Remembering the Vikings in Thirteenth-Century England and Denmark

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In 1240, Matthew Paris recorded in the *Chronica Majora* that:

> rumour abounded in England that the Danes were preparing to invade the kingdom. This did not, however, happen, for the ships loaded with men and women were sent elsewhere in order to repopulate, cultivate and occupy the lands that the Mongols had devastated.[1]

In the entry for 1241, Matthew returned to the subject of the Danes and their ambitions against England. Matthew had learned that the powerful king of Denmark, the elderly Valdemar II (r. 1202–41), had passed away that year:

> Valdemar, the king of the Danes, he who had been bold enough to threaten to invade England, while indulging in arrogant threats of this sort, passed away after having ruled for forty years. In order that he should experience the power of the prayers of St Edward, which that saint had poured out before God for the defence of the English against the tyranny of the Danes, the same king's only son and heir had gone the way of all flesh and the realm of Denmark was left defenceless.

Later, probably sometime before 1251, Matthew returned to this story and added further information at the bottom of the folio, concerning Valdemar's victories over the pagans in the eastern Baltic. He also corrected the claim that the son who had predeceased Valdemar II, the young Valdemar III, was his father's only heir. In fact, Valdemar had three other sons, the two oldest of whom, Erik IV 'Ploughpenny' (r. 1241–50) and Abel (r. 1250–2), were now at war with each other.[2]

[1] *Chron. Maj.,* iv, p. 9. This essay has previously been presented as a paper at the University of Aarhus and at the Thirteenth Century England Conference at the university of Cambridge. I am grateful to the audiences at both events for their comments. I owe thanks to Kasper H. Andersen, Richard Cole and Susan Raich for answering questions and discussing the topic with me. I am especially grateful to Thomas Heebøll-Holm for reading and commenting upon an earlier version of this article and to Carl Watkins for his comments on the final version.

[2] *Chron. Maj.,* iv, pp. 92–3, since Erik IV Ploughpenny is referred to as still being alive the entry must have been authored before rumours of his death in 1250 reached Matthew. Erik's death is incorrectly recorded in *Chronica Majora* under the year 1251, *Chron. Maj.*, v, p. 223. On the Danish campaigns in the Baltic, see E. Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades*, 2nd edn. (London: Penguin, 1997); I. Fonnesberg-Schmidt, *The Popes and the Baltic Crusades, 1147–1254* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); J.H. Lind, C.S. Jensen, K.V. Jensen and A.L. Bysted,

Although Valdemar II was dead and the rumoured invasion never took place, Matthew remained interested in the subject. He returned to it in the *Historia Anglorum* (c. 1250–5), an abbreviated version of the *Chronica Majora*, offering more details about the Danish claims and their preparations for the invasion of England.[3] Allegedly, Valdemar II had, 'in his last days gathered a fleet and an army for the invasion of England, which he claimed belonged to him by ancient right'.[4] That Matthew retained the invasion story here is interesting, given that the *Historia Anglorum* otherwise significantly reduced the number of anecdotes relating to developments outside England.[5] In his last years, c. 1255–9, Matthew produced a new and still more abbreviated version of the *Chronica Majora*, the *Abbreviatio chronicorum*. Once again, Matthew included the stories of the Danish invasion plans describing how the Danish king had brought 'the terrible vengeance of Edward the Confessor' upon himself by daring to threaten England. Matthew, however, did not just copy his earlier versions of the story but updated his information about subsequent developments in Denmark: instead of Erik IV and Abel the claimants to the Danish throne were now identified as Abel and the youngest of Valdemar II's sons, Christopher (r. 1252–9). This probably reflects the fact that Matthew had by then learned how Christopher had eventually taken the throne after the deaths of Erik and Abel.[6]

Matthew's information about the situation in Denmark can be confirmed in outline by other sources: Valdemar II had indeed ruled for almost forty years, from 1202 to his death on 28 March 1241.[7] His eldest son and junior co-king, Valdemar III, had predeceased him, although that had happened already ten years previously, in 1231.[8] Civil war erupted between Valdemar's remaining sons in the wake of their father's death and continued on-and-off until Erik IV's death, allegedly by Abel's orders, in 1250.[9] When Abel died in 1252, the throne passed to the last surviving son, Christopher I.

Matthew's information that a Danish fleet sailed east in 1240 is also corroborated by other sources. A papal letter issued by Pope Gregory IX on 14 December 1240 authorised the Danish bishops to preach a crusade against the heathens who had attacked the Christians in Estonia.[10] As Iben Fonnesberg-

Jerusalem in the North: Denmark and the Baltic Crusades, 1100–1522 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012).

3 For the dating of Matthew's works, see R. Vaughan, *Matthew Paris* (Cambridge University Press, 1958), pp. 61, 113–14.

4 *HA*, ii, pp. 447–8.

5 See B. Weiler, 'Matthew Paris on the Writing of History', *Journal of Medieval History*, 35 (2009), 254–78 at 256, 269.

6 *HA*, iii, p. 283; *Chron. Maj.*, v, p. 223.

7 On Valdemar II's reign, see N. Skyum-Nielsen, *Kvinde og Slave* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1971), pp. 219–322; A.E. Christensen, 'Tiden 1042–1241', in I. Skovgaard-Petersen, A.E. Christensen and H. Paludan (eds.), *Danmarks historie, bind 1. Tiden indtil 1340* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1977), pp. 211–399, esp. 373–99.

8 *Annales Danici Medii Aevi*, ed. E. Jørgensen (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gad, 1920), pp. 108–9.

9 *Annales Danici*, pp. 111–13.

10 *Diplomatarium Danicum, 1:7, 1238–1249*, ed. N. Skyum-Nielsen and H. Nielsen (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 1990), no. 62, pp. 59–61.

Schmidt has argued, the letter was most likely issued in response to appeals for help from Estonia. These would have reached Denmark earlier that year, and it is possible that it was Danish bishops who brought it to the attention of the pope.[11] That a Danish army did make it east in 1240 is attested by the Livonian chronicle, which claims that a 'grand host' of the Danish king participated in the campaign against Novgorod late that year. This host may be identical with the Danish fleet that Matthew informs us turned east in the same year to target the lands devastated by the Mongols.[12] The outline of events presented by Matthew, then, corresponds to what else we know about the situation in Denmark in 1240. The question that this article will investigate is whether Matthew's information about Valdemar II's claim to the English crown and the alleged invasion plan can also be substantiated, or whether we are dealing with a story fabricated or exaggerated by Matthew Paris.

Matthew Paris' information about the alleged Danish threat against England has received scant attention from both Danish and English medieval historians, and has never been the subject of sustained investigation.[13] That is understandable: the thirteenth century saw its share of wars and invasions, and it is no wonder that an aborted conflict like this has escaped attention. It has perhaps also been the casualty of the subdivisions within the modern-day study of medieval history. Historians of tenth and eleventh-century England are highly aware of the connections between England and Denmark, most evident in the North-Sea empire created by Cnut the Great.[14] Historians of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, on the other hand, are much more likely to focus their attention towards the south, to France. As Susan Reynolds remarked at a previous Thirteenth Century England Conference, 'in practice' when historians of medieval England mention "the Continent" they 'often seem to be thinking just of France, or even northern France'.[15] France was of course central to

[11] Fonnesberg-Schmidt, *Popes and the Baltic Crusades*, pp. 208–9.

[12] *Livländische Reimchronik*, ed. L. Meyer (Hildesheim: F. Schöningh, 1876), l. 2082, p. 48. For the suggestion that the campaign against Novgorod and the crusade authorised by Gregory IX were connected, see Lind, Jensen, Jensen and Bysted, *Jerusalem in the North*, pp. 272–6.

[13] It is mentioned in passing in F. Schiern, *Descente en Angleterre projetée par le roi de Danemark Valdemar Atterdag de réunion avec les Francais* (Copenhagen: Thiele, 1860), pp. 13–14. The rumours of Danish threats against England are also mentioned in Lind, Jensen, Jensen and Bysted, *Jerusalem in the North*, p. 281, although without references and with the incorrect suggestion that the planned invasion was rumoured to involve an alliance with the Mongols. Kurt Villads Jensen has confirmed to me in private communication that the source for this is the notice in Matthew Paris under discussion here. I am grateful for his help in my investigation.

