

A medieval manuscript illustration depicting a battle scene. In the upper half, a group of knights in chainmail and conical helmets ride horses towards the right. They are armed with spears and shields. The horses are decorated with red and green saddle cloths. In the lower half, the scene shifts to the aftermath of battle, with fallen knights and horses on a green field. The background is a solid blue color. The style is characteristic of late medieval manuscript illumination, with bold outlines and a limited color palette.

WRITING BATTLES

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON WARFARE
AND MEMORY IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE

Edited by Rory Naismith, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh
and Elizabeth Ashman Rowe

Writing Battles

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Memory in Medieval Europe*

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Rory Naismith
Máire Ní Mhaonaigh
Elizabeth Ashman Rowe
St Swithin's Day, 2019

Abbreviations

| | |
|----------|--|
| ANS | <i>Anglo-Norman Studies.</i> |
| ASC | <i>Anglo-Saxon Chronicle</i> , cited by year and (where appropriate) manuscript, using the conventional lettering A–H, and with reference to <i>The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: a Revised Translation</i> , trans. Dorothy Whitelock, David C. Douglas and Susie I. Tucker (London: Eyre & Spottiswood, 1961) and <i>The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: a Collaborative Edition</i> , gen. ed. David Dumville and Simon Keynes, 9 vols. (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1983–2004), as follows: |
| A | <i>Volume 3, MS A</i> , ed. Janet Bately (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1986). |
| C | <i>Volume 5, MS C</i> , ed. Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001). |
| D | <i>Volume 6, MS D</i> , ed. G. P. Cubbin (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996). |
| E | <i>Volume 7, MS E</i> , ed. Susan Irvine (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004). |
| ASE | <i>Anglo-Saxon England.</i> |
| EETS | Early English Text Society. |
| OS | Original Series |
| GDB | ‘Great’ Domesday Book (Kew, The National Archives, E 31/2/1-2) |
| HE | Bede, <i>Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum</i> (<i>Ecclesiastical History of the English People</i>), with reference to <i>Ecclesiastical History of the English People</i> , ed. Bertram Colgrave and Roger A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969). |
| HH | Henry of Huntingdon. |
| MGH | Monumenta Germaniae Historica. |
| DC | Deutsche Chroniken. |
| SS | Scriptores. |
| SRG n.s. | Scriptores rerum Germanicarum: nova series |
| SSRG | Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi. |
| OMT | Oxford Medieval Texts. |
| WM | William of Malmesbury |

Introduction

Medieval battles, model and myth

Rory Naismith, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh and Elizabeth Ashman Rowe

Battles have long featured prominently in historical consciousness, as moments when the balance of power was seen to have tipped, or when aspects of collective identity were shaped. This volume examines the changing importance of battles in the *longue durée* of British, Irish and Scandinavian history. It looks back a thousand years, from the vantage point of a group of modern nations that are acutely aware of their military past. The volume was prompted by the slew of commemorations of great conflicts in the 2010s. The year 2014 saw the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, the 700th anniversary of Bannockburn and the millennium of the Battle of Clontarf; 2015 the centenary of Gallipoli, the bicentenary of Waterloo, the 600th anniversary of Agincourt and the millennium of the invasion of England by King Cnut; and 2016 the centenary of the Somme and the Easter Rising, and the millennium of Ashdon/*Assandun*. In each of these years a conference was hosted by the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic at the University of Cambridge in which historians of medieval and modern history entered into dialogue on the nature of commemoration and the place of battles in recollection of the past.¹ *Writing Battles* showcases a critically digested selection of material from those conferences, chosen and arranged by the editors to stand alone as a coherent volume, and supplemented with contributions by other scholars.

The core of this volume focuses on material from the medieval period, placed alongside snapshots of warfare in more recent times. What emerges from this juxtaposition is the timelessness of warfare as a structuring element in both society and memory. Striking continuities are highlighted in the physical, spiritual and literary commemoration of battle, beginning with how and by whom a battle is named, as Robert Bartlett's opening chapter explores. A name accords a battle definition, bestowing upon what Bartlett terms 'the messy realities of courage and confusion' a simple label. Yet in reality the contours of any given conflict are difficult to draw, dependent as they are on changing political and cultural assumptions. According a particular battle decisive status is entirely subjective, as noted by Matthew Strickland in his discussion of writing and remembering battle in Anglo-Saxon England. The influence of battles perceived as momentous is debated throughout the volume.

Encounters long regarded as 'key markers in the course of history', in Strickland's words, punctuate the chapters, including the battle of *Brunanburh* in 937 in which

King Æthelstan won ‘undying glory by the sword’s edge’, as the title of Strickland’s chapter recalls. The Battle of Ashdon/*Assandun* in 1016, presented as definitive in contemporary and later sources, was but one of many staging posts on a long and rocky road. It constitutes a focus of Jenny Benham’s analysis of the movement from conflict to peace. Among the most mythologized of battles, Hastings in 1066 (once known as the Battle of Senlac, as Bartlett informs us) looms large, being celebrated in poetry and prose, as well as stonework and tapestry. Yet that should not obscure its undoubted significance. It marks an important point in Rory Naismith’s account of war and the making of London: interest in that city on the part of the Normans after the battle illustrated how control of London had come to signify control of the kingdom as a whole. A mere three weeks before Hastings, the Battle of Stamford Bridge was fought, in which the king vanquished in the later encounter, Harold II Godwineson, had been victorious. As a case study in writing battles, Stamford Bridge proves instructive, with a plethora of texts of various dates and genres providing different perspectives on this military engagement. Translation and analysis of the material in question by Naismith, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh and Elizabeth Ashman Rowe enhances readers’ appreciation of the synergies that compound, connected battle accounts can create.

The realities of conflict which must have informed such descriptions are difficult to detect. Tony Pollard interrogates how the different stages of medieval battle have been brought to the contemporary screen, often with the help of modern technology, such as pyrotechnics. In the medieval world, there must have been considerable variety in scale of battle and the duration of conflict, as Strickland discusses; differences in battle type are similarly reflected in terminology, as the distinction between *cath* (a single battle) and *cogadh* (a more extended encounter) in medieval Irish writing shows. The ideology of warfare is equally elusive. What was considered right and wrong? What were the rules of engagement? These remain to a large extent hidden from view. Values such as heroism, courage and generosity permeate poetic accounts like the Old English composition, *The Battle of Maldon*, recalling the defeat of Byrhtnoth and his followers against Vikings in 991. Like their much earlier Brittonic counterparts of the kingdom of Gododdin, whose destruction at the hands of the men of Deira and Bernicia is marked in a series of poetic elegies, *Y Gododdin* (*The Gododdin*),² Byrhtnoth’s men demonstrated ultimate loyalty to their lord, choosing to fight to the death on the battlefield. How much such emotive depictions are imbued with literary licence is impossible to say.

Occasionally, those participating in conflict or observing at close quarters provide their own perspective on events. Charlemagne’s grandson, Nithard, records some details of warfare in his chronicle, as Strickland relates, but his comments on the Battle of Fontenoy of 841 in which he himself was involved are disappointingly sparse. Asser is more forthcoming in his account of the military encounters of King Alfred the Great, but his desire to glorify his patron means that his comments are coloured by his partisan approach. Rowe comments on the extent to which the views of Snorri Sturluson on the conduct of warfare are reflected in his description of the Battle of Stiklestad, fought near Trondheim in Norway in 1030. His emphasis on eyewitness accounts seems far-fetched; nonetheless, ‘he paradoxically captures the chaos of the actual battle – fighters

in the thick of it do not and cannot see the actual battle, as it unfolds'. The sense of panic expressed in many battle narratives, as well as the frequency of violent death, captured the essence of medieval conflict, even if many of the details may be made up.

Fabricated history is in any case revealing, and as fixed nodes in a complex construction of the past, battles embody characteristic features of their age. Pollard explores how medieval battles are translated into modern film in his chapter, while Robert Tombs comments on the vast and diverse popular literature pertaining to the First World War. There are points of comparison, but also contrast, in how modern authors deal with issues of authenticity, as well as atmosphere. Ní Mhaonaigh, Natalia Petrovskaia and Rowe illustrate some of the myriad ways in which medieval battle narratives were deployed. Writing battles was a means of writing society and politics, as much as military history, as Rowe illustrates, drawing on Scandinavian narratives in which issues of honour are made to complicate warfare among rulers. Religion too was a central concept, as Petrovskaia's exploration of the influence of the Crusades on battle narratives brings to the fore; the enduring interest of the latter is manifest in modern film, as Pollard notes. Indeed religion continues to play a key structural role in the experience and memorialization of conflict in modern times, as evident in Tombs' contribution. While medieval religious commemoration is best known in the context of elites and leaders, however, and almost any fight in the name of Christianity against its enemies was a holy one, the religious element in modern times is somewhat different and has included a highly devolved element, manifested (for example) in tens of thousands of plaques and cenotaphs in British churches.

Notwithstanding these different emphases, remembering and writing battles down through the ages underlines the enduring importance of the past for the present. It was ever thus: peace strategies during King Stephen's reign in the twelfth century inform the depiction of conflict and peace in accounts of the Battle of Ashdon/*Assandun* written at that time, as Benham relates. Deliberate recollection of Troy in medieval Irish narratives served to validate contemporary political events. Furthermore, in her analysis of the historiographical notion of *translatio imperii*, whereby history was conceived of as a linear succession of transfer of empires, Petrovskaia adduces sixteenth-century evidence from South America of its utility, alongside medieval examples, in which the trope is used in parallel though different ways.

In the construction of identity, battles were made to play a variety of roles, often being closely tied to the promotion of institutional, royal or national allegiance. This continues today and Pollard highlights how *Braveheart* in particular has been utilized 'in conversations about Scottish identity and nationalist politics'. At an earlier period, battles were used to mark specific phases in the origin legends of both Anglo-Saxon and Irish kingdoms, as Strickland and Ní Mhaonaigh discuss. In Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (*The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*), they form crucial moments in the advance of Christianity itself. The malleability of such created memories is evident in Strickland's account of the very different purposes to which the legend of Hengist and Horsa was put in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and in a tenth-century Welsh poem, *Armes Prydein Vawr* (*The Prophecy of Great Britain*). A century or so later, a sense of shared identity was coupled with an actual aversion

to battle in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, as Strickland also observes. Notwithstanding this, Anglo-Saxon England and London, in particular, owed its unified character to military activity. Naismith delineates how London came into being as a community in arms towards the end of the ninth century, becoming England's leading centre about one hundred years later at the turn of the new millennium. While peoples may define themselves in relation to specific battles, such encounters may also be made to promote a type of aristocratic identity, as Rowe's assessment of Scandinavian texts makes clear.

Such variety is to be expected in a written culture extending across Latinate Europe and encompassing a time span of considerable duration. Local colours shine through, notwithstanding the monochromatic tenor of some of the sources and traditions upon which those writing battles drew. Bartlett elucidates the Latin terminology underlying the naming of battles, and Petrovskaja comments on the formulaic nature of medieval chronicling more generally, illustrating it with reference to the Welsh *Brut y Tywysogion* (*The Chronicle of the Princes*) and other compilations. But classical rhetorical style was also influential, especially the work of the fifth-century historian, Paulus Orosius. His emphasis on the emotive dimension of historical writing, with its concomitant stress on violence, is likened by Petrovskaja to the sensationalism of modern newspapers, leading in both cases to a partial presentation of supposed facts.

Oral sources can only be conjectured, and lists of kings and other casualties, as well as battle catalogues, can but occasionally be glimpsed. But the existence of a multitude of text types brings different perspectives to light. Commemorative rune-stones set forth a minimum of information, and it must be assumed that the story of the battle to which they allude was more widely known. Rowe contrasts these laconic accounts with Old Norse metrical compositions of considerable complexity, showing how their skilful authors balanced comprehension with artistry. The didactic function of some accounts, including many chronicles and exemplary battle narratives, is distinct from the moral and emotional force of other texts.

Such depictions shape the legacy of battles, some of which might leave many kinds of legacy, depending on perspective. The chapters in *Writing Battles* seek to present a variety of these perspectives, examining how different times and cultures reacted to war, and drawing strength from one another to construct an overarching view of the subject. In the medieval context which is our primary focus, this often includes retrospective assessment of battles from long ago – sometimes through the imaginative recreation of very distant events, plucked from legends of medieval England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Scandinavia and beyond. In assessing how these and other battles were remembered and recalled in selected periods, we offer food for thought in relation to current conflicts. Writing battles retains a universal hue.

This is, in short, a book which offers an invitation to new ways of thinking about conflict and its impact on the collective psyche by turning back to old ways. *Writing Battles* shows what can be gained if the remit of commemoration is extended back beyond the last two centuries. Fighting and killing have been deplored, glorified and everything in between across the ages, and this volume reminds us of the visceral impact left on those who come after.

Notes

- 1 The conferences in question were 'Writing Battles: Ireland and the Wider World' (5–6 December 2014); 'Writing Battles: Scandinavia and the Wider World' (18–19 September 2015); 'Writing Battles: England and the Wider World' (15–16 April 2016).
- 2 Kenneth Jackson, *The Gododdin: The Oldest Scottish Poem* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1969); A. O. H. Jarman, *Aneirin, Y Gododdin: Britain's Oldest Heroic Poem* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1988).

‘What is this Castle call’d that stands hard by?’

The naming of battles in the Middle Ages

Robert Bartlett

Introduction

In his pioneering article of 2000, ‘The Naming of Battlefields in the Middle Ages’, Philip Morgan began by invoking Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, and this chapter will do the same.¹ In Act Four, after the great struggle between the French and the English fought on St Crispin’s day, 1415, the weary king hears the welcome words from the French herald: ‘The day is yours.’ Henry’s first response is to thank God – ‘Praised be God, and not our strength for it’, he says – but he follows this pious utterance immediately with a question to the herald: ‘What is this Castle call’d that stands hard by?’ and, on learning that it is called Agincourt, makes the pronouncement, ‘Then call we this the field of Agincourt.’

Battles don’t name themselves. Someone has to decide which of many local features is to be chosen to immortalize the fight. It might be a stream that ran through the field of battle, a nearby castle, as in the case of Henry’s Agincourt, the nearest town or a multitude of other landmarks. This is not to mention the possibility of taking a name from something other than topography, as in the case of the Battle of the Golden Spurs, a name by which the battle fought between the French and the Flemish outside the walls of Courtrai in 1302 is often known, on account of the number of gilded spurs the victorious Flemings stripped from the dead or captured French knights.

Then, of course, there is the question of who names the battle. In the case of Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, the situation is quite clear: the victorious general decides the name. But things are not always that simple. In the heat of events, even a victorious general might overlook this important task. Then it is up to others, participants and non-participants alike, to find a way of talking about the bloody day. And, naturally, the victors and the vanquished might not come to the same conclusion about the name a battle was to be remembered by. In the American War between the States this issue recurred, not only in the name of the overall conflict itself, but in the naming of no fewer than eight battles where the Union and the Confederacy differed, of which Bull Run/Manassas is the best known. In this case, as in several others, the Union

chose to name the battle after a landmark on the battlefield, usually a stream, and the Confederacy after the town that served as its base for the operation.²

The First World War saw a kind of fighting that made definition of a specific 'battle' very difficult. Trench lines ran for hundreds of miles, military activity might take place almost continuously and even the big 'pushes' could be difficult to separate and name. Consequently, after the war the British government established an official 'Battles Nomenclature Committee', whose task was to name and date battles. This published a report in 1922: *The Official Names of the Battles and Other Engagements Fought by the Military Forces of the British Empire during the Great War 1914–1919*. The committee continued its task during the Second World War and the Korean War. Part of its practical purpose was to give sense and order to the award of battle honours; it is, after all, very difficult to give battle honours unless one knows the battle for which they are being awarded. Naturally enough, although there was coordination of British and Empire efforts in this respect, the French and the Germans might do things differently. While the British Third Battle of Ypres starts on 31 July 1917 and ends on 10 November of that year, the French Second Battle of Flanders, while starting on the same day, ends on 9 October, and the German Battle of Flanders starts on 27 May 1917 and ends on 3 December.³

In the Middle Ages, the heralds were the closest thing to a Battles Nomenclature Committee. Their first and main function was to identify and record participants at tournaments, but this role gradually expanded to include real battles too. 'Sir', says one address to the heralds in the fifteenth century, 'yours is a fair office, for by your report men judge of worldly honour ... in arms, in assaults, battles, sieges and elsewhere ...'⁴ The chronicler Enguerrand de Monstrelet, writing a history of the years 1400–44, and the ultimate source of the scene in Shakespeare's play, describes how Henry V summoned the heralds, both French and English, after his victory, and

The king asked them the name of the castle that he saw nearby. And they answered him that it was called Agincourt. 'And because', said the king, 'all battles ought to bear the name of the fortress, village or town nearest to where they took place, this from now and forever shall be named the battle of Agincourt.'⁵

Modern historians have been sceptical whether this exchange took place as described, but there is no doubt that 'Agincourt' was the usual name of the battle from or soon after 1415, although there were some other ways of referring to it; the most chilling is probably a local French designation of the battle as 'the day of the English'.⁶

Grammatical form

The standard modern form of battle names in English is a generic noun, 'battle', and a specifier, in most cases a place name in the genitive: 'Battle of PLACENAME'. Looking at each of these elements in turn, and beginning with usage in English, it is clear that by the end of the Middle Ages, the current convention, 'the battle of PLACENAME', was well established. In the short summary chronicle contained in the commonplace

book of John Benet, who was vicar of Harlington in Bedfordshire in the 1450s and 1460s, there are mentions of ten battles, most of them in English in the form 'the battle of Poitiers', 'the battle of Shrewsbury', 'the battle of Agincourt', and so on, although on two occasions the text switches into Latin, for the *primum bellum apud St Albans* (the first battle at St Albans) and *bellum apud Northampton* (the battle at Northampton), while Towton, the bloody battle fought ten miles south-west of York on Palm Sunday 1461, is 'the great battle in the North'.⁷ The word 'battle' is derived from Old French and is found in English from around 1300, although not commonly with a genitive place name of this type until later.

Obviously, battles had been written about in England before 1300 and, prior to the arrival of the French loanword, there was the Old English 'fight', as both noun and verb.⁸ In its earlier, briefer annals the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* uses the forms 'At this time X fought with Y at placename' or 'At this time X and Y fought at PLACENAME'. Thus the annal for 851 begins, 'At this time the ealdorman Ceorl, with the men of Devon, fought with the heathen men at *Wicgan beorge*', and that for 715 reads 'At this time Ine and Ceolred fought at *Wodnes beorge*'. Minor variants are found, such as the reversal of the order of opponent and place ('At this time Cuthred fought at *Beorg feorda* with Æthelbald', s. a. 752), or the use of alternative prepositions ('At this time Cynewulf and Offa fought around Bensington', s. a. 777).⁹ These formulations, which are common, perform the same service of identifying a site as is done by 'Battle of PLACENAME', but, instead of the somewhat neutral noun 'battle', also identify the opponents and use an active verb 'fight'.

For analysis of terminology in Latin, which was the most common medium of historical writing for most of the Middle Ages, the natural starting point is Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* (*Etymologies*), written in the seventh century, one of the most formative works in the intellectual life of the medieval West. This is what he has to say of the subject:

Bellum, pugna and proelium differ. For *bellum* is said of the whole, as in Punic. Its parts are *pugnae*, as in Cannae ... Again, there are many *proelia* in a *pugna*. For one thing is happening on the wings, another in the middle, another in the extremities of the battle-line. Therefore, *bellum* is the whole, *pugna* what happens on one day, *proelium* is part of a *pugna*.¹⁰

This is clear and concise, qualities of Isidore's that have always attracted medievalists looking for a guide to the complexities of usage (a well-known case is the reliance on Isidore's categories when discussing the so-called ages of man, childhood, adolescence, etc.). He seems to be saying, simply, that there is war, as in Punic war, there is battle, as in the Battle of Cannae, and there are the subordinate actions during a battle: *bellum*, *pugna*, *proelium*. However, although clear and concise, and perhaps appropriate for classical Latin, these distinctions are completely useless when actually investigating the medieval Latin terminology of warfare.¹¹

As already mentioned in passing, the chronicle in the commonplace book of the fifteenth-century vicar, John Benet, called the first battle of St Albans (1455) and the battle of Northampton (1460) *primum bellum apud St Albans* and *bellum apud*

Northampton, and the use of *bellum* for battle was completely standard, as also is its specification with the phrase ‘*apud* plus PLACENAME’. For example, although the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is mainly in English, the entry for 1046 in the Laud Manuscript (MS E: Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud misc. 636) opens with a single phrase in Latin, *Bellum apud Uallium Dunas* (this is the battle of Val-ès-Dunes, January 1047), and that for 1054 with *Bellum apud mare mortuum* (the battle of Mortemer, February 1054).

Fontenoy

One of the most distressing battles in the struggles between members of the Carolingian dynasty that took up much of the ninth century was Fontenoy: a bloody encounter between Charlemagne’s grandsons in 841, sixteen miles south-west of Auxerre. Analysis of how it is referred to by the chroniclers and other narrative writers brings up a few points of general relevance. The first is simply lexical and grammatical. Although, as we have seen, a common Latin formula for naming a battle was to use *apud* (‘at’) plus the name of the place, it was also possible to construct an adjective from the place name and use that instead. The Latin adjectival form from Fontenoy was *Fontaneticum*, so we have references throughout the centuries to either the *praelium Fontaneticum* or the *bellum Fontaneticum*.¹² We also have two rarities in this case. One is a poem about the battle written by a participant, who names himself as Angelbert. The earliest manuscript of the poem, from the tenth century, has a heading, *Versus de bella que fuit acta Fontaneto* (‘Verses on the battle which was done [i.e. fought] at Fontenoy’), with an apparently unique use of *bella* as a feminine singular.¹³ Whether the heading bears any relation to what the ninth-century poet wrote, we do not know, but we do know what Charles the Bald, one of three brothers involved in the battle, called it, since he wrote a letter referring to the *Fontanicum bellum*.¹⁴ Two other points might be made. One is that the battle was so memorable, that it could be used as a dating signpost. Writing some seventy years after the battle, Bishop Radbod of Utrecht (899/900–917) chose to date an event ‘in that year when four kings, contending against each other with their armies, fouled the fields of Fontenoy with Christian blood’.¹⁵ It should be mentioned that there is considerable confusion in the historical tradition as to whether three or four kings fought at Fontenoy. The ‘fields’ in Radbod’s sentence are plural, and Fontenoy is, in various forms in the different manuscripts of his text, an adjective governing this plural noun.¹⁶ Finally, it was always possible to refer to the battle in a different way, and several annals took up the informative and pertinent name, ‘The Battle of the Three Brothers’.¹⁷ This gave no toponymical information but did point out the essence of the matter, fratricidal war.

Alternative conventions

As this example shows, there are other ways of identifying battles apart from topography. It might be possible to identify battles by the participants or, from the

victors' point of view, the enemy. Thus, one way of naming the Battle of Stamford Bridge, when Harold of England defeated invading forces under Harald Hardrada of Norway, in alliance with Harold's own brother, Tostig, is 'the battle of the Norwegians'.¹⁸ The place where the battle was fought was subsequently known as *Pons belli*, perhaps 'Battle Bridge' in the vernacular.¹⁹ Chroniclers sometimes give the saint's day on which a battle was fought. The D version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* says of Hastings, 'This fight took place on the day of Pope Calixtus'; that is, the third-century pope and saint whose feast day was 14 October. The great German victory over the Magyars in 955 was fought on 10 August, St Lawrence's day, and several chroniclers comment upon this, some describing Otto I, the German king, invoking the saint, or even, in one tendentious account, having him promise to found a bishopric at Merseburg dedicated to Lawrence.²⁰ Otto I subsequently did indeed encourage the feast day of St Lawrence to be treated with especial liturgical solemnity.²¹ Yet no medieval battle, to my knowledge, came to be permanently named after the day on which it was fought, although Towton is several times called 'Palmsunday field'.²²

A well-known modern example of such naming is Lord Howe's naval action against the French Revolutionary Fleet in 1794, known both popularly and officially as the Glorious First of June rather than by any feature of sea or land. The Glorious First of June was such a fixed part of the traditions of the British Navy that after the battle of Jutland in 1916, a battle the Germans considered they had won, the Kaiser wanted to call the battle the 'North Sea Battle of June 1st', in imitation and refutation of the British name, although his naval commanders were not in favour and the German name for the battle was eventually the Battle of the Skagerak, the strait between Denmark, Norway and Sweden.²³

Senlac

Of all the battles discussed here there was none fiercer than J. H. Round's ferocious attack on what he saw as the spurious archaizing of his Liberal foe, Edward Freeman, Regius Professor of History at Oxford 1884–92, who had attempted to rename the battle of Hastings the Battle of Senlac.²⁴ Orderic Vitalis, the Anglo-Norman historian writing in the 1120s and 1130s, is the only medieval author to refer to the battle as Senlac, but he does so repeatedly. There are a dozen examples in his *History*. He usually employs the form *bellum*, *proelium* or *certamen* plus the adjective *Senlaciūm* – thus describing the English earls Edwin and Morcar as among those 'who were not present at the Senlac battle' – as well as referring to 'the place which was called Senlac from of old', 'Senlac, where the battle took place' and William the Conqueror's fight against Harold in 'the field' or 'the heath' of, or at, Senlac.²⁵ The arch-Tory, Round, dismissed Freeman, Orderic and Senlac with customary gusto, arguing that the name was clearly French and thus had no right to a Sussex home in 1066. Round argued 'the truth is simply that the site of the battle had no name at all', and hence was named from the nearest significant settlement, Hastings, as happened in the case of many other battles. Round's point about the lack of an immediate place name to apply to the battle site is illustrated by the 'D' version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (London, British Library,

Cotton Tiberius B.IV), which says the battle took place ‘at the grey apple-tree’ – a memorable phrase but one that never caught on as the name of the battle and has some deficiencies as a permanent identifier of location.

However, in an article published in 1913, W. H. Stevenson conclusively demonstrated the existence of a good, local, English name at Battle, Sandlake in modernized form, that occurs ‘scores of times’ in local documents from the twelfth century onwards, and thus exonerated Orderic from at least the charge of pure invention.²⁶ Why the Anglo-Norman chronicler chose this form, so consistently and so uniquely, remains unexplained. Opponents of Freeman derided the use of the name Senlac as typical of ‘the Old English school’ and it does seem that it appealed to the Victorian romantics. ‘Senlac’ occurs eight times in Tennyson’s drama, *Harold*, and is used by William Morris, Charles Kingsley and by Palgrave in his *Visions of England*. Andrew Lang managed to work it into his poem *Omar Khayyam*: ‘In those old days when Senlac fight was fought’, doing well here to employ the Old English ‘fight’ instead of the effete French import ‘battle’. Later, George Orwell also used the name – ‘The men who fought at Verdun, at Waterloo, at Flodden, at Senlac, at Thermopylae – every one of them had lice crawling over his testicles’²⁷ – a typically Orwellian combination of high romanticism and apparent hard realism.

The site of the battle is now called Battle, as it was already in William I’s reign. In Domesday Book, recording the results of a survey carried out only twenty years after the battle, the church and abbey founded on the site, and its abbot and monks, are almost invariably termed ‘the church’, ‘abbey’, and so on, *de la batailge*, in a curious mixture of Latin and French.²⁸ Its estates are *Terra Aecclesiae de Labatailge*. There is one mention of the *abbas sancti Martini de Labatailge*, one of the *abbas sancti Martini de loco belli* and one of the *terra sancti Martini de bello*,²⁹ but the simple forms ‘abbey of Battle’, ‘monks of Battle’, and so on, already predominated over the longer form with the saint’s dedication. However, you cannot call a battle ‘the Battle of Battle’, and Domesday Book also makes it clear there was another way of referring to the battle. This is expressed in references to the lands of men who fell *in bello Hastingsensi*; *in bello de Hastings*; *in bello apud Hastings* and *ad bellum Hastings*, thus running through a range of possible grammatical constructions, ‘the Hastings battle’, ‘the battle of Hastings’, ‘the battle at Hastings’, but demonstrating that in 1086, twenty years after the event, it was named from the same location, six miles distant from the battlefield, that we use today.³⁰

‘The place where the battle was fought’, says Orderic Vitalis of Senlac, ‘is, on account of that, called Battle to this day’.³¹ Places gave their names to battles but battles could also give their names to places, and Battle in Sussex is a perfect example but it is not the only one. Medieval Europe was dotted with churches called ‘Battle’ or ‘Victory’ in memory of some great battle. After crushing the invading forces of the emperor Otto IV and his allies in 1214, Philip Augustus of France, ‘considering the victory that the Lord of hosts had given him in the battle of Bouvines’, founded a monastery near Senlis dedicated to the Virgin Mary and named it La Victoire.³² King Philip’s grandson, Charles of Anjou, who conquered the kingdom of Sicily, followed his grandfather’s example after defeating and executing his rival, the Hohenstaufen Conradin, in 1268: ‘In the place where king Charles won the victory over Conradin he built a church in honour of the Blessed Virgin, which is called Sancta Maria de Victoria.’ This was a

Cistercian monastery that admitted only French or Provençal monks, since, Charles declared, it should be a perpetual memorial that it was by the support of those two nations that he had won his kingdom. More than forty years later, when the emperor Henry VII undertook an expedition to Italy, his followers threatened to demolish the monastery, out of hostility to the Angevins of Sicily and loyalty to the traditions of the Hohenstaufen.³³ John I of Portugal vowed to build a religious house if he won the battle of Aljubarrota in 1385, which he did. The house is known as Santa Maria da Vitória, or simply Batalha, and became the dynastic mausoleum of John's family.

Variant names

Despite the possibility of other ways of naming, by mentioning the enemy fought or the day the battle took place, the standard practice in medieval battle nomenclature was to identify the battle by the place at which or near where it was fought. A choice had to be made, as the Agincourt story demonstrates. For obvious reasons, battles were often fought in open and unoccupied ground, hence giving several choices of which nearby place to name them after. The battle of Poitiers of 1356 has often been called the battle of Maupertuis by French writers, this being the actual site of the fighting, six miles south-east of Poitiers itself. Froissart calls it the battle of Poitiers but twice specifies it was fought 'near Poitiers, in the fields of Maupertuis' or 'in the fields of Maupertuis, two leagues from Poitiers'.³⁴ However, the contemporary Italian chronicler, Matteo Villani, was insistent that the proper name of the battle was Trecceria, although why he thought this or what place it refers to seem impenetrable mysteries.³⁵

In his article, Philip Morgan devoted considerable attention to cases where battles might have more than one name and to the process whereby names developed and were imposed. The battle of Bosworth in 1485 is a good example, which was given at least five other appellations before the current convention became standard. The earliest recorded name was 'the field of Redemore', but the official proclamation by Henry VII, as he was known, issued soon after the battle, says that Richard III had been killed at a place called Sandeford. This points to another source of variant names for battles, since it is likely, as Tim Thornton has argued, that this name was consciously chosen because Sandeford was the name of a great final battle in the prophecies attributed to Thomas the Rhymer of *Erceldoun*/Earlston, and hence Henry VII or his advisers were saying that now the English civil wars were at an end.³⁶ It had for centuries been customary to look to written prophecies for guidance and perhaps reassurance in the chaotic world of political and military events, with Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Prophetia Merlini* (*Prophecies of Merlin*) being one of the most widely disseminated examples of the genre and the most frequently commented upon. *Erceldoun's* prophecies were of this type: slightly cryptic descriptions of the fortunes of war. They were well known in late medieval and early modern England and Scotland, being circulated in manuscript and later in printed copies down to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Thomas seems to have been a real person who lived in the Scottish borders in the later thirteenth century, and he is credited with predicting the death of Alexander III in 1286.³⁷

It is certainly the case that the battle of Sandeford figures as a great final encounter in Erceldoun's prophecies, but it is not the only example of a name drawn from this prophetic material being applied to actual battles. The last pitched battle between the forces of the Tudor and Stewart monarchs, fought in 1547, 9 miles east of Edinburgh, is nowadays usually called the battle of Pinkie, but it had other names. An Englishman present at the battle and writing in the following year explains:

This battle and field the Scots and we are not yet agreed how it shall be named. We call it Musselburgh field, because that is the best town (and yet bad enough) nigh to the place of our meeting. Some of them call it Seton field (a town there nigh too), by means of a blind prophecy of theirs, which is this or some such toy: 'Between Seton and the sea, many a man shall die that day.'³⁸

This is precisely the wording that describes one of the battles in Thomas the Rhymer's prophecies. By a strange coincidence, a third example of Thomas's prophecies supplying an alternative name for a battle is the engagement usually called the Battle of Prestonpans, which was fought in 1745 only three miles from Pinkie, and a victory for Bonnie Prince Charlie. Afterwards a participant wrote, 'This Battle, which the Prince's army called Gladsmuir and other people Preston.'³⁹ Gladsmuir is indeed found in Thomas's prophecies. These three examples, and they are not the only ones, show how the habit of interpreting contemporary events through the medium of ancient prophecies could influence the very naming of battles.

Comparison of battles

One situation when it was useful to have an agreed name for a battle was if one wanted to compare it with another battle. Medieval chroniclers sometimes did this. For example, both the anonymous author of the *Vita Edwardi secundi* (*Life of Edward II*) and Sir Thomas Gray in his *Scalacronica* compare the Battle of Bannockburn of 1314, the great Scots victory over the English, with the battle of Courtrai (the battle also known as the Battle of the Golden Spurs) fought twelve years earlier, when the townsmen of Flanders had destroyed a French army commanded by Robert of Artois, the cousin of the king of France. Neither of these authors calls the battle of 1314 the Battle of Bannockburn, indeed not naming it, although Gray mentions Bannockburn as a physical feature, but they need a clear identification for the earlier battle. After describing the defeat of the English by the Scots foot soldiers in 1314, the author of the *Life of Edward II* writes, 'Indeed I can remember no other example of such an army so quickly scattered by foot soldiers, except when the flower of France fell before the Flemings at Courtrai, where that noble count Robert of Artois died.'⁴⁰ Here the earlier battle is identified both by its location and by the name of the most prominent casualty. Gray goes even further, in suggesting that the Scots's tactics at Bannockburn were actually modelled on those of the Flemings at Courtrai: 'these Scots had taken their example from the Flemings who had earlier at Courtrai on foot utterly defeated the power of France.'⁴¹ And the

English apparently learned from their defeat at Bannockburn, for Geoffrey le Baker, describing the battle of Poitiers in 1356, at which a Scots contingent fought on the French side, says, 'It was not hidden to them [the Scots] that, throughout the time of the current king of the English [that is, Edward III], the English have been accustomed to fight on foot, copying the Scots in this matter, ever since the Stirling conflict [that is, Bannockburn].'⁴² So the Scots copy the Flemings, then the English copy the Scots, and carry their tactics with them, to fight the Scots in France.

A comparison between Bannockburn and Courtrai is also often undertaken by modern military historians, who point to a cluster of such encounters between commoners on foot and mounted knights at this time: Courtrai 1302, Bannockburn 1314 and Morgarten 1315, a Swiss victory against Habsburg troops. As for the name Bannockburn itself, Geoffrey Barrow pointed out that 'the three best early chronicle sources' for the battle, which include the *Life of Edward II* and Gray alongside the Lanercost Chronicle, do not refer to the battle by name, that some Englishmen referred to it as the Battle of Stirling, just as Geoffrey le Baker does, taking the name from the castle that the English army was trying to relieve, but that the form 'battle of Bannok' is found in Scots usage and that the modern convention, 'Battle of Bannockburn', was well established by the 1320s and 1330s.⁴³

A very sustained comparison of two battles was undertaken by the author of the *Crónica del Don Alfonso el Onceno* (*Chronicle of Alfonso XI*) when he came to describe that king's victory over the Muslims of Granada and Morocco in 1340.⁴⁴ He identifies the battle as being 'near Tarifa' (*cerca de Tarifa*), although the battle is now more usually called the Battle of the River Salado. The chronicler compares this battle with the battle we call Las Navas de Tolosa, the great Christian victory fought 128 years earlier, in 1212. That earlier battle is named in the *Chronicle* as 'the great battle in which the other king Alfonso of Castile [i.e. Alfonso VIII] defeated Muhammad al-Nasir near Úbeda in Las Navas de Tolosa' (*navas* are high lands between mountains).⁴⁵ Las Navas is often called 'the battle of Úbeda' in medieval Spanish sources, Úbeda being the fortress 20 miles south of Las Navas which the crusaders besieged and took after the battle.⁴⁶ The *Chronicle of Alfonso XI* describes the victory in 1340 and then devotes an entire chapter to the subject 'Which battle was more praiseworthy, this one, or that of Úbeda?'⁴⁷ The chronicler compares the two battles in terms of the amount of time involved in preparing for battle, the crusading status of the campaign, the size and composition of the armies, the presence of non-Spaniards on the Christian side and the casualties. At the end of this careful comparison of 'that battle of Úbeda' and 'this battle of Tarifa' (*quella batalla de Úbeda* and *esta batalla de Tarifa*), he concludes that the latter, that of 1340, deserved greater praise and honour. Froissart's account of Poitiers includes just such a weighing-up of that battle with the battle of Crécy fought ten years earlier, concluding that Poitiers was 'much better fought' and was distinguished by 'more fine feats of arms'.⁴⁸ It is also worth noting that the two battles compared in the *Chronicle of Alfonso XI* both have alternative names: the Battle of the River Salado alias the battle of Tarifa and Las Navas de Tolosa alias the battle of Úbeda, in each case a name drawn from a natural feature and a name from a strategically important nearby fortified town. Bannockburn alias Stirling is similar.

Wahlstatt

A battle whose nomenclature is particularly complex, or perhaps confusing, is that fought in 1241 when a Mongol army rode into Poland, devastating the land and defeating an army led by Duke Henry of Silesia (whose head they paraded on a pole), before moving on to Hungary.⁴⁹ Most Polish chronicles describing the battle mention the city of Legnica (Liegnitz in German), which was certainly the most important settlement in the vicinity. They say the battle took place ‘in the territory of Legnica’ or ‘near Legnica’. But most of them also give another place name: *Walstat*. ‘Duke Henry was killed by the Tartars near Legnica in *Walstat*’; ‘the Tartars killed duke Henry in a battle near Legnica, in a place which is called *Walstat*’.⁵⁰ Most significantly, a chronicle composed in the 1380s says the conflict took place when the Mongol army ‘had come near Legnica to the place that is now called *Walstat*’.⁵¹ The implication is that the place had acquired its name since the battle. And the simplest explanation for that development is that *Walstat* means ‘battlefield’ in German, something that is quite clear from contemporary German-language sources. For instance, the poem on the crusade of Landgrave Ludwig of Thuringia describes a truce to allow the recovery of the dead who lay ‘on the battlefield (*walstat*)’, and a continuation of the Saxon World Chronicle describes how, in 1298, after defeating and killing his rival Adolf of Nassau, Albert of Habsburg ‘possessed the battlefield (*walstat*)’.⁵² The German *wal* is related to the Old English *wæl*, ‘slaughter, carnage’, a word that occurs in King Alfred’s translation of Orosius, and, combined with *stow*, gives *wælstow*, ‘place of slaughter’, an exact equivalent to the German *walstat*. According to the D version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, after the Normans defeated the English ‘at the grey apple-tree’ on St Calixtus’ day 1066, ‘the French took possession of the place of slaughter (*wælstowe*)’.

This sounds fairly straightforward. The picture is complicated, however, by an imaginative historian (always a headache). Jan Długosz, the most important historical writer in late medieval Poland, gives a long description of the battle, and says it took place ‘in the field called “Good Field” (*Bonus Campus*)’ and theorizes why the place had this name: perhaps it was its fertility, he suggests, perhaps ‘because it stretched out widely in all directions’.⁵³ The origin of this alternative name may be found in an alternative spelling of *Walstat*. The illustration of the battle in the so-called Hedwig Codex of 1353, which celebrates St Hedwig, Duke Henry’s mother, has an inscription: ‘Here duke Henry, son of St Hedwig, fights with the Tartars in the field which is called *Wolstat*’.⁵⁴ *Wol*, unlike *wal*, is a good thing, an adverb meaning ‘well’, developing also as a noun in the late Middle Ages and ready to form compounds. So someone looking at the place name *Wolstat* might jump to the conclusion it meant ‘Nice Place’, *Bonus Campus*, especially since many new villages founded for German settlers in Silesia had such tourist-prospectus names: Schönheide, ‘Beautiful Heath’; Friedewalde, ‘Peaceful Forest’.⁵⁵

As mentioned, Jan Długosz was a lively and imaginative historian. One detail he reports about the battle that caught the attention of later generations was the fact that the victorious Mongols, in order to estimate enemy casualties, cut off the ears of the dead, filling nine large sacks with them.⁵⁶ This would indeed be a convenient way of working out the number of the slain. In the nineteenth century, historians made

several attempts to calculate this total, but faltered on uncertainty both about the size of a sack and whether the Mongols had cut off one or two ears from each body. This, of course, has nothing to do with battle names. More relevant is the fact that it became, and remains, the practice of German historians to call the battle the battle of Wahlstatt and of Polish historians to call it the battle of Legnica. Wahlstatt in Silesia, which was the name of the settlement and the church built on the site, down to the twentieth century, took its name from the battle. The site, 10 miles south-east of Legnica, is now called Legnickie Pole, 'Legnica field', and apparently has a small museum dedicated to the battle.

Tannenberg/Grunwald

At Wahlstatt or Legnica, Poles and Germans fought side by side against the Mongols. Much later in the Middle Ages, in 1410, they faced each other in a huge and decisive battle, known to the Germans as Tannenberg and to the Poles as Grunwald. A joint Polish-Lithuanian army confronted and defeated the Teutonic Knights just inside the border of the Knights' domains in Prussia, killing the Grand Master, Ulrich von Jungingen, and hundreds of Knights. The Knights later erected a chapel on the site of the battle, but it was not otherwise an encounter they wished to commemorate. It was, in fact, only with the rise of romantic nationalism in the nineteenth century that the battle came to have a powerful meaning, both for the Prussian state, which began to look back to the Teutonic Knights as precursors, and to the Poles, especially during the period when Polish statehood was extinguished (1795–1918).⁵⁷ In 1901, the second centenary of the Prussian Kingdom, a stone was erected on the battlefield with an inscription commemorating Ulrich von Jungingen, who, it stated, had died a hero's death 'in the struggle for *deutsches Wesen*', that is, 'Germanness', while on the anniversary of the battle in 1910 a huge equestrian statue of King Władysław Jagiełło, the victor, was unveiled in Cracow in the presence of 150,000 Poles, Cracow at this time being under the comparatively relaxed rule of the Austrians. The name of the battle became an issue in August 1914, when the Russians invaded Prussia and were defeated by troops under the command of General Hindenburg. Fighting had certainly taken place in the vicinity of Tannenberg, but the decision to call this encounter the battle of Tannenberg was a conscious one. Hindenburg recalled first arriving at the site:

Tannenberg! A word pregnant with painful recollections for German chivalry, a Slav cry of triumph, a name that is fresh in our memories after more than five hundred years of history ... A simple monument there bore silent witness to the deeds and deaths of heroes. On one of the following days we stood near this monument while Samsonoff's Russian army was going to its doom of sheer annihilation.⁵⁸

The commemoration and the naming of the battle continued to be shaped by the traumatic twists and turns of twentieth-century history. After the creation of the Polish republic in 1918, Grunwald was celebrated in various ways. Copies were made

of the eighteen banners of the Teutonic Knights that the Polish-Lithuanian army had captured in 1410, and these were hung in Wawel castle in Cracow. At the World Fair in New York, in 1939, the Polish pavilion was fronted by a huge equestrian statue of King Władysław Jagiełło, like the one in Cracow (the New York one can now be seen in Central Park). After the German invasion of Poland in 1939, the statue of Władysław Jagiełło in Cracow was destroyed, the Wawel banners were taken back to Prussia and, most sinister of all, when the Einsatzgruppen death squads were sent into occupied Poland, the action was named 'Operation Tannenberg'. But, in 1945, the Red Army entered Berlin and Polish artists produced prints, with the words 'Grunwald 1410, Berlin 1945' and depictions of a shattered Knight's helmet and a shattered Nazi helmet, each next to a crow or raven that had presumably been feasting on Teutonic flesh. The inscription praising Ulrich von Junglingen's heroic defence of Germannness was chiselled away and a new monument built at the site of Grunwald, which was inaugurated in 1960 with a fly-past of Migs and Ilyushin bombers. Pope John XXIII declared that Grunwald had been a *bellum iustum*, a just war. In 2006, when the Poles played the Germans in the football World Cup in Dortmund, many of their fans wore T-shirts emblazoned 'Grunwald 1410, Dortmund 2006'.⁵⁹

The 'field'

In Monstrelet's account, Henry V names the battle of 1415 'the battle of Agincourt' (*la bataille d'Azinvourt*), but in Shakespeare's play he calls it instead 'the field of Agincourt'. This is not what Shakespeare's main source, Holinshed, says, where it is simply 'the batail of Agincourte' (1577) or 'the battell of Agincourt' (1587). However, the battle is already 'Agincourt field' in the so-called Agincourt Carol, perhaps sung at the entry of Henry V to London after the campaign, and certainly a very early reference.⁶⁰ 'The field of Agincourt' and 'Agincourt field' are found elsewhere in fifteenth-century English.⁶¹

Of course there were battles fought in enclosed terrain, with hedges and vineyards (Poitiers, 1356, is an example) or even in towns, such as the first and second battles of St Albans (1455 and 1461), but, for obvious reasons, battles were often fought in open and unoccupied ground. Contemporary accounts suggest that leaders of armies were well aware of the advantages of such countryside for deployment and mobility. When Baldwin of Boulogne marched south from Edessa in 1100 to take up the crown of Jerusalem, he encountered opposition from Muslim forces in the narrow pass near Beirut. One report tells how, unwilling to assault them on this site, he feigned withdrawal and the Muslim forces followed him 'into the plain'. As soon as he saw they were 'in an open, level site (*in campestri loco*)', Baldwin attacked and defeated them.⁶² At the start of his Italian expedition of 1158, the emperor Frederick Barbarossa traversed the Alps and then 'moved his army towards Brescia, around which he found very level fields, extremely suited to armies'.⁶³ One account of the battle of Crécy (1346) tells how the English 'fought with the king of France by the forest of Crécy in the level and open places (*in locis planis et campestribus*)'.⁶⁴

Reports such as these, stressing the search for flat and unencumbered terrain, often use the word *campestris* to describe it. It derives from the Latin *campus*, meaning field or level piece of land; a word which, significantly, gradually assumed an additional military meaning, perhaps influenced by the fact that a well-known *campus* was the Campus Martius in ancient Rome, where military exercises took place. In the form *camp*, meaning 'battle', the word was an early Germanic borrowing from Latin and is found in that form in Old English, for example, in *Beowulf* and in the poetic account of the battle of *Brunanburh* in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and it also occurs in modern German as *Kampf* (as in *Mein Kampf*, 'My Struggle'). The Latin adjective *campestris* came to form part of a standard phrase in medieval Latin, *bellum campestre* or *prelium campestre*, both of which we might translate as 'pitched battle' or 'battle in the open field'. Count Fulk of Anjou, writing his remarkable autobiographical memoir in the 1090s, mentions seven battles he and his ancestors fought, qualifying four of them as *campestre*, and from the twelfth century both forms, *bellum campestre* and *prelium campestre*, are very common in most parts of Europe.⁶⁵ The great Christian victory of Las Navas de Tolosa of 1212 is persistently called a *campestre prelium* in the documents of its victor, Alfonso VIII himself, after the battle.⁶⁶ The battle of Courtrai or the Golden Spurs of 1302, the battle of Mühldorf in 1322 (which decided the disputed imperial election between Louis the Bavarian and Frederick of Habsburg), and the battle of Otterburn, fought between the English and the Scots in 1388, are all described as a *bellum campestre*.⁶⁷ The phrase is often used when a commentator wished to point out that one party had avoided open battle. Thus, when Boleslav III of Poland invaded Moravia in 1103 or 1104, the contemporary Polish chronicler remarks that, although the Moravians gathered their forces, 'they did not dare to engage him in *prelium campestre*', which we might translate as 'in the open field'.⁶⁸ Likewise, when Simon de Montfort the elder was facing numerous enemies in the south of France, during the Albigensian crusade, it was noted that, 'nevertheless they never dared to attack him in a *bellum campale*' or a *bellum campestre*.⁶⁹ The *Poem of the Cid*, devoted to the Spanish hero of the late eleventh century, which is in Castilian, uses *lid* for battle, a word derived from Latin *lis* and which is still a current Spanish word. In fact, the *Poem* uses it seventeen times, often with the adjective *campale*. El Cid, who was 'the good *campeador*', won five such battles, *lides campales*.⁷⁰

In the Germanic languages, the word 'field' and its cognates underwent a similar development in meaning. Neither in the case of the Latin/Romance terminology nor in that of the Germanic did the original meaning disappear, so we have two parallel lexical families: one rural and perhaps idyllic and the other bellicose. Regions with wide, fertile fields might be called Campania or Champagne; the word 'champaign' entered English with the meaning 'level, open country'; a *fête champêtre*, at least as depicted by Titian or Giorgione, might be fun, but it was more perilous to go on campaign perhaps under the command of a *maréchal du camp* (attested in French from the sixteenth century). Likewise, fields might be fair and fertile, but 'to take the field', whether or not under a Field Marshal, meant to go on campaign (*Feldzug* in German). It is therefore no surprise to find the word 'field' in English meaning simply 'battle' or 'battlefield'. Bosworth Field is a well-known example and, the victor, Henry VII himself referred to the battle as 'our first field'.⁷¹ (The phrase 'the battle

of Bosworth Field' is hence redundant, meaning 'the battle of Bosworth battle'.) Two years after Bosworth, the battle of Stoke occurs in English records as 'Stoke Field' a few months after the event.⁷² The Middle English poem on what we call the Battle of Neville's Cross, fought between the English and the Scots outside Durham in 1346, is titled 'Durham ffeilde'.⁷³

This usage spawned a whole military vocabulary. 'To win the field' or 'hold the field' meant to be victorious in battle, as did, obviously, 'to obtain the field of victory'. Thus, at Lewes in 1264, 'the barons obtained the field with a glorious victory'.⁷⁴ Four years later, after Charles of Anjou defeated Conradin, his army 'returned to the field of victory to collect the spoils'.⁷⁵ In French, to abandon the field (*le champ guerpier*) was synonymous with quitting the battle (*partir ... de la bataille*).⁷⁶ When it became clear at the battle of Poitiers in 1356 that the French had lost, one of King John's men came to him and said (according to Geoffrey le Baker), 'Lord, the field has fallen to the English (*Domine, campus Anglicis cessit*)', but the king responded he would not abandon the field (*non illo die foret campum deserturus*).⁷⁷

Conclusion

The urge to name battles is understandable. It gives the messy realities of carnage and confusion a simple label. It is true that medieval battles often took place in a short period of time, sometimes only a few hours, and that it might be the case that every part of the action was visible to all combatants, but there were also many encounters that were spread over several days or were marked by total disorder and misunderstandings on the part of the leaders. The name, 'Battle of X', reifies this, creating a simple and solid event from the mess. It also distinguishes a battle from a skirmish, nicely defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as 'an irregular engagement between two small bodies of troops, especially detached or outlying portions of opposing armies; a petty fight or encounter'. We do not usually give such encounters names, though obviously it was irresistible in the case of the fight between small bodies of Jacobites and Hanoverians in 1746 at Tongue in Sutherland. The Skirmish of Tongue involved around 250 men.

A last word from the Italian noble Fabrizio, the young and romantic hero of Stendhal's *La Chartreuse de Parme* (*The Charterhouse of Parma*), who is inspired by Napoleon's return from exile in 1815 to attempt to join the French army. Making his way north, he catches up with the troops as they advance towards Brussels. His experiences are confused and chaotic. He has his horse stolen (twice); he hears the cannonade; at one point he joins a group galloping along with a French general; and he is wounded by a French soldier in the confusion that night. Eventually he makes his way back safely, but Stendhal describes Fabrizio's persistent doubt: "Have I really been present at a battle?" It seemed to him that he had, and he would have been supremely happy if he could have been certain of this.' His experiences have matured him, but, Stendhal reflects, 'He remained a child upon one point only: Was what he had seen a battle? And, secondly, was that battle Waterloo?'⁷⁸ Fabrizio's confusion reflects not only the chaos of battles but also the need to name them.

Notes

- 1 Philip Morgan, 'The Naming of Battlefields in the Middle Ages', in *War and Society in Medieval and Early Modern Britain*, ed. Diana Dunn (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 34–52.
- 2 James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 346 n. 7.
- 3 I am most grateful for the advice of Christopher Hunt, formerly of the Imperial War Museum, on this subject.
- 4 *Débat des héraults de France de d'Angleterre*, cited in Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press and London, 1984), 138.
- 5 'Après, icellui roy leur demande le nom du chastel qu'il veoit assez près de lui. Et ilz lui respondirent qu'on le nommoit Azincourt. "Et pour tant", dist le roy, "que toutes batailles doivent porter le nom de la plus prouchaine forteresse, village ou bonne ville où elles sont faictes, cestes dès maintenant et pardurablement sera nommée la bataille d'Azincourt": *La chronique d'Enguerran de Monstrelet*, vol. 3, ed. L. Douët-D'Arcq, Société de l'histoire de France, 99 (Paris: J. Renouard, 1859), 111 (ch. 148); cf. Jean de Waurin, *Recueil des croniques et anchienes istories de la Grant Bretagne* V.1.xii, ed. William Hardy and Edward L. C. P. Hardy, 5 vols, Rolls Series 39 (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1864–91), II, 217.
- 6 Jonathan Sumption, *The Hundred Years War. Vol. 4: Cursed Kings* (London: Faber & Faber, 2015), 460, citing André Leguai, *De la seigneurie à l'État. Le Bourbonnais pendant la guerre de Cent ans* (Moulins: Les Imprimeries réunies, 1969), 324.
- 7 Dublin, Trinity College, MS 516, fols. 201v–202; there is a full description of the manuscript in Marvin L. Colker, *Trinity College Library Dublin: Descriptive Catalogue of the Mediaeval and Renaissance Latin Manuscripts*, 2 vols (Aldershot: Scolar, 1991), II, 976–1002; the summary chronicle is not edited in *John Benet's Chronicle for the Years 1400 to 1462*, ed. G. L. Harriss and M. A. Harriss, *Camden Miscellany* 24 [= *Camden Fourth Series* 9 (1972)], 151–233, which is a much longer chronicle in the same manuscript.
- 8 In addition to the poetical word *guð*, meaning 'combat, battle, war', which is found in many compounds.
- 9 'Her Ceorl aldor mon gefeaht wiþ hæþene men mid Defena scire aet Wicgan beorge'; 'Her Ine ond Ceolred gefuhton aet Wodnesbeorge'; 'Her Cupred gefeaht ... aet Beorg feorda wiþ Æþelbald'; 'Her Cynewulf ond Offa gefuhton ymb Benesing tun'.
- 10 'Differt autem bellum, pugna et proelium. Nam bellum uniuersum dicitur, ut Punicum. Huius partes sunt pugnae, ut Cannensis, Thermensis. Rursus in una pugna multa sunt proelia. Aliud enim in cornibus, aliud in media, aliud in extrema acie geritur. Bellum igitur est totum, pugna unius diei, proelium pars pugnae est': Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, XVIII.1.viii (*Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum libri XX, Tomus II, Libros XI–XX continens*), ed. W. M. Lindsay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), II, 274. (I have not identified the battle labelled *Thermensis*).
- 11 Compare Nonius Marcellus, *De conpendiosa doctrina*, ed. Wallace M. Lindsay (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1903), 437: 'Bellum et proelium hoc differunt, quod proelia partes sunt belli, hoc est in bello congressiones'.
- 12 For example, *praelium Fontaneticum*: Ado of Vienne, *Chronicon*, ed. Georg Pertz, MGH SS 2 (Hannover: Hahn, 1829), 322; Ademar of Chabannes, *Historiae* III.19

- (*Ademari Cabannensis opera omnia. Pars I, Chronicon*), ed. P. Bourgain, *Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio mediaevalis* 129 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 137; *bellum Fontaneticum: Annales Sancti Dionysii*, ed. Georg Waitz, MGH SS 13 (Hannover: Hahn, 1881), 719; Adelerius of Fleury, *Miracula Sancti Benedicti*, ed. Oswald Holder-Egger, MGH SS 15.1 (Hannover: Hahn, 1887), 499; Orderic Vitalis, *Historiae ecclesiasticae libri tredecim* I.24, ed. Auguste Le Prévost, 5 vols, Société de l'Histoire de France [n.v.] (Paris: J. Renouard, 1838–55), I, 159.
- 13 *Versus de bella quae fuit acta Fontaneto*, ed. Ernst Dümmler, MGH Poetae Latini aevi Carolini 2 (Hannover: Hahn, 1884), 138; Peter Godman, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance* (London: Duckworth, 1985), 262–5; the heading is in MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 1154, fols. 136r–v.
 - 14 *Epistolae Karolini aevi* 4, ed. Ernst Perels, MGH Epistolae (in Quart) (Berlin: Weidmann, 1925), 725; Hadrian II to Charles, 870, citing Charles' letter.
 - 15 'ipso, ut ferunt, anno, quo reges quatuor, uno geniti patre, inter se cum suis exercitibus dimicantes, Fontanidos campos multo christianorum sanguine foedaverunt': Radbod of Utrecht, *Libellus de miraculo sancti Martini* 4, ed. Oswald Holder-Egger, MGH SS 15.2 (Hannover: Hahn, 1888), 1242. The text was written 903×917.
 - 16 *Fontanidos* in the early manuscripts; *Fontanicos*, *Funtanidos*, and *Fundandos* in the later.
 - 17 'Bellum trium fratrum': *Annales Alamannici*, *Annales Weingartenses*, *Annales Sangallenses maiores*, ed. Georg Pertz, MGH SS 1 (Hannover: Hahn, 1826), 49, 65, 76; *Annales Formoselenses*, ed. Georg Pertz, MGH SS 5 (Hannover: Hahn, 1844), 35.
 - 18 'prelio Northwigenarum': *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis and Robert of Torigni*, ed. Elisabeth van Houts, 2 vols, OMT (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992–5), II, 166 (Orderic Vitalis).
 - 19 For example, 'in loco qui tunc Stanfordebrige, nunc autem ex rei eventu etiam "Pons belli" dicitur': Aelred of Rievaulx, *Vita sancti Ædwardi regis et confessoris*, ed. Francesco Marzella, *Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio mediaevalis* 3A (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 162; *Calendar of the Patent Rolls: Henry III (1232–47)*, ed. H. C. Maxwell-Lyte (London: Mackie, 1906), 405; Thomas Wykes, *Chronicon*, in *Annales monastici*, ed. Henry R. Luard, 5 vols, Rolls Series 36 (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts and Green, 1864–9), IV, 6, identifying the battle as 'cum Scotis et Norwegis!' Gaimar, writing c. 1140, calls the site 'Punt de la Bataille': Geffrei Gaimar, *Estoire des Engleis*, ed. Ian Short (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 284 (line 5227).
 - 20 'Otto rex cum Agarenis pugnabat in festivitate sancti Laurentii': Pertz, *Annales Sangallenses maiores*, 79; 'Imperator indici sanxit ieiunium ipsa, que tunc erat, in vigilia sancti Laurentii martyris, per cuius interventum sibi populoque suo ipsum Deum poposcit esse refugium': Ruotger, *Vita Brunonis Archiepiscopi Coloniensis*, ed. Irene Ott, MGH SRG n.s. 10 (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1951), 36 (XXXV); 'Postera die, id est in festivitate Christi martyris Laurentii, rex ... hoc fecit lacrimis votum profusis: si Christus dignaretur sibi eo die tanti intercessionis preconis dare victoriam et vitam, ut in civitate Merseburgiensi episcopatum in honore victoris ignium construere': Thietmar of Merseburg, *Chronicon* II.10, ed. Robert Holtzmann, MGH SRG n.s. 9 (Berlin: Wiedmann, 1935), 48.
 - 21 Helmut Beumann, 'Das Kaisertum Ottos des Grossen: Ein Rückblick nach Tausend Jahren', *Historische Zeitschrift* 195 (1962): 553–7.
 - 22 'Palme Sonday fe[lde] called York felde': 'A Short English Chronicle', in *Three Fifteenth-Century Chronicles*, ed. James Gairdner, Camden Society n.s. 28 (London:

- Camden Society, 1880), 77. There is a marginal note in the text which describes the conflict as taking place 'be side Shireborne'; this is also how Gregory's Chronicle (in *The Historical Collections of a Citizen of London in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. James Gairdner, Camden Society n.s. 17 (London: Camden Society, 1876), 216) locates it; it was also called the battle of Seton (Gairdner, *Three Fifteenth-Century Chronicles*, 161).
- 23 Walter Görlitz (ed.), *The Kaiser and His Court: The Diaries, Note Books and Letters of Admiral Georg Alexander von Mueller, Chief of the Naval Cabinet, 1914–1918* (London: Macdonald, 1961), 171.
 - 24 J. H. Round, 'Mr Freeman and the Battle of Hastings', in his *Feudal England: Historical Studies on the XIth and XIIth Centuries* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1895 [reissued 1964]), 259–63 ('The Name of "Senlac"').
 - 25 Orderic Vitalis, *Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. Marjorie Chibnall, 6 vols, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968–80), II, 172, 180, 186, 190, 266, 356; III, 92, 214, 304; IV, 92, 138; V, 174.
 - 26 W. H. Stevenson, 'Senlac and the Malfossé', *English Historical Review* 28 (1913), 292–303.
 - 27 George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), 75.
 - 28 *Domesday-Book: seu liber censualis Willelmi primi regis Angliae*, ed. Abraham Farley, 2 vols (London: n. p., 1783), I, fols. 11d, 17d, 34a, 59d, 100b, 100d, 101b, 104a, 157a (Kent 6, Sussex 8, Surrey 4, Berks. 15, Devon 1 (4, 34, 52), 9, Oxon. 10).
 - 29 Farley, *Domesday-Book*, I, fols. 17d, 11d; I, fol. 20b (Sussex 8.1, Kent 6.1, Essex 13).
 - 30 Farley, *Domesday-Book*, I, fol. 409 (Suffolk 31. 50); I, fol. 50 (Hants. 69. 16); I, fol. 208 (Hunts. D7); I, fol. 275 (Norfolk 66. 41).
 - 31 'Locus vero ubi, sicut supra diximus, pugnatum est, exinde Bellum usque hodie vocatur': van Houts, *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II, 172.
 - 32 Louis VIII for La Victoire, 1223: 'Ludovicus Dei gracia Francorum rex. Noverint universi presentes pariter et futuri quod cum felicis recordationis charissimus genitor noster Philippus, Francorum rex, habita consideratione ad eam quam Dominus exercituum illi dedit in Bovinarum bello victoriam, abbatiam novam ab ipsa nominatam Victoria, prope Silvanectum fundasset in honore et nomine beate et gloriose semper Virginis Marie, Matris illius Domini qui fortis est et potens in prelio': Amédée Vattier, 'Cartulaire de l'abbaye de La Victoire', *Comptes-rendus et mémoires du Comité archéologique de Senlis* 2 (1887): 33–5.
 - 33 'in loco autem quo victoriam habuit rex Carolus de Corradino quandam ecclesiam construxit ad honorem Beatae Virginis, quae dicitur Sancta Maria de Victoria': *Anonymi Vaticani Historia Sicula*, ed. L. A. Muratori, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* 8 (Milan: Società Palatina, 1726), col. 780; *Constitutiones et acta publica imperatorum et regum*, ed. J. Schwalm, MGH Leges 4.2 (Hannover: Hahn, 1909–11), 1364; Pietro Egidi, 'Carlo I d'Angiò e l'abbazia di S. Maria della Vittoria presso Scurcola', *Archivio storico per le province napoletane* 34 (1909): 252–91, 737–67 and 35 (1910): 125–75; Léopold Janauschek, *Originum Cisterciensium* (Vienna: Alfred Hölder, 1877), I, 261; Ferdinando Ughelli, *Italia sacra* 7, rev. edn (Venice: Bernardinus Tanus, 1721), cols. 573–7. A text attributed to Ptolemy of Lucca states that the monastery was destroyed by an earthquake: 'Super genealogia et posteritate Caroli regis Siciliae', *Historiae Francorum scriptores* 5, ed. André Duchesne (Paris: Sébastien Cramoisy, 1649), 893. Luigi Mammarella, 'Santa Maria della Vittoria di Scurcola', in his *Abbazie e monasteri cistercensi in Abruzzo*, I tascabili d'Abruzzo 27 (Cerchio: Adelmo Polla Editore, 1995), 137, says the abbey was hit by two severe earthquakes in 1502 and 1505.
 - 34 'celle bataille qui fu assés priès de Poitiers, ès camps de Maupertuis', 'Ceste grant bataille ... qui fu ès camps de Maupertuis, à deux lieuwes de Poitiers': Jean Froissart,

- Oeuvres de Froissart. Chroniques*, ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove, 25 vols (Brussels: Victor Devaux, 1867–77), V, 432, 434; *Chroniques de J. Froissart*, ed. Siméon Luce, Gaston Raynaud and Léon Mirot, 15 vols in 17, Société de l'histoire de France [n. v.] (Paris: J. Renouard, 1869–1975), V, 52, 59–60, which has ‘camps de Biauvoir et de Maupertuis’ in the first case.
- 35 ‘Questa battaglia fu fatta ... presso a Pittieri a due leghe in una villa che si chiama Trecceria, la quale per questo caso più tosto confermò il suo nome ch'altra mutazione le desse’: Matteo Villani, *Cronica* VII.19, ed. Giuseppe Porta, 2 vols (Parma: Fondazione Pietro Bembo, 1995), II, 39, with an editorial note suggesting he means the Old French *tricherie*, ‘trick’, ruse, although why Poitiers was a trickier battle than any other is not clear.
- 36 Morgan, ‘The Naming of Battlefields in the Middle Ages’, 44; Peter Foss, *The Field of Redemore: The Battle of Bosworth, 1485* (Leeds: Rosalba, 1990), 16–24; Tim Thornton, ‘The Battle of Sandeford: Henry Tudor’s Understanding of the Meaning of Bosworth Field’, *Historical Research* 78 (2005).
- 37 Cyril Edwards, ‘Thomas of Erceldoune [called Thomas the Rhymer] (fl. late 13th cent.), Supposed Author of Poetry and Prophecies’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 60 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), LIV, 286–8; for the mentions of this battle and of those discussed in the following paragraph, see *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune: Printed from Five Manuscripts, with Illustrations from the Prophetic Literature of the 15th and 16th Centuries*, ed. James A. H. Murray, EETS OS 61 (London: N. Trubner, 1875), xxxi, xxxiii, xxxv, xxxviii, xl, xli, lxxix, 34, 36, 37, 42, 53, 57, 62–3; *Thomas of Erceldoune*, 2 vols, ed. Ingeborg Nixon, Publications of the Department of English, University of Copenhagen, 9 (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 1980–3), I, 68–79; II, 46, 73–6, 78–9, 85–6, 101–2.
- 38 William Patten, *The Expedition into Scotlande of the Most Woorthely Fortunate Prince Edward, Duke of Soomerset* (London: Richard Grafton, 1548), preface, fol. a vii (spelling modernized).
- 39 David Wemyss, Lord Elcho, *A Short Account of the Affairs of Scotland in the Years 1744, 1745, 1746*, ed. Evan Charteris (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1907), 277; Arran Johnston, *On Gladsmuir shall the Battle be! The Battle of Prestonpans 1745* (Solihull: Helion, 2017), xii, 188, 198.
- 40 ‘Siquidem a seculo recordor inauditum talem exercitum coram peditibus tam subito dispersum, nisi cum flos Francie coram Flandrensibus apud Courtray cecidit, ubi nobilis ille comes Artagensis Robertus occubuit’: *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, ed. Wendy Childs, OMT (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 96.
- 41 ‘lez ditz Escotez avoient pris ensaumpler a lez Flemenges, qi devaunt avoient a Courtray descounfist a pe le poair de France’: Sir Thomas Gray, *Scalacronica*, ed. Joseph Stevenson (Edinburgh: Maitland Club, 1836), 142.
- 42 ‘istos non latuit quod per totum tempus moderni regis Anglorum maxime consueti sunt Anglici pugnare pedestres, in quo Scotos sunt imitati, a discrimine Strivilinensi’: *Chronicon Galfridi le Baker de Swynebroke*, ed. Edward Maunde Thompson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889), 143.
- 43 G. W. S. Barrow, *Robert Bruce and the Community of the Realm of Scotland*, 4th edn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 281.
- 44 *Crónica del Don Alfonso el Onceno*, 251–2, ed. Cayetano Rosell, *Crónicas de los reyes de Castilla*, 3 vols, Biblioteca de autores españoles 66, 68, 70 (Madrid: M. Rivadeneyra, 1875–8), I, 325–9.

- 45 'La grand batalla que el otro Rey Don Alfonso de Castiella venció al Miramamolin cerca de Úbeda en las Navas de Tolosa': Rosell, *Crónica del Don Alfonso el Onceno*, I, 328 (\$252).
- 46 For example, 'la batayla d'Úbeda': *Llibre dels fets del rei en Jaume*, ed. Jordi Bruguera, 2 vols (Barcelona: Barcino, 1991), II, 101, 276, 286 (\$77, 369, 380).
- 47 Rosell, *Crónica del Don Alfonso el Onceno*, 328–9 (\$252).
- 48 'trop mieux combatue ... plus de biaux fès d'armes': de Lettenhove, *Oeuvres de Froissart. Chroniques*, V, 427; Luce, ed., *Chroniques de J. Froissart*, V, 42–3.
- 49 See *Wahlstatt 1241: Beiträge zur Mongolenschlacht bei Liegnitz und zu ihren Nachwirkungen*, ed. Ulrich Schmiewski (Würzburg: Bergstadt, 1991); Aleksander Paron, 'The Battle of Legnica (9 April 1241) and Its Legend', in *Meetings with Emotions: Human Past between Anthropology and History*, ed. Przemysław Wiszewski (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Chronicon, 2008).
- 50 *Annales Wratislavienses maiores, Annales Cisterciensium in Heinrichow*, ed. Georg Pertz, MGH SS 19 (Hannover: Hahn, 1866), 532, 545.
- 51 *Chronica principum poloniae XX*, ed. Zygmunt Węcłowski, *Monumenta Poloniae historica* 3 (Lwów: Akademii Umiejętności, 1878), 489.
- 52 *Die Kreuzfahrt des Landgrafen Ludwigs des Frommen*, ed. Hans Naumann, MGH DC 4.2 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1923), 263 (line 4611); *Sächsische Weltchronik, Erste Bairische Fortsetzung XVIII*, ed. Ludwig Weiland, MGH DC 2 (Hannover: Hahn, 1877), 331.
- 53 Jan Długosz, *Annales: liber septimus, liber octavus*, ed. Jan Dąbrowski (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1975), 21; see the various opinions on this in Schmiewski, *Wahlstatt 1241*, 110, 131, 133, 193.
- 54 'Hic pugnat dux Henricus filius sancte Hedwigis cum Thartaris in campo quod dicitur Wolstat': Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, MS Ludwig XI 7, fol. 11v.
- 55 Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950–1350* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), 133.
- 56 Dąbrowski, *Annales*, 24.
- 57 For the following, see Sven Ekdahl, 'The Battle of Grunwald/Tannenberg and Its Political and Symbolic Interpretations in Poland and Germany through the Centuries', in *Jan Matejko's Battle of Grunwald: New Approaches*, ed. Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius (Warsaw: The National Museum, 2010).
- 58 Paul von Hindenburg, *Out of My Life*, trans. F. A. Holt (London: Cassell & Company, 1920), 92.
- 59 Maciej Michalski, 'The Two Swords: Using the Symbol of the Battle of Grunwald (1410) in the 19th and 20th Century Poland' (sic), in *Meetings with Emotions*, ed. Wiszewski, 109.
- 60 Anne Curry, *The Battle of Agincourt: Sources and Interpretations* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000), 284.
- 61 'oure Kyng, as a worthy conqueror, had þat day þe victorye in þe feelde of Agyncourt': *The Brut or The Chronicles of England*, ed. Friedrich W. D. Brie, 2 parts, EETS OS 131 and 136 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1906–8), 597; 'in Azyngcorte felde owre kynge faught w^t þe ffrensshmen': *Chronicles of London*, ed. Charles Lethbridge Kingsford (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), 119.
- 62 *Annali Genovesi di Caffaro*, ed. Luigi Tommaso Belgrano, *Fonti per la storia d'Italia* 11 (Genoa: Istituto Sordo-Muti, 1890), 6; cf. Albert of Aachen, *Historia Ierosolimitana, History of the Journey to Jerusalem VII.33–4*, ed. Susan B. Edgington, OMT (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 532–8. Fulcher of Chartres gives a fuller and less simplified account, as an eyewitness: Fulcher of Chartres, *Historia Hierosolymitana (1095–1127)* II.1–8, ed. Heinrich Hagenmeyer (Heidelberg: Winter, 1913), 352–65.

