

BLOOD OF KINGS: SAINT EDMUND AND THE PROBLEM^{LB}
OF SACRIFICIAL KINGSHIP IN AELFRIC'S
LEGEND OF ST. EDMUND

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ABSTRACT

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Though Abbo of Fleury is first to treat the historical death of King Edmund of East Anglia in a full-length narrative, he is not the only hagiographer to attempt to make sense of Edmund's death in 870. Aelfric of Eynsham, an Anglo-Saxon Abbot, takes Abbo's account, abbreviates it, and translates it for two of his friends in a larger work, Lives of the Saints. This collection was a compilation of lives of saints celebrated by the local monastic community and was intended for private devotion. Though Aelfric borrows heavily from Abbo's version of the tale, he alters the text to suit his audience. In editing Abbo's work, Aelfric contends that he retains the complete sense of the narrative. In the Legend of St. Edmund, however, Aelfric's editing mars even the sense of Abbo's Passio Sancti Eadmundi. It is my contention that the Legend of St. Edmund, Aelfric severs the natural ties between the king and the land, and omits the ritual slaying of the king. I also contend that Edmund's guardian, the grey wolf, is significant to an understanding of kingship that recognizes the role of the Christian God as well as the role of Odinn.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records that in 866, “a great heathen force came into English land, and they took winter-quarters in East Anglia; there they were horsed, and they made peace with them” (Savage 92). From there, the Viking army travels to York in 867, then to Mercia and Nottingham in 868, and returns to York again in 869. The Chronicle records that in 870, the Vikings again return to East Anglia, this time engaging in warfare with King Edmund:

Her rad se here ofer Myrce innon Eastaengla and
wintersetl namon aet Theodforda; and thy wintra
Eadmund cyning him with feaht, and tha Daeniscan
sige naman, and thone cyning ofslogon . . .
(Cotton MS. Tiberius B. IV Classen 27)

[The force went over Mercia to East Anglia, and took
quarters at Thetford. In that [winter], St. Edmund the
king fought against them and the Danes took the victory,
killed the king, and overcame all the land.] (Savage 92)

The details concerning the fight are few and it is unclear by what method King Edmund is killed in battle. Though this is not the only source that records the death of King Edmund, it is apparently one of the earliest. In both Aelfric’s and Abbo’s account, King Edmund of

East Anglia is a devout Christian who refuses to acknowledge the over-lordship of Hingwar, or pay tribute to Hingwar's Danish army. This refusal costs King Edmund his life. Instead of going out to meet his oppressors in battle gear, Edmund chooses to lay his weapons aside and imitate Christ's example in the Garden of Gethsemane. In both Abbo's version and Aelfric's rendering of the tale, Edmund refuses to fight Hingwar, but allows the Danish general to lead him to his death. After the Danes celebrate by torturing Edmund with arrows, they strike off his head and carry it away with them as they return to their ships. Along the way, the Danes dispose of Edmund's head in a thicket of brambles. Upon finding Edmund's body without the head, the distraught East Anglians form a search party and go looking for it. Meanwhile, a grey wolf, under God's direction (or so both Abbo and Aelfric assure us) finds the head of the king and guards it day and night. As the search party nears the head, the head begins to cry "here! here! here!" Eventually, the East Anglians find the head of the king and the head's peculiar guardian. The wolf allows King Edmund's people to transport the head back to the village and the wolf follows the procession silently at a distance. Once the procession reaches town, the wolf turns again and disappears into the forest.

The legend that emerges from popular sources after King Edmund dies is first recorded by Abbo of Fleury, a visiting French clergyman who reportedly hears the tale from Dunstan. Dunstan, Abbo's source, apparently hears the tale as a young man while listening to Edmund's aged armor-bearer relate the tale to King Aethelstan. A century later, Aelfric, Abbot of Eynsham, translates the tale from Abbo's Latin composition into Old English, along with the legends of other saints commemorated by the monastic community, at the request of Aelfric's patron, Aethelweard, and Aethelweard's son, Aelthelmaer.

Little is known about Aelfric of Eynsham, himself. He was born circa 955, probably in Wessex, and died circa 1010. In between these years, we know that Aelfric entered the Old Monastery at Winchester in 970 and was ordained as a priest in 985. In 1005, Aelfric

became the abbot of the new monastery at Eynsham. In the years between 989-1010, Aelfric composed the majority of his surviving works on theology, grammar, and martyrology, including De Temporibus Anni, Grammar, Glossary, Genesis, Colloquy, Interrogationes, De Falsis Deis, De XII Abusives, Lives of the Saints, Hexameron, Joshua, Numbers, Judges, Admonitio, Catholic Homilies I, and Catholic Homilies II, the Life of Aethelwold as well as letters to Wulfstan, Sigeweard, and the monks of Eynsham.

Aelfric's second book of Homilies, the Lives of the Saints, is an unusual collection of passions and lives of saints widely honored by the monastic community in England. Aelfric makes a distinction between Lives of the Saints and the other works that have come before:

Nam memini me in duobus anterioribus libris posuisse
passiones uel uitas sanctorum ipsorum, quos gens ista
caelebre colit cum ueneratione festi diei, et placuit
nobis in isto codicello ordinare passiones etiam uel
uitas sanctorum illorum quos non uulgas sed coenobite
officiis uenerantur.

[. . . I call to mind that, in the former two books, I have
set forth the Passions or Lives of those saints whom
that illustrious nation celebrates by honouring their
festival, and it has [now] pleased me to set forth, in this
book, the Passions as well as the Lives of those saints
whom not the vulgar, but the monks, honour by special
services.] (Preface I, 4-8)

Aelfric tells his audience that this work concerns the saints venerated by the monks rather than those merely esteemed by the laity and peasants. In the Preface, Aelfric addresses his book to two people: Aethelmaer, who is Aelfric's friend, and Aethelmaer's father,

Aethelweard, an alderman. In the Preface Aelfric explains in two languages his purpose for translating the Latin texts into Old English. In his address to Aethelmaer, Aelfric writes in Latin. When addressing his alderman and patron, Aelfric uses Old English.

Latin, it seems, was in a state of decline in some areas of the country in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. Fisher notes that “the decay of Latin learning did not necessarily involve a comparable decline in the strength of religious feeling, though a lack of an educated clergy would have made the maintenance of high standards of observance difficult to sustain over a long period” (205). Stenton contends that the “translation of scriptures, and the composition of homilies for delivery by rustic priests were all concessions to the needs of men of little knowledge or inadequate scholarship” (460). Stenton states that these translations “were in no way substitutes of the Latin learning through which alone a priest could come to the full understanding of his duty” (460). Stenton writes that Aethelweard’s grasp of Latin was mediocre at best and that Aethelweard’s “version of the Chronicle has exasperated historians ever since the twelfth century” (461). After establishing that every other Christian nation has, at one time or another, translated sacred texts into the vernacular, King Alfred, in his Preface to St. Gregory’s Pastoral Care writes:

. . . it seems better to me, if it seems so to you,
that we also should translate certain books which
are most necessary for all men to know, into the
language that we can all understand, and also
arrange it, as with God’s help we very easily can
if we have peace, so that all the youth of free men
now among the English people, who have the
means to be able to devote themselves to it,
may be set to study for as long as they are of no
other use, until they are able to read English writing

well; afterwards one may teach further in the Latin
language those whom one wishes to teach further
and wishes to promote to holy orders.

(Swanton 62)

Alfred's primary reason for translating the Latin texts into Old English is that Old English is the common language among the culturally and linguistically diverse population of ninth and tenth century England. The nobility, like Aethelweard and his son, may not have the background in Latin to read the texts as they are written. Given the state of classical learning, especially among the laity, perhaps Aethelweard's request for a translated text is understandable. Still, English is not a substitute for Latin in the church. Alfred states that if teacher wishes to promote a student or encourage that student to take holy orders, the pupil must learn Latin.

Aelfric is also quick to inform the audience that his reasons for translating the lives of the saints from Latin to English have little to do with any egalitarian sensibilities. He makes clear that the English language is inferior to Latin in a way that necessarily devalues the sacred texts in translation:

Nec tamen plura promitto me scripturum hac lingua,
quia nec conuenit huic sermocinationi plura inseri;
ne forte despectui habeantur margarite christi.

[I do not promise . . . to write very many [saints' Lives
and Passions] in this tongue, because it is not fitting that
many should be translated into our language, lest
peradventure the pearls of Christ be had in disrespect.]

(Preface I, 10-12)

Aelfric indicates that language is part of the mystery and sacred words part of the holiness surrounding the documents. By removing the texts linguistically from their roots, Aelfric

fears that he runs the risk of making common or lowly the Lives and Passions of the early saints, especially in the minds of those who hear or read the sacred stories interpreted in the vernacular. Some works, such as the Vitae Patrum, Aelfric states he will not attempt to translate at all because they contain “many subtle points which ought not be laid open to the laity, nor indeed are we ourselves quite able to fathom them” [“Ideoque reticemus de libro uitae patrum, in quo multa subtilia habentur quae non conueniunt aperiri laicis, nec nos ipsi ea quimus implere”] (Preface I, 13-14). Aelfric is so concerned about employing the vernacular in the service of the church that he begs the recipient of the text not to blame him for treating the Latin authorities in an unworthy manner:

Non mihi inputetur quod diuinam scripturam nostrae
lingue infero, quia arguet me praecatus multorum fidelium
et maxime aethelwerdi ducis et aethelmeri nostri, qui
ardentissime nostras interpretationes Amplectuntur
lectitando.

[Let it not be considered as a fault in me that I turn sacred
narrative into our own tongue, since the request of many
of the faithful shall clear me in this matter, particularly that
of the governor Aethelwerd, and my friend Aethelmer, who
most highly honour my translations by their perusal of them.]

(Preface I, 29-32)

Aelfric writes that he translates the texts from Latin to Old English to make the texts more accessible to his audience who may not read or speak Latin fluently and to delight both readers and hearers as well as move them to greater acts of devotion:

Hunc quoque codicem transtulimus de latinitate ad
usitatam Anglicam sermocinationem, studentes aliis
prodesse edificando ad fidem lectione huius

narrationis quibus-cumque placuerit huic operi operam dare, siue legendo, seu Audiendo; quia estimo non esse ingratum fidelibus.

[This book I have translated from the Latin into the usual English speech, desiring to profit others by edifying them in the faith whenever they read this relation, as many, namely, as are pleased to study this work, either by reading or hearing it read; for I think it is not displeasing to the faithful.] (Preface I, 1-3)

Aelfric's purpose, then, is to teach and encourage through the examples of the lives and martyrdom of the saints contained in his Lives of the Saints, to spur on the apathetic in the faith to greater works. Aelfric claims that he writes "not at all" to "offend the hearers" but to "rather refresh by their [the saints'] exhortations such as are slothful in the faith, since the Passions of the Martyrs greatly revive a failing faith" [Illa uero que scripturus sum suspicor non offendere audientes, sed magis fide torpentes recreare hortationibus, quia martyrum passiones nimium fidem erigant languentem] (Preface I, 13-16).

Aelfric does not pretend to make completely accurate translations of the Latin narratives. In the Preface, Aelfric writes:

Nec potuimus in ista translatione semper uerbum ex uerbo transferre, sed tamen sensum ex sensu, sicut inuenimus in sancta scriptura, diligenter curauimus uertere Simplici et aperta locutione quatinus proficiat Audientibus.

[Nor am I able, in this translation, to render everything word for word, but I have at any rate carefully

endeavored to give exact sense for sense, just as I find
it in the holy writing, by means of such simple and
obvious language as may profit them that hear it.]