[14] See E. Roesdahl, 'Denmark-England in the Eleventh Century: the Growing Archaeological Evidence for Contacts across the North Sea', *Beretning fra seksogtyvende tværfaglige vikingesymposium*, 26 (2008), 7–31; T. Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great: Conquest and the Consolidation of Power in Northern Europe in the Early Eleventh Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2009); T. Bolton, *Cnut the Great* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017).

[15] S. Reynolds, 'How Different was England?', *TCE*, vii, pp. 1–16, 1, but see now, for some examples of works that integrate England into a wider European comparative framework, M.G.A. Vale, *The Princely Court: Medieval Courts and Culture in North-West Europe,*

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781800101135.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

England's political and cultural history in the period, whereas Denmark, for instance, became increasingly peripheral to English concerns. This is felt in the (relative) ignorance of, or confusion about, developments there among those English chroniclers who wrote about Denmark.[16] As evident from the essays in this volume, and the other papers presented at the seventeenth Thirteenth Century England conference, England was not, however, isolated, and news from across Christendom circulated widely. Matthew Paris may have been deeply suspicious of foreigners, but he, as much as the rest of the English elite, knew that the ambitions and decisions of foreign rulers and magnates mattered to the fortunes of England.[17]

Matthew Paris and Denmark

The last decade has seen a great outpouring of interest in the nature and purpose of historical writing in the middle ages. Matthew Paris is, apart from William of Malmesbury, perhaps the English chronicler who has been the subject of most sustained work of this kind.[18] This has deepened and nuanced our understanding of Matthew's writings and his interest in moral lessons, prophecies and wonders. But it has also made it clear that he combined this with the ambition to accumulate correct information and to present this in a chronologically and factually accurate fashion.[19]

1270–1380 (Oxford University Press, 2001); B. Weiler, *Kingship, Rebellion, and Political Culture: England and Germany, c.1215–c.1250* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

16 See L. Kjær, 'Tilfangetagelsen af Valdemar II Sejr i Dunstableårbogen', (Danish) *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 113 (2014), 342–50.

17 For studies of thirteenth-century England's international relations, see, among others, C. Tyerman, *England and the Crusades 1095–1588* (University of Chicago Press, 1988); J.R. Maddicott, *Simon de Montfort* (Cambridge University Press, 1994); D.A. Carpenter, 'The Gold Treasure of King Henry III', in D.A. Carpenter, *The Reign of Henry III* (London: Hambledon, 1996), pp. 107–36; N. Vincent, *Peter des Roches: An Alien in English Politics, 1205-38* (Cambridge University Press, 1996); B. Weiler, 'Matthew Paris, Richard of Cornwall's Candidacy for the German Throne, and the Sicilian Business', *Journal of Medieval History*, 26 (2000), 71–92; B. Weiler, *Henry III of England and the Staufen Empire, 1216–1272* (Woodbridge: Royal Historical Society/Boydell Press, 2012). Nathan Greasley's paper at the *TCE* conference in 2017, 'Matthew Paris and the News from Europe', was particularly enlightening in this respect.

18 B. Weiler, 'William of Malmesbury on Kingship', *History*, 90 (2005), 3–22; S.O. Sønnesyn, *William of Malmesbury and the Ethics of History* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012). See also N.F. Partner, *Serious Entertainments: The Writing of History in Twelfth-Century England* (University of Chicago Press, 1977); C. Given-Wilson, *Chronicles: The Writing of History in Medieval England* (London: Hambledon, 2004) and C.S. Watkins, *History and the Supernatural in Medieval England* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

19 See in particular Weiler, 'Matthew Paris on the Writing of History'; B. Weiler, 'History, Prophecy and the Apocalypse in the Chronicles of Matthew Paris', *English Historical Review*, 133 (2018), 253–83; D.A. Carpenter, 'Matthew Paris and Henry III's Speech at the Exchequer in October 1256', in Carpenter, *Reign of Henry III*, pp. 137–50; D.A. Carpenter, 'Chronology and Truth: Matthew Paris and the *Chronica Majora*', in J. Clark (ed.), *Matthew Paris. Monk, Historian, Artist* (forthcoming), accessible at http://www.finerollshenry3.org.uk/redist/pdf/Chronologyandtruth3.pdf (accessed 10/05/2017); L. Kjær, 'Matthew Paris and the Royal Christmas: Ritualised Communication in Texts and Practice', TCE, xiv, pp.

In the *Liber Additamentorum* (c. 1247–59) Matthew Paris recorded the legendary story of how the relics of his monastery's patron, St Alban, had been captured by the Danes and subsequently returned to England.[20] This story, he noted, he had learned from three 'trustworthy and discreet men', born and educated near St Albans, who had served in the household of Valdemar II for several years. These were Otto, who had been Valdemar's clerk and treasurer, the 'incomparable goldsmith' John of St Albans, and the same John's son, Nicholas of St Albans. The latter, Matthew recorded, had overseen the royal mint for Valdemar and later performed the same task for Henry III. Both John and Nicholas were, furthermore, devotees of St Alban. John had worked on the martyr's reliquary, while his son later donated a ring containing a costly jewel to the monastery.[21] Matthew's information about Nicholas' career can be substantiated by the chancery records: he appears first in 1237 where he acquired the mint in both London and Canterbury.[22] Besides this he also took on other tasks in Henry III's service: performing work on a reliquary for Thomas Becket and serving at the Exchequer.[23] Matthew's interests and experience overlapped in a

141–54. Nevertheless, Matthew was of course, especially where events outside England were concerned, dependent on the quality of his sources. The question is then how well placed a monk from St Albans was to obtain information about events in Denmark? Although the close political ties of the eleventh century had been severed in the aftermath of 1066, there was still a constant traffic of people and news across the North Sea. Danish merchants visited English harbours.*RLC*, i, pp. 335, 419, 600, 613, 617, 638, 642; ibid., ii, pp. 10, 133; *CPR, 1216–25*, pp. 125, 289, 377, 450, 456; *CPR, 1225–32*, p. 59; *CR, 1237–42*, pp. 453, 462. See N. Hybel and B. Poulsen, *The Danish Resources c. 1000–1550: Growth and Recession* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 356–7. Members of the Danish elite, most famously the future archbishop of Lund, Anders Sunesen (c.1167–1228), studied at English schools, while English clerks and monks were invited to take up places in the royal administration or monastic foundations.T. Bolton, 'English Political Refugees at the Court of Sveinn Ástríðarson, King of Denmark (1042–76)', *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, 15 (2005), 17–36; P. Gazzoli, 'Anglo-Danish Connections and the Origins of the Cult of Knud', *Journal of the North Atlantic*, 4 (2013), 69–76; M. Münster-Swendsen, 'Educating the Danes: Anglo-Danish Connections in the Formative Period of the Danish Church, c. 1000–1150', in Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and T. Småberg (eds.), *Friendship and Social Networks in Scandinavia, c. 1000–1800* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 153–73. See now also the contributions in M. Münster-Swendsen, T.K. Heebøll-Holm and S.O. Sønnesyn (eds.), *Historical and Intellectual Culture in the Long Twelfth Century: The Scandinavian Connection* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016). Matthew Paris was on familiar terms with three Englishmen who had done just that.

20 On the disputes over the relics of St Alban, see M. Hagger, 'The *Gesta Abbatum Monasterii Sancti Albani*: Litigation and History at St. Albans', *Historical Research*, 81 (2008), 373–98.

21 *Gesta abbatum monasterii Sancti Albani*, ed. H.T. Riley, 3 vols. (Rolls Series, 1867–69), i, pp. 12–19; *Chron. Maj.*, vi, p. 384. See also B. Weiler, 'Historical Writing and the Experience of Europeanisation: The View from St Albans', in J. Hudson and S. Crumplin (eds.), '*The Making of Europe': Essays in Honour of Robert Bartlett* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 205–43 at 208.

22 *CR, 1234–37*, p. 477.