- 63 'versus Brixiam suos movet exercitus, circa quam campos invenit planissimos, exercitibus aptissimos': Vincent of Prague, *Annales*, ed. Wilhelm Wattenbach, MGH SS 17 (Hannover: Hahn, 1861), 669.
- 64 'cum Francorum rege ... iuxta forestam de Cressy in locis planis et campestribus confligendo': *Scotichronicon by Walter Bower, in Latin and English*, 14.1, ed. Donald Watt, 9 vols (Aberdeen and Edinburgh: Aberdeen University Press, 1987–98), VII, 254.
- 65 Fulk of Anjou, *Fragmentum historiae Andegavensis*, ed. Louis Halphen and René Poupardin, *Chroniques des comtes d'Anjou et des seigneurs d'Amboise* (Paris: August Picard, 1913), 232–8.
- 66 'apud Navas de Tolosa campestri prelio', 'secundo anno quo ego ... regem Cartaginis campestri prelio superavi': Julio González, *El reino de Castilla en la epoca de Alfonso VIII*, 3 vols (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Escuela de Estudios Medievales, 1960), III, 583–5, 587–96, 600–1, 602–11, 612–21, nos. 905, 907–11, 915, 917–21, 923–7; see Ana Rodríguez, 'Forging Collective Memory: Las Navas and Bouvines', *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 4, no. 1 (2012): 15.
- 67 *Annales sancti Martialis Lemovicenses*, ed. Oswald Holder-Egger, MGH SS 26 (Hannover: Hahn, 1882): 441; *Continuatio chronici Guillelmi de Nangiaco*, ed. H. Géraud, *Chronique de Guillaume de Nangis et de ses continuateurs*, 2 vols, Société de l'histoire de France [n.v.], (Paris: J. Renouard, 1843), II, 7; Watt, *Scotichronicon* XIV.52, VII, 420.
- 68 'Ipsi etiam Morauenses ... non sunt ausi cum eo prelium campestre committere': *Gesta principum Polonorum (The Deeds of the Princes of the Poles)* II.26, trans. Paul W. Knoll and Frank Schaer, and ed. Karol Maleczynski et al. (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2003), 164–6.
- 69 'nunquam tamen ipsum aggredi ausi sunt bello campali (al. campestri)': Pierre des Vaux-de-Cernay, *Historia Albigensis* §140, ed. Pascal Guébin and Ernest Lyon, 3 vols, Société de l'histoire de France 412, 422, 442 (Paris: J. Renouard, 1926–39), I, 146.
- 70 *Poema de Mio Cid*, ed. Colin Smith, trans. Abel Martínez-Loza (Madrid: Catedra, 1972), 194 (line 1333).
- 71 'our furst felde': *The Will of Henry VII*, ed. T. Astle (London: T. Payne, 1775), 36; in modernized English in *Testamenta vetusta: Being Illustrations from Wills, of Manners, Customs, &c. as Well as of the Descents and Possessions of Many Distinguished Families. From the Reign of Henry the Second to the Accession of Queen Elizabeth*, ed. Nicholas Harris Nicolas, 2 vols (London: Nichols & Sons, 1826), I, 32.
- 72 Michael Bennett, *Lambert Simnel and the Battle of Stoke* (Gloucester: Sutton, 1987), 9.
- 73 *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, ed. Francis James Child, 5 vols in 9 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1882–1898), III, pt. 2, 282.
- 74 'barones ... campum cum victoria gloriosa mirabiliter adepti sunt': *The Chronicle of William de Rishanger*, ed. James Orchard Halliwell, Camden Society 15 (London: Camden Society, 1840), 34.
- 75 'in campum victoriae pro spoliis colligendis redierunt': William of Nangis, *Gesta sancti Ludovici*, in *Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France* 20, ed. P. C. F. Daunou and Joseph Naudet (Paris: L'Imprimerie Royale, 1840), 436.
- 76 *Li Fet des Romains compilé ensemble de Saluste et de Suetoine et de Lucan* II.20.xiii, ed. L.-F. Flutre and K. Snejders de Vogel, 2 vols (Paris: E. Droz, 1935–8), I, 308–9 (The text dates to 1211×1214).
- 77 Thompson, *Chronicon Galfridi le Baker*, 150.
- 78 'Ai-je réellement assisté à une bataille? Il lui semblait que oui, et il eût été au comble du bonheur, s'il en eût été certain' (ch. 4); 'Il n'était resté enfant que sur un point: ce qu'il avait vu était-ce une bataille, et en second lieu, cette bataille était-elle Waterloo?' (ch. 5).

Battle-writing and commemoration

The transition from conflict to peace

Jenny Benham

‘... consuming war / will quite devour this solitary isle / not leaving any over whom to rule / nor to resist foreign invasions ... in yielding thou hast won. / That which thy sword could never do / thy tongue hath brought to pass by gentle speech.’¹

These lines from the anonymous Elizabethan play *Edmund Ironside* describe the circumstances of the battle of *Assandun* in 1016 and how two evenly matched rivals over the throne of England went from pursuing a bloody conflict that neither could win to extending the hand of friendship for the promotion of future peace. Writing some 500 years after the actual events at the battlefield, these lines encapsulate more the ideal of how the transition from conflict to peace should be made than the historical reality. Nevertheless, it shows how those writing about battles and their aftermath continued to debate and negotiate the complex relationship between war and peace, creating and recreating memories of the transitional process among communities divided by conflict. This chapter aims to show something of the framework within which narrative sources from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries retold such battle events, and how to understand the role of peacemaking and commemoration within them.

It may seem counter-intuitive to write about peace in a volume about battles and battle-writing. Yet, in the medieval period the notion of restoring or imposing peace through warfare was well developed and had been inherited from Roman thinking that wars had to be just, that is ‘fought to bring peace to Rome and her provinces’. Rulers were peacemakers because they were commanders who had achieved victory in war.² Victory was thus seen as the best form of peace and this notion survived into the medieval and later periods.³ During the Middle Ages, St Augustine, a fifth-century theologian and bishop (d. 430), was the central authority on ideas of peace as expressed through his *City of God*, which was written shortly after the sacking of Rome by the Visigoths in 410. According to St Augustine, Christ was the highest peacemaker, reconciler of man to God through his Incarnation and Crucifixion, and it was this that the medieval ruler emulated.⁴ Peace was also the bond of charity, and a breach of peace was a religious matter, a sin. In other words, peace was the supreme good, which became a standard justification for war, and victory in battle was God’s just judgement.⁵

We can see these ideas converge in the work of the early seventh-century writer, Isidore of Seville, a major influence on the development of Anglo-Saxon and early medieval intellectual life. Isidore commented in his *Etymologies* that victory was 'either the killing or the complete despoiling of the enemy or both' and that such a victory was followed by peace.⁶ Such notions are evident in many descriptions of battles in what would eventually become known as the kingdom of England. For instance, the compiler of the poem on the battle of *Brunanburh* in 937 stated that the field was slick with men's blood and never before had so many men been felled and slaughtered in the island of Britain since the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons some 500 years earlier.⁷ In the 980s, *Brunanburh* was still known as the 'great battle' (*bellum ... magnum*), one which had consolidated 'the fields of Britain' (*Brittannidis arua*) into one, 'there was peace everywhere, and abundance of all things, and [since then] no fleet has remained here, having advanced against these shores, except under treaty with the English'.⁸ These tenth-century writers portray peace as the immediate result of victory in battle. However, while some writers focus on the destruction of the enemy as a mark of success in war and in achieving peace, others were more mindful to show that, in practice, the idea of peace being something achieved through victory is not very reflective of the many factors and strategies involved in establishing peace between two parties following battle.

Some of the most interesting instances of battle-writing and depictions of the transition from conflict to peace are those surrounding the battle of *Assandun* in 1016, fought between the two rival forces of Edmund Ironside and the Danish leader Cnut. Edmund had been proclaimed king by the English councillors and citizens of London after the death of his father, King Æthelred II, often referred to as 'the Unready'. Cnut, by contrast, had a claim to the English kingdom as the heir to his father Swein, who had conquered England in 1014. Upon the death of Æthelred, the C-version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, compiled at some point between 1016 and 1023, relates a series of battles. Four of these battles were won by Edmund; one, at Sherston, saw a great slaughter on both sides before the armies separated of their own accord; and the last battle, that of *Assandun*, possibly Ashingdon or Ashdon in Essex, was won by Cnut. 'There', says the chronicler, 'Cnut had the victory and won for himself all the English people ... and all the best of the English was there destroyed'.⁹ Edmund fled and shortly afterwards exchanged hostages with Cnut so they could meet at 'Olney' near Deerhurst, where they established a friendship with pledges and oaths. There the two rivals divided the kingdom between them, Edmund succeeding to Wessex and Cnut to Mercia ('feng Eadmund to Westsexan Cnut to Myrcean').¹⁰ A short while later, the chronicler records that Edmund died and was buried at Glastonbury, and that Cnut succeeded to the whole of the English kingdom.¹¹

In his account of the treaty between Edmund and Cnut, however, the chronicler shows that the two made peace as if they were equals and not as if Cnut was the victor of the final battle. The account is characterized by reciprocity with both sides providing hostages, pledges and oaths, and, most importantly, the two rivals divided the kingdom between them. What is certain from this is that victory in battle was by no means a reliable way to settle a dispute between kings. Far from being decisive, the battles fought in 1016 merely reinforced the fact that neither side had the capacity to win the

war and that the issue at stake could only be settled through negotiation. Crucially, the terms of the peace did not reflect the outcome of the final battle, at *Assandun*, but rather the military activities of both kings as a whole and the behaviour of their respective supporters. The work written in praise of Emma of Normandy, successively wife of kings Æthelred and Cnut, similarly echoes the chronicler's assessment of events, depicting the battle of *Assandun* as a resounding victory for Cnut but the peace as being that desired by the fighting supporters of both kings. Writing twenty-five or so years after the battle, the anonymous author noted the divisions among the supporters and the need to establish peace among them. He comments, for example, that Edmund's death, a few weeks after the agreement had been struck, was an act of God because if both had survived neither should rule securely ('*si uterque superuiveret neuter regnaret secure*') and the kingdom would be continually wasted by renewed conflict ('*et regnum diatim adnihila[re]tur renouata contentione*').¹² Here, the author showed that how to establish and maintain peace in a kingdom with many divisions continued to be a hotly debated topic. Indeed, writing about the destruction at the battle of *Assandun* and the transition from conflict to peace must have taken on an added significance at a time when Harthacnut, Emma's son by Cnut, had invited Edward, Emma's son by Æthelred who had spent most of his life living in exile in Normandy, to share the English kingdom with him.¹³ In a curious twist of history, Harthacnut died shortly after Edward had returned to the English court, mirroring Edmund's death just weeks after the division in 1016 and making the author's comments about God's providence to achieve peace appear prophetic.

In the decades and centuries following *Assandun*, the continued preoccupation of writers with the behaviour of the supporters during the military campaign is clearly evident in descriptions of the battle and its aftermath, and by the twelfth century the episode was being retold as an *exemplum* of how conflicts between rulers should be resolved. Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum* (*History of the English*) begun c. 1129 and recording events up to 1154, after describing *Assandun* as 'the fiercest and final' battle, a place where an 'amazing slaughter of the English occurred', records how the armies met for a seventh time in Gloucestershire.¹⁴ Here, fearing the strength of both Edmund and Cnut, the supporters of the kings devised a scheme whereby the two claimants should fight in single combat, and, having accepted this proposal, the duel began with crowds watching from the sides. 'At length', writes Henry, 'the incomparable valour of Edmund began to thunder' and Cnut, 'in fear of himself', suggested that instead of either of them perishing on the field of battle, they should share the kingdom. 'With these words the generous mind of the young man was softened and the kiss of peace was exchanged ... Edmund received the kingdom of Wessex. Cnut received the kingdom of Mercia'¹⁵ Ailred of Rievaulx, whose account of this event in the *Genealogia regum Anglorum* (*Genealogy of the Kings of the English*) may have been based on that of Henry, added: 'For words accomplished what swords had not.'¹⁶

Henry of Huntingdon and Ailred were not the only writers to imagine that there were attempts to settle this dispute by single combat. Geffrei Gaimar, writing in the 1140s, follows Henry's story in the main, but adds small details such as that the single combat would take place on a boat in the middle of the river Severn, which was tethered with chains and iron cables to both banks.¹⁷ Like Henry, Gaimar gives

a starring role to the 'barons' of both kings in the negotiations and preparations.¹⁸ Unlike Henry, however, Gaimar asserts that although both kings prepared for single combat, at the point at which they were to clash weapons, Cnut offered to divide the kingdom and Edmund agreed.¹⁹ Walter Map, writing in the 1180s or 1190s, seems to have conflated Gaimar's description and that of Henry of Huntingdon. He notes, for instance, how the two adversaries proceeded to the island in the Severn on boats coming from opposite sides of the banks equipped with 'excellent and precious arms and horses' – this arrangement and especially the weaponry having being recorded in detail by Gaimar.²⁰ Map, like Henry, thought that single combat had taken place. After a long fight and when it became apparent that Edmund had the upper hand, Map states that the Danes 'compelled the two by many prayers and tears to make a treaty in these terms, that during their lives they should possess the kingdom equally divided between them, and that on the death of either the survivor should succeed to the whole.'²¹ Intriguingly, Map seems to depict more of an east-west, rather than north-south, divide, with Cnut receiving London and the parts beyond Icknield way – an ancient track running from Dorset to Norfolk – while Edmund had the rest.²² In contrast to these writers, William of Malmesbury, who completed his history of the English kings in the late 1120s, thought that Edmund had proposed single combat but that Cnut rejected this 'out of hand', and then noted that the matter was instead settled by the treaty dividing the kingdom.²³

These twelfth-century attempts at battle-writing clearly reduce much of the conflict and surrounding negotiations between Edmund and Cnut to one legendary event in the single combat, and R. M. Wilson once considered that they were likely based on now lost material, which may have existed in several versions.²⁴ However, these descriptions are not just attempts at battle-writing by authors with a keen interest in the Anglo-Saxon past, but also reflections of a renewed interest in how conflicts between rulers should be resolved. Indeed, it is no accident that many of them were written during King Stephen's reign (1135–54), which was characterized by a disputed succession to the English throne and divisions among the supporters.²⁵ These descriptions further show that by the twelfth century, writers perceived of two different but interlinked strategies of how to achieve peace, namely, arbitration and mediation. Mediators were those who intervened in a dispute by helping to bring about a settlement acceptable to all parties. An arbitrator, by contrast, was given the power by both parties to decide on and impose a settlement.²⁶ This latter strategy is found in how the two kings consented to submit their dispute to a judgement by God in the form of single combat, with their supporters acting as an arbitration panel.²⁷ However, the view that the matter be settled by negotiation and resulting in the treaty and the division of the kingdom shows that mediation was the preferred option, and this, moreover, reflects the relative use of these two strategies more generally.²⁸ That mediation was the preferred option to resolve disputes is hardly surprising, as it gave supporters an incentive in maintaining the peace and in continuing to cooperate and collaborate to achieve this aim.²⁹ Such a strategy, furthermore, adhered closely to the ideas of kingship as they were perceived in that same period, with the king ruling with the help of his advisers. Later depictions of *Assandun* and the transition from conflict to peace were hence highly idealized, even if not untrue in their depiction of methods.

Having strategies to achieve peace and understanding the role of battle-writing within this is one thing, the long-term transition from conflict to peace is quite another. In every description of how peace was achieved, the main concern was to limit further bloodshed. For instance, Henry of Huntingdon states that Edmund asked for the single combat ‘rather than have two mortal men moved by ambition to be king carry the guilt for the blood of so many of their subjects.’³⁰ Such concerns were born out of attempts by the church to limit violence, because it was a sin, and became incorporated into peacemaking strategies to bind the victors of battles to their defeated enemies in a shared sense of atonement for the shedding of blood.³¹ Within this Christian context, the lifespan of apologies and reconciliations were increased by ensuring decent burials for the dead, by memorializing penitent acts through the construction of monuments and by fostering saints and their relics as the grantors of victory as well as the guarantors of peace. We can see the last of these in the *Translatio Sancti Aelfegi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi et martiris* (*Translation of St Ælfheah, Archbishop of Canterbury and Martyr*), likely compiled in the late eleventh century by the Canterbury monk Osbern. Here, the author notes about the treaty in 1016 that Cnut ‘made peace and gained, after the peace, half the realm, and later the whole.’³² This account makes no mention of the battle of *Assandun*. Instead, the author portrays the conflict more generally and attributes to Archbishop Ælfheah of Canterbury, who was martyred in 1012 while in the captivity of Scandinavian raiders, the honour of preventing it:

Now Cnut, the prince of the Danes, when he saw that his people were being slaughtered without cease by the English army, and that he was almost compelled to surrender by the difficulty he was experiencing, gathered together all the wisest of the Englishmen who had fled to him and asked why so many adversities troubled him. They replied with one voice: ‘These things have been foretold by the venerable martyr Ælfheah. For when he was subjected to a cruel torture by your forefathers, he prophesied to them that they would never take firm root in the kingdom of the English, but would perish in a worse destruction than that of Sodom. Now, if you wish to appease him in your own time, hasten to make an oath to fulfil this promise to him that, if good fortune should come, you will disinter the venerable relics of his body from the place in which they were buried, and will make every effort to translate them, in the traditional way of the ancients, to the see of his patriarchate.’ The prince agreed, with the approval of his advisers. (And) a sign of divine propitiation followed the council. For a few days later Cnut made peace.³³

Here, it is Cnut’s repentance of violence, epitomized in the killing of the former archbishop rather than the battle of *Assandun*, that is the key to securing peace, and thereby his rule.³⁴ This transition from conflict to peace was completed by Cnut arranging for the translation of the relics of saint Ælfheah’s from St Paul’s, London, to Christ Church, Canterbury.³⁵ At the point that Ælfheah’s tomb at St Paul’s was opened and seeing the saint lying uncorrupted, Cnut supposedly exclaimed: ‘Most holy father, sweeter than all delight, most blessed father, more precious than all the treasures of the world, have pity on this sinner of a king, lest either the first indignity or the later cruelty unjustly perpetrated on you by my kinsmen against justice and goodness, should stand

to my charge.³⁶ Evidently, to this eleventh-century author, it was a penitent Danish king, guided by an English saint, that would heal both sides of this conflict and ensure that peace was long-lasting.

The particular atonement retold here may not carry much of historical accuracy to it, but we know from other evidence that Cnut seems to have taken such measures seriously. John of Worcester asserts, following the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, that Cnut and Thorkell, earl of East Anglia, built a church on the hill of the battle, which was consecrated in 1020 in the presence of Archbishop Wulfstan and many other bishops with great ceremony and magnificence.³⁷ The editors of John of Worcester's chronicle surmise that the co-founding is a later interference – Thorkell's exact allegiance and role at *Assandun* is difficult to ascertain – but that there was a tradition of Cnut showing repentance for the slaughter at *Assandun* is certain. Henry of Huntingdon thought that Cnut built churches at all the places where he had fought a battle, 'and particularly *Assandun*', placing in them priests and ministers to celebrate mass for those who had been slain.³⁸ We could speculate that one reason why Cnut decided to build a church at the site of *Assandun* was because many of those slain may have remained on the battlefield. The conflict evidently continued after the battle, leaving little time to bury corpses. Other battles seem to have suffered a similar fate. For instance, in the early twelfth century, the Anglo-Norman writer Orderic Vitalis noted about the site of the Battle of Stamford Bridge – fought between the English king, Harold Godwinson, and the Norwegian king, Harald Hardrada, and his allies in 1066 – that 'travellers cannot fail to recognise the field, for a great mountain of dead men's bones still lies there and bears witness to the terrible slaughter on both sides'.³⁹

Again, haste was likely the reason for this, since Harold rushed off to fight William at Hastings immediately after his victory against the Norwegians. In any case, it would seem that Cnut's intention in the aftermath of *Assandun* was to memorialize his apology with the foundation of a church, just as William of Normandy later built a monastery at the site of the battle of Hastings. According to the *Chronicle of Battle Abbey*, William made a vow before the battle that 'on this very battlefield I shall found a monastery for the salvation of all, and especially for those who fall here'.⁴⁰ Some military historians have seen in these monuments on battlefields a wish not for peace but for a permanent memorialization of 'the act of conquest'.⁴¹ While there might be something in this, it is important not to lose sight of the Christian context within which any act of war or peace was made in the medieval period. These churches may hence have given thanks to God and a specific saint for victory while at the same time serving as permanent evidence of Christian penance and humility, thereby healing divided communities by making no distinction in the prayers for the fallen between victor and vanquished or friend and foe. Perhaps then we should view these medieval memorials, like their modern counterparts, as open to multiple contesting and at times provocative interpretations.⁴²

Cnut seems to have gone further in his wish to heal the division with the supporters of Edmund by ensuring that his adversary was honoured even in death. The exact circumstances of Edmund's death are unknown, with both medieval and modern commentators vacillating between its cause being wounds received at *Assandun* and foul play by the notorious traitor Eadric Streona.⁴³ What we do know is that the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records that Edmund was buried with his grandfather, King Edgar,

often referred to as 'the Peaceable', at Glastonbury.⁴⁴ In the twelfth century, William of Malmesbury reported in the *Gesta regum Anglorum* that Cnut subsequently in his reign honoured Edmund, 'his brother', at his tomb in Glastonbury and presented a pall decorated with peacocks in many colours.⁴⁵ Matthew Paris picked up on this story in the thirteenth century and added that the peacocks represented the resurrection.⁴⁶ William, who at one point was a monk at Glastonbury, inserted a royal charter at this point in his narrative, dating from 1032 and confirming previous grants to the monastery. In the charter, William set out Cnut's reasons for the grant as being 'on account of my love for the kingdom of Heaven and to secure indulgence for my misdeeds and remission of the sins of my brother King Edmund'.⁴⁷ Both kings are here portrayed as penitent for the blood shed during their conflict and Cnut as honouring another victim of the violence, while at the same time legitimizing his own succession from Edmund, as per the treaty.

While Edmund may not have perished on the battlefield, William certainly had a penchant for recording that nobles who had, and in particular those with a royal ancestry, received a decent burial and were subsequently honoured. For instance, he also records how King Athelstan had the sons of his uncle, Æthelweard, who were both slain at *Brunanburh* in 937, buried at Malmesbury.⁴⁸ He states that they were interred at the head of St Aldhelm's tomb and that afterwards Athelstan gave the church many estates and confirmed them with charters, one of which he gives in his narrative.⁴⁹ The final sentence of this charter states: 'And I know no more just course of action than to give them [the estates] to God and St Peter, who caused my enemy's downfall in the sight of all men and have given me a prosperous reign.'⁵⁰ Here, William connects penitence for bloodshed with giving thanks for victory and the peace that followed. This charter, as also that mentioned earlier, is almost certainly spurious. William had been charged with assisting the abbot of Glastonbury – the powerful Henry of Blois, who was a grandson of William the Conqueror and brother of King Stephen – in restoring the reputation of the monastery and justifying its claims to vast estates.⁵¹ William thus linked commemoration of noteworthy historical events and individuals to the donation of land to specific churches with which he was himself associated in order to give greater credence to the charters as legal acts.

Nonetheless, while the exact details of William's narrative and the charters may not be accurate, the context of the burials carries a grain of truth to it. According to Gillingham, decent burial was routinely offered to those with a shared culture from the late eleventh century onwards and men of rank could certainly anticipate that their bodies would be recovered.⁵² In some cases such practices may even have extended to enemies. For instance, William of Malmesbury states that after the Battle of Stamford Bridge, Tostig, Harold Godwinson's brother, received the honour of burial at York, despite the fact that he had been allied to, and fought with, Harold's enemy. William suggests that Tostig was recognized among the dead by the wart between his shoulder blades.⁵³ Such depictions can be compared with the aftermath of the ninth-century Battle of Fontenoy, which was remembered as the most horrific event of the Carolingian civil wars fought between the brothers Lothar, Louis the German, and Charles the Bald, and their successors. After this battle, the contemporary Nithard records how 'they buried friends and enemies alike, the faithful and the faithless'.⁵⁴ *The Annals of St. Bertin* similarly noted that the kings

'gave orders for the bishops to remain in the same spot the next day to bury the corpses.'⁵⁵ Seemingly, even in the earlier medieval period, there was a notion that honouring those killed in battle with decent burial was an important aspect of transitioning from conflict to peace, even though before the twelfth century, such a show of pity was perhaps unusual rather than the norm.⁵⁶ It is certainly significant that only later sources mention the burial and honouring of any of the men who had fought at *Brunanburh* and *Assandun*. Indeed, the author of the poem of the *Brunanburh* conveys no apology for the shedding of blood and refers to the feeding of ravens and other beasts, implying that the corpses of the dead were left on the field.⁵⁷ What is most evident from all of this is that depictions of honouring the dead as a strategy to heal divided communities are inextricably linked with the purpose and circumstances of those writing them.

In the aftermath of battle or any conflict, every society faces complex moral, legal and political choices. In the medieval period, rules of conflict and violence originated with the church and its efforts to limit excessive violence and protect churches, churchmen and non-combatants from attacks. Treaties from this period also present themselves or justify their existence within a similar framework of parties having abandoned the horrors of conflict, excessive violence and criminal and unchristian behaviour. As those writing about battles were often ecclesiastics, they had a difficult balance to tread between glorifying God's judgement through victory in battle and holding up peace as the ultimate goal of warfare while at the same time imposing limits to violence and promoting commemoration and apologies as long-term strategies for healing divided communities. Medieval writers emphasized the Christian virtues of humility and obedience as the routes by which humanity's erroneous behaviour would be absolved and both victor and vanquished could resume their rightful place in post-conflict society. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, great changes were taking place in the conduct of war and in the treatment of enemies and non-combatants, as well as in the development of theories of peace and how to achieve it.⁵⁸ These changes are reflected by those writing about battles and the transition from conflict to peace in the Anglo-Saxon past, showing that these were issues that continued to matter long after the memories of the actual events had passed. The creation of new memories of the conflict of 1016 and its resolution thus served as a model and reminder of the 'rules' at a time when these were not firmly established. Perhaps then, the enduring legacy of the battle of *Assandun*, the peace between Edmund and Cnut and the debate over how to transition from conflict to peace is best captured by the anonymous Elizabethan writer who subtitled his play about these events 'War hath made all friends', implying that the horrors of division and bloodshed could focus the minds of the stakeholders and incentivize future collaboration and cooperation.⁵⁹

Notes

- 1 *Shakespeare's Lost Play: Edmund Ironside*, ed. Eric Sams (London: Fourth Estate, 1985), Act V, Scene 2, ll. 1888–2005.
- 2 Philip de Souza, 'Parta victoriis pax: Roman Emperors as Peacemakers', in *War and Peace in Ancient and Medieval History*, ed. Philip de Souza and John France

- (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 77, 81 and 85. The ideology is clearly outlined among ancient thinkers, such as Cicero, whose *On Duties* argued that wars should only be undertaken with the aim of living in peace and security ('Quare suscipienda quidem bella sunt ob eam causa, ut sine iniuria in pace vivatur'): Cicero, *De officiis* I.35: *Cicero: On Duties*, ed. and trans. Walter Miller (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913), 36–7.
- 3 Antony Adolf's study on peace contains interesting comparisons with other periods and different cultural traditions, for which see his *Peace: A World History* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2009).
 - 4 Thomas Renna, 'The Idea of Peace in the West, 500–1150', *Journal of Medieval History* 6 (1980): 147; *Augustine, City of God against the Pagans*, ed. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 909–65.
 - 5 The essential study on the so-called 'just war' is F. H. Russell, *The Just War in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). For a more recent summary of the rules of war in the period 500–1250, see Rory Cox, 'The Ethics of War up to Thomas Aquinas', in *The Oxford Handbook of Ethics of War*, ed. Seth Lazar and Helen Frowe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 99–116.
 - 6 Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, XVIII.1.11–2.1 (*Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum libri XX*, ed. W. M. Lindsay, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), II, 275–6; *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. Stephen A. Barney et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 360). On the influence of the writings of Isidore of Seville in the Anglo-Saxon period, see Michael Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 127, 309–13.
 - 7 ASC ACD s. a. 937 (Cubbin, 42–3; Batley, 71–2; O'Brien O'Keeffe, 78–9).
 - 8 Æthelweard, *Chronicon* IV.5 (*The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. A. Campbell (London: Thomas Nelson, 1962), 54): '... undique pax, omniumque foecundia rerum, nec usque ad istas motus adhaesit sine littora Anglorum foedere classicus.'
 - 9 ASC C(D,E), s. a. 1016 (ed. Irvine, 74; ed. Cubbin, 62; ed. O'Brien O'Keeffe, 102–3).
 - 10 ASC C(D,E), s. a. 1016 (ed. Irvine, 74; ed. Cubbin, 62; ed. O'Brien O'Keeffe, 103). Note that the D-version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records Cnut succeeding to the northern parts ('þam norð dæle'), rather than simply Mercia, while the twelfth-century chronicler, John of Worcester, states that Cnut succeeded to Wessex, East Anglia, and Essex with London and Edmund to the rest of the kingdom. John of Worcester, *Chronicon* s. a. 1016 (*The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, 3 vols., ed. R. R. Darlington and P. McGurk; trans. Jennifer Bray and P. McGurk (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995–8), II, 492–3).
 - 11 ASC C(D,E), 1016 (ed. Irvine, 74; ed. Cubbin, 62; ed. O'Brien O'Keeffe, 103).
 - 12 *Encomium Emmae Reginae* (*Mirror of Queen Emma*) II.10–14 (*Encomium Emmae Reginae*, ed. Alistair Campbell (London: Royal Historical Society, 1949), 26–31).
 - 13 ASC C(D, E) s. a. 1041 (ed. Irvine, 77; ed. Cubbin, 66; ed. O'Brien O'Keeffe, 107).
 - 14 HH, *Historia Anglorum* VI.13 (*Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon, Historia Anglorum*, ed. Diana Greenway (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 358–61).
 - 15 HH, *Historia Anglorum* VI.13 (ed. and trans. Greenway, 360–1).
 - 16 *The Genealogy of the Kings of the English*, in *The Historical Works of Aelred of Rievaulx*, trans. J. P. Freeland and Marsha L. Dutton (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2008), 111.
 - 17 Geffrei Gaimar, *Estoire des Engleis*, ll. 4269–77 (*Geffrei Gaimar: Estoire des Engleis; History of the English*, ed. and trans. Ian Short (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 232–3). This description bears many similarities to depictions of other peace

- conferences, for which see Jenny Benham, *Peacemaking in the Middle Ages: Principles and Practice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 35–6; Jenny Benham, 'Constructing Memories of Peacemaking', in *Citation, Intertextuality and Memory in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, 2: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Medieval Culture*, ed. Giuliano di Bacco and Yolanda Plumley (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 2013), 6–9.
- 18 Geffrei Gaimar, *Estoire des Engleis*, ll. 4255, 4292, 4379 (ed. and trans. Short, 232–5 and 238–9).
 - 19 Geffrei Gaimar, *Estoire des Engleis*, ll. 4305–57 (ed. and trans. Short, 234–7).
 - 20 Walter Map, *De nugis curialium* V.4 (*Walter Map: De Nugis Curialium; Courtiers' Trifles*, ed. and trans. M. R. James, C. N. L. Brooke and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 424–5); Geffrei Gaimar, *Estoire des Engleis*, ll. 4262–4 (ed. and trans. Short, 232–3). John of Worcester (*Chronicon* s. a. 1016 (ed. Darlington and McGurk, trans. Bray and McGurk, II, 492–3)) by contrast, notes that arms and garments were exchanged as gifts at the peace conference.
 - 21 Walter Map, *De nugis curialium* V.4 (ed. and trans. James, Brooke and Mynors, 424–7).
 - 22 Walter Map, *De nugis curialium* V.4 (ed. and trans. James, Brooke and Mynors, 430–1). This might have been based on his, slightly garbled, reading of Gaimar's division, which seems to have at its basis the border set out in the treaty between Alfred and Guthrum in the ninth century. *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, ed. Felix Liebermann, 3 vols (Halle, 1903–16), I, 126–8.
 - 23 WM, *Gesta regum Anglorum* II.180 (*William of Malmesbury: Gesta regum Anglorum; The History of the English Kings*. Volume 1, ed. and trans. R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 316–19). A summary of these various sources and the single combat can also be found in C. E. Wright, *The Cultivation of Saga in Anglo-Saxon England* (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1939), 183–98.
 - 24 R. M. Wilson, 'Lost Literature in Old and Middle English', *Leeds Studies in English* 2 (1933): 26–7.
 - 25 There is a significant historiography surrounding this renewed interest in conflict resolution, and its link to justice and identity. For some examples, see Paul Dalton, 'Geffrei Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis*, Peacemaking and the "Twelfth-century Revival of the English Nation"', *Studies in Philology* 104 (2007); Jay Paul Gates, 'Imagining Justice in the Anglo-Saxon Past: Eadric Streona, Kingship and the Search for Community', *The Haskins Society Journal* 25 (2013): 125–46; Jane Zatta, 'Gaimar's Rebels: Outlaw Heroes and the Creation of Authority in Twelfth-Century England', in *Essays in Medieval Studies: Proceedings of the Illinois Medieval Association*, 16: *Out of Bounds*, ed. William Fahrenbach (Chicago: West Virginia University Press, 1999), 27–40.
 - 26 The standard work on this topic is Hermann Kamp, *Friedensstifter und Vermittler im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2001).
 - 27 Other depictions of arbitrations between rulers in the twelfth century show that single combat was one option for arbitrators making a judgement. For one example, see *Gesta Regis Henrici Secundi Benedicti Abbatis*, 2 vols, ed. W. Stubbs (London: Longman, 1867), I, 139–50.
 - 28 There are only two other arbitrations involving English kings from the period before 1200. The first is the Treaty of Rouen of 991, whereby the dispute between King Æthelred 'the Unready' and Richard, leader of the Normans, was arbitrated by the papacy, and the second can be found in 1177, when King Henry II of England

- arbitrated the dispute between Alfonso VIII of Castile and Sancho VI of Navarre. For these, see Jenny Benham, 'The Earliest Arbitration Treaty? A Re-assessment of the Anglo-Norman Treaty of 991', *Historical Research* 93 (2020); Fernando Luis Corral, 'Alfonso VIII of Castile's Territorial Litigation at Henry II of England's Court: An Effective and Valid Arbitration?', *Nottingham Mediaeval Studies* 50 (2006): 22–42.
- 29 For a brief introduction to this, see Jenny Benham, 'Peace, Security and Deterrence', in *A Cultural History of Peace in the Medieval Age*, ed. Walter P. Simons (London, Bloomsbury, 2020), pp. 122–4.
 - 30 HH, *Historia Anglorum* VI.13 (ed. and trans. Greenway, 361–2).
 - 31 On the promotion of peace and the limiting of violence under the Peace and Truce of God movements of the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries, see Thomas Head and Richard Landes, 'Introduction', in *The Peace of God: Social Violence and Religious Response in France around the Year 1000*, ed. Thomas Head and Richard Landes (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).
 - 32 'Textual Appendix: *Translatio Sancti Ælfeigi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi et martiris*', ed. and trans. Alexander R. Rumble and Rosemary Morris, in *The Reign of Cnut, King of England, Denmark and Norway*, ed. Alexander R. Rumble (London: Leicester University Press, 1994), 300–1.
 - 33 '*Translatio Sancti Ælfeigi*', ed. and trans. Rumble and Morris, 298–301.
 - 34 It might be relevant within this context that in the *Early History of Glastonbury*, the twelfth-century author asserted, wrongly, that Ælfheah had been martyred in the reign of Edmund Ironside, and he linked Danish violence and conquest to that same reign without specifically mentioning the battle: *De antiquitate Glastonie ecclesie*, ch. 23 (*The Early History of Glastonbury*, ed. John Scott (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1981), 73).
 - 35 '*Translatio Sancti Aelfegi*', ed. and trans. Rumble and Morris, 300–5.
 - 36 '*Translatio Sancti Aelfegi*', ed. and trans. Rumble and Morris, 306–7. William of Malmesbury in the twelfth century also reported on the body of Ælfheah being uncorrupted, for which see *Gesta regum Anglorum* II.208 (ed. and trans. Mynors, Thomson and Winterbottom, 386–7).
 - 37 John of Worcester, *Chronicon* s. a. 1020 (ed. Darlington and McGurk; trans. Bray and McGurk, II, 506–7); ASC CDE, s. a. 1020 (ed. Irvine, 75; ed. Cubbin, 63; ed. O'Brien O'Keeffe, 104).
 - 38 WM, *Gesta regum Anglorum* II.181 (ed. and trans. Mynors, Thomson and Winterbottom, 322–3). Many subsequent chroniclers followed this, including Matthew Paris in his *Chronica Majora*, s. a. 1020 (ed. Luard, I, 503).
 - 39 Orderic Vitalis, *Historia ecclesiastica* III (*The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, ed. and trans. Marjorie Chibnall, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969–78), II, 168–9).
 - 40 *The Chronicle of Battle Abbey*, ed. Eleanor Searle (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 37.
 - 41 Ian Atherton and Philip Morgan, 'The Battlefield War Memorial: Commemoration and the Battlefield site from the Middle Ages to the Modern Era', *Journal of War and Culture Studies* 4 (2011): 292–4.
 - 42 Kris Brown, 'Commemoration as Symbolic Reparation: New Narratives or Spaces of Conflict?', *Human Rights Review* 14 (2013): 275.
 - 43 For a discussion of the medieval evidence and its surrounding historiography, see Gates, 'Imagining Justice in the Anglo-Saxon Past'.
 - 44 ASC C(D, E), s. a. 1016 (ed. Irvine, 74; ed. Cubbin, 62; ed. O'Brien O'Keeffe, 103); John of Worcester, *Chronicon* s. a. 1016 (ed. Darlington and McGurk; trans. Bray and McGurk, II, 492–3).

- 45 WM, *Gesta regum Anglorum* II.184 (ed. and trans. Mynors, Thomson and Winterbottom, I, 330–1); WM, *De antiquitate Glastonie ecclesie*, ch. 64 (ed. Scott, 132–3).
- 46 Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora* s. a. 1026 (ed. Luard, I, 505).
- 47 WM, *Gesta regum Anglorum* II.185 (ed. and trans. Mynors, Thomson and Winterbottom, I, 332–3).
- 48 WM, *Gesta regum Anglorum* II.135 (ed. and trans. Mynors, Thomson and Winterbottom, I, 220–1).
- 49 WM, *Gesta regum Anglorum* II.136 (ed. and trans. Mynors, Thomson and Winterbottom, I, 222–3).
- 50 WM, *Gesta regum Anglorum* II.137 (ed. and trans. Mynors, Thomson and Winterbottom, I, 224–5).
- 51 WM, *The Early History of Glastonbury*, ed. Scott, 1.
- 52 John Gillingham, “‘Holding to the Rules of War (*Bellica iura tenentes*)’: Right Conduct Before, During and After Battle in North-western Europe in the Eleventh Century”, *Anglo-Norman Studies* 29 (2007): 5–6.
- 53 WM, *Gesta regum Anglorum* III.252 (ed. and trans. Mynors, Thomson and Winterbottom, I, 468–9).
- 54 Nithard, *Historiae* III.1 (*Nithardi Historiarum libri IIII*, Ernst Müller, MGH: SSRG 44 (Hanover: Hahn, 1907), 28; *Carolingian Chronicles: Royal Frankish Annals; Nithard’s Histories*, trans. Bernhard Walter Scholz (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1972), 156).
- 55 *Annales Bertiniani* s. a. 841 (*Annales Bertiniani*, ed. G. Waitz, MGH: SSRG 4 (Hanover: Hahn, 1883), 25; *The Annals of St-Bertin*, trans. Janet L. Nelson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 50).
- 56 Gillingham, “‘Holding to the Rules of War’”, 5–6.
- 57 ASC ACD s. a. 937 (ed. Cubbin, 42–3; ed. Batley, 71–2; ed. O’Brien O’Keeffe, 78–9).
- 58 For good introductions to this, see Matthew Strickland, ‘Killing or Clemency? Ransom, Chivalry and Changing Attitudes to Defeated Opponents in Britain and Northern France, 7th–12th Centuries’, in *Krieg im Mittelalter*, ed. Hans-Henning Kortüm (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001); Kiril Petkov, *The Kiss of Peace: Ritual, Self and Society in the High and Late Medieval West* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).
- 59 *Shakespeare’s Lost Play: Edmund Ironside*, ed. Sams, 57.

‘Undying glory by the sword’s edge’

Writing and remembering battle in Anglo-Saxon England

Matthew Strickland

In 1772, the banker Henry Hoare decided to commemorate the end of the Seven Years’ War against France in 1763 by building a monument at Kingsettle Hill, Somerset (then as now part of the Stourhead estate) on the assumed site of Egbert’s stone, the meeting point where King Alfred had mustered his forces prior to giving battle at Edington in 878.¹ The inscription on King Alfred’s Tower leaves no doubt as to the perceived importance of the king and his victory, and by extension, the values for which the more recent war had been fought:

ALFRED THE GREAT
AD 879 on this Summit
Erected his Standard
Against Danish Invaders
To him We owe The Origin of Juries
The Establishment of a Militia
The Creation of a Naval Force
ALFRED The Light of a Benighted Age
Was a Philosopher and a Christian
The Father of his People
The Founder of the English
MONARCHY and LIBERTY

Great battles have long been regarded as key markers in the course of history. Charles Martel’s defeat of Ummayyad forces at Poitiers (also known as the battle of Tours) in 732, for instance, could with hindsight be hailed as a pivotal moment which halted the tide of Muslim conquest in Europe.² Yet the selection of those conflicts deemed to be the most important or worthy of appropriate commemoration has always been subjective, reflecting changing cultural and political assumptions.³ Hence, despite the significance accorded by Hoare to Alfred’s triumph in 878, neither Edington nor any

engagement in Britain before 1066 featured in Sir Edward Creasy's *The Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World. From Marathon to Waterloo* (1851), the pioneer of the 'decisive battles' tradition of military historiography, though both Charles Martel's victory at Poitiers and the earlier defeat of Attila by the Roman general Aetius at Chalons in 451 were among his chosen battles.⁴ For Creasy, whose work has been characterized by John Keegan as 'the Whig interpretation of history written in blood',⁵ far more significant was the annihilation by Arminius (otherwise known as Hermann) of three legions under the Roman commander Varus in the Teutoburger Wald in AD 9, which thus saved Germania from Roman conquest and in so doing laid the distant foundations of the British Empire itself:

Had Arminius been supine or unsuccessful, our Germanic ancestors would have been enslaved or exterminated in their original seats along the Eyder and the Elbe. This island would never have borne the name of England, and 'we, this great nation, whose race and language are now overrunning the earth, from one end of it to the other' would have been utterly cut off from existence ... Arminius is far more truly one of our national heroes than Caractacus.⁶

A century later, J. F. C. Fuller, Creasy's influential successor in the genre, granted Alfred and his fortress building a fleeting mention but ignored Edington altogether.⁷ Nevertheless, the spirit that had motivated Hoare's construction of Alfred's Tower was once again in evidence in the inscription on a new memorial to the battle of Edington erected in 2000 on the edge of Bratton Camp, the Iron Age hillfort in which Alfred may have besieged Guthrum's routed forces: 'To commemorate the battle of Ethandun fought in this vicinity May 878 AD when King Alfred the Great defeated the Viking army, giving birth to the English Nationhood.'

Mythologies of battle

Irrespective of their contemporary military or political significance, a number of battles from the medieval past have assumed a powerful – and still evolving – place in national, ethnic or confessional mythologies. Battles such as Clontarf in 1014, the victory of the Iberian Christian kings over the Muslim Almohads at Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212 or the triumph of Philip Augustus at Bouvines in 1214 have come to be seen as a formative moment in the forging of a nation.⁸ As Georges Duby noted in his classic *Le Dimanche de Bouvines*, which remains one of the most important and influential studies of the metamorphosis of a medieval battle from event to national myth, 'The word Bouvines had been unceasingly heard in cavalry quarters and the Grande Armée's camps. Emblem for squadrons, passwords whispered by sentries, it was the name of a victory inserted by each generation, in its place between Tolbiac and Marignano, on the thread of a long litany of appropriation, elation, reassurance and consolation.'⁹ The humiliation of defeat in the Franco-Prussian war in 1871 marked a huge resurgence of interest in the battle, including the commissioning in 1879 of a striking series of stained glass windows for the church at Bouvines depicting the

defeat of the German emperor Otto IV and his invading army, while the anniversary of this French victory was being still more aggressively celebrated only weeks before the outbreak of a new war with Germany in 1914.¹⁰ Similarly, the Battle of Bannockburn, 1314, while not truly decisive in military terms, quickly came to symbolize the struggle for liberty, and the 700th anniversary of the battle reflected its continuing cultural and political potency for Scottish identity.¹¹ The battle of Lake Peipus (the 'Battle on the Ice') in 1242, where Alexander Nevskii, the prince of Novgorod, defeated the Teutonic Knights equally came to symbolize the repulse of a foreign invader, and as such was immortalized in the 1938 Eisenstein film with a score by Prokofiev.¹²

Even defeat might be mythologized: the battle of Kosovo, in which the Ottoman Turks overcame the Serbs in 1389, assumed an important place in Serbian national consciousness, with its anniversary chosen for declarations of war or the ratifications of peace treaties.¹³ The memory of defeats, moreover, could be nursed for centuries and where possible, avenged. Following his victory over the Russians in 1914, the German general Ludendorff deliberately chose to name the battle not Allenstein (Olsztyn), where the battle was actually fought, but after the nearby site of Tannenburg (or Grünwald), for it was there that in 1410 the Teutonic Knights had suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of a Polish-Lithuanian army. Developed from 1927 as the Tannenburg National Memorial, the site was subsequently chosen as Hindenburg's mausoleum and further exploited by the National Socialists from 1935.¹⁴ By comparison, perhaps the most significant medieval battle in English national mythology, that of Agincourt in 1415, is distinctive in being a victory attained not in a defensive war but in a campaign of conquest. Immortalized by Shakespeare, the battle's enduring resonance long after English ambitions in France had withered lay in large part in the powerful theme of the triumph of the beleaguered few, a band of brothers, against the many.¹⁵ Still more potent, Saladin's destruction of the army of the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem at Hattin in 1187, which resulted in his conquest of the Holy City, could be appropriated as symbolic of victory over 'crusaders' and colonialists, whether by Arab nationalists such as Nasser, dictators such as Saddam Hussein, or by current jihadis.¹⁶

Yet by contrast, few if any engagements of Anglo-Saxon England before the battle of Hastings in 1066 appear on the roll call of the many engagements of the Middle Ages which have been similarly memorialized and mythologized on such a scale. The chance survival of celebrated vernacular poems on the battles of *Brunanburh*, 937, where King Æthelstan 'won undying glory by the sword's edge in battle' and of the heroic last stand of Ealdorman Byrhtnoth against the Vikings at Maldon, 991, together with their concomitant importance in the extant corpus of Old English literature, has secured the enduring memory of these two engagements, but they stand in near isolation.¹⁷ While the unknown location of *Brunanburh* has precluded specific memorialization, Maldon has left a stronger imprint in local memory; in Ely cathedral, for example, the chapel of St George, dedicated as a memorial to those fallen in the Great War, contains a window erected in the 1920s depicting Byrhtnoth and Hereward the Wake as regional heroes from the Anglo-Saxon past (Figure 3.1), while in 2006 a bronze statue of Byrhtnoth by John Doubleday, with scenes from the battle and from tenth-century daily life on its plinth, was set up at Maldon overlooking the site of the engagement in 991.¹⁸ Nevertheless, such engagements scarcely play a role in national consciousness



Figure 3.1 Detail of a stained glass window, 1922, commemorating the Great War, depicting Byrhtnoth and his men before the Battle of Maldon in 991, from St George's Chapel, north transept, Ely Cathedral (photograph: M. Strickland).

comparable to that of the battles of Bouvines, Las Navas or Kosovo, and while within Britain the battle of Hastings remains far better known than any insular conflict before 1066, its political and cultural resonances are both distant and ambivalent.¹⁹

But what of the memory and commemoration of battles in Anglo-Saxon England itself before the cataclysm of 1066? How did writers such as Bede or the compilers of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* regard the place of battle in their conception of history and their remembered pasts? Which battles were recorded, in what ways and for what reasons? And beyond such texts, what can be recovered concerning the extent to which major engagements were remembered, and how far the actual sites of significant combats were marked or otherwise memorialized? The study of battle in Anglo-Saxon England is fraught with methodological challenges: the dominant role of oral forms of transmission of battle memory now beyond recovery, the paucity of the surviving

record, the laconic nature of annals, the borrowing from classical texts of vocabulary or verbatim description of battle by authors of Latin texts, and the reticence – even by lay authors who were warriors themselves – to provide detailed narratives. Nevertheless, this chapter argues that although very little can be known about the actual course of the great majority of engagements fought before 1066, the ways in which certain battles were selected for record and the manner of their memorialization are more revealing and indicate the central significance of battles as key cultural markers. It demonstrates their fundamental role in key narratives, whether to chart the early conquests of the *gens Anglorum*, the rise or fall of individual kingdoms, the advance of Christianity or the struggle with pagan invaders. It explores how beyond such historical writings and vernacular or Latin poetry, key engagements might be memorialized through mechanisms such as liturgical commemoration or the preservation of weapons or banners imbued with real or imagined associations with a major conflict, and examines the surviving evidence for the ways in which battlefields themselves could be identified and commemorated.

The limits of battle

In turning to these themes in relation to Anglo-Saxon England, it is important to be aware – not least in the context of a volume inspired by the commemoration of the Great War – that an exclusive focus on the memory and memorialization of battle may be distorting, not only in terms of the place of battle itself in warfare pre-1066 but also in terms of the commemoration of those affected by war and the ways in which conflict might be remembered. In terms of scale and duration, early medieval battles were far removed from the prolonged struggles of the First World War, fought as these were on an unprecedented scale. As Hew Strachan has noted: 'In the past battles had been affairs of single days and losses of perhaps 30 per cent had rendered armies unable to fight again until the following campaigning season ... In 1914-18 casualties mounted because the fighting was continuous. What were called battles lasted months, and previous generations would have described them as campaigns.'²⁰ By contrast, the Roman military writer Vegetius could observe in the late fourth century AD that 'a pitched battle (*conflictus publicus*) is defined by a struggle lasting two or three hours, after which all hope of the defeated party falls away.'²¹ Early medieval battles might vary in scale and duration, but most were fought by comparatively small numbers of the social elite and their followers. Conversely, however, raids or invasions by the enemy impacted far more widely on the population at large, for pre-Conquest warfare was characterized by the habitual enslavement of women and children, and the slaying of the old, infirm and others who impeded the effective movement of human booty. If the experience of war by civilian populations in the First World War differed markedly within and beyond Europe, the nature of early medieval warfare meant that there was little or no effective 'non-combatant' immunity, for these very elements of society were the principal targets.²²

Recorded memory, moreover, might focus less on individual engagements than on campaigns or wars, whether of defence or conquest, as extended struggles against an

enemy. Such an impression is strongly conveyed in Einhard's *Life of Charlemagne*, in which, amid a long catalogue of wars, the battles fought by the king, such as those in the Saxon wars at Detmold and on the River Hase, both in 783, receive only passing mention.²³ A similar sense is gained in the annals of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and the *Mercian Register* for Edward the Elder's reign and the campaigns of his sister Æthelflæd, in which major battles such as Tettenhall in 910 receive little prominence among a record of fortress-based warfare and *burh*-building, reflecting a massive and sustained communal effort; or still again in the sombre narration of the waning English fortunes against the renewed Viking attacks under Svein and Cnut. Alfred himself saw the parallel to his own wars against the Vikings in Orosius's description of Rome's life or death struggle with Hannibal and the Carthaginians, and noted how the Romans 'would never shrink from the war though they often stood on a small and hopeless foundation, so that at last they had the mastery over all those who before nearly had it over them'.²⁴

It was even possible, though exceptional, for some powerful kings who spent lifetimes campaigning never to fight a pitched battle.²⁵ The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* noted of King Edgar *sub anno* 959, with approbation but evident wonder, that 'God supported him so that kings and earls willingly submitted to him and were subject to whatever he wished. And without battle he brought under his sway all that he wished'.²⁶ Power so projected may also perhaps explain the lack of reference to any great battle linked to the establishment of the supremacy of the Mercian kings Æthelbald and Offa, though it is more likely that the West Saxon compilers of the *Chronicle* chose to suppress any major Mercian victories, just as the military successes of King Alfred's daughter Æthelflæd and her husband Ealdorman Æthelræd of Mercia would have been lost to posterity were it not for the independent record of the *Mercian Register*.²⁷

Equally, just as the study of medieval warfare has increasingly stressed the comparative infrequency of battle compared to the ubiquity of siege, raiding and devastation, so too assaults against cities or their resistance might well be perceived by contemporaries as more significant than battle. The fall of Jerusalem to the forces of the First Crusade in 1099 was an event that not only overshadowed the earlier battles fought en route, notably those of Dorylaeum in 1097 and Antioch in 1098, but impacted profoundly on the consciousness of Christendom. The day of its capture, July 15, was celebrated in the Patriarchate of Jerusalem as a feast day, 'the Jerusalem feast', with a special liturgy, while John of Würzburg, writing c. 1170, noted that at the Holy Sepulchre on the following day 'both in the giving of alms and in the prayers, they make solemn mention of all the faithful dead, more especially of those who fell on the occasion of the storming of Jerusalem, whose burying place near the Golden Gate is most famous'.²⁸ John, moreover, provides a precious glimpse of how the memory of such a great feat of arms could be contested: to his fury, he found that a memorial to the German crusader Wichman had been erased and replaced by verses claiming sole glory for the Franks for the capture of the city, which caused John to pen his own lines celebrating the role of Lotharingians in the taking of Jerusalem.²⁹

While the religious significance of the Holy City naturally made this an exceptional event, other sieges might achieve prominence in the memory of early medieval campaigns. Thus the Frankish defence of Paris against the Vikings in 885–6 was

famously celebrated in Abbo of St Germain's *Bella de Parisiacae urbis* (*The Wars of the City of Paris*), the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* lauded the stout resistance of London against Cnut's forces in 1016, and the major reverses inflicted on the Scots at their sieges of Durham in 1008 and 1039 were prominent victories to northern writers.³⁰ As these conflicts reveal, moreover, the distinction between battles and sieges was often blurred and significant engagements, costly in lives, might occur at the storming of fortresses. At York in 867, for example, the Great Army slew many Northumbrians and their two rival kings, Osbert and Ælla, who had effected an entry into the city, while at Derby in 917 the *Mercian Register* recalls how four thegns dear to Æthelflæd 'were killed within the gates'.³¹ Equally, besiegers might be routed by surprise sallies, as befell Osric, king of Deira, who in 634 was slain with most of his army when the British king Cædwalla, whom he had besieged in an *oppidum municipium* (probably York), carried out a surprise sally in force, while in 878 a desperate foray by the men of Somerset and Devon besieged in the fortress of Countisbury inflicted a heavy defeat on the Viking forces led by one of the sons of Ragnar Lothbrok.³² What constituted a 'battle' was thus not always sharply defined, nor restricted to the meeting of two armies in the open field in a *praelium campestre*, a form of encounter which might often, but not always, be accompanied by actions such as formal challenges or signifying the site for combat to mark out the ensuing engagement as a distinctive form of trial of strength and legitimacy.³³

'Wars of kites and crows'?

It is ironic that although the martial culture of the Anglo-Saxons placed much stress on lasting 'word-fame' achieved through feats of arms, so little record has survived of the engagements in which such deeds were performed. That the great majority of battles fought in pre-Conquest England have been consigned to obscurity or oblivion is no doubt in large measure due to the same reasons which make any attempt to reconstruct the nature, course and tactics of these early engagements so fraught with difficulty, if not impossible: the paucity of the historical record and the limitations of surviving sources, whether these be vernacular poetry, annals or the Latin narratives of writers such as Bede or Asser.³⁴ King Alfred himself noted how the fame of great men might perish 'through the bad conduct of those writers who – in their sloth and in carelessness and also in negligence – leave unwritten the virtues and deeds of those men who in their day were most renowned and most intent on honour'.³⁵ Such a dearth is further compounded by the unknown locations of the great majority of battlefields; the disputed site of *Brunanburh* is notorious, with over forty different locations being posited, and this for the battle which was probably one of the greatest of the age.³⁶

Descriptions of battle in medieval Latin narratives, moreover, are plagued by the potentially distorting influence of biblical and classical models (Figure 3.2); as Richard Abels and Stephen Morillo have demonstrated, for instance, much of the fuller narrative of the battles of Sherston and of *Assandun* between Edmund Ironside and Cnut in 1016 found in John of Worcester's *Chronicle* derives not from the lost version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* to which John had access but is taken almost verbatim from Sallust's



Figure 3.2 Representation of the battle against Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 14, with the combatants outfitted as warriors of the eleventh century (London, British Library, Cotton Claudius B.IV (s. xi^{2/4}), f. 24v) (© The British Library Board).

Cataline and the *Jurgurthine Wars*.³⁷ Use of classical military terminology – such, for example, as Asser’s reference to the Roman ‘testudo’ to describe Alfred’s formation at the battle of Ashdown in 871 – serves further to occlude the nature of actual formations or combat.³⁸ Those few military men who chose to write history also did so in Latin, but even they rarely recorded their own experiences of combat in any detail. It has been noted of the late tenth-century nobleman Ealdorman Æthelweard that ‘in his family the traditions of scribe and warrior met’, yet despite being far better placed than clerical authors to describe the nature of armies and conflict, his own Latin rendering of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* rarely adds significantly in terms of battle description to his vernacular exemplar.³⁹ Similarly, while the Carolingian nobleman Nithard’s Latin chronicle affords some precious details of warfare, it too is notably limited in what he tells us of the great Battle of Fontenoy in 841 in which he himself fought.⁴⁰ It is thus Asser’s account of the battle of Ashdown in 871 which remains one of the fullest of the period and, perhaps surprisingly, considerably more so than for Alfred’s great triumph at Edington which receives only a brief record. Yet though it provides valuable information relating to the contingents of the Viking army and even the topography, it is evidently a carefully crafted tale to highlight the bravery and initiative of Alfred, *secundarius* or heir apparent to his brother King Æthelred; when Æthelred delays in order to hear mass, Alfred is forced to engage one part of the Viking host in battle without the king’s aid but ‘supported by divine counsel and strengthened by divine help’.⁴¹ The battle seems to have been an important one in blunting the onslaught of

the Great Army, but it is of greater importance to Asser as an early signifier of Alfred's military capacity and fitness for rule.

It was small wonder that post-Conquest authors such as John of Worcester turned to classical battle narratives or to later oral traditions to augment the scanty annals of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* which they clearly deemed to be inadequate.⁴² For the laconic and often formulaic notices of battles in the *Chronicle* rarely give any details of the fighting itself and frequently are limited to recording prominent leaders who fell in the conflict. In some cases, only one side in an engagement is identified, as, for example, the bald notice *sub anno* 746 that 'in this year King Selred was slain,' or in 798, when 'there was a great battle in Northumbria in spring, on 2nd April, at Walley, and Alric, Heardberht's son, was killed and many others with him,' though we are not told by whom.⁴³ Many of the early entries in the *Chronicle* are simply a bare record of battles, which reveal the significance of major engagements as markers of memory, but give no sense of the nature of these struggles.⁴⁴ Yet even what must have been formative and, for the *Chronicle*'s compilers, comparatively recent engagements in the rise of Wessex, such as Egbert's victories over the Mercian king Beornwulf at Wroughton in 825, and over a combined army of Cornish and 'a great naval force' of Danes at Hingston Down in 838, receive only the barest record. Given the likely circumstances of the *Chronicle*'s production in the 880s, this is particularly striking.

More localized engagements, by contrast, could be afforded prominence. Hence, the *Chronicle* recounted a particularly bloody engagement fought between the men of a Mercian shire or sub-kingdom and a West Saxon shire in 802: 'Ealdorman Aethelmund rode from the province of the Hwiccs across the border at Kempsford. And Ealdorman Weohstan with the people of Wiltshire met him, and a great battle took place, and both ealdormen were killed.'⁴⁵ It was this annal which prompted John Milton to comment dismissively: 'Such bickering to recount, met often in these our writers, what more worth is it than to chronicle the wars of kites or crows flocking and fighting in the air?'⁴⁶ Such entries do, however, afford an important glimpse of the memory of conflicts operating at a more regional level of the shires and the earlier tribal groupings which they often reflected. As the shire continued to form the fundamental unit of later Anglo-Saxon armies, so the *Chronicle* continued to reflect regional identities – and rivalries – within larger military operations. Hence, it noted with unusual detail how in 903, as Edward the Elder's army withdrew from ravaging East Anglia, the men of Kent 'lingered behind there against his command – and he had sent seven messengers to them'. Overtaken and defeated by the pursuing Danish army, two ealdormen and a number of Anglo-Saxon nobles were slain, though the *Chronicle* was eager to stress that for the Danes it had been a pyrrhic victory, with their heavy losses including a king, jarls and, most significantly, their ally, Edward's cousin and rival Æthelwold.⁴⁷ In the *Maldon* poet's famous celebration of the valiant last stand of Earl Byrhtnoth and the men of Essex against the Vikings at Maldon in 991, we surely have a chance survival of the kind of verse that must have commonly extolled the deeds of the men of the shire and their leaders, while we catch an echo of local oral tradition in the *Chronicle*'s proud statement that although Ulfcetel, ealdorman of East Anglia, had been defeated by the Danes in 1004, yet 'if their full strength had been there, the Danes would never

have got back to their ships; as they themselves said, they never met worse fighting in England than Ulfcetel dealt to them.⁴⁸

If the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* gives few details of the course of battles, the prominence it gives to recording kings and nobles who fell in combat is one of its most distinctive features. Particularly for the earlier annals, its compilers may have drawn on other forms of written record such as king lists, necrologies or obits in *libri vitae*, but from the later ninth century the *Chronicle's* more detailed record not only of important Anglo-Saxon casualties but also of Viking kings or jarls who fell in battle suggests that lists of high-ranking casualties were being compiled in the aftermath of battle.⁴⁹ In the later medieval period, it would be the role of the heralds to record the names of the noble dead, identified by their coats of arms. Who performed this function in earlier conflicts, and how the prominent dead were recognized, is unknown: in the Scandinavian world, as in earlier Anglo-Saxon England, the task most likely fell to the poets who accompanied armies into battle, and who were the guardians of memory of deeds both of courage and of shame. But such a role may conceivably have been undertaken by clerics with the army, such as royal chaplains, and in the listing of fallen ealdormen, reeves, king's thegns and other notables we may perhaps have a reflection of the precociously literate dimension of later Anglo-Saxon government argued for by James Campbell.⁵⁰

The chance survival of the *Battle of Maldon* raises the further question of how far the laconic annals recording battle in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* were intended merely as an aide memoire, implying access to fuller oral accounts and poems (whether legendary or more contemporary). The chronicler Æthelweard's comment that *Brunanburh* 'is still called the "great battle (*bellum magnum*)" to the present day by the common folk' indicates the currency of its memory in the 970s–80s.⁵¹ Though an isolated occurrence, the inclusion of the famous Old English poem on this battle in the *Chronicle* entry for 937, possibly added in the reign of Edmund to highlight his role in Athelstan's great victory, strongly suggests access to a wider body of vernacular verse commemorating major battles.⁵² Within the Scandinavian world, more certainly, skaldic verses such as Sighvat the Skald's *Ólafsdrápa* (*Poem of Olaf*) or Ottar the Black's *Knútsdrápa* (*Poem of Cnut*), which respectively lists the victories of St Olaf of Norway – 'Now have I, O stirrer up of conflicts, reckoned nine battles' – and of Cnut, vividly reflects the primacy of battles in the recording the achievements of kings and jarls.⁵³ Nor were such compositions confined only to the praise poets: in the *Liðsmannaflokkur* (*Song of the Men of the Host*) we catch the collective voice of Cnut's army, boasting of its deeds of valour in combat in England, while skaldic verses attributed to Harald Hardrada show a king himself composing poems on forthcoming battle immediately prior to his demise at Stamford Bridge in 1066.⁵⁴

By its very nature the poetry of scop and skald presents a highly stylized vision of battle.⁵⁵ How far the heroic ideals of courage, loyalty and generosity set out in poems such as the *Battle of Maldon* represent the reality of conduct in battle has been much debated, not least in relation to the topos of retainers choosing to die for their lord rather than leaving the battlefield.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, when combined with the evidence of the narrative sources, the essential nature of early medieval battle emerges clearly enough. In the wars related by Bede, many kings met a violent death in battle, while one of the

most striking and consistent features of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's* notices of battle is the high number of noble casualties, whether Anglo-Saxon earldomen, reeves, thegns, bishops or abbots, or Viking kings or jarls. For before the importation with the Norman Conquest of notions of honourable surrender and the expectation of ransom, the fate of defeated warriors was almost certain death; nobles were peremptorily slain in or after battle, precisely because they were the military elite.⁵⁷ In 878, 937 or 991, the choice was a stark one between victory, death or shameful flight. Some ran away; the *Maldon* poet denounced for posterity the cowardly flight of Godric on the very horse of Ealdorman Byrhtnoth whom he had abandoned in the fray, while the cowardice of Ealdorman Ælfric, the treachery of Eadric Streona and the betrayal of the king and people by lack of resolution in the face of the Danes are a leitmotif running powerfully through the *Chronicle's* annals from the 980s to 1016. Brief though his description of Svein's defeat of Earl Ulfcelt in 1010 was, the chronicler found space to record that while the men of East Anglia immediately fled, 'the men of Cambridgeshire stood steadfast', but that after many of their leaders had fallen, it was Turcytel Mare's Head who 'first started the flight'.⁵⁸ But it was precisely in the panic of the rout and pursuit that the majority of casualties occurred in medieval engagements, a grim reality vividly captured by the *Brunanburh* poet: 'The whole day long the West Saxons with mounted companies kept in pursuit of the hostile peoples, grievously they cut down the fugitives from behind with their whetted swords'.⁵⁹ And if the devouring of the dead by birds and beasts was a stock feature of artistic or poetic depiction of the aftermath of battle, it nevertheless reflected the reality that in many conflicts, the bodies of the enemy were left unburied, while some might suffer mutilation or beheading for grisly trophies of war.⁶⁰

In Frankia, vernacular triumphal poems such as the Old High German *Hludwigslied* (*Song of Louis*) celebrating the victory of Louis III at Saucourt over the Vikings in 881, found a parallel in courtly Latin verses, such as those lauding the successful campaign of King Pippin of Italy against the Avars in 796, Sedulius Scottus's 'On the Slaughter of Northmen' by the emperor Lothar and John Scotus Eriugena's poem in which he gave thanks for Charles the Bald's victory over his brother Louis at Laon in 859.⁶¹ Verses celebrating *Brunanburh* contained in a panegyric to Athelstan suggest that at the courts of the West Saxon kings victories might similarly be commemorated in Latin praise poetry.⁶² Such oral memories were paralleled by visual depictions of great battles, though these have been still more comprehensively lost. The Frankish poet Ermold the Black, who had fought for Louis the Pious's son Pippin of Aquitaine in 824, mentions paintings at the royal palace at Ingelheim which celebrated the Carolingian dynasty's victories, while famously Byrhtnoth's widow Ælflæd bequeathed a tapestry depicting the deeds of her husband to the monastery of Ely, where he was buried.⁶³ The Bayeux Tapestry may well have been exceptional in its size and sophistication, but it was hardly unique, and Baudri, abbot of Bourgueil, writing c. 1100 refers to wall hangings in the chamber of William the Conqueror's daughter Adela of Blois depicting the Norman Conquest, along with biblical scenes, the siege of Troy and events from Roman history.⁶⁴ Such visual narratives in turn suggest intriguing, if ultimately unrecoverable, links between pictorial depictions of battle and oral or written accounts.⁶⁵

Banners, armour and weapons, whether passed down as treasured heirlooms or vaunted as rich gifts or war booty, might equally preserve traditions of conflict and

victory. Bede noted that the monks of Bardney Abbey placed over the tomb of King Oswald 'his banner (*vexillum*) of gold and purple', presumably furnished by his niece Osthryth, queen of Æthelred of Mercia, 'in order that the royal saint might be perpetually remembered'.⁶⁶ How far Oswald's sanctity made this an exceptional act is uncertain, but the sending of banners of defeated enemies to rulers was a widespread practice.⁶⁷ The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records the capture of 'the banner which they call the Raven' in the victory of the men of Somerset and Devon over the brother of Ivar in 878, and it was still the subject of legend in the early twelfth century.⁶⁸ Following his triumph at Hastings William the Conqueror sent Harold's 'famous banner in which the image of an armed warrior was woven in pure gold' to Alexander II, mirroring the pope's gift of a papal banner for the 1066 expedition.⁶⁹ Arms associated with holy rulers or military saints might be preserved as relics, such as the helmet and hauberk of St Wenceslaus (duke of Bohemia, 907–35) kept in St Vitus Cathedral, Prague (Figure 3.3).⁷⁰ William of Malmesbury could note in the 1120s that the sword lost by Athelstan but miraculously replaced by St Aldhelm in the nick of time to ward off a surprise attack on his camp by Olaf just prior to *Brunanburh* was preserved in the royal treasury 'on account of that miracle'.⁷¹ Malmesbury also preserved the tradition that Athelstan had received from Duke Hugh of the Franks a sword which belonged to the Emperor Constantine, whose hilt contained two nails from the True Cross; Charlemagne's lance, which was none other than the holy lance of Longinus which pierced the side of Christ and which the Frankish emperor had carried against the Moors in Spain; and 'the pennant that St Maurice carried before the legion'.⁷²

If such weapons were venerated for their miraculous powers, others were treasured for their more secular associations with great warriors and their triumphs (Figure 3.4). In 1015, the ætheling Athelstan, son of King Æthelred II, bequeathed to his brother



Figure 3.3 The hauberk of St Wenceslas (Prague Cathedral) (Wikipedia Commons).



Figure 3.4 A sword, probably made in tenth-century Germany but with hilt-fittings added in England, found in the River Witham, Lincolnshire, 1848 (© Trustees of the British Museum).

Edmund a sword 'which belonged to Offa', the great king of Mercia (r. 757–96), and as late as the twelfth-century Angevin rulers could possess swords attributed to legendary figures such as Tristan or Arthur, or which were claimed to be the work of the smith Wayland.⁷³ Ancestral blades might be redolent with memories of warfare, and of feud: *Beowulf* dramatically recalls how, after a uneasy peace with the Frisians following the death of the Half-Dane Hnæf, Hengest had been stirred to vengeance when 'Hunlaf's son placed Battle-Flame, the best of swords, in his lap; its edges were well known to the Jutes.'⁷⁴ Many weapons and banners must have been dedicated as votive offerings to churches, but the *Beowulf* poet was no doubt drawing on knowledge of others kept as secular trophies when he described how the hero slew Grendel's mother with a 'victory-blessed blade, an ancient sword made by giants, firm in its edges, the pride of fighters' which was hanging on the wall of her underground lair.⁷⁵ Its golden hilt depicted an earlier conflict, the destruction of the race of giants in the great Flood, as well as the name in runes of its first owner; by gifting it to King Hrothgar, *Beowulf* in turn ensured it would in future recall the Geat's own struggle with the monsters that had beset the Danish hall of Heorot.⁷⁶

Battle and the origins of the *gens Anglorum*

Surviving epic poems such as *Beowulf* and the *Fight at Finnesburg* fragment reveal how deeply rooted the earlier conflicts of their ancestors were in the collective memory of the Anglo-Saxons. Such combats may perhaps have been among the subjects of those 'English poems (*Saxonica poemata*)' which Asser notes Alfred as having frequently heard and memorized as a child, but certainly the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*'s record of

the battles of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes against the Britons in the later fifth and sixth centuries indicate the important place played by battles as key markers in the origin legends of the earliest Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and the establishment of the *gens Anglorum* in Britain.⁷⁷ As Nicholas Brooks has noted, the *Chronicle*'s 'account of Hengist and Æsc's victories may have served as "charter-myths", justifying the dynasty's control of both the eastern Jutish half and the West Saxon half of Kent'.⁷⁸ How such early victories could subsequently be linked to lineage and noble pedigree is indicated by Asser's remark that Alfred's mother Osburh was the daughter of Oslac, descended from the 'Goths and Jutes' and in particular from the line of Stuf and Wihtgar, who had defeated the British at Wihtgarabyrig on the Isle of Wight.⁷⁹

As for Kent, so the creation of Wessex was signalled by a series of engagements marking the slow but inexorable conquest of the British. Some of these early battles were linked to pseudo-etymologies, as *sub anno* 508, when the *Chronicle* recorded that 'Cerdic and Cynric killed a British king, whose name was Natanleod, and 5,000 men with him. Then the land right up to Charford was called Netley after him.' Others were associated with the fall of specific towns or cities to the invaders, such as the victory over the Britons at *Biedcanford* in 571, which resulted in the capture of Limsbury, Ayelsbury, Bensington and Eynsham, while Gloucester, Cirencester and Bath are noted as having fallen to the Saxons following the great battle won by Cuthwine and Ceawlin at Dyrham in 577. Baldly listed and formulaic though they are, the fact that notices of these early battles, many of which are not to be found in Bede, were brought together in the 890s by writers within the orbit of Alfred's court at a time of Viking menace indicates a desire to remind not only the West Saxons but also other English of their common identity, conquests and invincibility in war. For the same reason the *Chronicle* was keen to record occasions on which rival kings of Wessex and of Mercia had joined forces to defeat the British, as in 743 when 'Æthelbald and Cuthred fought against the Britons', even if Mercian victories in other contexts were probably deliberately suppressed.

