⁵ I do not mean to imply that such continuity did not exist elsewhere in England—only that Laȝamon modelled the *Brut* on texts available to him near his home. For discussion of Laȝamon's knowledge of Worcester manuscripts, see Stanley, pp. 31-32, and Frankis, "Laȝamon's English Sources," p. 73-74.

ambivalence since his work is neither a nostalgic, nor a fully nationalistic, enterprise, but an attempt to write the history of England using a local literary culture. The extent of his success in marrying this archaic literature to English identity can perhaps be measured by the later influence of the *Brut*. Although it was apparently widely used as a resource by writers of vernacular history in the fourteenth century, it seems to have had little stylistic impact.⁹⁶ Already in the Otho MS, much of the “Anglo-Saxon” quality of the text is diminished.⁹⁷ That the literary style of the *Brut* proved to be less influential than its content and linguistic medium may be testament to its own regional limitations.

⁹⁶ See James I. McNelis III, “Laȝamon as Auctor,” in Le Saux, *The Text and Tradition of Laȝamon’s Brut*, pp. 253-272. Although the fourteenth-century alliterative tradition is thought by some to resemble the *Brut* in collocating archaism and regionalism, McNelis finds little evidence of Laȝamon’s direct influence on fourteenth-century alliterative verse, except for the *Alliterative Morte Arthur* and perhaps *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (pp. 259-262).

⁹⁷ For Otho scribe’s use of “principles substantially at odds with the antiquarianism that seems so obvious in Caligula’s lines, see Christopher Cannon, “The Style and Authorship of the Otho Revision of Laȝamon’s *Brut*,” *Medium Ævum* 62 (1993): 187-209, at p. 193.