23 M. Allen, *Mints and Money in Medieval England* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 62; R. Churchill, *Mints, Moneyers and other Mint Officials during the reign of Henry III* (London: Baldwins, 2012), pp. 36–7; J.S. Jensen, 'Nicholas af Saint Albans - Valdemar Sejrs engelske mønt- og pengemand gennem 30 år', *Nordisk Numismatisk Unions Medlemsblad*, 2 (2005), 58–62; J.S. Jensen, 'Two Hoards of Short Cross Sterlings from Ribe, and English

number of ways with this family: he too was an accomplished goldsmith and his interest in the art is apparent in the detailed descriptions, and illustrations, of metalwork found in the *Chronica Majora*.[24] As a monk at St Albans, Matthew of course had an institutional involvement in the cult of St Alban, but his contributions to this went above and beyond the merely routine: sometime before 1240 he had already composed his *vie de Seint Auban*.[25] Finally, in 1248–9, Matthew, like John and his son, crossed the North Sea, although his journey took him to Norway.[26] It is likely that Matthew's acquaintance with John and Nicholas of St Albans was more than a chance encounter, and it has been suggested that they may have been the source for his information about Denmark.[27] Nicholas, at least, had returned to England a number of years before 1240 and was thus in a position to inform Matthew about the arrogant claims that Valdemar II had allegedly been making.

Nicholas of St Alban's connection to the English court is also interesting, for Matthew Paris was not the only one to pay attention to events in Denmark in 1240. The chancery records indicate a sudden spike in interest in Denmark at the royal court during that year. Henry III had been in contact with Valdemar II earlier in his reign: in 1222 he had received messengers from Valdemar, who were sent back with gifts, a golden brooch and a belt, to their master.[28] In 1228 another messenger from Denmark is noted in the Liberate Rolls.[29] For the next twelve years, however, the chancery records betray no signs of contact. But in the summer of 1240 Denmark is mentioned again, and this time it was Henry III who was sending his men east. On 18 July Henry ordered the port of Yarmouth to prepare a ship for a journey to Denmark to carry Henry's messengers Geoffrey Fitz Guy and Adam of Conteshalia.[30] It is possible that Yarmouth was unable to fulfil the order, for a week later a similar command was issued to the port of Dunwich.[31] Five months after that another messenger was commanded to go to Denmark: on 15 December Henry issued a letter to Bartholomew of Howden to go to Denmark and Saxony as the king's messenger and to buy falcons for the king in the same places.[32] On 30 January, Henry ordered that the citizens of

Merchants in Denmark in the Middle of the Thirteenth Century', in B. Cook and G. Williams (eds.), *Coinage and History in the North Sea World, c.500–1250: essays in honour of Marion Archibald* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 477–86 at 481–2.

24 Vaughan, *Matthew Paris*, p. 20.

25 Ibid., p. 177; F. McCulloch, 'Saints Alban and Amphibalus in the Works of Matthew Paris: Dublin, Trinity College MS 177', *Speculum*, 56 (1981), 761–85.

26 See B. Weiler, 'Matthew Paris in Norway', *Revue Bénédictine*, 122 (2012), 153–81.

27 Weiler, 'Historical Writing and the Experience of Europeanisation', p. 209.

28 *RLC*, i, p. 508. On Henry III's use of gifts, see B.L. Wild, 'Secrecy, Splendour and Statecraft: The Jewel Accounts of King Henry III of England, 1216–1272', *Historical Research*, 83 (2010), 409–30; B. Wild, 'A Gift Inventory from the Reign of Henry III', *English Historical Review*, 125 (2010), 529–69; B. Wild, 'Emblems and Enigmas: Revisiting the "Sword" Belt of Fernando de la Cerda', *Journal of Medieval History*, 37 (2011), 378–96.

29 *CLR, 1226–40*, p. 66.

30 Ibid., p. 483.

31 33 Ibid.

32 *CPR*, *1232–47*, p. 240.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781800101135.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Dunwich were to be allocated £15 for 'a service they have recently performed for us in a mission to the lands of Denmark'.[33] It is not clear, however, if this related to the messengers sent in July or to Bartholomew's more recent mission.

In 1240, then, Henry III sent at least two separate missions to Denmark. This is the more interesting, as there is no record of him sending any other messengers to Denmark in the remaining thirty-two years of his reign.[34] The most likely explanation is that the rumours of a Danish threat mentioned by Matthew Paris had also reached the royal court. The messengers would have given Henry III the opportunity to test whether the rumours spoke true, and, if so, to attempt to dissuade the Danish king.[35] If Nicholas of St Albans and his companions were the sources of the rumours about Valdemar II's claims, they may also have had a hand in spreading the news at court. As we have seen, Nicholas had found a place in Henry III's favour prior to 1240. We know from Matthew Paris that other stories from Denmark circulated at court courtesy of Nicholas and his companions: Edward of Westminster, one of Henry III's closest advisers, had confirmed to Matthew the veracity of their story of the recovery of St Alban's relics.[36]

Remembering the Vikings in Thirteenth-Century England

If rumours of Valdemar II's ambitions against England attracted a ready audience, this may in part be explained by the central role that stories of older Danish invasions played in the English historical imagination. That this past remained alive in thirteenth-century England is in part explained by its centrality to the foundation myths of several of the most important religious and political institutions of England. The Viking invasions of the ninth to eleventh centuries had been extraordinarily productive of martyrs and witnessed the sacking of numerous monastic communities. Horrible as these experiences had been, they had also left the institutions affected with a glorious past witnessing their suffering and endurance under the onslaught of the pagans. England, itself, as a united kingdom, was one of the entities that had been born out of the crucible of the Viking invasions and the struggle of the kings of Wessex with the Vikings formed the narrative backbone of its earliest history, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.[37]

[33] *CLR, 1240–45*, p. 27.

[34] Another messenger from Denmark is noted in 1245, *CLR, 1240–45*, p. 313.

[35] On the use of merchants and messengers to gather information in the period, see J.R. Alban and C.T. Allmand, 'Spies and Spying in the Fourteenth Century', in C.T. Allmand (ed.), *War, Literature and Politics in the Late Middle Ages* (Liverpool University Press, 1976), pp. 73–101; P. Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, trans. M. Jones (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), p. 226.

[36] *Gesta abbatum monasterii Sancti Albani*, i, p. 19; R. Kent Lancaster, 'Artists, Suppliers and Clerks: The Human Factors in the Art Patronage of King Henry III', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 35 (1972), 81–107 at 96–7.

[37] See R. Cole, 'Memory of the Viking Age in Britain – From Trauma to Empire', in J. Glauser, P. Hermann and S.A. Mitchell (eds.) *Handbook of Pre-Modern Nordic Memory Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, vol. 1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), pp. 891–8.

The renewed interest in the history of England, its saints, and its monasteries in the twelfth century saw these prestigious and dramatic stories reimagined and elaborated.[38] Across historical genres, authors revelled in imagining the onslaught of the 'impious people of the northern regions' that 'gnashing and raving to sate the hunger of its ferocity, and longing to quench the hunger of its spite with the outpouring of human blood' fell upon England.[39] Matthew Paris straddled the boundaries of hagiography, institutional, regnal and universal historiography and in each context he paid careful attention to the destructive, but central, role played by the Vikings. The *Chronica Majora* borrowed its account of the Viking invasions from Wendover's *Flores historiarum*, in turn compiled from a vast range of twelfth-century histories of England.[40] To these Wendover had added more explicit reflections on the importance of these stories for contemporary audiences: the 'most terrible' devastations of the Danes were a 'warning to succeeding generations' of the wages of sin.[41]

One element of these stories that circulated widely, and which is important for our purposes, is the idea that the Danes had laid claim to the English crown. In Geoffrey Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis* the Danish invaders repeatedly refer to a claim to having been kings in Britain before the arrival of the English.[42] The idea resurfaced in later vernacular works. In the widely disseminated thirteenth-century romance of *Gui de Warewic*, the wise lord Heralt informs King Athelstan:

> My forbears once used to tell me that the Danes formerly had rights in this land, but that was a long time ago; then their people lost their land and were slain in battle, killed and destroyed and maltreated. In this way they lost their rights, because they were defeated in battle.[43]

The idea was also familiar in court circles. In the 1170s Richard fitz Nigel, in his *Dialogue of the Exchequer*, stated that the Danes 'claimed some rights to

[38] See especially J. Barrow, 'Danish Ferocity and Abandoned Monasteries: The Twelfth-Century View', in M. Brett and D.A. Woodman (eds.), *The Long Twelfth-Century View of the Anglo-Saxon Past* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 77–93; R. Bartlett, 'The Viking Hiatus in the Cult of Saints as Seen in the Twelfth Century', ibid., pp. 13–25, and now E. Parker, *Dragon Lords: The History and Legends of Viking England* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018).