Strikingly, the *Brunanburh* poet could link Athelstan's great victory in 937 with these triumphs of the *gens*' more distant past: 'Never yet in this island before this, by what books tell us and our ancient sages, was a greater slaughter of a host made by the edge of the sword, since the Angles and Saxons came thither from the east, invading Britain over the broad seas, and the proud assailants, warriors eager for glory, overcame the Britons and won a country'.⁸⁰ Likewise in the prologue to his own *Chronicon*, Ealdorman Æthelweard told his relative, Matilda, abbess of Essen, that she could find in the following pages 'so many wars and slayings of men and no small wreck of navies on the waves of ocean, especially with reference to our ancestors in Britain from Germany'.⁸¹ A parallel tradition among the British, glimpsed early in Gildas's reference to a significant defeat of the Saxons at the siege of Mount Badon, c. 500, cast resistance to the tide of conquest in terms of increasingly legendary battles and the growing figure of Arthur, whom 'Nennius' had fight twelve great engagements, while the Welsh *Armes Prydyen Vawr* (*The Great Prophecy of Britain*), composed c. 927–50, looked to a great battle in which the Cymry would drive the descendants of 'Hors and Hengist ... who purchased Thanet with cunning falsehood', out of the island of Britain.⁸²

Expansion and hegemony

In a similar manner to the *Chronicle*'s narration of the *Adventus Saxonum*, Bede could depict battles as formative moments in the expansion of the Anglians, and in the ebb and flow of Northumbrian supremacy. He was clearly reflecting a strong Northumbrian tradition in regarding Æthelfrith's great victory over the men of Dalriada under Aedan macGabran at *Degsastan*, c. 603, as one such defining moment in the kingdom's expansion, noting that 'from that time no Irish king in Britain dared make war on the English race to this day.'⁸³ As Colgrave suggests, Bede's reference to Æthelfrith as 'a very brave king and most eager for glory' who 'ravaged the Britons more than any other English ruler', and his statement that Aedan fled with few survivors, suggests that Bede may have been drawing on a vernacular poem celebrating the battle, though he gives it a biblical gloss by comparing Æthelfrith to Saul.⁸⁴ Bede equally uses his account of the pagan Æthelfrith's victory over the Britons at Heronbridge, near Chester, c. 613 to depict him as the rod of God's anger against the British clergy, and in particular the monks of Bangor-on-Dee, who had earlier refused to accept the reforms demanded by Augustine. Seeing the clergy assembled separately, and being informed that they were praying for the success of their army, Æthelfrith is made to remark, 'If they are crying to their God against us, they are fighting against us even if they do not bear arms.' He therefore attacked and slew supposedly some twelve hundred clergy first, before routing the remainder of their army.⁸⁵

Æthelfrith's own death in battle at the river Idle in 616 against Edwin, powerfully aided by Rædwald king of the East Angles, marked the rise of the Deiran dynasty to power within Northumbria and the subjugation of Bernicia to it.⁸⁶ But for Bede, Edwin's success while yet a pagan was already part of a divinely preordained path to conversion; and his subsequent pledge in 625 to convert should he triumph over Cwichelm of Wessex, who had sent an assassin to kill him, has an evident parallel with Gregory of Tours' story of how Clovis, in the midst of a battle against the Alemanni at Tolbiac c. 496 (or 506), promised to become a Christian should he be granted victory.⁸⁷ In Bede's subsequent narrative, battles become critical moments in both the expansion and defence of the new religion as much as of Northumbrian hegemony. Edwin's defeat and death at *Haethfelfth* (Hatfield Chase) in 633 is cast as the result of an unholy alliance of the pagan Penda of Mercia and the godless Cædwalla of Gwynedd, who 'rebelled' (*rebellavit*) against Edwin's overlordship and who, 'though a Christian by name and profession, was nevertheless a barbarian in heart and spared neither women nor innocent children.'⁸⁸ The defeat, in which 'the whole of his army was either slain or scattered', evidently had severe consequences, including perhaps the temporary occupation of part of Northumbria by Cædwalla, the destruction of key secular and ecclesiastical centres (with Yeavering abandoned and the royal vill and church at *Campodonum*, near Dewsbury, Yorkshire, burned), and the slaying of the apostasized rulers of a now separated Bernicia and Diera.⁸⁹ Yet for Bede, the struggle becomes an epic one for the very survival not only of Christian Northumbria but for the *gens Anglorum* itself, since Cædwalla intended, so Bede alleges, 'to wipe out the whole English nation from the land of Britain.'⁹⁰ The victory of Oswald, Æthelfrith's son, over Cædwalla at *Denisesburn*, or *Hefenfeld* (Heavenfield) as it was afterwards known, is thus portrayed by Bede as a holy

war; the king erects a cross prior to the battle, an act implicitly recalling Eusebius's story of the vision of Constantine at the battle of the Milvian Bridge against Maxentius in 312 and the divine exhortation '*In hoc signo vincis*'.⁹¹ Before this cross, Oswald and his men kneel in prayer that 'God defend us in his mercy from the proud and fierce enemy; for he knows that we are fighting in a just cause for the preservation of our whole race (*iusta pro salute gentis nostrae bella suscepimus*).'⁹²

The religious significance of such engagements was heightened by the sanctification of Edwin and Oswald as Christian kings who had met a violent death against a pagan enemy. Oswiu's subsequent battle in 655 against the great army of Penda at the river Winwæd, with a small force 'but trusting in Christ as their leader', is couched in similar terms of holy war. When Oswiu's attempts to buy off battle with tribute are rejected, Bede has him declare that 'if the heathen foe will not accept our gifts, let us offer them to him who will, even the Lord our God'. He then vows that if victory should be granted him he will dedicate his daughter Ælflæd to the religious life and grant twelve estates to found two monasteries.⁹³ His resulting triumph over an enemy which Bede claims 'was thirty times as great' as his own army obliterated the threat of pagan attack, and for Bede led directly to the conversion of the Mercians.⁹⁴

It was natural that both the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Asser should likewise cast the wars against Vikings as a righteous struggle to defend the homeland from the heathen. Thus Asser, who consistently refers to the protagonists as Christians and pagans, noted how at Ashdown 'one side is bent on evil, the other side fighting for life and their loved ones and their native land'.⁹⁵ The *Mercian Register* recalls how in 917 Æthelflæd took Derby 'with the help of God', while Æthelweard noted of Edward the Elder's victory at Tettenhall that the Danish kings Healfdene and Eowysl were slain and that Ivar 'also hastened to the court of the infernal one'.⁹⁶ What is striking, however, is how comparatively little part the direct intervention of saints or the miraculous play in such accounts compared to Ottonian narratives of victories over the pagan Magyars or to later crusading narratives of combat with the heathen.⁹⁷ The latter frequently claim that military saints such as St George were seen fighting alongside the army of the faithful, as during Count Roger's victory over the Muslims at Cerami in Sicily in 1063, or the miraculous appearance of George, Demetrius and other saints to assist the beleaguered crusaders at Antioch in 1098.⁹⁸ By contrast, the *Brunanburh* poem, while unambiguous in depicting the battle as defending and consolidating the overlordship of Athelstan, contains only a single religious reference, that to the sun as 'God's bright candle'; and Bede's account of the miraculous 'Alleluia victory' by the Christian Britons over the 'Saxons and Picts', who were routed in terror when St Germanus of Auxerre instructed them to shout 'Alleluia' in unison, finds few parallels, even in Bede's own text.⁹⁹

End of empire

If battles might be seen as key markers in the expansion or defence of peoples, kingdoms and the faith, defeats could equally be seen to hail the retreat from empire or a kingdom's collapse. Bede regarded the defeat and death of King Ecgrifh at the hands of the Picts at Nechtansmere (or Dunnichen) in 685 as divine punishment on the

Northumbrian king for having unjustly sent a force to ravage the Irish, 'a harmless race that had always been most friendly to the English,' and which had impiously plundered churches and monasteries. In so doing he had gone against the advice not only of the holy man Egbert but also of St Cuthbert, then bishop of Lindisfarne.¹⁰⁰ Looking back from 731, Bede regarded this catastrophe as a tipping point, for 'from this time the hopes and strength of the kingdom of the Angles began to "ebb and fall away"'.¹⁰¹ 'For the Picts,' he noted, 'recovered their own land which the English had formerly held, while the Irish who lived in Britain and some part of the British nation recovered their independence, which they have now enjoyed for about forty-six years. Many of the English were either slain by the sword or enslaved or escaped by flight from Pictish territory'.¹⁰² The battle seems to have left a deep impression on Northumbrian memory, and the anonymous *Life of Cuthbert* has the saint foresee Ecgrith's death in a vision.¹⁰³

In Frankia, the bloody Battle of Fontenoy, fought in 841 in the context of a civil war between the sons of Louis the Pious, could be similarly regarded by Regino of Prüm, writing his *Chronicon* at the turn of the ninth century, as ushering in the end of the Frankish empire, for the slaughter there of the Frankish nobility had opened the way for the attacks of the Northmen.¹⁰⁴ As it had involved the slaying of fellow Franks and Christians, the battle had necessitated the imposition of penance by an assembly of clergy and had provoked deep soul-searching among the Frankish aristocracy. Nithard, who took part on the winning side, spends far longer in his account demonstrating how Charles and Louis repeatedly sought a peaceful outcome from Lothar and their reluctance to join battle than he does in giving details of the fight itself.¹⁰⁵ A lament on the battle composed by Angelbert, a nobleman who had fought on the side of Lothar, spoke of the suffering and carnage and wished oblivion on so wretched a conflict:

'Be no glory of that battle, never let that fight be sung,
from his rising in the morning to the setting of the sun,
South and North, bewail them who in that ill change to death were done.
Cursed be the day that saw it, in the circuit of the year
count it not, let it be razed from the memory of men,
never shine the sun upon it, nor its twilight break the dawn.'¹⁰⁶

Bede, by contrast, had voiced less aversion to battle between fellow Christian rulers of the early kingdoms. Thus, his account of the great battle in 679 between Ecgrith and Æthelred of the Mercians, in which Ecgrith's brother Ælfwine was killed, focused on the fact that 'although there was good reason for fiercer fighting and prolonged hostilities between the kings and between these warlike peoples', peace was brought about through the mediation of Archbishop Theodore.¹⁰⁷ Bede undoubtedly knew of Theodore's *Penitential*, with its penalties for killing even in a licit public war, yet he mentions no imposition of penance on the warring parties.¹⁰⁸ Instead, he noted without any disapproval that Ecgrith, 'to whom the duty of vengeance belonged', accepted the wergild for his slain brother from the Mercian king, thereby allowing hostilities to be ended.¹⁰⁹ By the mid-eleventh century, however, a sense of shared identity and aversion to battle in the context of civil war emerges powerfully in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's* remark that when in 1052 the forces of the exiled Earl Godwine confronted those of

King Edward the Confessor at London, peace was made, for 'it was hateful to almost all of them to fight against men of their own race, for there was little else that was worth anything apart from Englishmen on either side; and also they did not wish the country to be laid open to foreigners, through destroying each other'.¹¹⁰

Other battles were viewed as ushering in not a decline in power but a complete defeat and subjugation. Thus the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* regarded Cnut's victory over Edmund Ironside at Ashingdon in 1016 as decisive, for 'all the nobility of England was there destroyed' and 'Cnut had the victory and won for himself all the English people'.¹¹¹ Hastings was to be seen in a similar light. Thus the E version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* noted starkly 'and Harold came from the north and fought with him [Duke William] before all the army had come, and there he fell and his two brothers Gyrth and Leofwine; and William conquered this country'. 'And the French remained masters of the field', added the D version, 'even as God granted it to them because of the sins of the people'.¹¹² Beyond these laconic entries, however, the magnitude of William's victory seems to have engendered a traumatized silence among Anglo-Saxon contemporaries, and it was not until the next generation that Anglo-Norman writers felt able to return to the subject.¹¹³ The new masters not only celebrated their triumph at Hastings in poetry, narrative accounts and embroidery but also brought with them memories of their own pivotal battles. Looking back from the 1070s, both William of Jumièges and William of Poitiers could hail Duke William's defeat of a rebel coalition at Val-ès-Dunes in 1047 as the critical moment in his consolidation of power in the duchy, and it was presumably a scribe writing at the direction of a Norman abbot who, sometime after the Conquest, added the brief Latin interpolation 'the battle of Val-ès-Dunes' into the Peterborough Chronicle, as well as a subsequent note of the significant Norman victory over a French-led coalition at Mortemer in 1054.¹¹⁴

Sites of memory? Memorial and commemoration of battle

The Conqueror's establishment of Battle abbey on the site of his victory over Harold in 1066 remains one of the most prominent examples of a medieval votive foundation established on a field of battle.¹¹⁵ Its own chronicle tradition, moreover, reveals how the abbey itself endeavoured to sustain and proclaim the significance of the battle to the crown and to the ruling Anglo-Norman aristocracy. Nowhere was this more perfectly captured than in the words this chronicle put into the mouth of Richard de Luci, the king's justiciar and brother of Abbot Walter, when he urged Henry II to renew a charter of William the Conqueror that had deteriorated from age: 'It is proper for you, if it please you my lord, to renew the charter of the church of Battle. Even if all its charters perished, all of us should be its charters, for by the conquest at Battle we were all enfeoffed'.¹¹⁶

But to what extent were earlier battlefields in Anglo-Saxon England marked or memorialized, and how far did they serve, in Jay Winter's evocative phrase, as 'sites of memory, sites of mourning'?¹¹⁷ Some battle sites were clearly well known. Bede says that Æthelfrith's victory over Aedán mac Gabráin in c. 603 took place at *Degsastan*, 'a very famous place (*in loco celeberrimo*)', which implies the battlefield was recognizable, presumably by the stone which gave the place its name.¹¹⁸ Recent anthropological

approaches to early battle sites have stressed the proximity of battles to key features in the landscape, including river crossings, prehistoric burial mounds or stones, and earlier fortifications, while some sites, such as that of *Woddesbeorg*, named as a battle site in the *Chronicle* in both 592 and 715, have been identified with some certainty.¹¹⁹ Whether or not we accept the intriguing suggestion that Anglo-Saxon armies may deliberately have sought battle 'in landscapes characterized by their sinister and marginal aspects', the proximity of some conflicts to ancient monuments doubtless rendered their locations more lasting in memory.¹²⁰ As Ryan Lavelle has noted, the fact that the battle of Edington took place on land that formed part of a West Saxon royal estate may well have assisted its continuing memory, while Alfred's mustering of his forces close to 'Egbert's stone' subsequently linked the victory to memory of the king pivotal to the rise of West Saxon power. It seems probable that it was for its powerful associations with Alfred's victory in 878 that King Eadwig chose *Ethandun* as the site for an assembly in 957.¹²¹

Trees appear as common markers of battle sites. Asser recalls how he visited the battlefield of Ashdown, presumably with Alfred as guide, and saw the 'rather small and solitary thorn tree' around which the two sides fought, while the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* noted that in 1066 Harold came against William 'at the hoary apple tree'.¹²² Later traditions associated ash trees with the sites of King Oswald of Northumbria's victory at Heavenfield and of his defeat and death at *Maserfelth*: in the 1160s, Reginald of Durham described the traditional site of the latter engagement at Oswestry as marked by a 'white church' at the spot Oswald fell, and nearby a well and a sacred ash tree.¹²³ There are no securely identified examples of battle memorial stones from Anglo-Saxon England comparable with the Pictish stone at Aberlemno, which combines a cross on one face with a detailed battle scene that may depict the defeat of the Northumbrians at Nechtansmere in 685 (Figure 3.5), or with the late tenth-century Sueno Stone, near Forres, which depicts scenes from a great battle, possibly the victory of the men of Moray over the Scots king Dubh at Kinloss in 966.¹²⁴ It may be that such a practice was culturally restricted to the north-east of Britain, but it is surely not impossible that among the many surviving fragments of Anglo-Saxon sculpted stones, some may once have formed part of crosses or markers placed to commemorate sites of battle.

Sites associated with the death in battle of those subsequently considered saints were naturally the focus of particular commemoration.¹²⁵ Bede notes that the site of Oswald's death at *Maserfelth* had been marked soon after his death by healing miracles, and that the removal from the spot of soil credited with curing properties had created 'a hole as deep as a man's height'.¹²⁶ Heavenfield was more famously marked, for (as Bede recorded) the place where Oswald erected his cross before the battle 'is still shown today and is held in great veneration'; numerous healing miracles had likewise occurred there and people still cut slivers of wood from the cross to mix in water, then give to sick men and animals (Figure 3.6).¹²⁷ Bede clearly reveals, moreover, how commemoration at the battlefield evolved from such pilgrimage first to a site of liturgical veneration by the monks of Hexham, and then to the establishment of a church on the site:

To this place the brethren of the church at Hexham, not far away, have long made it their custom to come every year, on the day before that on which King Oswald



Figure 3.5 The battle scene on the Pictish Aberlemno Stone (Angus) (Wikipedia Commons).

was killed, to keep vigil there for the benefit of his soul, to sing many psalms of praise, and next morning to offer up the holy sacrifice and oblation on his behalf. And since that good custom has spread, a church has lately been built there so that the place has become still more sacred and worthy of honour in the eyes of all.¹²⁸

Though Bede makes no mention of prayers for those fallen in battle other than Oswald, the desire to offer such wider intercession is suggested by the *Whitby Life of Gregory the Great*, written between 704 and 714. This records how Trimma, a priest in a monastery south of the Humber, was commanded in a dream to go to a place ‘in the district of Hatfield Chase’, where King Edwin of Northumbria had been killed in battle in 633, to remove his bones and take them to the monastery of Whitby. When Trimma asked how he could find a place that was unknown to him, he was instructed to go to a village in Lindsey and find a *ceorl* named Teoful, who would be able to guide him to the battlefield. The battle site itself was evidently known to certain locals, but not marked.



Figure 3.6 The site of the battle of Heavenfield in modern times, with a wooden cross erected in 1927 on the site of an earlier stone one (photograph: M. Strickland).

Trimma was duly led to the site, where his digging eventually yielded the *thesaurum desiderabile* of Edwin's bones (*sancta ossa*), which were brought to Whitby and placed in the church of St Peter near the altar of St Gregory.¹²⁹ The *Life* goes on to note that

it is also related of this priest who afterwards lived for a time on the holy site of the first burial that he had frequently seen the spirits (*spiritus*) of four of the slain, who were undoubtedly baptized people, coming in splendid array to visit their own bodies. The priest added that, if he could have done so, he would have liked to build a monastery there.¹³⁰

The monastery was never established, but Trimma clearly believed that such a foundation was desirable not only for the veneration of King Edwin but also for the souls of his Christian companions who had fallen in the battle of *Haethfelth*, and who had yet received no fitting burial or commemoration.

Votive monasteries founded as thank offerings for victory might preserve the memory of the conflict which gave rise to them, but were not necessarily established on the site of the battle itself.¹³¹ When Oswiu sought to fulfil the vow he had made prior to engaging Penda at the Winwaed, he duly provided twelve small estates totalling 120 hides, but half of these were in Bernicia and half in Deira.¹³² Likewise, Alfred established a votive monastery not at the site of his greatest battle, Edington, but at Athelney, partly no doubt because the location afforded it the safety of the defensive complex of the two

forts at Athelney and Lydd, and because the choice of site may have reflected the critical role Athelney played as a refuge from Guthrum's forces at the nadir of his fortunes.¹³³ One can only speculate as to whether, if he had emerged the victor at Hastings, Harold Godwineson would have founded a votive abbey to commemorate his crushing defeat of Harold Hardrada and his Norwegians at Stamford Bridge. As it was, because the Normans had no interest in preserving the memory of this northern battle nor the local Anglo-Saxons in affording invaders decent burial, Orderic Vitalis could note that some sixty years after the conflict, the site was still strewn with 'a great mountain of dead men's bones', making the site of the battlefield unmistakable to travellers.¹³⁴

Those foundations established in the context of successful conquest, rather than to give thanks for salvation from invasion, might have more ambiguous and multivalent meaning. Though its location has been much debated, the church built by Cnut to commemorate his crucial triumph at Ashingdon in 1016 may have been intended not only as a victory monument but as an act of reconciliation with the defeated Anglo-Saxons and a symbol of his Christian kingship.¹³⁵ Conversely, while William the Conqueror's foundation of Battle abbey served in part as an act of atonement for the bloodshed at Hastings, the erection of the high altar over the very spot where Harold was said to have fallen sent an unambiguous message that the Norman victory has been the just judgement of God in a great trial by battle.¹³⁶

If comparatively few religious foundations in pre-Conquest England are known to be associated directly with battle sites, the burial in other monasteries of high-ranking men who had fallen in battle might help preserve the memory of the engagements in which they died. Thus William of Malmesbury, drawing on a near-contemporary Latin poem in praise of Athelstan, noted that the king had his cousins, Ælfwine and Æthelwine, sons of Æthelweard, who had died at 'the battle against Olaf' (i.e. *Brunanburh*), buried in Malmesbury abbey.¹³⁷ Following his death at the Battle of Maldon, Ealdorman Byrhtnoth was buried at Ely, of which he had been an important patron.¹³⁸ There, traditions concerning the battle survived well into the twelfth century to be recorded in the *Liber Eliensis*. Its fanciful narrative regarding Maldon has been well described as a 'concatenation of unlikelyhoods', but the *Liber* nevertheless affords an intriguing example of how a monastic chronicle sought to create legendary circumstances for the gift by Brythnoth to Ely of a number of estates, portrayed as the result of the ealdorman's gratitude for the abbot's hospitality to him and his forces on their way to battle.¹³⁹ Other endowments, however, were more certainly linked to pious benefactions made in the expectation of mortal danger in battle, and might thus preserve the memory of that conflict. Domesday Book records that St Peter's church at Westminster received lands at Paglesham in Essex from an unnamed thegn 'before he went to battle in Yorkshire with Harold', a chance glimpse of a phenomenon more frequently associated with departure for crusade, but which may have been a much more widespread practice.¹⁴⁰

Though the evidence for Anglo-Saxon England is more limited, Frankish and Ottonian sources reveal how important engagements might be commemorated liturgically.¹⁴¹ Thus notices of a number of Charles Martel's victories were added in the eighth century to St Willibrord's Calendar from Echternach, while similarly Louis the Younger's victory at Andernach in 876 over Charles the Bald was celebrated in a

sacramentary from Lorsch.¹⁴² Charles the Bald endowed the church of St Denis with a villa to fund liturgical commemoration not only of his birthday, elevation to the throne and marriage, but also of his great victory over the invasion of his brother Lothar on 15 January 859.¹⁴³ As part of his celebration of his victory over the Hungarians the battle of the Riade in 933, Henry I endowed a number of churches so that they might give alms to the poor, while Otto I made similar votive endowments to churches in Italy as thanks for his victory over Berengar in 962.¹⁴⁴ Saints associated with major victories were suitably celebrated. Otto I's great victory over the pagan Magyars at the river Lech in 955 was fought on 10 August, the day of St Laurence, and special honours were paid the saint on that day, when all the archbishops of the Reich were to wear their pallia. The battle was also celebrated in the papal privilege which sanctioned the archbishop of Magdeburg and suffragans to venerate St Maurice, who was becoming increasingly associated with the relic of the Holy Lance.¹⁴⁵

If, as seems likely, great victories such as Edington or *Brunanburh* were similarly celebrated kingdom-wide by religious foundations, no record survives. Nevertheless, obits from *libri vitae* suggest how liturgy might preserve memory of battles. Byrhtnoth's obit was recorded not only at Ely but also at Ramsey and Winchester, while that of the thegn Oswig, who fell fighting against the Danes in 1010, was also commemorated at Ely on 5 May, the day of that battle.¹⁴⁶ A poignant addition made to a martyrology from St Augustine's, Canterbury, sometime after the Conquest noted under the date of 14 October the death of King Harold 'with very many brothers of ours', presumably having in mind benefactors of the abbey, although a number of abbots are known to have been present in Harold's army.¹⁴⁷

That intercession might be extended not only to nobles but also to their fallen followers is indicated by the record in the *Liber Memorialis* (*Memorial Book*) of Merseburg, which recorded the obits of Counts Gero and Vuolcomar 'with their companions (*cum sociis*)', who had been slain in battle against the Polish ruler Boleslav Chrobry in 1015.¹⁴⁸ This defeat moved the bishop and chronicler Thietmar of Merseburg to mourn the loss of some 200 select *milites*, adding: 'May Omnipotent God look upon their names and souls with mercy! May all of us who caused their deaths, through our sins, be reconciled to him through Christ! And may God mercifully protect us so that we never need to endure such a thing again!'¹⁴⁹ The bishop, however, had to chronicle further bloody defeats, notably that in 1018 in which Duke Gottfried, Bishop Adalbold of Utrecht and many of their men were slain by the Frisians on the island of Merwede: a terrible slaughter such as 'has not occurred in those lands, on any day, or in any year, since the time of Charles [the Great]', and which caused Thietmar to reflect at length on sin and the causes of the calamity. 'Their bodies,' he noted, 'endured the punishment earned by our sins. Yet I hope that their souls will rejoice, since they have been purified by such great suffering.'¹⁵⁰

Such sombre reflections reinforce the impression that defeat often served as a greater stimulus to early medieval annalists than victory, as if the shame, outrage or guilt at a great calamity was felt to demand a fuller explanation than did a simple notice of a triumph. Such an outlook is reflected in the tone and content of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's* dismal if more detailed record of Anglo-Saxon military failures against the Danes from the 990s to 1016. It was likewise only a catastrophic defeat which

prompted the redactor of the *Royal Frankish Annals* to provide an unusually detailed account of how in 782 the Frankish envoys Adalgis and Gailo rashly attacked a Saxon force without the aid of Charlemagne's kinsman Theoderic, fearing 'that the honour of the victory might be Theoderic's alone if they fought at his side'. Their hurried charge, 'as if chasing runaways and going after booty instead of facing an enemy drawn up for battle', ended in disaster, with four counts, twenty distinguished nobles and many of their followers falling, along with Adalgis and Gailo themselves.¹⁵¹ Similarly, Einhard's fullest account of an engagement is that of the slaughter of Charlemagne's rearguard by the Basques at the Pyrenean pass of Roncevalles in 778, which claimed the lives of many, including the king's steward Eggihard; Anselm, count of the Palace; and Roland, lord of the Breton March.¹⁵²

It is probable that the names of those who fell in the defeat of 778 were originally preserved in necrologies, but the anonymous Frankish author known as the Astronomer, writing c. 840, indicates the story of the battle was now common knowledge when, referring in passing to those slain at Roncevalles, he remarked that 'because who they were is widely known, I refrain from naming them'.¹⁵³ This battle would, of course, later be transformed into the epic struggle depicted in the *Song of Roland*, in which Roland, by now the nephew of Charlemagne, and the twelve peers fight heroically to the death against a vast force of pagan Saracens.¹⁵⁴ As with the *Gododdin* and *The Battle of Maldon*, exemplary courage and loyalty in the face of overwhelming odds transform defeat into a moral victory, ensuring everlasting fame and – at least for Roland and his comrades – the crown of martyrdom. Few other battles, however, have undergone so remarkable a transmutation in their telling. In the wake of the First Crusade, moreover, the conflict's altered guise as a struggle between forces of Christendom against those of Islam ensured the legend's ubiquitous and lasting dissemination and continuing evolution well into the fifteenth century.¹⁵⁵ By the twelfth century, a memorial abbey and hospital had been founded on the supposed site of the battle of Roncevalles and the rock on which the dying Roland had attempted to break his famous sword Durendal.¹⁵⁶ In a remarkable instance of how such a transformed narrative of conflict might serve to inspire men in other battles, William of Malmesbury recounts how the Normans advanced into battle at Hastings singing a 'song of Roland' (*cantilena Rolandi*).¹⁵⁷

William of Poitiers, by contrast, made no mention of the *Song of Roland*, but claimed that Duke William's own exhortation to his men before the battle was outstanding, though he noted that it had been 'brief because of the circumstances', and admitted that 'it has not been transmitted to us in all its distinction'.¹⁵⁸ This did not prevent him from drawing on Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae* (*The War of Catiline*) to imagine what the duke might have said, including reminding the Normans of their previous triumphs. The trope was developed by subsequent authors, reflecting the importance the genre of pre-battle oration was to assume as a feature of post-Conquest battle-writing.¹⁵⁹ If King Harold sought to inspire his men before Stamford Bridge and Hastings by likewise recalling the earlier victories of the Anglo-Saxons, did he recall Edington or *Brunanburh* as instances of triumph over the foreign invader? It seems likely, but we can only speculate. What is certain, however, is that the memory of battles – whether transmitted through vernacular and Latin poetry, historical narratives, liturgical commemoration, depictions in decorative arts or the preservation of weapons, armour

or banners – played a key role in the shaping of the remembered past and in articulating political and cultural identities in pre-Conquest England.

Although so little English record of the catastrophe of Hastings is extant, it is appropriate to conclude this survey of the writing and memory of battle in Anglo-Saxon England by noting that traditions of some pre-Conquest battles did survive the upheavals of the Conquest. Thus, we glimpse a vivid legend of the Battle of Stamford Bridge in the twelfth-century interpolation into the ‘C’ version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which tells of how a lone Norwegian axeman held the bridge against Harold’s army until an Anglo-Saxon warrior in a boat speared him from below.¹⁶⁰ Henry of Huntingdon’s dramatic accounts of, for example, the treachery of Ealdorman Eadric at the battle of *Assandun*, and of the single combat between Edmund Ironside and Cnut similarly reflect what must have been a vibrant body of oral tradition.¹⁶¹ Anglo-Norman historians might have largely accepted the Norman version of the events of 1066 and seen in Harold’s demise the fall of a perjured usurper, but they were just as anxious to record, and if need be to embellish, great battles from their now shared Anglo-Saxon past.¹⁶²

Notes

My thanks to John Gillingham, Andrew Roach and Stuart Airlie for their helpful discussion of this chapter, and to Alan Williams at the Wallace Collection.

- 1 Kenneth Woodbridge, *Landscape and Antiquity: Aspects of English Culture at Stourhead, 1718-1838* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 51–70. For the campaign and battle of Edington, Richard Abels, *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (London: Longman, 1998), 155–63, and Ryan Lavelle, *Alfred’s Wars: Sources and Interpretations of Anglo-Saxon Warfare in the Viking Age* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2010), 179–81 and 308–14, which discusses the varying locations suggested for the battle of *Ethandun*, and whose chapter, ‘Fields of Slaughter: Battles and Battlefields’, offers an excellent survey to which I am indebted.
- 2 Gibbon wryly commented that without this victory ‘perhaps the interpretation of the Koran would now be taught in the schools of Oxford, and her pupils might demonstrate to a circumcised people the sanctity and truth of the revelation of Mahomet’ (Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 7 vols (London: H. Froude, 1903–6), VI, 5). For the very little that is known of the engagement itself, see Maurice Mercier and André Seguin, *Charles Martel et la bataille de Poitiers* (Paris: Guethner, 1944); Bernard Bachrach, *Early Carolingian Warfare: Prelude to Empire* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 170–8.
- 3 See the useful overviews by Athena Leoussi, ‘Famous Battles and their Afterlife’, and Beatrice Heuser, ‘Famous Battles: A Typology’, both in *Famous Battles and How They Shaped the Modern World, c. 1200 BCE-1302 CE. From Troy to Courtrai*, ed. Beatrice Heuser and Athena Leoussi (Barnsley and Havertown, PA: Pen and Sword, 2018).
- 4 Edward Creasy, *The Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World: From Marathon to Waterloo* (London: Richard Bentley, 1851, reprinted Royston: Oracle, 1996). For the decisive battles genre see Yuval Noah Harari, ‘The Concept of “Decisive Battles” in World History’, *Journal of World History* 18 (2007): 251–66. More contemporary writers,

- however, gave the battle scant coverage: while the Moore Continuation of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* recorded Charles Martel's death in 741, the battle of Tours passed unnoticed, as it did subsequently in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, despite the presence at Alfred's court of Grimald from St Bertin.
- 5 John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (London: Cape, 1976), 57.
 - 6 Creasy, *Fifteen Decisive Battles*, 179, in which he quotes from Thomas Arnold's *Introductory Lectures on Modern History*, ed. H. Reed (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1857), 42; and for wider context, Matthew Nicholls, 'The Battle of Teutoberg Forest Commemorated: From the Arch of Germanicus to the Arminius Monument', in *Famous Battles and How They Shaped the Modern World*, ed. Heuser and Leoussi.
 - 7 John F. C. Fuller, *Decisive Battles of the World*, 3 vols (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1954), I, 355–6, though he briefly noted the significance of Edmund Ironside's defeat at Assandun in 1016. Basil Liddell Hart's *The Decisive Wars of History: A Study in Strategy* (London: G. Bell, 1929) similarly jumps directly from Caesar's wars to the campaigns of 1066.
 - 8 For Las Navas, see Francisco Garcia Fitz, *Las Navas de Tolosa* (Barcelona: Ariel, 2005); and Martin Alviria Cabrer, *Las Navas de Tolosa 1212: Idea, Liturgia y Memoria de la Batalla* (Madrid: Silex, 2012).
 - 9 Georges Duby, *Le Dimanche de Bouvines. 27 Juillet 1214* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), translated by C. Tihanyi as *The Legend of Bouvines: War, Religion and Culture in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 2.
 - 10 Duby, *Le Dimanche de Bouvines*, 287–96 and 360–1. The battle's legacy is the subject of a number of papers in *Bouvines 1214–2014: histoire et mémoire d'une bataille. Approches et comparaisons franco-allemandes*, ed. Pierre Monnet and Claudia Zey (Bochum: Dieter Winkler Verlag, 2016), and see now the important study by Dominique Barthélemy, *La Bataille de Bouvines. Histoire et légendes* (Paris: Perrin, 2018).
 - 11 For Bannockburn and its commemoration, see *Bannockburn, 1314–2014: Battle and Legacy. Proceedings of the 2014 Stirling Conference*, ed. Michael Penman (Donington: Paul Watkins, 2016).
 - 12 Donald Ostrowski, 'Alexander Nevskii's "Battle on the Ice": The Creation of a Legend', *Russian History* 33 (2006): 289–312.
 - 13 René Grémaux, 'De slag van Kosovo, 1389–1989', *Spiegel Historiae* 25 (1990): 226–33; Marko Suika, 'The Image of the Battle of Kosovo (1389) Today: An Historical Event, a Moral Pattern, or the Tool of Political Manipulation', in *The Uses of the Middle Ages in Modern European States: History, Nationhood and the Search for Origins*, ed. Robert J. W. Evans and Guy P. Marshal (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 152–74.
 - 14 William Urban, *Tannenberg and After: Lithuania, Poland and the Teutonic Order in Search of Immortality* (Chicago: Lithuanian Research and Studies Center, 2003); Sven Ekdahl, 'The Battle of Tannenberg-Grunwald-Žalgiris (1410) as Reflected in Twentieth-Century Monuments', in *The Military Orders: History and Heritage*, ed. Victor Mallia-Milanes (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); Jürgen Tietz, *Das Tannenberg-Nationaldenkmal. Architektur, Geschichte, Kontext* (Berlin: Hiss-Medien, 1999); Stefan Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory: War, Remembrance and Medievalism in Britain and Germany, 1914–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 36–7 and 127–45.
 - 15 For its developing myth see Anne Curry, *Agincourt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), in a new series, *Great Battles*, exploring the evolving cultural and political legacy of major engagements.

- 16 John France, *Hattin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), especially 132–68.
- 17 *The Battle of Brunanburh: A Casebook*, ed. Michael Livingston (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 40–7 usefully provides the variant texts of the poem found in ASC ‘A’ and ‘B’ *sub anno* 937, though here and subsequently for all quotes from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* I have used the translation in *English Historical Documents: Volume I: c. 500–1042*, ed. D. Whitelock, 2nd edn (London: Eyre Methuen, 1979); *The Battle of Maldon*, ed. Donald G. Scragg (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981).
- 18 Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory*, 152 and figure 33.
- 19 Matthew Bennett, ‘The Battle of Hastings: Military History, Myth and Memory’, in *Famous Battles and How They Shaped the Modern World*, ed. Heuser and Leoussi.
- 20 Hew Strachan, *The First World War* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 165–6.
- 21 Vegetius, *Epitoma rei militaris* III.9, ed. Michael D. Reeve (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 85; *Vegetius: Epitome of Military Science*, trans. N. P. Milner, 2nd edn (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996), 83.
- 22 Matthew Strickland, ‘Slaughter, Slavery or Ransom? The Impact of the Conquest on Conduct in Warfare’, in *England in the Eleventh Century*, ed. C. Hicks (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1992); Matthew Strickland, ‘Killing or Clemency? Changing Attitudes to Conduct in War in Eleventh and Twelfth-Century Britain and France’, in *Krieg im Mittelalter*, ed. Hans-Henning Kortüm (Berlin: Academie Verlag, 2001); John Gillingham, ‘Christian Warriors and the Enslavement of Fellow Christians’, in *Chevalerie et christianisme au XIIe et XIIIe siècles*, ed. Martin Aurell and Catalina Girbea (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2011); John Gillingham, ‘Women, Children and the Profits of War’, in *Gender and Historiography: Studies in the Earlier Middle Ages in Honour of Pauline Stafford*, ed. Janet L. Nelson, Susan Reynolds and Susan Johns (London: Institute of Historical Research, 2012). For devastation (*vastatio*) in northern Britain, see James E. Fraser, ‘Warfare in Northern Britain, c. 500–1093’, in *A Military History of Scotland*, ed. Edward M. Spiers, Jeremy A. Crang and Matthew J. Strickland (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 72–4.
- 23 As Einhard himself commented, ‘Despite the fact that it dragged on for so long, Charlemagne himself did not meet the enemy in fixed battle (*acie conflixit*) more than twice in the course of this war’, with both engagements occurring in 783 (Einhard, *Vita Karoli* II.8 (*Einhardi vita Karoli magni*, ed. Oswald Holder-Egger, MGH: SSRG 25 (Hannover: Hahn, 1911), 11; *Einhard and Notker the Stammerer, Two Lives of Charlemagne*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (Harmonsworth: Penguin, 1969), 63).
- 24 *King Alfred’s Orosius*, ed. Henry Sweet (London: Trübner for the Old English Text Society, 1883), pt I, 192; Robert H. Hodgkin, *History of the Anglo-Saxons*, 2 vols, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), II, 567.
- 25 J. Gillingham, ‘Richard I and the Science of War in the Middle Ages’, in *War and Government in the Middle Ages. Essays in Honour of J. O. Prestwich*, ed. John Gillingham and James C. Holt (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1984), esp. 80–3.
- 26 *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition* [ASC, with traditional manuscript designations A–H where necessary], gen. ed. David N. Dumville and Simon D. Keynes, 9 vols (Cambridge: Brewer, 1983–); *English Historical Documents*, ed. Whitelock, from which all translations are taken. Edgar is, however, conventionally hailed as ‘Edmund’s son, bold in battle’ in the poem celebrating his coronation at Bath in 973 (ASC, C, 973).
- 27 In the absence of any Mercian chronicles of the eighth century, all that is recorded by the *Chronicle* is the West Saxon tradition that in c. 752, Cuthred of Wessex had

- secured independence of at least part of the kingdom from Aethelbald by a victory at *Beorhford*; that the men of Kent had contested Offa's overlordship at a battle at Otford in 776, which may have been a significant Mercian reverse; but that Offa had fought with Cynewulf and taken Bensington in 799.
- 28 M. Cecilia Gaposchkin, 'The Liturgical Memory of July 15, 1099. Between History, Memory and Eschatology', in *Remembering the Crusades and Crusading*, ed. Megan Cassidy-Welch (London: Routledge, 2017); *Description of the Holy Land by John of Würzburg*, trans. A. Stewart (London: Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society, 1890), 38–41.
 - 29 *Description*, trans. Stewart, 38–41. Though lacking the religious significance of Jerusalem, the long and bitter struggle by the forces of the First Crusade to take and hold the city of Antioch itself became the focus of a developing tradition and chanson cycle. See *The Chanson d'Antioche: An Old French Account of the First Crusade*, ed. Susan Edgington and Carol Sweetman (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011); and Simon T. Parsons, 'Making Heroes Out of Crusaders: The Literary Afterlife of Crusade Participants in the *Chanson d'Antioche*', in *Jerusalem the Golden: The Origins and Impact of the First Crusade*, ed. Susan B. Edgington and Luis B. Garcia-Guijarro Ramos (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014).
 - 30 *Le siège de Paris par les Normands: poème du IXe siècle*, ed. Henri Waquet (Paris: Champion, 1942); ASC, C, 1016, and cf ASC, C, 1009; *Symeonis Opera Omnia*, ed. Thomas Arnold, 2 vols (London: Longman, 1882, 1885), I, 125–6 and 90–1.
 - 31 ASC, C, 867; *Mercian Register*, 917.
 - 32 Bede, *HE* III.1 (*Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Bertram Colgrave and Roger A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 212–13); Asser, *De rebus gestis Ælfredi*, ch. 54 [hereafter 'Asser'] (*Asser's Life of King Alfred*, ed. William H. Stevenson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1904), 43–4; *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources*, trans. Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (Harmondsworth, 1983), 83–4).
 - 33 Duby, *Le Dimanche de Bouvines*, 190–201. See also the chapter by Robert Bartlett in this volume.
 - 34 For valuable discussions of the challenges of the sources for early battles and what may be recovered, see Guy Halsall, *Warfare and Society in the Barbarian West, 450–900* (London: Routledge, 2003), 177–214; and Lavelle, *Alfred's Wars*, 264–314. For approaches to battle drawing on anthropology and landscape see also Thomas J. T. Williams, 'Landscape and Warfare in Anglo-Saxon England and the Viking Campaign of 1006', *Early Medieval Europe* 23 (2015): 329–59, and Thomas J. T. Williams, 'The Place of Slaughter: Exploring the West-Saxon Battlescape', in *Danes in Wessex. The Scandinavian Impact on Southern England, c. 800–c.1000*, ed. Ryan Lavelle and Simon Roffey (Oxford: Oxbow, 2016), which also provides a useful survey of scholarship on medieval battlefields.
 - 35 *King Alfred's Old English Version of Boethius' De Consolatione Philosophiae*, ed. Walter J. Sedgfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1900), 44, lines 1–4, and cited by Roberta Frank, 'The Battle of Maldon and Heroic Literature', *The Battle of Maldon, AD 991*, ed. Donald Scragg (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 206.
 - 36 For useful reviews of the evidence for the location of *Brunanburh*, see Sarah Foot, *Æthelstan: The First King of England* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 172–9; Paul Cavill, 'The Place-Name Debate', *The Battle of Brunanburh: A Casebook*, ed. Michael Livingston; and Lavelle, *Alfred's Wars*, 308–14.
 - 37 Richard Abels and Stephen 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. The impact of such findings on the

- much debated question of continuity or disjuncture between later Roman and early medieval military practice and organization is developed in a rejoinder by Bernard Bachrach, "A Lying Legacy" Revisited: The Abels-Morillo Defense of Discontinuity', *Journal of Medieval Military History* 5 (2007): 153–93.
- 38 Asser, ch. 38 (ed. Stevenson, 29–30; trans. Keynes and Lapidge, 79), *testudine ordinabiliter condensata*. Vernacular terminology might, by contrast, be more informative. Thus, for instance, while Asser simply uses the term *proeliis* for the nine engagements that took place between the West Saxons and the Danes in the 'year of battles' of 871, Ryan Lavelle has noted that the phrase *folc gefeoht* used for these by the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* seems to denote more specifically 'battles which had required the participation of the king with all of the army units of his ealdormen, who, in turn, had called out their thegns and followers' (Lavelle, *Alfred's Wars*, 264–5).
 - 39 Patrick Wormald, 'Æthelweard [Ethelwerd] (d. 998?), Chronicler and Magnate', in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, in Association with the British Academy: From the Earliest Times to the Year 2000*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, 60 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Scott Ashley, 'The Lay Intellectual in Anglo-Saxon England: Ealdorman Æthelweard and the Politics of History', in *Lay Intellectuals in the Carolingian World*, ed. Patrick Wormald and Janet Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
 - 40 Nithard, *Historiae* II.9–10 (*Nithardi Historiarum libri IV*, ed. E. Müller, MGH: SSRG 44 (Hannover: Hahn, 1907), 23–7).
 - 41 Asser, chs. 37–9, and for Edington, ch. 56 (ed. Stevenson, 28–31 and 45–7; trans. Keynes and Lapidge, 78–80 and 84–5); Abels, *Alfred the Great*, 78–80.
 - 42 Henry of Huntingdon, for example, expands the *Chronicle's* account of the battle of Ashingdon in 1016 with additional material, probably derived from oral stories (*Historia Anglorum*, VI:13, *Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon, Historia Anglorum (History of the English People)*, ed. and trans. Diana Greenway (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 358–9. For such later traditions see Cyril E. Wright, *The Cultivation of Saga in Anglo-Saxon England* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd), 186–91.
 - 43 ASC, 748, 798.
 - 44 Guy Halsall, 'Anthropology and the Study of Pre-Conquest Warfare: The Ritual War in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Weapons and Warfare in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Sonia C. Hawkes (Oxford: Oxbow, 1989), 163.
 - 45 ASC, D, 802. Lavelle, *Alfred's Wars*, 300, suggests that the memory of battles fought within the core territory of Wessex in the ninth century carried greater importance than those in the subsequent wars of the dynasty's expansion.
 - 46 John Milton, *The History of Britain*, 2nd edn (London: John Martyn, 1677), 216.
 - 47 ASC, 903.
 - 48 ASC, C, 1004.
 - 49 At Edward the Elder's victory at Tettenhall in 910, for example, among the defeated Danes 'there were killed King Eowils and King Healfdene and Earl Ohter and Earl Scurfa, and Othulf the *hold*, and Benesing the *hold*, and Anlaf the Black and Thurferth the *hold*, and Osfrith Hlytta, and Guthfrith the *hold*, and Agmund the *hold* and Guthfrith' (ASC, 910).
 - 50 As expressed, for example, in James Campbell, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London: Hambledon Press, 1986). For a wider study of their functions, see Bernard Bachrach, 'The Medieval Military Chaplain and His Duties', in *The Sword of the Lord: Military Chaplains from the First to the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Doris L. Bergen (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2004).
 - 51 Æthelweard, *Chronicon* IV.5 (*The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. Alistair Campbell (London: Nelson, 1962), 54).

- 52 *The Battle of Brunanburh: A Casebook*, ed. Livingston; Simon Walker, 'A Context for Brunanburh?', in *Warriors and Churchmen in the High Middle Ages: Essays Presented to Karl Leyser*, ed. Timothy Reuter (London: Hambledon, 1992). For the battle and its sources, Sarah Foot, 'Where English becomes British: Rethinking Contexts for Brunanburh', in *Myth, Rulership, Church and Charters*, ed. Julia Barrow and Andrew Wareham (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); and Foot, *Aethelstan*, 169–83.
- 53 Margaret Ashdown, *English and Norse Documents Relating to the Reign of Ethelred the Unready* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), 158–61 and 136–9. A *drápa* is a poem with a refrain.
- 54 Ashdown, *English and Norse Documents*, 140–3; *King Harald's Saga*, trans. Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), 150–1. See also Rowe in this volume.
- 55 For a useful overview, see Frank, 'Battle of Maldon and Heroic Literature'.
- 56 Rosemary Woolf, 'The Ideal of Men Dying with Their Lord in the Germania and the Battle of Maldon', *Anglo-Saxon England* 5 (1976): 63–81; Roberta Frank, 'The Ideal of Men Dying for Their Lord in the Battle of Maldon: Anachronism or *Nouvelle Vague*?', in *People and Places in Northern Europe, c. 500-1600: Essays in Honour of Peter Hayes Sawyer*, ed. Ian Wood and Niels Lund (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1991), 95–106; Steven Fanning, 'Tacitus, "Beowulf" and the Comitatus', *Haskins Society Journal* 9 (2001): 17–38; and Brian Wallace, 'Warriors and Warfare: Ideal and Reality in Early Insular Texts' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2011).
- 57 Strickland, 'Slaughter, Slavery or Ransom', 41–60.
- 58 ASC, 1010. For an analysis of the context of this engagement, Ian Howard, *Swein Forkbeard's Invasions and the Danish Conquests of England, 991-1017* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2003), 86–8; and on cowardice see Richard Abels, 'Cowardice and Duty in Anglo-Saxon England', *Journal of Medieval Military History* 6 (2006): 29–48.
- 59 ASC, C, 937.
- 60 Jennie Hooper, "'Rows of the Battle Swan": the Aftermath of Battle in Anglo-Saxon Art', in *Armies, Chivalry and Warfare in Medieval Britain and France: Proceedings of the 1995 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. Matthew J. Strickland (Stamford: Paul Watkins Press, 1998); Judith Jesch, 'Eagles, Ravens and Wolves: Beasts of Battle, Symbols of Victory and Death', in *The Scandinavians from the Vendel Period to the Tenth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. Judith Jesch (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002); and for changing attitudes to the treatment of the fallen, see John Gillingham, "'Holding to the Rules of War (*Bellica Iura Tenentes*)": Right Conduct Before, During and After Battle in North-Western Europe in the Eleventh Century', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 29 (2007): 1–15.
- 61 For the *Ludwigslied*, John K. Bostock, *A Handbook of Old High German Literature*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 235–48, and D. H. Green, 'The *Ludwigslied* and the Battle of Saucourt', in *The Scandinavians from the Vendel Period*, ed. Jesch; Peter Godman, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance* (London: Duckworth, 1985), no. 23, 187–91, provides the text and translation of the anonymous poem on Pippin's victory (and cf. the celebration of the subjection of the Avars to Charlemagne in Theodulf's poem on the court, in Godman, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, no. 15, lines 33–520); Sedulius Scottus, *Carmina*, in *Poetae latini aevi Carolini. Tomus III*, ed. Ludwig Traube (Berlin: Weidmann, 1896), no. 60, 217; John Scot Eriugena, *Carmina*, in *Poetae latini aevi Carolini. Tomus III*, ed. Traube, 527–9, and Godman, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, no. 50, at 302–5; Michael McCormick, *Eternal*

Victory: Triumphal Rulership in late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 369 and 373.

- 62 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum* II.135 (*William of Malmesbury: Gesta regum Anglorum; the History of the English Kings. Volume 1*, ed. and trans. R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson and Michael Winterbottom, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), I, 220–1).
- 63 Ermoldus Nigellus, *Carmina*, ed. Edmond Faral (Paris: Champion, 1932), 164, and Godman, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, no. 37; Mildred Budny, 'The Byrhtnoth Tapestry or Embroidery', in *The Battle of Maldon*, ed. Scragg; Pauline Stafford, 'Kinship and Women in the World of Maldon: Byrhtnoth and His Family', *The Battle of Maldon: Fiction and Fact*, ed. Janet Cooper (London: Hambledon Press, 1993), 231–2.
- 64 *Les oeuvres poétiques de Baudri de Bourgueil*, ed. Phyllis Abrahams (Paris: Champion, 1926), lines 93–572; and see Shirley A. Brown and Michael Herren, 'The Adelae Comitissae of Baudri of Bourgueil and the Bayeux Tapestry', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 16 (1994): 55–73.
- 65 Charles R. Dodwell, 'The Bayeux Tapestry and the French Secular Epic', *Burlington Magazine* 108 (1966): 549–60; Christopher Barrett, 'Roland and Crusade Imagery in an English Royal Chapel: Early Thirteenth-Century Wall Paintings at Claverley, Shropshire', *Antiquaries Journal* 92 (2012): 129–68.
- 66 *HE* III.11 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 246–7).
- 67 Thus, for example, the Frankish forces which defeated Muslims off the Balearic islands in 799 sent Charlemagne the captured banners of the enemy, while in 865, Count Robert the Strong sent the banners of defeated Vikings to Charles the Bald (McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, 376–7).
- 68 ASC, 878. The early twelfth-century Bury compilation known as the *Annals of Neots* noted of this banner that

'Men say that the three sisters of Ingvar and Ubbe, the daughters of Lothbrok, wove that banner and did the whole of it in a single day. Moreover, men say that in every battle in which that battle went before them, the raven in the middle of the design seemed to flutter as if it were alive, if they were going to have the victory. But if they were about to be beaten in the coming fight, it would hang down without moving. And this was often proved to be true' (Asser, ed. Stevenson, 265–7; trans. Hodgkin, *History of the Anglo-Saxons*, II, 566).
- 69 William of Poitiers, *The Gesta Guillelmi of William of Poitiers*, ed. and trans. Ralph H. C. Davies and Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 152–3.
- 70 M. Bravamanova, 'The So-Called Armour of St Wenceslaus – a Historical Introduction', *Acta Militaria Mediaevalia* 8 (2011): 213–20; and Nicholas Checksfield, David Edge and Alan Williams, 'An Examination of the Wenceslaus Mail Hauber', *Acta Militaria Mediaevalia* 8 (2012): 229–42.
- 71 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum* II.131 (ed. and trans. Mynors, Thomson and Winterbottom), 208–9.
- 72 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum* II.131 (ed. and trans. Mynors, Thomson and Winterbottom), 208–9; Laura H. Loomis, 'The Holy Relics of Charlemagne and Æthelstan: The Lance of Longinus and St Maurice', *Speculum* 25 (1950): 437–56.
- 73 Dorothy Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), no. XX, 58; Hilda Ellis Davidson, *The Sword in Anglo-Saxon England: Its Archaeology and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1962), 104–51; Emma

- Mason, 'The Hero's Invincible Weapon: An Aspect of Angevin Propaganda', in *The Ideals and Practice of Medieval Knighthood*, ed. Christopher Harper-Bill and Ruth Harvey (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1990), III.
- 74 *Beowulf*, ed. and trans. Michael Swanton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978), lines 1137–45.
- 75 *Beowulf*, lines 1557–69.
- 76 *Beowulf*, lines 1677–98.
- 77 For a detailed analysis see Patrick Sims-Williams, 'The Settlement of England in Bede and the *Chronicle*', *Anglo-Saxon England* 12 (1983): 1–42.
- 78 Nicholas Brooks, 'The Creation and Early Structure of the Kingdom of Kent' and 'The English Origin Myth', in Nicholas Brooks, *Anglo-Saxon Myths: State and Church, 400–1066* (London: Hambledon, 2000), 40–6 and 87 respectively; Kenneth Harrison, 'Early Wessex Annals in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*', *English Historical Review* 86 (1971): 527–32.
- 79 Asser, ch. 2 (ed. Stevenson, 4; trans. Keynes and Lapidge, 68).
- 80 Asser, ch. 22 (ed. Stevenson, 19–20; trans. Keynes and Lapidge, 74–5); ASC, C, 937.
- 81 Æthelweard, *Chronicon*, prologue (ed. Campbell, 1).
- 82 Gildas: 'The Ruin of Britain', and Other Works, ed. and trans. Michael Winterbottom (London: Phillimore, 1978), 27–8; Nennius, 'British history' and 'The Welsh annals', ed. and trans. John Morris (London: Phillimore, 1980), 35, 76, and for comment on this battle list, Guy Halsall, *Worlds of Arthur* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 8–20 and 66–8; *Armes Prydein Vawr*, trans. John K. Bollard, in *The Battle of Brunanburh: A Casebook*, ed. Livingston, 28–9. On battle in early Welsh literature, see Marged Haycock, 'Living with War: Poets and the Welsh Experience, c. 600–1200', in *Kings and Warriors in Early North-West Europe*, ed. Jan E. Rekdal (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2016), a reference I owe to the kindness of Thomas Clancy.
- 83 *HE* I.34 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 116–17). The battle is the only one to be listed specifically by name in Bede's recapitulation of key events at the close of book V (*HE* V.24, 'pugnatum ad Degastane').
- 84 *HE* I.16 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 116, n.1).
- 85 *HE* II.2 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 140–1). For a critical assessment of Bede's story, Nicholas J. Higham, 'Bancornaburg: Bangor-is-y-coed Revisited', in *Archaeology of the Roman Empire: A Tribute to the Life and Works of Professor Barri Jones*, ed. Nicholas J. Higham, *British Archaeological Journal: International Series* 940 (Oxford: British Archaeological Records, 2001), 311–18. Excavations at nearby Heronbridge revealed skeletons with wound trauma that may have occurred in this engagement (David J. P. Mason, 'AD 616: The Battle of Chester', *Current Archaeology* 202 (2005): 516–24).
- 86 *HE* II.12 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 180–1).
- 87 *HE* II.9 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 164–7); Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* II.30 (*Gregorii episcopi Turonensis. Libri Historiarum* X, ed. Bruno Krusch and Willhelm Levison, MGH, *Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum* 1 (Hannover: Hahn, 1951), 75–6).
- 88 *HE* II.20 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 202–5).
- 89 *HE* II.20 and III.1 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 202–5 and 212–15).
- 90 *HE* II.20 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 204–5).
- 91 *HE* III.2 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 214–17); and for the legacy of the Milvian Bridge legend, see Raymond van Dam, *Remembering Constantine at the Milvian Bridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
- 92 *HE* III.2 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 214–15).
- 93 *HE* III.24 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 290–3).

- 94 *HE* III.24 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 290–3). For the context of these campaigns, see Philip Dunshea, 'The Road to *Winwaed*? Penda's Wars against Oswiu of Bernicia, c. 642 to c. 655', *Anglo-Saxon England* 44 (2015): 1–16.
- 95 Asser, ch. 39 (ed. Stevenson, 30–1; trans. Keynes and Lapidge, 79–80).
- 96 Æthelweard, *Chronicon* IV.4 (ed. Campbell, 52–3). In this context it is perhaps significant that Æthelweard, or his source, renders the place name of the battle as *Wodnesfeld* (Æthelweard, *Chronicon* (ed. Campbell, xxx–xxxi)).
- 97 For the importance of St Michael to the Ottonians in war, see Carl Erdmann, *The Origin of the Idea of Crusade* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 21. Earlier, the poem celebrating the Frankish victory over the Avars in 796 could note that 'God sent Saint Peter, the prince of the Apostles, to aid Pippin, the son of our great king' (*misit Deus Petrum sanctum, principum apostolorum, in auxilium Pippini magni regis filium*): *De Pippini regis victoria Avarica*, v. 4 (*Poetae latini aevi Carolini. Tomus I*, ed. Ernst Dümmler, MGH: *Poetae latini medii aevi* 1 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1881), 116–17; Peter Godman, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance* (London: Duckworth, 1985), 186–91).
- 98 Geoffrey of Malaterra: *The Deeds of Count Roger of Calabria and Sicily and of His Brother Duke Robert Guiscard*, trans. Kenneth B. Wolf (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 109–10 (book II, ch. 33); *Gesta Francorum et aliorum Hierosolimitanorum*, ed. Rosalind M. T. Hill (London: Nelson, 1962), 69; and Elizabeth Lapina, 'Crusades, Memory and Visual culture. Representations of the Miracle of Intervention of Saints in Battle', in *Remembering the Crusades and Crusading*, ed. Welch, which usefully collects other references to the apparition of military saints in combat. See also John R. E. Bliese, 'St Cuthbert's and St Neot's Help in War', *Haskins Society Journal* 7 (1995): 39–62.
- 99 *HE* I.20 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 62–5), an account which Bede drew from Constantius' *Life of St Germanus*, composed c. 475.
- 100 *HE* IV.26 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 426–9). It was perhaps this sacrilegious attack on Irish churches that the poet Riagail of Bangor had in mind when he wrote in his poem on the battle of Dunnichen, 'Today Oswiu's son was slain / in battle against iron swords, / even though he did penance, it was a penance too late' (*The Triumph Tree: Scotland's Earliest Poetry AD 550-1350*, ed. Thomas O. Clancy (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1998), 115).
- 101 *HE* IV.26 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 428–9), citing Vergil, *Aeneid* II.169.
- 102 *HE* IV.26 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 428–9).
- 103 Anon., *Vita sancti Cuthberti* IV.8 (and cf. Bede, *Vita (prosaica) sancti Cuthberti*, ch. 27) (*Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 122–3 and 242–7).
- 104 Regino of Prüm, *Chronicon* II 841 (*Reginonis abbatis Prumiensis cronicon*, ed. Friedrich Kurze, MGH, SSRG 50 (Hannover: Hahn, 1890), 75); *History and Politics in Late Carolingian and Ottonian Europe: The Chronicles of Regino of Prüm and Adalbert of Magdeburg*, trans. Simon Maclean (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 131–2): 'In this battle the power of the Franks was so diminished, and their famous manhood (*virtus*) so weakened, that thereafter they were incapable not only of expanding the kingdom but of defending its frontiers.' For a full discussion of conduct at Fontenoy and its impact on subsequent Frankish attitudes to combat, see J. Gillingham, 'Fontenoy and After: Pursuing Enemies to Death in France between the Ninth and Eleventh Centuries', in *Frankland: The Franks and the World of the*

- Early Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of Dame Jinty Nelson*, ed. Paul J. Fouracre and David Gantz (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008).
- 105 Nithard, *Historiae* II.9–10 (ed. Müller, 23–7).
- 106 Helen Waddell, *Medieval Latin Lyrics* (London: Constable, 1929), 104–5; for a more recent edition, see Godman, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, no. 39, 262–4.
- 107 *HE* IV.21 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 400–1).
- 108 The handbook on penance subsequently attributed to Bede, and which derives from that of Theodore, affords reduced penance for one who had killed in public war or at his lord's command (Allen J. Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 76).
- 109 *HE* IV.21 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 400–1). Bede similarly shows his ready acceptance of the obligations of vengeance in his ensuing story of the Northumbrian thegn Imma, who was captured in the battle but luckily escaped execution, even though his Mercian captor should, by rights, have put him to death in vengeance for those of his own family who had fallen in the battle against the Northumbrians (*HE* IV.22 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 400–5)).
- 110 ASC CD 1051.
- 111 ASC C 1016.
- 112 ASC E 1066; ASC D 1066.
- 113 Elisabeth M. C. Van Houts, 'The Trauma of 1066', *History Today* 46, no. 10 (1996): 9–15; and Elisabeth M. C. Van Houts, 'The Memory of 1066 in Oral and Written Traditions', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 19 (1997): 167–79.
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- 129 *Vita Gregorii*, ch. 18 (*The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great by an Anonymous Monk of Whitby*, ed. and trans. Betram Colgrave (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1968), 102–3).
- 130 *Vita Gregorii*, ch. 19 (*The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great by an Anonymous Monk of Whitby*, ed. and trans. Betram Colgrave, 104–5).

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Fortress London

War and the making of an Anglo-Saxon city

Rory Naismith

London is a city awash with memory, and recollections of military conflict are inscribed especially deeply into the city's fabric. Monuments have been erected across the capital to mark the nation's victories and lament its casualties. In character these monuments range from the grandiose Nelson's Column (1840–3) to the moving and sombre Royal Artillery Memorial (1925). But the bulk of them were erected in, and commemorate clashes during, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Earlier engagements are much less overtly marked among London's public memorials. Indirectly, however, battles and wars from a millennium before have left an important legacy that runs even deeper, in the form of the city itself. In an important sense battles made London the city it is today. The earliest steps in the city's rise to prominence in England were shaped by its role in military events of the early Middle Ages, as a place that was fought over many times from the ninth century onwards, and which took on a key role in marshalling the resources of the region and the kingdom for war from the turn of the first millennium.

The roots of this status go back even further. Since its foundation by the Romans, London has dominated the north bank of the Thames. Geography dictated that it should play a strategic role, being the point of entry to an arterial waterway that stretched through southern Britain, and being situated near the last point at which the river can be bridged or forded,¹ yet also with access to the sea. The importance of the city's watery setting was compounded as the river gave way to (mostly) dry land. On both banks the Thames looked out over extensive marshes, with the high hills of the North Downs and Chilterns a few miles beyond. Between the hills and the marshes were some of the most thickly forested areas of southern Britain. The modern urban sprawl of south-east England conceals a basin that narrows into a funnel in the upper Thames valley: to traverse it by either land or water meant having to go via London.² The city was ideally placed to join up centres of wealth and power on either side of the Thames, and beyond the sea. Seeing this, the Roman administration enhanced *Londinium's* centrality with the development of a road network that radiated out from it like spokes on a wheel. Accessibility and connectivity have been at the heart of London's unique identity since the beginning, and have brought it wealth and prominence as well as, at times, danger.

The threat of war strongly marked the first millennium of London's history. As a hub of Roman provincial administration and the preferred seat of the governor, *Londinium* gained a formidable circuit of walls in the late second century, completed with a stretch along the riverbank later in the third. At this stage the city's military capabilities seem to have been tested only occasionally: London's massive walls, some of the longest in the northern part of the empire, were as much a show of strength as a response to a direct threat.³ But the long legacy of these defences, which were maintained across the Middle Ages and still roughly correspond to the boundaries of the City of London, is testimony to the importance of defence.

As the lynchpin of the Thames and, eventually, of England as a whole, London constituted a supreme prize for enemies, and was targeted many times for battle and siege in the centuries after the collapse of Roman rule. These actual attacks on London were concentrated into three distinct phases. The first, when the vikings threatened it between the 870s and 890s, gave the city a firmer collective identity within south-east England; the second, between about 990 and 1016, forced London to the vanguard of England's struggle against the vikings, as it became the stronghold of Æthelred II (978–1016) and his son Edmund Ironside (1016); and the third cemented this status as the Normans conquered England in 1066, with London being their principal objective after the battle of Hastings. The eleventh century saw nothing less than a national realignment that focused the English war effort on London. Both the city and its relationship with the kingdom transformed for good. By 1016, and even more so by 1066, there was a dawning sense that as went London, so went England. This status as incipient capital stemmed in large part from the role the city had come to play in late Anglo-Saxon England's response to the exigencies of war.

Yet if London with its sturdy walls was a fortress, it was at the same time very much a city. These functions were closer counterparts in the early Middle Ages than they would be in later times. A thriving commercial economy was by no means incompatible with a belligerent, heavily militarized character. Many medieval cities used their wealth to embark on aggressive ventures against enemies, or challenge overbearing authority.⁴ In the case of London the relationship was reversed: warfare, and preparations for warfare, lent urgency and energy to broader developments, speeding them up and setting them on a new, unpredictable course. In other words, London managed to grow rich off kings, armies and fleets, friendly and hostile alike.

London on the eve of the Viking Age

The vikings came to London for the first time in 842.⁵ It was one of three towns hit that year, along with Rochester in Kent and Quentovic in northern Francia, close to modern Boulogne.⁶ This selection of targets includes some of the key trading hubs of the North Sea. The vikings who were responsible for the raid chose their hunting grounds carefully, drawing on familiarity with the currents of shipping and commerce. Concentrations of resources such as towns, along with monasteries, presented rich pickings.

In the case of London, it is not clear whether this attack fell on the city proper – the walled area of former Roman London – or on the remnants of the settlement

to the west that had been the main centre of economic gravity in London since the seventh century. Known to scholarship as *Lundenwic*, this accumulation of homes and workshops was one of many trade-focused settlements that sprang up across Europe in the seventh and eighth centuries. At its height London was one of the largest among them, and the Venerable Bede famously described it as ‘an emporium for many nations who come to it by land or sea.’⁷ The ‘many nations’ he referred to included several surrounding English peoples. Although London was a key city for the East Saxons, this small kingdom was politically overshadowed already in the seventh century, and London was thereafter fated to be ruled by a series of distant and more powerful kingdoms. Yet subordination for the East Saxons meant success for *Lundenwic*, its good road and river connections coming back into play as the town developed into a point of convergence for traders who tapped into diverse markets and elites. At this stage it is better seen as a sort of permanent market where many networks and interests intersected than a cohesive urban community with its own identity.⁸ For this reason *Lundenwic* opened its doors to the interests of several kings and kingdoms: openness was the basis of its success. A hall belonging to the Kentish king is mentioned in a law-code issued in the period 673–85, while Æthelbald of Mercia (716–57) granted exemption from toll to a number of ships docking in London.⁹

Despite its evident desirability and profitability, *Lundenwic* remained undefended; neither is there any indication that the walls of nearby *Londinium* – which housed St Paul’s Cathedral from 604 – were ever manned against an attacking army between the sixth and ninth centuries. Siege warfare and assaults on fortifications were a rarity in England at this time, and there is no evidence that London factored into any military campaign before the ninth century.¹⁰ Takeover of London and its region was instead accomplished by targeting local rulers and bringing them into Kentish or Mercian spheres of influence. Power over the city was a political as well as an economic boon. London’s connectivity and age-old prestige meant that it was a favoured venue for province-wide ecclesiastical meetings.¹¹ Gregory the Great had even expected it to become the metropolitan see for Britain at the time of the Roman mission in the 590s; a revival of this scheme was tentatively floated as a resolution to the division of Canterbury’s province with Lichfield two centuries later.¹² Coenwulf, king of the Mercians (796–821), met with the contentious Archbishop Wulfred (805–32) in London to settle their differences, and some years earlier the same king had minted a remarkable gold coinage in the city inscribed *DE VICO LVNDONIAE*.¹³ In the 820s, London became a metonym for authority over the Mercian kingdom more widely as its formerly subject territories in the south-east were lost. The Mercian king Ludeca (826–7) minted coins proclaiming that they came from *LVNDONIA CIVIT[as]*, and when a few years later Ecgbert of Wessex (802–39) temporarily conquered all Mercia (829–30), he resurrected the exact same design to emphasize his new position.¹⁴ It had become a frontier city, with the Thames itself forming the boundary between Mercian Middlesex and West Saxon Surrey.

Coenwulf, Ludeca and Ecgbert presided over a very different settlement to that of a century earlier. *Lundenwic* had lost much of its momentum in the latter part of the eighth century. The shape of the town becomes less easy to trace archaeologically, perhaps because it was breaking up into a series of smaller nuclei of activity spread

out over a wide area. A significant ditch of this period, identified in what had been a dynamic commercial district at Covent Garden, would have provided some measure of protection for part of this settlement, though probably not all:¹⁵ in the early to mid-ninth century, London sprawled along the banks of the Thames in a series of pockets from Westminster to the City. The references on Ludeca and Ecgerht's coins to the *civitas* of London suggest that by the time they were made, minting was taking place within the Roman walls. A nineteenth-century find from near St Paul's of a lead weight stamped with coin-dies of the mid-870s points to a possible location for coin production, and by the middle decades of the ninth century London's economic centre of gravity appears to have straddled the western area of the walled city and the land immediately beyond:¹⁶ a charter of 857 refers to property *in vico Lundonie* outside the 'west gate', just beyond the western walls of the Roman city.¹⁷

It was onto this stretch of riverside settlement that the vikings probably descended in 842. They came again in 851, in the same year that they also attacked Canterbury.¹⁸ Shipping in the Thames estuary was probably one of the attractions that led vikings to establish their winter camp at Thanet (or possibly Sheppey) in 851–2.¹⁹ As viking raids multiplied in number and escalated in scale, London was thrust into the midst of the action and onto a course that would transform it for good.

London in the first Viking Age (c. 870–940)

The high degree of accessibility that had helped make London such a hub of trade in the seventh and eighth centuries also put it in the sights of viking armies. In 870–1 a viking army that had fought its way into Wessex encamped at Reading, Berkshire, further up the Thames valley, and in 871–2 relocated to London itself. It is not known where in the city the vikings stayed. They might have constructed a fort of their own, as they did elsewhere in Britain, Ireland and mainland Europe, or else occupied part of the area within the Roman walls.²⁰ The only possible archaeological find connected with the viking presence in these years is a hoard of coins and hacksilver, similar to other assemblages from viking sites, uncovered at Croydon in 1862, about 10 miles south.²¹

It may well have been while the viking army was based at London that the Mercians made peace with them, as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* says they did in the same year.²² The occupation of a major centre that had held such symbolic significance in previous decades could have been one factor in driving the Mercians to negotiate. Moreover, London was probably still the principal mint-place in the midland kingdom, and hence a vital economic asset for Mercia. Politically, however, it was a city of divided loyalties. Since the 860s the bishop of London had gravitated to assemblies of the West Saxon court, and in the course of the 870s, as the position of Mercia's kings at times became unpredictable, the moneyers based in London started to recognize the West Saxon Alfred (871–99) as well as Burgred (852–74) and later Ceolwulf II (874–9).²³ It needs to be underlined that the coins strongly indicate that London did not fall into viking hands for any protracted period in the 870s.²⁴ These same coins also suggest a level of initiative being taken by moneyers and doubtless other local elites in the London area.

While London remained a Mercian city in name, its inhabitants looked more and more often across the Thames to Wessex for leadership in troubled times.

The city's situation became even more precarious later in the 870s. In January 878, Wessex itself was overrun after Alfred was caught unawares by a viking strike at Chippenham. His kingdom was left on the brink of collapse. But in May of the same year Alfred turned the tables with a stunning victory over the vikings at the battle of Edington, after which he was in a position to dictate terms to the viking leader Guthrum. The latter and his men accepted baptism, and after a sojourn at Cirencester made their way out of Alfred's kingdom to settle in East Anglia in 880. These events did not touch directly on London, though must have cast a pall over the city as a new threat emerged closer to home. In 878, the inhabitants could have watched a new force of vikings sail past along the Thames, and make camp a few miles upstream at Fulham in Middlesex on the north bank of the river. This probably smaller group established contact with the (by now defeated) army of Guthrum, and then after passing the winter decided that their prospects in England were no longer so favourable, and sailed down the Thames once more to depart for Ghent.²⁵

London had been forced onto the front line by viking movements in the 870s, and the accommodation reached by Alfred with Guthrum's army, at some point in or after 880, left it very much in harm's way.²⁶ The treaty reached by the two rulers specifies a boundary running up the Thames, then up the Lea to its source, cross country to Bedford and finally up the Ouse to Watling Street. This placed London only a few miles from viking territory in Essex, beyond what is now Bow Creek in the Docklands – though the fact that it is on the English side at all is significant, and had the Fulham vikings enjoyed more success the boundary could have taken a different course. In this new position, any further hostilities would have been sure to affect London, and such was indeed the case in (probably) 883. The events of this year are especially murky, with some *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* manuscripts alluding only to an action at London in which the prayers of the English were answered, as a consequence of divine intervention after they sent alms to Rome and to 'India'. The vikings may have temporarily occupied London and then been ejected, or the English may have fought off an attempted seizure.²⁷ Also contentious are the events at London three years later in 886. The *Chronicle* describes how Alfred *gesette* London: an Old English verb with a range of meanings along the lines of 'established' or 'occupied', while the Latin rendition of the *Chronicle* completed by Asser just a few years later renders the passage as *restauravit et habitabilem fecit* ('restored [it] and made it habitable').²⁸ What exactly Alfred restored is left to the imagination. This could also have been the occasion for laying out or expanding the new street system that is observable within the walled city, along with associated amenities such as markets,²⁹ but military installations and organization such as walls, ditches and garrison arrangements surely loomed large as well, given the painful experiences of recent times.³⁰ The depredations of multiple viking armies in the south-east in 885 could also have been on the king's mind. One had been successfully held at bay by the walls of Rochester, then later joined forces with an East Anglian expedition to establish a fort at Benfleet in Essex and raid south of the Thames.³¹ This campaign may have been the immediate cause for reinforcing London as another stronghold in the south-east,³² but London's symbolic importance,

border location and traditional Mercian affiliations meant that the event took on larger dimensions. The *Chronicle* states that the restoration of London was the occasion for a submission to Alfred by 'all the English people that were not under subjection to the Danes', with the city then being entrusted to Æthelred, ealdorman of the Mercians and Alfred's son-in-law. In other words, London was the venue for a ceremonial demonstration of allegiance towards Alfred, reviving the city's long-established role as a prestigious meeting place.³³

Although presented very much as an event, indeed a formative one for the Mercians and the West Saxons, the 886 restoration of London was one step in a process. London had functioned as an important node in Alfred's defensive infrastructure for years before 886,³⁴ and been issuing handsome coins which bore Alfred's name and a newly created monogram of the city since about 880. Restoration was also still an ongoing concern more than a decade after 886 when in 898 or 899 a meeting took place at Chelsea to discuss 'the restoration of the city of London' (*de instauracione urbis Lundonie*).³⁵ Excavations in London support this picture of a more gradual, limited process, with no sign of a sudden transformation. By the time of Alfred, activity had become concentrated within a block of land in the walled city running along the Thames waterfront from roughly St Paul's Cathedral to Old Billingsgate, following an essentially new street-plan.³⁶

By the standards of the time London was an important concentration of trade and population which attracted involvement and investment from far and wide, but the scale and speed of its growth need to be kept in perspective. Alfredian London covered only a small fraction of the expanse contained by the Roman defences. Its population was surely limited. Yet London was a very different kind of city going into the final years of Alfred's reign, when viking hostilities resumed in the 890s. Even its preferred name in Old English changed at around this time, shifting from *Lundenceaster* ('London-chester', perhaps inspired by Bede's frequent reference to London as a *civitas*) to *Lundenburh* ('London-fortress').³⁷ For the first time in 893 the Londoners (*to Lundenbyrig ... mid þæm burgwarum*) are described by the *Chronicle* as playing an active and distinct part in fighting the vikings. As part of an army led by Ealdorman Æthelred, they sallied out to storm a second viking fort at Benfleet. They succeeded in their endeavour, and the booty, prisoners and ships taken at Benfleet were brought back to London and Rochester.