(Preface I, 22-24)

Aelfric confesses almost immediately that he has chosen to alter some of the details in these narratives to better suit his audience culturally. Because the Anglo-Saxons are used to encountering only one king in a story, Aelfric simplifies the Latin text in his translation to include only one king per saint's life, even if two or more emperors appear in the Latin text. (Preface 20-21). Aelfric also takes liberties in shortening or abridging the "longer narratives of the Passions" (I, 25-26). Though careful to retain the general sense of the longer passages, Aelfric abbreviates the language "in order that no tediousness may be inflicted on the fastidious, as might be the case if much prolixity were used in our own language as occurs in the Latin" (I, 26-28). Aelfric further contends that his method does no injury to the text but rather makes it more bearable, even delightful. He writes that brevity of speech "does not always deprave speech but oftentimes makes it more charming" (I, 29). Aelfric contends that the verbosity for which Latin is famous does not translate well into English. By limiting his translations to the sense of the longer narratives, Aelfric hopes to better retain the interest of his audience. In spite of this, Aelfric takes pains to establish himself as a faithful translator of the sense of the text. In his address to Aethelweard, Aelfric writes:

Ne secge we nan thincg niwes on thissere gesetnysse
forthan the hit stod gefyrn awriten
on ledenbocum theah the tha laewedan men thaet nyston
Nelle we eac mid leasungum thyllic liccetan
forthan the geleaffulle faederas and halige lareowas
hit awriton on leden-spraece to langum gemynde
and to trymmincge tham towerdum mannum.

[We say nothing new in this book,
 because it has stood written down long since
 in Latin books, though lay-men knew it not.
 Neither will we feign such things by means of falsehoods,
 because devout fathers and holy doctors
 wrote it in the Latin tongue, for a lasting memorial,
 and to confirm the faith of future generations.]

(Preface I, 46-52)

Long and short are relative terms in Aelfric's work which covers some 974 pages in a modern two-volume, dual language edition. Spatially, the passage of time is equally questionable, both between events within the tales and time between the writing of the legend and the emergence of the saints' following among the clergy. Aelfric writes that these legends have been in circulation for some time and indicates that all have authorized Latin sources, suggesting antiquity. Some of Aelfric's "antiquated" legends are scarcely over three-hundred-years old, however, and have roots that extend back, not to Rome or Egypt, but rather to Northumbria, Wessex and East Anglia. There are thirty-one lives and passions included in his collection of saints' legends and, of these, four of his legends are about Anglo-Saxon saints.

In this context, Aelfric's Legend of St. Edmund is a bit of a puzzle. As I have indicated, Aelfric establishes his sources as "devout fathers and holy doctors" who recorded their works as "a lasting memorial, and to confirm the faith of future generations" (46-52). Yet, the primary source of the St. Edmund legend is the beheaded king's surviving armor bearer who is several years old when he conveys his information to young Cuthbert. Cuthbert, when he is old, then relates the tale to Abbo, Aelfric's Latin source. Aelfric also contends that he will neither record any new information, nor "feign such things by means of falsehood." Yet in recording in Old English only the sense of the

Latin text and editing longer passages from the older texts, he significantly disfigures the original and at times compromises the sense of his translations as well. Aelfric caters very little to the modern historian's understanding of truth, though he does take pains, apparently, to trim excessive tortures and purge lengthy, pithy monologues from his translations in order to improve the original works. Rather than adding more to Abbo's text to further flesh out the characters in the tale, Aelfric reduces the scope of the basic narrative to include fewer miracles and keeps lengthy monologues from drowning the plot.

Russom, Pope, and Gem have noted that Aelfric's style does not tend to bend the natural structure of the Old English language in order to imitate the flair of Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry, nor does Aelfric strive for the complexity of structure and meter found in Beowulf, Dream of the Rood, or Battle of Maldon. Rather, Aelfric's style combines straightforward prose with some conventions of Anglo-Saxon poetry. Pope terms the result "poetic" or "rhythmic prose" due to its limited use of Anglo-Saxon poetic devices, particularly alliteration. Aelfric's poetic style deviates from the "two-stress meter" favored by the Beowulf poet, and in meter and level of complexity it deviates from the models of heroic poetry. Aelfric's "use of alliteration," however, "makes it clear that [Aelfric] employs a meaningful line unit; and scribal 'pointing' at the mid-line syntactic breath indicates the presence of smaller significant units comparable to verse" (Russom 133-134). Russom also contends that Aelfric's style follows closely the naturally occurring speech patterns in Old English. Russom writes that "since Aelfric is not restricted by the rules of traditional verse, his balanced patterns presumably occur with something like their natural frequency" (142). In the Legend of St. Edmund, Aelfric's modified heroic style suits the subject, the death of a new kind of hero--the martyred Anglo-Saxon royal saint. Hurt contends that "in some ways, the saint's life came to fill in a Christianized society the function that the epic or lay had in a pagan society," and, just as it occurs in the Cynewulfian saints lives, the "epic manner" in Aelfric's Lives of the Saints appears "not only in diction but also in characterization and tone" (65).

Aelfric is not the first to use heroic poetry to celebrate Christian themes. In the English language “Caedmon’s Hymn” is the earliest written example using the devices of secular heroic poetry for sacred purposes, and Dream of the Rood employs heroic conventions to commemorate the battle prowess of the king who willingly gives up his life for his friends. Mayr-Harting writes that at “many a turn the world of heroic saga coloured the presentation of saints’ lives, and this in its turn influenced the actions of those who aspired to sanctity” (26). It is possible to see in the actions which St. Edmund of East Anglia takes upon hearing Hingwar’s threats the influence of other holy lives, particularly King Hezekiah, St. Sebastian, and Christ. It is also possible to see the influence of earlier hagiographical works upon Abbo’s and Aelfric’s interpretations or glosses of events in the tale and the pre-Christian elements in the silence with which Aelfric enshrouds particular events, or omits them entirely.

It is Aelfric’s silence or lack of elaboration on the images of the dying king, the earth-fast tree, and the wolf that raises speculation about the significance of these images in Aelfric’s Legend of St. Edmund. In the last decade, the bulk of Aelfrician criticism has been concerned with Aelfric’s style or with Aelfric’s use of particular words or phrases. Aelfric’s Legend of St. Edmund has been virtually ignored. The academic community has also turned from examining the historical or cultural validity of the events in Legend of St. Edmund. This has left the literary cultural historian with scant recent secondary-source material dealing with the Legend of St. Edmund in its cultural context. Almost none of the recent available sources address the presence of the wolf in the tale, or the earth-fast tree to which the Vikings secure Edmund before torturing and killing him. Some critics, particularly Gransden and Loomis, have suggested that Aelfric’s Legend of St. Edmund, based on Abbo’s Passio, is a collection of other hagiographic material gathered from other saint’s lives.

Gransden contends that Abbo’s Passio, the primary source for Abbo’s Life of St. Edmund, seems to be a “hodge-potch” of earlier saints’ legends, a collage of imagery

drawn from earlier sources (6). She blames Aelfric for constructing the tale from parts of St. Sebastian's martyrdom, Life of St. Mary of Egypt, Martyrdom of St. Denis and even the Old Testament heroic figure, Daniel (6-7). While the tale might borrow from all of these traditions to some extent, Gransden faults Abbo, not the elderly religious story-teller Dunstan, with excessive plagiarism, though Abbo apparently depends heavily upon St. Dunstan's oral account for his information. If the legend borrows mainly from Roman hagiographical stock, as Gransden claims, it is possible that Dunstan or the old armor bearer fabricated the account of Edmund's death, or augmented the narrative with pieces from existing saints' legends or topoi from remnants of pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon or Norse origins. While Gransden's position does not entirely account for the presence of some events occurring within the narrative, her arguments challenge the reader to consider the sources of Abbo's and Aelfric's St. Edmund legends and to ponder to what extent older source material, both pagan and Christian, could have contributed to the evolution of the Saint Edmund legend and to Aelfric's version in particular.

Aelfric's Lives of the Saints, though tamer than their Latin originals, share with other saints' legends a synthesis of Christian and heathen or pagan archetypes. While it is not possible to know precisely how familiar Aelfric or his sources were with the religion of the pre-Christian Norse, Danes or Anglo-Saxons, it may have been difficult to fully escape the influences of these cultures in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Most scholars contend that the conversion period marked the end of organized Anglo-Saxon religion, if there was even such an organized religion at beginning of the Anglo-Saxon occupation of Britain. Based on this information, some scholars have decided that there were no survivals of pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon culture and that the Vikings converted so quickly that virtually no aspect of their religion survived in England past the ninth century. Chaney writes, however, that although "no Anglo-Saxon work gives us full information on pre-Christian religion in England," almost no "poem from before the Norman Conquest, no matter how Christian its theme, is not steeped in it, and the evidence for pagan survivals and their

integration into the new faith go beyond even the literary sources” (*Paganism* 200).

Chaney cites briefly a few of the references to heathen practices in the laws of post-conversion England, particularly “under Alfred, Edward the Elder, Athelstan, Edmund, Aethelred the Redeless, and Cnut” and states that references to pagan revivals also exist in canonical works as late as the 890s (199). In *Sermon of the Wolf*, Wulfstan lists the deeds of the English, including “heathen vices” and apostasy, that are bringing about their destruction at the hand of the Vikings (181). Wulfstan also notes the presence of “witches and wizards” whose defiance of Christian doctrine is precipitating God’s wrath upon the English. Though in theory, the conversion of England is complete, there are remnants--fragments of previous religious thought and practice.

Chaney believes that pagan practice survived under a thin Christian veneer after the conversion period, particularly in the popular understanding of kingship. Though at times Chaney overextends his arguments, he does raise the reader’s awareness of pre-Christian elements in Anglo-Saxon culture and he makes a case for studying works that are written down in the Christian era with an understanding of the religion that existed in Anglo-Saxon England before St. Augustine landed on the Isle of Thanet. Chaney writes, “We divorce too much, I think, Anglo-Saxon Christianity from the culture, shaped by paganism, which formed and even warped it” (*Paganism* 217).

Wormald takes a different view of pagan survivals among the Anglo-Saxons. He contends that for the most part the conversion was complete by the end of the eighth century. Wormald notes that by 800 fathers (and mothers) stopped naming their sons after saga heroes, and he credits this information as proof that the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon population was complete. One of the letters Aelfric writes in the first years of the eleventh century, however, is addressed to a person named Sigeward. Sige is a hero from a Norse saga called the *Saga of the Wolsungs*. It appears that even though by this time the Anglo-Saxons may have made a clean break with the saga heroes of old, the Norse had not. King Alfred and later, Wilfstan, Archbishop of York, both write letters

condemning Anglo-Saxons who abdicated culturally and politically to join forces with the Norse mercenaries. Even on the continent, in the ninth century, Pippin II of Aquatain apparently adopted the Norse religion in order to win allies for himself against his cousin (Wormald 154).