[39] Goscelin of Saint-Bertin, *The Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely*, ed. and trans. R.C. Love (Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 106–7.

[40] Roger Wendover, *Chronica sive Flores Historiarum*, ed. H.O. Coxe, 5 vols. (Rolls Series, 1841–4), i, pp. 277–382, 429–82, 504–505, 511.

[41] Wendover, *Flores Historiarum*, ed. Coxe, i, p. 280; *Chron. Maj.*, i, p. 377, adapting Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum: The History of the English People*, ed. and trans. D. Greenway (Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 274–6).

[42] Geoffrey Gaimer, *Estoire de Engleis,* ed. and trans. I. Short (Oxford University Press, 2009), ll. 2085–7, 4315–21, pp. 114, 234.

[43] 45 *Gui de Warewic: Roman du XIIIe siècle*, ed. A. Ewert, 2 vols. (Paris: Champion, 1932–3), ll. 9135–42, ii, pp. 73–4; translation from *Boeve de Haumtone and Gui de Warewic: Two Anglo-Norman Romances,* trans. J. Weiss (Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2008), p. 198.

the kingdom by ancient law, as the *History of the Britons* relate more fully'.[44] It appeared again in the works of William of Newburgh, writing in the 1190s. According to his *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, Phillip II Augustus had in 1193 sought the hand of princess Ingeborg of Denmark. As dowry he had requested the 'ancient right of the king of the Danes in the kingdom of England and to obtain it the army and fleet of Denmark for one year'.[45] John Gillingham suggested that both Richard fitz Nigel and William of Newburgh derived the idea of a Danish claim to the English throne from Gaimar.[46]

John Baldwin has argued that Newburgh's account of the marriage proposal may simply have been 'a matter of English jitters'.[47] Given the centrality of the Vikings to the English historical imagination, it is necessary to consider the possibility that the rumours about Valdemar II's intentions that spread in England during 1240 were the result of 'English jitters' playing up again, leading to a misinterpretation of Danish activities in the Baltic. Such anxieties may have been stimulated by the perceived weakness of England. According to Matthew Paris, complaints had been raised in 1237 that Henry III had been unable to 'defeat or deter any of the kingdom's enemies, not even the weakest of them'.[48] This may have been accentuated by the departure of Richard of Cornwall and several leading magnates on the Barons' Crusade in 1240. According to Matthew, the English prelates had complained to Richard that in his absence they would be subject to the 'rapacity of foreigners', although Matthew may have had papal envoys rather than ravaging Danes in mind.[49]

One legend associated with past Viking invasions may have played a role in shaping Matthew Paris' account of events in 1240–41. In both his history of St Albans, the *Gesta abbatum*, and his translation of the life of Edward the Confessor, *Estoire de Seint Aedward le Rei*, Matthew included the story of how a Danish threat against England had been averted.[50] While attending mass, St Edward had been granted a vision in which he saw that the (unnamed) king of

[44] Richard FitzNigel, *Dialogus de Scaccario*, in *Richard FitzNigel, Dialogus de Scaccario (The Dialogue of the Exchequer), and Constitutio Domus Regis (The Disposition of the King's Household)*, ed. and trans. E. Amt and S.D. Church (Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 84–5.

[45] William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I*, ed. R. Howlett, 4 vols. (Rolls Series, 1884–9), i, p. 368.

[46] J. Gillingham, *The English in the Twelfth Century: Imperialism, National Identity and Political Values* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000), p. 119.

[47] J.W. Baldwin, *The Government of Philip Augustus*: *Foundations of French Royal Power in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 82, but see also now T.K. Heebøll-Holm, 'A Franco-Danish Marriage and the Plot against England', *Haskins Society Journal*, 26 (2014), 249–68.

[48] *Chron. Maj.*, iii, p. 381.

[49] *Chron. Maj.*, iv, p. 11; see M. Lower, *The Barons' Crusade: A Call to Arms and its Consequences* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005). I am grateful to Adrian Jobson for discussing this point with me.

[50] On Matthew Paris' story of St. Edward, see especially P. Binski, 'Reflections on *La estoire de Seint Aedward le rei*: Hagiography and Kingship in Thirteenth-Century England', *Journal of Medieval History*, 16 (1990), 333–50. On the *Gesta Abbatum*, see Vaughan, *Matthew Paris*, pp. 182–9.

Denmark was preparing an invasion fleet and was planning to invade England where the Danes would 'repeat their old misdeeds'. St Edward was, however, comforted when he saw the Danish king stumble aboard one of his ships and fall into the sea.[51] This God had done 'for the merits of St Edward'.[52] Where the ancient sins of the English had called down the Vikings upon them, the virtues of Edward the Confessor had averted a repeat of such tribulations. This story is particularly important for our purposes. The fate of Valdemar II closely parallels that of the unnamed Danish king, as both were brought down by Edward the Confessor as they were about to invade England. The story of Edward's intervention is likely to have been close to mind for Matthew in 1240: the first half of the *Gesta Abbatum* was composed c. 1235–50, while a date of 1236 has recently been convincingly argued for the *Estoire*.[53] This story may well have influenced Matthew's interpretation of events in 1241, a point to which I will return again below. The information derived from chancery records discussed above suggests that Matthew was probably correct that rumours about Danish intentions abounded in England in 1240. In order to ascertain whether there were any factual foundations for these rumours, however, we will now have to look at what was being said in Denmark about England and the Viking past.

Remembering the Vikings in Thirteenth-Century Denmark

Danish claims to the English throne began to be put forward not long after the death of the last Danish king of England, Harthacnut, in 1042.[54] In the 1070s Adam of Bremen recorded in his *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen* that England had been subject to Denmark 'since ancient times'. More recently, Edward the Confessor had promised the inheritance of the English throne to Sven Estridsen, king of Denmark (r. 1047–76) and nephew of Cnut the Great.[55] Adam did not make the source of this information clear, but he was familiar with Sven and the Danish court and it is likely to have originated there. At least two expeditions to England were carried out in Sven's reign, in 1069 and 1075, under the command of Sven's sons, while an interpolation in the Peterborough chronicle claims that Sven himself led an invasion in 1070.[56] Sven

51 Aelred of Rievaulx: *Vita Sancti Edwardi regis et confessoris*, c. 9, *PL*, 195, col. 749; Matthew Paris, *La estoire de Seint Aedward le Rei*, ed. K.Y. Wallace (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1983), l. 1305–68, p. 37–9.

52 *Gesta Abbatum*, i, p. 35.

53 For this dating, see D.A. Carpenter, 'King Henry III and Saint Edward the Confessor: The Origins of the Cult', *English Historical Review,* 122 (2007), 865–91 at 886.

54 On the importance of England to the eleventh-century kings of Denmark, see especially P. Gazzoli, 'Anglo-Danish Relations in the Later Eleventh Century' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2010).

55 Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, iii.12, 52, ed. B. Schmeidler, 3rd edn., MGH SSRG 2 (Hanover and Leipzig: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1917), pp. 152, 196; F. Barlow, *Edward the Confessor* (London: Historical Association, 1970), p. 93; Gazzoli, 'Anglo-Danish Relations', pp. 120, 122.