Rivers and other waterways continued to be a core part of viking strategy in the 890s. Benfleet had offered access to the Thames estuary, and another viking force in 894 made its way overland from Chester via Northumbria and East Anglia to Essex, and built a fort a little further north at Mersea, in the mouth of the Blackwater. Over the winter of 894–5 this army rowed up the Thames and the Lea, and proceeded to build another fortress at an unknown location on the Lea, 20 miles above London.³⁸ The Londoners, as part of a larger force, made a move against this emplacement, but were repulsed. At this point in 895 the danger to London was evidently grave, for Alfred brought an army to the city in order to protect its citizens while they gathered their harvest from surrounding lands, under threat of viking attack. The king forced the vikings to relocate later in the year, however, by building a pair of fortresses on either bank of the Lea. He thereby cut off the vikings' waterborne escape route. They sent

their women to safety in East Anglia, abandoned their ships to be taken or destroyed by the Londoners, and set off westwards for Bridgenorth on the Severn.³⁹

Alfred's restoration seems to have had as much of an impact on London's military cohesion and confidence as on its size or physical shape. The Londoners (or *burhware* of London) became a significant and effective element of the English armed forces.⁴⁰ In this respect London fitted into a larger military revolution that began in the late ninth century, as the English turned to fortification in response to the viking threat. Fortresses emerged as one of two pillars of Anglo-Saxon military strategy, alongside a more mobile standing army, the latter often (but not always) under royal direction.⁴¹ The *Chronicle* describes how in 893 units from both fortress garrisons and the main army worked together to pin down a viking force that was filtering through the Weald in small groups.⁴² The use of defended, well-manned strongpoints enabled the English defenders to resist and pin down enemy incursions until help could arrive, as happened at Rochester in 885 and Exeter in 893; equally, a fortress could be used as a base for stockpiling supplies and for launching offensive operations against nearby foes, as at London and also Chichester in the 890s.⁴³ Under Alfred and Edward the Elder (899–924), such places featured prominently in the schemes of both the English and the vikings, in sharp contrast to the rare use of fortifications in earlier Anglo-Saxon England.⁴⁴

How the defences of London and its counterparts were to be manned is suggested by the so-called *Burghal Hidage*: a list of thirty-three English fortresses, each with the number of hides (i.e. units of land supporting one family each) needed for its support from the surrounding area. A calculation at the end of one version of the text suggests that these often large figures relate to liability for defence as well as for construction and maintenance.⁴⁵ Different segments of the population fulfilled these roles: maintenance doubtless fell largely on lower-status peasants, while military service was – as it had been for generations by this time – the remit of bookland-holders and their dependants.⁴⁶ Even so, the heavy burden of the measures demanded in the *Burghal Hidage* suggests that the range of individuals performing military service expanded considerably.⁴⁷ The developing city had its share of bookland holdings within the walls that could have contributed; indeed, it may have mostly or entirely broken down into large elite properties, and so been especially well geared towards armed service.⁴⁸ But those who dwelt within the walls of London could only have furnished some of its necessary manpower: the bulk of its defenders were surely drawn from outside the walls, coming from the bookland-holders of a dependent district of unknown size extending across the neighbouring countryside.⁴⁹ In a military sense they were as much Londoners as those who lived within the city, and a law-code of Æthelstan (924–39) reveals the cohesion which such bonds could generate.⁵⁰

London itself does not in fact appear in the *Burghal Hidage*, although one of the apparently new fortresses named in the *Burghal Hidage* is Southwark, referred to as *Supringageweorche* ('work/fortress of the men of Surrey'). It was assigned a large reckoning of 1,800 hides: following the equation the *Burghal Hidage* made between length of defences and number of hides needed, this could reflect the circumference of the whole island on which Southwark stood.⁵¹ No archaeological evidence has yet been found for the earliest stages of the 'fortress of the men of Surrey', and it may never have

got beyond the planning stages, or, if it did, only been used temporarily at this time, as part of a very specific scenario.⁵² The aim behind its establishment appears to have been defence of land south of the Thames: Southwark's placement on a pivotal road south to Chichester, and its possible connections with beacons, points to a concern to safeguard a routeway that headed south from the river, rather than along it.⁵³ The distinct outlook of the fortress on the southern bank of the Thames might help explain why London itself does not appear in the *Burghal Hidage*:⁵⁴ situated on the north bank, its military concerns lay elsewhere, and the Thames at this stage still lay open to traffic, friendly or otherwise.⁵⁵

The sharp contrast between London and Southwark is symptomatic of the diversity that can be seen in almost every aspect of the fortresses of this period.⁵⁶ Some were built rapidly to respond to a specific situation, with no apparent expectation of longer-term use or an urban role.⁵⁷ The unnamed English and viking forts on the Lea in 894–5 fall into this category, for example. Others, like London, had a well-established role as a town or other form of central place before their fortifications were taken in hand. The process of building or rebuilding defences did not take place in isolation, and a whole series of functions might be created or consolidated at the same time. The result would be a concentration of administrative and economic roles, with a substantial permanent population and a wider orbit of rural residents to protect, and in turn be protected by, the fortress-town. A charter from Worcester dating to the period 884–901 vividly describes how the *burh* there had been built 'for the protection of all the people' (*eallum þæm folce to gebeorge*); it also outlines that the *burh* should contain streets and a market, and describes the interests which the bishop, the ealdorman and King Alfred had in the community.⁵⁸

One can imagine something similar at London in or around 886. But while it can now be appreciated as part of a complex landscape of defence that stretched across southern and central England and involved much more than *byrg* alone, the city on the Thames was – as it has always tended to be – a special case. London's 886 restoration was one of very few late-ninth-century cases of urban rebuilding to be recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and contemporary sources. Its high profile was founded on the maintenance across the ninth century of London's far-flung connections, giving it a status that spanned the English kingdoms. Figures from across both Wessex and Mercia continued to take an active interest in London. The bishop of Worcester bought a property there for commercial purposes in 857, and both he and the archbishop of Canterbury owned significant blocks of property in the developing core of the intramural settlement by the late 880s and 890s.⁵⁹ Large elite properties of this kind were essential building blocks in the redevelopment of London and other southern English towns, providing an economic and jurisdictional framework for more granular activity.⁶⁰ But one can contrast the strictly Mercian magnates who oversaw the urban redevelopment of Worcester with the wide range of Mercian, West Saxon and Kentish figures who gathered at Chelsea in 898 or 899 to discuss how London was taking shape: Alfred himself, Ealdorman Æthelred and his wife and the archbishop of Canterbury were the principal actors, while the text notes that the bishop of Worcester was also present because he received lands immediately abutting those of the archbishop. It leaves open the possibility that other important figures might have been in attendance, such as the bishop of London, who is conspicuous by his absence.

Alfredian London was not a capital city: nowhere in Britain was at this time.⁶¹ But it was recognized as a place with special status for those on both sides of the Thames, and was one of very few to issue coins with a clear mint-name. By the time of Alfred's restoration this position must have been founded on more than commercial activity. London was still a going concern, and as an urban centre of long-standing, the city may have helped define expectations for new or refounded fortress-towns elsewhere, but nonetheless it was far from what it had been in the time of Bede. What it had inherited was a position on the frontier between Mercia and Wessex, which assumed more significance as the two kingdoms drew together. Its geographical setting on arterial roads and rivers also meant that it was still one of the lynchpins of southern England as both a meeting and trading place and as a stronghold. Redevelopment of London in the late ninth century equipped the city to embrace this role in changing circumstances, as sieges and fortresses rose to prominence in Viking-Age warfare. To do so required not only stout and well-maintained walls but also a social infrastructure capable of keeping them manned.⁶² It can be argued that these militarily driven transformations were the key legacy of the period for London. From the late ninth century, London emerged as a community capable of taking the initiative for itself. A whole new side to the settlement can be seen in subsequent decades. By the time of Æthelstan it hosted a coordinated ensemble of 'peace-gilds' which submitted their own set of statutes to the king.⁶³ This included all those 'who belong to London' (*þe to Lundenbyrig hyrað*), which probably reflects a broadened and redirected conception of the district militarily responsible for London: it encompassed men and women and rich and poor alike, who took collective responsibility for upholding the community's rights – above all property rights – in the face of aggression from other groups in the vicinity. For the first time, London was an assertive rather than passive presence in the south-east, ready to stand up against thieves from surrounding jurisdictions.⁶⁴ The 'peace-gilds' were not a military body as such, though their formidable scale, cohesion and ambition would undoubtedly have served the city well in times of war – and indeed the line between armies and armed bands of criminals (or posses dealing with them) was a fine one.⁶⁵

The city as it stood in the early tenth century had been moulded by two generations of warfare and 'restoration', which brought new settlers to the city and probably forged stronger connections between town and surrounding countryside. London was consequently successful in staving off further viking attacks, and contributed significantly to offensive operations against them. In a very real sense, the wars and military reorganization of the ninth century were the making of London.

London and the return of the vikings (c. 980–1016)

If London was brought into being as a community in arms during the last decades of the ninth century, it took on a much more concrete leadership role in England almost exactly a century later, at the turn of the first millennium. Military pressures once again were a crucial precipitating factor. Viking raids began again from about 980, escalating in severity over the subsequent four decades and culminating in a Danish campaign

of conquest from 1013.⁶⁶ The outcome of these years for London went far beyond the loose special status the city enjoyed under Alfred. By the later years of Æthelred II (978–1016), London was effectively England's capital city in a number of respects. It was a favoured residence for kings, a base for fleets and armies, a staunch bulwark against vikings and other foes and a driving force in the finance of kingship and war. Partly for these reasons, it had also emerged as probably the largest and wealthiest town in the land.

Many of these developments came about quite rapidly as a result of unfolding events, and not as part of a conscious programme of centralization. While there was of course a firm existing foundation to build on, and potential for growth at such a well-sited hub of travel and communication, London in the mid-tenth century was a very different kind of settlement. It had probably not expanded much beyond its ninth-century core, and was dominated by large estates owned by members of the elite.⁶⁷ The city was certainly rivalled and quite probably surpassed as a centre of population and commerce by York, Lincoln and other towns of an economically dynamic 'eastern zone'.⁶⁸

By the latter part of the tenth century, however, London was not the frontier fortress it had been in the time of Alfred, nor was it part of the same composite kingdom. Alfred's heirs, from the 950s, were in command of a realm that extended from the south coast to Yorkshire, and had loose suzerainty over lands to the west and north.⁶⁹ London thus found itself in the heart of England, located on what continued to be a key regional frontier within the kingdom.⁷⁰ The creation of this larger polity, and the desire of its kings to exert increasingly rigorous and aggressive power across it,⁷¹ reignited the value of London's connectivity in the later tenth century. From the time of Edgar (959–75) and especially his son Æthelred II, it often hosted meetings of the king, bishops, ealdormen and other powerful figures.⁷² At Easter in 1012 an array of England's great and good met in London to oversee the assembly and payment of a tribute to the vikings. The latter, encamped a few miles down the Thames at Greenwich, slew the captive archbishop of Canterbury shortly thereafter.⁷³

This threatening viking army did not succeed in taking London itself: none in fact ever did, at least by force of arms. Given the generally dismal record of the English against the Danes under Æthelred, London's survival speaks volumes about the effectiveness of its resistance, and sets it apart from other towns and fortresses of the period.⁷⁴ Its defences were still essentially those of the Roman period, perhaps augmented with ramparts and an external ditch, both now known only faintly.⁷⁵ These walls were most likely held by a variety of defenders. When a direct attack threatened the city, every able-bodied individual might have been called on, regardless of their experience and training: one of the advantages of a strongly fortified position was that it helped offset such weaknesses in the defending force.⁷⁶ But the fact that London fared so well suggests that it was also served by more professional units. After 1012, these included the crack viking mercenaries brought into the king's employ;⁷⁷ and the city may also have maintained a relatively effective version of the Alfredian-period arrangement, with men being provided by landowners and their dependants in the town and nearby territories.⁷⁸ A higher proportion of these could have come from the city itself as London's population expanded, and came to include more and more men

who would have been liable to military service.⁷⁹ The underpinning organization of these forces may well have been as much personal as institutional, based on leading figures in the city and their followers: London's close involvement with the king, and with powerful individuals who surrounded him and formed the backbone of his armies, was thus fundamental to its military prowess. Major landholders could summon and lead contingents from their tenants and commended men, like the sailors from across south-east England who swore they 'would live and die with him [Earl Godwine]' (*woldon mid him libban 7 licgean*) in 1052.⁸⁰ In this way lords such as the earl could put together substantial companies, for either their own ends or those of the king: a list of 'shipmen' shows how the bishop of London called on between one and five men each from thirty-two estates (mostly in Essex and Middlesex) to make up the crew of a warship, probably to join one of the many fleets put together by Æthelred II in the years around 1000.⁸¹ Once ready, this ship would probably have been based in London, which also developed a role as a mustering point or base for armies or fleets intended to go and campaign elsewhere.⁸² Great numbers of battle-worthy ships gathered at London in 992 and 1009 to face the vikings, albeit without much success in either case. In the early months of 1010 a major army assembled in London: the vikings eluded it by transferring to the other side of the Thames at Staines.⁸³

All of these defenders were sorely needed as London endured repeated attacks by viking forces, drawn by its concentration of wealth and its accessibility. In 994, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records that a fleet of 94 ships led by the future kings Olaf Tryggvason (of Norway) and Swein Forkbeard (of Denmark) descended on London. But the vikings 'suffered more harm and injury than they ever thought any citizens would do to them', and with the help of the Virgin Mary – on whose nativity the attack took place (8 September) – the city was preserved. Here the London predilections of the chronicler are clearly on display,⁸⁴ and the violence of subsequent decades would give him many more opportunities to celebrate the city's success. In late 1009, after arriving in summer and ravaging southern England, a particularly large army led by Thorkell the Tall settled into a winter camp on the Thames and undertook frequent attacks against London. 'But, praise be to God', the *Chronicler* wrote, 'it still stands untouched, and [the vikings] always suffered loss there.'⁸⁵

As the tribulations of Æthelred's reign neared their climax, London became one of the most keenly contested cities in the kingdom. In 1013, it was the last, staunchest holdout of Æthelred when Swein returned to England with a conquering army. After securing the submission of Oxford and everything north of Watling Street, Swein turned towards London. By this stage it was the key base of Æthelred and his most loyal forces, and in effect the key to the kingdom. The urgency of Swein's march was such that many of his men drowned while crossing the Thames without a bridge or ford. When they reached the city they were initially repulsed by the Londoners – probably with the help of a force of vikings led by Thorkell who had thrown in their lot with Æthelred in 1012, and now formed a formidable standing army based at Greenwich.⁸⁶ Only after Swein moved westwards to Bath and forced the surrender of the rest of the kingdom did London relent. Æthelred himself abandoned the city with his fleet, while the bishop of London was tasked with escorting the king's youngest sons to safety overseas.⁸⁷

The City of London and the ongoing military efforts of the king of the English were becoming closely associated with one another in a deeply personal nexus that drew in ealdormen and others below them. The convergence of these forces is especially apparent in the bloody and eventful year 1016. When Æthelred's eldest surviving son, Edmund Ironside, attempted to raise an army early that year, he faced dissension among the contingents from various regions: they would only go to war if the king and the Londoners (*þære burhware ... of Lundene*) fought with them. Yet even when the king and his London forces did venture out, there was too much talk of treachery for the English to maintain cohesion, and the army dissolved. By Easter Edmund had joined his father in London, and Swein's heir Cnut also turned towards the city with all his strength. In the midst of this drama, Æthelred himself died on 23 April. His burial in St Paul's Cathedral – the first royal funeral there since the seventh century – was symptomatic of the defining role London had come to play in the latter part of his reign, and still more so in its immediate aftermath.⁸⁸ Royal funerals say as much about the actions of would-be heirs as about the deceased themselves.⁸⁹ In this case, the initiative was seized by Edmund and his supporters in London. Their bid for Edmund's succession is enshrined in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which says simply that 'all the councillors who were in London and the citizens' (*ealle þa witan þe on Lundene wæron 7 se burhwaru*) chose him as king, 'and he stoutly defended his realm while his life lasted' (*7 his rice he heardlice werode þa hwile þe his tima wæs*). As far as the *Chronicle's* author was concerned, this was a unanimous, legitimizing event, the defining moment in Edmund's path to the throne. Only later does the annal mention that Edmund 'took possession of Wessex' (*gerad þa Westseaxan*) and received its submission.⁹⁰ Other accounts suggest a bumpier process in which London, and especially the military elements in London, were decisive, but only by overcoming other factions in the kingdom and even within the city. John of Worcester's Latin chronicle (drawing on a lost alternative version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*) gives greater emphasis to an assembly of clergy and aristocrats who met at Southampton to accept Cnut and reject all the heirs of Æthelred. Later they abandoned this pledge and shifted their allegiance to Edmund, after he had been chosen by the Londoners and magnates based in the city.⁹¹ London's case was by no means the only one being made by those who claimed to speak for the kingdom, and neither was the rest of England passive in the face of Cnut's advance, as the main *Chronicle* text would seem to imply. The tense situation within London is only known from the *Encomium Emmae reginae* (*Mirror of Queen Emma*), written in the early 1040s to celebrate the achievements of King Cnut. Yet there is no obvious reason to doubt its more elaborate account of events in spring 1016. The *Encomium* states that London, under siege by Cnut's army, agreed to accept him as king once Æthelred was dead and buried. Cnut even entered the city and briefly sat on 'the throne of the kingdom' (*solio regni*). But the night before this, Edmund had been spirited out of London by a part of the army within the city (*pars interioris exercitus*) who rejected the decision of their fellow citizens. They and Edmund gathered their forces, while Cnut moved his army out of the city, distrusting its inhabitants. Only then did Edmund make his move and return to London, where he was acclaimed as king, and made ready for his campaign in the rest of England.⁹²

Edmund's circuitous route to power was not the end of the year's events for London. Cnut's army and its ships mounted a siege of the city, and dug a ditch which allowed

them to bypass the newly rebuilt London Bridge and the incipient town (or, in real terms, suburb) of Southwark at its southern tip.⁹³ They went on to surround the whole city with another ditch on the north side of the Thames. Despite all this, London held firm until Edmund and his army returned and marched in via what is now Tottenham. A bloody battle followed at nearby Brentford, on the Thames, in which Edmund put the Danes to flight. The latter unsuccessfully besieged the city for a third and final time that year, after Edmund moved off into Wessex. Despite the best efforts of the main *Chronicle* account to concentrate on Edmund and his energetic efforts against the vikings, it is clear that his leadership was, from a London perspective, patchy. Edmund's cause seems to have been upheld in the city at this pivotal time by one of the most respected commanders on the English side: Ulfcelt of East Anglia, whose presence in London is only mentioned in Scandinavian sources.⁹⁴

The fighting of 1016 was still not yet done, though London's direct part in it was over. Edmund would eventually be bested by Cnut at the battle of *Assandun* on 18 October, and the two came to terms soon after in Gloucestershire. Their agreement left Cnut in control of lands north of the Thames, including London. After all the bitter struggles earlier in the year, it must have been galling for the Londoners to submit to the Danes, offer them payment in return for peace, and see the viking army take up quarters in the city for the winter. Yet even these measures reflect Cnut's acceptance that, for better or worse, London had gained a special place in the kingdom; one which meant it had to be dealt with directly, and closely watched.

The acquisition of London held a further, highly tangible attraction for Cnut. The military pressures of Æthelred II's reign had turned the city into England's strongbox: a vital engine in the finance of the struggle against the vikings. There were several dimensions to this role, but the one which probably joined the dots together was the raising of vast tribute payments to buy off raiding armies between 991 and 1018.⁹⁵ These efforts should be seen as an exceptional endeavour, prompted by a combination of desperate circumstances and brutally effective royal government.⁹⁶ As such, the mechanisms exploited to raise and assemble the tributes of Æthelred's reign evolved rapidly on an ad hoc basis, calling in all the resources of late Anglo-Saxon government.⁹⁷ London's part in this process can only be pinned down in 1012. That year's handover of £48,000 was associated with – and probably gathered at – a meeting of the leading magnates held in the city. Other payments are not associated with particular places. The decision to work out of London in this case was perhaps dictated by the presence nearby of the main viking force, which held Archbishop Ælfheah hostage at Greenwich. But the evidence of the coinage strongly indicates that London's financial role had been exceptional for at least two decades by 1012. London had been prominent as a minting centre throughout the tenth century, though for a long time it worked on a similar level to other major mint-towns of the kingdom such as Canterbury, Chester, Winchester and York, and was often surpassed in number of moneys and level of productivity. From about the 980s, however, the situation began to change radically. London, along with other leading mint-towns like Lincoln, Stamford, Winchester and York, gained a large number of additional moneys, and the collective contribution of these towns to the currency grew substantially, accounting for up to 70 per cent of all single-finds of coins from England.⁹⁸ From about the millennium London's standing graduated

into a league of its own, leaving even the other major mint-towns far behind (Figure 4.1). Between about 990 and 1060 London regularly supported at least thirty moneyers in one coin-issue and sometimes up to seventy: approximately double the number of Lincoln or York, the next largest mint-towns. Moreover, it became the main centre for making and distributing dies to all other minting locations.⁹⁹

London was a major city in its own right, but that in itself is not enough to account for such swift and disproportionate expansion – nor the fact that production diminished significantly at a time when London was going from strength to strength as a concentration of trade and population. The extraordinary fiscal demands that began to fall upon the city and the kingdom in the reign of Æthelred II, and continued into the middle of Edward the Confessor's, provide the most compelling explanation for London's contribution. Directly and indirectly, warfare drove much of that demand, in the form of recoinages, tribute payments and probably also payment of armies. London met these exactions not as a single orchestrated entity – there was no one 'royal mint' at this time – but as a collection of separate, granular operations that revolved around the moneyers, each of whom ran an essentially independent enterprise, dealing directly with his own network of clients. The fact that London had so many moneyers is a signal of just how much demand was concentrated in the city; but it also invites the question of why minting was organized in this highly compartmentalised way. The coinage needs to be lifted out of isolation and seen as an integral element of late Anglo-Saxon power relations. London's moneyers probably all had other occupations and responsibilities which made them effective operators in the world of lordship as well as of money. Some would have been thegns or lords in their own right; others might have been subordinated to more powerful lords.¹⁰⁰ Either way, the moneyers would have been embedded in hierarchical networks that helped channel business to them. Some might also have benefited from horizontal connections based on kinship, gild membership or other forms of friendship. Moneyers most likely arose to serve the demands of these specific networks – not an organic, faceless market of 'walk in' customers. Business of this kind must have existed, though would have been difficult to attract and much less predictable. For this reason one suspects that the norm was for minting to be channelled by existing relationships.¹⁰¹ London's moneyers were numerous and productive because the city lay at the heart of a complex web of fiscal, military and other interests that mediated the production and circulation of coined money through personal connections that stretched across the kingdom.

The currency demonstrates how London's centrality to the English war effort went beyond the raw military might of armies, fleets and fortifications, though the city had all of these aplenty. London as a concentration of people, craft and commerce was in the midst of rapid growth, clearly attested archaeologically for this period.¹⁰² Part of this can be attributed to a broader process of urban expansion in Northern Europe.¹⁰³ But London's transformation was especially impressive and swift, the turning point being again in the last decades of the tenth century and the beginning of the eleventh. What made the difference was a unique conjunction of kingship, warfare and the background demands that both created. The frequent presence of the king and his leading councillors would have served to attract money to the city. Like the archbishop of Canterbury and bishop of Worcester in earlier times, diverse elite figures invested in



Figure 4.1 A pair of London pennies minted during its rise to prominence under Æthelred II. To the top is a penny of the *First Hand* type (probably minted in the 980s), by the moneyer Beornwulf; to the bottom is a penny of the *Helmet* type (probably minted between the mid-1000s and c. 1009), by the moneyer Eadwold (both coins now in a private collection; photographs: R. Naismith).

London property, and spent time and resources there.¹⁰⁴ They would also have brought people: servants, hangers-on and other dependants. Other aspects of London's military role served to swell its population and coffers. Frequent assemblages of armed forces generated custom for local tradesmen. Warriors at this time were well-paid, well-supplied professionals who would each come with (if the Domesday Book customs of King Edward's time already applied) a pound in pay, based on a per diem of four pence for two months' service.¹⁰⁵ Gatherings of the army or navy in London would have led to this money being spent on provision, lodging and entertainment in the city's markets. Moreover, the city's stout walls and formidable defences perhaps made it an attractive destination for refugees fleeing destruction in other parts of England: the *Encomium* states precisely this, noting that London's population in early 1016 was swollen 'because the chief men and part of the army had fled into it, and also a very great number of common people'.¹⁰⁶ Military and economic affairs were closely interwoven.

London (1016–66)

London enjoyed a long period of relative peace after 1016, although its association with the king and his armed forces persisted. In the immediate aftermath of the wars of Æthelred, Cnut's concern was seemingly to chastise and secure London, while at the same time maintaining it as a resource. On top of the tribute and provisions extracted from the city in 1016, he imposed a further tribute of £10,500 on London in 1018. This may have been punitive: the rest of the kingdom paid £72,000.¹⁰⁷ A few years later Cnut also deprived London of the relics of St Ælfheah, and he and his court seem to have favoured Winchester over London.¹⁰⁸ The city on the Thames appears, however, to have been a base for the standing armed force recruited by Æthelred in 1012, and kept on in one form or another by Cnut and his successors until 1051. Referred to as *liðsmen* ('seamen') in one annal of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, this body of veteran soldiers could be used by the king to enact his will.¹⁰⁹ It was a substantial unit, especially at first:¹¹⁰ Forty-five ships went over to Æthelred in 1012, while Cnut maintained forty ships after dismissing most of his army in 1018. At some point later in Cnut's reign this was scaled down to sixteen ships, while when his second son Harthacnut came over from Denmark he brought with him sixty-two ships, that were to be paid at a more generous rate. This heavy imposition seems to have been temporary. Only thirty-two ships remained in 1041, and just fourteen by the middle of the reign of Edward the Confessor, nine of which were dismissed in 1050, with the remainder only promised one year's further pay. They too were laid off in 1051.¹¹¹

While they lasted, the *liðsmen* were a prominent element of London's population. Their influence helped turn the city's influence over the royal succession in 1016 into a precedent. After Cnut's death in 1035, they had an important voice at the meeting in Oxford where the succession to the kingdom was decided, and seven years later Edward the Confessor was acclaimed as king by 'all the people' (*eall folc*) in London.¹¹² With their generous pay from the king, they might have founded some of the several early churches in London with dedications that suggest a Scandinavian connection (e.g. St Bride and St Olaf),¹¹³ and also had a cemetery somewhere in the city. One of the monuments that perhaps once stood there is the famous tombstone carved with a rampant Ringerike-style beast which came to light near St Paul's Cathedral in the mid-nineteenth century.¹¹⁴

Even though Edward reduced and eventually dismissed the *liðsmen*, the city's association with vital military and political meetings was now secure enough to stand on its own.¹¹⁵ In 1049 and again in the crises of 1051–2, London stood at the centre of events. During the latter set of confrontations between Edward and Earl Godwin, London was the scene of three meetings, two of which were accompanied by military stand-offs along the Thames, with Godwine and his supporters in Southwark, and the king's men on the northern shore. It was in London that the two parties agreed to settle an initial dispute, and the city was the target of Godwin and his men (and the headquarters of the king) when the earls sought to return to power in 1052.¹¹⁶

By 1066, control of London stood for control of the kingdom. The city's association with the crown and its resources had recently been reinforced by Edward's lavish patronage of the immediately adjacent Westminster Abbey, where William and (probably) Harold

were both crowned.¹¹⁷ After Edward's death and the succession of Harold Godwinson in January, London again served as the base for fleets and armies. It was where King Harold gathered his forces to meet threats coming from both the north and the south,¹¹⁸ and when Harold set out to meet William of Normandy's invasion, his army included a contingent of Londoners who were said to have been charged with protection of the king and his standard.¹¹⁹ After the battle of Hastings in October, Duke William began a sure but circuitous march to London. Going around the Weald, he proceeded through Sussex, Kent and Surrey.¹²⁰ An advance party of William's army encountered fierce resistance in Southwark, and was prevented from crossing the Thames into the city, so that William chose to take another detour and make his crossing of the river at Wallingford. This cautious approach reflects the paramount military and political importance of London, as well as its still formidable defences. The city was swollen with a mass of soldiers, including survivors from Harold's army,¹²¹ and it had emerged in the confused aftermath of Hastings as the centre of a bid for power on the part of Edward's great-nephew Edgar the Ætheling. In the words of Guy of Amiens, at this dark time 'the report flew round that London had a king and the English survivors rejoiced' (*sparsit fama uolans quod habet Londonia regem, gaudet et Anglorum qui superset populus*).¹²²

The earls and bishops (including both archbishops) who found themselves in London at this moment weighed their chances as William approached. Gradually, they jumped ship, abandoning Edgar's cause for William's: Stigand, archbishop of Canterbury, was apparently the first, meeting William in Wallingford, while a larger party came out to meet the duke at Great Berkhamsted in Hertfordshire. This group included Edgar himself, Ealdred, archbishop of York, several other bishops and earls, as well as 'all the chief men from London' (*ealle þa betstan men of Lundene*).¹²³ Not everyone in the city went along with this submission. William of Poitiers and Guy of Amiens both emphasized that London was a pugnacious and heavily defended city. Some sources describe vigorous preparations for a siege on the part of local leaders, with conflict only being forestalled by clever negotiation on William's part; others even mention a skirmish within the walls of the city.¹²⁴

These divergent accounts reflect the perspectives of various observers, who wanted to call attention to different parts of a complex story.¹²⁵ London in 1066 comes across as a hotbed of rumour: a stage on which the feelings of several factions ran high. As with Edmund Ironside's succession fifty years earlier, there were probably differences of opinion within the city. One gets the sense that at least a portion of the military forces massed within the city were spoiling for a fight, whereas the bishops and earls recognized that discretion was the better part of valour.¹²⁶ The latter eventually got the upper hand, and after cooler heads had prevailed the city was delivered to William without a serious fight.

Conclusion

It is tempting to take for granted London's status as a place of such inherent greatness that it must always have been the fulcrum of England. In the era from Alfred to the Norman Conquest, nothing of the sort can be assumed. If the people of England had

begun to assign a special quality to London by 1016 and certainly 1066, it was for their own concrete and definable reasons. A happy coincidence of physical and human geography was one of them. From Roman times the city had benefited from good road, river and sea access, and in the Anglo-Saxon era it sat at a confluence of kingdoms. As the dust settled at the end of the 870s this was still true, though the kingdoms involved had changed. London sat on the frontier of Mercia and Wessex, with viking territory now situated just a few miles away to the east of the river Lea. The 'restoration' of London by Alfred the Great in 886 accompanied a ceremonial submission of the Mercians, and probably reflects this liminal quality: it was the ideal location to affirm the cooperation of the surviving Anglo-Saxon realms against the vikings.

London's location on the border of traditionally Mercian and West Saxon territory continued to be a factor in its prominence. Mercia, Wessex and the south-east were all major players in the kingdom that started to coalesce under Alfred. But London's Alfredian redevelopment also led to a transformation in the character of the city. With the viking threat looming, London's enhanced military role generated a clearer sense of cohesion within the city. It was in these years that London started to emerge as a force in its own right, as well as a venue for powers based in more distant regions to come together. If the Londoners had not participated in Alfred's campaigns of the 890s, it is unlikely that they would have constituted their 'peace-gilds' in subsequent years to press the citizens' legal interests against aggressors. In an important sense, the pressures of war were the making of London as a community.

But it was the phase of bitter warfare against the vikings a century later, around the turn of the first millennium, that would revolutionize London's position. Changes at this time unfolded with the startling speed that the desperation of war often brings. Military developments were closely intertwined with political and economic forces. London became a mighty stronghold precisely because it was a significant, well-defended city; in turn it became a greater city because it was a mighty stronghold. These roles stimulated one another in symbiotic fashion, against the backdrop of a kingdom that was gaining in size and cohesion. Crucially, during the troubled reign of Æthelred II the city gained a close association with the king and his armies, serving effectively as figurehead for the kingdom. But the foundations laid at this time proved strong enough to outlast the turbulence of Æthelred's later years. The functions London took on – as a preferred locus for national meetings, for the nomination of kings, for the assembling of armies and fleets and for the management of the currency – stuck, sustaining the city's standing and wealth for generations to come. It was in the crucible of war that London transformed into the heart of the English kingdom.

Notes

- 1 Though it was not the very last point at which a crossing was feasible. See John Baker and Stuart Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage: Anglo-Saxon Civil Defence in the Viking Age* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 326.
- 2 Hugh Prince, 'The Situation of London', in *The City of London from Prehistoric Times to c. 1520*, ed. Mary D. Lobel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Baker and Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage*, 289–91.

- 3 Richard Hingley, *Londinium: A Biography. Roman London from Its Origins to the Fifth Century* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 173–8.
- 4 Compare the example of emergent Italian communes in the eleventh and twelfth centuries: Chris Wickham, *Sleepwalking into a New World: The Emergence of Italian City Communes in the Twelfth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), esp. 56–7.
- 5 Or at least the first recorded time: there may well have been earlier viking incursions into southern England that have gone unrecorded: Clare Downham, ‘The Earliest Viking Activity in England’, *English Historical Review* 132 (2017): 1–12.
- 6 ASC 842. The ASC exists in eight main manuscript versions, conventionally referred to with the letters A–H. For the period down to the 890s they are for the most part in agreement, but subsequently there is significant variation. Where appropriate, references to the ASC therefore also include one or more letters to identify individual manuscripts. A complete translation drawing on all versions can be found in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Revised Translation*, trans. Dorothy Whitelock, David C. Douglas and Susie I. Tucker (London: Eyre & Spottiswood, 1961); this is the translation used here. The text is best consulted in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, gen. ed. David Dumville and Simon Keynes, 9 vols (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1983–2004), but direct reference is only given where specific passages of text are referred to.
- 7 Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* IV.22 (*Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 400–5).
- 8 Rory Naismith, *Citadel of the Saxons: The Rise of Early London* (London: IB Tauris, 2018), 72–104.
- 9 Naismith, *Citadel of the Saxons*, 95–8; S. E. Kelly, ‘Trading Privileges from Eighth-Century England’, *Early Medieval Europe* 1 (1992): 3–28.
- 10 John Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 191–2. Compare Guy Halsall, *Warfare and Society in the Barbarian West, 450–900* (London: Routledge, 2003), 215–27.
- 11 Catherine Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils c. 650–c. 850* (London: Leicester University Press, 1995), 27–39.
- 12 Thomas F. X. Noble, ‘The Rise and Fall of the Archbishopric of Lichfield in English, Papal, and European Perspective’, in *England and Rome in the Early Middle Ages: Pilgrimage, Art, and Politics*, ed. Francesca Tinti (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014).
- 13 This coinage has been argued to represent a response to a Carolingian gold coinage of Dorestad which also describes the mint-place as a *vicus* (Gareth Williams, ‘The Influence of Dorestad Coinage on Coin Design in England and Scandinavia’, in *Dorestad in an International Framework: New Research on Centres of Trade and Coinage in Carolingian Times, Held at the National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden, the Netherlands, June 24–27, 2009*, ed. Annemarieke Willemsen and Hanneke Kik (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 108–9). The opposite is of course equally possible, and it is in any case problematic to draw such close associations within so small a body of surviving gold coins, especially when there is a plausible local context for references to *vicus Lundoniae*, meaning either *Lundenwic* or a royal estate in the city (Rory Naismith, *Money and Power in Anglo-Saxon England: The Southern English Kingdoms 757–865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 114–17).
- 14 Rory Naismith, ‘Two Important Coins of the Mercian Supremacy’, *British Numismatic Journal* 89 (2019): 203–8.

- 15 Gordon Malcolm, David Bowsher and Robert Cowie, *Middle Saxon London: Excavations at the Royal Opera House 1989–99* (London: Museum of London Archaeology Service, 2003), 118–20; Jim Leary et al., *Tatberht's Lundenwic: Archaeological Excavations in Middle Saxon London* (London: Pre-Construct Archaeology, 2004), 76–7 and 124–5.
- 16 John Schofield et al., *St Paul's Cathedral before Wren* (London: English Heritage, 2011), 51–2, 54–6 and 250–4; Martin Biddle, 'A City in Transition: 400–800', in *City of London*, ed. Lobel, 29. See also now Julian Ayre and Robin Wroe-Brown, 'The Post-Roman Foreshore and the Origins of the Late Saxon Waterfront and Dock of Æthelred's Hithe: Excavations at Bull Wharf, City of London', *Archaeological Journal* 72 (2015): 121–94.
- 17 P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1968) [hereafter referred to as 'S'], no. 208 (*Cartularium Saxonicum: A Collection of Charters Relating to Anglo-Saxon History*, ed. Walter de Gray Birch, 3 vols (London: Whiting & Co., 1885–99), no. 492). The location is described as being *non longe from Uuestgetum*. It is not clear which gate was the 'west gate'. It has been suggested that the estate lay within the city (Kelly, 'Trading Privileges', 12), though a location immediately outside the walls, around the mouth of the Fleet, seems more likely (Derek Keene, 'Alfred and London', in *Alfred the Great: Papers from the Eleventh-Centenary Conferences*, ed. Timothy Reuter (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 239). See also S 1194 (*The Charters of Christ Church, Canterbury*, ed. N. P. Brooks and S. E. Kelly, 2 parts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), no. 76), issued in *Lundonia civitate* in 845.
- 18 ASC 851. Some versions of the *Chronicle* do not mention London at this point. Asser also omits it in his *De rebus gestis Ælfredi*, ch. 4 (which was adapted from an early version of the ASC), though the passage which immediately follows clearly relates to London. For text and comment, see *Asser's Life of King Alfred, together with the Annals of Saint Neots Erroneously Ascribed to Asser*, ed. William Henry Stevenson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 5 and 177; *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources*, trans. Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), 68 and 231.
- 19 ASC 851. ASC A does not specify where the camp was established, while others say Thanet, and Asser has Sheppey.
- 20 Gareth Williams, 'Viking Camps and the Means of Exchange in Britain and Ireland in the Ninth Century', in *The Vikings in Ireland and Beyond: Before and After the Battle of Clontarf*, ed. Howard B. Clarke and Ruth Johnson (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2015).
- 21 Nicholas Brooks, *Communities and Warfare 700–1400* (London and Rio Grande: Hambledon, 2000), 69–92 (an updated reprint of a chapter co-written with James Graham-Campbell). See also Alfred Smyth, *King Alfred the Great* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 46–8.
- 22 See also S 1278 (*Cartularium Saxonicum*, ed. Birch, no. 534): a charter which laments the hefty payment that was required from Mercia 'in that same year when the pagans stayed in London'.
- 23 Simon Keynes, 'King Alfred and the Mercians', in *Kings, Currency and Alliances: History and Coinage of Southern England in the Ninth Century*, ed. Mark A. S. Blackburn and David N. Dumville (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1998), 8–9, 11 and 14–18; Mark Blackburn, 'The London Mint in the Reign of Alfred', in *Kings, Currency and Alliances*, ed. Blackburn and Dumville, 108–20.

- 24 Pace Jeremy Haslam, 'The Development of London by King Alfred: A Reassessment', *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society* 60 (2009): 114–15; Smyth, *King Alfred*, 46.
- 25 John Baker and Stuart Brookes, 'Fulham 878–79: A New Consideration of Viking Manoeuvres', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 8 (2012): 23–52. The ASC and Asser assign the arrival and departure of the Fulham vikings to 879 and 880 respectively, though continental annals of the same period suggest the Anglo-Saxon records put the movements of this viking force one year ahead of their proper date: Charles Plummer, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel, with Supplementary Extracts from the Others*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1892–9), II, 95.
- 26 The treaty carries no date, but must have been concluded before Guthrum's death in 890, and after the battle of Edington (May 878), most probably once Ceolwulf II had disappeared from the scene in Mercia in 879 and Guthrum's army had settled in East Anglia in 880. See Keynes, 'King Alfred and the Mercians', 31–4; David N. Dumville, *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar: Six Essays on Political, Cultural, and Ecclesiastical Revival* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1992), 1–23; with wider commentary in Paul 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. Dawn M. Hadley and Julian D. Richards (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 43–64; Dawn M. Hadley, *The Vikings in England: Settlement, Society and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 29–37; Tom Lambert, 'Frontier Law in the Anglo-Saxon England', in *Crossing Borders: Boundaries and Margins in Medieval and Early Modern England. Essays in Honour of Cynthia J. Neville*, ed. Sara M. Butler and Krista J. Kesselring (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018), 21–42.
- 27 Keynes, 'King Alfred and the Mercians', 21–3. In older scholarship it was widely believed that this passage had been wrongly transplanted from a different annal in the Chronicle, perhaps 885 or 886.
- 28 ASC 886; Asser, *De rebus gestis Ælfredi*, ch. 83 (*Asser's Life*, ed. Stevenson, 69; *Alfred the Great*, trans. Keynes and Lapidge, 97–8).
- 29 Keene, 'Alfred and London', 241–3; Keynes, 'King Alfred and the Mercians', 23. See also the example of Worcester: p. 84.
- 30 Any archaeological evidence for such efforts in London either awaits discovery or has been obliterated. For comparative purposes, it should be noted that a new ditch was dug immediately outside the Roman walls at Winchester (Martin Biddle, 'The Study of Winchester: Archaeology and History in a British Town, 1961–1983', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 69 (1983): 119–26), while there is evidence for Anglo-Saxon reconstruction of Roman town defences at Exeter (Stuart Blaylock, *Exeter City Wall Survey* (Exeter: Exeter Archaeology, 1995), 46–7).
- 31 ASC 885; Asser, *De rebus gestis Ælfredi*, chs. 66–7 (*Asser's Life*, ed. Stevenson, 49–51; *Alfred the Great*, trans. Keynes and Lapidge, 86–7). Some of the information relating to this year seems to have been omitted by all surviving ASC manuscripts and by Asser, and can only be recovered (in slightly mangled form) from Æthelweard, *Chronicon* s.a. 885 (*The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. and trans. Alistair Campbell (London: Nelson, 1962), 44–5).
- 32 Keynes, 'King Alfred and the Mercians', 23.
- 33 Naismith, *Citadel of the Saxons*, 107–8.
- 34 Gareth Williams, 'Military and Non-Military Functions of the Anglo-Saxon Burh, c. 878–978', in *Landscapes of Defence in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. John Baker, Stuart

- Brookes and Andrew Reynolds (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 146. Jeremy Haslam ('Development of London') has argued that the intramural Alfredian settlement was redeveloped rapidly in 879/80, as Guthrum's army and the Fulham vikings retreated.
- 35 S 1628 (*Charters of Christ Church, Canterbury*, ed. Brooks and Kelly, no. 100).
- 36 Naismith, *Citadel of the Saxons*, 122; Valerie Horsman, Christine Milne and Gustav Milne, *Aspects of Saxo-Norman London 1: Building and Street Development Near Billingsgate and Cheapside* (London: London & Middlesex Archaeological Society, 1988), 14–16, 28–30 and 112–13; Keene, 'Alfred and London', 245.
- 37 Greg Waite, 'The Preface to the Old English Bede: Authorship, Transmission, and Connection with the *West Saxon Genealogical Regnal List*', *ASE* 44 (2015): 78–83. *Lundenburh* appears in some earlier annals in the ASC (e.g. 457, 851, 872), although these were probably composed in the late ninth century; the name would remain popular in the tenth century, alongside *Lunden(e)*.
- 38 This distance would place the fortress somewhere in the vicinity of Ware, Hertfordshire, though no specific site can be identified.
- 39 ASC 894, 895.
- 40 The usual sense of *burhware* in Old English was 'people associated with a town', in a judicial and organizational as well as military sense: at Canterbury, for example, there were associations of 'inner' and 'outer' *burhware* from about 860 until at least the mid-eleventh century (Nicholas Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury: Christ Church from 597 to 1066* (London: Leicester University Press, 1984), 27–33). While *burhware* in the ASC usually occur in a military context, it is not clear whether this meant solely town-dwellers or those whose military obligations were tied to the town: Williams, 'Military and Non-Military Functions', 134–5.
- 41 In modern military parlance, this pair constitute a 'defence in depth', tailored to counter the tactics of highly mobile viking bands. For deeper discussion see Richard Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* (London: British Museum Publications, 1988), 68–78; Richard Abels, 'Reflections on Alfred the Great as a Military Leader', in *The Medieval Way of War: Studies in Medieval Military History in Honor of Bernard S. Bachrach*, ed. Gregory I. Halfond (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 56–62; Matthew Strickland, 'Military Technology and Conquest: The Anomaly of Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 19 (1997): 369–73.
- 42 ASC 893.
- 43 For the possible importance of fortresses as concentration points for supplies (which could be used by the English and denied to the vikings) see Williams, 'Military and Non-Military Functions', 131–2.
- 44 Ryan Lavelle, 'Controlling and Contesting Urban Spaces: Rulers and Urban Communities in Southern England and Northern France from the Later 9th to 11th Century', in *Fortified Settlements in Early Medieval Europe: Defended Communities of the 8th–10th Centuries*, ed. Neil Christie and Hajnalka Herold (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2016), 164–5. There is also evidence for earlier prototype networks of fortification, particularly in Mercia (Steven Bassett, 'Anglo-Saxon Fortifications in Western Mercia', *Midland History* 36 (2011): 5–10; Baker and Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage*, 49–63; Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, 180–246), while the power to command labour on building fortresses was reserved in West Saxon charters from the time of Æthelbald (Brooks, *Communities and Warfare*, 32–47).
- 45 Alexander R. Rumble, 'An Edition and Translation of the *Burghal Hidage*, Together with Recension C of the *Tribal Hidage*', in *The Defence of Wessex: The Burghal Hidage and Anglo-Saxon Fortifications*, ed. David Hill and Alexander R. Rumble (Manchester:

- Manchester University Press, 1996). The date of the *Burghal Hidage* is contentious. In its extant form the list probably dates to the early tenth century, though large parts of the system it portrays might date back to the late ninth (Nicholas P. Brooks, 'The Administrative Background to the *Burghal Hidage*', in *Defence of Wessex*, ed. Hill and Rumble, 90–2; Dumville, *Wessex and England*, 24–7; Baker and Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage*, 32–3). For the argument that the *Burghal Hidage* stems from a more rapid process of systematization in 878/9, see Jeremy Haslam, 'King Alfred and the Vikings: Strategies and Tactics, 878–886', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 13 (2006): 122–54, with critique in John Baker and Stuart Brookes, 'From Frontier to Border: The Evolution of Northern West Saxon Territorial Delimitation in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 17 (2011): 108–23.
- 46 Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation*, 43–68. Compare Brooks, *Communities and Warfare*, 63–6; Alexander R. Rumble, 'OE Waru', in *Defence of Wessex*, ed. Hill and Rumble, 179; Nicholas Brooks, 'Alfredian Government: The West Saxon Inheritance', in *Alfred the Great*, ed. Reuter, 158–62. Note the more sceptical reading of George Molyneaux, *The Formation of the English Kingdom in the Tenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 86–92, which draws on later sources to suggest that the terms usually taken to denote maintenance (*wealstylling*) and military service (*wære*) both relate to more general burdens, with actual defence being a separate matter.
- 47 Williams, 'Military and Non-Military Functions', 134–5.
- 48 Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, 254–5 and 270–1; Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation*, 58–68.
- 49 The size and shape of this district are never specified, though the later legal composition VI Æthelstan alludes to an area under London's jurisdiction (see n. 63). This could have been Middlesex, which Asser already associated with London in the early 890s (*De rebus gestis Ælfredi*, ch. 4 (Asser's *Life*, ed. Stevenson, 5; *Alfred the Great*, trans. Keynes and Lapidge, 68)). But the area denoted by Middlesex could have been different from the Domesday-era shire, and from context the area of VI Æthelstan sounds like it may have been relatively small (Pamela Taylor, 'Boundaries and Margins: Barnet, Finchley and Totteridge', in *Medieval Ecclesiastical Studies in Honour of Dorothy M. Owen*, ed. M. J. Franklin and Christopher Harper-Bill (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1995), 277–8).
- 50 See below n. 64.
- 51 David Hill, 'Gazetteer of Burghal Hidage Sites', in *Defence of Wessex*, ed. Hill and Rumble, 218–19; Tony Dyson, 'London and Southwark in the 7th Century and Later: A Neglected Reference', *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society* 31 (1980): 83–95.
- 52 Compare Brooks, 'Administrative Background', 144–5.
- 53 Baker and Brooks, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage*, 60–1, 159–60 and 326.
- 54 Other suggestions have been put forward for London's absence. Jeremy Haslam has argued that it lay outside English control at the time he believes the *Burghal Hidage* was composed (in 878), and was only incorporated into the network of English defences a year or two later (Haslam, 'King Alfred and the Vikings'; Haslam, 'Development of London'). Baker and Brookes (*Beyond the Burghal Hidage*, 325–7) have proposed that London formed a pair with nearby Southwark, and was omitted as a high-status settlement rather than a fortress as such.
- 55 There is no archaeological evidence of a bridge across the Thames in the ninth century (*pace* Haslam, 'Development of London', 130–7).

- 56 On terminology, with the important implication that the usual scholarly catch-all terms *burh* or borough create a misleading sense of unity, see Barbara Yorke, 'West Saxon Fortifications in the Ninth Century: The Perspective from the Written Sources', in *Landscapes of Defence*, ed. Baker, Brookes and Reynolds.
- 57 For a distinction between 'forts' and 'minor "burhs"' in the *Burghal Hidage*, see Brooks, 'Administrative Background', 130–1; Baker and Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage*, 86.
- 58 S 223 (*Cartularium Saxonicum*, ed. Birch, no. 579; *English Historical Documents. Volume 1: c. 500–1042*, ed. Dorothy Whitelock, 2nd edn (London: Eyre Methuen, 1979), no. 99).
- 59 S 346 (*Cartularium Saxonicum*, ed. Birch, no. 561) and 1628 (*Charters of Christ Church, Canterbury*, ed. Brooks and Kelly, no. 100). For the possible locations of these sites, see Tony Dyson, 'Two Saxon Land-Grants for Queenhithe', in *Collectanea Londiniensia: Studies in London Archaeology and History Presented to Ralph Merrifield*, ed. Joanna Bird, Hugh Chapman and John Clark (London: London and Middlesex Archaeological Society, 1978), 200–15; Alan Vince, *Saxon London: An Archaeological Investigation* (London: Seaby, 1990), 20–2; with a more reserved reading in S. E. Kelly, *Charters of St Paul's, London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 25.
- 60 Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, 269–74.
- 61 Carlrichard Brühl, *Aus Mittelalter und Diplomatie: Gesammelte Aufsätze*, 3 vols (Hildesheim: Weidmann, 1989–97), I, 69–137; Derek Keene, 'Capital Cities in Medieval England to 1300', in *Lo sguardo lungimirante delle capitali: saggi in onore di Francesca Bocchi*, ed. Rosa Smurra, Hubert Houben and Manuela Ghizzoni (Rome: Viella, 2014), 21–60.
- 62 Dorn van Dommelen, 'Boroughs and Socio-Political Reconstruction in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in *Place-Names, Language and the Anglo-Saxon Landscape*, ed. Nicholas J. Higham and Martin J. Ryan (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2011), 229–37.
- 63 For text and translation, see *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, ed. and trans. F. L. Attenborough (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 156–69.
- 64 Naismith, *Citadel of the Saxons*, 133–5; Rory Naismith, 'The Origins of the Husting and the Folkmoot', *History* 104 (2019): 409–24. See also Van Dommelen, 'Boroughs and Socio-Political Reconstruction', 231–3.
- 65 Halsall, *Warfare and Society*, 14–19; Williams, 'Military and Non-Military Functions', 141–2; Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation*, 64.
- 66 For a detailed chronology of these actions, see Simon Keynes, 'The Historical Context of the Battle of Maldon', in *The Battle of Maldon, AD 991*, ed. Donald Scragg (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 84–98; Simon Keynes, 'The Vikings in England, c. 790–1016', in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings*, ed. Peter Sawyer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 73–82.
- 67 Naismith, *Citadel of the Saxons*, 138–40; Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, 342–7.
- 68 Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, 342–7; G. G. Astill, 'Towns and Town Hierarchies in Saxon England', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 10 (1991): 111.
- 69 Molyneux, *Formation*, esp. 1–6.
- 70 Compare ASC DE 1051, in which London was the venue for a meeting of men called from both sides of the Thames.
- 71 Molyneux, *Formation*, 195–230; James Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxon State* (London and New York: Hambledon, 2000).
- 72 Simon Keynes, 'Church Councils, Royal Assemblies, and Anglo-Saxon Royal Diplomas', in *Kingship, Legislation and Power in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Gale R.

- Owen-Crocker and Brian W. Schneider (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2013), 151–2; David Hill, *An Atlas of Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1981), 85–91 and 94–5.
- 73 ASC CDE 1012. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* survives in eight manuscripts versions. The convention since the mid-nineteenth century has been to refer to these with the letters A–H. For various periods the annals in these eight converge and diverge in complicated patterns, which reflect the interweaving circulation of earlier witnesses. For the reign of Æthelred a particularly vivid and high-flown account is preserved by three manuscripts (C, D and E): it is believed that this was composed in period 1018–23, either at London or by someone with strong London sympathies and connections (Keynes, ‘Historical Context’, 95–8; Simon Keynes, ‘The Declining Reputation of King Æthelred the Unready’, in *Anglo-Saxon History: Basic Readings*, ed. David A. E. Pelteret (New York: Garland, 2000), 162–3).
- 74 Strickland, ‘Military Technology’, 372.
- 75 Vince, *Saxon London*, 87–90.
- 76 For Anglo-Saxon fortifications as a ‘force multiplier’ of this kind, see Bernard S. Bachrach and Rutherford Aris, ‘Military Technology and Garrison Organization: Some Observations on Anglo-Saxon Military Thinking in Light of the Burghal Hidage’, *Technology and Culture* 31 (1990): 1–17.
- 77 See n. 86.
- 78 This would mark an exception from the general rule of apparent relaxation in the late tenth century of Alfred’s schemes for maintaining a standing army and fortress-based garrisons: Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation*, 92–3. Compare John Beeler, ‘The Composition of Anglo-Norman Armies’, *Speculum* 40 (1965): 412–13 for the contribution of townsmen in twelfth-century armies.
- 79 Naismith, *Citadel of the Saxons*, 166–7; Vince, *Saxon London*, 92. London’s formal military obligation to the king remains unknown, however. Towns were often able to negotiate lighter reckonings for their military contribution to the king: Exeter in 1066 only rendered the equivalent of five hides for land or naval expeditions, presumably meaning one man (Kew, The National Archives E 31/2/1–2 (‘Great’ Domesday Book [GDB]), f. 100r (*Domesday Book: A Complete Translation*, ed. Ann Williams (London: Penguin, 2003), 277)). On the other hand, the capacity to raise and equip a large military contingent was an assertion of influence and collective identity. One can imagine that although the obligation of a city may have been light, under the right circumstances its citizens could have chosen to make a larger contribution.
- 80 ASC CD 1052 (*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition. Volume 5: MS. C*, ed. Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), 112). Compare Stephen Baxter, *The Earls of Mercia: Lordship and Power in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 85–9; Robin Fleming, ‘Rural Elites and Urban Communities in Late-Saxon England’, *Past & Present* 141 (1993): 9–10.
- 81 *Charters of St Paul’s*, ed. Kelly, no. 25. The total number of men demanded was either 45 or 59, depending on whether one doubles the requirement assigned to paired estates. See further Pamela Taylor, ‘The Endowment and Military Obligations of the See of London: A Reassessment of Three Sources’, *Anglo-Norman Studies* 14 (1992): 293–303; C. R. Hart, *The Danelaw* (London: Hambledon, 1992), 205–20; Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation*, 108–10. On the interests of other (mostly secular) landowners in large cities such as London, see Fleming, ‘Rural Elites and Urban Communities’.
- 82 On London’s prominence in naval warfare, see Nicholas J. Hooper, ‘Some Observations on the Navy in Late Anglo-Saxon England’, in *Studies in Medieval*

- History Presented to R. Allen Brown*, ed. Christopher Harper-Bill, Christopher Holdsworth and Janet L. Nelson (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1989), 203–13.
- 83 ASC CDE 992 and 1009.
- 84 ASC CDE 994.
- 85 ASC CDE 1009. The location of the viking camp is not specified. It could have been Greenwich, which was a viking base by 1011–12.
- 86 ASC CDE 1012 mentions forty-five ships led by Thorkell entering English service. A new annual tax (the *heregeld*) was instituted to pay this force: Keynes, 'Historical Background', 100–2; Levi Roach, *Æthelred the Unready* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 223–5 and 266–7.
- 87 ASC CDE 1013.
- 88 Simon Keynes, 'The Burial of King Æthelred the Unready at St Paul's', in *The English and their Legacy: 900–1200. Essays in Honour of Ann Williams*, ed. David Roffe (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2012), 129–48.
- 89 Nicole Marafioti, *The King's Body: Burial and Succession in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2014), 86–93; Ryan Lavelle, *Alfred's Wars: Sources and Interpretations of Anglo-Saxon Warfare in the Viking Age* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2010), 260–2.
- 90 Passages of Old English are here taken from MS E (*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition. Volume 7: MS. E*, ed. Susan Irvine (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 72–3).
- 91 John of Worcester, *Chronicon* s.a. 1016 (*The Chronicle of John of Worcester. Volume II: The Annals from 450 to 1066*, ed. R. R. Darlington and P. McGurk, trans. Jennifer Bray and P. McGurk (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 484–5).
- 92 *Encomium Emmae reginae* II.7–8 (*Encomium Emmae Reginae*, ed. Alistair Campbell, with introduction by Simon Keynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 22–5).
- 93 Archaeological evidence for the first-known medieval London Bridge consists of timbers felled in the period c. 982–1032, and at around the same point it is referred to in Old Norse skaldic poems (Baker and Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage*, 157–60; Bruce Watson, Trevor Brigham and Tony Dyson, *London Bridge: 2000 Years of a River Crossing* (London: Museum of London Archaeology Service, 2001); for the argument that London Bridge may have been in existence much earlier, in or before the time of Alfred, see Haslam, 'Development of London', 130–6. For the early development of Southwark, see Naismith, *Citadel of the Saxons*, 127–8, 155 and 176.
- 94 Russell Poole, 'Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History: Some Aspects of the Period 1009–1016', *Speculum* 62 (1987): 280–98, with Russell Poole (ed. and trans.), 'Liðsmannaflökk', in *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 1: from Mythical Times to c. 1035*, ed. Diana Whaley (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 1014–28.
- 95 There is extensive scholarship on these payments and how reliable the evidence for them is: M. K. Lawson, 'The Collection of Danegeld and Heregeld in the Reigns of Aethelred II and Cnut', *English Historical Review* 99 (1984): 721–38; M. K. Lawson, '"Those Stories Look True": Levels of Taxation in the Reigns of Aethelred II and Cnut', *English Historical Review* 104 (1989): 385–406; 'Danegeld and Heregeld Once More', *English Historical Review* 105 (1990): 951–61; John Gillingham, '"The Most Precious Jewel in the English Crown": Levels of Danegeld and Heregeld in the Early Eleventh Century', *English Historical Review* 104 (1989): 373–84; John Gillingham, 'Chronicles and Coins as Evidence for Levels of Tribute and Taxation in Late Tenth and Early Eleventh-Century England', *English Historical Review* 105 (1990): 939–50; Keynes, 'Historical Background', 103–7; Roach, *Æthelred the Unready*, 175–6.

- 96 Andrew Wareham, 'Fiscal Policies and the Institution of a Tax State in Anglo-Saxon England within a Comparative Context', *Economic History Review* 65 (2012): 910–31; Roach, *Aethelred the Unready*, 221–5; Rory Naismith, *Medieval European Coinage, with a Catalogue of the Coins in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. 8: Britain and Ireland c. 400–1066* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 253–8.
- 97 Lawson, 'Collection of Danegeld', esp. 723–31.
- 98 Rory Naismith, 'London and Its Mint c. 880–1066: A Preliminary Survey', *British Numismatic Journal* 83 (2013): 56–8. Single-finds, thought to represent the results of random losses from coins in circulation, are a better overall gauge of the input of individual mint-places into the circulating currency than hoards, which are often idiosyncratic in composition.
- 99 Naismith, 'London and Its Mint', 53–6 and 58–62. See also Naismith, *Citadel of the Saxons*, 153–9.
- 100 Naismith, *Medieval European Coinage*, 240–3.
- 101 Rory Naismith, 'The Currency of Power in Late Anglo-Saxon England', *History Compass* (forthcoming). In this respect moneyers were analogous to the bazaar traders of modern North Africa famously studied by Clifford Geertz ('Suq: the Bazaar Economy in Sefrou', in *Meaning and Order in Moroccan Society: Three Essays in Cultural Analysis*, Clifford Geertz, Hildred Geertz and Lawrence Rosen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 123–276).
- 102 Naismith, *Citadel of the Saxons*, 171–9; Vince, *Saxon London*, 26–37.
- 103 Derek Keene, 'Towns and the Growth of Trade', in *The New Cambridge Medieval History. Volume IV: c. 1024–c. 1198*, ed. David Luscombe and Jonathan Riley-Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 47–85; Christopher Loveluck, *Northwest Europe in the Early Middle Ages, c. AD 600–1150* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 302–60.
- 104 The abbot of Ely, for example, acquired a large estate which became known as *Abboteshai: Liber Eliensis* II.60 (*Liber Eliensis*, ed. E. O. Blake (London: Royal Historical Society, 1962), 131–2; *Liber Eliensis: A History of the Isle of Ely from the Seventh Century to the Twelfth*, trans. Janet Fairweather (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), 156–9). For other elite properties in London and Southwark, Fleming, 'Rural Elites and Urban Communities', 13.
- 105 GDB, f. 56v (ed. Williams, 136). For discussion, see Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation*, 132–45; Richard Abels, 'Household Men, Mercenaries and Vikings in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Mercenaries and Paid Men: The Mercenary Identity in the Middle Ages*, ed. John France (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 159.
- 106 *Encomium Emmae reginae* II.7 (*Encomium*, ed. and trans. Campbell, 22–3).
- 107 Lawson, "'Those Stories Look True'", 391.
- 108 David Hill, 'An Urban Policy for Cnut?', in *The Reign of Cnut: King of England, Denmark and Norway*, ed. Alexander R. Rumble (London: Leicester University Press, 1994), 103–4. For Ælfheah's relics and their translation to Canterbury in 1023, see M. K. Lawson, *Cnut: England's Viking King 1016–35*, 2nd edn (Stroud: Tempus, 2004), 130–3; Timothy Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great: Conquest and the Consolidation of Power in Northern Europe in the Early Eleventh Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 86–9; Naismith, *Citadel of the Saxons*, 147–8 (with the key text translated in Alexander R. Rumble and Rosemary Morris, 'Textual Appendix', in *Reign of Cnut*, ed. Rumble). On Winchester's prominence in the time of Cnut see Matthew Townend, 'Contextualizing the *Knútsdrápur*: Skaldic Praise-Poetry at the Court of Cnut', *ASE* 30 (2001): 168–73.

- 109 ASC E 1035. Lawson, *Cnut*, 163–4. The *liðsmen* should probably be seen as distinct from the king's housecarls, who were household warriors similar to those of other kings: Nicholas J. Hooper, 'The Housecarls in England in the Eleventh Century', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 7 (1985): 161–76; Nicholas J. Hooper, 'Military Developments in the Reign of Cnut', in *Reign of Cnut*, ed. Rumble; Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation*, 161–70.
- 110 The *Chronicle* only ever gives numbers of ships, and the exact number of men each would have translated to has been estimated at 50–80, meaning that the number in England between 1012 and 1051 varied between perhaps a few hundred and almost 5,000. For discussion see N. A. M. Rodger, 'Cnut's Geld and the Size of Danish Ships', *English Historical Review* 110 (1995): 392–403; Lawson, 'Collection of Danegeld', 737–8; Lawson, *Cnut*, 223–4.
- 111 ASC CDE 1012, CDE 1018, E 1041, CD 1040, C 1049, CD 1050, D 1051. See further Abels, 'Household Men', 157–8.
- 112 ASC E 1035 (1036), E 1042 (1041).
- 113 Christopher Brooke and Gillian Keir, *London 800–1216: The Shaping of a City* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1975), 138–42; Vince, *Saxon London*, 148–9; Gustav Milne, *Excavations at Medieval Cripplegate: London Archaeology after the Blitz, 1946–68* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2001), 126–7.
- 114 This monument, however, was not found in situ. Naismith, *Citadel of the Saxons*, 149–50; John Schofield, *St Paul's Cathedral*, 46–9 and 254–65; Dominic Tweddle et al., *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture. 4: South-East England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 226–8.
- 115 Keynes, 'Church Councils', 151–2 (with Westminster at 155). See also Martin Biddle, 'Seasonal Festivals and Residence: Winchester, Westminster and Gloucester in the Tenth to the Twelfth Centuries', *ANS* 8 (1986): 51–72.
- 116 ASC CDE 1051–2. For further discussion of these events, see Frank Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*, 2nd edn (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 104–26; Lavelle, *Alfred's Wars*, 297 notes that the vocabulary of the ASC suggests a military dimension to these meetings. Godwin and Harold took advantage of their extensive property and connections in Southwark during these events: Fleming, 'Rural Elites and Urban Communities', 13–14.
- 117 Naismith, *Citadel of the Saxons*, 165–8 and 188–9; Simon Keynes, 'The Anglo-Saxon Origins of Westminster Abbey' (forthcoming). The location of Harold's coronation is not actually made explicit, but as it occurred the day after Edward's death at London or Westminster, and Harold had been present at the king's deathbed (*Vita Ædwardi regis* II.11 (*The Life of King Edward Who Rests at Westminster*, ed. and trans. Frank Barlow, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 118–19 and 122–3)), Westminster Abbey was most probably the venue. Compare Frank Barlow, *The Godwins: The Rise and Fall of a Noble Dynasty* (Harlow: Longman, 2002), 126–7.
- 118 ASC CE 1066; Wace, *Roman de Rou*, ll. 244–5 and 266–9 (Wace: *The Roman de Rou*, ed. Anthony J. Holden, trans. Glyn S. Burgess, with notes by Glyn S. Burgess and Elisabeth van Houts (St Helier: Société jersiaise, 2002)). Domesday Book records that one unnamed thegn donated land at Paglesham, Essex, to Westminster before leaving with Harold on his northern campaign: Kew, The National Archives E 31/1/1–3 ('Little' Domesday Book), f. 15r (ed. Williams, 980).
- 119 Wace, *Roman de Rou*, ll. 7819–30 (Wace, ed. Holden and trans. Burgess).

- 120 On the difficulty of pinning down the scale of destruction in these areas from Domesday Book, see John Palmer, 'The Conqueror's Footprints in Domesday Book', in *The Medieval Military Revolution: State, Society and Military Change in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Andrew Ayton and Leslie Price (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1995).
- 121 William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi* (*The Gesta Guillelmi of William of Poitiers*, ed. and trans. R. H. C. Davis and Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 146–7); Wace, *Roman de Rou*, ll. 8859–66 (Wace, ed. Holden and trans. Burgess).
- 122 Guy of Amiens, *Carmen de Hastingae proelio* (*The Carmen de Hastinae Proelio of Guy, Bishop of Amiens*, ed. and trans. Frank Barlow, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 38–9).
- 123 ASC D 1066 (*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition. Volume 6: MS D*, ed. G. P. Cubbin (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996), 81); John of Worcester, *Chronicon*, s.a. 1066 (*Chronicle of John of Worcester*, ed. Darlington et al., 606–7).
- 124 Guy of Amiens, *Carmen de Hastingae proelio* (*Carmen*, ed. and trans. Barlow, 38–45); William of Jumièges, *Gesta Normannorum ducum* (*The Gesta Normannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni*, ed. and trans. Elisabeth van Houts, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992–5), II, 170–3).
- 125 Naismith, *Citadel of the Saxons*, 182–7.
- 126 Edward Impey, 'William the Conqueror and the Capture of London in 1066', in *1066 in Perspective*, ed. David Bates (Leeds: Royal Armouries Museum, 2018), 35–47.

‘Axe-age, sword-age’

Writing battles in Viking Age and medieval Scandinavia

Elizabeth Ashman Rowe

The theme of ‘writing’ battles needs to be taken loosely when applied to Viking Age and medieval Scandinavia, for, in addition to the runic inscriptions and medieval manuscripts that constitute our written sources, there is also a large body of poetry about battles that was composed and transmitted orally and would not be written down until some 200 or 300 years later. But regardless of the medium of communication, the importance of writing battles in Viking Age and medieval Scandinavia stemmed from the centrality of battles to the profoundly important questions of life and the afterlife. The gods of pagan Scandinavia were not eternal, and one day they – and mankind and the earth itself – would be destroyed in the apocalyptic battle known as Ragnarök. To stave off this defeat for as long as possible, Odin arranged for the very best human warriors to be killed in battle, after which they would join him in Valhöll. While waiting for the army of giants and monsters to appear, the slain warriors spend their days testing their military skills against one another, and in the evenings they feast together. These beliefs about the afterlife and the fate of the world served the needs of early Viking Age society, which comprised many small polities ruled by kings, jarls and chieftains. The rulers were often in conflict with their neighbours as they sought to expand or defend their territories and obtain the material resources that would keep them in power. Such conditions led rulers to encourage the belief that the best afterlife would go to men who died in battle, and the militarized nature of early Viking Age society was a direct descendant of the homosocial subculture of the *Männerbund* developed during the Germanic Migration Age and the Vendel Period.¹ One characteristic of this subculture was the individual warrior’s devotion to his lord, even to the point of gladly giving his life for him; another characteristic was the valorization of fame. A famous verse from the Eddic poem *Hávamál* (*The Speech of the High One*) asserts that a man’s only truly lasting legacy is his reputation:²

Cattle die, kinsmen die,
oneself dies likewise;

I know one thing that never dies:
the judgement about each dead man.

This combination of beliefs and structures of power meant that battles should not only be welcomed as opportunities to serve one's lord and gain entrance to Valhøll, but they should also be remembered; they were the foremost means of achieving undying fame.

Remembering battles was also important for the lords themselves, who needed a good reputation even more during life than after death, in order to attract and retain the fighting force they needed to gain and maintain power. This reputation was in part provided by court poets (Old Norse *skáld*, sg. and pl.), who composed poems celebrating the achievements and qualities of their patrons. Their pre-eminent verse form was the eight-line stanza in the complex *dróttkvætt* metre, which combined a fixed structure of stresses, alliteration, half-rhyme and full rhyme with non-standard syntax, specialized vocabulary and elaborate paraphrases known as kennings.³ The interlocking features of the structure preserved the integrity of the stanzas, so that the poets boasted that their compositions would endure as long as men were alive to remember them. Undying reputation was thus communicated through an imperishable medium.

The importance of an imperishable medium for the transmission of undying reputation is also seen in the material culture of early Scandinavia, in the runic inscriptions carved onto stone monuments displayed prominently in the landscape.⁴ Runes developed in the first or second century CE from the encounter of Germanic mercenaries with the writing systems of the Roman Empire. The runic alphabet was brought north by returning warriors and became widespread across the Germanic and Scandinavian areas, with the oldest inscriptions preserved in the north dating from around 160 CE. These inscriptions are found on portable objects such as weapons, combs and bracteates, but by the sixth century, runes began to be inscribed on stone. The first such inscriptions appear to have been magical in purpose, but by around 400 CE rune-stones were used to commemorate the dead. Because the inscriptions usually name the sponsors of the stone and their relationship to the deceased – most often sons and widows – another function of rune-stones seems to be the identification of heirs.

It is the commemorative function of rune-stones that can make them examples of 'writing battles'. Inscriptions such as the following allude to specific battles:

- Thorbjørn the skald raised this stone in memory of S[---]-Thórir, his son, who fell in Denmark.⁵
- Arnstein raised this stone in memory of Bjør, his son. He met his death in the army when Knút attacked England.⁶
- Guð raised this stone in memory of Olaf, his son, a very good bold young warrior. He was killed in Estonia.⁷
- Thorkel placed this stone in memory of Gunni, his son. He met death in battle when the kings fought.⁸

The references provide a minimal amount of information, and the writers of the inscriptions take it for granted that the battle was known and the story of the fallen warrior would be retold from generation to generation.



Figure 5.1 The Turinge rune-stone (SÖ 338) (Wikipedia Commons).

Rune-stones were not the only way in which death was marked in Viking Age Scandinavia, for the sources also refer to funeral feasts, drinking the funeral ale and the composition of eulogies in skaldic verse. In some cases, the undying reputation was doubly preserved by inscribing part of the eulogy in runes, as on the Turinge Stone (Figure 5.1)⁹:

Ketil and Bjørn, they raised this stone in memory of Thorstein, their father;
 Qnund [raised it] in memory of his brother, and the housecarls [raised it] in
 memory of the just one, [and] Ketiley [raised it] in memory of her husband.
 The brothers were
 the best of men

on land
 and out in the host;
 [they] treated their housecarls well.
 He fell in battle
 east in Russia,
 the leader of the host,
 the best of landholders.

The verse provides no detail about the battle. It is important to record that Thorstein was killed in a particular battle, but not how or why, nor whether he was victorious or defeated. Instead, it commemorates his rank (commander), social status (landholder) and behaviour (he treated his men well). And as runic monuments sometimes do, this one also celebrates one of the sponsors of the memorial: Thorstein's brother Qnund, also a warrior and also one of 'the best of men on land and out in the host'.

Whereas the Turinge Stone was erected by the fallen man's family, presumably on their ancestral property, the Karlevi stone was erected at or near the battle site on Öland by the surviving warriors (Figure 5.2):¹⁰

This stone is set up in memory of Sibbi the Good, son of Foldar, and his retinue
 set [it] on [his grave-mound] ...
 The battle-tree of Thrúd,
 a man whom the greatest deeds followed
 – most know that –
 lies hidden in this mound.
 A more honest wagon-Vidur
 of the mighty ground of Endil,
 a hard-fighting man,
 will not rule land in Denmark.

Unlike the simple language of the Turinge verse, the Karlevi poem features the elaborate language of *dróttkvætt*. The first-half of the stanza is not in prose order: rather than saying 'Hidden in this mound lies the battle-tree of Thrúd [a battle-goddess], [a warrior] whom the noblest deeds followed – all men knew that', the core of the statement is hidden or buried, as it were, within the phrase 'hidden in this mound', just as the man himself is. Similarly, his identity as a warrior is hidden in poetic circumlocution: he is the 'battle-tree' of a battle-goddess. The second half of the stanza is in prose order, but its meaning too is hidden, this time within a nested series of paraphrases: Endil was a sea-king, so his mighty ground is the sea; the wagon of the sea is a ship; Vidur is a god; the god of the ship is a man. In plain language, it says, 'A more honest, hard-fighting seafarer will not rule land in Denmark.' Because the monument is at the battle site, there is no need to record where the battle took place; instead the verse records the fallen lord's homeland, Denmark.

Skaldic eulogies could give more extensive accounts of battles, as in *Haraldskvæði* (*Poem of Harald*), the memorial poem for King Harald Fairhair of Norway, composed by one of his court poets around 930.¹¹ Harald died of old age, but he had fought many



Figure 5.2 The Karlevi rune-stone (Öl 1) (Wikipedia Commons).

battles as a young man, and the memorial poem includes a description of the last of these, the Battle of Hafrsfjord:¹²

Hear now how there
in Hafrsfjord grappled

the king of high kin
 with Kjotvi the wealthy!
 Warships sailed westward
 willing for battle,
 with dragon-heads gaping
 and graven prows.
 They were laden with warriors
 and with white shields,
 spears brought from Britain,
 blades of Frankish forging.
 The berserks bellowed;
 battle was upon them.
 Wolfskin-wearers howled
 and weapons rattled.
 They tested the ambitious man
 who taught them to flee,
 the lord of the East Men
 who lives at Utstein.
 He steered steeds of Nökkvi
 seeing battle in prospect.
 Hard were shields hammered
 till Haklang fell.
 The fat-necked king, flagging,
 defending the land against
 the tousled-headed one, shielded
 his ships with an island;
 The wounded thrust themselves
 under thwarts, raising
 their arses heavenwards,
 heads stuck in the bilges.
 On their backs they bore, gleaming –
 bombarded with stones –
 hall-tiles of Sváfnir,
 the timorous soldiers.
 Home from Hafrsfjord
 hastened eastern bumpkins,
 their minds on mead-drinking,
 made tracks over Jadar.