Stenton states that Christianity was the dominant religion in Anglo-Saxon England as early as 644. He is quick to add, however, that “it is equally certain that the older beliefs of the English people, though driven underground, were still alive” (128). Arguing for the presence of a viable pagan religion in pre-Christian England, Stenton uses place-names to demonstrate the attachment of the local population to certain deities. Stenton contends that the presence of the gods’ names imbedded in the place-names of specific geographical locations demonstrates that Augustine and his companions encountered a “living” religion when they landed on the Isle of Thanet in 597 (102). Relying on archaeological and linguistic evidence, Stenton contends that “Woden, Thunor, Tiw, and Frig are the only deities whose individualized worship in England is beyond dispute” (99). Stenton does state, however, that “[n]o heathen names have so far been found in Northumbria” and that “they are very rare between Humber and the Welland” and “there is no certain example in East Anglia” (102). On the other hand, the Anglo-Saxons were not culturally isolated from the influence of Norse or Danish settlers who apparently had a thriving religion of their own. In the first quarter of the tenth century, Norse-Irish raiders returned to settle, rather than just attack and flee. Where there is an absence of linguistic associations with the pagan past, either Anglo-Saxon or Scandinavian, archeology provides links between the Christianized cultures and their pre-Christian influences.

While Wormald is not prepared to argue that the Anglo-Saxons still indulged in observance of pre-Christian ritual, he suggests that the Vikings’ religion was still thriving in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Wormald writes that the stress which the Anglo-Saxon writers laid on “the paganism of their Viking enemies may not have been misplaced” (163). A scattering of rather curious archeological discoveries seems to

validate this opinion. The Gosforth Cross, situated in a churchyard near Gosforth, Cumbria, displays an unusual synthesis of pre-Christian and Christian religion. On the east face of the cross, near the bottom, is a reproduction of the Crucifixion scene with Longinus attending and “a woman with a distinctively Scandinavian hairstyle” standing with him (163). Above this, Wormald notes, is “a scene reflecting the vengeance of Vidarr, Son of Odin, on the Great Wolf [Fenrir], an episode in Ragnarok, the Norse Dooms Day” (163). Wormald surmises from this that “memories of pagan traditions died hard in Scandinavian England” just as they did in Iceland. He further states that “there is no counterpart” to this alchemy of religious ideas in early Anglo-Saxon sculpture, citing this as evidence for a clean break from the pagan past among the Anglo-Saxons. The appearance of other Viking Age sculpture on previously Christian Anglo-Saxon sites, according to Wormald, “shows points of continuity with Anglian traditions,” and demonstrates, as at Gosforth, an assimilated Christian message that does not “ignore the pagan Scandinavian past” (163).

It is unclear which group of settlers, the Christianized Danes or the Irish-Norse population, contributed most to the kind of synthesis found at Gosforth. During the tenth century, almost 200 years after Edmund’s death, Viking armies, the descendants of Hingwar (Ivarr the Boneless) began invading the northern Anglo-Saxon kingdoms from bases in Ireland. Campbell writes that “through the first half of the tenth century, Ivarr’s descendants sought from their Dublin base to regain control of Northumbria” (145). In 918, York, already under Danish control, received threats of an Irish-Norse invasion from Dublin. In 919, Norse invaders reconquered York and established a kingdom in the northern part of the region. Campbell contends that there “is no question that a very substantial part of the aristocracy of this area [the Danelaw] was of Viking origin or that they had dominated the whole of it for 38 years without intermission before Edward the Elder’s Conquest” (161). These invaders had perhaps some contact with the Christian religion, but it is fairly certain that the new army was still predominately heathen. Over

the next hundred years, the new Viking invaders settled in beside their Christianized Danish neighbors, bringing their religion and their systems of government with them. Swanton contends that “Wulfstan’s northern seat at York was at the heart of the Scandinavian settlement, and heathen worship must have been a constant preoccupation” (184). Swanton further notes that “in his sermons and in the legal codes for which he was responsible,” Wulfstan frequently speaks against the pagan practices of the newly arrived Northmen and the remnants of pre-Christian religion still practiced by the Anglo-Danish and Anglo-Saxon populations (184). Stenton records that as late as 927, the kings of Scotland and Strthclyde and the English lords of Bamburgh met with Athelstan and pledged to “suppress ‘idolatry’” within their countries (340).

Ridyard states that “the complexity of the problem of cultural transmission cannot be over estimated” especially as it concerns the cultural transmission between the Anglo-Saxons and the other cultures they encountered (77). Ridyard reminds the reader, however, that one should not overlook the Hebrew, Greek and Roman impact upon the Anglo-Saxons through religious education in the churches and monasteries. She writes that the “traditions which the church thus inherited included not only the northern and pagan, upon which the Chaney thesis is centered, but also the Mediterranean and the Hebraeo-Christian ” (77). Ridyard also believes that Chaney overstates his case for the survival of the pagan cult of kings, the innate sanctity of royal families, and the king’s sacral role as mediator between God and humankind. She contends that with the coming of Christianity the nature of kingship changed, becoming something other than what it was in the pagan past. She states that Anglo-Saxon kingship in the Christian era was not so much concerned with preserving its pre-Christian roots, but rather with molding “the rulership which it inherited in accordance with its own societal needs--to create a new model of useful rulership” (78). The result of this process, Ridyard claims, was more than a mere synthesis; it was “a radical reinterpretation of the traditions to which it was heir” (78). While the expectations the *folc*, or people placed upon the king might not have

changed, Ridyard contends “the principles underlying that expectation were new and challenging” and, while the form might remain the same, “meaning was changed” (78).

Ridyard suggests that though the forms of pre-Christian culture and religion might have survived, the meaning of those forms was lost or changed over time. To some extent this is probably true. In one church calendar, dated before 1100, the anonymous writer details both the significance of each month in the church calendar and how each month was significant to pre-Christian cultures in Rome and in England. Some of the author’s information seems spurious, particularly his explanation of *Thrimilci*, the “three-milk” month which the author suggests is so called because “formerly there was in Britain, and also in the land of Germany from whence the nation of the Angles came into this Britain, such plenty that in that month they milked their beasts three times a day” (Swanton 80). This demonstrates some knowledge of the past, but an imperfect understanding of the religious significance. The days of the week, the names of the gods (to some extent), holidays, festivals and prognosticating devices and folk belief remained beyond the seventh century, but the meaning and the understanding of some pagan ideas, Ridyard contends, vanished in the years following the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon population. Though it is impossible to state to what extent the Anglo-Saxons and Danes retained a working knowledge of pre-Christian religious rites and symbols, it is possible to see in the sacrificial death of the king and in the presence of the wolf at Edmund’s death dim reflections of what may have existed in the Anglo-Saxon and Danish imagination before the introduction of Christianity. The result of this kind of syncretistic stitching of details is a patch-work quilt of ideas and imagery. The authors seem to employ odd scraps from several sources to give the tale its unique coloring and texture.

As I have already demonstrated in this chapter, Aelfric’s Anglo-Saxon England is not a homogenous culture, but rather a collection of communities, Danish, Norse, Celtic, and English. The legends in Aelfric’s Lives of the Saints are not literal translations of the original works, but rather translations of the sense of those tales. Aelfric’s paraphrased

legends are flavored by the cultures that shaped them. Over the next three chapters I hope to offer some sense of origin and continuity to the images of the dying king, the earth-fast tree, and the grey wolf in Aelfric's Legend of St. Edmund.

CHAPTER II

THE KING MUST DIE

John Glyde, Jr., a folklorist who has studied the legend of St. Edmund, reports that at Hoxne, an oak exists which has “always been known as St. Edmund’s Oak” and is believed to be the same tree to which Edmund was bound at the time of his legendary martyrdom at the hands of the Vikings (Loomis 108). Loomis records that almost a thousand years after the death of King Edmund, a tree exists which still carries the designation of Edmund’s Oak. Whether or not this tree is the same tree upon which Edmund died in 870, the designation of such a tree demonstrates that St. Edmund left a considerable impression upon the descendants of the ninth century Viking raiders and Anglo-Saxons of East Anglia. The Danes seem to take a special interest in venerating King Edmund of East Anglia. Not only do the Danes seem to rapidly convert to Christianity, but within thirty years of his death, the Danes become avid supporters of his cult (Campbell Pagans 25). Ridyard provides a detailed analysis of particular coinage in currency in the Danelaw in the years following Edmund’s martyrdom. She believes that these commemorative coins, bearing a bust of the king on one side and a wolf on the other side, were “minted and circulated in the Eastern Danelaw of which Edmund’s kingdom formed a part, under the auspices of its Danish rulers, and for the use of its mixed Danish and indigenous population” (216). She contends that the coinage is indicative of the political and cultural unity emerging between the Danes and the East Anglians by the end of the tenth century as well as evidence for the mutual support, both Danish and East Anglian, of the cult of St. Edmund. Ridyard’s explanations for the Danish adoption of St.

Edmund's cult center on St. Edmund's role as "mediator, spiritual or political, between East Angles and Danes" (217). Ridyard contends that any one or combination of the following reasons might have facilitated the cultural transference of the cult of St.

Edmund: 1) the Danes discovered that "the Christian God was a protector at least as effective as Wodan"; 2) the Danes wanted to appease the conquered East Anglians and halt rebellion within the borders by making Edmund less of a political rallying point for the disenfranchised East Anglians now living under Danish rule; 3) the Danes sought political reconciliation with the East Angles; 4) the Danes wanted to establish the legitimacy of Danish rule by commemorating the king they conquered (217). Ridyard states that Edmund seems to have been the last independent reigning Anglo-Saxon monarch in East Anglia and "perhaps even the last surviving representative of the ancient ruling dynasty of the East Angles" (217). Ridyard concludes that St. Edmund's "Danish 'successors' hoped that by showing themselves to be patrons of his cult they might suggest their own legitimate succession to the kingdom and might accordingly buttress their somewhat anomalous political position" (217). Perhaps it is impossible to say what aspects of King Edmund's martyrdom impressed Aelfric's culturally diverse audience the most or how his audience interpreted politically the sacrifice Edmund makes on behalf of his people. Abbo and Aelfric focus on Edmund's humility, courage, and integrity and interpret the death of the king through a Christianized filter. Still, one has to wonder if Aelfric's audience noticed that the narrative is not completely seamless in its presentation, nor the sacrificial death of the king so far removed from the heathen past.

Aelfric records that after the Viking army (led by Hingwar [Ivarr] and Hubba) landed in Northumbria and conquered the territory, Hingwar traveled by sea to East Anglia to continue the conquest and demand tribute. The Chronicle records that this is not the first foray the Vikings made into East Anglia for this purpose. The Vikings most likely pressed King Edmund of East Anglia with demands for financial support before this army arrives. Still, Aelfric implies, the Viking army manages to catch Edmund by surprise. As the

situation reaches a crisis point, Edmund responds to the threat of Viking defeat in a way that suggests that he looked to biblical and extra-biblical models for inspiration.

King Edmund seems to have a difficult time choosing a role model in his period of crisis and Aelfric seems to have trouble choosing which sacred role-model Edmund resembles most consistently as the story develops. Aelfric opens the narrative with a description of the slaughter following in the wake of the latest Danish invasion under the generalship of Hingwar (Ivarr the Boneless) and Hubba. While Hubba continues in Northumbria, Hingwar turns south and east, invading East Anglia by sea, looking for tribute and political power:

And se fore-saeda hingwar faerlice swa swa wulf
 on lande bestalcode and tha leode sloh
 weras and wif and tha ungewittigan cild
 and to bysmore tucode tha bilewitan cristenan
 He sende tha sona sythan to tham cyninge
 beotlic aerende thaet he abugan sceolde
 to his man-raedene gif he rohte his feores

[And the aforesaid Hingwar suddenly, like a wolf,
 stalked over the land and slew the people,
 men and women, and witless children,
 and shamefully tormented the innocent Christians.
 Then soon afterward he sent to the king
 a threatening message, that he must bow down
 to do him homage, if he recked of his life.]