56 *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition, vol. 7, MS E*, ed. S. Irvine (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), *sub anno*, 1070, pp. 88–9; L.M. Larson, 'The Efforts of the

was, according to Orderic Vitalis' (garbled) account, motivated by a desire to uphold his hereditary claims in England.[57]

Sven's son, Cnut IV (r. 1080–86), prepared an invasion in 1085 in alliance with the count of Flanders,[58] but was prevented from carrying it out first by threats from Germany, then by the outbreak of a rebellion that cost him his life.[59] Cnut was subsequently canonised and became the patron saint of the Danish royal family.[60] In the early hagiographical literature, the *Passio sancti Canuti regis* (c. 1095–1101) and Ælnoth of Canterbury's *Gesta Swenomagni regis et filiorum eius et passio gloriosissimi Canuti regis et martyris* (c. 1112–13), Cnut's plans for England were presented as a holy war: a struggle that would both cleanse the Danes of sloth and luxury and bring freedom to the oppressed Anglo-Saxons.[61] In the *lectiones* for the celebration of St Cnut, which drew on these, the connection between the expedition and the Danish claims was made more explicit.[62] Here Cnut is presented as issuing instructions that:

> In order that the people should be exercised in virtue rather than sloth, a fleet should be made ready for the conquest of England, which had fallen away from Danish rule and later had been seized by strangers.[63]

Danish Kings to Recover the English Crown after the Death of Harthacnut', *Annual Report of the American Historical Association* (1910), pp. 71–81.

57 Orderic Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ed. and trans. M. Chibnall, 6 vols. (Oxford University Press, 1968–80), iv, p. 226. For a recent interpretation that minimises the importance of Cnut the Great's inheritance to Sven, see L.C.A. Sonne, 'Svend Estridsens politiske liv', in L.C.A. Sonne and S. Croix (eds.), *Svend Estridsen* (Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 2016), pp. 15–38 at 35–7.

58 E. Oksanen, *Flanders and the Anglo-Norman World, 1066–1216* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 18.

59 N. Lund, 'Knuts des Heiligen beabsichtiger Zug nach England im Jahre 1085', in W. Paravicini (ed.), *Mare Balticum: Beïträge zur Geschichte des Ostseeraums im Mittelalter und Neuzeit* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1992), pp. 101–10; Larson, 'Efforts', p. 80; Gazzoli, 'Anglo-Danish Relations', pp. 141–2; K. Esmark, 'Spinning the Revolt: The Assasination and Sanctification of an Eleventh-Century Danish King', in H. Jensen (ed.), *Rebellion and Resistance* (Pisa University Press, 2009), pp. 15–31.

60 On Cnut's cult and the Danish monarchy, see M.H. Gelting, 'The Kingdom of Denmark', in N. Berend (ed.), *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy: Scandinavia, Central Europe and Rus' c. 900–1200* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 73–120.

61 *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, ed. M.C. Gertz (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gad, 1908–12), pp. 67, 96–101. For the dating of Ælnoth's work, see M.H. Gelting, 'Two Early Twelfth-Century Views of Denmark's Christian Past: Ailnoth and the Anonymous of Roskilde', in I.H. Garipzanov (ed.), *Historical Narratives and Christian Identity on a European Periphery: Early Historical Writings in Northern, Eastern-Central, and Eastern Europe (c.1070–1200)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), pp. 33–56 at 38–9.

62 See R. Hankeln, 'Kingship and Sanctity in the *Historia* in Honour of St Canutus Rex', in J. Bergsagel, D. Hiley and T. Riis (eds.), *Of Chronicles and Kings: National Saints and the Emergence of Nation States in the High Middle Ages* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2015), pp. 159–91, who suggests a tentative date for these as 'at least shortly after 1120'.

63 *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, p. 141, in the breviaries of Roskilde and Schleswig.

Cnut IV's ambitions were thus connected to both his reforming mission and his holy death.[64] It gave the claim to England a prominent and prestigious place in the cult of the Danish kings' dynastic patron.

Throughout the twelfth century, we find scattered mentions of the Danish claims to the English throne across north-western Europe. Thomas Heebøll-Holm has drawn attention to a notice in a Flemish continuation of Sigebert of Gembloux's *Chronicon sive Chronographia.* According to the chronicle, the Danish King Erik III 'the Lamb' (r. 1137–46), had laid claim to the English throne after Henry I's death, citing his 'predecessors' hereditary right' and the close relations of England and Denmark. Erik III had, allegedly, attacked and plundered England's borders in 1138 before being defeated.[65] At the end of the twelfth century, Lambert of Ardres, writing just across the Channel, claimed that the Danes:

> … stand ready in expectation, hoping and expecting that even after the passage of many years they would be restored and returned to the rule of England, which of old they had obtained at some point or other in some way or other (*quandocumque quomodocumque*)[66]

Lambert's seeming certainty about contemporary Danish claims to England contrasts intriguingly with his lack of clarity about the basis of their claims. It seems to indicate an awareness of contemporary politics rather than deep knowledge of the history of the two kingdoms.

It is only from the late twelfth century onwards, however, that the surviving sources allow us to examine the Danish perspectives on the Viking past in more detail. In England the twelfth-century renaissance of historical writing had resulted in countless negative portrayals of the Vikings. In Denmark, on the other hand, they were reinvented and celebrated as icons of ancestral pride and models of masculine virtue.[67] This was, in part, a reaction to increased interaction with western European elites. Appropriately repackaged in Latin texts and decked out with classical virtues the Vikings offered Danish elites a prestigious past that could rival English, French and German stories of the exploits of Arthur

[64] On the importance of moral reform to the lives of St Cnut IV, see S.O. Sønnesyn, 'Monastic Life as a Matrix of Meaning: History, Liturgy, and Interior Reform in Early Danish Historical Texts', in Münster-Swendsen, Heebøll-Holm and Sønnesyn (eds.), *Historical and Intellectual Culture* , pp. 131–47.

[65] T.K. Heebøll-Holm, 'When the Lamb attacked the Lion: A Danish Attack on England in 1138?', *Journal of Medieval Military History*, 13 (2015), 27–49.

[66] Lambert of Ardres, *Lamberti Ardensis historia comitum Ghisnensium*, ed. J. Heller, MGH SS 24, p. 557.

[67] See T.K. Heebøll-Holm, 'Between Pagan Pirates and Glorious Sea-Warriors: The Portrayal of the Viking Pirate in Danish Twelfth-Century Latin Historiography', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*, 8 (2012), 141–70. More generally on Scandinavian reactions to interaction with Europe, see T. Foerster, *Vergleich und Identität: Selbst- und Fremddeutung im Norden des hochmittelalterlichen Europa* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2009) and R. Scheel, *Lateineuropa und der Norden: Die Geschichtsschreibung des 12. Jahrhunderts in Dänemark, Island und Norwegen* (Berlin: Trafo, 2012).

and Charlemagne.[68] In the opening lines of his monumental *Gesta Danorum*, the Danish chronicler Saxo Grammaticus (fl. c.1188–1208) made clear how interaction with European historiography had provided the stimulus for his own work. It was 'because other nations are in the habit of vaunting the fame of their achievements, and joy in recollecting their ancestors', that his patron Archbishop Absalon had tasked him with creating a history of the Danes.[69]

Among the Danes' ancient achievements none was more celebrated than the conquest of England. Saxo's contemporary, Sven Aggesen, writing c.1188,[70] described Cnut the Great as a Danish Alexander who 'widened the boundaries of his kingdom by the amazing force of his valour', subjugating England and other neighbouring kingdoms.[71] Saxo noted that where:

> Lack of information, uncertainty, and the rust of antiquity have impaired the splendour of … others, Cnut's prestige, supported by the enjoyment of a long-lasting fame, revives continually through the undying fruits of memory.[72]

Central to Saxo's portrayal of Cnut was the fact that he was no mere ambitious Viking, but the rightful heir to the English throne. Throughout the *Gesta Danorum*, Saxo pays more attention to the achievements of the Danes in Britain/England than any other country outside Scandinavia. In these stories the point is made repeatedly and in various ways that the Danish kings have a legitimate claim to England's crown. First, the Danish kings were closely related by blood to the English royal family: in the first chapters of the *Gesta* Saxo informed his readers that the Danish royal family was directly descended from Dan – brother of Angel, the ancestor of the Angles, the later conquerors of England.[73] The connection had also been renewed in more recent times. After Hastings, Harold Godwinsons' sons and daughter fled to Denmark where they were well received by Sven Estridsen. The latter also arranged a marriage between Harold's daughter and a Russian prince Valdemar:

> A later inheritor of his blood and name, his grandson by a daughter, became the ruler of our own day [i.e. Valdemar I (r. 1146–82)]. So on the one side British, on the other Eastern blood (*hinc Britannicus, inde*

[68] For Danish knowledge of English history, see M.H. Gelting, 'Henry of Huntingdon, The Chronicle of Roskilde, and the English Connection in Twelfth-Century Denmark', in Münster-Swendsen, Heebøll-Holm and Sønnesyn (eds.), *Historical and Intellectual Culture* , pp. 104–18.