These stanzas strike a balance between artistic complexity and ease of comprehension. There is some non-prose word order, the two kennings are simple ones ('steeds of Nökkvi' for 'ships' and 'hall-tiles of Sváfnir' for 'shields'), and we know that *Lúfa*, the tousled-headed one, is one of Harald's nicknames, supposedly a result of his vow not to comb or cut his hair until he was king of all Norway. As is usual, the poet assumes a considerable amount of background information on the part of his audience, to

the frustration of modern historians trying to use the poem as a historical source. Harald is said to live at Utstein, near Hafrsfjord in south-western Norway, whereas his opponents are called 'eastern bumpkins' whose home is somewhere on the other side of Jadar (modern Jæren in southern Norway), yet Harald is also *allvalda austmanna*, the lord of the East Men, and Kjotvi is said to be defending the land against him. Modern historians suggest that if Harald lived at Utstein, he was most likely defending his own territory, but the medieval Icelandic sources that preserve the poem or are based on it (*Fagrskinna*, *Egils saga*, and *Heimskringla*) say that the battle was Harald's attack on the territory of his opponents.¹³ The limitations of the Icelanders' knowledge of early Norwegian history are seen in their disagreement over whether it is Kjotvi or Haklang who is king of Agder.¹⁴

Historical problems aside, the naval action is described fairly clearly. In dragon-headed warships, Harald's opponents approach from the east. In addition to regular warriors, their force includes berserks, special fighters who fight in a frenzy, like animals, unarmoured.¹⁵ These berserks wear wolf-skins, bellow madly and clash their weapons. All of the enemy force is well equipped with high-quality imported armaments such as English spears and Frankish sword-blades. Although the attack does test Harald, the ambitious king, he is nonetheless victorious. Haklang falls in battle, and the fat-necked king, Kjotvi, grows tired and orders a retreat, taking his ships behind an island. In the end they flee back in the direction from which they came, pelted with stones. Stones were presumably used because Harald would not waste arrows or spears on a retreating fleet that he is not pursuing.

The battle narrative not only celebrates Harald's victory but also increases his reputation and disparages that of his opponents. Harald is referred to as 'the king of high kin', ambitious (in reference to his achievement in expanding his territory) and the lord of the East Men. He welcomes the prospect of battle and fights hard. In contrast, his enemies are denigrated as 'timorous' and 'bumpkins', whose minds are fixed on the delights of the mead-hall rather than the exertions of fighting. They are cowardly and ridiculous; the wounded try to protect themselves by hiding under the cross-thwarts that serve as benches, but the submissive sexual position of their exposed raised arses signal that they are unmanly.¹⁶ Also an inversion of proper position is the location of their shields, which they wear on the backs (to protect themselves from the missiles) while fleeing, rather than holding in front of themselves as they fight. In contrast to the runic inscriptions that mention battles, where the outcome is not specified, *Haraldskvæði* enacts a closed system of honour in which Harald's reputation is increased at the expense of the reputations of the men he defeats. Honour in defeat was only achieved through death, and the pragmatic military virtue of knowing when to retreat was not acknowledged in the early Viking Age.

Other Scandinavian battle narratives are preserved in the kind of Old Norse verse known as Eddic poetry.¹⁷ Less rigid in form than *dróttkvætt*, Eddic poetry consists of stanzas between two and seven lines long, in which each line is divided into two half-lines linked by alliteration. Each half-line contains two stressed syllables in various combinations with unstressed syllables. There is no rhyme. Eddic poetry was used for primarily for narratives about gods and heroes, but dialogues and wisdom poems such as *Hávamál* are also found.

The chief repository of Eddic poetry is an Icelandic manuscript from around 1270 known as the Codex Regius.¹⁸ It begins with *Völuspá* (*The Seeress's Prophecy*), in which a seeress whom Odin has raised from the dead relates the creation and destruction of the world of the Norse gods. The poem briefly describes 'the first war in the world', the battle of Odin and the other Æsir against the gods known as the Vanir, but much more extended is its account of Ragnarøk. The story must have been familiar to the audience of the poem, which proceeds from event to event without any connecting narrative. It begins with the death of the beloved god Baldr, followed by references to the begetting of an avenging brother; the punishment of the god Loki, who was responsible for the killing; the existence of the giants, dead evil-doers and monsters who will form part of the army attacking the gods; and the appearance of ill omens such as black sunshine and blood on the walls. The imminence of Ragnarøk is signalled by the crowing of roosters in Ásgard and Hel and the baying of a monstrous hound or wolf. Then human society crumbles into violence and immorality:

Brothers will fight each other and will be the death of each other,
cousins will spoil the bonds of kinship;
it is hard in the world, great whoredom,
axe-age, sword-age, shields are cloven,
wind-age, wolf-age, before the world falls into ruin;
no man will spare another.¹⁹

Monsters who had been chained break their bonds, and under Loki's command a ship of giants, monsters and dead men makes its way towards Ásgard. Heimdall, the watchman of the gods, blows his horn in warning, and the battle begins. As the earth and sky break apart and troll-women leave their rock dwellings and roam freely, each god fights desperately against a particular opponent. Odin takes on the monstrous wolf Fenrir, Freyr battles the fire-giant Surt and Thor attacks the Midgard Serpent. The 'terrible doom' (Old Norse *ragnarøk*) cannot be evaded, and the gods are vanquished, the earth sinks into the steaming sea, the sky turns black, the stars vanish and the heavens are consumed in a final conflagration. The poem ends on a hopeful note, describing a green earth rising up out of the sea and the return of the surviving gods and men, but the gods of the Viking Age are fallen forever.

In contrast to the praise of heroic virtues found in skaldic poetry and runic inscriptions about battles, *Völuspá* draws attention to the emotional and physical toll of battle, noting the grief of Odin's wife Frigg, the wrath of Thor and the last staggering steps of the fatally injured god. Also in contrast to skaldic poetry's focus on rulers and their retainers, *Völuspá's* account of Ragnarøk provides the linked perspectives of biological families situated in a society of their peers and in the natural environment. The first appears in the micro-narrative of stanzas 53–54, in which Odin advances to slay Fenrir:

Then another sorrow comes to Hlín [i.e. Frigg]
when Odin goes face-to-face with the wolf to slay him,
and the bright bane of Beli attacks Surt;²⁰

then the joy of Frigg will fall.
 Then Vidar, the great kinsman of Victory-Father [i.e. Odin],
 comes to slay the carrion-beast [i.e. the wolf];
 he lets a sword stand in the heart
 of the kinsman of Hvedrung [i.e. Loki (Fenrir is Loki's son)]: then father is avenged.

In this depiction of viking society, fathers are killed in fighting, wives sorrow over husbands, and sons avenge fathers. The poem reinforces this by referring to Odin by one of his cognomens, Victory-father (*Sigföður*). This is also a bitter paradox, as Odin could decide the outcome of human battles, but he cannot grant victory to himself.

The perspective of families in the natural environment appears in the micro-narrative of stanzas 56–57, which relates the death of Thor:

Then the famous kinsman of Hlódyn comes,
 Odin's son goes face-to-face with the wolf [i.e. monster] to slay him,
 out of anger the warder of Midgard kills [the serpent]
 – all men must clear out their homesteads –
 dying, the son of Fiörgyn goes nine paces
 from the serpent undismayed by scorn.

 Sun grows black, earth sinks into the sea,
 Shining stars disappear from the heavens;
 steam rages against the fire,
 a high flame plays against the very sky.

Thor too is put into a familial context, as the son of his parents (kinsman (i.e. son) of Hlódyn (Earth)/son of Fiörgyn (Land) and son of Odin). But his battle is not a social one: he is 'the warder of Midgard [the world of men]', and his opponent is the Midgard Serpent, whose ordinary environment is the sea. Like human beings, who are powerless against wind and wave, Thor is broken by the serpent, and the earth sinks into the sea. The poem reinforces the theme of man's unequal contest with nature by interjecting the phrase 'all men must clear out their homesteads' between 'out of anger the warder of Midgard kills [the serpent]' and 'dying, the son of Fiörgyn goes nine paces'. *Völuspá* gives us battles within battles within battles: human blood-feuds play out within the larger context of the battle of men against the sea that is implied in the battle of god against monster.

We do not know whether *Völuspá*, as we have it, accurately represents the mythology of pagan Scandinavia, for Eddic poetry is anonymous and difficult to date.²¹ Poets were probably able to compose in an archaic style if they chose, and there is little external information that sheds light on the date of composition. A reference in one redaction of *Völuspá* to the coming of 'a powerful, mighty one, he who rules all' has been interpreted as a sign of Christian influence.²² Nonetheless, some Eddic poems are considered to date back to as early as the ninth century, and some of the heroic material draws on oral traditions going back to the Migration Age.

One such example is *Hlōðskviða* (*Hlōð's Poem*), known in English as *The Battle of the Goths and Huns*.²³ It is incompletely preserved and now consists of some thirty-

two stanzas and prose links that presumably fill in for stanzas that once existed.²⁴ It tells the story of two half-brothers, Angantýr and Hlōd, the sons of Heidrek, king of the Goths. The legitimate son, Angantýr, inherits his father's kingdom, but the illegitimate Hlōd demands half as his share of the inheritance. Angantýr denies this claim, and Hlōd, whose mother was the daughter of the king of the Huns, attempts to gain his share of the inheritance by force. Although the precise historical background of the poem is debated, it must go back to the later fourth or early fifth century, for it preserves place-names associated with the Danube Goths: *Danparstaðir* (Dnieprsteadings), *Dúnheið* (Don[ec]-heath), *Harvaðafföll* (Carpathian mountains) and *Jassarfföll* (Gesenke mountains).²⁵ And although scholars disagree about whether the poem arose from a specific battle, the names of the characters probably do derive from specific historical figures, as six of them are mentioned independently in the Old English poem *Widsith*.²⁶

The Battle of the Goths and Huns is a typical example of 'writing battles' in the Viking Age. The lore of the early Germanic peoples was often organized into lists according to category, and the inscription on the Rök Rune-stone indicates that battles formed one category of lore.²⁷ We might therefore speculate that *The Battle of the Goths and Huns* was an early Viking Age imagining of a famous battle of ancient times that was included in one of these lists. A few specific details – the identity of each side, some personal names, and some place-names – were still known, and it appears that the battle was memorable for its vast number of casualties rather than for individual feats of martial prowess or as an example of a hero tragically being forced to choose between conflicting obligations. It also appears that the *casus belli* was lost along with much other information about the original battle, so the Scandinavian poet depicts it as a conflict between brothers over the inheritance of their father's kingdom. Like the other Eddic poems that recount interactions between Germanic individuals and the Huns, *The Battle of the Goths and Huns* tells the story from the point of view of the Goths, but it presents the Huns in a fairly neutral way. This is markedly different from the poems that depict the Hunnish king Atli (Attila) in a sympathetic light, but those poems are not narratives of battles, although they feature plenty of killing and bloodshed.²⁸

The Battle of the Goths and Huns in fact relates two battles: the first on the border of the Gothic kingdom and the second in the interior. The first battle might be part of the underlying tradition, but it could also be the poet's invention. If so, it is an invention that serves many literary purposes. First, it sets up a narrative sequence – an arrival, discussion between the Gothic military leader and a senior subordinate, preparation for battle, battle, aftermath – whose repetition gives the poem its fundamental bipartite structure.²⁹ The first battle also underscores the theme of destruction of a family, for the commander of the Gothic border garrison is none other than Hervor, Angantýr's sister. The first battle therefore establishes the threat of Hunnish aggression, dramatically increases Angantýr's reasons for fighting (he is avenging his sister as well as defending his kingdom), creates a sense of foreboding, and sets up the second battle as an escalation of the first. Despite the repetition of the narrative sequence, the second battle is not a repeat of the first: the first sees the Goths defeated, but the second sees them victorious.

The account of the first battle is given in minimal prose form. If we assume that the prose conveys the sense of a stanza and does not add further details, it looks as though there were only a few stanzas about this battle, for only a few sentences describe it³⁰:

[Hervqr and her foster-father Ormar] rode out of the fortress with the entire army to confront the Huns; a very great battle began there. But because the Huns had a much larger force, the odds turned against Hervqr and her men, and in time Hervqr fell, and a great troop around her. And when Ormar saw her death in battle, he fled, and all those who were not very valiant [fled as well].

This battle is not given much thematic weight, and no details of the fighting are supplied. Hervqr's courage and martial prowess go unremarked, and the narrator does not evaluate the combat. It seems to be a fairly straightforward case of a larger force overcoming a smaller one. The only judgement falls on the Goths who flee, with a distinction implied between their flight and that of Ormar. The former flee because they would not fight to the death, but Ormar flees in order to warn Angantýr.

The second sequence's dialogue and preparations for battle are far more extensive than those of the first sequence, and they establish the heroic virtues of the Goths. Angantýr is deeply affected by the killing of his sister, but he is also aware that his retinue is not as large as it should be, despite his generosity. An old warrior declares his readiness to fight and 'leaped onto his horse as though he were young'.³¹ He rides off to tell the Huns where the battle is to be fought, and he performs his duties as herald with bold words and a strong, loud voice.

Like the first battle, Angantýr's battle against the Huns is described in the prose of the saga. There are no details at all of most of the fighting; the narrator only says, 'On the second day they began their battle, and they fought all that day, and in the evening they went to their encampments. They fought in this manner for eight days: the leaders were then all unwounded, but no-one knew the death-toll, how many fell.'³² The narrator then builds up to the climactic ninth day of the battle – nine being a significant number for the Norse – by declaring that the fighting grew even more bitter and by laying out the motivations on each side. The Huns fight for their lives, knowing that the Goths will not give them quarter, and the Goths stand fast and encourage each other to fight, because they are defending their freedom and the land of their birth. We then get a more detailed account of the fighting. Towards the end of the day the Goths surge against the Huns, who give way, whereupon Angantýr leaves the protection of his shield wall and hews his way towards the leaders of the Huns, whose defensive troops fall apart before this single-handed onslaught. Angantýr kills his half-brother Hlqđ and Hlqđ's grandfather Humli. The Huns flee, and the Goths chase them down and kill them 'and made so great a butchery that the rivers were obstructed and the water spilled out of the river-beds, and the valleys were full of dead men and horses'.³³ The account of the battle finishes with Angantýr's reproach to his dead brother for not accepting his offer of treasure in exchange for dropping the demand to share the rule of the Goths. Angantýr says, 'You are rewarded with war [alone]; you have neither land nor gleaming arm-rings.' He concludes, 'Evil was fated to us, brother; I have become your killer. It will always be remembered; evil is the decree of the Norns [the Fates].'³⁴

The battle is thus not described as we might have expected, with glorious deeds of bravery carried out by heroic warriors; instead, it is judged in moral terms. Far from praising Hlōd as honourably fighting to the death to pursue his rightful inheritance, Angantýr implies that accepting a settlement would have been the best course of action, but he does not spare himself: he declares that for him to have killed his brother was an evil thing. Nor does he excuse his action by blaming it on the Norns. Moreover, his conclusion reverses the heroic ethos in another way. Whereas *Hávamál* asserts that an undying reputation is the reward for the warrior who falls in battle, Angantýr says that what will be forever remembered is not the heroism of the fighters but the evil of brother killing brother. This motif in turn echoes the fratricide that *Völuspá* lists among the dire events presaging Ragnarök. The wrongness of Angantýr and Hlōd breaking the bonds of kinship is thus given cosmological significance, but whereas the last battle of the gods is depicted in terms of tragic heroism, the battle of the Goths and the Huns is not. From a modern perspective, the narrative poignantly foreshadows some of the themes of the First World War. The valleys filled with dead men and horses resemble the trenches, and the Hunnish enemy was literally a brother who should never have been an adversary. *The Battle of the Goths and Huns* is in some ways the viking equivalent of *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

The coming of Christianity and the development of larger states did little to change the culture of rulers and their warriors. Christian kings wanted their men to fight until the last no less than pagan kings did, and they were able to offer eternal salvation as an incentive to do so. The textuality of remembering battles changes (slowly, and in different ways in different places) from rune-stones and Eddic poetry to prose narratives, but skaldic poetry continues.

A narrative about a battle from this period of Scandinavian history is that of the Battle of Stiklestad, which was fought near Trondheim, Norway, in 1030. On one side was King Olaf Haraldsson, who was attempting to regain his throne; on the other side were the jarls, chieftains and men of Trøndelag and other parts of Norway, who had become disaffected with the king for his seizure of property, his attempts to expand his power at the expense of the aristocracy and his forcing of Christianity upon his subjects. Olaf was killed in the fighting, and somewhat ironically, he became considered a saint a year later. The Battle of Stiklestad is mentioned in a number of medieval Norwegian and Icelandic prose sources, but it receives its fullest treatment in *Heimskringla* (*The World's Orb*), a history of the kings of Norway written by the Icelandic chieftain Snorri Sturluson (d. 1241) around 1230.³⁵ Iceland at this point was independent of Norway.

Snorri's account of the battle is very much coloured by his awareness that Olaf would become a saint and Norway's 'eternal king', but describing Stiklestad is also an opportunity for Snorri to present his own views on the conduct of warfare, views that were gained through his participation in the rancorous conflicts between the chieftains of Iceland.³⁶ With Olaf as his mouthpiece, Snorri argues that it is better to leave the estates of one's enemies intact, rather than burning them: in case of victory, 'then it is good to go to large houses and grand farms, but that which is burned benefits no-one.'³⁷ We are also told that 'plundering is carried out in such a way that much more is spoiled than remains to be of use' and that captured spies should be killed.³⁸ Furthermore, if a smaller force must face a much larger one, the smaller force must attack swiftly.³⁹

Snorri recounts how Olaf drew up his troops, organized a shield wall, and put his court poets behind it, saying, 'You shall be here and see the events that here take place. Then you will not have to rely on word of mouth, because you shall report them [i.e. the events] and compose about them later.'⁴⁰ Although there is some temptation to compare battlefield poets to journalists, it is more likely that this particular speech was invented by Snorri.⁴¹ The reason for thinking this is that skaldic verses are a major source of information in *Heimskringla*, as Snorri discusses in the prologue to this work. Declaring that Olaf's poets were behind the shield wall with their king and saw everything with their own eyes invests the resulting verses with maximum authority, unlike dubious 'word of mouth' reports from unknown persons with an unverifiable knowledge of what happened. Moreover, as the poets begin to compose, Snorri says that people began to memorize the verses on the spot, thus implying that the verses he cites are exactly as the poets created them and not vulnerable to charges of having been changed or corrupted before being safely preserved in oral tradition.⁴² Snorri was a poet himself, and his concern to validate the art of Norse poetics is manifest in another of his works, now known as Snorri's *Edda*, but we see it no less in his historiography. Ironically, Snorri does not carry through this methodology; he ends up including information that comes from a memorial poem about Olaf that was composed by a poet not present at the battle.⁴³

Possibly more historically plausible is the use of a poem to rally Olaf's troops before the battle: one of the poets recites *Bjarkamál in fornu* (*The ancient lay of Bjarki*), supposedly the poem that was used to rally the troops of the legendary Danish king Hrólfr *kraki* before his last battle.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, Snorri's report that the men were greatly moved by the recitation and felt that it was well chosen may be yet another of his inventions, created with the purpose of showing the value and effectiveness of poetry. The choice of this particular poem also serves the literary purpose of foreshadowing Olaf's own fate, for this will be his last battle. Further indications of Olaf's fate are a dream he has on the morning of the battle, which is interpreted as portending his death, and a solar eclipse in the middle of the fighting.⁴⁵

Even though Snorri presents a secularized version of the saga about the future St Olaf, omitting the miracles and other pious material present in his sources, his description of the battle is still strongly coloured by hagiography. The eclipse echoes the eclipse that supposedly took place during the Crucifixion, and Olaf only kills one man before he himself is wounded. Immediately he throws down his sword and starts to pray. He is wounded twice more and dies, meek and Christ-like. After this there is a brief description of the denouement in which each side sends the other side fleeing, and then the account turns to the aftermath of the battle and the various individuals who died of their wounds. Snorri brings his account to an end with a combination of two quite different discourses: on the one hand, an annalistic or chronicle-like note giving the day of the week (Monday) and the date of the battle according to the Roman system (the fourth day before the kalends of August), and, on the other hand, two skaldic stanzas about the conclusion of the battle. Snorri rarely dates the events in *Heimskringla* according to the Roman system, and here it is a way of emphasizing the importance of the event as well as its double valence: Olaf was a royal patron of poets, but he was also a Christian saint.

As an example of 'writing battles', Snorri's account of the actual fighting is extremely minimal. One gets the impression that he expanded the run-up to the battle with poetry, dreams, anecdotes, last-minute conversions, speeches on both sides and so on, because he doesn't have that much information about the battle itself. He doesn't even dare to attempt a sequential account. Instead, he provides a number of anecdotes which he says took place at more or less the same time.⁴⁶ Although we must be highly sceptical of his attempts to validate his account with reference to eyewitness sources, he paradoxically captures the chaos of actual battle: fighters in the thick of it do not and cannot see the overall battle as it unfolds.

In contrast to Snorri's fragmented account of the Battle of Stiklestad, his account of the Battle of Stamford Bridge is a fully developed narrative that describes the terrain, the tactics and even the weather (Figure 5.3).⁴⁷ This battle near York put an end to the 1066 invasion of England led by King Harald Sigurdarson of Norway, the younger half-brother of King Olaf Haraldsson. King Harald had first shared the throne of Norway with Olaf's son Magnús and then became sole ruler after Magnús's death. Scandinavian tradition holds that Magnús had a claim on the English throne, stemming from an agreement with Harthacnut, and Harald considered that he had inherited this claim. Medieval Scandinavian histories recount that Harald was persuaded to act on this claim by a visit from Tostig Godwineson, the exiled earl of Northumbria.

Even before Harald's fleet leaves Norway, Snorri foreshadows its failure. Although it is a very large force of nearly two hundred warships supported by supply ships and smaller boats, there are premonitions of disaster in the form of ominous dreams, above all Harald's own dream of his brother, who predicts Harald's death and says that God is not to blame. Harald's response is to open Olaf's shrine, cut his hair and nails, lock the shrine again and throw the keys into the river.⁴⁸ Harald then takes the fleet to Orkney, gathers reinforcements and continues to England, where he lands at Cleveland, which he raids and subjugates. He continues south in this way, meeting no resistance to his plundering, killing, and arson until he gets to Holderness, where he defeats a small defence force, and Fulford, where on Wednesday 21 September 1066 he takes advantage of the dyke and the fen to inflict massive casualties on the large army of Earl Morcar and Earl Wealtheof, including Morcar himself.⁴⁹ Harald pursues Wealtheof and the survivors to York, where there is further fighting. Joined by Tostig and his forces, Harald moves his troops up to Stamford Bridge and prepares to take York. The townsmen decide to surrender, and on Sunday they meet with Harald outside the city and give him hostages. Harald and his men return to their ships in high spirits, intending to take possession of York the next day, but that night the army of Harold Godwineson arrives from the south and secures York so that no news of their arrival can get to the Norwegians.

Monday 25 September sees a spell of hot weather. Harald takes two-thirds of his men to York for what he thinks will be a ceremonial entry. They bring their helmets, shields and weapons but leave their mail-coats behind. As they approach the town, a large force rides towards them, their weapons glittering in the sun like ice. Tostig advises retreating to the ships, but Harald overrules him and sends three of his fastest riders back to fetch more men. In the meantime, the Norwegians form a large circular shield wall, with the outer men planting their spears and halberds in the

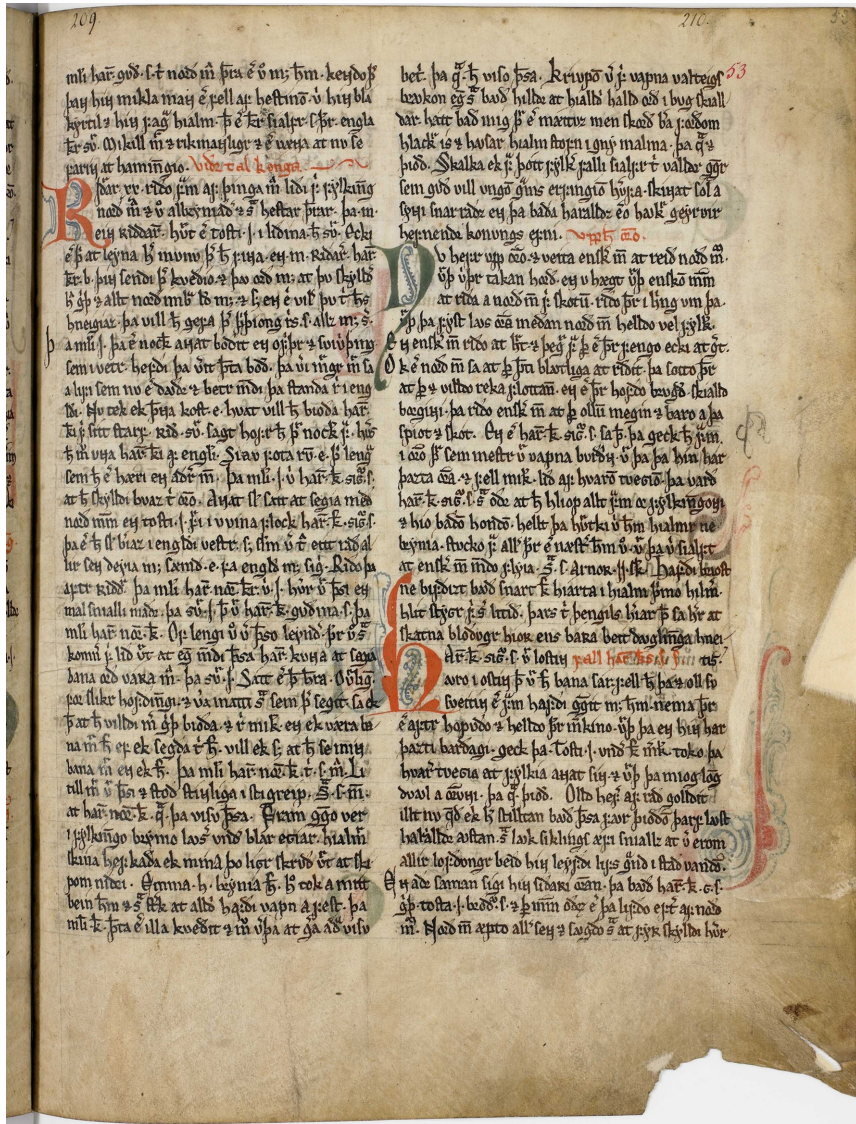


Figure 5.3 Part of the account of the battles in Northern England in 1066, from Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla* (Copenhagen, Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, AM 45 fol. (1300–24), fol. 53r (handrit.is)) (© Den Arnamagnæanske Samling).

ground against a cavalry attack. Tostig and his men draw up separately. Harald rides around the formation to check it, but his horse falls and Harald with it. Unharmed, he declares it a good omen, but Harold Godwinson says that Harald's luck has run out. Harold offers his brother Tostig a pardon and a third of England, but of England the Norwegian invader will only get 'a space seven feet long, or as much longer as

he is taller than other men.’⁵⁰ Tostig refuses, and when Harald learns that the English negotiator was none other than Harold himself, he reproaches Tostig for not telling him sooner, when they could have killed Harold. Tostig replies that he would rather be slain by his brother than be his slayer. Harald then composes a skaldic verse lamenting the absence of his mail-coat, but the verse is in a simple metre, and Harald immediately composes another one in *dróttkvætt*.

The battle now begins, and the English can do little as long as the Norwegians keep in their circular formation, but encouraged by the failure of the English attacks, the Norwegians break formation, and then the English charge them from all sides. Also leaving the protection of the shield wall, Harald joins the fighting. He lays about him ferociously, and the English are just on the point of fleeing when he is killed by an arrow in the throat. The Norwegians heroically reject a truce, and the battle enters its second phase. Then the Norwegian reinforcements arrive, fully armoured but exhausted by their dash to Stamford Bridge. The leader of the new troops raises Harald’s standard, and the battle is again renewed, and the English are again on the point of fleeing when the spent Norwegians decide to shed their armour in order to have the strength to continue fighting. The English are then able to pick off most of the leaders on the other side. Sunset ends the battle, and the surviving Norwegians hasten to their ships.

Snorri’s account of the Battle of Stamford Bridge differs from the account of the Battle of Stiklestad in two important ways. The difference in the coherence of the narratives is partly due to fuller sources. Snorri mainly drew on the saga of Harald Sigurdarson found in an Icelandic history of the kings of Norway from around 1220 known as *Morkinskinna* (rotten parchment); he also made use of the compilation known as *Fagrskinna* (fair parchment), which is later than *Morkinskinna* but based on other sources in addition to *Morkinskinna*.⁵¹ Snorri and the authors of these earlier Icelandic histories might also have known a fuller oral tradition about Stamford Bridge, such as the information that accompanied the transmission of the skaldic verses about the battle attributed to Harald and his poets.⁵² The coherent narrative of the battle found in the Icelandic sagas is not derived from the Norwegian accounts written in Latin around 1200, which are much less detailed. Theodoricus Monachus devotes a single paragraph to it⁵³:

When Harald arrived in England together with the aforementioned Tostig, they made the territory of Northumbria subject to their rule. King Harold of England had at that time gone to Normandy, but when he heard of the arrival of enemies, he made a speedy return to England, assembled a huge army and took the invaders unawares. When Harold drew near, most of the Norwegian forces, laden with booty, made for their ships. The remainder, though few, with steadfast courage prepared for battle. But what can a few brave men do against so many thousands? And as King Harald himself, mounted on horseback, endeavoured to draw up his battle line, his horse stumbled and he was thrown to the ground, whereupon he is reported to have said, ‘Seldom is a sign of this sort an omen of victory.’ Nor was he mistaken in this unlucky omen, for he fell in that same battle. Tostig, the brother of King Harold of England, who had lured Harald there, was also killed, and almost all their army was annihilated.

The Icelandic historians do preserve some elements of the Norwegian accounts, such as the involvement of Tostig and Harald's fall from his horse, but these elements are rewritten. Tostig is left out of the picture until after the first fighting at York, so that the Norwegians get full credit for the victories up to this point, and Harald is given a different response to his fall, which contributes to his characterization as a warrior boldly defying fate.

The second difference is that whereas Snorri's account of the Battle of Stiklestad is composed on the basis of oral tradition, Scandinavian works that mention the battle, and Snorri's own agenda, his account of the Battle of Stamford Bridge makes use of all of those and in addition Anglo-Norman accounts of the Battle of Hastings, such as William of Malmesbury's *Gesta regum anglorum* (*Deeds of the kings of the English*).⁵⁴ The borrowings are extensive, including the description of the Norman cavalry; Harold Godwineson's stand on the heath; the repulse of the Norman army's first attack; the breaking of formation by a company of the English to pursue some of the enemy, who promptly turn and kill then; and the death of Harold by an arrow in the head.⁵⁵ Above all, the Icelanders adopt William's assertion that Harold Godwineson is not rightfully king of England. In implying that the Norwegian Harald is also not rightfully king of England, the Icelandic historians are developing an argument that the Norway created by the conquests of Harald Fairhair constitutes the only realm over which the kings of Norway rightfully rule.⁵⁶ Ambitious kings such as St Olaf and his half-brother might endeavour to bring Denmark, England and Iceland under their control, but the Icelandic historians do their best to demonstrate that this is against God's will. This was a particular threat during Snorri's lifetime, and it was a threat in which Snorri was personally involved. Snorri's involvement had come about because in order to strengthen his position in his conflicts with other Icelandic chieftains, he had gone to Norway and swore fealty to King Hákon. Hákon commanded him to persuade his countrymen to submit to Norwegian rule, but Snorri disobeyed this and other commands, which eventually brought about his death.⁵⁷ It is thus not surprising that *Heimskringla* contains a number of warnings to the Icelanders about preserving their independence.⁵⁸

In writing the battles of Stiklestad and Stamford Bridge as he does, Snorri's originality lies less in the elements of his account, since most are already present in his Icelandic sources, but in the ends to which he puts them in exploiting their potential more fully. In the saga of St Olaf, Snorri ultimately casts the narrative in the shape of a tragedy of princes. After being deposed, Olaf is torn between the historical life's difficult demand that he attempt to regain his kingdom, and his private desire to become a monk and devote the rest of his days to God. The pathos of Olaf's situation solicits the sympathy of Snorri's audience, and with it, their political consent to the institution of the monarchy. In the saga of Harald Sigurdarson, Snorri invokes quite a different rhetoric. Rather than opposing the historical and the individual within a Christian context, he sets the historical against the heroic. Harald's situation is never depicted as pathetic: when he closes the shrine of St Olaf and throws away the key, we see not a king's tragic fall but a deliberate refusal of all that St Olaf represents. Harald rejects the role of Olaf-imitator and adopts that of Germanic hero. From this point on, the discourse of heroic poetry replaces that of hagiography. Visions of troll-women

and the beasts of battle signal the coming defeat, a causeway of corpses enables the Norwegians to cross Fulford dry-shod, and many of Harald's men display the loyalty of Byrhtnoth's men and fight until they are killed rather than survive their slain lord.

The characterization of Harald and the Norwegians as deserted by their luck is also politicized. By Snorri's time, the words for '(good) luck' or '(good) fortune' were fully harmonized with the Latin complex of terms and ideas referring to Christian 'grace', so that Harald's loss of luck, which is remarked upon by the English Harold, is further evidence of Harald's loss of Christian legitimation, first seen in the dream in which St Olaf predicts that Harald will fail in England and that God is not to be blamed for it.⁵⁹ Snorri may have bestowed God's mandate to rule England on William simply because William's success made this manifest, but other factors may have contributed to Snorri's historiographical choice. According to *Heimskringla*, Normandy, like Iceland, was settled by chieftains fleeing Harald's war of unification, and perhaps Snorri saw Normandy as a parallel to or a political sibling of Iceland, so that he viewed the conquest of England by the Normans with a kind of fraternal pride.⁶⁰ Snorri may also have been motivated by a general sense that Scandinavians were superior to the English.⁶¹

As the present chapter has demonstrated, 'writing battles' in Viking Age and medieval Scandinavia was a means of writing reputation, religion and politics as well as a means of writing military history. Certain motifs and themes recur, separated in time by many centuries as those battles may have been. Dialogue and description of the preparations for battle feature in the accounts of the Battle of the Goths and the Huns and the Battle of Stamford Bridge, as does the importance of the shield wall. In both narratives, rivers are filled with the bodies of the dead, and brothers offer reconciliation but are refused. Both narratives end by condemning the aggression: Angantýr's judgement of his brother ('You are rewarded with war [alone]; you have neither land nor gleaming arm-rings') parallels Snorri's judgement of King Harald⁶²:

King Olaf forced the people of [Norway] into Christianity and better customs and harshly punished those who turned a deaf ear. The chieftains of the land would not suffer his right judgements and equitable judgements and rose against him here and killed him in battle in his very own territory. He became a saint for that. But Harald went raiding to make himself famous and [gain] a realm, and [he] forced all people to be under him, those that he was able to. And he was killed in battle in the territory of other kings.

Other values encoded in these battle narratives reveal a society with two loci of honour: the family and the retinue of the ruler. The development of the latter dates to the early Iron Age, when changes to the system of land ownership in southern Scandinavia led to larger numbers of landless men, who then supplied the fighting forces of the local rulers.⁶³ The battles discussed in this chapter illustrate how tenets of family honour – avenge offences, do not kill your brother – can complicate the warfare of rulers, as when the triumph of the Goths' defence against the Huns is wholly overshadowed by fratricide, or when Tostig's refusal to identify his brother King Harold to the Norwegians when Harold is an easy target radically changes the odds of a Norwegian

victory over the English at Stamford Bridge. Conversely, honourable behaviour in the context of rulership – treat your retainers well, give your life for your lord – redounds to the honour of families, as seen in the runic inscriptions in which a family monument celebrates a reputation gained in the retinue.

Despite the persistence of these values as late as the second half of the eleventh century, the battles discussed here also demonstrate a major difference between writing battles in the Viking Age and writing battles in medieval Scandinavia. In the Viking Age, the men who died in battle and the people who commemorated them through their battles shared a single ideology and a single goal: celebrating the virtues of heroic society. In the Middle Ages, battles were written by historians. The men associated with battles still have reputations, but these are manipulated by the historians for contemporary purposes. In the case of Snorri Sturluson's histories, we might even say that his writing of battles is part of a larger battle, namely the battle to preserve Icelandic independence. But like the Battle of Stiklestad and the Battle of Stamford Bridge, Snorri's battle will end in defeat. Snorri himself would die by violence, and not at all heroically. The man who manipulated the reputation of warrior kings had no reputation for heroic bravery – his last words were reputedly 'Don't strike!'⁶⁴

Notes

- 1 Joseph Harris, 'Love and Death in the *Männerbund*: An Essay with Special Reference to the *Bjarkamál* and *The Battle of Maldon*', in Joseph Harris, *Speak Useful Words or Say Nothing: Old Norse Studies*, ed. Susan E. Deskis and Thomas D. Hill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 2008).
- 2 *Hávamál*, stanza 77: 'Deyr fé, deyia frændr, / deyr síafr it sama; / ec veit einn, at aldri deyr: / dómr um dauðan hvern' (*Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denmälern*, ed. Gustav Neckel and Hans Kuhn, vol. 1: Text, 4th edn (Heidelberg: Winter, 1962), 29). Translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
- 3 For an introduction to this verse form, see Roberta Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry: The Dróttkvætt Stanza*, *Islandica* 42 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 1978).
- 4 See R. I. Page, *Runes (Reading the Past)* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987); Erik Moltke, *Runes and Their Origin: Denmark and Elsewhere*, trans. P. Foote (Copenhagen: Nationalmuseets Forlag, 1985); Terje Spurkland, *Norwegian Runes and Runic Inscriptions* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005); Sven B. F. Jansson, *Runes in Sweden*, trans. P. Foote (Värnamo: Gidlunds, 1987).
- 5 Stangeland (N239); see Spurkland, *Norwegian Runes*, 94–5, whose translation is used here.
- 6 Galteland (N184); see Spurkland, *Norwegian Runes*, 96–7, whose translation is used here.
- 7 Frugården (Norra Åsarp, Västergötland, Sweden); translation adapted from Jansson, *Runes in Sweden*, 54.
- 8 Råda (Västergötland, Sweden); translation adapted from Jansson, *Runes in Sweden*, 82.
- 9 Södermanland, Sweden (SÖ 338); translation adapted from the translations of Jansson, *Runes in Sweden*, 58–60, and Arild Hauge (<https://www.arild-hauge.com/se-runeinnskrifter-soedermanland.htm>).

- 10 Öl 1. Translation of the prose part of the inscription adapted from that of Arild Hauge (<https://www.arild-hauge.com/se-runeinnskripter-oeland.htm>); translation of the verse adapted from the translations of Hauge (<https://www.arild-hauge.com/se-run-einnskripter-oeland.htm>); Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry*, 121–2; and Jansson, *Runes in Sweden*, 134–6. The runic alphabet did not distinguish between long and short vowels, so Sibbi's epithet could be *góði* ('the Good') or *goði*. The latter title is not fully understood. It is related to *goð* ('god') and must have designated a man with some cultic function; later the Icelanders used it more generally to mean 'chieftain'.
- 11 *Fagrskinna* (*Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sögum, Fagrskinna – Nóregskonunga tal*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, Íslenzk fornrit 29 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1985), 67) attributes the verses about the Battle of Hafrsfjord to Thjóðólfr of Hvin; *Heimskringla* attributes them to Thorbjörn Hornklofi (*Haralds saga ins hárfagra*, ch. 18; Snorri Sturluson. *Heimskringla* 1, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Íslenzk fornrit 26 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1941), 115).
- 12 *Heimskringla* 1, 115–17. The translation is that of Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes, Snorri Sturluson. *Heimskringla*. Vol. 1: *The Beginnings to Óláfr Tryggvason* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research/University College London, 2011), 67–8, but I have omitted nominative endings from Old Norse masculine nouns, substituted the more literal 'lord of the East Men' for 'lord of the Northmen' and made a few other very minor changes for clarity, not wanting to duplicate their footnotes.
- 13 See Claus Krag, 'Vestfold som utgangspunkt for den norske rikssamlingen', *Collegium Medievale* 3 (1990): 179–95; Ole Georg Moseng et al., *Norsk historie I: 750-1537* (Oslo: Tano Aschehoug, 1999), 62–3; Claus Krag, *Norges historie fram til 1319* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2000), 46. *Ágrip ... Fagrskinna*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, 67; *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, ed. Sigurður Nordal, Íslenzk fornrit 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1933), 22–3; and *Heimskringla* 1, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 114–15.
- 14 According to *Heimskringla*, Kjotvi is king of Agder (*Heimskringla* 1, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 114). According to *Egils saga* – which many scholars consider to have been written by Snorri Sturluson, the author of *Heimskringla*, (Thórir) Haklang is the king (*Egils saga*, ed. Sigurður Nordal, 23).
- 15 See Anatoly Liberman, 'Berserks in History and Legend', *Russian History* 32 (2005): 401–11.
- 16 See Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man: Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society*, trans. Joan Turville-Petre (Odense: Odense University Press, 1983).
- 17 See Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn and Brittany Schorn (eds), *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
- 18 See Margaret Clunies Ross, 'The Transmission and Preservation of Eddic Poetry', in *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry*, ed. Larrington, Quinn and Schorn, 22–5.
- 19 *Völuspá*, stanza 45 (*Edda*, ed. Gustav Neckel and Hans Kuhn, 10–11).
- 20 This line refers to another contest that is taking place at the same time, namely the fight between the Vanir god Freyr ('the bright bane of [the giant] Beli') and the fire-giant Surt.
- 21 See Bernt Ø. Thorvaldsen, 'The Dating of Eddic Poetry', in *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry*, ed. Larrington, Quinn and Schorn.
- 22 These lines (in stanza 65) are often omitted from translations. For a broader discussion of Christian influence on *Völuspá*, see for example Ursula Dronke (ed. and

- trans.), *The Poetic Edda, Vol. II: Mythological Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 93–104, as well as her commentary on individual stanzas.
- 23 *Hlǫðskviða* is preserved in the saga usually known as *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, chs. 13–14. A convenient edition with facing-page translation is *Saga Heiðreks konungs ins vitra: The Saga of King Heiðrek the Wise*, ed. and trans. Christopher Tolkien (London: Thomas Nelson, 1960), 46–58.
 - 24 *Hervarar saga* and *Hlǫðskviða* along with it exist in several redactions. The best text (the ‘R’ redaction) does not contain as many stanzas as the ‘U’ redaction, but the stanzas in the latter are corrupted. Echoes of *Hlǫðskviða* are also found the *Gesta Danorum*, a heroicized history of Denmark written in Latin around 1200 by Saxo Grammaticus. Saxo’s version diverges considerably from the Norse, but a few details correspond to those in the preserved Old Norse verse; see *Saga Heiðreks konungs*, ed. and trans. Tolkien, xxi–xxxi; and Omeljan Pritsak, ‘*Hlǫðskviða*’, in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano et al. (New York: Garland, 1993).
 - 25 *Saga Heiðreks konungs*, ed. and trans. Tolkien, xxiii–xxiv; Pritsak, ‘*Hlǫðskviða*’, 286.
 - 26 *Saga Heiðreks konungs*, ed. and trans. Tolkien, xxv–xxvi.
 - 27 See Lars Lönnroth, ‘The Riddles of the Rök-stone: A Structural Approach’, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 92 (1977): 1–57; Judith Jesch, ‘Memorials in Speech and Writing’, in *Runesten, magt og mindesmærker: Tværfagligt symposium på Askov Højskole 3.-5. Oktober 2002*, ed. Gunhild Øeby Nielsen (Højbjerg: Hikuin, 2005), 95–104; Joseph Harris, ‘Myth and Meaning in the Rök Inscription’, *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 2 (2006): 45–109; Joseph Harris, ‘The Rök Stone through Anglo-Saxon Eyes’, in *Anglo-Saxons and the North: Essays Reflecting the Theme of the 10th Meeting of the International Society of Anglo-Saxonists in Helsinki, August 2001*, ed. Matti Kilpiö and Leena Kahlas-Tarkka (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2009), 11–45; Stephen Mitchell, ‘Memory, Mediality, and the “Performative Turn”: Recontextualizing Remembering in Medieval Scandinavia’, *Scandinavian Studies* 85, no. 3 (2013): 282–305; Judith Jesch, ‘Runes and Verse: The Medialities of Early Scandinavian Poetry’, *European Journal of Scandinavian Studies* 47, no. 1 (2017): 181–202.
 - 28 These poems include *Guðrúnarkviða II* (*The second lay of Guðrún*), *Guðrúnarkviða III* (*The third lay of Guðrún*), *Oddrúnargrátr* (*Oddrún’s lament*), *Atlakviða* (*The lay of Atli*), and *Atlamál in grœnlensko* (*The Greenlandic poem of Atli*). All are translated in *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Carolyne Larrington, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
 - 29 In its current form, this narrative sequence is cast as a series of dialogues, but Tolkien argues that originally it also included narrative; see *Saga Heiðreks konungs*, ed. and trans. Tolkien, xxii.
 - 30 *Saga Heiðreks konungs*, ed. and trans. Tolkien, 53.
 - 31 *Saga Heiðreks konungs*, ed. and trans. Tolkien, 55.
 - 32 *Saga Heiðreks konungs*, ed. and trans. Tolkien, 57.
 - 33 *Saga Heiðreks konungs*, ed. and trans. Tolkien, 57.
 - 34 *Saga Heiðreks konungs*, ed. and trans. Tolkien, 58.
 - 35 *Ágrip ... Fagrskinna*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, 30 (*Ágrip*) and 201 (*Fagrskinna*); *Monumenta historica Norvegiæ: latinske kildeskrifter til Norges historie i middelalderen*, ed. Gustav Storm (Kristiania [Oslo]: A. W. Brøgger, 1880), 39–42 (*Theodoricus Monachus. Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium*) and 131–2 (*Acta Sancti Olavi regis et martyris*); *Snorri Sturluson. Heimskringla* 2, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Íslenzk fornrit 27 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1945), 347–94 (*Óláfs saga helga*, chs. 197–235).

- 36 For the history of the Icelandic conflicts of the thirteenth century, see Gunnar Karlsson, *The History of Iceland* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 72–82. A contemporary account is found in *Sturlunga saga*, trans. Julia H. McGrew; introduction by R. George Thomas (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1970–4). Sverre Bagge treats these remarks about the conduct of war as entirely derived from Snorri's sources (Sverre Bagge, *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), 185–6).
- 37 *Heimskringla* 2, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 357.
- 38 *Heimskringla* 2, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 357.
- 39 *Heimskringla* 2, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 366.
- 40 *Heimskringla* 2, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 358.
- 41 Diana Whaley draws attention to the fact that 'very many skalds composed eye-witness accounts of battles' (Diana Whaley, *Heimskringla: An Introduction* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research/University College London, 1991), 75).
- 42 *Heimskringla* 2, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 360.
- 43 *Heimskringla* 2, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 366. Sverre Bagge (*Society and Politics*, 29) considers this scene 'more as a description of [Olaf] and his relationship to his skalds than as an account of Snorri's sources'.
- 44 *Heimskringla* 2, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 361.
- 45 *Heimskringla* 2, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 368 (the dream) and 378 (the eclipse).
- 46 *Heimskringla* 2, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 383.
- 47 See *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar*, chs. 80–94, in *Snorri Sturluson. Heimskringla* 3, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Íslenzk fornrit 28 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1951), 175–93.
- 48 Snorri does not relate the events in Norway in the order in which they happened, but Harald's dream of Olaf is part of the sequence of events bracketed by 'while the fleet was lying in the Solund' and 'King Harald, before he left Trøndelag, had his son Magnús taken as king there' (*Heimskringla* 3, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 175 and 178). The visit to the shrine takes place 'when King Harald was ready to sail out from Trondheim' (*Heimskringla* 3, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 175).
- 49 This account of the battle is not historically accurate in a number of respects; the earl with Morcar was Edwin, not Wealtheof. See below for borrowings from an account of the Battle of Hastings and see Rory Naismith and Matthew Strickland in this volume. Kelly DeVries argues that the saga sources preserve some accurate details (*The Norwegian Invasion of England in 1066* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1999), 262–96). *Heimskringla* 3, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, xxxi–ii, also discusses the inaccuracies.
- 50 '[S]jau fóta rúm eða því lengra sem hann er hæri en aðrir menn' (*Heimskringla* 3, Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 187).
- 51 For *Morkinskinna*, see *Morkinskinna: The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030–1157)*, trans. Theodore M. Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade, *Islandica* 51 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000). For *Fagrskinna*, see *Fagrskinna, a Catalogue of the Kings of Norway: A Translation with Introduction and Notes*, trans. Alison Finlay, *The Northern World* 7 (Leiden: Brill, 2004).
- 52 Kari Ellen Gade argues that the author of *Morkinskinna* had information of an oral nature; see Kari Ellen Gade, 'Morkinskinna and 25th September 1066', in *Poetik und Gedächtnis: Festschrift für Heiko Uecker zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Karin Hoff et al., *Beiträge zur Skandinavistik* 17 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2004).

- 53 *Monumenta historica Norvegiæ*, ed. Gustav Storm, 56–7; *Theodoricus Monachus. Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium: An Account of the Ancient History of the Norwegian Kings*, trans. David and Ian McDougall (London: Viking Society for Northern Research/University College London, 1998), 45.
- 54 For Snorri's use of the *Gesta regum anglorum*, see Paul A. White, *Non-Native Sources for the Scandinavian Kings' Sagas* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 85–90. Gade, 'Morkinskinna', 215–16, argues that the Scandinavian narratives about the Battle of Stamford Bridge ultimately derive from the *Historia ecclesiastica* of Orderic Vitalis.
- 55 Some of these borrowed elements are also in *Morkinskinna* and *Fagrskinna*, but there are many more in *Heimskringla*. See *Heimskringla* 3, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, xxxii–xxxiii. For alternative sources of Snorri's account, see Bruce E. Gelsinger, 'The Battle of Stamford Bridge and the Battle of Jaffa: A Case of Confused Identity?', *Scandinavian Studies* 60 (1988): 13–29; and Shaun F. D. Hughes, 'The Battle of Stamford Bridge and the Battle of Bouvines', *Scandinavian Studies* 60 (1988): 30–76. Neither of these suggestions has won widespread acceptance.
- 56 See Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, 'Historical Invasions / Historiographical Interventions: Snorri Sturluson and the Battle of Stamford Bridge', *Mediaevalia* 17 (1994): 149–76.
- 57 See Karlsson, *The History of Iceland*, 79–81.
- 58 The most explicit one is found in chapter 125 of the saga of St Olaf, where Einar of Möðruvellir voices his opposition to submitting to King Olaf (*Heimskringla* 2, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 215–17). Snorri carefully avoids presenting this as his own view, but by putting this speech in the mouth of a respected character and by declaring that this speech convinced everyone, Snorri persuades his own audience to agree as well.
- 59 See Peter Hallberg, 'The Concept of *Gipta-Gæfa-Hamingja* in Old Norse Literature', in *Proceedings of the First International Saga Conference, University of Edinburgh, 1971*, ed. Peter Foote, Hermann Pálsson and Desmond Slay (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London, 1973), 143–81.
- 60 Rowe, 'Historical Invasions', 159–60.
- 61 This view is prominent in many sagas; see Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, 'Helpful Danes and Pagan Irishmen: Saga Fantasies of the Viking Age in the British Isles', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 5 (2009): 1–21.
- 62 *Saga Heiðreks konungs*, ed. and trans. Tolkien, 58; *Heimskringla* 3, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 201. As with the criticism of Olaf's ambition to annex Iceland, the criticism of Harald is put into the mouth of an authoritative character.
- 63 Lotte Hedeager, *Iron-Age Societies: From Tribe to State in Northern Europe, 500 BC to AD 700*, trans. J. Hines (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 248.
- 64 'Eigi skal höggva' (*Íslendinga saga*, ch. 151): *Sturlunga saga* 1, ed. Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason and Kristján Eldjárn (Reykjavík: Sturlunguútgáfan, 1946), 454.

Medieval Irish battle narratives and the construction of the past

Máire Ní Mhaonaigh

Battles serve as significant markers in many historical accounts, convenient chronological points from which to survey past (and future) developments. They punctuate timelines and function as posts against which other happenings can be measured, providing fixed nodes in a complex construction of the past. As events in their own right, they can also come to embody the characteristic features of their age. Battle narratives act as close-ups of these moments, choreographed by those with a vested interest in presenting a specific version of history, directing how the past should be read. This chapter will illustrate these universal observations with reference to a particularly rich vein of battle-writing from medieval Ireland, dating from the period between the coming of Vikings at the very end of the eighth century to the arrival of the Anglo-Normans in the last third of the twelfth.¹ Writing in both Latin and Irish was already well established when the first Viking raids on Irish centres were recorded in the last decade of the eighth century and the first decades of the ninth. Latin literacy acquired through Christianity from the fifth century was adapted and applied to the Irish language also, so that a vibrant and varied bilingual textual culture was in evidence from the seventh century.² In the following centuries, use of the vernacular increased, but Latin retained much of its significance and writing in both languages was informed and shaped by a broader Latinate intellectual milieu. Religious and secular texts were created and transmitted in ecclesiastical establishments, so that church and influential dynasties worked collaboratively in the maintenance and justification of power.

Writing history was a central part of this process; the present was validated with reference to the past. To this end, learned scholars recorded their perception, imagined and real, of what had gone before. The framework within which history was related was that employed by many other medieval European peoples, similarly engaged in mapping their stories onto a chronology driven by Christian concerns.³ In the case of Ireland, an extensive literature surviving from a relatively early period provides an important insight into this intellectual endeavour. Heroes and happenings associated with pre-Christian Ireland were aligned with major world empires and events, showcasing and often prefiguring later Christian and contemporary affairs.⁴ Of this continuous constructed narrative, battles formed an important part. As stopping stages and sometimes turning points in history, they mark highs and lows of interaction

between dynasties and of their leaders' careers. Hailed simultaneously as victory and defeat, the stakes are high when such encounters are called into being and recalled. A universal of human history, battle-writing acquires specific definition when articulated in various places and at different times. I present some aspects of the medieval Irish manifestation of this in what follows below.

Writing *catha*: Writing history

The centrality of battles in the construction of the medieval Irish past may be seen in the frequency with which such encounters are described in the literary corpus. Moreover, battle narratives (*catha*) constitute a specific grouping in the schematic categorization of material a medieval Irish scholar should control. *Catha* (the plural form of *cath* 'battle or battalion')⁵ is one of twelve categories of 'major tales' (*prímscéla*) that medieval Irish poets should be able to relate to kings and chieftains, according to a list of tale-titles preserved in a twelfth-century Irish manuscript, the Book of Leinster.⁶ Nine such battle tales are specifically named, and eight in a related list described as 'the chief battles of Ireland' (*primchatho hÉrend*), of which only two are common to both, *Cath Maige Tuired* (*The Battle of Mag Tuired*) and *Cath Maige Mucraime* (*The Battle of Mag Mucraime*).⁷ Stories corresponding to these two particular titles have in fact survived which deal with kings and warriors of the prehistoric (i.e. pre-Christian) period.⁸ However, many other named battle narratives do not find a match in the body of surviving tales, though whether this is due to loss of evidence or the artificial nature of the tale-lists in the first place is impossible to say. Some of the other categories of 'major tales' in these lists contain battle accounts under another name – tales of destruction (*togla*), death (*aideda*) and sieges (*forbassa*) in particular.⁹ Indeed *Forbais Étar* (*The Siege of Howth*) is referred to as *Cath Étar* (*The Battle of Howth*) in the Book of Leinster itself.¹⁰

In terms of how material deemed to be essential to a professional class of scholars was conceptualized, therefore, battles (alongside other major events) held an important place. As the purveyors of history and the arbiters of knowledge about the past, these highly trained practitioners of learning were presented as having access to key information. That this should include familiarity with battle narratives is not surprising, even if the connection between these representational tale-lists and learned practice is difficult to gauge. One version of the list, surviving as part of a story entitled *Airec Menman Uraird maic Coisse* (*The Stratagem of Uraird mac Coisse*), allegedly depicts the king-scholar relationship at work. When asked by the king for *scéla*, a word encompassing stories, news, information and events, the learned Uraird mac Coisse offered the ruler for narration 'your choice of the chief-tales of Ireland' (*do thogha do phrímscéluiph Érend*), enumerating a long list of titles from which the king could select.¹¹ The object of the exercise was to entice the king to request the final tale on the list, *Orgain Cathrach Máil Milscothaig* (*The Destruction of Máel Milscothach's Settlement*), since this was a story he could not have known. It was in fact an allegorical tale, composed by Uraird to recount an attack on his own homestead by the king's men in coded terms. Predictably, the king did indeed select it 'as we have never heard

it' (*ór ní chualamuir riam hé*).¹² Urard – alias Máel Milscothach – received generous compensation for the attack, the real identity of the plunderers being revealed by an angel of God at the end of the tale within a tale.¹³

The Stratagem of Urard mac Coisse is a highly sophisticated piece of writing, demonstrating skilful use of allegory and other literary devices, and a playful, pointed use of language itself. In casting himself as Máel Milscothach, Urard presents himself as the eloquent attendant of the king, since *máel* means servant or devotee and the epithet *milscothach* is a compound of 'honey' (*mil*) and the adjectival form of 'flower, pick' (*scoth*). This is explained in a series of learned glosses, as referring to the best (pick) of words and language (*scoth briathar ocus scoth innsci*), so that Máel (aka. Urard) is the mellifluous one (*milis briathrach*, of sweet words, or sweetly verbose).¹⁴ This honey-mouthed, maltreated professional – as he would have it – acquires what he is legally due by means of his verbal craft, presenting a carefully argued, veiled defence of the art of learning in the process. For this too he is rewarded, since it is decreed in the story that the highest grade of poet (*ollam*) should henceforth have an honour-price, and therefore status, equivalent to that of the most important king, the king of Tara (*fri rígh Temra*).¹⁵

The long list of tale-titles embedded in the metanarrative of this composition serves to underline the immense learning of Urard and his ilk. The tales in question form part of the historical knowledge Urard claims to be able to recollect in his ability to relate the series of Ireland's occupations 'from the first taking of Ireland after the Flood down to the time in which he himself lived' (*o chétgaphail Erend iar ndilinn cusin n-aimsir sin a mbui feisne*).¹⁶ Ireland's history is thus cast in a biblical framework and the stories (*scéla*) to which Urard and his learned colleagues have privileged access create a tapestry of past events.¹⁷ The past informs the present, as Urard's depiction of a contemporary occurrence in the guise of earlier happenings vividly shows.¹⁸ The list of cattle-raids, voyages, destructions and battles (for example) provides a record of Ireland's continuous history, stretching from the time of Noah to the time in which that history was written and rewritten, in response to and shaping contemporary events.

The Stratagem of Urard mac Coisse exemplifies the learned, literate context in which the makers of history operated in the tenth or eleventh century when the tale was composed. It depicts historical characters; Urard's death is recorded under the year 990 CE in annalistic compilations.¹⁹ Moreover, he is associated elsewhere too with the king who features in the story, Domnall úa Néill, if he is identical with the Mac Coisse who marked the death of that ruler in 980 by means of a poem.²⁰ The construct in which past events are placed and ordered within a sequence of land-takings (*gabála*), referred to in the story, was in use before this time, being noted in passing in *Historia Brittonum* (*The History of the Britons*), a Latin text written in Gwynedd in North Wales in the first half of the ninth century.²¹ It also informs Irish texts of the period whose authors were particularly concerned with the 'order of history' (*ord senchasa*), in the words of Máel Muru, an ecclesiastic from the monastery of Fahan, Co. Donegal, who died in 887, being celebrated as 'a royal-poet of Ireland' (*ríghhili Érend*) and a most wonderful 'historian' (*senchaid*) in his obituary.²² Máel Muru's own historical writing includes a long poem exploring from where the Irish came, *Can a mbundas na nGáedel* (*Whence the Origins of the Irish?*). As a wandering people, they resemble the Israelites, the Irish

too being God's chosen people (*túatha Dé*).²³ This influential composition informed the writing of history in the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries. *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* (*The Book of Invasions*, literally 'The Book of the Taking(s) of Ireland') which serves as an overarching origin-legend for the Irish setting out their history from pre-Christian times to the authors' own day combines the concept of biblical descent expounded by Máel Múru (and earlier authors) with the equally biblical notion of sequences of settlers.²⁴

The foundational *cath*: *The Battle of Mag Tuired*

Moreover, as in the Bible, battles serve as key chronological markers in a continuous history. The foundational battle, as far as Ireland's story is concerned, is *The Battle of Mag Tuired* (Moytirra), two interlinked encounters in which pre-Christian deities, Túatha Dé Danann ('the peoples of the God Danu'), defeat two other groups of invaders, the Fir Bolg and the Fomoiri (Fomorians) in turn.²⁵ The king of the Túatha Dé Danann, Núadu, lost an arm in the first battle, and being blemished, he was no longer deemed fit to rule. He was replaced by Bres whose mother was of the Túatha Dé Danann but whose paternal kin, the Fomoiri, imposed severe tribute on his subjects during his rule. Complaints about this harsh treatment arose among his dissatisfied people, 'for their knives were not greased by him ... their breaths did not smell of ale' (*ar níbtar béoluide a scénaí úatha ... níptar cormaide a n-anáulai*).²⁶ A carefully contrived satire ultimately brought his sovereignty to an end and he sought to regain it by force, summoning a host of Fomoiri for assistance. Despite the military might of Bres and his supporters, the perfectly balanced society of the Túatha Dé Danann prevailed, according to the story, under the omnipotent Lug Lonnansclech, son of Cian mac Déin Chécht, who took control when Núadu could no longer rule. Being multi-skilled (*samildánach*) himself,²⁷ Lug's role as leader was to ensure that every member of the Túatha Dé Danann applied his own particular art in the battle, from the brazier who supplied spear-rivets and sword-hilts to the cupbearers who ensured that the enemy was consumed by an unquenchable thirst. According to this exemplary tale, the Túatha Dé Danann formed a cooperative, harmonious community perfectly in tune with nature and in which each profession had an essential role to play.

The outcome of the battle may not be in doubt but the author lingered nonetheless on the incredulity of the Fomoiri that things were not going their way, notwithstanding their 'strong indestructible battalions' (*catha daiggné ditogladai*) and the superiority of their armour.²⁸ The destructive aspect of the conflict was also brought to the fore in the tale, 'abundant was the stream of blood over the white skin of young warriors mangled by the hands of bold men while rushing into danger for shame' (*ba himgae réun folu tar gelníus móethócláech ann ierna léudh do lámaiuh létmiuch oc teicht a ngáuhad ar imbnárie*).²⁹ The messy banality of fighting too was underlined, 'because of the slipperiness of the blood under the warriors' feet, they kept falling down and their heads were cut off them as they sat' (*co tuislitis assa sessam lie slimreth na foluo fou cossaib na míliodh, co mmbentaéis a cinno díob ana suidip*).³⁰ Yet the battle of Mag Tuired had its heroes, most notably Lug who slew the giant one-eyed Balor with a perfectly aimed slingshot.³¹

Balor was in fact Lug's grandfather, according to the story. Thus, like Bres, Lug too is depicted as being of mixed parentage, though in his case, it was his father who was of the Túatha Dé Danann, and his mother, Balor's daughter, Ethne, was of the Fomoiri.³² However, it is the conception and parentage of Bres which is emphasized in the narrative, and so the dangers of transformation through the paternal line. It is no coincidence that the mother of Bres is called Ériu, one of a number of names for Ireland itself. She is approached by a beautiful stranger who came in a silver ship from across the sea and with whom she slept willingly, only afterwards enquiring who he was. He revealed himself as Elatha mac Delbaeth, king of the Fomoiri, and told her that a son would be born of their union.³³ That son, Bres, may have been fair, as the meaning of his name is explained, but appearances can be deceptive and the rule of this stranger's son brought in fact darkness on Ériu's kin – Ireland – as is described in the tale. John Carey has suggested that this incident would have had particular resonance in ninth-century Ireland, when *The Battle of Mag Tuired* was first written, and that the foreign suitor would have brought Vikings to mind. That the Fomoiri are associated with Viking territories in the tale reinforces the point, specifically their links with Lochlainn, a place from which Vikings came and later used for Norway, and *Insi Gall*, the Hebrides, literally 'the islands of the foreigners (*gaill*): *gaill* being a common term for Scandinavians'.³⁴ Reading *The Battle of Mag Tuired* as political allegory, the nature of alliances with recently settled Scandinavians is being explored.

This is but one strand in a complex narrative that is presented as signifying a transformational moment in Ireland's prehistory, at the centre of which is the conflict between the gods that is the battle of Mag Tuired. It forms part of the framework within which Ireland's history was constructed, alluded to in *The Stratagem of Urard mac Coisse*, as we have seen. In the case of *The Battle of Mag Tuired*, the Túatha Dé Danann take the land of Ireland from the Fir Bolg (in the first battle of Mag Tuired) and are in turn challenged by the Fomoiri who are ultimately defeated in the second battle by the Túatha Dé Danann whose status as the premier gods of Ireland is in this way secured. The significance of this point in the account of Ireland's past shaped by medieval scholars is made clear by its synchronization with a defining moment in world history, the destruction of Troy: 'For the battle of Mag Tuired and the destruction of Troy occurred at the same time' (*úair is a n-áonaimsir rogníadh cath Muigi Tuired ocus togail Traoi*).³⁵ And as the destruction of Troy ultimately led to the foundation of Rome and the triumph of a new Christian empire, the battle of Mag Tuired was likewise interpreted as an important turning point in Ireland's continuous history, the Túatha Dé Danann giving way to the Gaels (*Gaídil*), ancestors of the Irish. These too were 'peoples of a God' (*túatha Dé*), but in this case the deity in question was not pre-Christian like Danu, to whom the Túatha Dé Danann owed allegiance, but the Christian God. While deliberately echoing the name of their pre-Christian predecessors, the phrase *túatha Dé* similarly aligned the Irish with God's chosen people, the Israelites, who were also termed *túatha Dé*, as noted earlier.³⁶ In this way, the course of Irish history is synthesized with universal Christian history, of which its pre-Christian dimension, as defined by the pivotal battle of Mag Tuired, was made to form an integral part.

Writing battles and Troy

The engagement of the learned Irish with classical material and with the story of Troy in particular was detailed and deep. In this they resembled other medieval peoples, many of whom traced their origins to the Trojans. The Troy legend, with its emphasis on genealogy and prophecy, provided European aristocracies with important tools with which to buttress their growing power, as Francis Ingledew has argued.³⁷ Medieval Irish scholars were among the first to create a vernacular version of the Troy events, translating into Irish, perhaps as early as the tenth century, a third- or fourth-century account of the Trojan War, *De excidio Troiae historia*, attributed to Dares Phrygius who allegedly fought on the Trojan side.³⁸ A version survives in the twelfth-century manuscript in which the tale-list also appears, the Book of Leinster; other versions of the Troy story are extant in later manuscripts.³⁹ The intense involvement with Trojan material the adaptation of *De excidio* embodies is manifest in Irish writing of the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries in various ways and in battle-writing in particular. In the first place, Irish heroes are frequently compared with Trojan counterparts, most notably in a twelfth-century poem in which Ireland's Alexander, the Ulster warrior Naise (among others), is recalled and the premier pre-Christian warrior, Cú Chulainn, is identified with Troilus.⁴⁰ Moreover, a seminal encounter between Ulster heroes, led by Cú Chulainn, and Connacht, related in the tale, *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (*The Cattle-Raid of Cooley*), is equated with Troy.⁴¹ In this way, a defining series of battles in Irish history, synchronized with the birth of Mary mother of Christ in medieval chronicles, is set on a par and deemed equally significant with the Trojan War.⁴²

Ancient battles are not the only encounters to be presented in this light. A twelfth-century account of the Battle of Clontarf fought between King Brian Boru of Munster and a coalition of Leinster and Viking opponents in 1014 is similarly infused with a Trojan hue. In a climatic passage in the narrative, Brian's son, Murchad, who has replaced his ageing father as battle commander, is compared skilfully and in a sustained manner with Hector. Each represented the epitome of heroism in his own time, the Irish warrior thus being accorded a place beside the Trojan hero on history's world-stage.⁴³ In addition, the fate of Murchad and his father Brian may have been read as resonant of that of the Trojans more broadly as well. Although the Trojans were defeated, the wanderings of a heroic survivor, Aeneas, led to the great foundation of Rome. In this connection, we may note that a version of the *Aeneid*, in which Aeneas' wanderings are related, was also translated into Irish in this period, so that the events of Troy itself and its aftermath were undoubtedly well known.⁴⁴ And as success was eventually built upon the ruins of Troy, failure at Clontarf on the part of a father and son, who were both slain in the encounter, marked a turning point in the fortune of the dynasty of Brian Boru. Brian's grandson, Tairdelbach, and great-grandson, Muirchertach, regained and amplified their lost power, becoming the most powerful kings in Ireland in their own day.⁴⁵ Casting Brian as a glorious ancestor, the story of Clontarf became one of triumph for his descendants, on whose initiative the twelfth-century narrative of the battle was composed. The text in question, *Cogadh Gáedhel re Galluibh* (*The War of the Irish against Foreigners*) is also preserved in the Book of Leinster, among whose pages is similarly found the Irish version of the Troy story, *Togail Troí* (*The Destruction of Troy*), as noted above.⁴⁶

Troy therefore functioned as an important chronological device in the construction of Ireland's history, and this historical dimension may have attracted medieval Irish scholars to classical material in the first place, as Leslie Diane Myrick and Erich Poppe have argued.⁴⁷ The story-world of Troy served the synchronistic scholarship which was a central part of the historicizing intellectual milieu of medieval Ireland well. In turn, evolving Irish versions of the Troy tale were shaped by this synthesizing approach, most notably by the addition of a prologue designed to link Troy to the biblical structure within which Ireland's chronology was placed.⁴⁸ As the battle narrative about Clontarf suggests, however, the content of Irish writing was similarly influenced by the Trojan tale, and by its Irish manifestation, *Togail Troí* (*The Destruction of Troy*), in particular.⁴⁹ Specific links have been drawn between copies of this text surviving in the Book of Leinster and two other narratives preserved therein we have encountered, *The Cattle-Raid of Cooley* and *The War of the Irish against Foreigners*.⁵⁰ As products of the same scribe (or school of scribes) addressing a similar theme – a major battle – connections between these compositions might be expected given the intertextual nature of medieval Irish writing, in which learned nuances and deliberate echoes were to the fore. Mutual literary influence, therefore, shapes these interconnected tales.

The how of writing battles: *Catha* as genre

Where writing battles is concerned, the influence of the Latin version of the story of Troy and related classical narratives has been deemed of even greater significance, since to them, and to the Troy tale in particular, has been attributed the rise of a literary sub-genre, *catha* or battle tales.⁵¹ As we have seen, *catha* formed one of twelve categories of 'principal stories' (*prímscéla*), according to two tale-lists, one embedded in a tenth-century narrative, *The Stratagem of Urard mac Coisse*. Moreover, two of the tales enumerated as *catha* in the lists, *The Battle of Mag Tuired* and *The Battle of Mag Mucrama*, are likely to have been originally composed in the ninth century.⁵² Historical battles provided fodder for this type of literary endeavour, including the seventh-century battle of Mag Rath (Moirá, Co. Down), celebrated in a tenth-century narrative bearing its name, *Cath Maige Rath* (*The Battle of Mag Rath*), as well as in later compositions.⁵³ Royal power and supremacy could be measured in terms of military success, and hence battle victories were included in eulogies of kings. When writing of his patron, Cerball mac Muirecáin, a ninth-century ruler of Leinster in the east of Ireland, the poet Dallán mac Móire promised that 'his [Cerball's] battles and his fights, all shall hear them from me' (*a chatha 's a chongala / úaim nos cechla cách*).⁵⁴ Medieval life in Ireland, as elsewhere, centred on conflict, and this is reflected in medieval Irish writing in various ways, and in varied battle tales.

Thus, medieval Irish scholars composed tales of battles before they first engaged with the legend of Troy in the tenth century. And some of those early battle narratives (*catha*) have in fact survived. Differences between these and later, lengthier stories have been noted, and it is in the development of a longer battle tale (when compared with the earliest literary examples) that the influence of translation texts has been perceived, post-dating the tenth century when classical material was first adapted, if

the extant evidence is representative. Conflict between two kings stands at the centre of these later eleventh- and twelfth-century vernacular texts, manifested above all in the clash of their mighty forces, and what is deemed a shift in focus has been linked with classical adaptations.⁵⁵ This literary form is seen as standing in marked contrast to earlier narratives punctuated by heroic single combats in which the king's role is less pronounced. Yet, a chronological distinction is far from clear-cut; the version of *The Cattle-Raid of Cooley* in the Book of Leinster, like an earlier version, presents an elaborate series of valorous duels before alluding rather perfunctorily to the meeting of two armies at the end. Moreover, even in vernacular versions of classical texts, the predominant focus is rarely the actual battle. Comparison of the account of the Battle of Clontarf told in *The War of the Irish against Foreigners* with a twelfth-century Irish rendering of Lucan's *Bellum civile* (*Pharsalia*), known in Irish as *In Cath Catharda* (*The Civil War*), reveals parallels in terms of how both authors set out the military credentials of their respective heroes by reference to earlier engagements, and employ similar tropes in depicting battle preparations. The consequences of the conflicts too are considered, with emphasis placed on the large number of casualties and what will ensue as a result. In the Clontarf narrative, the pitiful journey homewards of the remnant of Brian's men is described, while the Irish adaptor of Lucan's *Bellum civile* comments in general terms on the horrors of a civil war.⁵⁶

Such broad similarities are suggestive of mutual literary influence and of texts emanating from the same intellectual milieu, notwithstanding the dependency of the author of *In Cath Catharda* (*The Civil War*) on a Latin text, from which he departed in content and particularly in form.⁵⁷ Specific parallels linking translation texts both with one another and with new literary creations in the vernacular suggest a vibrant learned context in which rhetorical techniques and descriptive language were being developed and creatively employed. Roman epics and their sources formed part of the literary mix, as did scholastic and other writings upon which medieval Irish authors also profitably drew. Contemporary vernacular compositions and adaptations of classical material were the products of the creative vibrancy this literary activity brought forth.⁵⁸

It was in this context that battle-writing continued to evolve and that medieval Irish *catha* took on different guises, shaped in part by Latin adaptations but in conjunction with learned activity more generally, of which translation texts formed an integral part. Engagement with such narratives would not alone have prompted the creation of a different type of battle-text. New ways of writing battles developed, but in a literary environment that was open to all influences and which flourished by being responsive in creative ways. But changes in how battles were depicted was also likely to reflect reality, at least in part.⁵⁹ Battle narratives were produced by a learned class that was acutely socially aware and cognizant of how the nature of warfare was evolving. By way of example, kings increasingly had recourse to professional mercenaries whose rise paralleled that of aristocratic knights elsewhere in medieval Europe of the day; they could therefore engage in more protracted military campaigns.⁶⁰ That narratives recording such activities should also evolve need not surprise us; thus, it is in current political developments that the origin of an evolving battle tale (*catha*) is to be found. In its formation, its vibrant creators undoubtedly drew on the variety of material at their disposal, among which was a rich corpus of translation texts.