(II, 39-45)

Hingwar's messenger further details his proposition to the East Angles and their king:

Hingwar ure cyning cene and sigefaest

on sae and on lande haefth fela theoda gewyld
 an com nu mid fyrde faerlice her to lande
 thaet he her winter-setl mid his werode haebbe
 Nu het he the daelan thine digelan gold-hordas
 and thinra yldrena gestreon ardlice with hine
 and thu beo his under-kyning gif thu cucu beon wylt
 for-than-the thu naefst tha mihte thaet thu mage him with-standan.

[‘Hingwar our king, keen and victorious
 by sea and by land, hath rule over many peoples,
 and has landed here suddenly even now with an army,

that he may take up his winter-quarters here with his host.
 Now he commandeth thee to divide thy secret treasures
 and thine ancestors’ wealth quickly with him.
 and thou shalt be his under-king, if thou desire to live,
 because thou hast not the power that thou mayst withstand him.’]

(II, 48-55)

Hingwar’s messenger leaves little doubt of his general’s battle prowess or his expectations. Hingwar wants a military base, financial support, and political clout. Hingwar offers the East Anglians life at the expense of their independence, their inheritance, and their economic well-being.

The story opens much like the Old Testament story told in II Kings 18-19, II Chronicles 32, and Isaiah 36-37, with an invincible heathen army under the leadership of an arrogant general coming against a righteous kingdom. When Sennacherib and the Assyrian army threaten to besiege Hezekiah’s city, Sennacherib’s ambassador, like Hingwar’s messenger, asks how the inhabitants of the city intend to repel an attack that

other kingdoms and divine forces have not been able to withstand. Sennacherib's messenger asks:

Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad?

Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Have they
rescued Samaria from my hand? Who of the gods
of these countries has been able to save his land from
me? How then can the Lord deliver Jerusalem from
my hand? (NIV Isaiah, 36: 19-20)

But Sennacherib, like Hingwar, will settle for tribute and control of the region. The messenger informs the king and the people of Jerusalem that Sennacherib wants to make a deal:

. . . This is what the king of Assyria says: 'Make
peace with me and come out to me. Then every
one of you will eat from his own vine and fig tree
and drink water from his own cistern, until I come
and take you to a land like your own, a land of grain
and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards . . .
Choose life and not death!'

(NIV II Kings, 18: 31-32)

Choosing life, in this case, means surrendering land and relocating to another territory that may or may not be as fruitful as the land each son had inherited from his father for generations. Sennacherib's message sends Hezekiah scurrying for divine help. First, he spreads the letter from Sennacherib across the altar and prays to God, then he consults the prophet. The prophet hears the voice of God and responds to the king immediately:

Tell your master, 'This is what the Lord says:
Do not be afraid of what you have heard--those
words with which the underlings of the king of

Assyria have blasphemed me. Listen! I am going
to put a spirit in him so that when he hears a certain
report, he will return to his own country, and there
I will have him cut down with the sword.'

(NIV Isaiah, 37:6-7)

Like King Hezekiah, St. Edmund receives a threatening message from an invading army and tells the general-king's messenger that he will not pay tribute or bow to the opposing general's heathen leadership. At this point, the Old Testament model falls apart, and instead of the holy man arriving with confirmation that they will win the battle and encouraging the king to stay and fight, the messenger of God advises the king to run and save his own life. When Edmund consults the bishop for direction, the bishop responds, not with assurance, but with terror. Aelfric writes that the bishop "feared for this terrible misfortune, / and for the king's life, and said that it seemed best to him / that he should submit to that which Hingwar bade him" (II, 59-61). Edmund responds to this information with silence and stares at the ground for a moment, as if in a quandary. This is clearly not the news he is expecting to hear. After scrapping the model of Hezekiah, Edmund embraces another example, this time, from the New Testament. After pausing for a moment to consider the gravity of the situation, Aelfric decides to meet his adversaries as Christ met the mob in the Garden of Gethsemane --unarmed, meek, and going willingly to his death:

Hwaet tha eadmund cynincg mid tham the hingwar com
stod innan his healle thaes haelendes gemyndig
and awarep his waepna wolde geaefen-laecan
cristes gebysnungum the for-bead petre
mid waepnum to winnenne with tha waelhreowan iudeiscan

[Then Edmund the king, when Hingwar came,

stood within his hall mindful of the Savior,
 and threw away his weapons, desiring to imitate
 Christ's example, who forbade Peter
 to fight with weapons against the bloodthirsty Jews.]
 (II, 101-104)

Edmund chooses to embrace death, rather than sacrifice the spiritual and temporal well-being of his people, or *folc*.

Aelfric's St. Edmund also emulates holy men in the manner of his death at the hands of the Danes. Aelfric compares him to Saint Sebastian, as King Edmund also dies at the command of a heathen political figure and is pierced with darts or arrows. Aelfric writes that the Vikings bind Edmund to "anum eorth-faestum treowe" [an earth-fast tree] and hurl spear-like missiles at the king "oth thaet he aell waes besaet mid heora scotungum / swilce ingles byrsta swa swa sebastianus waes" ["until he was all beset with their shots, as with a porcupine's bristles, even as Sebastian was"] (II, 117-118). While the iconography of the arrows does establish a link between St. Sebastian and St. Edmund, it also indicates a connection between St. Edmund and the Norse god Baldr whom the gods set up for target practice. McDougall implicitly establishes this connection between Baldr and King Edmund, portraying both as living targets set up for the amusement of the crowd. McDougall writes that pelting a particular person with missals of various kinds seems to have been a regular after dinner treat in the North:

Evidence that using a member of one's company as
 a designated bullseye was regarded by medieval
 Icelanders as the proper sport of the ancient gods
 available in Snorri Sturluson's account of the Aesir's
 practice of standing the invulnerable Baldr up at
 assemblies so that all present could amuse
 themselves by pelting him with anything handy

(219).

Unlike King Edmund, though, Baldr is practically invincible against the missiles hurled at him, except for the dart Loki fashions from a sprig of mistletoe. This dart, having been made from a plant which had not promised to hurt Baldr, pierces through the skin and Baldr dies instantly. The strongest link between Baldr's death and St. Edmund's slaying is the manner in which it is carried out. Aelfric records that the Vikings set Edmund up, "swilce him to gamenes to" ["as if for their own amusement"] (II, 116). Like Baldr, Edmund also dies while providing entertainment for his assailants.

The thin veneer of Christian death does not quite cover all of Edmund of East Anglia's concerns. Like Hezekiah, Edmund is worried about his people's temporal inheritance and their honor among humankind. He tells the Bishop that he cannot leave his people or their inheritance unprotected:

Eala thu bisceop to bysmore synd getawode
 thas earman land-leoda and me nu leofre waere
 thaet ic on feohte feolle with tham the min folc
 moste heora eardes brucan

[‘Behold, thou Bishop, the poor people of this land
 are brought to shame, and it were now dearer to me
 that I should fall in fight against him who would possess
 my people's inheritance.’] (II, 64-67)

In the midst of his ethical dilemma and his debate with the priest, Edmund chooses to remain with his *folc*. When the priest advises Edmund to flee, Edmund responds ‘like a king’:

Naes me naefre gewunelic thaet ic worhte fleames
 ac ic wolde swithor sweltan gif ic thorfte
 for minum agenum earde and se aelmihtiga god wat

thaet ic nelle abugan fram his biggengum aefre
 ne fram his sothan lufe swelte ic lybbe ic

[‘It was never my custom to take flight,
 but I would rather die, if I must,
 for my own land; and almighty God knoweth
 that I will never turn aside from his worship,
 nor from His true love, whether I die or live.’]
 (II, 78-82)

Here, Edmund asserts his relationship to the land and to his *folc*. He vows to fight “for minum agenum erde,” [“for my own land”] (II, 80). At this point, Edmund decides to stay and confront the Vikings and die if necessary to defend the land itself and his people. Edmund gives himself for the people and for the land, in much the same way heathen kings before him sacrificed themselves for the well-being of the *folc*. Though on the surface it seems that he is sacrificing himself in a Christ-like manner--giving himself meekly to the hands of his oppressors--his temporal concerns seem out of place. If, instead, he is dying in defense of his land and people, why does Edmund throw aside his weapons and passively allow the Vikings to take him? If he is reticent to bow to Hingwar’s lordship, why does Edmund meekly follow behind him when Hingwar leads him away?

In the tenth century, the bishops begin to refer to the king as Christ’s vicar, a post which carried with it the responsibility for the spiritual health of the king’s subjects. In Institutes of Polity, Archbishop Wulfstan reminds the king of his role as guardian of the faith and admonishes him to set the example of piety within his realm. Wulfstan writes that it “behoves the Christian king in a Christian nation to be, as is right, the people’s comfort and a righteous shepherd over the Christian flock” (Swanton 188). Wulfstan contends that it is the king’s responsibility to “raise up the Christian faith with all his power and zealously advance and protect God’s Church everywhere, and with just law to

bring peace and reconciliation to all Christian people” (188). Wulfstan also calls upon the king to “repress and condemn heathenism” and “carefully keep God’s commandments and frequently seek out wisdom with the council, if he wish to obey God aright” (188). If the king seeks a reputation that lives on after he dies, Wulfstan advises him to “love God’s law and abhor injustice” (188). Wulfstan is not the only church official to emphasize the religious duties of the king as Christ’s representative on earth. Silverman records that Aelfric, in his homily for the Sunday after Ascension writes that the king is “Cristes sylfes speligend” [the king is Christ’s own vicar] (332). Silverman contends that by the mid-tenth century, this model of kingship was fully in place in England (333). While Edmund’s death occurs about half a century before this designation of the king’s office appears in writing, it is evident that the church recognized the potential the king had to influence his people for good or evil. Clearly, Edmund accepts his responsibility and demonstrates his convictions through passively resisting the demands of the heathen general.

The role of the king as priest and spiritual head of his community appears before the coming of Christianity. Chaney carefully outlines the role of the priest king in the early Anglo-Saxon period. He states that “in northern paganism, not only was Woden or Odin the god of the ruler, but the ruler was the leader of the tribal cult. The king’s god was the people’s god, and the king as *heiler fullt* stood between his tribe and the tribal gods, sacrificing for victory and plenty, ‘making’ the year” (*Paganism* 209). The king, according to Chaney, was “[t]ied into temporal and cosmic history by divine descent, he represented and indeed was the ‘luck’ of his people” and Chaney suggests that this is how one should view the role of the traditional Germanic, Anglo-Saxon ruler (*Paganism* 209). “Consequently,” Chaney notes, “the conversion of the *folc* stemmed from the conversion of the king to the more powerful deity, since it was the king’s relationship with the gods which ‘saved’ his people as much as did the gods themselves” (*Paganism* 209). Chaney

further states that “this royal function, when translated into Christian eschatology, was to be part of medieval rulership throughout the Middle Ages” (*Paganism* 209).

Even the terms Anglo-Saxon poets and scribes used to modify warrior kings are epithets which express the different roles embodied in secular and sacred kingship in the Anglo-Saxon era. Clemoes stresses the importance of epithet, particularly those concerning the roles of the king. He asserts that terms “such as, ‘eoden’ (leader of a people), ‘-cyning’ (‘king’) compounds (‘eor-,’ ‘folc-,’ ‘leod-,’ eod-cyning’) and ‘folce’s or ‘rices hydre’ (‘guardian of a people or kingdom’), relate a king to his whole people, while others . . . such as ‘dryhten’ . . . connect him with a troop of his choice followers, his ‘comitatus’” (5). Clemoes further notes that “the words ‘eoder’ (‘an enclosure or precinct’), ‘helm’ (‘a cover’), and ‘hleo’ (‘a shelter’) are used only in poetry . . . to refer to a king as a protector of a social group” (8). While all of these appear in reference to *Beowulf*, only the generic *cyning* is used with the same frequency in Aelfric’s *Legend of St. Edmund*. Other titles, such as *faeder* (father) and *sanct* (saint), replace the traditional warrior attributes of kingship. Holy passivity, it seems, replaces the action-based epithets of *Beowulf*.