[69] Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*: *History of the Danes*, ed. and trans. K. Friis-Jensen and P. Fisher, 2 vols. (Oxford University Press, 2015), preface, 1.2, v. i, p. 2–3. For the dating, ibid., p. xxxv.

[70] For the dating, see *The Works of Sven Aggesen: Twelfth-Century Danish Historian*, trans. E. Christiansen (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1992), p. 26.

[71] Sven Aggesen, *Lex castrensis*, ch.1; Sven Aggesen, *Historia brevis*, ch. 9, both in *Scriptores minores historiae Danicae medii ævi*, ed. M.C. Gertz, 2 vols. (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gad, 1917–22), i, pp. 65, 67, 120–5; translation in *Works of Sven Aggesen*, ed. Christiansen, p. 63

[72] *Gesta Danorum*, x.20.3, v. i, pp. 772–3.

[73] *Gesta Danorum*, i.1.1-3, v. i, pp. 18–20.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781800101135.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> *Eous sanguis*) flowed into our leader at his propitious birth and created an embellishment for both races through his shared lineage.[74]

The Valdemarian kings were thus presented as the natural heirs of both the first and the last Anglo-Saxon kings, Angel and Harold Godwinson. By the time Saxo was writing, Valdemar I and his sons, Cnut VI (r. 1182–1202) and Valdemar II, had already begun to be recognised as overlords by some of the Slavic people of the Baltic. Saxo's implication was that the English, left with no ruler of their own line, should do the same.

The claim had been reinforced further through the many treaties in which the English had recognised the rights of Danish kings. In Book Nine, Saxo alleges that the Danish queen, Tyra Danebod, was the daughter of the English King Æthelred. When Tyra's son Harald Bluetooth later plundered his grandfather's realm the English king was so impressed by his vigorous grandchild that he made him his heir, disinheriting his own son in the process.[75] This, Saxo affirms, gave Harald and his heirs a 'particularly strong and just' claim to the English throne.[76] Over the next generations this would be further enhanced in the confrontations between Æthelred's English and Danish descendants. One after the other, Æthelred's son and grandson, here named Æthelstan and Edward, made pacts with Harald Bluetooth's son and grandson, Sven Forkbeard and Cnut the Great, recognising the Danes as their heirs.[77] When Cnut finally conquered England he did so not as a foreign opportunist but as the upholder of a claim reinforced three times over.

Most importantly, however, the Danish claim was vindicated in trial by battle. In the numerous clashes between Danes and the inhabitants of Britain described in the *Gesta Danorum*, Saxo was at pains to show that the Danes were not just stronger, but also more virtuous than their opponents. Both the legendary Danish kings Amleth and Frode the Peaceful were invited to feasts by the 'British' only to be treacherously attacked by their hosts. In both encounters the Danes were, however, victorious thanks to their wisdom and prowess.[78] At length, however, the tricks of the English were successful. After the death of Harthacnut, Harold Godwinson devised a treacherous plan to defeat the Danes: he had had all the Danes in England invited to feasts across the country and 'when nocturnal wine and sleep had lulled them to unconsciousness, he had them ambushed

[74] Adapted from the translation in *Gesta Danorum*, xi.6.3, v. ii, pp. 798–801. See Bolton, 'English Political Refugees'. Saxo's fondness for antique vocabulary may explain the haphazard changes between British/English in the *Gesta Danorum*, see comments by Karsten Friis-Jensen in *Gesta Danorum*, i, xlvi–xlvii.

[75] *Gesta Danorum*, ix.11.2–5, v. i, pp. 672–7.

[76] *Gesta Danorum*, x.1.3, v. i, pp. 680–1.

[77] *Gesta Danorum*, x.12.6, x.14.4, v. i, pp. 726, 732.

[78] *Gesta Danorum*, iv.1.19, v.14.1–4, v. i, pp. 216, 344–50. On the place of this in Danish historical writing, see L Kjær, 'Feasting with Traitors: Royal Banquets as Rituals and Texts in Medieval Scandinavia', in L. Hermanson, W. Jezierski, H.J. Orning and T. Småberg (eds.), *The Power of Practice: Rituals and Politics in Medieval Scandinavia c. 650–1350* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2015), pp. 269–94.

and murdered'.[79] The loss of England then, Saxo concluded, did not result from defeat in battle but from treachery:

> A few brief moments of the night put an end to the Danes' long dominion and an empire that had been painstakingly reinforced over the years by the valour of their forebears. Fate never again restored that rule to our countrymen. In that fashion England regained by crime the right to self-government which she had lost through faint-heartedness.[80]

The emphasis on the Danish king's legitimate claim to the English throne contrasts with Saxo's disparaging description of the Norman invasion of England: it was a mere opportunistic 'assault', only successful because it 'happened' to occur while the English were busy fighting off the Norwegian invasion.[81] That Saxo chose to mention the Norman invasion at all, however, is interesting. Throughout the *Gesta Danorum* Saxo was extremely reluctant to note any developments in the rest of the world except when they directly affected Denmark. The Norman invasion of England then, still in the thirteenth century, seems to have been considered an important development also for the history of Denmark.

Saxo was closely connected to the court of Valdemar II. He dedicated the *Gesta Danorum* jointly to the archbishop of Lund and the king, and prefaced the *Gesta* with an account of Valdemar's achievements in northern Germany.[82] The *Gesta* was completed early in Valdemar's reign, c.1208, but royal interest in the Danish past continued to flourish in the 1240s. About the middle of the thirteenth century an anonymous Icelandic author composed his *Knýtlinga saga*, a tale of the Danish kings. The author is often assumed to have been identical with Óláfr Þórðarson who was at Valdemar's court in the years around 1240. The saga related that Óláfr had acquired 'much learning from [Valdemar II], and had a great many remarkable stories from him to tell'.[83] Thus, the author implied that the saga depended in part on the king's own anecdotes of the past. Besides these the author also made use of the *Gesta Danorum*.[84]

Knýtlinga saga is also interesting for our purposes because it offers an indication of the historical interests and horizons of the Danish court at exactly the time that Matthew Paris recorded his stories about the alleged invasion plans.

[79] *Gesta Danorum*, x.21.6, v. i, pp. 778–9.

[80] Ibid.

[81] 'Eodem forte tempore Normannorum dux pari impetus diuersum insule latu aggreditur', *Gesta Danorum*, xi.6.2, v. ii, pp. 798–9.

[82] *Gesta Danorum*, Preface,1.6, v. i, pp. 6–8.

[83] *Knýtlinga saga*, ch. 127, p. 315, translation from *Knytlinga Saga: The History of the Kings of Denmark*, trans. P. Edwards and H. Pálsson (Odense University Press, 1986), p. 175.

[84] See L.B. Mortensen, 'A Thirteenth-Century Reader of Saxo's Gesta Danorum', in L. Melve and S. Sønnesyn (eds.), *The Creation of Medieval Northern Europe: Christianisation, Social Transformations, and Historiography: Essays in Honour of Sverre Bagge* (Oslo: Dreyers forlag, 2012), pp. 346–55 at 355. On Óláfrs karriere, see G. Sigurðsson, 'Óláfr Þórðarson hvítaskáld and Oral Poetry in the West of Iceland, c. 1250: The Evidence of References to Poetry in the Third Grammatical Treatise', in M.C. Ross (ed.), *Old Icelandic Literature and Society* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 96–115 at 97–8.