The why of writing battles: *Catha* and contemporary conflict

However, an interest in these texts as accounts of the past, on the part of Irish authors, was paramount, as their comparison and synchronization of Irish and Graeco-Roman historical events shows. Creating a distinguished pre-Christian history, punctuated by venerable battles, and comparable with that of prestigious ancient civilizations ensured one's standing in a contemporary world. Depicting a glorious past was an act of predicting a powerful present, predetermined by what went before.

Thus, narratives set in the past resonate in the present, as *The Battle of Mag Tuired* makes clear. Recourse to past precedents cast contemporary events into relief and as circumstances changed, texts might be reworked to reflect that fact. This can be illustrated with reference to another battle tale which shares the pages of the twelfth-century Book of Leinster, with narratives already noted, such as the Irish adaptation of the Troy tale and the story of the Battle of Clontarf. The text in question, *Cath Ruis na Ríg* (*The Battle of Rosnaree*), is thematically linked to *The Cattle-Raid of Cooley*, a version of which is found in the same manuscript.⁶¹ It continues the account of rivalry between the territories of Connacht and Ulster, providing a sequel to the longer tale. Notwithstanding the fact that there is no clear victor depicted in the *The Cattle-Raid of Cooley*, the Ulster legendary king, Conchobar mac Nessa, is presented as pining in the opening scene of *The Battle of Rosnaree*, as a result of his defeat at the hands of the king and queen of Connacht in the earlier cattle raid. He is roused from the lethargy into which he has fallen because of the battle loss and advised to seek assistance 'from absent friends' (*cot chairdib écmaissi*). These include Conall Cernach, a prominent Ulster warrior in other heroic tales who is raising tax and tribute in Lewis, Caithness and Orkney, as well as in Scythia, Dacia, Gothia and Northmannia, while also voyaging the Ictian and Tyrrhenian seas and pounding Saxon roads. Conchobar is encouraged simultaneously to send messengers 'to the foreign lands of the foreigners' (*co gall-iathaib na ngall*) to acquire allies in the form of Scandinavian rulers such as Amlaíb (Norse Óláfr), grandson of the king of Norway, and the king of the Orkneys and Alba (Scotland) among others.⁶² Military reinforcements arrive in the form of three battalions led by Conall Cernach, Amlaíb and the sons of Romra.⁶³ In the version of the tale in the Book of Leinster, however, they play no active part in Conchobar's subsequent success.

A later copy of the story is more consistent in this and other aspects, and it has been suggested that it may reflect more accurately a version of the tale which predates what we now have in the twelfth-century manuscript.⁶⁴ If so, the narrative surviving in the Book of Leinster represents a reworking of an earlier text, indeed a completely different version of a pre-existing tale.⁶⁵ This creative composition has been ascribed to one of the scribes of the Book of Leinster, Áed mac Crimthainn, who was working in the early decades of the manuscript's production in the 1150s and 1160s.⁶⁶ However, the question of authorship must remain speculative. Patrick Wadden has placed the tale as it survives in the Book of Leinster in a very specific context relating to this period, reading the Ulster-Connacht rivalry which lies at its heart as symbolic of contention between an historical king of the north of Ireland, Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn (McLoughlin) who died in 1166, and his Connacht counterpart, Tairdelbach Ua

Conchobair (O'Connor), who predeceased him by some ten years.⁶⁷ The particular circumstances in the 1150s which Wadden sees reflected in the narrative do indeed provide a plausible context for *The Battle of Rosnaree*. But the narrative may well have been read in an additional political light.

A main theme of this battle tale throughout is the triumphant return of an exiled hero – Conall Cernach – with foreign mercenaries. The latter have a Scandinavian hue, represented by Amlaíb, grandson of a king of Norway (Lochlainn), and the Gaelic-named Findmór mac Rofher, king of the seventh part of the same territory (Lochlainn). The foreign lands from which mercenaries were recruited are characterized with reference to *gall*, a word originally signifying one from Gaul but which came to be applied to other types of foreigners, including Vikings and, as the Book of Leinster was being written, to Normans as well.⁶⁸ These *gaill* (the plural form of *gall*) could indeed represent Hebridean and other allies to whom Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn had recourse at various points of his career, as Patrick Wadden has cogently argued.⁶⁹ A contemporary and staunch supporter of Muirchertach, the Leinster king, Dermot McMurrough (Diarmait Mac Murchada) is better known for acquiring outside allies, seeking the assistance of King Henry II of England on his expulsion from Ireland in the wake of the death of Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn in 1166. He returned the following year with Norman reinforcements, depicted as *Saxain* 'Saxons' in a note in the Book of Leinster itself.⁷⁰

Among the foreign destinations travelled by Conall Cernach were Saxon roads, according to *The Battle of Rosnaree*.⁷¹ The tale may have acquired an added resonance, as work continued on the Book of Leinster during the period of Diarmait's exile and return and in the years following his unexpected death in 1171 when Henry II sought to curb the growing power of Norman magnates in Ireland, including Diarmait's son-in-law, the earl of Pembroke, Richard fitz Gilbert de Clare, better known as Strongbow.⁷² In the wake of Diarmait's recruitment of foreign assistance from *gaill* and *Saxain*, the allies with which Conall Cernach returned, according to *The Battle of Rosnaree*, the tale may have been read, by some at least, as echoing contemporary circumstances.

Writing battles: Shaping history

The past is reshaped in the present, and as barometers of history battle narratives provide some measure of the ways in which conflict was construed and created by learned authors serving the needs of contemporary patrons. As rhetorical set pieces, their value as historical documents when an actual encounter is being related is circumscribed. Examining these texts as conscious literary creations, however, reveals much about contemporary ideologies and the learned tradition in which such conflict accounts were wrought. The *catha* considered in the preceding sections show the extent to which their makers were steeped in the biblical and classical traditions of their time. In constructing their literary depictions, they drew on the considerable learned arsenal at their disposal and cast kings' conflicts in a mould so as often to bolster the position of political leaders. Such texts may not relate much about particular battles or always reveal the actualities of fighting, but they are invaluable in elucidating ideology and

ambition and in highlighting the crucial role of learned authors in maintaining the ruling elite.

They also provide crucial nodes in a structure chronicling and constructing the past from the foundational battle of Mag Tuired to the historical early eleventh-century encounter at Clontarf (and after). It was a framework within which pre-Christian warriors found their place, and in whose actions contemporary deeds might be reflected, as has been argued in the case of *The Battle of Rosnaree*. Art was made quite consciously to imitate life in *The Stratagem of Urard mac Coisse*, the in-tale of destruction it contains deliberately imitating an actual event. In all their variety, only a flavour of which I have provided in the preceding, battle narratives are imaginative, ideological documents, encapsulating what were deemed significant moments along a continuing timeline. Writing battles in medieval Ireland was an important exercise in constructing the past.

Notes

- 1 For a general account of the literature of the period, see Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'The Literature of Medieval Ireland, 800–1200: From the Vikings to the Normans', in *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature, Volume I: To 1890*, ed. Margaret Kelleher and Philip O'Leary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
- 2 See Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Literature of Medieval Ireland to c. 800: St Patrick to the Vikings', in *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature*, ed. Kelleher and O'Leary.
- 3 See, for example, John Carey, 'Lebor Gabála and the Legendary History of Ireland', in *Medieval Celtic Literature and Society*, ed. Helen Fulton (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005).
- 4 See Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'The Peripheral Centre: Writing History on the Western "Fringe"', *Interfaces: A Journal of Medieval European Literatures* 4 (2017): 59–84; Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Universal History and the Book of Ballymote', in *Book of Ballymote: Codices Hibernenses Eximii II*, ed. Ruairí Ó hUiginn (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2018); Elizabeth Boyle, 'Biblical History in the Book of Ballymote', in *Book of Ballymote*, ed. Ó hUiginn.
- 5 *The Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language*, eDIL: www.dil.ie, 1 *cath* (dil.ie/8344).
- 6 R. I. Best, Osborn Bergin, M. A. O'Brien and Anne O'Sullivan (eds), *The Book of Leinster Formerly Lebar na Núachongbála*, 6 vols (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies 1954–83), IV, 835–7.
- 7 Proinsias Mac Cana, *The Learned Tales of Medieval Ireland* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1980), 41–3, 54.
- 8 Elizabeth A. Gray (ed. and trans.), *Cath Maige Tuired: The Second Battle of Mag Tuired*, Irish Texts Society 52 (Dublin: Irish Texts Society, 1982); Máirín O Daly (ed. and trans.), *Cath Maige Mucrama: The Battle of Mag Mucrama*, Irish Texts Society 50 (Dublin: Irish Texts Society, 1975). *The Battle of Mag Tuired* is discussed in greater detail elsewhere in this article.
- 9 Mac Cana, *Learned Tales*, 41.
- 10 Mac Cana, *Learned Tales*, 45; the last line of the tale enumerates the key incidents therein, stating 'Hence, then, the Circuit of Aithirne and the Killing of Mess Gegrai by Conall Cernach and the Battle of Étar are named' (*Is dé sin trá atá Cuairt Aithirni ocus*

- Marbad Meisse Gegrai do Chonall Chernach ocus Cath Étair*): Caoimhín Ó Dónaill (ed. and trans.), *Talland Étair: A Critical Edition with Introduction, Translation, Textual Notes, Bibliography and Vocabulary*, Maynooth Medieval Irish Texts 4 (Maynooth: Department of Old and Middle Irish, National University of Ireland, 2005), 51, 62. See also Best and O'Brien, *The Book of Leinster*, II, 433 (lines 13547–9). It is actually given an alternative title again in that manuscript: *Talland Étair (The Land-holding (?) of Howth)*.
- 11 Mac Cana, *Learned Tales*, 50.
 - 12 Mary E. Byrne (ed.), 'Airec Menman Uraird maic Coisse', in *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts*, ed. Osborn Bergin, R. I. Best, Kuno Meyer and J. G. O'Keeffe (Halle and Dublin: Max Niemeyer and Hodges, Figgis & Co., 1908), II, 48.
 - 13 The tale is edited without translation by Byrne, 'Airec Menman'. There is a partial translation by Judith S. Schoen in an unpublished Masters thesis, 'Orcaín Catrach Mael Miscothaig: An Edition and Partial Translation of *Airec Menman Uraird maic Coisse*', University of Utrecht 2015, available online at <https://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/316025> (accessed April 2019). For commentary, see in particular Erich Poppe, 'Reconstructing Medieval Irish Literary Theory: The Case of *Airec Menman Uraird maic Coisse*', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 37 (Summer 1999): 33–54.
 - 14 Byrne, 'Airec Menman', 47–8. For the specific meaning of the words in question, see [www.dil.ie s.v. mil](http://www.dil.ie/s.v/mil) (dil.ie/32220), *scoth* (dil.ie/36590), *briathar* (dil.ie/6796), *insce* (dil.ie/28887), *milis* (dil.ie/32244), *briathrach* (dil.ie/6798).
 - 15 Byrne, 'Airec Menman', 75–6; Judith Schoen comments on this aspect of the tale, 'Orcaín Catrach Mael Miscothaig', 13–14.
 - 16 Mac Cana, *Learned Tales*, 50; Byrne, 'Airec Menman', 42–3.
 - 17 The importance of the Bible in constructing Ireland's past has long been noted; see, for example, Carey, 'Lebor Gabála and the Legendary History of Ireland'; Mark Williams, *Ireland's Immortals: A History of the Gods of Irish Myth* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016), 130–6.
 - 18 Erich Poppe has argued that the author of *The Stratagem of Uraird mac Coisse* sought to highlight the contemporary relevance of past events for the audience of the tales: 'Reconstructing Medieval Irish Literary Theory', 47.
 - 19 Seán Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill (eds and trans.), *The Annals of Ulster, to 1131* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983), 422–3; Whitley Stokes (ed. and trans.), *The Annals of Tigernach* (Felinfach: Llanerch, 1993), II, 239; William M. Hennessy (ed. and trans.), *Chronicum Scotorum: A Chronicle of Irish Affairs from the Earliest Times to AD 1135* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1866), 232–3.
 - 20 Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, *Annals of Ulster*, 414–15.
 - 21 John Morris (ed.), *Nennius, British History and the Welsh Annals* (London and Chichester: Phillimore, 1980), 51 (§13); see also Williams, *Ireland's Immortals*, 142–3.
 - 22 Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, *Annals of Ulster*, 342–3.
 - 23 James Henthorn Todd (ed. and trans.), *Leabhar Breathnach annso síis: The Irish Version of the Historia Britonum of Nennius* (Dublin: Irish Archaeological Society, 1848), 220–71; reference to 'the order of history of the sons of Míl, as it happened' (*ord senchasa mac Míled / feib ro relad*), 224–5.
 - 24 Carey, 'Lebor Gabála and the Legendary History of Ireland'.
 - 25 The text is examined by Williams, *Ireland's Immortals*, 94–5, 101–26.
 - 26 Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, 32–3 (§36).
 - 27 Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, 40–1 (§68).

- 28 Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, 56–7 (§127).
- 29 Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, 58–9 (§131).
- 30 Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, 58–9 (§132).
- 31 Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, 60–1 (§135).
- 32 Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, 38–9 (§55).
- 33 Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, 26–9 (§§16–21).
- 34 Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, 38–9 (§51); John Carey, ‘Myth and Mythography in *Cath Maige Tuired*’, *Studia Celtica* 24/25 (1989/1990): 55–6, 58–60.
- 35 Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, 40–1 (§69).
- 36 John Carey, ‘The Name “Tuatha Dé Danann”’, *Éigse* 18 (1981): 291–4; Williams, *Ireland’s Immortals*, 186–91.
- 37 Francis Ingledew, ‘The Book of Troy and the Genealogical Construction of History: The Case of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia regum Britanniae*’, *Speculum* 69 (1994): 669, 676.
- 38 Ralph O’Connor provides an overview of the chronology of Irish adaptations of classical material in his ‘Irish Narrative Literature and the Classical Tradition, 900–1300’, in *Classical Literature and Learning in Medieval Irish Narrative*, ed. Ralph O’Connor, *Studies in Celtic History* 34 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2014); for the date of the Troy material, see especially 13–15 (with references).
- 39 There is a useful summary of the various versions of the text in Michael Clarke, ‘The Extended Prologue of *Togail Troí*: From Adam to the Wars of Troy’, *Ériu* 64 (2014): 23–9.
- 40 F. J. Byrne (ed. and trans.) ‘Clann Ollaman Uaisle Emna’, *Studia Hibernica* 4 (1964): 61, 76 (stanza 4). For commentary on the poem, see also Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, ‘The Hector of Ireland and the Western World’, in *Sacred Histories: A Festschrift for Máire Herbert*, ed. John Carey, Kevin Murray and Caitríona Ó Dochartaigh (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2015), 258–68.
- 41 Byrne, ‘Clann Olloman Uaisle Emna’, 62, 76 (stanza 5).
- 42 Michael Clarke, ‘An Irish Achilles and a Greek Cú Chulainn’, in *Ulidia 2: Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales*, ed. Ruairí Ó hUiginn and Brian Ó Catháin (Maynooth: An Sagart, 2009), 238–51. See also Erich Poppe and Dagmar Schlüter, ‘Greece, Ireland, Ulster and Troy: Of Hybrid Origins and Heroes’, in *Other Nations: The Hybridization of Medieval Insular Mythology and Identity*, ed. Wendy Marie Hoofnagle and Wolfram R. Keller, *Britannica et Americana* 3rd Series 27 (Heidelberg: Winter, 2011).
- 43 Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, ‘“The Metaphorical Hector”: The Literary Portrayal of Murchad mac Briain’, in *Classical Literature and Learning in Medieval Irish Narrative*, ed. O’Connor; Michael Clarke and Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, ‘The Ages of World and the Ages of Man: Irish and European Learning in the Twelfth Century’, *Speculum* 95 (2020).
- 44 George Calder (ed. and trans.), *Imtheachta Æniasa: The Irish Æneid*, Irish Texts Society 6 (London: Irish Texts Society, 1907); Erich Poppe, *A New Introduction to Imtheachta Aeniasa, the Irish Aeneid: The Classical Epic from an Irish Perspective*, Irish Texts Society Subsidiary Series 3 (London: Irish Texts Society, 1995).
- 45 Ní Mhaonaigh, ‘“The Metaphorical Hector”’, 161.
- 46 James Henthorn Todd (ed. and trans.), *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh: The War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill, or the Invasions of Ireland by the Danes and Other Norsemen*, Rolls Series 48 (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1867).
- 47 Leslie Diane Myrick, *From the De excidio Troiae historia to the Togail Troi: Literary-Cultural Synthesis in a Medieval Irish Adaptation of Dares’ Troy Tale*, *Anglistische Forschungen* 223 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1993), 70–1; Poppe, *A New Introduction*.

- 48 Clarke, 'The Extended Prologue'.
- 49 See, in particular, Brent Miles, *Heroic Saga and Classical Epic in Medieval Ireland*, Studies in Celtic History 30 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011).
- 50 Miles, *Heroic Saga*; see also Clarke, 'An Irish Achilles' and Ní Mhaonaigh, "'The Metaphorical Hector'"
- 51 Proinsias Mac Cana, 'La traduction des épopées étrangères en Irlandais', in *Traduction et traducteurs au moyen âge*, ed. Geneviève Contamine (Paris: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1989), 80. See also Uaitéar Mac Gearailt, 'Togail Troí: Ein Vorbild für spätmittelirische catha?', in *Übersetzung, Adaptation und Akkulturation im insularen Mittelalter*, ed. Erich Poppe and Hildegard L. C. Tristram (Münster: Nodus Publikationen, 1999), 123–9 and his 'Togail Troí: An Example of Translating and Editing in Medieval Ireland', *Studia Hibernica* 31 (2000–1): 71–85.
- 52 *Cath Maige Tuired*, however, was reworked in the eleventh century: see Carey, 'Myth and Mythography'; Williams, *Ireland's Immortals*, 112–18, discusses another possible later innovation in the tale.
- 53 For discussion (and references to the tales in question), see Máire Herbert, 'Fled Dúin na nGéd: A Reappraisal', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 18 (Winter 1989): 75–87.
- 54 Kuno Meyer (ed. and trans.), 'A Poem by Dallán mac Móre', *Revue celtique* 29 (1908): 211, 213 (stanza 6). For a discussion of this type of poem, see Peter J. Smith, 'Early Irish Historical Verse: The Evolution of a Genre', in *Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Ages, Texts and Transmission: Irland und Europa im früheren Mittelalter: Texte und Überlieferung*, ed. Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter (Dublin: Four Courts Press 2002), 330–3.
- 55 See, for example, Mac Gearailt, 'Togail Troí: Ein Vorbild', 125–6.
- 56 I have discussed this example in the context of an analysis of the influence of classical adaptations on contemporary vernacular compositions in 'Classical Compositions in Medieval Ireland: The Literary Context', in *Translations from Classical Literature: Imtheachta Aeniasa and Stair Ercuil ocus a Bás*, ed. Kevin Murray, Irish Texts Society Subsidiary Series 17 (London: Irish Texts Society, 2006), 17–18.
- 57 Cillian O'Hogan has shown that the author was dependent on scholia and other late antique Latin literature to supplement his source text: 'Reading Lucan with Scholia in Medieval Ireland: In *Cath Catharda* and Its Sources', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 68 (Winter 2014): 21–49.
- 58 Ralph O'Connor draws attention to the range of models drawn on by Irish creative authors: 'Was Classical Imitation Necessary for the Writing of Large-scale Irish Sagas? Reflections on *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and the "Watchman Device"', in *Classical Literature and Learning in Medieval Irish Narrative*, ed. O'Connor.
- 59 See Mac Gearailt, 'Togail Troí: Ein Vorbild', 125.
- 60 For an account of the nature of military activity in Medieval Ireland, see the chapters by Thomas Charles-Edwards, Marie Therese Flanagan and Katharine Simms in Tom Bartlett and Keith Jeffrey (eds), *A Military History of Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). The professional mercenary class is the focus in Seán Duffy (ed.), *The World of the Galloglass: Kings, Warlords and Warriors in Ireland and Scotland, 1200-1600* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007).
- 61 Cecile O'Rahilly (ed. and trans.), *Táin Bó Cúailnge from the Book of Leinster* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1967).
- 62 Edmund Hogan (ed. and trans.), *Cath Ruis na Ríg for Bóinn*, Todd Lecture Series 4 (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1892), 10–13 (§7); see also 14–15 (§8).

- 63 Hogan, *Cath Ruis na Ríg*, 16–17 (§10).
- 64 Uáitéar Mac Gearailt, 'Cath Ruis na Ríg and Twelfth-Century Literary and Oral Tradition', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 44 (1991): 146.
- 65 As argued by Mac Gearailt, 'Cath Ruis na Ríg', 149.
- 66 Uáitéar Mac Gearailt, 'Change and Innovation in Eleventh-Century Prose Narrative in Irish', in *(Re)oralisierung*, ed. Hildegard L. C. Tristram, *ScriptOralia* 84 (Tübingen: Gunter Narr 1996), 451.
- 67 Patrick Wadden, 'Cath Ruis na Ríg for Bóinn: History and Literature in Twelfth-Century Ireland', *Aiste* 4 (2014): 11–44.
- 68 Bartholomew Mac Carthy (ed. and trans.), *Annála Uladh, Annals of Ulster, Otherwise Annála Senait, Annals of Senat: A Chronicle of Irish Affairs A.D. 431-1131, 1155-1541* (Dublin: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1893), II, under the year 1175 (182–3); Seán Mac Airt (ed. and trans.), *The Annals of Inisfallen (MS. Rawlinson B. 503)* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1953), under the year 1170 (304–5).
- 69 Wadden, 'Cath Ruis na Ríg for Bóinn'.
- 70 Best, Bergin and O'Brien, *The Book of Leinster*, I, xvii; see Marie Therese Flanagan, *Irish Society, Anglo-Norman Settlers, Angevin Kingship: Interactions in Ireland in the Late Twelfth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 108–9.
- 71 Hogan, *Cath Ruis na Ríg*, 10–11 (§7).
- 72 The politics of these years is discussed in Flanagan, *Irish Society*, 56–111. The Book of Leinster was written over a period of fifty years or more beginning in around 1151; see, for example, Elizabeth Duncan, 'A Reassessment of the Script and Make-up of *Lebar na Nuachongbála*', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 59 (2012): 45–60. (*Lebar na Nuachongbála* was an older name for the Book of Leinster).

Which ‘pagans’?

The influence of the crusades on battle narratives in Britain, Ireland and Scandinavia

Natalia I. Petrovskaja

In mockery of literary critics of his own time, Théophile Gautier wrote the following lines:

Encore du moyen âge, toujours du moyen âge ! qui me délivrera du moyen âge, de ce moyen âge qui n'est pas le moyen âge?

‘Again the Middle Ages, always the Middle Ages! Who will deliver me from the Middle Ages, from this Middle Ages which is not the Middle Ages?’¹

According to Gautier, this only fuelled the public’s interest, a comment on the fashion for the Middle Ages, real or imagined, which took hold in the nineteenth century. In the mid-twentieth century, in his inaugural lecture as chair of Medieval and Renaissance English Literature at the University of Cambridge, C. S. Lewis observed that this nineteenth-century ‘Romantic distortion’ of the Middle Ages has its own ‘imaginative value’, adding, however, from an academic perspective, that an awareness of the distinction between imagined and real Middle Ages is also essential.²

The sentiment that the commonly perceived Middle Ages are somehow not the *true* Middle Ages, so emphatically and comically expressed by Gautier, combined with the question of whether we can hope to understand the *true* Middle Ages at all, plays a crucial role in the formation of one of the theoretical approaches to the study of the period which has recently gained prominence: the idea of the Middle Ages as ‘Other’.³ This theory is ultimately based on the notion that the culture of the Middle Ages is external to our contemporary culture, and the two can be defined in opposition each to the other. An example of the type of phenomena that this approach attempts to make sense of is the notion, formerly widespread but now no longer generally accepted in academic circles, of medieval obscurantism, ignorance or, in somewhat gentler terms, ‘quirkiness’. Differences in perceptions of the world, which have often led in the past to this type of conclusion, present one of the most fascinating problems that face us when studying this period (and indeed arguably any period of the past). The most

illustrative example, perhaps, is the idea – which persists even to this day despite the best efforts of medievalists – that medieval thinkers conceived of the world as flat.⁴ The misconception arises from a difference in representation and conceptualization. The authors of the *mappae mundi*, the medieval world maps, of which the most famous example is the thirteenth-century monumental map preserved in Hereford Cathedral Library, did not perceive the world as a disk. They merely represented (as we do) a two-dimensional projection of a three-dimensional object. This was, in their case, the inhabitable part of the world. They also represented on these maps events of the past, such as the crucifixion, or monuments no longer in existence at the point at which the map was painted, such as the Tower of Babel. This does not mean, and it is not generally taken to mean, that the medieval authors of these maps believed the Crucifix or the Tower of Babel still to be standing in their day. They depicted important historical moments, and the maps thus served to represent time as well as space, projecting (to use a modern concept) four dimensions onto the two-dimensional page.

A similar problem to that presented by the *mappae mundi* is the apparent confusion found in many medieval fictional and historiographical texts between – to us – the clearly disparate groups of Jews, Saracens and Vikings.⁵ What are we to make of, for instance, the blatantly non-Muslim of *Danmark Sarrazins* ‘Danish Saracens’ of the late thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century Middle English romance *Of Arthour and of Merlin* (l. 2067)?⁶ Was the famous fourteenth-century armchair traveller Sir John Mandeville simply confused when he referred to a *land of Sarazin habitable* ‘land inhabited by Saracens’ in the north, beyond Prussia?⁷ These problems cannot be solved except in rethinking categorizations, medieval and modern. It is worthwhile considering this issue, since a significant number of medieval insular texts of various genres (this being another instance of modern categorization) display a tendency to conflate different types and categories of non-Christian peoples, using what appears to be interchangeable terminology.⁸ The substitutions, for instance, of ‘Saracen’, ‘pagan’, for Vikings and Jews, and in some instances of ‘Saracen’ for pagan Romans, represent a phenomenon observed throughout medieval insular literature.⁹ The conventions, metaphors and representational techniques in medieval texts cross what in contemporary discourse would be genre boundaries, because text type distinctions in the Middle Ages do not correspond to our contemporary genre conventions. While some difference in imagery and prose style may be observed between chronicles and histories or histories and ‘romances’, Latin texts and those translated into or composed in the vernacular, some types of representation can be observed across the board, and the conflation of non-Christian peoples marked by interchangeable use of terms to designate them can be seen in chronicles and pseudo-histories as well as in knightly romances. This conflation might represent a different way of thinking. It has been suggested that medieval systems of binary oppositions might have been based primarily on religion rather than on racial or ethnic considerations, as contemporary theories such as ‘Orientalism’ or ‘Postcolonialism’ might lead us to think.¹⁰ Conversely, diachronic considerations, thinking of past opponents of Christendom in terms of contemporary opponents, and vice versa, might have been of primary importance. As we have seen in the example of *mappae mundi*, the past was present (in both senses of the word) in medieval depictions of the world.

The most famous and best-discussed example of the use of the term 'Saracens' in an unexpected context is in the Middle English *King Horn*, a romance composed in the second half of the thirteenth century.¹¹ This is a story of the growth of a knight from child to hero, the challenges he faces, his victories and final reward of love and a kingdom. It survives in only three manuscripts and represents one of the very earliest examples of the Middle English romance. Towards the beginning of the narrative, when the hero is still only fifteen, the king his father, riding by the seashore comes across fifteen ships of *Sarazins kene* 'bold Saracens', who promptly attack him. The setting of *King Horn* appears to be the British Isles in the Anglo-Saxon period, thus preceding the crusades and the major conflicts with Eastern 'Saracens', and it has been argued that the term is used in this text to designate the Vikings.¹² However, in other versions of the *King Horn* story, such as the Anglo-Norman *Romance of Horn*, composed about a century earlier than *King Horn* and probably sharing a common source with it, the origins of the 'Saracens' are variously given as Africa, Canaan or Persia.¹³ Whether this means that in the shared source the 'Saracens' were never Viking, or whether the Anglo-Norman text simply represents the next logical step in the mis-identification, elaboration, is still subject to debate.

If *King Horn* is taken as using 'Saracen' to refer to invaders originating from the northern parts of the Continent, parallels are to be found elsewhere in medieval English literature, in texts of a slightly later (turn of the century) date: the pseudo-historical Middle English verse *Chronicle* attributed to one 'Robert of Gloucester', and in the romance *Of Arthour and of Merlin*.¹⁴ Sir John Mandeville also uses the term for northern 'pagans' in his fourteenth-century *Travels*. Of these examples, the *Chronicle* of 'Robert of Gloucester' is, perhaps, the most intriguing, because of its claim to historical veracity. Its reference to 'Saracens' comes in the Arthurian section, where none could be.¹⁵ When Arthur's nephew Mordred rebels against the king, he promises large stretches of land to a king of the Saxons called Chelrik or Chesrik (depending on the manuscript) in exchange for military aid. In response, Chelrik brings eight hundred ships of 'Saracens' to Britain:

So that eight hundred ships into this land he (= Saxon king Chelrik) brought
 full of armed Saracens, as he (= Mordred) had beseeched him
 Great power from Ireland Mordred also won to his side
 Of Picars (= Picts) and of Scots, and of each manner of men thereto
 That he knew bore no love to the King (=Arthur).

(ll. 4521–5)

In this passage, Mordred's Saxon ally provides 'Saracens', to add to his army of Irish, Picts and Scots. Ultimately, this may well be an echo or doubling of the coming of five Saxon ships of one Chertik mentioned further in the text (ll. 4671–2), an historical event attested in other (trusted) historical sources, such as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (written in Old English, the earliest manuscript being of late-ninth-century date), which mentions it in the entry for the year 495: 'In this year two chieftains, Cerdic and his son Cynric, came with five ships to Britain at the place which is called *Cerdesora*, and they fought against the Britons on the same day.'¹⁶ Arthur, Mordred

or the Saracens are, of course, not mentioned in this text, because they belong to the realm of legend, and at this point, Robert of Gloucester's *Chronicle* had crossed well into the realm of pseudo-history. The direct source of the Saxon Saracens passage in Robert of Gloucester's *Chronicle* is the very similar passage in the *Roman de Brut* of Wace, composed in Anglo-Norman French in the 1150s, which also refers to 'Saracens' among Mordred's allies.¹⁷ The latter text, based on Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* (*History of the Kings of Britain*), is a metrical 'romance' (meaning vernacular) chronicle, largely unreliable and pseudo-historical in nature, as was, indeed, Geoffrey's Latin work.¹⁸ Both, however, had immense significance in formulating an origin-story for the Anglo-Normans, and subsequently, the English.¹⁹ In this Arthurian context, the identification of Saxons with Saracens presupposes a disassociation of the English audience with their own Saxon past and re-association with the Brittonic hero Arthur.²⁰ The term 'Saracen' appears to have been used here generically, to mean 'non-Christian' or even simply 'military opponent'.

This interpretation is supported by the use of the term 'Saracens' for what must surely be Vikings later on in the text, in the context of a discussion of the reign of King Edmund (reigned 939–46) (ll. 5586–8). Edmund is ascribed the following action:

Saracens that were there living in England
in Lincoln and in Leicester and in Derby as I understand
in Stafford and in Nottingham, he drove away completely
and brought in their stead Christian men.

(ll. 5592–5)

This passage sets 'Saracens' as the opposite of 'Christian men' and presents Edmund's actions as the Christianization of part of the land through the substitution of its population. Indeed, the 'Robert of Gloucester' *Chronicle* has been described as an outline of the history of Christianity within the British sphere, and in this respect it fits well with a distinguished historiographical tradition of a Christian or ecclesiastical history.²¹ One need only think of Bede's famous *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (*Ecclesiastical History of the English People*) (completed c. 731) or the historical third book of the *Imago Mundi* (*Image of the World*) of Honorius Augustodunensis (first quarter of the twelfth century).²²

The 'Robert of Gloucester' *Chronicle* relies on previous tradition, using a wide variety of historical and pseudo-historical texts as both sources of information and models of composition. Medieval writers were highly reliant on precedent and convention. Previous writing and existing descriptions were frequently drawn upon and reapplied to new works and situations. The ultimate model of global religious history for these writers was the immensely influential fifth-century *Historiae adversus paganos* (*Histories against the Pagans*) of Paulus Orosius.²³ The phrase 'against the pagans' in the title of his work refers to its main argument. Formulated as a counterargument against those pagan critics who had suggested that the Christianisation of the Roman Empire was the cause of all misfortunes that had thereafter beset it, Orosius's work is an overview of world history, focusing on those calamities that had preceded the conversion, often drawing comparisons between past and present.²⁴ In its very conception, as well as in

its structure, the work is an opposition of Christians and pagans, the latter designation also featuring in the work itself. The work formed a crucial template for historical writing throughout the European Middle Ages. Since its composition in the early fifth century, the text became what in modern terms would be described a bestseller: it was translated into a number of medieval vernaculars and even now several hundred manuscripts of the text survive.²⁵ Orosius's influence on such major (and in their turn influential) medieval authors as Gregory of Tours, Bede and Otto of Freising, as well as Asser, is well known.²⁶

It may well be this framework of Orosius opposing Christian to non-Christian and his technique of comparing and contrasting differing historical periods, that informed the tendencies in historical writing and representations of non-Christians that we are observing in our insular texts.²⁷ The most striking example of the overt use of Orosius specifically in relation to a discussion of non-Christians occurs in what is perhaps the most famous royal biography of Anglo-Saxon England, the *De rebus gestis Ælfredi* (*Life of King Alfred*) composed by Asser c. 890. Michael Lapidge has noted the 'pervasive debt to the Latin of Orosius' in its military descriptions.²⁸ One of the quotations from Orosius identified by Lapidge is *nauali proelio contra paganicas naues in mare congressus est* 'launched a naval attack on the high seas against Viking ships'.²⁹ The Latin *paganicas naues* literally means 'pagan ships'. While there is nothing unusual or surprising in the use of the term 'pagan' for the Vikings, the fact that this is a quotation from Orosius means that two different sets of 'pagans' from different historical periods are being equated here. This synchronizing reading is in itself very Orosian.

As well as its influence on Asser, Orosius's work appears to have had an impact beyond Anglo-Saxon England. It has also been suggested that the text and subsequent glossing may have influenced the composition of the Irish pseudo-historical *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* (*The Book of the Taking(s) of Ireland*) and the earliest Arthurian vernacular prose narrative, the medieval Welsh *Culhwch and Olwen*.³⁰ Orosius's engagement with the pagan past and constant synchronization between Christian present and pagan past are also features of later medieval works. A similar engagement of Christian authors with the non-Christian (pagan) past can be observed in much of medieval Irish literature, as, for instance, in *Aided Chonchobair* (*The Death-tale of Conchobar*), where the death of Conchobar, the pagan king of Ireland, just after his decision to convert to Christianity upon hearing the news of the Crucifixion, can be seen as a symbolic representation of the end of pre-Christian and the beginning of a Christian Ireland.³¹

The presentation of a pre-Christian Britain in familiar non-Christian terms is often achieved in thirteenth-century texts by using the label of 'Saracen'. An instance is found in connection to Britain in a continental text, the French collection of Arthurian texts known as the *Vulgate Cycle* (its other names are the Lancelot-Grail Cycle, *Prose Lancelot* and *Pseudo-Map Cycle*).³² The first text in the Cycle, *L'Estoire del Saint Graal* (*The History of the Holy Grail*), presents, as a prelude to the story of Arthur, the story of Joseph of Arimathea and the coming of the Grail, and of Christianity, to Britain. The text depicts this pre-Christian Britain as inhabited not by pagan giants (as in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* on which *The History of the Holy Grail* is ultimately based) but by 'Saracens'.³³ When Joseph and his companions arrive in

Britain, they see 'the land and the country that was completely peopled by Saracens and unbelievers'.³⁴ The narrative continues to describe the gradual conversion of the inhabitants from what is repeatedly referred to as 'Saracen religion' to Christianity.³⁵ The style of description is characteristic rather of crusade romances (usually defined as tales of knightly adventure linked to issues and concerns related to the European experience of the crusades) or *chansons de geste* (epic poems) than of pseudo-historical narratives concerning pre-Christian Britain.³⁶ The opposition of non-Christian past and Christian present is, however, distinctly Orosian.

Another aspect of the immense influence of Orosius is the emotional impact of the writing. It has recently been demonstrated by Peter van Nuffelen that Orosius followed the classical rhetorician Quintilian (born c. AD 35) in the importance he accorded to the emotional investment of author and audience in a historical text.³⁷ The resulting historical writing is highly emotionally charged and intended to have a strong effect on the reader. This is achieved through laying particular stress on catastrophes and violence. Although chronicle writing is often described as 'dry' in style, it has also often been observed that medieval chronicles have a distinct tendency to stress violent deeds, famine and other disasters. It may therefore be worthwhile to consider re-evaluating our understanding of medieval historical writing to see it in the Orosian (ultimately classical Roman) rhetorical tradition, more akin in fact to the sensationalism of modern newspapers, with their similar pretence to impartial cold enumeration of facts. In the case of Orosius this was supported by stylistic devices, and some of his medieval successors followed suit.³⁸

Medieval chronicle writing was heavily formulaic as well as dependent on tradition, a stylistic trend that went hand in hand with the chroniclers' didactic goals and their desire to supply not merely historical information but moral lessons to be derived from that information.³⁹ For instance, the medieval Welsh chronicles, known under the collective title *Chronicle of the Princes* appear to be very selective in the instances of Welsh pilgrimage to the Holy Land that they record for the crusading period, possibly selecting on the basis of a moral message: only two instances are recorded, in both of which the pilgrims perish en route.⁴⁰

Another feature that may be the result of a tendency towards moralization that has been observed for medieval discussions of the crusades is that early texts related to the crusades present these 'as part of the age-old struggle with paganism', to borrow John Tolan's phrase, and fit within an Orosian historical framework.⁴¹ Crusaders in this early discourse were presented as apostles and martyrs, while the Saracens were cast as the reincarnation of Romans, pagan persecutors of the Christians.⁴² When (mis-)represented as pagans, Saracens were depicted in much the same way as Roman 'idolaters' had been.⁴³ It is here that the overlap with the representation of the Jews (also cast in a historical role, conflated with New Testament Jews persecuting Christ) occurs.⁴⁴ The literary images of Jews and Saracens become conflated, and are merged in turn with the biblical image of the Jews and Pontius Pilate, and with pagan Romans.⁴⁵ The Orosian framework so often used by medieval authors suggests that rather than ignorance, the conflation in question represents what might be called 'metaphorical transference' – a rhetorical feature used for emphasis and to convey a sense of continuity or, indeed, parallelism.

The medieval Welsh texts also present the Jews as opponents of the crusaders. In the entry for the year 1185, *Brut y Tywysogion* (the *Chronicle of the Princes*) record the arrival of the patriarch of Jerusalem to England, 'to seek help from the king of England, lest the Saracens and the Jews should harry all the land of Jerusalem'.⁴⁶ In the margin of one of the versions of this chronicle, a scribe added a note which omits all reference to 'Saracens' and retains only a reference to the Jews: 'The patriarch of Jerusalem came to England to get help against the Jews'.⁴⁷ There is a certain degree of variation observed in the different versions of the chronicle that have come down to us. In the 1188 entry of the *Chronicle of the Princes*, describing the fall of Jerusalem (which fell in 1187), one version of the text describes Saracens and 'pagans', but the other major version refers to 'Saracens and Jews'.⁴⁸ In non-historical, literary sources, a similar re-attribution of the 1187 conquest of Jerusalem to the Jews is seen in the poem of the Northwallian/North Welsh poet Elidir Sais (active c. 1195–c. 1245).⁴⁹ Elidir Sais refers not only to Saladin by name but also to a 'victory by the Jews / around the grave of Christ'.⁵⁰ The event on which the poem focuses is the exile of the Northwallian ruler Dafydd ab Owain Gwynedd (d. 1203), which the poet compares to the fall of Jerusalem. An illegitimate son of Owain Gwynedd (1110–70), Dafydd ruled Gwynedd after the former's death but was ultimately ousted by his nephew, Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, in 1194, leading to exile in 1198.⁵¹ Elidir, whose name 'Sais' means Saxon and is a reflection of his own time of exile in England, which may have been linked to that of his patron, uses parallelism to increase the impact of his poem on his audience by linking an event of 1198 which took place in Wales to an event of 1187 which took place in the Holy Land.

That this phenomenon represents convention rather than confusion is apparent from the frequency with which examples are to be found in medieval sources, including not only historical writing and chronicles but also fiction such as the 'crusade' romances.⁵² In the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman verse romance *Boeve de Haumtone* (*Bevis of Hampton*), for instance, a Saracen opponent of the hero is anachronistically ascribed responsibility for Christ's death.⁵³ The story of Boeve, involving treachery, substitutions, escape to distant exotic lands, a non-Christian bride, travels and battles, was very popular in the insular world, and a Middle English, Middle Welsh, Norse and Early Modern Irish versions survive. In the Early Modern Irish translation of the Middle English version of the text (which survives in a fifteenth-century manuscript), not only Saracens but also Jews are named explicitly as the opponents of the hero during his stay at Rhodes on the way back from India.⁵⁴ While this reference is unique for the literary tradition concerning Boeve, and both the Welsh and the Norse texts follow the Anglo-Norman version closely, a similar conflation of Saracens and Jews does occur in another Irish translated romance, *Fierabras*.⁵⁵ This conflation may be indicative of a phenomenon similar to that observed for the Welsh chronicles. The Welsh translation of Boeve's story, meanwhile, uses the term *paganyeit*, 'pagans', while the Norse version uses *heidíngi* 'heathens' for the non-Christians.

'Heathens' is a common term used also in the Norse translation of the French *chansons de geste* of the Charlemagne Cycle, which includes heroic battle narratives concerned with fictionalized battles between Charlemagne and Saracens. The *Karlamagnús saga* (*Charlemagne's Saga*) is a collection of prose texts concerning Charlemagne, translated into Old Norse probably in the reign of King Hákon IV of

Norway (1204–63).⁵⁶ This collection contains texts based on a variety of sources. One of the texts in this collection is *Rúnzivals þátr*, the Old Norse translation of the famous French epic poem, the *Chanson de Roland* (*Song of Roland*) focusing on the battle of Roncesvalles.⁵⁷ The Norse version of this text appears to have been produced in the thirteenth century and follows closely one of the versions of the French texts now surviving (Digby).⁵⁸ One of the few cases where the translator appears to introduce alterations is in adding, for instance, *konungr hinn heiðni*, ‘the heathen king’, to the reference to King Marsile.⁵⁹ The additional identification of Marsile as non-Christian using a generic term reinforces the religious dichotomy set up in the text.

The reference to ‘pagans’ in the Welsh chronicles in connection to the fall of Jerusalem and in the Welsh version of *Boeve de Haumtone* as a synonym for the Saracens raises a further interesting question, that of the meaning of that word. As we have seen, the opposition Christian–pagan, building on the precedent of Orosius, was often perceived in temporal terms, as opposition between the Christian present and the non-Christian (or pre-Christian) past. The use of the term for ‘pagan’ or ‘heathen’ in the insular context throws a great deal of light on the differences between the categories in which medieval people thought versus the categories in which we now think. The etymological roots of the word ‘pagan’ remind us that modern and medieval associations of the term might not entirely coincide. For instance, as the eminent French medievalist, the late Jacques Le Goff observed, the terms ‘pagan’ and ‘peasant’ (in French *païen* and *paysan*) both go back to the Latin term *paganus*.⁶⁰ Awareness of this in medieval contexts might result in the notion of pagan being not only or exclusively ‘non-Christian’ but more specifically uncivilized (particularly if one considers the link between the terms ‘civilization’ and *civitas* ‘city’).⁶¹

In most insular texts, the term ‘pagan’ is reserved specifically for non-Christians, but the shifts in the applications of the term to different groups at different times appear to reflect the same Orosian diachronic and comparative way of thinking that we have observed in the apparent ‘conflation’ of biblical Jews and ‘contemporary’ medieval ‘Saracens’. One of the most interesting examples of a shift in the use of the term ‘pagan’ can be seen in the Welsh *Chronicle of the Princes*. A shift in the use of the word occurs in the entries relating to the final years of the eleventh century. The term is used exclusively to designate the Vikings until the year 1091, the last entry mentioning them. After 1094, the first crusading entry, ‘pagan’ is used exclusively in an eastern, crusading context, primarily as synonym for ‘Saracen’.⁶² This change parallels the development of the medieval authors’ concerns with non-Christians outlined in general terms for medieval Europe by John Tolan.⁶³ According to Tolan, after the conversion of the Roman Empire the main threat to the ideal of a Christianized world were the pagan Germanic invaders, who were in turn also converted to Christianity and thus gave place to the Islamic opponent.⁶⁴ The use of an Orosian quotation regarding pagans in relation to Vikings in Asser’s *Life of King Alfred* is another example of this trend of substitution.

It is useful to place alongside each other the three instances of conflation: pagans and Saracens, pagans and Vikings, and Saracens and Vikings. If the contrast between pagan Romans and Christians in Orosius informed the later representations of non-Christians (Vikings and Saracens) in later texts, influence appears to have been exerted

both ways for representations of Saracens and Vikings. It is this mutual influence of two major traditions of depicting conflict with pagans, Viking to Saracen to Viking, that gave rise to such hybrids as *King Horn*, discussed at the beginning of this article.

For medieval authors who, as we have seen, depended heavily on precedent and tradition, the scheme outlined by Tolan represents a habit of depicting new antagonists in terms of 'pagans' already known and familiar from earlier texts. Particularly striking, and explicable best through this theory of reuse of previous conventions, is the otherwise perplexing phenomenon of the description of Romans as 'Saracens' in some of the late medieval texts when they return to the subject of Ancient Rome. An example of this is in one of the Middle English hagiographical narratives concerning Saint Katherine: in the *Life of Saint Katherine* preserved in the fourteenth-century Auchinleck Manuscript (Edinburgh, Adv. MS 19.2.1), where the fourth-century Roman emperor Maxentius is described as a 'Saracen'.⁶⁵ This is not to be found in any of the versions of the Katherine legend.⁶⁶ Later, in John Capgrave's mid-fifteenth-century version of the *Life of Katherine*, the words *Sarrazin* and *Sarcynrye* are also used to signify 'pagan' and 'non-Christian lands' generally.⁶⁷ The evocation of a contemporary Orient in these saints' lives places them in a position of relevance to the crusading discourse of the time.⁶⁸

The apparent shift in the application of the label 'Saracen' to other non-Christians in these texts has, as we have seen, numerous parallels in other medieval insular works. If we place the Auchinleck Manuscript within the same Orosian tradition of opposing a Christian reading of the world and its history to a pagan one, the Roman 'Saracens' become part of a paradigm rather than an oddity. Since Jews, pagan Romans and 'contemporary' Saracens are seen as components in a continuous sequence, their designations become synonymous. For an example of such a conceptual continuity one need only think of the medieval theory of *translatio imperii* 'translation/transmission of empire'. This medieval concept corresponded to the idea of sequential historical progression from east to west, from the creation of Man in the Earthly Paradise located in the farthest east, through Mesopotamia and the Holy Land, the Roman Empire, to the Carolingian Empire, and, in English sources, the Angevin Empire.⁶⁹ On a terminological level, this tradition of continuity (a point of contention in contemporary scholarship though it may be) is expressed in the vocabulary we still employ: the Roman Empire is succeeded by the Holy Roman Empire, which lasted until the nineteenth century.⁷⁰ The Hapsburg court and political organization at the end of that period had little enough in common with the era of Augustus (47 BCE–14 CE), though the names of their empires imply a connection.

The manipulation of continuity perception through the use of names is also apparent in the Anglo-Norman *Chronique des ducs de Normandie* of Benoît Sainte-Maure. This chronicle, composed c. 1175 for Richard I Plantagenet, uses the term 'Saracens' on several occasions (e.g. ll. 18099, 18424) to designate the Danes. In this case, the dichotomy is used to obfuscate the connection between the Normans (= Northmen) and the Danes by placing them on different sides of the Christian–pagan divide using familiar contemporary terminology borrowed from the crusades. The same phenomenon can be observed in the *Roman de Rou*, nearly contemporary to the *Chronique des ducs de Normandie*, composed by Wace c. 1160.⁷¹ These texts belong

to the Orosian tradition that represents Christian history in opposition to paganism and pagan history. Indeed, we have already seen a similar case of disassociation in Robert of Gloucester's *Chronicle*: an English disassociation with Saxon past in that instance, where the association of Saxons as Saracens creates a definitive opposition between the audience and their Saxon roots, paralleling the Norman disassociation with Scandinavian past seen in the texts discussed here. In the case of Robert of Gloucester, the disassociation works as part and parcel of the English appropriation of the Arthurian legend. The audience of the chronicle identifies with Arthur rather than with Mordred and his allies, and thus Arthur is perceived as the true ancestor, or at least predecessor, of the English.

The interchangeable use of terminology for non-Christians, which can be mistaken for confusion, may be seen as a backdrop for a representation of Christian continuity.⁷² If in line with the medieval theory of *translatio imperii*, history was perceived to move westwards in a succession of empires, the Orosian opposition of Christian to non-Christian remained, with only the individual components (on both sides) successively replaced by new players. This perspective on the world is a synchronic view that we catch a confusing glimpse of in the surviving thirteenth-century world maps, the monumental *mappae mundi* of Hereford Cathedral and others, where the past overlaps with the present.

It may be tempting to see this phenomenon as uniquely medieval and completely alien to our understanding of history. However, the use of past categories to present an interpretation of present-day situations is not an exclusively medieval technique, though, as we have seen, it was particularly widespread in medieval insular literary and historical texts. The same technique can be observed in much later texts relating to a different hemisphere. The sixteenth-century Spanish Dominican friar best known for his description of the colonization of the West Indies, Father Bartolomé de las Casas, followed the established tradition of western historiography in his reliance on classical exemplars in his descriptions of Spanish actions in the colonies, so much so that some of the episodes he described are generally believed to have come from classical sources rather than corresponding to actual events he had witnessed. Most importantly he drew parallels between the Spanish Reconquista and events in the West Indies (as did his contemporaries) depicting, however, the Spanish in the role of the 'Saracens', and thus reversing the common identification of the colonizers with national heroes such as El Cid.⁷³

As Sif Ríkharðsdóttir observes in her discussion of the Old Norse version of the *Chanson de Roland*, while all texts reflect the cultural context from which they originate, some 'are more firmly grounded than others in the conditions out of which they arose', while others are more universal.⁷⁴ In some cases, the conceptual frameworks represented by the texts have undergone such complete change in the intervening period that sections of the texts become obscure and difficult to interpret. The way in which different groups of people are perceived and categorized, and the selection of elements which constitute the necessary criteria for identity formation, appears to have undergone precisely such a cardinal change. Contemporary theories of identity formation include several major theoretical frameworks through which we as moderns tend to look at our sources. The most influential one currently is the Self-Other

dichotomy, based ultimately on the writings of the mid-twentieth-century French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. As Pamela A. Patton describes this, the theory, picked up on and enriched by Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi Bhabha and others, 'offers an appealing lens through which to scrutinize medieval understandings and constructions of identity'.⁷⁵ It is, nevertheless, merely a lens. That this is how we look at medieval constructions of identity does not necessarily mean that it is how those identities were in fact constructed at the time.⁷⁶ It is not inevitably how the medieval authors and audiences perceived the people around them. The notion of universal applicability of the frameworks we employ is an assumption, and the notion that medieval thinkers thought about the world in binary East–West terms has been called into question in recent years.⁷⁷

If we read what appear to be the instances of confusion of categories of 'Saracens', Vikings, Jews, Romans and 'pagans', in the light of Orosian rhetorical tradition, the *translatio imperii*, and a synchronizing view of history, we start to see a device designed to approximate the events described to emotional events familiar to the reader. Medieval authors examined here use the terminology associated with past conflict to describe present conflict, using past events as metaphors for the present and vice versa.

Notes

- 1 Théophile Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1979), 49; my translation.
- 2 C. S. Lewis, 'De descriptione temporum', in *They Asked for a Paper: Papers and Addresses* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962), 23.
- 3 See, for instance, Gabrielle M. Spiegel, *The Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography* (Baltimore, MD, and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 58–9 and 79–80. More recently, the subject of the Middle Ages as 'other' was addressed in a significant proportion of contributions at the International Medieval Congress 2017 held at the University of Leeds. The theme of the congress as a whole was 'Otherness'. For details of the congress and short abstracts of sessions and contributions, see www.imc.leeds.ac.uk/imc/imc-2017/ (last accessed 12 January 2019).
- 4 A recent volume published in Dutch, Hans Dijkhuis, *De Platte Aarde. De Rijke geschiedenis van een mythisch denkbeeld* (Amsterdam: Athanaeum–Polak & van Gennep, 2016) is an example. For discussions, see Jill Tattersall, 'Sphere or Disk? Allusions to the Shape of the Earth in Some Twelfth-Century and Thirteenth-Century Vernacular French Works', *The Modern Language Review* 76 (1981): 31–46, and David Woodward, 'Medieval Mappaemundi', in *The History of Cartography I: Cartography in Prehistoric, Ancient, and Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean*, ed. J. B. Harley and David Woodward (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1987), 318–19, the article is accessible online at www.press.uchicago.edu/books/HOC/HOC_V1/HOC_VOLUME_1_chapter18.pdf (accessed 11 January 2019).
- 5 Kathy Cawsey justly queries whether ignorance or 'a confused goulash of alterity', to use her term, suggested by an Orientalist perspective could be the answer to this question: Cawsey, 'Disorienting Orientalism: Finding Saracens in Strange Places in Late Medieval English Manuscripts', *Exemplaria* 21 (2009): 385. Note that 'Saracen' is

- itself a generic term of uncertain origins, commonly used to refer to Arabs or Muslims in medieval texts, as well as used for Turks, Danes, Lithuanians, among others; see John V. Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 127 and 287 n. 25; the use of the term in Anglo-Saxon texts, which derived the usage from St Jerome, is discussed in Katharine Scarfe Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 33 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), especially 5–6, 93.
- 6 A transcription of the text is available on the National Library of Scotland website: <https://auchinleck.nls.uk/mss/arthur.html> (accessed 11 January 2019). For an edition, see *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, ed. O. D. Macrae-Gibson, 2 vols, Early English Texts Society Ordinary Series 268 and 279 (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1973 and 1979). For a discussion, see Siobhain Bly Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity: The Auchinleck Manuscript* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 168–73, and Aisling Byrne, 'West Is East: The Irish Saracens in *Of Arthour and of Merlin*', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 55 (2011): 217–30. For more on the text, see David Burnley, 'Of Arthour and of Merlin', in *The Arthur of the English: Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages 2*, ed. W. R. J. Barron (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996), 83–90, and Nicole Clifton, 'Of Arthour and of Merlin as Medieval Children's Literature', *Arthuriana* 13 (2003): 9–22.
 - 7 *The Book of John Mandeville*, ed. Tamarah Kohanski and C. David Benson (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), ch. 11. For a discussion, see Alan V. Murray, 'The Saracens of the Baltic: Pagan and Christian Lithuanians in the Perception of English and French Crusaders to Late Medieval Prussia', *Journal of Baltic Studies* 41, no. 4 (2010): 417–18.
 - 8 For a discussion of genre, see Kevin Sean Whetter, *Understanding Genre and Medieval Romance* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).
 - 9 Reference to Scandinavians as 'Saracens' does occur, though rarely, in Medieval French texts; Diane Speed, 'The Saracens of *King Horn*', *Speculum* 65 (1990): 564–95, and elsewhere in this article, pp. 153–6. In the French literary context, the interchangeable use of *Sarrazin* 'Saracen' and *africain* 'African' is frequent; Chantal Connochie-Bourgne, 'Le cas de l'*Image du monde*: une encyclopédie du XIII^e siècle, ses sources antiques, l'apport médiéval', in *La transmission des connaissances techniques: tables rondes Aix-en-Provence, avril 1993–mai 1994*, ed. M.-Cl. Amouretti and G. Comet, Cahier d'histoire des techniques 3 (Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 1995), 91–3.
 - 10 See Cawsey, 'Disorienting Orientalism', 382; and Richard Cole, 'Racial Thinking in Old Norse Literature: The Case of the Blámaðr', *Saga-Book* 39 (2015): 27.
 - 11 For an edition, see *Four Romances of England: King Horn, Havelok the Dane, Bevis of Hampton, Athelston*, ed. Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake and Eve Salisbury (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999). For more on this text, see Diane Speed, 'The Saracens of *King Horn*', *Speculum* 65 (1990), especially 564 for date, manuscripts and significance to the Middle English romance tradition; Janice Hawes, 'Saracens in Middle English Romance', in *Islam and Postcolonial Discourse: Purity and Hybridity*, ed. Esra Mirze Santesso and James McClung (London: Routledge, 2017).
 - 12 See Dorothee Metlitzki, *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 120–5 and discussion in Speed, 'The Saracens of *King Horn*', 564–5. Note, however, that references to 'Saracens' do occur in Anglo-Saxon texts, though there is scant evidence for direct contact between the Anglo-Saxons and the Middle East. For an in-depth discussion of references to 'Saracens',

- Arabs, and Islam in Anglo-Saxon sources, see Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World*, especially 2, 55–6, 66–7 for references to evidence of direct contact. Interestingly, contact was partly through Scandinavia: Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World*, 56.
- 13 Discussed in Speed, ‘The Saracens of *King Horn*’, 567.
- 14 Discussed in Speed, ‘The Saracens of *King Horn*’, 566–7; and Siobhain Bly Calkin, ‘Violence, Saracens, and English Identity in *Of Arthour and of Merlin*’, *Arthuriana* 14, no. 2 (2004): especially 25–6.
- 15 A recent discussion of author and text is available in Philip A. Shaw, ‘Robert of Gloucester and the Medieval Chronicle’, *Literature Compass* 8, no. 10 (2011): 700–9. For the text itself, see *The Metrical Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester*, ed. William Aldis Wright, Rolls Series 86, 2 vols (London: Eyre & Spottiswood, 1887, reprinted 2012), I. The translations of extracts from this text provided in the present discussion are mine.
- 16 Dorothy Whitelock, ed., *English Historical Documents. Volume 1: c. 500–1042*, 2nd edn (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1979), 144.
- 17 Digital images of one of the manuscripts containing this text in the British Library, Egerton MS 3028 copied in the second quarter of the fourteenth century, are available on the British Library website at <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/waces-roman-de-brut> (consulted 11 January 2019).
- 18 *Geoffrey of Monmouth: The History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973); and *Geoffrey of Monmouth: The History of the Kings of Britain*, ed. and trans. Michael D. Reeve and Neil Wright (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007).
- 19 For discussions, see, for instance, Julia C. Crick, *The Historia Regum Britannie of Geoffrey of Monmouth, vol. 4: Dissemination and Reception in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991); Francis Ingledew, ‘The Book of Troy and the Genealogical Construction of History: The Case of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae*’, *Speculum* 69 (1994): 665–704.
- 20 For a discussion of the Anglo-Norman and English appropriation of Arthur, in Geoffrey’s *History of the Kings of Britain* and other works based on it, see Tamar Drukker, ‘King, Crusader, Knight: The Composite Arthur of the Middle English Prose Brut’, *Arthurian Literature* 20 (2003): 186.
- 21 Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity, 1290–1340* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 89.
- 22 For an introduction to Bede and a selection of extracts from the *Ecclesiastical History*, see Rowan Williams and Benedicta Ward, *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History: An Introduction and Selection* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012). For an overview of Honorius Augustodunensis and historical writing, see Valerie I. J. Flint, ‘World History in the Early Twelfth Century: The *Imago Mundi* of Honorius Augustodunensis’, in *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to Richard William Southern*, ed. R. H. C. Davis and J. M. Wallace-Hadrill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).
- 23 Peter van Nuffelen, *Orosius and the Rhetoric of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 14.
- 24 Matthew Kempshall, *Rhetoric and the Writing of History, 400–1500* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 64–79; van Nuffelen, *Orosius*, 92.
- 25 For more on Orosius, see van Nuffelen, *Orosius*, especially 1, 45–65; and Kempshall, *Rhetoric*, especially 64–79. For more on the Old English *Orosius*, see *The Old English Orosius*, ed. J. Bately, Early English Texts Society Subsidiary Series 6 (London: Early English Texts Society, 1980); *The Old English History of the World: An Anglo-Saxon*

- Rewriting of Orosius*, ed. and trans. M. R. Godden, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 44 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).
- 26 Kempshall, *Rhetoric*, 83–4, 107–8, 306.
- 27 This discussion will focus primarily on later medieval literature; for an overview of the subject in relation to early medieval Insular literature, see T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Perceptions of Pagan and Christian: From Patrick to Gregory the Great', in *The Introduction of Christianity into the Early Medieval Insular World: Converting the Isles I*, ed. Roy Flechner and Máire Ní Mhaonaigh (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), who observes (263) that there are several sets of binary oppositions in the literary sources, of which Christians versus pagans is but one. The early sources appear to use the term *gentes* more often than they do *pagani*, a balance that appears to have been reversed for the later period examined here.
- 28 Michael Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 119.
- 29 Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 119 (the Orosius quotation is from chapter 64). See *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources*, trans. Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (London: Penguin, 1983), 86.
- 30 Oliver Szerwiniack, 'D'Orose au *Lebor Gabála Érenn*: les gloses du manuscrit Reg. Lat. 1650', *Études Celtiques* 31 (1995): 205–17; Andrew Breeze, 'Orosius, the Book of Taliesin, and *Culhwch ac Olwen*', *Studia Celtica* 45 (2011): 203–9.
- 31 Andrew P. Scheil, 'Transition and Renewal: Jews and the Church Year in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Imagining the Jew in Anglo-Saxon Literature and Culture*, ed. Samantha Zacher (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 108–10; John Corthals, 'The *Rhetoiric* in *Aided Chonchobuir*', *Ériu* 40 (1989): 41–59; see also Kim McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature* (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1990). For a discussion of the historical conversion of Ireland to Christianity, see Colmán Etchingham, 'Conversion in Ireland', in *Introduction of Christianity*, ed. Flechner and Ní Mhaonaigh.
- 32 This Cycle is the basis of that form of the Arthurian legend most familiar to us today, for it was the primary source on which Sir Thomas Malory based his *Le Morte Darthur*. *Sir Thomas Malory: Le Morte D'Arthur*, ed. Janet Cowen, 2 vols (London: Penguin, 1969).
- 33 For a discussion, see Doaa Omran, 'Anachronism and Anatopism in the French *Vulgate Cycle* and the Forging of English Identity through Othering Muslims/Saracens', in *Travel, Time, and Space in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Time: Explorations of World Perceptions and Processes of Identity Formation*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2018): 266–84.
- 34 Carol J. Chase (trans.), *The History of the Holy Grail*, Lancelot-Grail. The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation, ed. Norris J. Lacy, 5 vols (New York and London: Garland, 1993), I, 120.
- 35 Chase, *The History of the Holy Grail*, 120–55.
- 36 See, for example, the passage describing the conclusion to the first battle, Chase, *The History of the Holy Grail*, 130. For an accessible overview of the concept of 'crusade romance', including discussion of both constituent terms, see Siobhan Bly Calkin, 'Crusades Romance', in *The Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature in Britain*, ed. Siân Echard and Robert Rouse (Hoboken, NJ, and Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 2017).
- 37 Van Nuffelen, *Orosius*, 117–19.
- 38 For a discussion of Orosius's style, see van Nuffelen, *Orosius*, ch. 5.

- 39 Ryan Lavelle, *Alfred's Wars: Sources and Interpretations of Anglo-Saxon Warfare in the Viking Age* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010), 265, 271 n. 36; Chris Given-Wilson, *Chronicles: The Writing of History in Medieval England* (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2004), 2.
- 40 Natalia I. Petrovskaia, *Medieval Welsh Perceptions of the Orient* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 56.
- 41 John V. Tolan, 'Muslims as Pagan Idolaters in Chronicles of the First Crusade', in *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. David R. Blanks and Michael Frassetto (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999), 98.
- 42 Tolan, 'Muslims', 101; Tolan, *Saracens*, 112, 127; Suzanne M. Yeager, *Jerusalem in Medieval Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 5.
- 43 Tolan, *Saracens*, 105–6.
- 44 Tolan, 'Muslims', 109.
- 45 Yeager, *Jerusalem*, 19.
- 46 *Brut y Tywysogyon: Peniarth MS 20*, ed. Thomas Jones (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1941), 129–30; *Brut y Tywysogyon or The Chronicle of the Princes: Peniarth MS 20 Version*, ed. Thomas Jones, History and Law Series 11 (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1952), 72.
- 47 Quoted and discussed in Natalia I. Petrovskaia, 'Rationalising Alterity: Medieval Welsh Crusading Discourse', *Poetica: An International Journal of Linguistic-Literary Studies* 83 (2015): 41.
- 48 *Brut y Tywysogyon or The Chronicle of the Princes: Red Book of Hergest Version*, ed. and trans. Thomas Jones (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1955), 170–1.
- 49 Discussed in Matthieu Boyd, 'Celts Seen as Muslims and Muslims Seen by Celts in Medieval Literature', in *Contextualizing the Muslim Other in Medieval Christian Discourse*, ed. Jerold C. Frakes (New York: Macmillan, 2011), 25–6, and Petrovskaia, 'Rationalising Alterity', 41–2.
- 50 Poem translated and discussed in Petrovskaia, 'Rationalising Alterity', 41.
- 51 Petrovskaia, 'Rationalising Alterity', 42.
- 52 Reliance on existing historiographical conventions in the depiction of non-Christian 'Others' has also been traced in Continental sources, for instance in Saxon chronicles; see Linda Kaljundi, 'Waiting for the Barbarians: Reconstruction of Otherness in the Saxon Missionary and Crusading Chronicles, 11th–13th Centuries', in *The Medieval Chronicle V*, ed. Erik Kooper (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2008), 119–20.
- 53 For a modern English translation of this work, see '*Boeve de Haumtone*' and '*Gui de Warewic*': *Two Anglo-Norman Romances*, trans. Judith Weiss (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2008), 60. There is a medieval Welsh translation of this text, and although the episode is present in it, the reference to Christ's death is absent; *Selections from Ystorya Bown o Hamtwn*, ed. Erich Poppe and Regine Reck, The Library of Medieval Welsh Literature (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), 19.
- 54 *The Irish Lives of Guy of Warwick and Bevis of Hampton*, ed. and trans. Fred Norris Robinson (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1907), 189, 212. A Welsh translation of the Anglo-Norman version of this popular romance was also made, in the thirteenth century, but here no specific reference is made to Jews. For a discussion of this text, see Erich Poppe and Regine Reck, 'Rewriting Bevis in Wales and Ireland', in *Sir Bevis of Hampton in Literary Tradition*, ed. Jennifer Fellows and Ivana Djordjević (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), 37–50.
- 55 For the Norse text, see *Bevers Saga, with the Text of the Anglo-Norman Boeve de Haumtone*, ed. Christopher Sanders, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, Rit, 51

- (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 2001). It is interesting that additions of a similar nature are attested in other Irish translations; for example, in chapter 26 of the Irish translation of the romance *Guy of Warwick*; F. N. Robinson, 'The Irish Lives of Guy of Warwick and Bevis of Hampton', *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* 6 (1908): 44, cited by Aisling Byrne, 'The Circulation of Romances from England in Late-Medieval Ireland', in *Medieval Romance and Material Culture*, ed. Nicholas Perkins (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2015), 192. The *Fierabras* instance is discussed in Michael Howard Davies's unpublished PhD thesis, 'Fierabras in Ireland – The Transmission and Cultural Setting of a French Epic in the Medieval Irish Literary Tradition'. University of Edinburgh 1995.
- 56 Sif Ríkharðsdóttir, *Medieval Translations and Cultural Discourse: The Movement of Texts in England, France and Scandinavia* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), 56–7.
 - 57 Eivind Fjeld Halvorsen, *The Norse Version of the Chanson De Roland [i.e. Runzivals þáttur, Extracted from Karlamagnús Saga]*, Bibliotheca Arnarnæana 19 (Copenhagen: E. Munksgaard, 1959).
 - 58 Sif Ríkharðsdóttir, *Medieval Translations*, 58.
 - 59 For a comparison between the French original and Old Norse translation, see Sif Ríkharðsdóttir, *Medieval Translations*, 58–9.
 - 60 Jacques Le Goff, *L'Europe est-elle née au Moyen Âge?* (Paris: Seuil, 2003); for an English translation, see *The Birth of Europe*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005).
 - 61 The pairing *cives* and *barbari*, civilized people and barbarians, is one of the standard oppositions discussed by Charles-Edwards, 'Perceptions', 263.
 - 62 Petrovskaia, 'Rationalising Alterity', 38. According to John Tolan, the terms 'pagan' and 'Saracen' were largely interchangeable throughout the medieval period; Tolan, *Saracens*, 128.
 - 63 John V. Tolan, *L'Europe latine et le monde arabe au Moyen Âge. Cultures en conflit et en convergence* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2009), 8–9.
 - 64 Tolan, *L'Europe latine*, 8–9.
 - 65 Tolan, *Saracens*, 131; Calkin, *Saracens*, 139–40; Carl Horstmann (ed.), 'Seynt Katerine', in his *Altenglische Legenden: neue Folge mit Einleitung und Anmerkungen* (Heilbronn: Henniger, 1881), 242, l.21.
 - 66 Calkin, *Saracens*, 139–40. It is, however, to be found in the Middle English Prose *Brut* (a late-fourteenth-century translation of an Anglo-Norman text). This text introduces the 'Saracen' Roman emperor Maxence, from whom a legendary 'Constantine' conquers Rome. The latter character represents a confusion of Constantines: the historical Emperor Constantine I 'the Great' conflated with the equally historical Constantine III, the general based in Britain who had proclaimed himself emperor at the beginning of the fifth century. *The Brut of the Chronicles of England*, ed. F. W. D. Brie, 2 vols, EETS OS 131 and 136 (London: Early English Texts Society, 1906 and 1908), I, 40 (ch. 47). For discussion, see Drukker, 'King, Crusader, Knight', 179.
 - 67 Other fifteenth-century versions using the term 'Saracen' are those in Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, 175 and Cambridge, University Library, Ff.2.38; referred to by Calkin, *Saracens*, 140.
 - 68 Calkin, *Saracens*, 135. For the concept of 'contemporary Orient', see Petrovskaia, *Medieval Welsh Perceptions of the Orient*, especially xxiv, 6, 18, 23–5.
 - 69 For an overview, see Natalia I. Petrovskaia, 'Translatio and Translation: The Duality of the Concept from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern Period', 同志社大学英語英文学研究 = *Doshisha Studies in English* 99 (2018): 115–36.

- 70 For a history of the Holy Roman Empire, see, for instance, Peter H. Wilson, *The Holy Roman Empire: A Thousand Years of Europe's History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); R. J. W. Evans, Michael Schaich and Peter H. Wilson (eds), *The Holy Roman Empire, 1495-1806* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), and Brendan Simms, *Europe: The Struggle for Supremacy, 1453 to the Present* (London: Allen Lane, 2013), ch. 1.
- 71 For the text, see Wace: *Roman de Rou*, trans. Glynn S. Burgess, with notes by Glyn S. Burgess and Elisabeth van Houts (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004); and discussion in Richard Cole, 'British Perspectives', in *Handbook of Pre-Modern Nordic Memory Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Jürg Glauser, Pernille Hermann and Stephen A. Mitchell, 2 vols (Berlin and Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 2018), II, 893.
- 72 Calkin, *Saracens*, 135. For Christendom as a cultural-political identity in the medieval West, see Denys Hay's influential *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1957).
- 73 Bartolomé de las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, trans. Nigel Griffin (London: Penguin, 1992), xxxii–iii, xxxv–vi.
- 74 Sif Ríkharðsdóttir, *Medieval Translations*, 53.
- 75 Pamela A. Patton, 'The Other in the Middle Ages: Difference, Identity, and Iconography', in *The Routledge Companion to Medieval Iconography*, ed. Colum Hourihane (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 492.
- 76 In some ways, the way we formulate the issue in its turn dictates our perception. Kathy Cawsey's analysis of scholarly attitudes to the 'Saracens' of *King Horn* brings to light an interesting trend: 'Earlier scholars interested in tracing Middle English romances back to an Anglo-Saxon or even Celtic origin automatically assumed the invaders of *Horn* were Vikings; more recent scholars, post-*Orientalism*, tend to read the Saracens as Easterners': Cawsey, 'Disorienting Orientalism', 385.
- 77 Cawsey, 'Disorienting Orientalism', 385, 389; Petrovskaia, *Medieval Welsh Perceptions of the Orient*, especially xxxi–ii.

Writing a battle

The case of Stamford Bridge (1066)

Rory Naismith, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh and Elizabeth Ashman Rowe

Writing battles: The Battle of Stamford Bridge

Battles, by definition, involve at least two participants with (to put it mildly) strongly opposed views, and in the Middle Ages they often pitted large groups from distinct polities or societies against one another. They were thought of, then and now, as pivotal periods when the dice of history were in dramatic motion – in short, the ideal stuff of historical or pseudo-historical writing. Even if, paradoxically, battles were events of violence and aggression, they were also moments of cultural interaction. It is frequently possible to compare the reactions to a battle on both sides, or among other third-party observers. There are a great many benefits to doing so. One is simply practical: not all accounts offer the same level of detail, and pinning down the specifics of military history means gathering all possible information, with the important caveat that apparent differences in battlefield events can sometimes be explained by distinctive ideological and literary perspectives as well as by the bloody reality of conflict.

There is a second reason to compare accounts from varied backgrounds: on the one hand, details can be sifted so as to reach a more confident overall view, and, on the other, that very comparison offers a lesson in what battles meant to writers and readers in different cultures. Momentous events like battles tended to be presented in a way consonant with specific literary expectations. Those expectations, along with the material trappings of battle in artistic representations, might be much the same for events in legend, the distant past or the present, creating a timeless ideal type of battle. The presence of so-called ‘beasts of battle’ (boar, eagle and raven) in Old English battle poetry, for example, probably should not conjure up visions of abandoned and despoiled corpses that crawled with carrion in real life – though one does not doubt that there were scavenging animals present in the aftermath of battle – but a convention that cut across legendary and ‘historical’ representations of conflict. It was part of what audiences expected in terms of build-up to, or consequences of, a key point in the narrative. Perspectives of this kind might also be shaped by the outcome of a battle, and the stakes an author had in it. If all one has is bombastic triumphalism from the

victor, the sour grapes of the vanquished offer a very different flavoured account of the same encounter, lamenting loss or inciting vengeance in lieu of celebrating success. It is all the more interesting when those clashing perspectives stem from different cultures.