Chaney contends that “[a]mong the Germanic tribes, to whom political and religious authority were not bifurcated, the king . . . not only was the war-chief of his people but . . . also embodied their ‘luck’” (*Kingship* 63). According to Chaney, the king was the political head of his *folc* as well as the incarnate manifestation of their fortune, good or ill. The king was also “the high-priest who dealt with the gods” and interceded for the *folc* (*Kingship* 63). In both pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon culture and in Christianized Anglo-Saxon culture, the king is apparently “the cosmic point through which is mediated divine help from above and sacrificial right relations with God from below” (*Kingship* 56). According to Chaney, the king is the connection between the physical and metaphysical worlds. He is an animated icon of flesh and blood through which the people have contact with the divine. Chaney writes that in Anglo-Saxon England, the king “is the tribal vessel

between Heaven and earth through which Grace is shed on the folk” (*Kingship* 56). The role of the king does develop in later Anglo-Saxon England in such a way as to make the king responsible for the spiritual welfare of his *folc*. Instead of mediator, however, the king becomes a role-model for personal piety and he seems to relinquish his mystical priestly role.

Chaney further contends that in pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon culture, the role of the king involved personal sacrifice. He writes that “pagan priest-kings staved off tribal calamity by offering *blot*--even themselves--to the gods” (*Paganism* 213). It is possible to read King Edmund’s execution as a supreme sacrifice of this kind. Edmund offers himself to avert disaster and to appease hostile forces--in this case, the Danes. If the Viking raids were increasing against the English during the second wave of invasions from Scandinavia and if Edmund was no longer able to defend his *folc*, it seems appropriate thematically, though not historically, that Edmund would offer himself sacrificially to the hands of the Vikings. If his weakness was seen as a sign of frailty or divine disfavor, could Edmund have returned to the older pattern of cleansing the land? It is clear that by his actions, Edmund sees himself as the shepherd of his people as well as the spiritual guardian of the realm. Edmund does offer himself to the Danes, sacrificing himself for his *folc*, but it is not clear that his people or his narrators viewed his personal sacrifice as a cleansing of the land. Still, the timing of Edmund’s death presents the reader with an interesting dilemma.

There is some debate about when Edmund’s death actually occurred. Critics who tend to view the legends as history are fairly evenly divided between the opinions that the death happened in November (as it appears on the church calendar) or in the spring. Davidson writes that there were three main feasts in pre-Christian Scandinavia: “one at the beginning of winter, when men sacrificed for plenty, one at mid-winter for the growth of crops, and one in summer for victory” (39). Whether Edmund was killed by the Vikings in November, during the blood month, or later in the spring or summer near the beginning of the summer campaigns, his death would fit the sacrificial model, at least seasonally.

Whether or not Edmund actually died in November, this is the month during which the church celebrates his martyrdom. November is important because it is the *blotmonth*, the time at which heathen Anglo-Saxons and Norsemen sacrificed living things, frequently cattle, to the gods to ensure that the land would remain fertile and the people protected. The sacrifice was both an offering for the people and a cleansing of the land. A church calendar dated before 1100, reads, “In the eleventh month in the year there are 30 days. The month is called in Latin *Novembris*, and in our language Blood-Month, because our ancestors when they were heathen, always sacrificed in that month . . .” (Swanton 85). Edmund’s sacrifice for land and *folc* falls during the first part of the blood month, emphasizing Edmund’s Christ-like example of sacrificial kingship as well as the older pagan model. Chaney writes that “[o]ne of the great high festivals of heathenism was the November sacrifice, when the cattle which could not be maintained during the long winter were sacrificed, probably in England as in the Scandinavian North for ‘plenty and peace’” (*Kingship* 57). Chickering further states that “the known rites involved the blood sacrifice of animals, and on great occasions, human beings” (290). Whether or not Edmund was martyred in November, it is interesting that this king who offered himself sacrificially to the Vikings is celebrated by the church in the middle of *blotmonth*.

The Anglo-Saxons were not the only people to offer blood sacrifices in times of hardship or to insure plenty. Ibrahim b. Ya’qub at Tartushi who was visiting Denmark in the mid tenth century wrote that the Danes held a feast “where all meet to honour their god and to eat and drink. Each man who slaughters an animal for sacrifice--ox, ram, goat or pig--fastens it to a pole outside the door of his house, to show that he [has] made his sacrifice in honour of the god” (Davidson 37). Apparently animal sacrifices were not the only kinds of sacrifices made to insure a good year or stave off calamity. Davidson writes that it is “implied in both Irish and Norse sources that kings were offered to the gods before the coming of Christianity” (66). Davidson records that a “number of legendary kings in Scandinavia are said to have been put to death because the harvests were bad, and

some of these were burned in their halls” (66). Chaney contends that ritual king-slaying was common in Scandinavia in times of hardship:

Ritual king-slaying was a common custom in the North
as a means of meeting tribal calamities when the ‘luck’
of the king and folk had deserted them; to restore the
favor of Woden-Othin the king whose responsibility
that favor was, was offered to him. (*Kingship* 15)

Davidson recalls the *Ynglinga Saga* in which the people sacrifice their king as a desperate measure to secure a good harvest. Davidson contends that the “sacrificial ritual of the Celts and Germans” went beyond the desire for bountiful harvests at home. She writes that “a large portion of their rites appear to have been used to obtain luck in battle and victory over their neighbors” (69). Not all sacrifices, then, concerned harvests. Some sacrifices were also made to the gods to insure victory. Davidson writes that the sacrifices for victory or luck were made “at the beginning of summer, the time traditionally associated with offerings made to Odin in return for victory in the oncoming season” (59). If Edmund was executed during the spring as Marsden contends, and if Marsden’s analysis of the manner of Edmund’s death is sound, it is possible that Edmund of East Anglia might have been an offering for luck at the beginning of the summer campaigns.

In the *Legend of St. Edmund*, the reader discovers sacrifice happening on at least two levels: the king sacrificing himself for his *folc* and the Vikings ritually offering the body of the king to Odin. Marsden advances his theory that King Edmund was sacrificed to Odin to ensure success in Ivarr the Boneless’s later campaigns against the English. Marsden begins by offering this translation of Abbo’s account describing Edmund’s martyrdom:

Edmund was half-dead, the warmth of life barely
throbbing now in his breast, when the executioner
swiftly pulled him from the bloody stake with the
inner parts beneath the ribs laid bare by repeated

stabbing, as if he had been torn on the rack or
tormented with savage claws. (148)

This section, which is missing from Aelfric's account, is based on Abbo's version of events. Marsden contends that whether or not Abbo "recognized as much, his evidence echoes other accounts of the ritual slaughter by the 'blood eagle'" (148). In comparing the slaying of Edmund with the martyrdom of Aella of Northumbria, Marsden concludes that the "decapitation of the king of East Anglia following the conquest of his kingdom would have been as apt occasion for ritual sacrifice to Odin as had been the slaughter of Aelle at York" (148). Chaney notes that King Vikar of Norway was "dedicated to [Othin] by both stabbing with a spear and hanging from a tree, the traditional modes of offerings to that deity" (*Kingship* 114). In both accounts of Edmund's martyrdom, the narrators state that Edmund was bound to a tree or a stake and shot with pointed missiles.

Smyth's account of Ivarr (Hingwar) supports Marsden's arguments. Smyth first establishes Ivarr as Edmund's executioner, then he carefully traces several instances of Ivarr's cruelty to his opponents in battle, particularly political leaders. In each instance that Smyth presents to the reader, he demonstrates the similarities in the ways in which the opposing kings were killed and describes the sacrificial significance of the "blood-eagle" ritual. As I mentioned earlier, a section of St. Edmund's martyrdom is missing from the Aelfric text in which Edmund seems to be flayed in the same manner as sacrificial victims in Scandinavian sagas. Smyth writes that the "mention of ribs being laid bare is precisely what the blood-eagle involved" (212). Smyth demonstrates that the words Abbo uses in his account indicate that Edmund died by blood-eagle:

. . . Abbo refers to Edmund again as being: 'lacerated to the very marrow by the acutest tortures' (*medullitus asperitate tormentorum dilaniatus*). This emphasis on the baring of the ribs (*costae*) and on the bones being exposed to the very marrow (*medulla*) and the use of

verbs signifying the tearing apart of the victim (*dilanio*:
-ac si raptum eculeo aut saevis tortum unguis)
 confirm that Edmund was not simply pierced by many
 arrows as was Sebastian but that, having undergone
 various tortures, he was finally torn apart in a blood-
 eagle ritual. (212)

Smyth further contends that “a society which indulged in the ritual slaying of its own kings could not be expected to deal kindly with the kings of its enemies” (220). If the Scandinavians did not spare their own political leaders in times of extreme hardship, the former would probably not show more mercy to captured nobility or royalty of other kingdoms. Smyth writes that the “kings of defeated armies” were “often taken alive” and “offered as human sacrifices to the war-god” (220). According to Smyth, there was a “flourishing” of the cult of Odin in Ireland and England from 850-870. In 870, King Edmund of East Anglia dies at the hands of Hingwar and his army (220). Smyth concludes that the word that is usually translated as “arrow” could also be translated as “spear” and that “[d]eath from piercing with such weapons was the standard form of human sacrifice to Odinn” (221). Further suggesting ritual sacrifice, Aelfric records that Edmund is lashed to an “earth-fast tree” [*anum eorth-faestum treowe*] (II, 109). Davidson contends that large trees were a natural link between humankind and the gods and that Yggdrasil, the most important tree in Norse and Germanic mythology, was the starting place, the beginning of creation--a place at which the gods met symbolically under its branches (24). In the “Havamal,” Odinn is called “Lord of the Gallows” (Crossley-Holland 15). The “Havamal” states that Odinn hangs from the World-Ash for nine nights as a sacrifice of himself to himself. Odinn says, “I was hung from that windswept tree, hung there for nine long nights; I was pierced with a spear; I was an offering to Odin, myself to myself” (Crossley-Holland 15). In the version of the “Havamal” recorded in the Poetic Edda, the same passage reads:

I wot that I hung on the wind-tossed tree
 all of nights nine,
 wounded by spear, bespoken to Othin,
 bespoken myself to myself . . .
 (“Havamal” 138.1-4)

The sacred tree also appears as a place of death in Dream of the Rood. The cross, the “despised gallows” on which Christ, “the powerful king, Lord of the Heavens” dies, narrates the death and subsequent resurrection of Christ, the best of warriors and kings. St. Edmund, like Christ, chooses death at the hands of his enemies. Edmund’s passivity becomes the mark of his courage as he is lashed between heaven and earth to the tree that connects this world with the next.