The saga was keenly interested in England and especially the achievements of Cnut the Great.[85] Here Cnut is presented as a flawed but glorious king, warlike and skilled. His greatest achievement is the conquest of England, 'richer in money than any other northern land'.[86] Cnut IV was given even more attention: almost a quarter of the saga was dedicated to his reign, including his plans to conquer England, on which, we are informed, he had a sound claim.[87]

The kings of Denmark participated actively in the cultivation of histories about Viking invaders and conquerors of England.[88] Valdemar II's father, Valdemar I 'the Great', owned a knife that had once belonged to Harald Hardrada. According to Saxo:

> This blade, now corroded by rust and scarcely fit to cut anything at all, was frequently shown by King Valdemar to his friends, for he was a man who was extremely keen to know about ancient deeds and to relate them.[89]

Valdemar II's brother and predecessor, Cnut VI, was celebrated in court writings as the heir of Cnut the Great, who had recovered and re-established the ancient laws of his great antecessor and namesake.[90] Valdemar II himself was praised by Óláfr for his knowledge of the ancient runic alphabet and his abilities as a poet.[91] As we have seen above, *Knýtlinga saga* further alleged that he had shared stories of past Danish kings with Óláfr.[92] In England, Henry III had impressed Matthew Paris with his knowledge of the saintly kings of England, including St Edmund, the most famous victim of the Viking invasions.[93] In Denmark, it was with stories of the Vikings that kings entertained their guests.

Further evidence for Valdemar's interest in his ancestors, and the rights he had inherited from them, is found in a letter from Pope Gregory IX issued in November 1240. The letter, a reply to a lost inquiry by the king, concerned the question of whether Valdemar II could reclaim possessions of the royal fisc that had been lost under his predecessors, which constituted a 'great injustice and

85 *Knýtlinga saga*, chs. 8–20, pp. 100–27.
86 *Knýtlinga saga*, chs. 8, 19, pp. 100–106, 124–6, translation in *Knytlinga saga*, trans. Edwards and H. Pálsson, p. 41.
87 *Knýtlinga saga*, chs. 28–63, pp. 145–200, on England, ch. 41, pp. 163-4, translation in *Knytlinga saga*, trans. Edwards and H. Pálsson, p. 69.
88 See L. Kjær, 'Rusty Knives, Runes and Vikings: The Valdemarian Kings and the Danish Past in a Comparative Perspective', in K. Hundahl, L. Kjær and N. Lund (eds.), *Denmark and Europe in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of Professor Michael H. Gelting* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 255–68.
89 Translation adapted from *Gesta Danorum*, xi.3.1, ii, pp. 791–2.
90 *Scriptores minores historiæ Danicæ medii ævi*, ed. Getz, i, p. 64. See M. Münster-Swendsen: 'The Formation of a Danish Court Nobility: The *Lex castrensis sive curiae* of Sven Aggesen Reconsidered', in S. Bagge, M.H. Gelting, F. Hervik, T. Lindkvist and B. Poulsen (eds.), *Statsutvikling i Skandinavia i Middelalderen* (Oslo: Dreyers forlag, 2012), pp. 257–79
91 Óláfr Þórðarson, *Málhljóða- og málskrúðsrit: Grammatisk-retorisk afhandling*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen: A.F. Høst, 1927), c. 4, ll. 79–82, p. 29.
92 *Knýtlinga saga*, ch. 127, p. 315, translation from *Knytlinga saga,* trans. Edwards and Pálsson, p. 175.
93 *Chron. Maj.*, v, p. 617.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781800101135.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

loss to his royal honour and his kingdom'.[94] Valdemar II's request was clearly directed towards strengthening the crown internally in Denmark, but it indicates an interest in the way history could legitimise contemporary claims. In the next generation, in England, Edward I would show how history could be used to legitimise expansion of authority both internally, in the *quo warranto* process, and externally, in his attempts to exercise overlordship of Scotland.[95]

The idea that the Danes maintained a claim to England was not merely a product of the English historical imagination. In historical writings, in Latin as well as Old Norse, in liturgy and, if *Knýtlinga saga* is to be believed, conversation, this notion from the Viking past was just as alive in thirteenth-century Denmark as it was in England. As highly placed and long-term members of Valdemar II's court, Nicholas of St Albans and his companions would have been well aware of this. Some visitors actively participated in it: Saxo Grammaticus tells of a certain 'British' clerk who 'was exceptionally learned in his knowledge of history' and who served Valdemar II's illegitimate half-brother, Christopher. In battle, the clerk would rouse Christopher's men into action with tales of the deeds of their ancestors.[96] It is likely that Matthew's story about Valdemar II's boasts about his rights to the English throne had a factual basis, although, certainly, domestic English traditions meant that there was a ready audience for any stories of renewed Danish threats against England. The next question we need to deal with, however, is whether Matthew was also right that there had been a concrete plan to invade England.

Invasion preparations?

The evidence for a full-fledged invasion plan is much less convincing. The *Chronica Majora*'s account of Valdemar's threats and English fear of invasion were written down relatively soon after the events.[97] But it was not until Matthew Paris reworked the account for inclusion in the *Historia Anglorum* in the 1250s that he claimed explicitly that an invasion force had been ready to set sail when Valdemar II's death intervened. It is possible that this reflected new information, just as in the case of his updated information about the succession struggles in Denmark, but there are reasons to doubt its accuracy. This is not just because it was written about a decade later, long enough for the details of the actual story to have become somewhat muddled, but also, more importantly, because the *Historia Anglorum*'s version of events aligns more closely with the miraculous story from the life of St Edward the Confessor: here, the Danish king

[94] *Diplomatarium Danicum, 1238–1249*, no. 61, pp. 58–9.

[95] A.J. Taylor, 'Recalling Anglo-Scottish Relations in 1291: Historical Knowledge, Cultural Memory and the Edwardian Inquests', *TCE*, xvi, pp. 173–206.

[96] *Gesta Danorum*, xiv.40.9, ii, p. 1321. As noted above, Saxo's fondness for archaizing terms renders it difficult to decipher whether the clerk '*nationis Britannice*' had an English or Celtic background.

[97] On the dating of this section of the *Chronica Majora*, however, see forthcoming work by Nathan Greasley, I am grateful to him for allowing me to read sections of his dissertation prior to submission.

had carefully prepared both fleet and army just before his death.[98] It is likely that the tightening up of the account of the Danish threat in the *Historia Anglorum* was due to the influence of the saintly example, as well as Matthew's desire to make the parallel between the two episodes and thus the moral and spiritual lesson to be drawn from it clearer.

As we have seen above, the Danish sources had much to say about the ancient Danish claims to England, but there is no direct evidence of any invasion plan. This may partly be due to the nature of the evidence: thirteenth-century Denmark had no Matthew Paris chronicling the year's events and we are instead forced to reconstruct events from the spare notices in, mostly much later, monastic annals. Instead of the evidence of day-to-day developments and communications at court allowed by the chancery evidence, historians of Denmark must make do with the glimpses provided by royal diplomas. Two Danish diplomas issued in 1240, however, require attention regarding possible plans against England. Over the summer of that year Valdemar II had been in negotiations with representatives of the count and countess of Flanders, Jeanne of Flanders and Thomas of Savoy. On 21 October Valdemar and his son and co-king, Erik IV, issued identical diplomas confirming the results of the negotiations. The primary subject appears to have been the continuation of existing agreements governing the treatment of merchants.[99] The diplomas, however, also gestured towards a wider alliance. They began by commemorating the 'ancient friendship' between Denmark and Flanders. After the main section on merchants' rights, the Danish kings also demanded the following:

> This condition also being added, that the count of Flanders, and whoever holds that title in future, and his men will undertake vigorously (*existant cum effectu*) to be friends of our friends and enemies of our enemies.[100]

The emphasis on effective support may hint at something more demanding than amicable relations. It might be tempting to connect this to the commemoration of ancient friendship between Flanders and Denmark: the last alliance between the two polities that we know of was the one established between Cnut IV and Robert I in preparation for the planned invasion of 1085. As Andrew Spencer shows in his essay in this volume, Flanders navigated a difficult diplomatic line in the mid thirteenth century, balancing its own interests and commitments to England and the French Crown. In 1242, for instance, Thomas of Savoy refused to support Henry III in his war against Louix IX despite the riches Henry III had showered upon him.[101] The agreement between Valdemar II and Flanders could be understood as an attempt to secure at least benevolent neutrality in case of war between Denmark and England. Caution is, however, called for: if

98 Aelred, *vita*, ch. 9, *PL*, 195, col. 749.
99 On the importance of this to Jeanne and Thomas, see E.L. Cox, *The Eagles of Savoy: The House of Savoy in Thirteenth-Century Europe* (Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 102–103.
100 *Diplomatarium Danicum, 1238–1249*, no. 59, p. 56, no. 60, p. 57.
101 See also Weiler, *Henry III of England and the Staufen Empire*, p. 82.

any particular, potential opponents were implied these are perhaps more likely to have been Flanders and Denmark's shared neighbours in northern Germany.