Several of the chapters in this volume are dedicated to exploring precisely what the conventions of writing battles were. This chapter offers a brief illustration of how differing outlooks can intermesh in the context of a single battle. It brings together accounts in four languages, from the outlooks of victor and vanquished, as well as more distanced onlookers, of a celebrated struggle in 1066 known to posterity as the Battle of Stamford Bridge (although other names for it existed, especially among those who lived nearby: see Robert Bartlett's chapter in this volume).

This battle was the climax of an invasion of England led by the Norwegian king Harald Sigurdarson (also known as *Harðráði* or Hardrada, 'hard ruler'), in alliance with the exiled English earl Tostig Godwineson, brother to their opponent King Harold II Godwineson. As these texts show, the invasion initially went well for Harald and Tostig. After converging on the river Ouse, on 20 September they faced and defeated an English army led by the two earls Edwin and Morcar. York opened its gates, and the city gave its support to Harald and Tostig's bid for power. King Harold, meanwhile, moved north as soon as he heard of the invasion, gathering his forces as he went. He reached Tadcaster, near York, on Sunday 24 September, and the following day took the enemy army by surprise at Stamford Bridge, where it awaited the delivery of hostages guaranteeing the allegiance of the Northumbrians. King Harold proved victorious: both the Norwegian Harald and Earl Tostig were killed, along with a great number of their men.¹

The selection of texts on the battle presented here offers distinct takes on the encounter. Two come from the victors (writing in Old English in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and in Latin in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta regum Anglorum*), and one from the defeated (writing in Old Norse in Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*), as well as another from a third-party observer (the Irish poet Gilla Cóemáin mac Samthainne). These texts vary in date. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* entries, which share some material in common, were probably put together soon after the event, while Gilla Cóemáin wrote in the early 1070s, just a few years after the battle. Of the two later authors, William of Malmesbury wrote the *Gesta regum* in England in the 1120s, when the battle was passing out of living memory, while *Heimskringla* was written by the Icelandic chieftain Snorri Sturluson in the early thirteenth century (though both also drew on earlier sources). Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by the editors.

There is much to be drawn out from setting these passages side by side. It will be immediately noticeable that the five texts vary widely in style. The two *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* accounts adopt a pretence of factual reportage, employing a laconic, no-nonsense tone. One reason they do so is that they assume a degree of considerable knowledge on the part of the audience. That may be why some significant seeming details suddenly leap out of nowhere, such as the many Flemings killed alongside Norwegians, mentioned towards the end of MS C: this point presumes that the reader remembers that Earl Tostig had previously been in exile with his brother-in-law, the count of Flanders. But the dry and authoritative-seeming manner of the *Chronicle* is simply a posture: its prose is woven from slanted views on the battle and its participants, as well as (probably) from more dramatic material. The two versions here come from

a period when the main manuscripts overlapped in most of their core information and even some specific wording,² but with each still putting a significantly different spin on events and drawing on distinct details. Both, for example, note the ways in which soldiers were forced out of combat (killing, drowning, flight, burning), but C ascribes these to the English soldiers and D to the Norwegians. This relative even-handedness might also relate to the probable access that the *Chronicle* sources had to information from both sides. That would explain why they (and, in turn, William of Malmesbury) are so much more informative about the initial movements of Harald and Tostig's army, and the manoeuvres that were undertaken to assemble the men. The initiative lies firmly with the invaders until Harold arrives more or less out of the blue. His steps in assembling men are left obscure. Only MS C offers even a vague description of how he gathered men to him as he raced north; MS D and William have him appear, almost as a *deus ex machina*, with army in tow. In general the MS D *Chronicle* writer showed a better eye for engaging anecdotes; above all, when he dwelt on the heroic efforts of a single Norwegian warrior who held off the entire English army at a key bridge. Both versions also note that Harold magnanimously allowed the survivors of the enemy army to return home, perhaps implying a degree of criticism. But this was also an opportunity for the D writer to note that, in comparison to the 312 ships that had arrived in Yorkshire, only 24 returned home – a very effective, if subtle, way of underlining the degree of slaughter.

The poem by Gilla Cóemáin mac Samthainne is very different in character. It situates the battle in relation to more local events, although like the English accounts it fastens on the headline outcome: the king of Norway's death. In this way the poem reveals how widely known the battle was, and also indicates the role of major battles as defining events in the minds of informed people across Northern Europe. At the same time, its coverage is brief and allusive: this is one event among many, and from Gilla Cóemáin's perspective complemented an account that primarily focused on developments within Ireland, while synchronizing them with global events. William of Malmesbury and Snorri Sturluson lie at the opposite extreme, in that both are considerably more elaborate yet also overtly rhetorical. William worked from a version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* account, and his debt to it is very clear, but he offers a significantly expanded and moralized version of the story about the lone Norwegian warrior found in MS D. Here, the soldier's naked, muscular bravado is portrayed as a manifestation of pride, leading to a well-deserved death. Snorri, meanwhile, constructs by far the longest narrative of the battle, fleshed out with direct speeches, poetic utterances and folk-tale-style anecdotes, such as the English king coming to confront his Norwegian counterpart directly but without making himself known. Snorri also offers the most detailed description of the actual battle, which diverges significantly from what can be pieced together from the earlier sources. Some of what he writes tallies closely with the English sources. The presence of the earl of Orkney is alluded to briefly at the end of the MS D account, while Snorri explains (in a section preceding the account of the battle here) that in fact two Orcadian earls joined Harald's army when it passed through the Northern Isles en route to England. Similarly, Snorri has a quite detailed description of Tostig's expulsion and attempts to gather support in Denmark and (more successfully) in Norway.

The inclusion of such precise-seeming details means that Snorri's equally circumstantial descriptions of battle might be thought at first to carry weight. But the picture he paints of a formalized confrontation needs to be read as a much more self-consciously literary artifice than, for example, the two *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* passages. Snorri describes a pitched battle in the heroic tradition, unlike the English sources that outline a surprise attack by the English. *Heimskringla* evokes a more even struggle, the turning point being when King Harald became enraged and rushed out to fight on his own – as legendary heroes were wont to do – only to be taken down by an English arrow to the throat. There are elements of particularism here: Snorri's interest was in the kings of the Norwegians rather than the English, so it is only to be expected that he takes their perspective. But there is also a large dose of imagination. This account is meant to be, above all, an entertaining one, meaning that while it offers a stirring literary exercise grounded in the reputation Stamford Bridge had as a pivotal clash, Snorri's description cannot be counted on for historically accurate particulars. He probably worked from a substantially different, and sparser, assemblage of information than the *Chronicle* authors or William of Malmesbury. Tellingly, he has nothing on the brave warrior who fought off the English at the bridge: an anecdote which would surely have featured prominently had Snorri known it.

Many similar observations could be made on the basis of these texts. The central point to take away is that battles, as critical events that took a heavy toll of lives and offered potential for both the highest glory and the deepest sorrow, were examined and re-examined by all parties involved (and often those who were not, at least directly), and framed according to distinct literary norms. Battle as the stuff of history was indistinguishable from battle as the stuff of legend.

The Textual Evidence

The following two texts are translated from different versions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, generally known as the C and D manuscripts (London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius B.I and B.IV respectively).³ C's account in fact stopped curtly (at the end of a folio in the manuscript) just before describing the lone Norwegian warrior who held back the English on the bridge; the end of this account was added on a new folio by a much later scribe, though it probably reflects text composed at the same time as the preceding material.

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle C

Once the ships had come home, King Harald of Norway suddenly came north into the River Tyne, with a great fleet – and it was no small one, but might have been [300 ships] or more. Earl Tostig came to him with all those he had been able to gather, just as they had arranged before, and the two of them led the whole fleet along the Ouse to York. Then, in the south, King Harold was told as soon as he came off his ship that King Harald of Norway and Earl Tostig had landed near York. Then he travelled north by day and by night, gathering his army as swiftly as he could. Before King Harold could get there, Earl Edwin and Earl Morcar gathered from their earldom as great a force as they could summon. They fought against the

[enemy] army, and slew many of the invaders, and many of the English people were killed, drowned or put to flight – and the Norwegians had control of the battlefield. This fight was on the eve of the day of St Matthew the Apostle [20 September], which was a Wednesday. After that battle King Harald of Norway and Earl Tostig went into York with as many men as they pleased. The city gave them hostages, and also furnished them with provisions, so that [the townsmen] left on their ships and proclaimed complete peace, such that they would all go south with him [King Harald] and subdue the kingdom. In the midst of all this, on Sunday, Harold, king of the English, came with all his army to Tadcaster. There he drew up his men, and then on Monday went right through York. And King Harald of Norway and Earl Tostig, with their forces, had moved by ship beyond York to Stamford Bridge, because they had been assured for certain that hostages would be brought to them there from the whole shire. Then Harold, king of the English, came upon them unawares beyond the bridge, and there they joined battle, and fought very fiercely all day long. And there Harald, king of Norway, and Earl Tostig were slain, and a countless number of others with them, both Norwegians and English, and the English put the Norwegians to flight. There was one of the Norwegians who stood against the English army, so that they could not cross the bridge, or achieve victory. Then one Englishman fired an arrow, but it did not stop him at all; and then another [Englishman] went under the bridge and stabbed through his byrnie. Then Harold, king of the English, came over the bridge with his army, and inflicted great slaughter on Norwegians and Flemings alike, and Harold allowed Hetmund, son of the [Norwegian] king, to return home to Norway with all the ships.

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle D

In the meantime Earl Tostig came into the Humber with sixty ships, and Earl Edwin came with a land army and drove him out, and the seamen deserted him. [Earl Tostig] went to Scotland with twelve small ships, and there Harald, king of Norway, met him with three hundred ships. Tostig submitted to him and became his man, and they both went up the Humber until they came to York. There Earl Edwin and his brother Earl Morcar fought against them, but victory went to the Norwegians. Harold, king of the English, was told of how things had happened thus far. This battle was on the eve of the day of St Matthew [20 September]. Then our King Harold took the Norwegians by surprise, and made contact with them beyond York at Stamford Bridge, with a great English army. A fierce battle was fought that day, on both sides. Harald Fairhair and Earl Tostig were slain, and the Norwegians who were left turned in flight; the English harried them violently from the rear until some came to their ships, while others were drowned and some burned, and some killed in other ways, such that there were few left alive. The English had control of the battlefield. Then the king made a truce with Olaf, the son of the king of the Norwegians, and their bishop and the earl of Orkney, and all those who were left on the ships. They disembarked to our king and swore oaths that they would thereafter observe peace and friendship with this land; and the king let them return home with 24 ships. These two battles took place within five nights.

The following text comes from the versified chronicle *Annálad anall uile* (*All the Chronicling Heretofore*), written in Irish by Gilla Cóemáin mac Samthainne around the year 1072. With reference to ‘the battle of the Saxons’ (*cath Saxan*) (§55), meaning Stamford Bridge, he wrote:⁴

*Dá bliadain – ní bréc i ngliaid –
ó éc Donnchada meic Briain,
cath Saxan – seól co nglaine –
i torchair rí Lochlainne.*

Two years – it is no falsehood – in battle
from the death of Donnchad son of Brian
to the battle of the Saxons – a pure course –
in which fell the king of Norway.⁵

The great English historian William of Malmesbury (d. c. 1143) composed his Latin *Gesta regum Anglorum* (*History of the English Kings*) in the years running up to 1126 and revised it thereafter. His account of the battle runs as follows:⁶

The same year, Tostig, borne from Flanders into the Humber by a fleet of sixty ships, harassed all the areas close to the mouth of the river with piratical raids; but he was briskly driven out of the region by Edwin and Morcar, brothers who were powerful because united, and so he turned his sails towards Scotland; there he met and submitted to Haruagra,⁷ king of the Norwegians, who was planning to attack England with three hundred ships. They then locked shields and harried the land lying north of the Humber; the brothers, at ease after their recent victory, since they feared nothing less than such pillaging, they attacked, defeated and besieged inside York. When Harold received word of this, he came in haste with all the forces of the realm; a huge battle ensued, in which both nations strove with utmost force. The English gained the upper hand and put the Norwegians to flight, but – this is something which perhaps posterity may find difficult to believe – for many hours one single Norwegian held up the final victory of such a large number of such powerful forces; at any rate, taking his stand at the entry to the bridge which is called Stamford Bridge, by killing off one after another from our side, and then many, he stopped them all crossing over. Offered the chance to give himself up, since as a man of such prodigious strength he would receive generous quarter from the English, he laughed at those who made the offer, immediately shouting out with a scornful frown that they were feeble-minded fellows if they could not withstand one single man. And because nobody was willing to go any closer, because they reckoned it inadvisable to fight hand-to-hand with a man who in his desperation had thrown away any chance of saving himself, one of the king’s bodyguards threw an iron spear at him from a distance, and even as he was flexing his muscles boastfully, made more careless by that very sense of invincibility, he was run through by it and yielded victory to the English. For as soon as they had been granted free passage, the army crossed and fell upon the Norwegians from

the rear as they scattered. King Haruagra and Tostig were killed and the king's son was mercifully sent home with all the ships.

The collection of Old Norse sagas known as *Heimskringla* (*The World's Orb*) was put together in the early thirteenth century by the Icelander Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241), and concerns the lives and deeds of kings, mostly of Norway, among them Harald Sigurdarson. Its rich account of the Battle of Stamford Bridge is presented below:⁸

The saga of Harald Sigurdarson, chapter 87

On Monday, when Harald Sigurdarson was finished with breakfast, he had the signal blown to go ashore. He then prepared the army and divided it into parties of those who would go and those who would stay behind. For every two men he had go ashore into one of the squadrons, there was one who stayed behind. Jarl Tósti [i.e. Earl Tostig] prepared to go ashore with King Harald with his own squadron, but the king's son Olaf, Jarl Pál of Orkney, Jarl Erlend of Orkney and Eystein the Heathcock stayed behind to guard the ships. Eystein was the son of Thorberg Árnason, and of the magnates he was then the most excellent and dearest to the king. King Harald had promised him his daughter Maria in marriage. The weather then was remarkably good, and the sun shone hotly. Men left their mail-coats behind but went ashore with shields and helmets and halberds and girded with swords, and many also had bows and arrows, and they were all very cheerful. But when they reached the vicinity of the town, a large troop rode towards them. Under the cloud of dust they saw beautiful shields and white mail-coats. Then the king halted his own troop and had Jarl Tósti called to him, and he asked what troop that might be. The jarl says that he thought it was more likely that they were hostile, but he also said that it might be that that would be some of his kinsmen, looking for mercy and friendship and thereby get trust and loyalty from the king. Then the king said that first they would keep quiet and find out about the approaching army. They did so, and the army appeared greater in size the nearer it came, and everywhere they looked, the weapons glittered like crushed ice.

The saga of Harald Sigurdarson, chapter 88

King Harald Sigurdarson then spoke: 'Let us now make some plan that is good and wise, because there is no doubting that it is hostile, and it will be the king himself.' Then the jarl answers, 'The first thing is to turn back to the ships as quickly as possible for our troops and weapons; then we can launch a response according to our means, or our other choice is to let the ships be our guard, and then mounted warriors will have no power over us.' Then King Harald answers, 'I will have another plan, to put the fastest horses under three valiant warriors, and they shall ride as quickly as possible and tell our troops – then reinforcements will quickly come to us – because the English men should expect the roughest of battles, rather than us getting worsted.' Then the jarl says that the king should decide in this as in other things; he also let on that he was not eager to flee. Then King Harald had his standard, the Land-Waster, set up. The one who bore the standard was called Frírek.

The saga of Harald Sigurdarson, chapter 89

Afterwards King Harald put his troops into a battle-formation; he had the formation be long and not thick. Then he bent the flanks around to the back, so that they met. That was then a ring both wide and thick, and all around the outside, shield overlapped with shield, and likewise overhead, but the king's squadron was inside the ring, and the standard was there. The king's party was of chosen men. In another place was Jarl Tósti with his squadron. He had another standard. The formation was drawn up in this way because the king knew that mounted warriors were accustomed to ride forward in small detachments and immediately withdraw. Now the king says that his squadron and the jarl's should advance to where there was the most need – 'and our bowmen shall also be there with us, but those who are standing foremost shall set the butts of their spears in the ground and aim the points at the breasts of the mounted attackers, if they ride at us, but those who standing nearest should aim their spear-points at the breasts of the horses.'

The saga of Harald Sigurdarson, chapter 90

King Harald Gudínason [i.e. Harold Godwinson] had arrived there with an army of overwhelming size, both mounted warriors and foot-soldiers. King Harald Sigurdarson then rode around his battle-formation and saw how it was drawn up. He rode on a black horse with a white blaze on its head. The horse fell under him, and the king fell forward off it. He stood up quickly and spoke: 'A fall is fortunate for faring!' Then Harald, king of the English, spoke to the Norsemen who were with him: 'Do you know that large man who fell off the horse there, with the blue kirtle and the beautiful helmet?' 'That is the king himself,' they said. The king of the English says: 'A large and mighty man, and yet we might expect that his luck is gone.'

The saga of Harald Sigurdarson, chapter 91

Twenty warriors from the troop of retainers rode forward before the Norwegian formation, and they wore full coats of mail, and their horses likewise. Then one of the riders spoke: 'Where is Jarl Tósti in the troop?' He answers: 'This is not to be hidden; here will you find him.' Then one warrior spoke: 'Harald, your brother, sends you greetings and these words with them, that you shall have a truce and all Northumberland, and rather than you not wanting to kneel to him, then he wants to give you a third of the entire realm, to be shared with him.' Then the jarl answers: 'That is somewhat different from the hostility and disgrace that was offered in the winter. If that had been offered then, then many a man would be alive who is now dead, and the realm of England would be better off. If I accept that option now, what will he then offer King Harald Sigurdarson for his efforts?' Then the warrior spoke: 'He said something about that, what of England he will bestow on him: a space of seven feet, or so much longer as he is taller than other men.' Then the jarl says: 'Go now and tell King Harald that he should prepare himself for battle. Another truth will be said among the Norsemen than that Jarl Tósti went from King Harald Sigurdarson and over to the party of his enemies,

when he was going to fight west in England. Rather, we shall all take the same path, to die with honor or obtain England with a victory.’ Then the warriors rode back. Then King Harald Sigurdarson spoke with the jarl: ‘Who was that eloquent man?’ Then the jarl says: ‘That was King Harald Gudinson.’ Then King Harald Sigurdarson spoke: ‘Too long was that hidden from us. They had come before our troop in such a way that this Harald would not have been able to give the word for the death of our men [i.e. we could have killed him first].’ Then the jarl says: ‘That is true, lord. A chieftain goes unwarily in such a way, and it might have been just as you say. I saw that he wanted to offer me a truce and great power, but I would have been the cause of his death if I had identified him. I would rather that he be the cause of my death than I his.’ Then King Harald Sigurdarson spoke to his men: ‘This was a little man who stood proudly in his stirrups.’ So say men, that King Harald Sigurdarson recited this verse:

Forward we go
in formation
without mail-coats
facing blue-edged weapons.
Helmets shine.
I have not mine.
Now our war-clothes lie
down at the ships.

Emma was the name of his mail-coat. She was fashioned in such a way that she reached down to the middle of his leg and was so strong that a weapon had never cut into her. Then King Harald Sigurdarson spoke: ‘That was badly recited, and I will make another, better verse.’ Then he recited this:

In battle we do not creep into the shelter of shields
because of the crash of weapons –
so the valkyrie Hild ordered,
the field of the hawk.
Long ago the necklace-wearing woman
commanded me to hold my helmeted head high
in the din of metal on metal,
where swords and skulls met.

Then Thjóðólf also recited:

I shall not turn away from the kings’ young heirs,
though the ruler
himself falls on the field;
it goes as God wills.
The sun shines on no stronger
makings of a king than those two;
true hawks are the avengers
of Harald the Clever.

The saga of Harald Sigurdarson, chapter 92

Now the battle begins, and the Englishmen launch an attack on the Norsemen. A hard resistance took place. The shooting of arrows made it impossible for the English to ride at the Norse, and they rode in a ring around them. That was the first pause in the battle, while the Norsemen held their formation well and the Englishmen rode at them hard and immediately rode back, as they were not able to engage. And when the Norsemen saw that, and they thought that the cavalry attack was weak, then they attacked them and wanted to drive them off, but when the Norwegian shield-wall dissolved, the English rode at them from all sides and attacked them with spears and arrows. And when King Harald Sigurdarson saw that, he went forward into the battle where the clash of weapons was the greatest. Then there was the hardest battle, and a great number fell on each side. Then King Harald Sigurdarson became so furious that he ran forward, leaving the formation completely behind him, and hewed with both hands. Neither helmet nor mail-coat withstood these blows. Then all those who were nearest hastened away. Then it seemed clear that the English would flee. So says Arnór Jarls'-poet:

In the clash of helmets, the lordly leader
 had little in the way of a protective breast-plate,
 nor did the battle-quick heart
 of the king tremble,
 where, watching the lord of chieftains,
 the army saw the bloody sword
 of the brave suppresser of princes
 bite warriors.

King Harald Sigurdarson was struck in the throat with an arrow. That was his death-wound. Then he fell, as did all that squadron that went forward with him, except for those who retreated, and they held the standard. Then there was again the hardest of battles. Then Jarl Tósti went under the king's standard. Each side then drew up their formations for a second time, and then there was a very long delay. Then Thjóðólf recited:

People have paid an evil price.
 Now I declare the army defeated.
 Harald needlessly bade men
 fare from the east.
 So ends the life of the clever ruler –
 we all are in a place of danger –
 the praiseworthy one
 got the ruin of his life.

And before the battle was joined again, then Harald Gudínason offered a truce to his brother Jarl Tósti and to those other men who survived in the Norwegians' troop. But the Norwegians all cried out with one voice and said that each would sooner fall dead across the corpse of his comrade than accept a truce with the

English; then they shouted the war-cry. Then the battle began again. So says Arnór Jarls'-poet:

The death of the dread king
 was ill-fated. Gold-chased
 spear-points did not spare
 the slayer of wrongdoers.
 All the troops of the generous lord
 chose far rather
 to fall around the battle-brave king
 than want a truce.

The saga of Harald Sigurdarson, chapter 93

At that moment, Eystein the Heathcock came from the ships with the troop that followed him. They were completely clad in mail-coats. Then Eystein got King Harald's standard, the Land-Waster. The battle resumed for the third time, and it was the sharpest fighting. Then many Englishmen fell, and it seemed clear that they would flee. This battle was called Heathcock's Fight. Eystein and his men had made their way from the ships so eagerly that they were already so exhausted that they could barely move before they came to the battle, but then they were so furious that they did not defend themselves [i.e. they only attacked] while they were still able to stand. In the end, they took off their mail-coats. Then it was easy for the Englishmen to find a place to land their blows, but some pushed themselves to the very limit and died unwounded. Nearly all the Norse aristocrats fell. This was in the latter part of the day. It was the case, as was to be expected, not all the men were alike: many fled, and various fates awaited those who escaped. It was getting dark in the evening before all the killing was over.

Notes

- 1 For more detailed discussion of the battle, see Frederick William Brooks, *The Battle of Stamford Bridge* (York: East Yorkshire Local History Society, 1956); Kelly DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion of England in 1066* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1999), especially 262–96.
- 2 Nicholas Brooks, 'Why Is the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* about Kings?', ASE 39 (2010): 43–70; Simon Keynes, 'Manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain. Volume I: c. 400–1100*, ed. Richard Gameson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 546–8.
- 3 The text can be found in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition. Volume 5: MS. C*, ed. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001); and *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition. Volume 6: MS D*, ed. Geoffrey Peter Cubbin (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996).
- 4 *Three Historical Poems Ascribed to Gilla Cóemáin: A Critical Edition of the Work of an Eleventh-Century Irish Scholar*, ed. and trans. Peter J. Smith, *Studien und Texte zur Keltologie* 8 (Münster: Nodus Publikationen 2007), 208–9 (stanza 55).

- 5 Donnchad mac Briain was son of the king of Munster and most powerful king in Ireland in this day, Brian Boru, who was killed at the Battle of Clontarf in 1014. Donnchad's death is recorded in annalistic compilations as having taken place when he was on pilgrimage in Rome in 1064, so the poet is correct in ascribing it to two years before the Battle of Stamford Bridge.
- 6 For the Latin text, see *William of Malmesbury: Gesta regum Anglorum; the History of the English Kings*, ed. and trans. R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998–9), I, 420–2. The translation given here was kindly provided by the editors' colleague, Professor Rosalind Love.
- 7 Here William writes *manus dedit*, literally 'gave his hands', an idiom often translated as 'surrender'; Mynors rendered this as 'gave him his fealty' which seems to over-translate somewhat. On the other hand, 'surrender' does not seem appropriate in this context either. A further issue is the name of the Norwegian king. *Haruagra* must be derived from the Old Norse *hárfagri* ('Fairhair'), which in Scandinavian sources is the nickname of an earlier King Harald of Norway, whom William seems to have confused with Harald Sigurdarson.
- 8 The text is found in *Snorri Sturluson: Heimskringla*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 3 vols (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1941–51), III, 183–92.

Shooting arrows

Cinematic representations of medieval battles

Tony Pollard

The November 2018 release of the Netflix movie *Outlaw King*, which tells the story of the Scottish warrior king, Robert Bruce, up until 1307, received respectable reviews and was enjoyed by viewers.¹ This came as a relief to the present author and a small group of fellow historians who served as advisers to the production, with all of us feeling we had a reputational stake in the film. My engagement as an adviser on *Outlaw King*, by its director David MacKenzie, dated back to 2014, coming not long after the broadcast of a two-part BBC television documentary, *The Quest for Bannockburn*.² These programmes, presented by Neil Oliver and myself, documented the archaeological search for the location of the 1314 Battle of Bannockburn in Central Scotland, which had been a topic for debate among historians for well over a century. The success of the project and the broadcast of the television programmes drew the attention of the film's production company, Sigma Films, and, given my previous experience as historical adviser on the first two series of the historical fantasy television drama, *Outlander*,³ led to engagement as a historical adviser. Soon thereafter, I helped to draw together a small team of historians in order to ensure that the considerable amount of research and consultation required could be accomplished in sync with the film's tight production schedule.⁴

Among other things, including the performances of the leading players, *Outlaw King* has been praised by film critics in print, and on internet blogs and YouTube vlogs, for its historical accuracy, though not surprisingly, some pundits have taken pleasure from pointing out inaccuracies.⁵ Some of these were deliberate liberties taken with historical events and timelines for the purpose of driving the film's plot. The most serious of these was of some concern to the present author, representing as it did the greatest liberty taken with historical fact, to which this chapter will later return.

Calling out inaccuracies in historical movies is to some akin to an armchair sport, and nowhere more so than within the ranks of the military historians – academic, popular and amateur.⁶ Spotting inaccuracies, however, can be more than an opportunity for military buffs to show off their knowledge. The most well-known medieval movie to be set in Scotland is the Mel Gibson epic, *Braveheart*, released in 1995. The film

has developed a reputation for its historical inaccuracies,⁷ but nevertheless the present author has for some years been using it as a teaching device in a Scottish medieval warfare course at the University of Glasgow. The film is the focus for class discussion, and here also, the most popular themes are historical error and anachronism, which range from the casting of Sophie Marceau, who was then in her mid-twenties, as the French princess, Isabella, purely for the purpose of providing romantic interest for Gibson's Wallace (in reality she was ten years old at the time of Wallace's death, and in any case, never met him), to the wearing of tartan by fourteenth-century Scots, and the poor quality of the military costume in general. Critiquing a film in this way is entertaining, but it also has educational value as students have to know their history in order to pick it apart.

Inaccuracies, at least on their own, however, are low-hanging fruit, and a wider discussion is encouraged in order to turn the sessions into a more rounded learning experience. *Braveheart* is ideal here as it has inspired critics and scholars to write on its place in conversations about Scottish identity and nationalist politics, while also assessing its treatment of sexuality and gender.⁸ But there is a further strand that can be drawn out from a critical viewing of *Braveheart*, and that is its portrayal of medieval warfare and particularly battle. The most striking scenes in the film are the key battles in Wallace's career as a military leader (the film, based loosely on the writings of Blind Harry,⁹ disregards the role of Andrew de Moray, who died of his wounds after the Battle of Stirling Bridge in 1297). This does not mean simply looking at what the film gets wrong, although this is part of it, but examining how it has influenced modern perceptions of medieval warfare and violence, which obviously requires it to be viewed as part of a canon of movies and TV shows that foreground medieval warfare.

There is now an extensive body of scholarship devoted to the cinematic portrayal of the medieval world (the somewhat amusingly anachronistic term *Medieval Cinema* has generally been adopted), and this field has engaged both scholars of film and historians. These studies have covered many aspects of medieval life and society,¹⁰ with a number of them considering medieval warfare and violence to some extent. The Christian versus Muslim conflicts known as the Crusades are a distinct area of interest, as exemplified by Nickolas Haydock and Edward L. Ridsen's edited volume, *Hollywood in the Holy Land*.¹¹ There has also been some attempt to consider very specific aspects of medieval warfare on screen, and a notable example here is Peter Burkholder's paper, 'X Marks the Plot: Crossbows in Medieval Film'.¹²

The majority of studies undertaken thus far have been by scholars perhaps more familiar with the field of film theory than the present author, but this contribution hopefully still has a place, because (1) it is the first academic analysis of any length to focus exclusively on the relationship between cinematic portrayals of medieval battles and the historical reality; (2) it is written by someone who was involved in the production of a film that depicts medieval warfare; (3) the author, as well as being a military historian, is also an archaeologist of conflict, and so can possibly bring a fresh perspective to the topic, not least through an intimate knowledge of some of the battlefields and artefacts represented in these productions.

This chapter has in part grown out of two public talks, both of which allowed the author to explore themes related to the portrayal of warfare in medieval movies and

also in fantasy cinema, where the depictions of conflict in films including the *Lord of the Rings* cycle and television series such as *Game of Thrones* draw heavily on the tropes and tactics of medieval warfare and have been influenced by historical films.¹³ Some brief reference will be made to these fantasy productions, but a fuller discussion will have to await another opportunity. Where relevant, examples will also be drawn from war movies depicting other periods, most notably those which portray ancient warfare, as these are closely allied to those from the later period in the style and choreography of the battles they depict.

It will come as no surprise that this chapter will not attempt to include every cinematic production that depicts medieval warfare, as even trying to do so would require a dedicated monograph. Instead, it will pick from an imaginary box set of relevant examples (see Appendix). Just as every film cannot be referenced, nor can every aspect of medieval warfare depicted in them. This chapter is primarily focused on the mechanics of battle, centring on the weapons and tactics portrayed on the screen, but even here there is a limit to what can be put under the spotlight, with topics such as swords and swordplay, the shield wall and ideas of chivalric warfare given only scant attention.

Another topic largely disregarded here is the representation of armour, which in itself is an area riddled with enough inaccuracy to keep the armchair critic occupied for a lifetime. Looking to the 1950s, for instance, which was a rich period for the medieval movie, a lot of hokey harness was created for Robert Taylor, who starred in three of the period's key medieval offerings: *Ivanhoe* (1952), *Knights of the Round Table* (1953) and *Quentin Durward* (1955). Taylor played Lancelot in the 1953 take on the King Arthur story, which in its trailer boasted a cast of thousands. Whatever the realities of its size, the cast of *Knights of the Round Table* was a cosmopolitan one, including not only knights in armour but also Picts wearing animal skins and daubed with woad (their makeup prefiguring *Braveheart*), and Northmen sporting horned helmets (also in *The Black Knight* and *Prince Valiant*), all of whom appear together at a council held at Stonehenge.¹⁴ In these various outings, the knight's costume is a Technicolor ensemble of plumed helmets, knitted chain mail, long, heraldic surcoats, which no doubt cover up a multitude of sins, and shields that when struck sound as though they have been beaten out of tin tea trays.¹⁵

Along with suits of armour, castles yell 'medieval' at the viewer, and when it comes to medieval warfare on the screen, the appearance of a battering ram or a siege tower is guaranteed to lift a scene.¹⁶ Sieges would again take up an entire chapter, and so in accord with the remit of the present volume priority is given to battles, which admittedly stands in contrast to the medieval reality, where battles were the rarer of the two types of conflict.¹⁷

Discussion will return repeatedly to *Braveheart* and *Outlaw King* and the earlier part of the First War of Scottish Independence with which they are concerned, covering the period of conflict between around 1297 and 1314 (the first war ended with a treaty in 1328). The battles of Wallace and Bruce, which feature in these films, tell us much about the basic principles of warfare in the medieval period, not least because they demonstrate the mechanics of conflict so clearly – in short, they serve as textbook examples of the medieval art of war and the changes it underwent. This chapter will

examine certain details of the on-screen depiction of these battles in an effort to identify portrayals that have merit when it comes to illustrating these basic principles. A result of this approach will perhaps be some surprises, with what might otherwise seem unpromising productions demonstrating issues relevant to an understanding of a period that saw important developments in the way that battles were fought.

Although the First War of Scottish Independence is a thread that runs all the way through the chapter, medieval battles and their portrayals will also be considered in a more general sense through reference to a range of cinema offerings, and in places these too will be used to inform the core discussion. It is hoped that this chapter will provide a worthwhile critique of the medieval battle in cinema, one that is more than a simple checklist of what is right and what is wrong. In short, it is hoped that it represents a constructive exploration of the complex relationship between the medieval past and the medieval present as far as it pertains to the mechanics of battle.

Setting the scene: The battlefield

Key to the outcome of almost every medieval battle was the landscape in which it was fought, or more accurately, to use the military term, the 'terrain' over which it ranged. Intelligent use of terrain, which involved matching it to the types of arms to be deployed, be they infantry or horse, could be a battle-winning strategy (cavalry for instance do not operate well in forest – although they do in *Gladiator*). Despite this, the cinematic depiction of the terrain in which historically documented medieval battles were fought, as opposed to generic or fantasy portrayals, has rarely been an important consideration. We have to turn to war films which portray later conflicts to see real efforts put into reconstructing environments approximating those from history. These include *Waterloo* (1970), where the landscape was sculpted to provide the ridge on which Wellington's army received Napoleon's attacks, and *Stalingrad* (1993), in which the shell-shattered urban landscape of the war-torn Russian city was recreated.¹⁸

Reusing the actual battlefield is never really an option for film-makers recreating historical battles, as modern landscapes rarely match their appearance centuries before.¹⁹ It is obvious, for instance, from the parched ground, vegetation and the range of hills in the distance, that Laurence Olivier's *Battle of Bosworth*, featured in his 1955 movie version of Shakespeare's *Richard III*, was not shot in the United Kingdom. Olivier seems to have considered shooting on the original battlefield in Leicestershire, but this was not suitable, probably because it was covered by modern farms, their enclosed fields and modern roads.²⁰ Historical integrity has always been a problem when real locations, as opposed to computer-generated imagery (CGI) recreations, are used. There is for instance a scene in *Alfred the Great* (1969) where, in the distance, a cyclist can be seen riding past a telegraph pole as the king inspects a war band. Even in almost pristine landscapes, such as the Wicklow hills across which a Roman cohort marches in the Hammer production *The Viking Queen* (1967), the inconveniences of the modern world are never far away. As a native chariot wheels away, the rear end of a blue van with someone reaching into the open back pops fleetingly into left of frame. This must have been especially irritating as the vehicle was presumably part of the crew

support, but then again, was it much more of an anachronism than calling a character based on Boudica a Viking queen?

A solution to Olivier's need for a battlefield was suggested by associate director Anthony Bushell.²¹ Escorial, near Madrid, was a climatically reliable location with wide open spaces and the added attraction of a good number of affordable extras. The movie battlefield is not on or near a hilltop, with Ambion Hill until recently being the traditional location of the actual battle, even to the point of having a visitor centre built on it. Just before battle is joined, the Duke of Richmond informs the king that the enemy has passed a marsh (the words are from the play), and such a feature is now known to have been present on the field, which points to a different understanding of the battle location in Shakespeare's day. It was in 2009 that archaeological survey finally confirmed the site of the battle, not far from the marshy ground known as Redemore, some two miles away from Ambion Hill.²² It was the presence of cannon balls, some smaller than cricket balls and made of lead with iron cores, which eventually revealed the site of the battle to metal detectors deployed by archaeologist Glenn Foard.

However, there are very few true medieval battle movies where a single historic clash is the main focus of the production – as is the case with *Waterloo* or *Stalingrad*. Exceptions are *Henry V* (1944 and 1989) and *Alexander Nevsky* (1938). In the latter, the 1242 fight on the ice between a Russian army largely made up of peasants and invading German Teutonic Knights takes up close to 40 minutes of the 146-minute running time, and that excludes the lead-up to the battle. The battle ends in Russian victory and the routed Germans falling through the cracking ice. This dramatic incident is recorded in history books, but Donald Ostrowski has argued that this has only occurred since the appearance of the film,²³ which would suggest an influence that goes beyond inspiring the many film-makers who would follow in Eisenstein's footsteps in creating on-screen battles.

To find other examples of battle movies we must turn to the ancient world, with an obvious example being *The 300 Spartans* (1962). This 'sword and sandals' epic tells the story of the Battle of Thermopylae (480 BCE), where the eponymous Greek warriors delayed the advance of a massively larger Persian invasion force at the natural bottleneck known as the Pillars of Fire, in reality a narrow coastal plain with the sea on one side and steeply rising hills on the other. Here the Spartans beat off attack after attack by the Persians, who were unable to fully deploy, using men armed with shields and spears fighting in tight formation, before finally being overwhelmed and dying to a man. The landscape is key to any portrayal of Thermopylae, and so the action is set in a suitable, if somewhat bland, location in Greece, with the battlefield bracketed between the seashore, which looks like nothing more than the shore of a lake, and craggy, rising ground, which on the lower slopes appears to be occupied by olive groves.

The story of Thermopylae, with added fantasy elements, was also turned into a series of comic books,²⁴ which provided the basis for the 2006 movie, *300*. This production used CGI to recreate the narrow patch of ground between mountain and sea in more dramatic fashion, so much so that at one point Persians are pitched over a cliff into the sea.²⁵ On arriving at the pass, before the arrival of the Persians, the Spartans prepare the ground by building a wall across it, shown in the first film and alluded to in the

second, which further limited the movements of the enemy and helped to the turn the battlefield into a controlled environment designed for the purpose of killing.

Similar preparations were made by the Scots before the Battle of Loudon Hill in 1307, though they dug ditches rather than build a wall. This small but important battle features as the climax of *Outlaw King*, albeit on a grander scale than the real thing. This might have come as a surprise to many viewers, who when presented with a film on the life of Robert the Bruce might expect the more famous Battle of Bannockburn (1314) to appear. That was the original plan, with not just Bannockburn, but also the Battle of Falkirk featuring in an early version of the script.²⁶ However, it became clear that the complexities of the story, and the difficulties of compressing a long timeline into a compelling narrative, made the inclusion of Bannockburn difficult. One of the problems with Mel Gibson's *Braveheart* is its rather confusing storyline, which, in covering Wallace's entire life, leaves the viewer somewhat confused over some of the allegiances of the characters and the sequence of events. Eventually, the bold decision was made to conclude *Outlaw King* with Loudon Hill, which ends the story in 1307 rather than 1314. Although little known, the battle represents a key turning point in Bruce's military career, as it was the first time his outnumbered Scottish army defeated the English in battle, coming as it did after a serious defeat at Methven in 1306, at the hands of the same English commander, Aymer de Valence. (This battle also features in the film, where it is portrayed as a night attack on Bruce's camp.) It was also a victory delivered thanks to Bruce selecting a battle site and preparing the ground before the enemy arrived.

Although the actual ground on which the Battle of Loudon Hill was fought has been quarried away, the shallow valley at the foot of Loudon Hill still gives some impression of the terrain in which the Scots arrived early and awaited the arrival of the English. Barbour in his fourteenth-century epic poem, *The Bruce*, suggests that both armies had agreed to meet at the spot on a given date to engage in combat, and such agreements were not unheard of, but it seems more likely that Bruce had intelligence of English movements and therefore had time to pick a spot on the road along which they were travelling and to turn the ground to his advantage.²⁷ This was not an ambush as much as it was a provocation to fight, but to fight on the challenger's terms. Barbour's description of the battle was used as the basis for the scene in *Outlaw King*, and Loudon Hill was visited by the author and the director, David MacKenzie, early on in the pre-production phase. According to Barbour, Bruce picked a spot where the road was flanked with marshy ground on both sides and then further restricted movement by digging long ditches between the wet ground and the road, leaving gaps so that passage was not entirely prohibited. When the English force, which was largely mounted, advanced on the Scottish position, they could not fully deploy because of the ditches (and marshes), and when they funnelled through the gaps, the Scottish spearmen could take them apart in penny packets.

Bruce's victory at Loudon Hill was not only good for Scottish morale, but also provided Bruce with a good idea of how to put the English, who would always outnumber and out-arm him, on the back foot, and it was a lesson that would serve him well when it came to Bannockburn six years later. A suitable analogy here is possibly the smaller but defter Judo fighter who deploys skill and speed to turn an

opponent's greater size and bulk against them, and in doing so topples the bigger foe to the floor. The recreation of the battle in *Outlaw King* was not filmed on the actual battle site, though the viewer is unlikely to know this as the distinctive form of the hill has been added through the magic of CGI.²⁸ Bruce did not pluck his ideas from nowhere, though, as the ability of Scottish spearmen on foot to defeat armoured men on horseback, particularly in confined terrain which prohibited a full-on charge, had already been proven at the Battle of Stirling Bridge in 1297.

At Stirling Bridge, the Scots under William Wallace and Andrew de Moray defeated an English force on the north bank of the River Forth close to Stirling Castle. The English crossed the river along a narrow bridge but were engaged by the Scots before they could deploy their entire force.²⁹ Those who had crossed were hemmed into a meander and so could not position their horse or archers effectively. There are clear parallels with Loudon Hill here, with limited access and confinement (the modern concept would be kettling) essential to Scottish victory. Speed of movement was an additional factor at Stirling Bridge, where the Scots rapidly closed the distance between themselves and the advancing English, once it had been decided between the two Scottish commanders that enough but not too many had crossed the bridge. This was a difficult judgement call, as advancing to attack prematurely would have worked in favour of the English, as a smaller force would have found more room in which to manoeuvre and deploy, while leaving it too late would allow more English troops across and give the leading elements time to shake out into battle array.

Not surprisingly, the Battle of Stirling Bridge features in *Braveheart*. What does come as a surprise though is the absence of a bridge. The only clue as to the location of this major set piece is the appearance of the word *Stirling* on the screen. The two armies form up on an expanse of well-grazed plain, with no sign of a bridge, let alone a river.³⁰ The location is the Curragh, an expanse of moorland in Ireland with a long tradition of use for military training, a connection also reflected by the armies on the screen, as the majority of extras on both sides were reservists from the Irish Defence Force.³¹ Just as the field bears little resemblance to the real thing, so it is with the battle, which opens with a spectacular English cavalry charge.

Wet-work: The mechanics of battle

As the horsemen in *Braveheart* bear down on the Scottish army at Stirling, Wallace calls out 'Hold, hold!' to his men, ordering them to keep their position in the face of the oncoming juggernaut of steel and horseflesh (Figure 9.1). Then at the last moment Wallace yells 'Now!' and a wall of spears is picked from the ground just in time for the horses to run into the angled points. (These are delivered to the frontline early on in the scene as wrapped bundles, which obscures their purpose.) Mel Gibson has clearly recognized the effectiveness of well-prepared infantry against horse here, but he has turned what would have been long, steel-tipped spears into roughly hewn timber poles sharpened at the business end (Figure 9.2). This cut from the wildwood rustication of the spear gives Wallace's army an earthy men-of-the-land feel and connects them to the Ettrick Forest where they had spent time training. This contrasts with the



Figure 9.1 English heavy cavalry charge Wallace's Scottish infantry in *Braveheart* (1995) at 'The 1297 Battle of Stirling' as used in the film. At this stage the Scottish spears are still not apparent as they are lying on the ground in front of the Scots.



Figure 9.2 William Wallace's Scottish spearmen reveal their 'secret weapon' in *Braveheart* (1995), just before the charging English heavy cavalry make contact at the 1297 Battle of Stirling (*sic*). The appearance of the spears – roughly cut from the wildwood – gives Wallace's army the earthy men-of-the-land feel, and connects them to the Ettrick Forest where they had spent time training.

barded (armoured) horses and the armour worn by their riders, however inaccurately rendered, of the English cavalry, which gives them an almost industrial appearance. Here we have the most obvious, and indeed effective, representation of the victory of the underdog over the better equipped bully in *Braveheart*.

Mel Gibson's portrayal of the Battle of Stirling also differs from the Battle of Stirling Bridge, in that the Scots are stationary and wait to receive a cavalry charge rather than, as they did in 1297, advancing on the English. Again though, the charging cavalry gives Gibson an opportunity to showcase the apparent military superiority of the English prior to it being smashed through the combined application of Scottish nerve and initiative. But this battle is not over with the defeat of the English cavalry, as there is still the infantry with which to deal. The foot soldiers from both armies then charge flat

out at one another and what follows is often, for this writer, the least satisfying element of any medieval battle in film, the melee.³²

There was at one time a tendency among historians to regard medieval warfare as lacking the finesse and art of earlier (classical and Roman) and later periods (fifteenth and sixteenth centuries) of conflict. Medieval armies simply thrashed it out with little thought to tactics or effective deployment. This is a tradition that Sean McGlynn traces back to Charles Oman, who in the 1880s popularized the image of knights fighting in single combat amid a disordered melee.³³ Although similar scenes characterize the battles in *Braveheart* and many other films, this is not an accurate reflection of the reality, and as this chapter will continue to emphasize, certainly not of those engagements involving Wallace, de Moray and then Bruce.

Before the Stirling melee develops, Gibson's infantry-against-infantry combat depicts another phase of battle that has also been the subject of discussion: shock. This is that high-impact collision between both sides, and it is an obvious feature of both the major battle scenes in *Braveheart*. If anything, the second charge, at the 1298 Battle of Falkirk, is the more violent of the two, with men running so fast that they somersault over one another on contact. It is tempting to say that *Braveheart* set something of a fashion here, with similarly full-on charges and acrobatic shocks appearing in *Troy*, *King Arthur*, and looking to fantasy films, *300* and several of the episodes of *Lord of the Rings*. However, Gibson himself credits a film shot in 1965 as a key inspiration for the *Braveheart* battle scenes, this being *Chimes at Midnight*, a cinematic take on the life of Falstaff as imagined by Shakespeare and directed by Orson Welles.³⁴ In an incredibly dynamic Battle of Shrewsbury there is shock as two cavalry forces charge into one another, followed by a brutal infantry melee with speeded up action, fast cutting and low-level hand-held camera work.³⁵

Some respected military thinkers, including Marshal de Sax, Guibert and Du Picq, have, as cited by John Keegan in *The Face of Battle*, considered this initial encounter in battles both ancient and more recent – up to the nineteenth century in the case of Du Picq. The earlier writers did not believe that soldiers fled the field as a result of shock, but Du Picq took a more nuanced line, to the point of not believing in shock. He proposed that charging armies slowed and lost momentum as they approached the enemy, or that one side gave way to the other, as if in a game of chicken.³⁶ In proposing a tendency to avoid combat, Du Picq, who was a veteran of the Crimean War, prefigures more modern studies of the realities of men in combat, the result of which is that the normal reaction is to try and avoid it.³⁷ This avoidance instinct not only affected the individual and the unit but also led to battles themselves only being fought when absolutely necessary, with sieges and economic warfare being preferred strategies.³⁸

In *Braveheart*, Gibson takes an alternative view, with his high-energy contacts pushing the concept of shock to its extreme, followed by both sides engaging in brutal hand-to-hand combat as the action shifts into melee. He also uses this choreography to almost comic effect, albeit via poor history, in his depiction of the Battle of Falkirk, where the Irish fighting for Edward I and the opposing Scots charge at one another in the same fashion as previously depicted in the Battle of Stirling. However, the scene defeats viewer expectation when, just before they reach the point of shock, both sides slow and break into an exchange of greetings and handshakes as the Irish go over to the Scottish side.³⁹

In the cinematic melee, the engagement breaks down into a series of individual hand-to-hand combats, pretty much in keeping with the model proposed by Charles Oman. These scenes are usually below par, and not simply because they don't reflect the reality – the melee in Gibson's *Stirling* does not – given that on the day the Scots were armed with spears rather than the swords and axes that dominate the scene. On a basic level, what is most disappointing about these massed combats is that they are boring, as they depict nothing but men hacking at one another, despite there being the move to more realistic violence epitomized by *Braveheart*.

Gibson's film set a new standard for violence in medieval cinema, and was probably one of the first of any genre to show fake limbs being severed from amputee stunt performers.⁴⁰ At one point during production a Scottish newspaper, in a no doubt carefully crafted public relations exercise, reported that *Outlaw King* would be the most violent yet.⁴¹ It is debatable, though, whether *Outlaw King*, even with an explicit disembowelling scene, is really much more violent than *Braveheart*, but neither can hold a decapitated head up to *Ironclad* (2011), which in one of many gruesome scenes depicts a man having his hands chopped off before being strapped to a mangonel (catapult) and thrown against the wall of Rochester castle.

The battle melees in earlier films, from the late 1930s to the 1950s,⁴² are generally characterized by somewhat mechanical and rather lacklustre stage fighting, with swordplay limited to a basic one-two, one-two crossing of swords.⁴³ Films such as *Ivanhoe* and *Knights of the Round Table* are just two examples here, though a battle in the latter does contain a shock scene as two forces of mounted knights charge and clash, but it is all at a gentler pace than in those scenes described earlier. Not all melee scenes from early films could be described as lame, with the cavalry battle from DeMille's 1935 epic *The Crusades*, an obvious change of location part way through the charge notwithstanding, achieving the high level of realism perhaps only possible through a shameful lack of concern for animal welfare at that time. It took until 1940 for the welfare organization *Animal Humane*, which introduced the 'No animals were harmed' film credit, to be granted access to sets, thanks to the Hays Department,⁴⁴ but by then vast numbers of horses had perished on film sets – with around 100 dying in a single production, during the making of *Ben Hur* in 1925.⁴⁵

Criticisms notwithstanding, every film-maker goes to great lengths to make these scenes as original and convincing as possible, using various camera techniques, including slow motion, jump and stutter cuts, and bloody special effects. When it comes down to it though, there is only so much variety that even the most imaginative director and fight arranger can inject into massed single combats, and it is for this reason that medieval battle scenes have for a long time included tactical embellishments and flourishes, none of which are in keeping with the Oman playbook.

No cannons in the canon: Issues with gunpowder

A major drawback about depicting medieval and earlier forms of warfare on screen is that it lacks the explosive spectacle of the gunpowder era, where the flash and bang of firearms, artillery and bombs, along with their capacity to wreak mass destruction,

add a dynamic and visually arresting dimension to combat scenes. It is for this reason that many have found ways of coming as close as they can to including such scenes without actually going to the lengths of using firearms and explosives. This latter point is interesting, as many medieval movies are set at a time when primitive gunpowder weapons, in the form of artillery and handguns, would have been available.

Gunpowder ordnance, which changed the face of warfare, makes what some might think a surprisingly early appearance, with Barbour mentioning the English use of cannon or 'crakys of war' in a campaign of 1327, just thirteen years after Bannockburn.⁴⁶ Cannon were also used at the Battle of Crecy in 1346 and during the siege of Berwick in 1333, a good indication that their use had become fairly standard during both major field battles and sieges in Europe before the middle of the fourteenth century. However, the effectiveness of these primitive gunpowder weapons at this time is debatable, and it seems likely that the impact on the battlefield was more psychological than physically destructive.⁴⁷ It has even been suggested, perhaps somewhat overcautiously, that that gunpowder artillery did not become greatly effective against masonry until the sixteenth century.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, given the presence of these weapons in the medieval armoury from the first half of the fourteenth century, one might expect film-makers to have made much of them, and given liberties taken elsewhere, could be forgiven for turning them into more effective weapons than they were in reality.

With the foregoing in mind, the almost total absence of cannon and indeed handguns in medieval combat scenes is striking. There are, however, the various on-screen versions of Shakespeare's *Henry V*, where an unmanned piece of ordnance appears in the Harfleur siege scene in Laurence Olivier's 1944 production. Kenneth Branagh, in his 1998 contribution, glories in the explosions that cast the city walls and the king delivering his 'once more into the breach' speech into silhouette, but 'the ordnance on their carriages, with fatal mouths gaping on girded Harfleur' is limited to a mention in Shakespeare's words, spoken to camera by Derek Jacobi as the chorus. In what might be a progressive move, the version produced for BBC television's *The Hollow Crown* series (2012), with Tom Hiddleston as Henry V, features a cannon being fired and the resulting impact on the town wall.

Outside of Shakespeare, and more on him later, a rare appearance of medieval artillery is made in *Krzyzacy* (aka *The Teutons*), a Polish film from 1960, which features the Battle of Grunwald (1410).⁴⁹ Of note here is the depiction not just of bows and crossbows but also of trestle mounted bombards, which are fired at oncoming Lithuanian cavalry. Continuing with exceptions, early handguns appear in the 1468 setting of *Quentin Durward* (1955), one of the two Sir Walter Scott adaptations starring Robert Taylor. It is noteworthy that these firearms are used by a group of Burgundian brigands. The handgun is not a chivalric weapon, with *Durward* painted as a romantic hangover from a gentler age, and so in this context there can be no coincidence that it is placed in the hands of the evil William de la Marck's henchmen.⁵⁰ This pairing of a particular type of weapon with 'bad guys' has much in common with the negative depiction of crossbows identified by Peter Burkholder.⁵¹

It is proposed here that the absence of gunpowder weapons from all but a very few of the many medieval movies set within the period in which they were available is not unrelated to the last point, in that they are not held in the popular imagination

as the type of weapon that would be used in a period where swords, spears and bows are regarded as the weapons of choice. In short, there is a concern that they are not seen as *medieval* and could therefore be read by viewers as anachronistic. A scene from Besson's Joan of Arc movie, *The Messenger* (1999), may add some credence to this argument. The strongest parts of the film are its siege scenes, where all manner of devices, including trebuchets and siege towers, are employed, but all of these are *medieval* in character. However, in an early scene Joan is questioned on her knowledge of modern artillery by officials at the French court, and later a French commander of the siege, in the midst of the action at Orleans, calls for the culverin, which is a type of light cannon (more likely here than the early handgun that shared the name). No such weapon arrives, and it seems not unreasonable to suggest that a scene with a gun has been cut, perhaps before it was filmed, and possibly for the reasons previously outlined. If this is the case, then the retained fragment of dialogue perhaps stands in subtle testimony to a loss of nerve on the part of the director who, despite the contemporary illuminated manuscript illustrations of guns being used in the siege, is playing to audience expectation.⁵²

A similar motive might have influenced Olivier's 1955 portrayal of Bosworth in *Richard III*, where in 1485, as the archaeology has reminded us, cannons were used in numbers; they are, however, entirely absent on screen. We can perhaps forgive the director and star for this omission, as Shakespeare himself does not mention ordnance in this case, but then again, the battle is not a major feature of the play, where the action moves very quickly from preparation to the king's death and battle's end. Whether Olivier was aware that cannons played a part at Bosworth is also uncertain, and so without evidence one way or the other the jury remains out on this case.

Whatever the reason for the omission in *Richard III*, there would appear to be an unwillingness on the part of film-makers to deploy artillery in their medieval battles, even when to do so would make them more historically accurate, for fear of defying viewers' expectations of what a medieval battle is. Andrew Elliott has coined the term *historicon* to describe an image or an object that summons up a given period, and here, Elliott is referring to the medieval era.⁵³ This might be a castle, a suit of armour or a joust, anything that sends an imagination underpinned by preconception in the right direction. Gunpowder weapons, however, are not medieval *historicons*, as they do not immediately suggest the period. Indeed, when it comes to the Middle Ages, they might even be regarded as *anti-historicons*.

Fighting with fire: Medieval movie pyrotechnics

Having largely elected not to portray gunpowder weapons, those who bring these medieval spectacles to the screen have found other ways to create explosive effects, and of course this applies as much to those battles that predate the use of the artillery and handguns as it does to those from the largely unrepresented early gunpowder era.

There is no better example of this medieval pyromania than the opening scene of *Outlaw King*, in which Edward I is directing the siege of Stirling Castle. Following an audience with Scottish nobles, including Robert the Bruce, Edward unleashes his huge

siege engine, the 'War Wolf', launching a flaming missile from this giant trebuchet, which arcs through the air before exploding in a napalm-like ball of flame against the castle wall. Ridley Scott provides one of the most spectacular, if somewhat over the top, portrayals of this delivery of fire in *Kingdom of Heaven*, where huge fireballs are launched over an unfeasibly long distance, out of the dark like so many burning comets, against the walls of Jerusalem. Nickolas Haydock, in *Movie Medievalism*, sees a visual connection between these projectiles striking the towers of the city, and the planes hitting the twin towers in New York on 9/11, and given the setting and context of the film this would seem a valid reading.⁵⁴

Sieges in general provide multiple opportunities for using both surrogates for explosives, in the form of Greek fire,⁵⁵ burning oil, and the more general use of fire, commonly delivered via burning arrows, to destroy buildings and provide plenty of smoke and flame.⁵⁶ Justifying pyrotechnic effects in field battles is more of a challenge than in sieges, but they are present in a number of cinematic depictions. Out of period perhaps, but one of the most influential scenes, as far as fire on the field is concerned, is in *Spartacus* (1960), where the gladiator army pulls flaming rollers downhill into the advancing Roman line. The same tactic/effect is used in the more recent Roman actioner, *Centurion* (2010), where this time it is flaming balls that bounce down slope into a Roman legion marching along a misty forest road. Fire is certainly popular in Roman movies, and in *Gladiator* (2000), Ridley Scott warms up for *Kingdom of Heaven* by bringing a flavour of Vietnam to the forests of Germany, as pots of Greek fire and flaming arrows are launched against the attacking tribes. The use of Greek fire has already been highlighted in the siege of Stirling Castle scene in *Outlaw King*, but flaming arrows also see action, later adding drama and illumination to the night attack at Methven.⁵⁷

Given that a Greek architect called Kallinikos is credited with the invention of the substance popularly regarded as an ancient form of napalm, and which went from being a weapon of war to much used cinematic effect, it is fitting that fire is also popular in movies featuring Greeks and their kin. It is fire balls that burn brightly during the beach night attack in *Troy* (2004), which among other things stands as an enduring example of how too much CGI can diminish rather than enhance movie battle scenes. There is a twist in this scene, though, as the Trojans positioned on the dunes shoot flaming arrows down on to the beach before rolling unignited balls of flammable material through them, with predictable results. A different tactic is adopted by the eponymous warriors at Thermopylae in *The 300 Spartans*, where they trap attacking Persians behind a wall of fire after a line of scattered straw is ignited after they have advanced across it. Similar preparations are made by the Roman knights at the Battle of Badon scene in *King Arthur*, here fought on the southern side of Hadrian's Wall, with fire arrows and flaming projectiles launched from Pict-operated trebuchets dropped onto the booby traps that await the unwitting Saxons. Returning to Scotland, as the Scottish army prepares for the Battle of Falkirk in *Braveheart*, a black oily substance is poured onto the ground, setting the scene for a nasty surprise coming the way of the English via *The 300 Spartans*. The immolation of the enemy by Wallace might add an extra level of spectacle for the viewer, but it is just one more element that draws the cinematic portrayal of the film away from reality as, of course, no such tactic was adopted in 1298.

Fighting in the shade: Arrow storms

The year before Falkirk, the Battle of Stirling Bridge was, with the loss of de Moray, something of a pyrrhic victory for the Scots. It also ensured that Edward I would put effort and resources into taking revenge and would bring the ringleaders of what he regarded as a rebellion to book.⁵⁸ In the face of an army some 15,000 strong, and led by Edward I in person, Wallace was to suffer a devastating defeat at Falkirk on 22 July 1298. Here he made the mistake of keeping his schiltrons of spearmen stationary, possibly even placing them within roped cordons to ensure that they stayed together as a body.⁵⁹ There were probably four of these, each perhaps a thousand strong, with bodies of archers alongside them. This meant that while they could use their long spears to provide effective defence against the English cavalry, in the face of which the Scottish cavalry fled and the archers were ridden down, when arrows started raining down on the densely packed, poorly armoured and immobile schiltrons of spearmen, they were cut to pieces.⁶⁰ It can be suggested that Wallace's victory the previous year worked against him at Falkirk. Due to the containment of the English force at Stirling Bridge, the Scots didn't get to experience the deadly efficiency of English archers. Therefore, when it came to Falkirk, Wallace did not perhaps fully appreciate the importance of keeping his troops mobile and using this to close the distance between the two sides. This failure may point to de Moray being the tactician among the pair – Wallace would never again command in battle, and his defeat at Falkirk marked a key turning point, downwards, in his fortunes.

There has been speculation, fuelled by some of the sources, that Bruce was fighting for Edward at Falkirk and that the Scottish nobles in command of the cavalry deserted him in an act of betrayal.⁶¹ Whatever the truth of the matter, Gibson cannot be criticized for having the nobles depart the field in Wallace's hour of need, nor for unmasking a helmed knight who engages Wallace in single combat as a duplicitous Bruce, who is later wracked with guilt as he wanders the corpse-strewn battlefield. Mel Gibson's depiction of Falkirk is, however, far from perfect, with the previously noted flame trap being just one of the liberties taken with it. A perhaps more serious flaw is the way that Gibson has the Scots stationary at Stirling, when they were mobile, and mobile at Falkirk when they were stationary, and the difference is key to understanding the outcome of both. Additionally, the absence of spearmen at Falkirk takes away not just a key element of the battle but also denies the viewer any possibility of learning anything about the basis of Scottish battlefield tactics from the time. The director of *Braveheart* can be seen as part of a long tradition of film-makers who don't quite get it right when it comes to depicting combat involving horses against infantry.

Among them is Sergei Eisenstein, who directed the hugely influential Russian epic *Alexander Nevsky*, which was released in 1938. It has been seen as an allegory for Nazi aggression, and as such holds something in common with another film that has a single historical battle at its core. In 1944, Lawrence Olivier's *Henry V* put out the message that, with Normandy landings on D-Day, things would go well in Europe for the latest army to cross the Channel. It is difficult to avoid making connections between the iconic images from Normandy and the Second World War in films that make the liminal zone of the beach the seat of action. In *El Cid*, the Moors land on the beach outside Valencia,

and it is here that the major siege and battle scenes are played out.⁶² The most overt reference to D-Day in any medieval movie is, however, to be found in Ridley Scott's *Robin Hood*, where the front ramps of landing craft propelled by oars deliver Norman troops and unconvincing anachronism in a scene that is as much *Saving Private Ryan* as it is *Saving Norman Archer*.

Wartime symbolism has also been noted by Stephen Knight, who sees the brutal Normans in *The Adventures of Robin Hood* from 1938 as Nazi Stormtroopers, pointing out that in 1935 Warner Brothers' agent in Berlin had been beaten to death for being Jewish.⁶³ Stormtroopers, but this time those from *Star Wars*, are perhaps not light years away from a modern viewer's thoughts when it comes to some of the helmets worn by the Teutonic infantry in *Alexander Nevsky*, with their eye slits and coal-scuttle brims. Some of the helmets are clearly recycled German–First World War models, and these are known to have been an inspiration for the *Star Wars* designers, notably John Mollo.⁶⁴

The Battle on the Ice in *Alexander Nevsky* is a sprawling and confused affair, which undoubtedly mirrors some of the reality of the original, fought on the frozen waters of Lake Peipus in 1242. There are, however, distinct phases to the combat narrative as presented in the film.⁶⁵ In cinematic terms, the battle gets off to a promising start, with the German cavalry charging Russian infantry armed with spears, who prepare to receive them in a convincing fashion (Figure 9.3). At first it looks like this will develop into a realistic set piece between the Russian equivalent of a 'schiltron' and heavy horse. The scene disappoints, however, as by the time the cavalry gets close to clashing with



Figure 9.3 In *Alexander Nevsky* (1938), massed ranks of Russian spearmen prepare to receive Teutonic cavalry in the Battle on the Ice (1242).

the foot soldiers, they are no longer armed with spears but with swords. Then, at least in keeping with Du Picq's denial of shock, what had been spearmen open up their ranks as the knights reach them and a chaotic melee ensues, with swords on both sides flailing in a most unconvincing fashion. It is only later, once the knights have dismounted and formed a shield wall that we see the effectiveness of spearmen as their lances push back repeated attacks by the Russian infantry. The Russians then try to break the stalemate by softening up the enemy with a shower of crossbow bolts. The missile weapons are shot over the heads of the men of the shield wall as though they were standard bows, and the bolts also look like arrows. Whatever the case, the impact of the scene is lost as the bolts/arrows look as though they have just been thrown into the air like so many pick-up sticks.

In contrast to *Alexander Nevsky*, archery is one thing that the *Braveheart* Falkirk gets right. Early on in the battle, Wallace and his men shelter under their shields as the English arrow storm rains down on them. Here at least there is an attempt to reflect reality, with the use of the longbow later heralding defeat for the Scots in the battles of the Second War of Scottish Independence. The arrows puncture exposed limbs and in some cases penetrate the shields. Nonetheless, it is an opportunity for humour as Simon, the eccentric Irishman, informs Wallace that God does not hold out much hope for his survival (though in much more colourful language).

Movie depictions of massed arrow flights, or storms as they are poetically known, have improved with time. In the 1950s, arrows, sometimes lacking flights and heads, were shot from under-strength bows, with all the velocity of a paper wrapper being blown from a drinking straw, to bounce harmlessly from the bodies of the enemy; examples of this can be seen in *Ivanhoe* and *Knights of the Round Table*. This is not always the case in those movies, though, and one fleeting shot in *Ivanhoe* has a crossbow bolt smash through a wooden shield in a most realistic fashion alarmingly close to the shield-bearer's head. (It is the best two seconds in the film.) Olivier was not so lucky in his 1955 production of *Richard III* when he was shot in the leg by an arrow, but fortunately it was his left leg with which he was already limping when in character and so the injury, which cannot have been serious, did not impede his performance.⁶⁶ In more recent films, the impact of arrows has a visceral quality, and in *Braveheart* the puncturing of limbs and even buttocks at Falkirk is very effective. In order to achieve these effects arrows were launched en masse from tubes powered by compressed air, while some were shot into the ground at very close range by archers standing on chairs, thus landing frighteningly close to the actors.

It was the Spartan, Dienekes, who, according to Herodotus, said, 'we shall fight in the shade', in response to the overwhelming number of enemy archers at a battle against the Medes. Of course, in *300* he speaks these words in a *Braveheart*-channelling demonstration of bravado under his shield, while the Spartans 'tuck tail' at Thermopylae, waiting for the Persian arrow storm to fall on them (Figure 9.4). Despite the vast number of arrows shown darkening the sky at Thermopylae in *300*, or indeed those shot at the real Battle of Falkirk in 1298, it is unlikely that by the time archaeologists got to the site that any would be left to find (the site of the Battle of Falkirk has still to be satisfactorily identified). This certainly proved the case at Hastings, Bannockburn, Barnet and other medieval battlefields subject to archaeological investigation. One of



Figure 9.4 The Spartans in *300* (2006) ‘tuck tail’ under their shields beneath the onslaught of a Persian arrow storm at the Battle of Thermopylae (480 BCE).

the reasons for this, in addition to decay over time, is that arrows were recycled. Those arrows that missed their targets would stick in the ground with the feather flights advertising their presence, allowing for them to be plucked like flowers once the battle was over. In at least one case in a British battle, Towton in 1461, enemy arrows which had fallen short were picked from the ground and shot back.⁶⁷

This recycling of arrows is absent from almost all medieval battle movies, an exception being *The Golden Horde* from 1951, where after defeating a small force of Genghis Khan’s ‘barbarians’, the crusaders under Sir Guy (David Farrar) are ordered to gather up the enemy’s unbroken arrows for later use. It is worth noting that when it comes to the orders given to archers in battle, ‘fire’ is not appropriate, for arrows are shot and not fired, the latter being a term reserved for firearms (or perhaps fire arrows). A more correct term is ‘loose’, or perhaps ‘release’, and probably as many films get it right as get it wrong. Alas, ‘fire’ does sneak into *Outlaw King*, albeit in a conversation about a monkey trained to shoot a bow.

The secret of his success: Loudon Hill and the seeds of Bannockburn

The English longbow would eventually help to bring spectacular victories against the French in the Hundred Years War (1330s–1450s), but in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, Robert the Bruce learnt the lessons of Stirling Bridge and Falkirk well. He had also suffered his own knocks, most particularly at Methven, when he appears to have let his guard down, while expecting his opponent to operate according to an already outmoded chivalric code. The most fundamental of these lessons was that infantry equipped with spears could defeat cavalry; another was that terrain could work in the underdog’s favour if the battlefield was well chosen.

At Loudon Hill in 1307, Bruce applied an ingredient of his own. He modified the terrain so that it gave him an advantage by turning it into a force multiplier. Of course, Wallace, de Moray and Bruce were not the first battlefield commanders to recognize

the benefits of well-chosen terrain; it was for instance noted by Vegetius, the Roman writer of a military treatise which later found popularity in the medieval period and beyond.⁶⁸ Having reliable intelligence that a mounted force would be moving along the road from Ayr, Bruce picked a suitable location along the route and prepared the ground before waiting for the enemy to arrive. As recorded in Barbour, Bruce had his men dig three lines of ditches between the road and areas of bog located some distance at either side. The ditches were punctuated by gaps, which were designed to let the enemy through but only in limited numbers.

The digging of the ditches, with even Bruce putting his back into it, is portrayed in *Outlaw King*, while Loudon Hill looms in the background. Once the work is done the English, under Aymer Valance, approach along the road. Bruce's army stand in plain sight, for this was no ambush, and inevitably the English charge at the Scottish line (Figure 9.5). At an order from Bruce the Scots dash behind the earthworks which they were concealing behind their backs, and taking up their spears brace for the English charge. By this time the cavalry has already built up a head of steam and too late they see the ditches. With cries of 'it's a trap!'; horses and men plunge into them, both to be impaled on stakes, as others are speared by the Scottish infantry. The battle quickly shifts from the shock phase, with the Scots absorbing the impact via the ditches and spears, into melee. How the English manage to engage in hand-to-hand combat is unclear. Some of them leap the lead ditch on their horses, while others might come in through the gaps, but this is not explicitly shown. The overall impression is one of confused and desperate hand-to-hand fighting, which cinematically is partially lifted above the norm by one side being on horseback (effective use of CGI preventing the animal cruelty apparent in DeMille's *The Crusades*).

A weakness of the battle as depicted is that the ditches and the spears appear as a surprise to the English, just as the roughly hewn spears used by Wallace are unleashed at the last moment in the *Braveheart* Battle of Stirling (Bridge). It is far more likely that the spears and the ditches would have been in plain sight – spears were certainly nothing new to the English by this time, so there was no element of surprise to be had there. What is more likely is that Bruce hoped to entice the enemy to attack at the



Figure 9.5 Scottish spearmen in *Outlaw King* (2018) receive charging English heavy cavalry at the Battle of Loudon Hill (1307).

gaps in the ditches, which would have been simple enough to do not only by putting his few men in them but also by making the ditches visible from the outside – raised banks of upcast earth would do this. In this way Bruce could take the momentum out of the English charge and also limit their ability to deliver a controlled charge across an extended front. In short, Bruce closed the English down and forced them into a position which worked against them, achieving something similar to the victory orchestrated by Wallace and de Moray at Stirling Bridge.

The element of surprise in the Loudon Hill scene is representative of a wider desire to satisfy the viewer who, as previously noted, will usually appreciate the unexpected. Other examples of course include Wallace in *Braveheart* at both Stirling, where the spears are presented at the last moment, and Falkirk, where the flame trap incinerates English troops. Ambushes of a more traditional nature, in this case drawing the enemy into a location where they can be attacked by a previously unseen force, appear in *Knights of the Round Table* and in *Alfred the Great*, the latter battle ending in dramatic fashion on a hilltop inside a chalk carved horse (one of these ancient markings also appears in Ridley Scott's *Robin Hood*).

Although there can be no doubt that guile and surprise were a feature of medieval warfare, which of course flew in the face of the idea of chivalric conduct, it is a trope which is somewhat overused in both *Braveheart* and *Outlaw King*. Both movies present the use of the spear by the Scots as a secret weapon that takes the English by surprise rather than the weapon of choice against which the English were slow to learn how to respond effectively – largely through fighting on foot, which did not come into fashion with the English until sometime before the Weardale campaign of 1327.⁶⁹ If anything, *Braveheart* comes closest to the reality here in the Stirling scene, for at the Battle of Stirling Bridge the English were at least shocked by the impact of the spear if not by its appearance on the battlefield. That said, the *Braveheart* version gets every other element wrong, even down to the way in which the spears were deployed.

While critiquing the Battle of Loudon Hill in *Outlaw King*, it would be remiss not to point out the most striking historical inaccuracy of the entire production, that being the appearance of Edward, Prince of Wales at the battle. In the film Edward I dies on his way to Scotland before the Battle of Loudon Hill and not, as was actually the case, after the battle, while travelling north to seek revenge. Young Edward's presence on the field allows for a Hollywood-style showdown between him and Bruce, and of course it is the Scottish king who gets the upper hand in this single combat. Having bested his opponent Bruce lets him go, which had the occasion actually arisen would seem a highly unlikely act of largesse. This scene was a late arrival in the script and was a result of the need to bring the sparring between the two,⁷⁰ which had punctuated the film up until then, to a satisfactory conclusion, while also allowing Edward to live on for a possible sequel featuring the Battle of Bannockburn.⁷¹

The beginning of the Battle of Bannockburn makes an appearance at the end of *Braveheart*, though from the set-up it is barely recognizable – yet again, the Scots and the English armies are arrayed before one another, but with the English for some reason expecting supplication from the Scots. Instead, Bruce makes an appeal to his men – 'You bled for Wallace, now will you bleed for me?' – at which point the dead warrior's sword is cast through the air in slow motion to land as a challenge. The

emotional effectiveness of this scene cannot be denied, and the power of the film as a political statement has been a topic of much discussion, but what it does not do is give Bannockburn the cinematic place it so richly deserves.⁷² The battle is important for a number of reasons, not least of which was its role in cementing Robert the Bruce's position as king of Scotland. In the context of the present discussion, however, it is key because it saw Bruce bringing together all of the lessons learnt from over fifteen years of war between Scotland and England, from battles fought by him and by others. It was his masterpiece, from drawing the English to Stirling Castle, where the ground suited him, to recognizing he had Edward on the back foot, to delivering the killer blow, and it left no doubt that Bruce was the ultimate student of war.⁷³

Having learnt the importance of arriving early and preparing the ground from Loudon Hill, Bruce brought his army to the New Park, a hunting forest to the south of Stirling Castle, which was under siege by his brother Edward. The story goes that Robert was angry with Edward for making an agreement with the English that if they could get within striking distance of the castle by Midsummer's Day of 1314, then the Scots would lift the siege of one of the few Scottish strongholds still in English hands. It seems unlikely that Robert would not have been in on this arrangement, and he might well have thought it a good way to ensure that when Edward arrived in Scotland, and he had announced that he was coming in late 1313, he didn't linger elsewhere and came straight to Stirling, where if the conditions on the day suited, Bruce would give him battle on ground of his choosing.⁷⁴

With his army camped in the New Park, Bruce prepared the ground, protecting his right flank by digging pits along the Bannock Burn to the north of the road along which the English would approach, while his left was covered by a deep gorge through which the burn (stream or small river) flowed. He also took the opportunity to train his men how to work with their spears in mobile schiltrons, having learnt from Stirling Bridge and Falkirk that movement could be the key to success and was the only way to avoid destruction in the face of massed longbows. He had been able to pin himself at Loudon Hill with the knowledge that he faced only a modest English force, and the majority of them were mounted without many, if any, archers – the difference, however, was not going to deter him from trying it again if the opportunity arose.