Though Aelfric includes the image of the “earth-fast tree,” he excludes the eviscerating details from Abbo’s text. Perhaps the information, like that of Vitae Patrum to which Aelfric makes reference in his preface to the Lives of the Saints, was too obscure or even potentially dangerous, given the fact that the new Norse still had some memory of heathen ritual and it would not do to have a Christian saint offered to a heathen deity. Perhaps Aelfric found the torture excessive and distracting. If Edmund was ritually executed by Hingwar and his army, Aelfric’s omission of these details changes even the sense of the narrative. Rather than dying as an offering to a pagan deity, Aelfric’s Edmund dies in an act of self-sacrifice for his people, just as Christ consciously decides to offer himself to save humankind. Ridyard contends that Edmund attains sanctity “not by the manner of his life but rather by the nature of his death, by his suffering martyrdom at the hands of the pagan” (93). Rather than allowing Edmund to suffer subjugation to a pagan deity in death, Aelfric liberates Edmund at the moment of death and absolves or vindicates the king. The author of Maxims I writes “Waerleas mon ond wonhydig, / aetrenmond ond ungetreow, / thaes ne gymeth god” [“The renegade and reckless man, venom-hearted and faithless, over him God will not watch”] (Exeter III 161-164) (Swanton 350). Aelfric’s

audience knew that God did not watch over the unjust at their death, yet Edmund's head enjoys divine protection through the agency of an animal greatly resembling a grey wolf.

CHAPTER III

CRYING WOLF

The grey wolf, like the sacrificial king, is not a stranger to Old English language or literature. In Elene, Judith, Battle of Finnsburh, and Battle of Maldon the grey wolf and the raven are harbingers of battle and slaughter. In the Fortunes of Men, the wolf is portrayed as “the grizzled hunter of the wastelands” who stalks the unfortunate man in the world (Bradley 341). In Maxims II, the wolf’s domain is confined to the forest and the author calls it “the wretched loner” (18). In Maxims I, the author warns the hearer about falling among men with wolfish habits:

Wineleas, wonsaelig mon genimeth him wilfas to geferan,
felafaecne deor. Ful oft hinese gefera sliteth
gryre sceal for greggum, graef deadum men;
hungre heofeth, nales thaet heafe bewindeth.
ne huru wael wepeth wulf se graega,
morthorcwealm maecga, ac hit a mare wille
(Exeter III, 146-151)

[. . . The unbefriended man gets wolves as his comrades,
beasts abounding in treachery; very often that comrade will
savage him. For the grey one there has to be dread, and
for the dead man a grave; it will mourn, this grey wolf,
out of ravening and it will wander round the grave, but

not with a dirge nor indeed will it weep for the death
and destruction of men but will always wish for more.]

(Swanton 349)

The language of the works itself is loaded with words that are derived from *wulf*, *wylf*, and *wearg*, some of which are *wulfheort* [“cruel, savage, wolf-hearted”], *wulfhaga* [“shelter from wolves”], *wulfesheafod* [“head of a wolf; outlaw”], *wulfheafodtreo* [“outlaw-tree, gallows, cross”], *wearg* [“outlaw, criminal; wolf, accursed one, felon”], *werig* [“wicked, cursed, wretched”], *weargberende* [villainous], *wearglic*, *wereglic*, *werilic* [“wretched”], and *weargnes*, *waergnes*, *wergnes*, *wyrgnes* [“evil”] (Borden 1580).

In examining the sacrifice and martyrdom of St. Edmund, one must also consider the figurative, literal, and linguistic presence of wolves in the narrative. Aelfric’s obsession with the wolf in his Legend of St. Edmund encompasses natural and unnatural manifestations of wolfish behavior: there are people who behave like wolves and a wolf which defies cultural expectations and behaves more like a human than a ferocious animal. Aelfric clearly views both aberrations of nature with reserve--the former with disgust and the latter with reverent fear.

Aelfric’s wolfish humans are of two kinds: Danes and thieves. The Danes arrive sacking and pillaging, burning and killing in first few lines of Aelfric’s tale. Aelfric describes Hingwar as a wolf who “on lande bestalcode and tha leode sloh / weras and wif and tha ungewittigan cild / and to bysmore tucode tha bilewitan cristenan” [“stalked over the land and slew the people, / men, women and witless children / and shamefully tormented the innocent Christians”] (II, 39-42). Aelfric also describes the Danes and Hingwar as *waelhreow* and *rethan*, [cruel, murderous, blood-thirsty, and wild] repeatedly in the text. Aelfric credits the Danes with “herigiende and sleande / wide geond land swa swa heora gewuna is” [“harrying and slaying widely over the land as their custom is”] (II, 27-28). The army’s appearance at the edge of the forest, return to the thickets and wild spaces on their return to the sea suggest that the invaders originate from and return to the

edges of human society. All of these environments, the wilderness, the forest and the sea are unstable, marginal areas. The Danes, like wolves, are portrayed as wild animals--haunters of the wastelands. Aelfric records that Hingwar and Hubba “aweston thaet land / and tha leoda ofslogon” [“wasted the land and slew the people”] (II, 31-32) much the same way wolves encircle and attack sheep. Aelfric states that the Danes appear to kill for sport, “swilce him to gamenes to” [“as if for their amusement”] (II, 116). The Vikings also kill like wolves in that they separate out the weakest member (in this case, an unarmed king who seems to be waning in power) and kill it, sparing the other members of the herd. The king’s calls for divine aid are reminiscent of the cries of a wounded or dying animal, and, not surprisingly, they precipitate his death.

The thieves who break into Edmund’s tomb to strip it of its gold are also portrayed as wolves, both in the animal sense and in the criminal sense. The thieves operate together as members of a pack to achieve their goal, to “stelan tha mathmas the men thyder brohton” [“to steal the treasures which the people had brought thither”] (II, 200). They try to break into St. Edmund’s vault by “craefte” [“craft”] (II, 201), and they dig under the door with a spade (II, 204). The “unge-saelige theofas” [“unblessed thieves”] (II, 198) are wretched outlaws, *weargas*, an Old English word that is connected at the root to a similar word for wolf. This imagery is further expanded when the thieves are first immobilized by a supernatural force that keeps them hanging from the objects to which they are attached. This image is intensified further when later the Bishop orders the thieves hanged from the high gallows. The gallows, also known as the *wulfheafodtree* or “outlaw-tree,” were usually set up at the edge of the wild spaces. “On the perilous roads” of “dark woods” Lopez writes, “travelers feared being waylaid by either highwayman or wolves, and the two often fused in the medieval mind: the wolf and the outlaw were one, creatures who lived beyond the law of human propriety” (208). Lopez contends that this fusion occurred because “darkness and savagery are symbolized in the wolf, while Enlightenment and civilization are symbolized in the tame wolf, the dog” (209). Lopez

also records that King Edgar “accepted in lieu of incarceration a set number of wolve’s tongues from a convicted criminal according to the crime, as though one were turning state’s evidence” (208).

Aelfric’s grey wolf, like the thieves and Danes, is also an unnatural creature. Not only does the wolf guard the king’s head through the night without devouring it, but it also follows the search party and the head of the king back to the edge of town as if the wolf were a domesticated creature. Aelfric’s wolf is unnatural in other ways as well—it has neither voice nor definite form. It is the king’s voice, not the wolf’s cries, that attracts the attention of the search party, and, when the procession returns to town, the wolf follows silently behind, not making a sound. Abbo remarks that the wolf is docile, behaving “swylce he tam waere” [“as he were tame”] (II, 162). The wolf is also characterized by a lack of definite color or proportion. The wolf is grey and Aelfric chooses not to elaborate much beyond this point. Instead of voice or definite form, Aelfric chooses to give his mysterious wolf presence—a nebulous state of being.

Aelfric’s manner of presenting the wolf does little to sharpen the lens through which the reader studies the animal. Aelfric first establishes for his audience that the guardian animal is a wolf and that it is grey. After this, Aelfric paints over the animal in shades of uncertainty and contradiction. Aelfric describes the animal as *graedig* and *hungrig* [“greedy” and “hungry”], yet abstaining (II, 156) and wild, but tame (II, 162). Instead of satisfying the reader’s curiosity about what has affected this change in the wolf’s traditional demeanor, why it follows the funeral procession rather than returns to the woods at once, Aelfric removes the wolf from the narrative entirely. In leaving the wolf at the end of the episode at the edge of society, he marginalizes the animal without further comment.

The task falls then upon others to account for the presence of the wolf in the Legend of St. Edmund and the Passio. Davidson and Stanley both comment on the importance of the wolf in Germanic and Celtic folklore. According to these accounts, the wolves’

habitat is usually confined to the forest, fens and wastelands. The only time these creatures emerge in villages or other places where humans gather is during times of great upheaval or on the battlefield with the eagle and the raven, also linked to battle. Davidson writes that the wolf or dog in Scandinavian folklore is the “guardian of the underworld” and that “a dog or wolf appears on a number of Gotland memorial stones of the Viking Age depicting the arrival of a dead hero in Valhalla” (57). The sagas are filled with a wide range of wolves such as Hati, Skoll, Fenrir, and Managarm. The Norse creation, Garm, is a figure which echoes both Cerberus, guardian dog of the underworld in Greek mythology, and the grey wolf in Aelfric’s Legend of St. Edmund. Garm, like Cerberus, guards the doorway to Hel (Guerber 181). In Norse mythology at least, wolves and hounds are more than just guardians of the underworld. Guerber states that at Woden / Odinn’s feet “crouched two wolves or hunting hounds, Geri and Freki, animals which were therefore considered sacred to him, and of good omen if met by the way” (181). The influence of wolves reaches even to Asgard, the home of the Aesir and forms a link between the world of humankind and the realm of the gods. In the Legend of St. Edmund, the king’s head enjoys the good fortune of a wolf’s protection and through this animals, perhaps, the protection of the gods.

Stanley write that the term *mearcweardas* or ‘warden of the march’ refers to the kind of relationship between St. Edmund and the wolf depicted in Aelfric’s and Abbo’s respective narratives. According to Stanley, the marches served as borders between tribes and were areas that stood directly “under the protection of the gods,” especial Wodan (75). Stanley further states that “no literary monument survives which mentions the wolves under Wodan’s special orders as guardians of the marches” (75). Stanley believes, however, that if the reader considers “how firmly the Anglo-Saxon imagination must have adhered to the idea of the wolves as beasts sacred to the highest god [Wodan],” one could then speculate that the wolves “protect the march under Wodan’s direction” (75). While Stanley makes an interesting conclusion, it is not entirely clear how he arrives at it.

Newton also approaches the possibility that wolves function as agents of Wodan and supports his theories with archeological evidence. In doing this, Newton demonstrates that there is a cultural precedent for venerating wolves in East Anglia as the guardian not of the borders, but of the king himself:

A belief in the totemic function of the wolf as
guardian spirit for the kings of East Anglia
may also explain why the wolf appears as
such an intimate and protective creature
in the Anglo-Saxon legend of the martyrdom
of the last English king of East Anglia . . .
It is tempting to view the wolf's miraculous
function in this legend as deriving from a traditional
association with the kings of East Anglia
(Newton 109).

Newton contends that the kings of East Anglia believed that they enjoyed divine protection. The wolf in both Abbo's account and in Aelfric's Life of St. Edmund arrives after the battle is done to claim the remaining spoil of war, in this case, the head of the king.

Perhaps the wolf's presence as protector indicates that Edmund is under the protection of divinity. Aelfric certainly presents the wolf as God's provision. The narrator credits God with appointing an unusual guardian to watch over the severed head of the king through the night:

Waes eac micel wundor thaet an wulf wearth asend
thurh godes wissunge to bewerigenne thaet heafod
with tha othre deor ofer daeg and niht.