Besides the relative silence of the Danish sources, a further point argues against lending too much credence to the *Historia Anglorum*'s account of an imminent Danish invasion. The information that Henry III's messengers reported back in 1240–1 appears to have calmed nerves, for there is no evidence in the English records of further military or diplomatic steps taken to avert an invasion.[102] Arguments *e silentio* of this sort are always problematic: the sources for thirteenth century Denmark as well as England are too fragmentary to allow us to base any firm conclusions on what the sources do not say. Nevertheless, on the basis of the currently available evidence it does not seem likely that preparations for an invasion were being put in place in 1240.

Whatever claims and ambitions may have been ventilated in Valdemar II's court they must quickly have been put on hold in 1241. Valdemar II died on 28 March that year and the tensions between his rival sons, Erik IV and Abel, duke of Schleswig, quickly erupted into armed conflict.[103] Although peace was re-established the tense internal situation did not provide an effective basis for foreign adventures.[104] In 1244 Erik and Abel's joint expedition to Estonia was abandoned en route.[105] Two years later, the tensions between the two broke out into open war.[106]

In England, however, Matthew Paris continued to keep an eye on developments across the North Sea. As we have seen above, at some point before 1251, Matthew updated his original entry on Valdemar II's death with more information about the civil war in Denmark.[107] Under the entry for 1251 in the *Chronica Majora*, Matthew described the murder of Erik IV, allegedly on Abel's order, and how Abel had then, allegedly, been exiled and slain by the Danish aristocracy. The Danes had proceeded to elect Valdemar II's third son, Christopher I, king. Matthew's account contains numerous inaccuracies: the murder of Erik IV in fact took place on 10 August 1250. Abel was, despite rumours of his involvement, elected king, although he died soon afterwards, in June 1252, while conducting a campaign against rebels in Frisia. As Matthew reported, he was followed as king by Christopher I. Matthew's account of the murder, although chronologically imprecise, does however feature many of the elements propagated by Christopher I in an attempt to tarnish Abel's descendants, an indication that Matthew Paris may again have been drawing on informants with access to information from the royal court.[108] In 1257 Denmark is again

[102] Compare the preparations against the expected invasion of 1085: J.R. Maddicott, 'Responses to the Threat of Invasion, 1085', *English Historical Review*, 122 (2007), 986–97.
[103] *Danmarks middelalderliger annaler*, ed. E. Kroman (Copenhagen: Selskabet for udgivelse af kilder til dansk historie, 1980), p. 172.
[104] See *Diplomatarium Danicum, 1238–1249*, no. 192, pp. 177–8.
[105] *Danmarks middelalderlige annaler*, p. 63.
[106] Ibid., pp. 63, 172.
[107] *Chron. Maj.*, iv, pp. 92–3.
[108] Ibid., v, pp. 221–2; *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, pp. 425–30; Kjær, 'Feasting with Traitors', pp. 284–7.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781800101135.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

mentioned, when Matthew recorded the events of the war between Christopher I and Haakon IV Haakonson of Norway and the, correct, information that peace had been established between them that year.[109]

The Danes and their past invasions of England also continued to be on Henry III's mind. In May 1246 Henry III ordered that three large wax candles were to be placed in front of the altar where St Edward saw his vision of the drowning of the Danish king.[110] The instructions contain no explanation of why Henry issued this command. It may have been to show gratitude to St Edward: in 1246 war had broken out again between Erik IV and Abel, a war that Matthew Paris interpreted as resulting from Edward the Confessor's continued protection of England and its king.[111] Ten years later, in 1256, Henry III intervened in the election of a new bishop in Ely.[112] The monastic community at Ely had chosen their subprior Hugh of Balsham, but Henry III objected and sought to insert instead his chancellor Henry of Wingham. Writing to Archbishop Boniface of Canterbury, Henry III explained his plan with reference to Ely's strategic importance:

> Because Danes and Saxons in ancient times waged war on England and invaded and infiltrated England through the lands of Ely, by which the kingdom was often exposed to the most grave danger, and to avoid this it was most necessary for us that a man of such character and faithfulness that we could trust in him as in ourselves was elected shepherd of the church of Ely.[113]

Matthew Paris also recorded Henry III's attempts to control the election and indicated the basics of the king's case. According to the *Chronica Majora*, Henry III's central objection to the election of Hugh was that Ely since ancient times had been a 'fortress and bastion' in times of war and it would not be safe to leave this in the hands of an unworldly monk.[114] Whatever Henry III's motivations for intervening, the historical and potential threat from Denmark remained a feature of political language and imagination in England long into the thirteenth century.

Conclusion

The evidence from the English chancery records and Danish historical works of the thirteenth century suggests that Matthew Paris's account had some factual basis. Anxieties about the intentions of the Danish king are the most likely

[109] *Chron. Maj.*, v, pp. 650–1; *Danmarks middelalderlige Annaler*, p. 86; *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, ed. M. Mundt (Oslo: Norsk historisk kjeldeskrift-institutt, 1977), pp. 176–7; N. Skyum-Nielsen, *Fruer og vildmænd I: Dansk middelalderhistorie, 1250–1340*, ed. I. Dübeck, K. Hørby and T. Riis (Copenhagen: Akademisk forlag, 1994), p. 28.
[110] *CR, 1242–1247*, p. 427.
[111] *HA*, iii, p. 283, on Henry III and the Confessor, see Carpenter, 'King Henry III and Saint Edward the Confessor'.
[112] W. Ullmann, 'The Disputed Election of Hugh Balsham, Bishop of Ely', *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 9 (1947-9), 259–68.
[113] *CR*, *1256-59*, pp. 108–109.
[114] *Chron. Maj.*, v, p. 619.

explanation for the sudden spike in interest in Denmark at the royal court in 1240. The fervent interest in the Danes' past hegemony over England shown in royal circles in Denmark renders it likely that claims to that effect were voiced in the court of Valdemar II. The available evidence does not, however, support the claim in the *Historia Anglorum* that an actual invasion fleet had been prepared in 1240. Matthew's anecdote, then, deals with an event that never happened. It nevertheless provides valuable insights into the political and historical perspectives of thirteenth-century England. It indicates something of the febrile atmosphere in England at the beginning of the 1240s. Henry III's defeats in France in 1224–27 and 1229–31, following the setbacks of his father's reign, had created a climate of anxiety. What fresh horror might emerge from England's past under this king who could not 'defeat or deter any of the kingdom's enemies, not even the weakest of them'?[115]

More generally, Matthew Paris' story of the 1240 invasion scare reminds us that modern academic divisions risk obscuring continuities, as well as the continuing influence wielded by memories of the past.[116] Thirteenth-century observers had to operate with the knowledge that across the North Sea, Danish kings were still laying claim to the English throne, and that under the right conditions the Danes might once again attempt to 'repeat their old misdeeds' in England. It is a reminder that to understand English history in the thirteenth century it is central to place it in the context of its long history of interaction with its European neighbours. In the thirteenth century the most pressing of these relationships was the one with the French crown, but it had not always been so and the English elite were keenly aware of this. In order to recreate imaginatively the horizon of possibility within which they acted we must not for 'Europe' read only 'France'.

[115] Ibid., iii, p. 381.
[116] See M. Brett, 'Introduction', in *Long Twelfth-Century View*, pp. 1–12.

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