When the English arrived, Edward II put out two probing advances, one along the road into the New Park and the other along the Scottish left flank, sending his men down onto the low ground of the Carse in the direction of the castle. Both forces were rebuffed by the Scots, and as part of the action along the road, Bruce killed an English knight called Henry de Bohun, in what has been remembered somewhat erroneously as a chivalric single combat. By the end of day one (23 June 1314) the English had received two bloody noses, and so Edward moved his army off the high ground along which the road ran, down onto the Carse, where he could water his horses and put some distance between him and the enemy. On past experience he probably thought it doubtful that Bruce would move from his secure position and offer him open battle. Edward is not remembered as a great military commander, but on day one of Bannockburn he did most things right and refused to be drawn in by Bruce, whom he denied a rerun of Loudon Hill.

The mistake Edward had made, however, was putting himself between two burns: the Pelstream and the Bannock Burn. During the night, Bruce recognized he had Edward at a disadvantage and so early the next morning he went on the attack. His spearmen moved off the high ground and down onto the Carse. As Edward's men, who had spent an uncomfortable night with their arms, tried to shake themselves out into a fighting line, the Scottish schiltrons advanced at speed towards them. It was this speed and the confined nature of the field that gave Bruce the upper hand, despite Edward's army being far superior, at least on paper, with around 3,000 foot and over 10,000 infantry to around 7,000 Scots, most of them on foot. The heavy horse was pushed back onto the English infantry, and the press was so great that the archers, behind the horse, could not properly deploy before becoming part of a general rout. Men were drowned and crushed to death as the fleeing soldiers tried to re-cross the burn, and Edward was turned away from Stirling Castle, where temporary sanctuary would surely turn to capture.

It was a stunning victory for the Scots, and it went a long way to securing Bruce's place as their king, but it was born from long experience. That experience had given him a valuable playbook as far as battle tactics were concerned, and at Bannockburn he needed it. On day one he had recreated the conditions that had worked so well at Loudon Hill, but Edward had been too canny to commit his full force into ground that favoured the enemy. His reconnaissance down onto the Carse and along the Scottish left flank had told him the enemy was positioned in depth, while his probing attack along the road had highlighted an inability to deploy properly and outflank, thanks to the pits and the gorge. On day two the circumstances had changed, and it was Bruce who went on the attack, steamrolling his spearmen into the English, who could not properly deploy thanks to the water courses. It was this replay of Stirling Bridge that ultimately gave Bruce victory at Bannockburn.

It's only a movie: Conclusion

Historical accuracy in movies is currently being questioned more than ever, particularly in the media,⁷⁵ and while some historians are vocal about their distaste of historical cinema, perhaps because they do not trust the viewing public to distinguish fact from fiction,⁷⁶ others, including the present author, embrace it and regard historical cinema as a valid pathway into history. Indeed, the present author has even gone so far as to suggest, albeit tentatively, that *Braveheart*, which is in part based on an unreliable medieval text, could be regarded as a source for our times, which like Blind Harry's poem requires knowledge of the period for the viewer to appreciate its good points, and hopefully this chapter has assisted in that regard.⁷⁷

What this chapter has not had the opportunity to consider is the fantasy genre, and its relationship to both medieval movies and history. A number of historians have pointed out the similarities between the clan feuds in *Game of Thrones* and the fifteenth-century *War of the Roses*.⁷⁸ The creators of the series have talked of having other conflicts in mind when they put together the Battle of the Bastards, with Agincourt providing the inspiration for the arrow storm and pile of bodies that builds

up as the battle progresses, but with the encirclement by the shield wall inspired by the Battle of Cannae, 216 BCE.⁷⁹ Like the Battle on the Ice in *Alexander Nevsky*, the Battle of the Bastards succeeds in demonstrating the effectiveness of disciplined bodies of spearmen against infantry lacking missile weapons, but it is also similar in that it fails to do the same when it comes to repulsing horsemen, when the men of the Vale charge to the rescue.

If it was possible to highlight just one fantasy scene relevant to the current discussion, it would be the Battle of the Mounds in *Conan the Barbarian* (1982), which like some of the scenes previously touched upon plays out in a stone circle. Here Conan and his comrade take on a dozen or so mounted men, with the leader of the band wearing a horned helm that is a practically replica of the one worn by the commander of the Teutonic Knights in *Alexander Nevsky*. The scene very effectively shows how reducing the battle space by picking the terrain and modifying it, and using the spear, can equalize combat between foot soldiers and cavalry. On the grounds of the mechanics of battle, it is in some respects of equal educational value as those scenes which aspire to historical accuracy in films such as *Outlaw King*.

Pierre Sorlin has pointed out that when considering film the historian should be looking at how history is understood and portrayed in the contemporary world, rather than spotting inaccuracies.⁸⁰ In a recent comment in reaction to *Mary Queen of Scots* (2018),⁸¹ Steven Reid, a historian of the period, has pointed out that looking for inaccuracies in the film is largely pointless, as even historians cannot agree on many of the facts of her life.⁸² There is merit in both of these viewpoints, and it is hoped that this chapter has looked beyond what's right and what's wrong to demonstrate that cinema portrayals of medieval battle not only can play a valid educational role but can also feed into a debate on the nature of warfare in the medieval era, with the focus here being particularly on the First Scottish War of Independence.

As previously mentioned, the most serious historical error, deliberate as it is, in *Outlaw King* is the appearance of Prince Edward at the Battle of Loudon Hill. Following the release of the film, the present author was congratulated by a fellow historian on its accuracy, and when asked whether the appearance of Edward at Loudon Hill detracted from his appreciation, his response was 'well, it's only a movie isn't it?'. The follow-up to this statement is often 'it's not a documentary is it?', which on the one hand, wrongly assumes that documentaries are always true to history, while on the other, excuses cinematic forays into the past for their inaccuracies. We should not forget, though, that they can also be entertaining, thought-provoking, inspirational and fun. Further to this, the foregoing has hopefully demonstrated that although movies are riven with error and inaccuracy, even some of the worst offenders can offer up vignettes or snapshots of something that approximates an accurate and illuminating depiction. Pulling these nuggets from what can be pretty thick mud does, however, require an understanding of what to look for, and this is what makes movies a potentially rewarding learning tool. For the historian, finding fault in *Braveheart* is like shooting fish in a barrel (with a bow of course). It is much more of a challenge perhaps to find the good in it, but shouldn't the work of the historian be just that, a challenge?

Appendix

Films mentioned in chapter ('the box set')

Title (Year of release) Director

The Adventures of Robin Hood (1938) Michael Curtiz and William Keighley

Alexander Nevsky (1938) Sergei Eisenstein

Alfred the Great (1969) Clive Donner

Ben Hur (1925) Fred Niblo

The Black Knight (1954) Tay Garnett

Braveheart (1995) Mel Gibson

The Bruce (1996) Bob Carruthers and David McWhinnie

A Canterbury Tale (1944) Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger

Centurion (2010) Neil Marshall

Chimes at Midnight (1965) Orson Welles

Conan the Barbarian (1982) John Milius

The Crusades (1935) Cecil B. DeMille

El Cid (1961) Anthony Mann

Excalibur (1981) John Boorman

Game of Thrones TV series (2011–19) Various Directors

Gladiator (2000) Ridley Scott

The Golden Horde (1951) George Sherman

Henry V (1944) Laurence Olivier

Henry V (1989) Kenneth Branagh

The Hollow Crown (2012–16) Various Directors

Ironclad (2011) Jonathan English

Ivanhoe (1952) Richard Thorpe

King Arthur (2007) Antoine Fuqua

Kingdom of Heaven (2005) Ridley Scott

Knights of the Round Table (1953) Richard Thorpe

Krzyzacy (1960) Aleksander Ford

LotR: Fellowship of the Ring, The Two Towers, Return of the King (2001–3) Peter Jackson

Mary Queen of Scots (2018) Josie Rourke

The Messenger (1999) Luc Besson

Monty Python and the Holy Grail (1975) Terry Gilliam and Terry Jones

Outlander (2014–) various directors

Outlaw King (2018) David MacKenzie

Prince Valiant (1954) Henry Hathaway

Quentin Durward (1955) Richard Thorpe

Robert the Bruce (2019) Richard Gray

Robin and Marion (1976) Richard Lester

Richard III (1955) Laurence Olivier

Saving Private Ryan (1998) Steven Spielberg

Spartacus (1960) Stanley Kubrick

Stalingrad (1993) Fyodor Bondarchuk

Star Wars (1977) George Lucas
300 (2006) Zack Snyder
The 300 Spartans (1962) Rudolph Maté
Troy (2004) Wolfgang Peterson
The Viking Queen (1967) John Chaffey
The Vikings (1958) Richard Fleischer
The War Lord (1965) Franklin J. Schaffner
War and Peace (1964) Sergei Bondarchuk
Waterloo (1970) Sergei Bondarchuk

Notes

- 1 Director David MacKenzie cut twenty minutes from the film following its critical reception at the festival in October 2018, prior to its appearance at the London Film Festival and then its premier on Netflix in November 2018. The film was the highest budget film produced by Netflix up to that time.
- 2 Initial involvement with the film, which included an aerial reconnaissance of Bannockburn with David MacKenzie, predated it going into production by almost two years.
- 3 *Outlander* is based on a series of historical fantasy novels by American author Diana Gabaldon, and concerns a female character who travels back in time from the 1940s to the 1740s where she becomes embroiled in the Jacobite rebellions.
- 4 The other members of the *Outlaw King* historical advisory team were Scott MacMaster (who went on to have most input), Callum Watson and Euan Loarridge. Other specialists, including Dr Toby Capwell, were called upon as and when required.
- 5 Lewis Knight, 'Outlaw King Review: Chris Pine Leads "An Elegy for Scottish Independence"', *Mirror* online, 18 October 2018; Gabriella Geisinger, 'Outlaw King on Netflix Reviews: What Do Critics Say about the Netflix Historical Drama?', *Express* online, 11 November 2018; 'Outlaw King: Historical Analysis Review', Crimes Against Medieval Realism YouTube Channel, 2018.
- 6 The terms 'film' and 'cinema' are used as interchangeable terms throughout this chapter to refer to cinematic productions.
- 7 Willy Maley, 'Braveheart: Raising the Stakes of History', *The Irish Review* 22 (1998): 70.
- 8 Tim Edensor, 'Reading *Braveheart*: Representing and Contesting Scottish Identity', *Scottish Affairs* 21 (1997): 135–58; Michael D. Sharp, 'Remaking Medieval Heroism: Nationalism and Sexuality in *Braveheart*', *Florilegium* 15 (1998): 251–66; Sally J. Morgan, 'The Ghost in the Luggage: Wallace and *Braveheart*: Post-Colonial "Pioneer" Identities', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 2 (1999): 375–92.
- 9 The screenwriter Randall Wallace (no relation) loosely based *Braveheart* on the epic poem, *The Wallace*, written by the fifteenth-century minstrel and poet known as Blind Harry. The work was composed in the 1470s, around 170 years after Wallace's death. It has been edited by Anne McKim, *The Wallace: Selections* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2003).
- 10 These include John Aberth, *A Knight at the Movies: Medieval History on Film* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003); Richard Burt, *Medieval and Early Modern Film and Media* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2008); Anke Bernau and Bettina

- Bildhauer (eds), *Medieval Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Tison Pugh (eds), *Queer Movie Medievalisms* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009); Martha W. Driver and Sid Ray (eds), *The Medieval Hero on Screen: Representations from Beowulf to Buffy* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2004); Laurie A. Finke and Martin B. Shichtman, *Cinematic Illuminations: The Middle Ages on Film* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2010); Andrew Elliott, *Remaking the Middle Ages: The Methods of Cinema and History in Portraying the Medieval World* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011); Kevin Harty, *The Reel Middle Ages: American, Western and Eastern European, Middle Eastern and Asian Films about Medieval Europe* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006).
- 11 Nickolas Haydock and Edward L. Ridsen (eds), *Hollywood in the Holy Land: Essays on Film Depictions of the Crusades and Christian-Muslim Clashes* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009).
 - 12 Peter Burkholder, 'X Marks the Plot: Crossbows in Medieval Film', *Studies in Popular Culture* 38, no. 1 (Fall 2015): 19–40.
 - 13 'War in Other Worlds: Battles in Fantasy and Science Fiction', keynote address at the 'War through Other Stuff' Conference, Edinburgh, February 2017 and 'From Agincourt to Game of Thrones: Fantasy and Reality in Cinematic Portrayals of Medieval Warfare', Public Talk, Dresden Military Museum, June 2017.
 - 14 Stonehenge features in *Knights of the Round Table* and *The Black Knight* (1954), while ancient stones also stand in *The War Lord* (1965), *Alfred the Great* (1969), *Excalibur* (1981) and *King Arthur* (2007), and there are other examples. These mock-stone monuments carry in their hollow cores a variety of ideas and messages, including Britannia and its ancient landscapes, continuity of tradition and authority, mysticism and magic, and also change and uncertainty – the lovemaking of a peasant couple in a stone circle is violently interrupted by the arrival of Danes at the start of *Alfred the Great* and stones are pulled down in *The Black Knight*.
 - 15 If these 1950s movies were entries in a fancy-dress contest, then the prize for the funniest costume would go to Alan Ladd in *The Black Knight* from 1954. In this, Ladd wears a chainmail T-shirt, over which is strapped a badly fitting white leather cuirass, with the visor-fitted helmet topped off with tall wings, the latter at times giving him the look of a prototype Batman.
 - 16 As will be noted later, the two forms of conflict were often associated, but field battles between two armies were high-risk undertakings and avoided if at all possible. See Adrian Jobson and James Ross, 'Medieval Warfare: Sources and Approaches'. The National Archives Media Player, 29 January 2010.
 - 17 Siege scenes of note appear in films such as: *The Crusades*, *Ivanhoe*, *The Vikings*, *The War Lord*, *El Cid*, *Robin and Marion*, *Excalibur*, *Robin Hood*, *The Messenger*, *Kingdom of Heaven*, and *Outlaw King*.
 - 18 It is perhaps noteworthy that *Stalingrad* was directed by Fyodor Bondarchuk, son of Sergei Bondarchuk, who directed not only *Waterloo* but also the 1964 movie version of *War and Peace*.
 - 19 This would in any case be unethical as historic battlefields represent hallowed ground, though some re-enactments do take place on actual sites, with the annual event at Waterloo being a prime example (where the dropping of good quality replica objects such as buttons also serves to confuse the archaeological record).
 - 20 Bruce Eder, *Richard III*, 2003. <https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/316-richard-iii> (accessed 12 February 2019).
 - 21 Eder, *Richard III*.

- 22 Glenn Foard and Anne Curry, *Bosworth 1485: A Battlefield Rediscovered* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2014).
- 23 Donald Ostrowski, 'Alexander Nevsky's "Battle on the Ice": The Creation of a Legend', *Russian History* 33 (2006): 308.
- 24 Frank Miller and Lynn Varley, *300: Story & Art* (Milwaukie, OR: Dark Horse Comics, 1999).
- 25 Coring by geomorphologists has established that the battlefield as it existed in 480 BCE is today buried beneath around 20 metres of geological deposits, with the seashore now 4 to 5 kilometres from the former pass. Rapp, in a summary of his coring project, states that the pass was between 10 and 20 metres wide at the 'Middle Gate' and that there was no cliff delineating the boundary between land and sea. He is content that the depiction of the topography in *The 300 Spartans* was reasonably accurate: George Rapp, 'The Topography of the Pass at Thermopylae Circa 480BC', in *Beyond the Gates of Fire: New Perspectives on the Battle of Thermopylae*, ed. Christopher Matthew and Matthew Trundle (Barnsley and Havertown, PA: Pen & Sword, 2013), 39–60.
- 26 James MacInnes and David Harrower, *Lion Rampant, a Screenplay* (typescript of unpublished script 2014).
- 27 Archie A. Duncan (ed.), *The Bruce, by John Barbour* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1997). Although written about seventy years after Bannockburn, this epic poem is an important source for anyone wishing to understand the First War of Scottish Independence. It was composed to flatter Robert the Bruce and his descendants and so should be approached with that in mind, but Barbour would have had access to recollections and documents that have long since disappeared (Duncan's translation from Old Scots is accompanied by an invaluable critical commentary).
- 28 Not many viewers are likely to notice that, given the position of the hill, the Scots in the film are facing east rather than west, as they would have been according to the most logical reading of the Barbour account, which would have the English coming from Ayr.
- 29 The footings for this medieval bridge which has long since been replaced can still be seen today as piles of stones breaking the surface of the water at times of very low tide. (The Forth even this far inland is a tidal river.)
- 30 The author has heard it said that there is no bridge as the film's budget did not allow for it. Gibson in his director's commentary to the 25th edition DVD, which is frustratingly uninformative throughout, makes no reference to the presence or absence of a bridge.
- 31 Irish locations and Irish Defence Force extras were also used in *Henry V* (1944), *The Viking Queen* (1967) and *Alfred the Great* (1969), while the island of Ireland continues to be a favourable location for productions such as *Game of Thrones*.
- 32 The term 'melee' in this sense refers to disorganized hand-to-hand fighting among massed combatants, using close quarter weapons such as spears, swords and axes. While it did occur in medieval battle, it is usually the dominant phase in cinematic portrayals.
- 33 Sean McGlynn, 'The Myths of Medieval Warfare', *History Today* 44 (1994), accessed via website of *De Re Militari: The Society for Medieval Military History*. In this paper he traces this view back to Charles Oman's 1885 *Art of War in the Middle Ages* and its reduction of medieval battle to melee, where the sword-wielding knight was the main form of combatant.
- 34 Roger Ebert, *Chimes After Midnight Review*, 2006. <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/great-movie-chimes-at-midnight-1965> (consulted 10 February 2019).

- 35 Like Bosworth in Olivier's *Richard III* (1955), the battle was filmed in Spain, but the wooded location and winter chill give it more of a flavour of an English battlefield. Also featured in the scene is the winching of heavily armoured knights onto horses, a myth that possibly has its popular roots in a similar scene in Olivier's *Henry V*, and from which Welles possibly took his cue.
- 36 John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (London: Pimlico Military Classics, 1976), 70–1.
- 37 In 1976 Keegan cited S. L. A Marshall's 1947 now somewhat discredited work *Men against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command*, to make this point, but David Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2009) also examines these issues.
- 38 Matthew Strickland and Robert Hardy, *The Great Warbow: From Hastings to the Mary Rose* (Stroud: Sutton 2005), xviii.
- 39 There is a similar scene in *El Cid* where Muslim and Christian armies face one another across a river as the commanders advance through the water. The two men, one of them the Cid, embrace, and to cheers the two armies rush into the river to greet one another.
- 40 Amputee stunt performers became so in demand, through films like *Gladiator*, *Troy* and *Saving Private Ryan* that an agency called Amputees in Action Ltd was formed in 2004.
- 41 'Outlaw King Will Feature Some of the Bloodiest Battle Scenes in Cinema History', *Scottish Sun* online, 19 November 2017.
- 42 Thanks to the Second World War there was not much in the way of medieval cinema appearing in the 1940s – though Olivier's *Henry V* in 1944 is an obvious exception. That year, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's masterpiece, *A Canterbury Tale* was also released. The film quickly switches from a medieval to contemporary setting, with the arrival of US troops in rural England prior to D-Day as the backdrop. In the memorable opening scene a medieval falconer's hawk transforms into a swooping Spitfire.
- 43 It is not just old movies where the melee lacks conviction – one need only look beyond the principals in the foreground of the climactic battle in 2004's *King Arthur*, to see paired extras going through a series of unconvincing choreographed motions.
- 44 Susan McCarthy, 'Hollywood's Long History of Animal Cruelty', *Salon* online, 2 April 2012.
- 45 Gwynne Watkins, 'Fires, Crashes, and Fascism: The Crazy Story Behind the Making of 1925's "Ben-Hur"', *Yahoo Entertainment* online, 2016.
- 46 Strickland and Hardy, *The Great Warbow*, 181.
- 47 Strickland and Hardy, *The Great Warbow*, 181.
- 48 Hannesjoachim Wilhelm Koch, *Medieval Warfare* (London: Bison Books, 1978), 55.
- 49 The film was released on the 550th anniversary of the battle and broke records for audience size in Poland, which demonstrates its important role in the national narrative.
- 50 The film delivers one of the funniest medieval lines outside of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975), when a lady-in-waiting comments, 'What a pity it is that the good old days of chivalry will never come back. What station we ladies used to hold. What magnificent slaughters were held in our honour.'
- 51 Burkholder, 'X Marks the Plot'.
- 52 Besson in mentioning the culverin might be doing nothing more than demonstrating he knows cannon were used, but in not showing them he is still playing safe with audience reaction.

- 53 Elliott, *Remaking the Middle Ages*, 182.
- 54 Nickolas Haydock, *Movie Medievalism: The Imaginary Middle Ages* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008).
- 55 What became known as Greek fire is thought to have appeared in the seventh century CE, though an earlier form might have existed. It was probably a type of light crude oil known as Naphtha, which was originally pumped through nozzles at the target but was also launched in ceramic containers – as occurs in *Outlaw King*. See Clifford J. Rogers (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Medieval Warfare and Military Technology*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 221–2.
- 56 In *The Crusades* (1935), the Saracen (Ayyubid) defenders ignite a huge vat of oil on the battlements of Acre before pouring it down on the crusader attackers with devastating results. However, pouring the oil and then igniting it might have been a safer way to accomplish this as far as the defenders are concerned. Health and Safety concerns notwithstanding, this siege scene, like that in *Kingdom of Heaven*, is set at night and with its massive engines and fireballs still ranks as one of the most spectacular ever filmed.
- 57 The practicality of fire arrows in open battle has been questioned, though it is accepted that they might have been practical in some more enclosed spaces against flammable targets: Lindybeige, YouTube episode, 'Fire-Arrows', 2016.
- 58 Michael Penman, *The Scottish Civil War: The Bruces & the Balliols & the War for Control of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Tempus 2002), 51.
- 59 Strickland and Hardy, *The Great Warbow*, 163.
- 60 'Schiltron', or 'schiltrom', is the term given to the massed bodies of spearmen which characterized Scottish tactics in the Wars of Independence. The term does not tend to be used in reference to the Battle of Stirling Bridge, where a single massed body of spearmen seems to be the impression most historians have of the Scottish force there. However, this author believes that schiltrons, with their required cadres of Non-Commanding Officers (NCOs) were deployed there – it is unlikely that the discipline and synchronized timing required to deliver the attack would have been possible without them.
- 61 Strickland and Hardy, *The Great Warbow*, 52.
- 62 A number of sieges related to the Scottish wars of independence gave rise to field battles as a by-product of attempts to relieve them. Examples include, the Battle of Dunbar (1296), as the Scots tried to relieve the English siege of Dunbar Castle; the Battle of Bannockburn (1314), as the English tried to relieve the Scottish siege of Stirling Castle; and the Battle of Halidon Hill (1333), as the Scots tried to relieve the English siege of the town of Berwick.
- 63 Stephen Knight, 'A Garland of Robin Hood Films', *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 29, no. 3–4 (1999): 37.
- 64 Ryan Gilbey, 'John Mollo Obituary: Star Wars Costume Designer Who Dressed Darth Vader', *The Guardian* online, 1 November 2017.
- 65 The phases of combat are (1) German cavalry charge; (2) Melee with Russian infantry; (3) Intervention of Russian reinforcements; (4) German defensive battle with shield wall; (5) Sally of German sword and buckler men, with ensuing melee; (6) Retreat of sword and buckler men behind shield wall; (7) Breaking of shield wall and further melee; (8) Single combat between Nevsky and commander of the Teutonic Knights; (9) Nevsky's victory prompts German rout, with many of them falling through the ice.
- 66 Eder, *Richard III*.

- 67 Towton is one of the few medieval battlefields in Britain where arrowheads have been recovered by archaeologists.
- 68 David Whetham, *Just Wars and Moral Victories: Surprise, Deception and the Normative Framework of European War in the Later Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 137.
- 69 Strickland and Hardy, *The Great Warbow*, 181.
- 70 David Harrower, James MacInnes and David MacKenzie (with revisions by Bathsheba Doran), *The Outlaw King: Lion Rampant* (typescript of unpublished script, 2016).
- 71 The Director of *Outlaw King*, David MacKenzie, was concerned that the present author, as adviser on the film would be unhappy with this conclusion. The reality was that there was no other option but to sit back and see what the audience and the critics had to say about it. As it was, these liberties taken with history did not seem to mar too many people's experience of the film. What is worrying here, though, is that many might not have been aware of the reality and are now convinced that Edward II fought at Loudon Hill.
- 72 If there is any justice, this will come with the sequel to *Outlaw King*. The battle did appear in the crowd-funded 1996 film, *The Bruce*, which featured a somewhat worse-for-wear Oliver Reed as Archbishop Wishart – Ridley Scott would give him a late flowering in *Gladiator*, but alas he was to die during the production and famously appeared in his later scenes as a CGI rendition. *The Bruce*, however, was an amateurish affair, with the battle looking like little more than a Sunday afternoon re-enactment. A further offering, *Robert the Bruce*, with Angus MacFadyen reprising his role from *Braveheart*, was scheduled for release at the time of this chapter going to press.
- 73 Tony Pollard, 'A Battle Lost, a Battle Found: The Search for the Bannockburn Battlefield', in *Bannockburn, 1314-2014: Battle & Legacy: Proceedings of the 2014 Stirling Conference*, ed. Michael Penman (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2016): 74–96.
- 74 Tony Pollard, 'A Conflicted Landscape: The Archaeological Search for the Battle of Bannockburn', *History Scotland* 14 (2014): 32–5.
- 75 Karen Rile, 'Getting Historical Movies Right: Hollywood Versus Historians', *JSTOR Daily* online, 3 February 2015; Clarisse Loughrey, 'Mary Queen of Scots: How Historically Accurate Is It?', *Independent* online, 15 January 2019; Gregory Wakeman, 'Is *The Favourite* Historically Accurate? Here Is What Its Cinematographer Told Us', *Metro* online, 31 January 2019; Alex von Tunzelmann, 'Rewriting the Past: Do Historical Movies have to be Accurate?', *The Guardian* online, 1 February 2019.
- 76 Antony Beevor, for one, has been very vocal in his disdain for Hollywood takes on history, in what he sees as a post-literate world, though he has not commented specifically on the medieval genre: Hannah Furness, 'Antony Beevor: Hollywood's Terrible Historical Ignorance is Extremely Dangerous', *Daily Telegraph* online, 11 March 2016.
- 77 Interview with Tony Pollard recorded in William Wallace pub, Bridge of Allan, for the *The Quest for Bannockburn* programmes. The scene did not appear in the edit broadcast on BBC TV in 2014.
- 78 Tharoor Ishaan, 'How *Game of Thrones* Drew on Wars of the Roses', *The Guardian* online, 29 May 2015; Dan Jones, 'Game of Clones: TV Historian Reveals the Real Stories behind Fantasy Epic *Game of Thrones*', *The Sun* online, 16 July 2017.
- 79 Michael Livingston, 'Getting Medieval on *Game of Thrones*' Battle of the Bastards', *Tor.Com* online, 23 June 2016.

- 80 Pierre Sorlin, *The Film in History: Restaging the Past* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), 19–22.
- 81 The only film referred to in this chapter with a female director (Josie Rourke), evidence if it were needed of the long-standing male dominance of the film industry. Hopefully, this situation is changing, and it will be interesting to see whether this also marks a change in the way that warfare is portrayed in films.
- 82 Steven Reid, 'Mary Queen of Scots: Don't Worry about Movie Accuracy, Historians Can't Agree on Who She Really was Either', *The Conversation* online, 18 January 2019.

A troubled memory

Battles of the First World War

Robert Tombs

The First World War is remembered in Britain as a uniquely poignant tragedy, bearing many meanings, including antimilitarist, internationalist, pacifist, sentimental and nostalgic. In no other European combatant country does it occupy quite this place in national culture, even though most suffered much more severely in loss of military and civilian life, disruption and impoverishment. Some of the reasons are plain. England has never made another military effort on this scale. The only events that approach it – at least those for which we have historical data – are the Civil War of the 1640s and the Napoleonic Wars, which also left long and disputed memories. In this case, there were implications for British society, its solidarity and divisions, and its institutions.¹

Perhaps most important of all, Britain is unique among the European combatants in never having undergone a subsequent trauma – revolution, civil war, dictatorship, defeat, foreign occupation – devastating enough to push 1914–18 into the background or even efface it entirely from popular consciousness. For Britain, alone in Europe, the First World War remains the most appalling event in three centuries.

Memory of the First World War is unusual – perhaps unique in modern times – in focusing overwhelmingly on *battles*; or even on one or two battles (depending on the country that is doing the remembering); or even on an undifferentiated image of ‘battle’, deprived of context or meaning. Although there were several eighteenth-century and the Second World War battles that compare in intensity of violence – Leipzig in 1813 and the Battle of Normandy in 1944, for example – the First World War battles caused cumulatively unprecedented bloodbaths in appalling conditions and rarely for an easily identifiable objective. The First World War also involved the whole nation: the middle classes and respectable working classes now served *en masse*, *saw* the horrors, and many wrote about them. Is there nevertheless a paradox here? For the war affected civilians in new ways – through mass blockade, aerial bombing, food rationing and mass mobilization of women’s labour. Yet all this – unlike in the Second World War – has been almost entirely overshadowed by memories of battle. One reason, surely, is that for Britain the impact of the war on civilians was relatively mild: poorer people ate better, for example, and the female death rate fell – unlike in Germany, where it rose by

51 per cent. So even for civilians, battle was their main trauma: one household in three suffered a casualty; one in nine a death.²

This was the last war to be represented and recalled mainly in words. There was from 1914 onwards a vast and diverse popular literature of the war in all countries, both romanticized and realistic, including songs, adventure stories, love stories, spy thrillers (for example those of John Buchan, the only ones remembered today), plays and children's stories. However, the English war literature that we remember now (of which more later) – is primarily poetry.³

In every country the war inspired floods of verse from romantic patriotism to black despair: some 2,225 poets were published in Britain alone. Some of the most powerful came from established writers far removed from the trenches, including Thomas Hardy, W. B. Yeats and Rudyard Kipling, and continuing after the war in modernist works by Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot. Even A. E. Housman's 1890s elegies took on a poignant retrospective meaning ('And there with the rest are the lads that will never be old') and were set to music by George Butterworth (killed in 1916).⁴ Verse was a natural medium for educated young English officers – the famous trench newspaper the *Wipers Times* joked in 1916 about the 'insidious disease' of poetry: 'Subalterns have been seen with a notebook in one hand, and bombs in the other absently walking near the wire in deep communion with the muse.'⁵

Poetry and painting could create starkly dramatic images. War artists, many officially appointed to the army, included both modernists such as Richard Nevinson or Paul Nash and traditionalists such as the portraitists William Orpen and John Singer Sargent.⁶ The latter's frieze-like yet highly naturalistic line of men blinded by gas is one of the most powerful visual images of the war.⁷ Poetry, more than novels or plays, have retained immediacy, power and accessibility – for example for teaching in schools – not least because most used traditional forms. Moreover, they are more amenable than long prose works to changing readings over the years. For example, paintings and poems were often later interpreted as 'anti-war' statements, though their creators and their first audiences saw them rather as tributes to the immense sacrifices of British soldiers in a terrible but just war.⁸

The Germans and French made a greater mark with autobiographical novels and slightly fictionalized memoirs, mostly realist in style, able to record more complex experiences, ideas and emotions. Several of these entered the canon, but others have recently been discovered. The most famous wartime and immediately post-war novels were French: Henri Barbusse's *Le Feu: journal d'une escouade* (awarded the Prix Goncourt in 1916) and Roland Dorgelès's *Les Croix de bois* (awarded the Prix Fémina in 1919); and perhaps the German Ernst Junger's *Storm of Steel* (1920). Novels – unlike most war poetry – could deliver an explicit and powerful political message, and in the French case, it was a radical one.

And yet, as Jay Winter, a distinguished historian of wartime culture, has pointed out, in France the war had and still has a far clearer meaning than in Britain: it was a war of liberation, to expel the invader who was also the traditional enemy, and therefore it cannot easily be dismissed as futile or meaningless, as is commonplace in Britain. He argues that 'remembering the Great War in France frequently entails speech acts of a different kind and character from those attending remembrance in

Britain ... the language used to honour the living and the dead who went through the war is different today and has been different in France and in Britain ever since the war', with far greater readiness to talk of *la gloire et le martyre*.⁹

Could it be, paradoxically, that *because* the war was fought on French soil, and for the liberation of France, *rejection* of this war for a Frenchman necessarily required a more radical rejection of the nation and of its glorification – or at least of the grubby reality of its political and social institutions. In short, you would have to say 'France's freedom was not worth this horror'. Hence, French war novels are more politically radical and even nihilistic than literary works in Britain. Barbusse became a Communist. The most nihilistic – and stylistically radical – of all, Céline, became a rabidly anti-Semitic fascist.¹⁰

Every genre of war art – more, surely, than in any previous war – aimed to confront civilians and non-combatants with the reality of war in the trenches. It has become a commonplace that civilians had no appreciation of the suffering of soldiers, didn't want to know, and instead satisfied themselves with patriotic platitudes such as 'The old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est / Pro patria mori*'.¹¹ This stereotype owes something to the anti-civilian venom of some of Siegfried Sassoon's writings:

I'd like to see a Tank come down the stalls,
Lurching to ragtime tunes or 'Home Sweet Home',
And there'd be no more jokes in Music-halls,
To mock the riddled corpses round Bapaume.¹²

But this has recently been disputed by Adrian Gregory. In reality, he says, contemporary civilian accounts demonstrate a fairly high degree of knowledge about conditions in the trenches. Home leave and frequent letters – in 1916 some 11 million letters and 875,000 parcels were being sent to the troops every month – maintained close contact, and civilians were painfully aware of the dangers and sacrifices of the soldiers.¹³ A film, *The Battle of the Somme* (1916), which gave a fairly realistic view of the trenches, was seen by 20 million people in six weeks. One of them was the prime minister Lloyd George's secretary, Frances Stevenson, whose brother had been killed. She wrote in her diary, 'I have often tried to imagine myself what he went through, but now I *know*, and I shall never forget.'¹⁴

The English soldier poets were not pacifists: they accepted the necessity of the war – 'the foul tornado, centred at Berlin', in Wilfred Owen's words.¹⁵ Several were decorated for gallantry, and some enjoyed the excitement, at least at times. Siegfried 'Mad Jack' Sassoon, who won the Military Cross, noted in his diary on the first day of the Somme that men were 'watching the show and cheering as at a football match', and he later described it as 'great fun'.¹⁶ But they felt they had to make people aware of what soldiers were suffering, impelled by agonizing survivors' guilt, made more acute by the strong sense of camaraderie that affected most men, and the special sense of responsibility upper-class officers learnt to feel for their soldiers:

But the kind, common ones that I despised
(Hardly a man of them I'd count as friend),
What stubborn-hearted virtues they disguised!¹⁷

Sometimes they felt guilt at killing. Sassoon wrote to a friend during the battle of the Somme that 'I chased 40 Bosches [*sic*] out of a trench ... all by myself. Wasn't that a joyous moment for me? They ran like hell and I chucked bombs and made hunting noises.'¹⁸ But that very same day he wrote this:

One says 'The bloody Bosche has got the knock;
And soon they'll crumple up and chuck their games,
We've got the beggars on the run at last!'
Then I remembered someone that I'd seen
Dead in a squalid, miserable ditch,
Heedless of toiling feet that trod him down.
He was a Prussian with a decent face,
Young, fresh and pleasant, so I dare to say.
No doubt he loathed the war and longed for peace,
And cursed our souls because we'd killed his friends.¹⁹

These mixed feelings contributed to the 'war to end war' resolve: that the only justification of these horrors and iniquities was that they should create a better, peaceful world. This can be seen in Wilfred Owen's sonnet addressed to an artillery piece – a necessary evil to be renounced once victory was won:

Reach at that Arrogance which needs thy harm
And beat it down before its sins grow worse ...
But when thy spell be cast complete and whole,
May God curse thee, and cut thee from our soul!²⁰

Hence the euphoric optimism that greeted President Woodrow Wilson's idealistic call for 'a peace without victory ... a peace between equals',²¹ to create a new world. This led to widespread public support for the League of Nations and various other ideas of federal and world government, and for disarmament. These sentiments were particularly strong in Britain throughout the interwar years, and even after the next war had begun.

The ways in which the war was publicly commemorated in Britain,²² with the emphasis not on victory but on mourning, helped to fix a certain memory for later generations: Lutyens's dignified Cenotaph, which Kipling called 'the place of grieving' (7 miles of wreath-laying mourners came to its inauguration); the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey (visited by 1 million people in its first week in 1920); the vast carefully planned war cemeteries; and Armistice Day with its funereal ceremony of remembrance led by the monarch. All emphasized collective mourning, sacrifice, the idea of the irreparable 'lost generation', recalled during the two-minute silence:

For those minutes, tell no lie:
(Grieving – grieving!)
Grave this is your victory;
And the sting of death is grieving!²³

Although only a minority – albeit a large one – had suffered directly, it was felt that all should share their grief. Celebrations, for example Victory Balls, were soon stopped as inappropriate. The contrast may be seen in France, which suffered double the loss of life, and where people had directly experienced terrible losses of freedom, security and property, but where the war, as noted earlier, was clearly one of national liberation. So France has always celebrated the Armistice with a public holiday and a victory parade, and its Unknown Soldier rests under Napoleon's Triumphal Arch.

British plans had been made for mass memorials well before the end of the fighting, and it was decided to place memorials where the soldiers – 600,000 – had been killed and buried, which meant that there were to be around 900 British Empire military cemeteries in France, some vast, marking the sites both of great battles, some tiny, on the sites of smaller actions. So carefully designed memorials to the dead – without any reference to victory, no triumphal arches or columns as in earlier wars – became the *only* permanent memorials, the only form of coherence and legibility given to those vast wildernesses of slaughter.²⁴

But many families had wanted the bodies of their loved ones brought home for burial (as the French did, as many village cemeteries show). This was resisted essentially for practical reasons and on grounds of cost. Failing that, many wanted to provide individual memorials of their choice. But British war graves, placed under a single body, adopted a uniform policy. The bodies of soldiers would remain where they had originally been buried. All would have standard headstones (again designed by Lutyens) in order to confer 'equal honour'. These bore a brief inscription and regimental badge and were placed in ranks, like an army of the dead. This too was at first highly and emotionally controversial. But very soon the sites were being visited by more than 100,000 people per year, often bereaved families and former soldiers and their families. Organized tours and guidebooks appeared, including a series of Michelin guides and a book entitled *How to See the Battlefields*. The British Legion organized a visit of 15,000 people to Ypres in 1928.²⁵ Twinning of British and French towns was also an aspect of commemoration at this time as devastated towns and villages were adopted by towns in Britain, the Dominions and the United States, which raised funds and gave direct help. For example, Newcastle adopted Arras; Sheffield, Bapaume; Llandudno, Mametz; Birmingham, Albert – often places where local regiments had fought.

Yet these specific and local 'sites of memory' inevitably created a fragmented and divergent 'memory' of the war in the different countries, even among Allies. Their dead were buried separately, as they had usually fought separately. French memory was concentrated on Verdun, and British largely on Ypres and the Somme: separate memories and separate grief tended to marginalize or even ignore the efforts, sacrifices and sufferings of other nations.

Why Verdun, the Somme and Ypres? Essentially because they were accumulatively the most bloody – there were three battles of Ypres – and where the largest number of soldiers had been engaged: almost every French regiment spent time at Verdun. So these were presumably the places where most bereaved relatives and survivors went. The nature of the war on the Western Front – perhaps the nature of modern war itself – meant that battles spread out over vast, featureless areas, and so perhaps it was difficult to find anything to focus on except cemeteries. This very sense of a devastated,

featureless, disorienting, inhuman environment of mud and ruin is precisely what the war literature expresses, a dehumanized landscape often described as 'lunar', where tens of thousands of soldiers simply disappeared – the Thiepval arch bears the names of 72,000 men who were officially 'Missing' at the Somme. Though at Verdun there were particular features of the battlefield – forts, hills, the town of Verdun itself – that do give some meaning and legibility, the dominating feature is nevertheless the Ossuary, begun in 1920 and containing the mass of bones of 130,000 unidentifiable French and German soldiers.

But it would, in theory, have been possible to commemorate victories – after all, there *were* victories, even in the First World War – the Marne in 1914 and again in 1918, or Amiens in 1918. But these have largely been eclipsed from memory and commemoration (unlike in the Second World War, where the D-Day beaches, for example, embody a very different kind of memory). The majority who had supported the Great War as a stern necessity, and the minority who had opposed it, had equal reason to emphasize its horrors, to advocate a new world united in consigning war to 'a dead past' – the words of King George V when he opened the Imperial War Museum in 1920.²⁶

Changes in the way the war was remembered have their own chronology, which differs from country to country. Most British people who lived through the war saw it as a struggle against German 'militarism', worthwhile because it would create a better world. What undermined this were less the events of 1914–18 than what happened subsequently. During the late 1920s, peace, disarmament and security through the League of Nations seemed at last to have hopes of succeeding. But suddenly, optimism collapsed amid economic disaster, international tension and in the 1930s renewed conflict. So the very idealism of the war turned on itself in bitter disillusion.

This disillusion grew in several stages. First, the Versailles Treaty failed to match idealistic hopes of reconciliation which had been articulated towards the end of the war. Even the British Cabinet was unanimously critical, most on practical, some on moral grounds. Youthful diplomats too were outraged: 'This bloody bullying peace is the last flicker of the old tradition', wrote Harold Nicolson, 'we young people will build again.'²⁷ To do so they set up an Institute of International Affairs. A fellow of King's College, Cambridge, John Maynard Keynes, an economic adviser at the peace conference, gave disillusion a powerful voice in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, a mixture of financial calculation and vehement polemic. In the opinion of one French critic, no book since Burke's *Reflexions on the Revolution in France* had wielded 'such a widespread and immediate influence ... over the destinies of Europe'.²⁸

Keynes was pugnacious in style and argument: 'If we take the view that ... our recent enemies ... are children of the devil, that year by year Germany must be kept impoverished and her children starved and crippled, and that she must be ringed round with enemies; then ... heaven help us all.'²⁹ His assertion that Germany was being treated with undue harshness became the progressive orthodoxy. So from the very beginning of the post-war period there was a strong 'appeasement' current across the political elite. This inevitably had its effect on recasting the war as futile, wasteful and a betrayal of 'the lost generation' who had given their lives. The war to end war had culminated in what Keynes condemned as 'a peace to end peace'.

Heart-searching was intensified by an interstate war of propaganda that immediately followed the Versailles Treaty. Its notorious Clause 231 (the so-called 'War Guilt Clause' or *Kriegsschuldfrage*) declared that Germany and Austria-Hungary were mainly responsible for the war – a view broadly endorsed by most (though not all) modern historians.³⁰ This was bitterly contested by the new German government in a campaign orchestrated by a special section of the foreign ministry which tried to shift the blame on to the Russians and the French. The new Bolshevik government cooperated in this effort to blame the war on the imperialist powers, especially Russia's ancient regime. Nearly a century later, the terms of the debate have changed little, and while infinitely less impassioned, they still have some political implications. For example, the newspaper *Die Welt* (4 January 2014) welcomed historical studies (the most distinguished by the Regius Professor of the University of Cambridge³¹) denying Germany's prime responsibility for the war, hoping this would facilitate a less inhibited German foreign policy.

The view that all states carried some blame for the war was accepted by many in Britain and France as a necessary part of post-war reconciliation. Lloyd George famously said that the nations had 'slithered' into war. But of course this fundamentally challenged the view of probably the majority about the war itself: rather than being a moral war against militarism and aggression, it became for critics a squalid struggle between cynical elites – such as those 'hard-faced men', in Keynes's famous phrase, 'who look as if they had done very well out of the war'.³² Even Rudyard Kipling, who had supported the war and was deeply involved in the official commemorations, could condemn it as a crime, as in his searing two-line epitaph:

If any question why we died,
Tell them, because our fathers lied.³³

That the war was indeed based on lies was asserted by Arthur (later Lord) Ponsonby, a Germanophile Liberal MP, pacifist and later Labour minister, in a very influential book entitled *Falsehood in War-Time* (1928), which a recent scholar describes as itself marked by contentious interpretations and even fabrications.³⁴ Ponsonby asserted that Britain and France had lied about the causes of the war, and that reports of German atrocities were myths or deliberate falsehoods. His aim was to show 'the blatant and vulgar devices [used] to prevent poor ignorant people from realizing the true meaning of war', and he concluded that 'none of the common herd ... will be inclined to listen to the call of their country once they discover the polluted sources from whence that call proceeds'.³⁵ Only in 2001 did historical research decisively prove that accounts of German atrocities in 1914, which Ponsonby dismissed, were largely true.³⁶

Also in the 1920s, powerful attacks began on British military commanders. Until then, the generals had been undisputed heroes: the commander-in-chief Douglas Haig's funeral in 1922 brought out crowds of mourners on the same scale, notes a recent historian, as for Princess Diana.³⁷ Winston Churchill was the first major critic, in his *World Crisis* (1923–31),³⁸ which in careful but effective wording blamed British generals for carnage on the Western Front – partly self-defence against criticism of his own Gallipoli disaster. More explicit criticism came in the early 1930s from David

Lloyd George in his memoirs.³⁹ One index entry reads, 'Military mind: regards thinking as a form of mutiny'.

The tenth anniversary of the Armistice seems to have occasioned a new wave of powerful artistic works, including plays, novels, memoirs and films re-emphasizing its horrors. R. C. Sherriff's play *Journey's End* (1928) showed large theatre and radio audiences the inhuman stresses of the trenches, and, set in a dugout, created one of the stereotypes of the Western Front – though the author, who had served in the trenches, denied any propagandist intention. The German Erich Maria Remarque's novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929), which did have a clearer message, was an international bestseller that became the first major 'talkie' war film in 1930. It showed German soldiers as human beings suffering in the same way as the British. The memoirs of Robert Graves (1929) and Siegfried Sassoon (1930), and the poetry of Edmund Blunden, Graves, Sassoon, Owen and others (edited in the late 1920s and early 1930s by Blunden⁴⁰) also appeared at this time.

The onset of the Great Depression, and then soon after that the rise to power of the Nazis in Germany, gave even more urgent reasons to reject war. Both left- and right-wing newspapers published gruesome photographs of trench warfare to 'make the blood of the most bigoted war-monger run cold'.⁴¹ Warmongers were by now in a small minority, at least in most countries. The international peace movement was probably strongest in Britain,⁴² where it spread across ages, classes and parties and attracted unparalleled mass involvement in which women (prominently Vera Brittain) were particularly active. A World Disarmament Conference of fifty-nine states met in Geneva in February 1932, the object of hopes, prayers and millions of petitions. But disarmament was a tricky issue. It gave a platform to Germany, which, although it was secretly rearming, was legally under restraints, and it demanded 'equal treatment', for which Ramsay MacDonald's government thought it had 'strong moral backing'.

In January 1933, while the Disarmament Conference was in session, Adolf Hitler, supported by some 40 per cent of the electorate, became head of a coalition government and soon seized sole power. The new regime continued to press for 'equal rights', and Hitler put on a convincing show of being a man of peace. But on 14 October Germany walked out of the conference, left the League of Nations, denounced the Versailles disarmament clauses, reintroduced conscription and began to triple the size of the army. One of Hitler's constant themes had been the iniquity of the Versailles Treaty, and many thought that this explained his rise. As the *Manchester Guardian* saw it, 'the Nazi revolution' was an outcome of 'brooding over the wrongs of Germany'. The Labour *Daily Herald* even welcomed his reintroduction of conscription as 'bright with hope', a sign that 'the poison of Versailles is at last draining from [Europe's] blood'.⁴³

So Hitler's arrival did not precipitate a change of heart in Britain. On the contrary, 'collective security', appeasement and disarmament seemed ever more urgent. The Oxford Union voted in a much reported debate a month after Hitler came to power to 'refuse under any circumstance to fight for King and Country'. The successful proposers argued that 'the war to end war' had produced only unemployment and spending on armaments. In October 1933 the Labour Party conference supported a similar motion to 'take no part in war and to resist it with the whole force of the Labour Movement'. At a by-election in East Fulham on 25 October 1933, just after Hitler had walked out of

the Disarmament Conference, the Tories were beaten by a peace candidate. It took, of course, a long and painful process of failed 'appeasement' to convince public opinion (especially its progressive element) in Britain and France that war might have to be faced again – though there remained a convinced, if dwindling, anti-war and pacifist core, including some famous names, at least until the summer of 1940.

On the other hand, there was an attempt in the late 1930s to revive the solidarity of the First World War alliance between France and Britain. In 1937, Sir Thomas Beecham and the London Philharmonic Orchestra performed Elgar, Delius and Berlioz in Paris. The Cambridge University Madrigal Society followed. In 1938, an exhibition of British paintings was held at the Louvre. In July there was a successful royal visit. An *Ode à l'Angleterre* was run up, paying tribute to 'English soldiers lying beneath white crosses'. A huge monument to Britannia was unveiled where the first BEF units had disembarked in 1914 at Boulogne. (It was later blown up by the Germans.) In July 1939, the Grenadier Guards marched down the Champs Élysées. The intention was to stress the democracies' shared cultural, historical and political heritage. This was the avowed aim of the Cannes Film Festival, set up in 1939 to rival Mussolini's Venice festival. The French cultural attaché asked for Alexander Korda's patriotic spectacular *The Four Feathers* to be shown there instead of at Venice. This story of a British officer who abandons the army because he is afraid of war, but recovers to become a hero, clearly resonated in the circumstances. So did Marcel L'Herbier's lavish *Entente Cordiale* (1939). This romanticized history of the pre-1914 Anglo-French rapprochement, scripted by the Anglophile novelist André Maurois, gave a flattering portrait of Edward VII, 'the greatest of diplomats' and stressed the historical necessity of Anglo-French solidarity.⁴⁴

The actual onset of war in September 1939 certainly awakened personal and collective memories of the First World War. People made comparisons with events three decades earlier. Some had flashbacks – the British general Alan Brooke, at a Franco-British wreath laying at the war memorial at Lens during the 'Phoney War', remembered over twenty years earlier giving orders 'to shell this self-same square'.⁴⁵ Sir Edward Spears, on a liaison mission, saw the French prime minister's mistress in red pyjamas and recalled that 'I had not seen red trousers on French legs since 1914' – when the French infantry still wore their traditional *garance* breeches.⁴⁶ Some soldiers and politicians wondered whether their own country and its allies had the same level of determination or patriotism as in the earlier war – echoes of the 'lost generation' idea. A British general 'could not help wondering whether the French are still a firm enough nation to again take their part in seeing this war through'.⁴⁷ The French had corresponding worries: their commander-in-chief Gamelin believed that '1914-18 has shown that one must always keep large French forces alongside the ... British. Whenever these were removed, they had to be rushed back in times of crisis.' He deployed the strongest element of France's strategic reserve on the BEF's left, to discourage a possible British rush for the ports – a disastrous decision.⁴⁸ Memories of the devastation and oppressive German occupation during the First World War no doubt explain the huge 'exodus' of civilians from northern and eastern France when the Germans invaded again in 1940. Churchill, meeting his pessimistic French counterparts, invoked the victorious alliance of the First World War and offered to unite the two states as a 'Franco-British Union'; he quoted a

First World War speech by the French prime minister Georges Clemenceau: 'We shall fight before Paris, we shall fight in Paris, we shall fight behind Paris.' A few days later he made his own most famous speech, surely inspired by Clemenceau: 'We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing-grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills.' But the Anglophobic Marshal Pétain's bitter response was 'You, the English, were done for [in March 1918]. But I sent forty divisions to rescue you. Today it's we who are smashed to pieces. Where are your forty divisions?'⁴⁹ He ordered the French army to stop fighting and established a collaborationist regime. But civilians under German occupation in the north of France, liberated by British troops in 1918, seem to have kept their confidence in Britain. The police reported that 'the people of the Nord now await a new 1918 ... their hope of salvation is England.'⁵⁰ Rebuttals of Anglophobic government propaganda often referred back to the earlier war. One underground newspaper referred to 'the great voice' of the British dead of 1914–18 'who contradict, Pétain, your criticisms of today'. Armistice Day saw gatherings at British war cemeteries and the distribution of leaflets: 'Have confidence, the English will rescue us, and France will be France again.' People wore red roses on the king's birthday.⁵¹ And four years later during the 1944 Liberation, the historian Richard Cobb, then a soldier, found 'enormous friendliness', many houses displaying photographs of British soldiers billeted with them in 1918.⁵²

Yet inevitably, the experience of the Second World War came to overshadow, if not obliterate, memory of the First World War. It seems that for a generation people simply stopped visiting the First World War cemeteries. When the historian Martin Middlebrook first visited the Somme in the 1960s to research his pioneering book *The First Day of the Somme*, published in 1971, there were no guidebooks, and he encountered no other visitors. But the memory of the First World War was about to revive. As often happens, an anniversary – the 50th – played a part: it produced a powerful and widely watched twenty-six-part BBC TV series, *The Great War* (1964), which used archive footage and sound effects to bring the horrors of trench warfare to a vast new audience. The zeitgeist of the 1960s was particularly receptive.

The Great War series evoked indignation and pity. So did Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem* (first performed in 1962 by German, Russian and English singers), with texts from the First World War poets, especially Wilfred Owen. Owen was only widely discovered in the 1960s – his work had been excluded from the 1936 *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* by its editor, W. B. Yeats, who considered it 'unworthy of the poet's corner of a country newspaper'.⁵³ Paul Fussell's seminal *The First World War and Modern Memory* (1975) – which the author said was inspired as much by the Vietnam War as the First World War – canonized the English war poets, Owen, Graves, Sassoon and Blunden; and it has been suggested that Owen is now the most studied poet in the language in English schools.

There was also mockery, fitting the anti-Establishment 1960s, both for the left (such as the socialist Joan Littlewood, director of the satirical musical *Oh What a Lovely War*, 1963, filmed in 1969) and the right (the proto-Thatcherite Alan Clark, author of a debunking military history, *The Donkeys* (1961), one of Littlewood's sources). The Oxford historian A. J. P. Taylor, in *The First World War: An Illustrated History* (1963), dedicated to Joan Littlewood, combined sarcasm and scholarship. The 1989 television

series *Blackadder Goes Forth* took up this theme, featuring endless attacks aimed to 'move [Haig's] drinks cabinet six inches closer to Berlin'. This use of black comedy seems to be uniquely British – it would be unthinkable in France, and probably meaningless elsewhere.⁵⁴ But in England, as a reviewer of *Oh What a Lovely War* commented, 1914–18 has become 'a sitting target for anyone who wants to deliver a bludgeoning social criticism without giving offence'.⁵⁵

From as early as the 1970s, there has been a revisionist current, essentially among academic military historians, led today by Brian Bond, Gary Sheffield and William Philpott. In a nutshell, their target has been the 'lions led by donkeys' (or perhaps the *Blackadder* or perhaps even the Lloyd George) image of the war: the belief that callous and incompetent British commanders repeatedly threw away thousands of lives in futile and stupid offensives. Instead, they have argued that the British learnt how to fight a new kind of mechanized war on an unprecedented scale, and that that they did so successfully. After all, they did win in the end with an unstoppable but costly offensive in 1918, when nearly two-thirds of the soldiers in the front line in August had become casualties by November, among them Wilfred Owen. The revisionist argument takes on the whole post-1960 or post-1930 legend of the war as a meaningless and undifferentiated carnage in the mud: carnage it was, they agree, but not meaningless. However, this is only arguable by accepting that the inescapable logic of the First World War was attrition: to fight battles essentially to kill enemy soldiers – as the German chief of staff General von Falkenhayn put it, to bleed the enemy white. And that rather takes us back to Barbusse, Dorgelès, Remarque, Sassoon and Owen. And whatever historians argue, a few lines of Owen outweigh a shelf of monographs.

The memory of the First World War shows little sign of losing its potency. It is constantly reinterpreted in novels (such as those by Sebastian Faulks and Pat Barker), plays and films (such as *Warhorse*), increasingly fanciful and sentimentalized and ever more remote from the lived reality of those who endured the war, mostly believing that it was just and necessary. As one veteran wrote in the 1960s, 'No, it wasn't like that. We ... did not feel so doom-laden, so utterly disenchanted. We thought we were fighting in a worthy cause and had no idea that our efforts would one day appear ... as merely absurd'.⁵⁶ As the approach of the 2014 centenary demonstrated, even to suggest that they might have been right could arouse strong emotions. Michael Gove made the comment that it had been 'a just war ... seen by participants as a noble cause ... defending the western liberal order'. This brought an outraged response from his shadow, Tristram Hunt (a professional historian),⁵⁷ and disdain from Cambridge's former Regius Professor, Sir Richard Evans, who suggested, rather optimistically, that pre-war Germany was more democratic than Britain and that during the course of the war it was rapidly moving towards full democracy.⁵⁸ Thus are replayed, in modified form, the arguments of the 1920s.

The years 1914–18 now represent, at least in Britain and to a lesser extent in France, a vision of horror unencumbered by purpose, meaning or consequence. How many people able to quote a line from Wilfred Owen could give a rough explanation of why the war started, why Britain joined in or what its consequences were? This disembodied memory of the battles in the trenches as a timeless, mythical quintessence of 'War' perhaps helps us to juggle our own ambivalence about war and violence. Everyone can

express their horror of the First World War. This makes it easy to be anti-war without being pacifist – without having to grapple with difficult questions about the morality or justification for war today.⁵⁹

Notes

- 1 The pre-eminent medieval comparison would be with the Battle of Hastings, which although a much smaller military effort, profoundly changed England and likewise bears many meanings.
- 2 An excellent general study of the war's effects on the nation as a whole is Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). On the demographic impact, the classic study is J. M. Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, 2nd edn (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).
- 3 This too has its echoes in the Anglo-Saxon period, which customarily 'wrote' battles in verse: not just the well-known *Battle of Maldon* but also the *Fight at Finnsburh*, *Waldere*, the *Battle of Brunanburh* and the *Capture of the Five Boroughs*. These poems are edited by George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: A Collective Edition*, 6 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931–1953) and are available in translations such as that of S. A. J. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: An Anthology of Old English Poems* (London: Dent, 1982).
- 4 'The Lads in Their Hundreds', *A Shropshire Lad* (1896).
- 5 *The Wipers Times* (20 March 1916), 45.
- 6 For an overview, see M. R. D. Foot, *Art and War: Twentieth Century Warfare as Depicted by War Artists* (London: Headline, 1990).
- 7 John Singer Sargent, 'Gassed' (1918), Imperial War Museum. Here again we find a medieval parallel in the brutal images of violence and robbery associated with the Battle of Hastings, as depicted in the frieze-like Bayeux Tapestry.
- 8 David Reynolds, *The Long Shadow: The Great War in the Twentieth Century* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 172–9.
- 9 Jay Winter, 'Cultural Divergences in Patterns of Remembering the Great War in Britain and France', in *Britain and France in Two World Wars: Truth, Myth and Memory*, ed. Robert Tombs and Emile Chabal (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 161–77.
- 10 See his *Casse-Pipe* and *Voyage au bout de la nuit*.
- 11 Owen, 'Dulce et Decorum est', drafted October 1917. For a modern collected edition of Owen's poetry, see *The Poems of Wilfred Owen*, ed. Jon Stallworthy (London: Chatto & Windus, 1990).
- 12 Siegfried Sassoon, 'Blighters', 1917. For a modern collected edition of Sassoon's war poems, see *The War Poems*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Faber, 1983).
- 13 Gregory, *The Last Great War*, 133; Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Jean-Jacques Becker (eds), *Encyclopédie de la Grande Guerre 1914–1918*, 2 vols (Paris: Perrin, 2012), I, 431.
- 14 Reynolds, *Long Shadow*, 341.
- 15 Owen, '1914' (written 1914, revised 1917–18).
- 16 William Philpott, *Bloody Victory: The Sacrifice on the Somme and the Making of the Twentieth Century* (London: Little Brown, 2009), 178–80; Jean Moorcroft Wilson, *Siegfried Sassoon: The Making of a War Poet* (London: Duckworth, 1998), 268.
- 17 Sassoon, 'Conscripts', 1917.

- 18 Wilson, *Siegfried Sassoon*, 269.
- 19 Sassoon, 'A Night Attack', 1918.
- 20 Owen, 'On Seeing a Piece of Our Heavy Artillery Brought into Action', written 1917–18.
- 21 Address to US Senate, 22 January 1917.
- 22 Gregory, *The Last Great War*, 208–20. See also Reynolds, *Long Shadow*, 179–85.
- 23 Rudyard Kipling, 'London Stone: Nov. 11 1923', 1923.
For a modern collected edition of Kipling's poetry, see *Rudyard Kipling: The Complete Verse*, ed. M. M. Kaye (London: Kyle Cathie, 1990), 665–6.
Likewise, the monument erected by William of Normandy after the Battle of Hastings – Battle Abbey – did not emphasize victory; it symbolized contrition and atonement for the notably unchivalric conduct of the fighting.
- 24 See Tim Skelton and Gerald Gliddon, *Lutyens and the Great War* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2008).
- 25 Captain Atherton Fleming, *How to See the Battlefields* (London: Cassell, 1919); Jean-Jacques Becker et al. (eds), *Guerre et cultures, 1914-18* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1994), 413–14, 419–24.
- 26 Reynolds, *Long Shadow*, 209.
- 27 Harold Nicolson, quoted in Anthony Lentin, *Lloyd George and the Lost Peace: From Versailles to Hitler* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 74.
- 28 Etienne Mantoux, *The Carthaginian Peace, or The Economic Consequences of Mr Keynes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), 6.
- 29 John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (London: Macmillan, 1920), 250–1.
- 30 Though not all: notably Stefan Schmidt, *Frankreichs Außenpolitik in der Julikrise 1914* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2009) and Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (London: Allen Lane, 2012). For the more orthodox view, see Annika Mombauer, *The Origins of the First World War: Controversies and Consensus* (London: Longman, 2002) and Gerd Krumeich, *Juli 1914: eine Bilanz* (Paderborn: Schoeningh, 2013).
- 31 Clark, *Sleepwalkers*.
- 32 Keynes, *Economic Consequences*, 133.
- 33 *A Choice of Kiplings Verse*, ed. Thomas Stearns Elliott (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), 164.
- 34 Gregory, *The Last Great War*, 41.
- 35 Arthur Ponsonby, *Falsehood in War-Time* (New York: Dutton, 1928), 9, 25–6.
- 36 John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).
- 37 Brian Bond, *The Unquiet Western Front: Britain's Role in Literature and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 47–8; Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2005).
- 38 *The World Crisis*, 6 vols (London: Butterworth, 1923–31).
- 39 *War Memoirs*, 6 vols (London: Nicholson and Watson, 1933–6).
- 40 For details, see Reynolds, *Long Shadow*, 343–6.
- 41 Beaverbrook Press, in Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain and the Crisis of Civilization* (London: Penguin, 2010), 184–5, 425 n. 36.
- 42 Reynolds, *Long Shadow*, 223–4.
- 43 David Dutton, *Neville Chamberlain* (London: Arnold, 2001), 198; Michael Howard, *War and the Liberal Conscience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 97.

- 44 For an overview, see Robert Tombs and Isabelle Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy: The French and the British from the Sun King to the Present* (London: William Heinemann, 2006), 514–38.
- 45 Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke, *War Diaries 1939-1945*, ed. Alex Danchev and Daniel Todman (London: Phoenix, 2001), 43.
- 46 Edward Spears, *Assignment to Catastrophe*, 2 vols (London: William Heinemann, 1954).
- 47 Alanbrooke, *War Diaries*, 13.
- 48 Letter of 6 February 1940, in Pierre Rocolle, *La Guerre de 1940*, 2 vols (Paris: Armand Colin, 1990), I, 282–3.
- 49 Charles de Gaulle, *The Complete War Memoirs*, trans. J. Griffin and R. Howard (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1998), 65.
- 50 Police report, November 1940, kindly communicated to the author by Professor Annette Becker.
- 51 de Gaulle, *The Complete War Memoirs*, 65.
- 52 Richard Cobb, *Paris and Elsewhere: Selected Writings*, ed. David Gilmour (London: John Murray, 1998), 29–30.
- 53 John Horne and Edward Madigan (eds), *Towards Commemoration: Ireland in War and Revolution 1912–1923* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2013), 134.
- 54 I once saw *Blackadder* on late-night French television, dubbed into French: after a while, I had the strange feeling that it was being presented as serious drama.
- 55 *The Times* (21 March 1963), in Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory*, 109.
- 56 Quoted in William Philpott, *Attrition: Fighting the First World War* (London: Abacus, 2015), 347–8.
- 57 *Daily Mail* (2 January 2014), response to it by Tristram Hunt, *The Observer* (5 January 2014).
- 58 *The Guardian* (13 July 2013 and 6 January 2014).
- 59 Conversely, the Battle of Hastings, which is re-enacted every year in sanitized, family-friendly fashion, allows participants and onlookers to be vociferously partisan without fear of being criticized as nationalists, classists or bloodthirsty ogres. It is one battle that endures in British memory but that has lost its horror.

Afterword

The companionship of battle-writers

Brendan Simms

'Confess', the poet begins, 'it's my profession that alarms you. This is why few people invite me to dinner.' Things have moved on since Margaret Atwood wrote these lines in 'The Loneliness of the Military Historian' more than twenty years ago.¹ The 'new military history' has taken scholars further and further into society and culture, and social and cultural historians in turn have engaged ever more with armed conflict. It is in this spirit that this splendid volume offers an interdisciplinary and highly innovative perspective on warfare and memory in Northern Europe.

War, as John Keegan, the author of the classic, *The Face of Battle* once said, is a 'process'. It takes place within a social context and has social consequences. It is, as Rory Naismith writes in this volume, a 'social enterprise'. He shows that London, not yet the nation's capital, was a city made by war, just as – one might add – the city made war. Its 'accessibility and connectivity' played a central role in the defence of Anglo-Saxon England and was thus crucial to the development of early English statehood. Its position as a financial hub, so widely noted today, was recognizable even then. The 'process' character of war is also very much evident in identity formation, for example – as Natalia Petrovskaja points out – in the construction of a 'Christian' versus a 'Saracen' identity during the Crusades, which were fought not only against Muslim infidels in the Holy Land but also against pagans in the Baltic. War was also, as Matthew Strickland shows, central to the formation of English identity during the Anglo-Saxon period.

But war is, of course, also an event, or a series of events, and the bulk of this book is concerned with 'battles' – how they were remembered as much as how they were fought. There is a natural tendency to focus on battles because they are discrete events and apparently easier to interpret than wars. 'Tony prefers battles', the narrator in Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride* tells us, because 'in a battle there are right actions and wrong actions and you can tell them apart by who wins'.² There is a lot in this idea, but things are also more complicated. For one thing, it is not always clear who won a battle. Sometimes, as with Southey's little Peterkin, people cannot recall what the fighting was actually about, but only that 'twas a famous victory'. Sometimes, as with the hero of Stendhal's *Charterhouse of Parma*, the protagonists are not even sure there has been a battle at all.

Besides, as Elizabeth Ashman Rowe demonstrates, battles were not always about fighting and victory. Military prowess was not necessarily a virtue, if it was deployed in an

unjust cause. The negotiation and reconciliation which followed the battle could be more important than the glory of victory itself. As Jenny Benham shows, this was particularly relevant in the case of civil wars or fratricidal strife. Chroniclers of the battle of Assandun (1016), at which Cnut worsted Edmund Ironside, emphasized the resulting peace as being desired by both sides. Likewise, there was no sense of triumph in the contemporary Nithard's account of the Battle of Fontenoy during the traumatic Carolingian civil wars, after which 'they buried friends and enemies alike, the faithful and the faithless'.

Above all, as several contributors make clear, what we would today call the 'kinetic' contest on the battlefield itself was often secondary to a much more important struggle about how the event was to be remembered. Battle narratives form a key component in the construction of the medieval Irish past, as Máire Ní Mhaonaigh discusses. Sometimes the remembering began before the first arrow was loosed. King Alfred, Matthew Strickland tells us, criticized 'the bad conduct of those writers who – in their sloth and in carelessness and also in negligence – leave unwritten the virtues and deeds of those men who in their day were most renowned and most intent on honour'. Perhaps this is why King Olaf of Norway took no chances at the Battle of Stiklestad in 1030. He placed his court poets just behind the shield wall and told them, in the words of the chronicler Snorri, 'You shall be here and see the events that here take place. You will then not have to rely on verbal reports, for you will report them [i.e. the events] and compose about them later.' Reading this, I was reminded of the care Hitler took to have the 1942 summer campaign in Russia, which he expected to be a resounding success, recorded for posterity by a specially dedicated team of chroniclers. He issued a special decree containing the 'basic instructions for the military-historical treatment of the Greater German liberation struggle'.³ 'Embedded' journalists or historians, it would seem, were not unknown in the Middle Ages.

In the 'battle after the battle', naming was a critical field of contestation. This was, first of all, an act of interpretation. Some English sources, we learn, called the Battle of Bannockburn the 'Battle of Stirling', because it was really that castle which was in contention. I was reminded here of the Battle of Waterloo, which was first christened 'Mont St. Jean' by Napoleon on account of the hamlet's importance that day; the town of Waterloo itself, which is some distance away, had nothing to do with the battle. Naming is also, secondly, an act of appropriation, by which the namer lays claim to the event in some way. It is, as Robert Bartlett shows, a way of asserting ownership, if not over the battle itself, then at least over the contested terrain. In this sense, the local French remembered the (for them) disastrous battle of Agincourt as 'the day of the English', suggesting that the victors were interlopers whose presence there that day required explanation. The same might said of the 'Norwegians' at Stamford Bridge.

Central to the process of remembrance is the process of recording. 'I write things down the way they happened,' Atwood's lonely military historian claims, 'as near as can be remembered'. Very often this was quite some time after the events themselves. Medieval 'oral' sources, as Elizabeth Ashman Rowe reminds us, are folk memories written down at some distance from, often hundreds of years after, the events they are describing.

One of the paradoxes of battle-writing is that visiting the place of strife does not necessarily reveal very much; it may even lead scholars astray. 'In the interest of

research', Atwood's military historian writes, 'I have walked on many battlefields that were once liquid with pulped men's bodies and spangled with exploded shells and splayed bone.' 'All of them', she continues, 'have been green again by the time I got there'. In some cases, the battlefield has physically changed out of all recognition with the passage of time. The classic case here again is Waterloo, where extensive burials and other earth movements have resulted in a rather different topography. 'They have ruined my battlefield', the duke of Wellington is said to have exclaimed when he returned to the site of his greatest triumph.⁴ In other cases, for example the battles of Hastings and *Brunanburh*, there is even considerable doubt as to where the battle actually took place.

That said, as Natalia Petrovskaia shows, the medieval past is less of a foreign country than we often make out. She vigorously resists the 'othering' of the Middle Ages as a sink of obscurantism, ignorance, backwardness and brutality. (I was reminded here of the Quentin Tarantino character in *Pulp Fiction* who threatens to 'get medieval' on the 'ass' of his unfortunate victim.) In fact, Petrovskaia argues, educated men in the Middle Ages did not think of the world as flat, and their cartographical efforts, which sought to 'depict time as well as space', deserve far more respect than they are accorded today. In general, this volume refreshingly tends to reduce the gulf between the present and the past which, for all their differences, have some very familiar features.

The link between present and past also features strongly in a number of other contributions. It was of course a connection made very strongly during the Middle Ages themselves, when the feats of old were mobilized in support of the struggle of the day. The Normans, we are told, advanced into battle at Hastings with the cry 'remember Roncevalles'. Later ages, in turn, remembered medieval battles. As the British armies assembled in northern France in 1914 near the site of the battle of Agincourt, for example, one newspaper recalled that 'England has yet greater wars today, and her sons again stand embattled in the very fields where noble Plantagenet with his "band of brothers" snatched overwhelming victory from the very jaws of disaster'. Thirty years later, as the landing craft neared the Normandy beaches, one British officer sought to inspire his men by reading out Henry V's famous speech before Harfleur, when Shakespeare has him exhort the men 'unto the breach once more'.⁵

Finally, some battles leave an enduring legacy. That of the First World War, with its iconic clashes at Gallipoli and the Somme, is explored by the modern historian Robert Tombs. He shows how the memory shifted from an acceptance of a necessary struggle to pacificism and the futility of war, and then back again, via recent revisionist studies of strategy. Tony Pollard, for his part, looks at the way in which medieval battles, in particular Bannockburn, are remembered in film. Here Mel Gibson's *Braveheart* has been much criticized for taking enormous liberties with historical fact. Pollard does not excuse these, but he tends to see the glass here as half full rather than half empty, pointing out that films on medieval themes greatly increase interest and indeed demand for expertise. His chapter is also full of curious facts, for example that there is such an increasing demand for genuine amputee actors that they have their own agency to represent them.

Some may cavil at the relative absence of women in this story. They shouldn't, because it simply reflects the sources. Atwood's *Robber Bride* is, in its own way, a piece

of feminist military-historical fiction. The principal belligerents are the women; the men are rather hapless civilians, sometimes fought over, sometimes merely collateral damage caught in the crossfire. Yet even Tony, who would dearly like to write a study of female military commanders – ‘iron hands, velvet gloves’ – has to admit that ‘there isn’t much material.’⁶ Others may object to this collection’s Eurocentricity, but as Tony points out to one critic of her graduate course, ‘of course it’s Eurocentric ... what do you expect in a course called Merovingian Siege strategy?’⁷ In the same spirit, this volume would be guilty as charged, but then what do you expect from a book about ‘warfare and memory in Northern Europe’!

Notes

- 1 Margaret Atwood, *Morning in the Burned House* (London: Virago 1995).
- 2 Margaret Atwood, *The Robber Bride* (London: Bloomsbury 1994), 554.
- 3 Brendan Simms, *Hitler: Only the World Was Enough* (London: Penguin 2019), 464.
- 4 Quoted in Brendan Simms, *The Longest Afternoon: The 400 Men Who Decided the Battle of Waterloo* (London: Allen Lane 2014), 76.
- 5 Quoted in Brendan Simms, *Britain’s Europe: A Thousand Years of Conflict and Cooperation* (London: Allen Lane 2016), 145 and 169.
- 6 Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 557.
- 7 Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 24.

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