[There was eke a great wonder, that a wolf was sent,

by God's direction, to guard the head against the
other animals by day and night.] (II, 145-147)

It is also possible to view the wolf as the presence of Wodan, as Newton contends. As I have noted in chapter two, in Maxims I, the author notes that God will not watch over the unjust or unrighteous man: "Waerleas mon ond wonhydig, / aetrenmond ond ungetreow, / thaes ne gymeth god. (Exeter, III, 161-164)

Davidson notes that Odin or Wodan was regarded "as the [ancestor]" of many English Kings and that "heroes could be represented as their sons" (91) and the grey wolf guards "the abode of the gods" (192). If the presence of the guardian wolf in the Legend of St. Edmund is the presence of Wodan, one could say that the god honored both Ivarr's sacrifice of King Edmund and Edmund's sacrifice of himself. One could read the wolf as a guardian spirit or as Odin / Wodan looking after his progeny or one could view the wolf as the presence of Odin / Wodan himself in the form of the wolf waiting at the misty edge where middle earth (the realm of humankind) meets Asgard, the realm of the gods, and Niflheim, the "Misty Hel" of the dead (Crossley-Holland xxii). In the same way, one can also see the wolf's behavior, as the Christian narrators do, as evidence of God's favor and Edmund's saintliness. As Aelfric and Abbo remind us, we should also understand that the wolf is presented as the guardian that the Christian God has sent to show his favor toward the king and his people. This discrepancy in interpretation is not unreconcilable if one considers that Anglo-Saxon society considered the king and land as one entity and that the *folc*, both as heathens and later as Christians, depended on the successful interaction between the king and the land in order to survive. One could see the presence of the wolf as the triumph of the Christian God over the Danish deities, or as foretelling the change culturally from the fragmented kingdoms of the Anglo-Saxons to a unified England under Edward. The restrained wolf is a sign of the staving off of tribal calamity. The gods, Christian, Anglo-Saxon, or Danish, have responded to the sacrifice of the king.

One could also see in the presence of the wolf part of a Norse myth that sets the foundation for Ragnarok in which the gods have bound the wolfish offspring of Loki in order to curtail the wolf's capacity for destruction as it grows. Though the Aesir bind Loki for their own protection, rather than the protection of humankind or a specific group of people, the wolf in this tale of impending destruction has some similarities to St. Edmund's guardian. Both wolves are bound by divine intervention and made harmless for a time. In both tales, it is clear that the bonds will not always halt destruction. The binding of the wolf is temporary. Like the chords with which the Aesir bind Fenrir, supernatural restraints will not hold either wolf forever. Eventually, Fenrir will break free and swallow Odin, while his companions, Skoll and Hati devour the sun and moon, respectively. Aelfric's natural wolf returns to the forest and presumably reverts to his usual habits. The Vikings return to the edge of the land--the sea, but they will come again to harry the English, first from Denmark, then from Norway and Ireland, and at last from Normandy in 1066 at which point a different kind of "wearg," the illegitimate son of a duke and a peasant woman, will seize the English throne.

CHAPTER IV

CRYING WOLF (PART II)

The grey wolf of Abbo's Passio and Aelfric's Legend of St. Edmund has a fairly short career as the animal guardian which faithfully tends the head of the king. Scarcely two or three centuries later the church casts another animal with more substantial character in the guardian's role. By the twelfth century, the grey wolf disappears from the popular version of the legend and a greyhound takes its place. There may be several reasons for this substitution in subsequent legends, but the transition occurs in writing with the scribal issuing of the Lodbrok legends.

Though the Danes emerged from the ninth century as the chief supporters of the cult of St. Edmund, the stigma of slaying the king remained with them. In the twelfth century, clergymen transcribing the Legend of St. Edmund begin amending the narrative again, this time to cast the Danes in a better light, and, to some extent, justify Hingwar's actions. According the Edmund-Ragnar stories, Ragnar Lodbrok, King of Denmark is out hawking in a small sea craft when a wind blows up suddenly and carries him several miles across the ocean to East Anglia. Fortunately for Lodbrok, King Edmund is a generous king and graciously receives him. After Lodbrok has time to recover from the shock of what has happened, he becomes an official member of Edmund's court and often goes hunting with the king. As a present, Edmund offers Lodbrok a grey hunting hound and compliments him on exceeding the skill of his best huntsman, Bern. Eventually Lodbrok's popularity with the king drives Bern to jealousy and to murder. One day while Lodbrok is out hunting with the king, Bern kills Lodbrok and hides his body in the brush. Eventually,

Lodbrok's loyal greyhound discovers the body and Bern's crime becomes public. To punish Bern for his crime, Edmund orders Bern to be set adrift on the sea. The currents, of course, return Bern to Denmark where he meets Lodbrok's sons, Hingwar and Hubba, and he explains that Edmund ordered Lodbrok killed. Hingwar and Hubba want revenge and vow to return to East Anglia to carry out their plan. When the brothers leave for England, they take Bern with them to show them the way. Unfortunately for Hingwar, Hubba, and their army of twenty thousand, storms drive them instead to Northumbria. Hingwar and Hubba ravage the area for three years before descending on Edmund's kingdom in 870. According to Loomis, these later legends attempt to explain why the Danes come to Northumbria and East Anglia in 866 (1). Loomis writes that the "consequences of the invasion were too great not to have excited the imagination of succeeding generations" (1). As each generation removed from the death of King Edmund added more scraps of information to the story, both the form and the meaning of the narrative changed.

The animal "lupis" in Abbo's *Legend of St. Edmund* and the "wulf" in Aelfric's rendering of the legend are clearly the same kind of animal--a wolf. By the twelfth century, when the Lodbrok legends begin circulating, however, the grey wolf evolves into a greyhound, and from there, into a black dog. The wild wolf of the Anglo-Saxon age has been domesticated. The wolf in Aelfric's *Legend of St. Edmund* responds not as predator, but as loyal servant of the king and the king's god. Given the wolf's unusual behavior and metamorphosis in later versions of the tale, it seems possible that the animal in Abbo's *Passio* and Aelfric's *Legend of Saint Edmund* may have been an unusual dog rather than a wolf. Guerber, Stanley, and Davidson speak of dogs and wolves in mythology as if they are interchangeable or at least equally applicable to the same myths or tales. Though Marsden, Smyth, Loomis, and Gransden convincingly argue that the Lodbrok legends are complete fabrications circulated in Norman England during the

twelfth century to explain the Danish attack upon the king of East Anglia, it is interesting that Aelfric's docile guardian behaves more like a dog and less like a wolf.

Aelfric records that the animal guarding the head of the king is grey and resembles a wolf. The ordinary grey wolf was not the only animal in the region that might have fit the description Aelfric gives the audience. Irish wolf-hounds are also large and grey and in the changing light of early morning and late afternoon, the animal might have been perceived as a wolf. It is also possible that the animal was a wolf-hybrid--a cross between a dog and a wolf. Lopez suggests cross-breeding as a reason for the unusual size and character of some legendary animals resembling dogs or wolves. He writes that "wolf-dog hybrids are sometimes larger than either parent and are far more likely, too, to prey on children and livestock, and would fear men less" (71). Whitlock advances the theory that this archetype of the ferocious wolf might have some basis in reality in that rabid dogs and wolves often display the same sort of behavior. A wolf which is literally starving would also have less natural fear of humankind. If Edmund's protector was neither completely dog nor completely wolf, starving or mad as his appearance indicates, it might explain his posture over the head of the king. Aelfric notes that the wolf does not consume the head of the king, however, and that the wolf surrenders the head to the people who have come for it. These are not responses typical to an undomesticated animal. While the unnaturalness of the response may have been the focus in Aelfric's legend, Lopez and Whitlock would respond that the behavior might have natural explanations.

It is also possible that Aelfric's grey wolf (or wolf-hound) may belong to a larger family of spectral hounds still observed in the British Isles, haunting the forest, coastline, and back lane of rural areas in Great Britain. Aelfric's wolf resembles these animals, particularly the Barguest and Shuck, both of which can appear as large grey or black dogs or wolves. Clarke reports that "[g]hostly black dogs are ubiquitous throughout the British Isles, guarding the twilight and liminal places--gates, crossroads and bridges--and following time-worn routes along ancient trackways" (145). Brown contends that the

most “striking characteristic of the Barguest type [of animal apparition] is that it goes out of its way to show the beholder that it is no normal dog, but a monster from another world, having no definite form, though it favours the black dog” (178). Shuck is also a shape-shifter of sorts. In Northumbria, Shuck also appears as a “goat, calf or horse” (Brown 176). Rudkin reports that these apparitions of varying descriptions often have two elements in common--either they are described as “a great black animal, bigger than any ordinary dog” or as “unusually large” (125). The ghost of Bonney Wells Lane, according to Rudkin, is described as “big an’ grey” (120). These spectral animals resemble Edmund’s mysterious guardian in color (grey) and nebulous form.

Brown has researched the black dog / spectral hound phenomenon and its occurrence in the British Isles. Brown divides the range of the black dog/spectral hound into two specific districts:

1) Cambridge, Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk, where the dog is frequently one-eyed, haunts coasts, fens, roads and church-yards, and is always ominous.

2) Cumberland, Westmoreland, Lancashire, West Yorkshire and Derbyshire, where it haunts hill-country, roads and churchyards, and is always ominous. (176)

Brown further contends that these animals are associated with a particular “place or ‘beat’ on a road and usually occur individually,” meaning that these dogs follow certain paths and generally travel one animal to a path or road (178). Wherever the spectral animals travel, they do so, like Edmund’s wolf, without vocalizing. The only sounds witnesses have documented are crackling through the hedges or the brush of the animal’s body as it passes down the lane (Rudkin 122). These spectral animals, like Edmund’s wolf, also have a particular affinity for specific trees, particularly elm, willow, or ash and also “clumps or thickets” (Brown 181). Aelfric records that the Vikings threw St. Edmund’s

head into a thicket of brambles and that a wolf emerged from the forest to guard it in that place. The modern spectral animals, like Edmund's and Abbo's wolves, are voiceless haunters of the hedges and thickets, traveling alone at the edge of human society.

Rudkin records hearing an unusual story regarding the mysterious spectral dog from the area near Grayingham. Apparently her friend, walking alone one day, suddenly found herself in the company of a large black dog who followed her down the path. After walking with the woman for a few miles and annoying her with his "tagging after," the dog vanished into an ash tree at the end of the lane (125). While this account cannot be verified by any scientific experiment, it is interesting that her account is not the only encounter to end near a specific tree. Rudkin reports hearing another story, from another neighborhood, very similar to the first in which the dog emerged from a hedge, just below an ash tree (126). While the significance of the ash tree might very well relate in the modern age to a late-developing folk-belief, the mystery surrounding the ash tree is much older. Owen writes:

The ash is very significant in northern mythology since, according to Snorri Sturluson's account, the center of the world was a great ash-tree, called Yggdrasil. Its three great roots stretched into the three realms of the Aesir (the gods), the frost giants and the dead, and its branches stretched over heaven and earth. (58)

The ash is a tree frequently associated with Woden / Odin. Motz writes that the "cosmic ash of the Germanic nations bears the name ascr Yggdrasils. Whether the name means 'Othinn's horse', as it is generally believed or 'Othinn's horse-post', as I have recently argued, it is clear that it [the ash] belongs to Othinn--Ygrr--The Terrible" (87). In Northern Devonshire, the phantom hounds frequently appear under "ancient thorn-trees" (Brown 182). The ghostly dog's particular association with the thorn-tree is probably a remnant of another belief system that has vanished almost entirely.

Brown further notes that these animals occur with regular frequency near the scenes or sites of executions and violent deaths whether “death is in battle, murder or suicide” and that these dogs often haunt “graves and gallows” (185). The roots for the Old English word for “gallows” ties the image to the wolf and through the wolf to the dog. Brown believes that the appearance of the dogs at these sites may have some foundation in the folk belief that the spectral dogs contain the departed spirits of their previous owners (185), a view which the Norse invaders cherished, according to Motz. Motz contends that “A belief in the detachable soul is fully attested for Norse tradition. Bearing the name *fylgja*, *jamingja*, or *hugr*, it may take the shape of a bear, goat, wolf, or bird, protect the man or harm an enemy” (85). Lopez demonstrates the continuation or further development of this folk belief, contending that a “belief in the transmigration of souls held that the soul of a highway robber would be enclosed after death in the body of a wolf” (208).

Brown also contends that some of these spectral animals are connected to specific persons, families or places. If the spectral dog is associated with a person, according to Brown, it functions as a symbol of the dead person. The animal may also be the “ghost of the real dog that belonged to the dead man” or a ghostly companion of the departed master (178). Palmer believes that these guardian spirits differ from the “Other World creatures” who possess a “grim character” in traditional folklore and that these dark animals “are usually associated with death” and serve either as an announcement that death has occurred or that death is coming (127). Brown also believes that in Lincolnshire at least, the Black Dog “seems to have some relation with settlements lying up streams and tributaries of the Humber, suggesting an association with an invasion by water, probably by Angles” (179).

Tracing the common mythology from which Edmund’s wolf and spectral hounds like Shuck might have emerged is difficult. Newton attempts to link the present-day spectral animal, Shuck, with an older stalker of the moors and hedges, Grendel. Newton claims

that the name, Shuck, derives its origins from the Old English word *succa* (meaning “devil” or “demon” in the East Anglian dialect), a word which Hrothgar uses to describe Grendel and his kindred (I.939a) (143-144). Newton claims that the lupine traits of Grendel and his mother are comparable to Shuck’s “canine characteristics” and that these traits in the Grendels are implied in the “use of such terms to describe them as *brimwulf* (II.1506a, 1599a), *heorowearh* (I.1267a), *grundwyrgegne* (I.1518b), *werhtho* (I.589) and the adjective *werga* (I.133a, 1747b)” (144). Newton contends that Grendel, like Shuck, is often “associated with the Devil and with death” and just as Grendel “usually dwells in and around fens and marshlands” from “whence he emerges, generally only at night, to hunt alone, hunting specific places,” Shuck often haunts the borderlands of society (144). Newton also specifically links the modern image of Shuck to the grey wolf present in Aelfric’s Legend of St. Edmund (143). Indeed in parts of East Anglia, the black dog apparition is still associated with coming “disaster, death and ill-luck” (Brown 185). Only in Lincolnshire, it seems, the spectral black dog is not feared, but rather seen as a guardian of treasure or a bringer of luck or “a protector of lonely women” (179).

Rudkin and Brown both advance the theory that perhaps the black dog’s significance lies in Anglo-Saxon culture itself before the Viking invasions began. Rudkin writes that it “is possible that he [the black dog/spectral hound] was known here before the coming of either [the Danes or the Saxons] and that the affinities in both Saxon and Danish belief strengthened his cult” (131). Like Brown, Rudkin has noticed the particular affinity of Lincolnshire for the black dog and she credits the development of the dog cult to that region in particular (131). First, Rudkin establishes a significant Anglian presence in Lincolnshire before the Danish invasion, then demonstrates again that this seems to be the only area in which the black dog apparition is not seen as monstrous or threatening. She then contends that the Angles in this area frequently raided neighboring areas, following the same paths along the rivers by which others have reported seeing the phantom dogs. She suggests that the tradition of the black dog began when Anglian armies, moving under

the cover of darkness, at times on hands and knees, invaded neighboring tribes and kingdoms, bringing with them “ill-luck, disaster, or death” (130). Rudkin believes the stories which followed these invasions determined how the rest of the country learned to perceive the appearance of voiceless phantom dogs that were a little larger than they should have been. While Rudkin makes an interesting case which might explain in part the origin of the terror of the dogs, she does not take into consideration the earlier sources which might explain both the origins of the dog and the presence of the wolf in the Legend of St. Edmund.

In examining the possible sources of Aelfric’s grey wolf, it is many times difficult to say which mythology had greater or primary influence on the development of the legend. The Romans (and through the Romans the Greeks and other civilizations with which they made contact), the Celts, and the Danes all had some impact upon Anglo-Saxon popular religious practice, the development of folklore, and, ultimately, the stock of narratives from which the church created saints’ legends. Palmer reminds the reader that the Romans also had an affinity for dogs and wolves. Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome were abandoned as children and suckled by a female wolf until they were weaned. Palmer offers another explanation for the presence of the guardian dog spirits who patrol roads and empty lanes. He writes that the Romans “believed that the sacrifice of a dog, particularly a black dog, beneath the foundation of a road would cause it to stand as a safe passageway forever” and he believes that “[m]any black dog myths may stem from this belief” (36). Palmer believes the spectral hounds are animals which “are sometimes guardians, dating perhaps from the time when a dog was sacrificed beneath a road or bridge to ensure safe passage” (127). The Celts also contributed to spectral hound folklore. Clarke notes that in the “Celtic and other traditions, dogs [are] able to sense the approach of death” and like Edmund’s grey wolf, act “as guardians of the threshold and the route taken by the coffin” (145).

Whitlock suggests the origins of the spectral hound stories range from wife's tales to keep the children away from dangerous areas, to the Wild Hunt of Germanic origin, to the Roman practice of sacrificing dogs and burying the remains of the animal "under the doorposts or walls of a new building" so that these spirits become the guardians of those structures (23-24). He also credits rabies with contributing to the strange appearance and behaviour of the spectral animals. Whitlock notes that "[i]n many instances, the dog is a fearsome hound, with glowing eyes and slavering jaws, which haunts the lonely lanes at night" (23). Whitlock also holds the natural world partially responsible for offering the human imagination the perfect model--the rabid wolf or dog. Whitlock states that the usual description one receives of spectral hounds often includes "glaring eyes" and "jaws dripping with saliva," an "accurate description of a dog with rabies" (24).

Whatever the ultimate source of the legends that arose out of the various cultures that colonized Great Britain, the remaining shadows that have emerged from the past are fascinating. The Romans, Celts, Anglo-Saxons and Norse all contributed to the development of the spectral legends. The three recurring symbols--the king, the tree and the wolf or dog connect the worlds of Midgard, Asgard and Niflheim. In the Legend of St. Edmund, as in the later legends that develop from a similar source involving spectral animals, one can see the wolf and the king meeting in the shadow of the world tree at the edge of middle-earth.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The fact that Aelfric adapts Abbo's Passio, which, as Graden contends, is a hotch-potch of other authors' work, does not devalue the importance of Aelfric's version of the text. The importance of Aelfric's Legend of St. Edmund is not in its originality of composition, but rather in the transference of this blend of church-tolerated syncretism from the Latin into the vernacular. Materials once only available to the monastic community were now accessible to others outside the walls of the cloister. It is possible that these materials both preserve dim memories of the past as well as hold up a mirror to the spiritual climate of the tenth and eleventh centuries.

One should not judge Aelfric's merit on the basis of his predecessor's dubious originality. Aelfric's paraphrases of Abbo's "hotch-potch" of existing hagiography, folk belief, and sagas, demonstrates his ability to summarize the more involved synthesis of spirituality in Abbo's work. Aelfric shows that he is able to maintain the seamless flow of the narrative in spite of his limiting focus.

I have stated that in his editing Aelfric alters the sense and form of Abbo's text. It is significant that Aelfric deletes Abbo's lengthier description concerning the torture of Edmund, in that he omits any information that would suggest that Edmund died by blood-eagle as a sacrifice to a heathen god. Aelfric's editing of Abbo's material signifies what aspects of Abbo's tale Aelfric thought important. The grey wolf, the earth-fast tree, and the sacrificial king survive the cutting and pasting between Abbo's work and Aelfric's.

It does not matter so much that Aelfric did not generate all of his material himself; rather it is important that he was at least aware of the pagan past of his ancestors and the descendants of the pagan Norse who had settled in England. He was apparently aware of the surviving elements of those earlier religions which still flavored the people's understanding of Christianity and kingship in tenth and eleventh century England.

In other works, such as Sermon on False Gods, Aelfric's contemporary, Wulfstan, demonstrates a partial knowledge of the old forms, and, to some extent, a knowledge of the meaning or sense of those forms. In Sermon on False Gods, Wulfstan expounds upon the similarities between the pagan deities of ancient Rome and the pagan gods of the pre-Christian Anglo-Saxons and Norse. He attempts to make sense of the similarities between the pantheons and the functions of each of the gods. Wulfstan's recording of the names and attributes of pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon and Norse gods demonstrates that neither Wulfstan nor Wulfstan's audience has been existing in a Christian vacuum. Wulfstan's Sermon of the Wolf, written less than a generation after Aelfric's Lives of the Saints, addresses heathen practices in the present-tense.

The problem of heathen and Christian syncretism plagues English Christianity well into the twentieth century. One need not go beyond common superstitions or the presence of the Shuck as guardian of the altar in Brigg to see this at work. Rudkin records that a Shuck-like apparition haunted the home of a Catholic family who were martyred during the Reformation in England. After a member of the family was murdered, the black dog apparition was said to have guarded the altar which the family built in the attic. Though the family members were Christian, the animal who guarded their ancestral home was a creature outside the boundaries of Christian theology, Protestant or Catholic. The syncretistic belief system's continuation beyond the turn of the century makes relevant the study of the earlier church-tolerated blending of beliefs that may have given rise to current syncretistic forms. In other cases involving the Shuck, elaborate rituals to frighten off spiritual evil are reminiscent of "A Charm for Bees" and "Charm for a Fruitful Land,"

both of which mix aspects of heathen and Christian rituals. In both magical texts, the speaker invokes both heathen deities and the Christian God. He or she also bends pieces of both heathen and Christian religious ceremonies to obtain what he or she wishes. As late as 1958, If Rudkin and Brown are to be believed, there were at least three recorded cases in Somerset “where a black dog was secretly buried in a churchyard to protect a new extension” (Brown 185). Brown also contends that there were people living in the 1950’s who would “vouch for this strange ritual among the sextons” (185). In this case, it seems that “form” (in the sense of “ritual”) was lost, rather than meaning. The purpose or meaning of the older practice of burying dogs under bridges, or encasing them in the brickwork of houses, was to insure the safety of the people who used them. In cases where the old rituals or forms have been forgotten, new forms or rituals have emerged to take their place. The study of Christian syncretism continues to garner case studies from the current century and render itself useful to the reader of saints’ legends.

The philosophy behind the culturally and spiritually eclectic construction of the lives of English saints has its roots in the foundation of the English church. From the very beginning of the English church, the imbruing of pagan forms with Christian meaning was encouraged. Though St. Augustine may have been the most instrumental in carrying out the beginning of the conversion of England, the mind behind the strategy belonged to Pope Gregory I. Instead of authorizing a full-scale demolition of heathen ritual or Anglo-Saxon culture, Gregory proposed a more moderate approach. Let the old places of worship stand. If the structures are sound, cleanse the buildings of heathen statuary and replace the figures with images of the saints. Let the Anglo-Saxons keep their feasts. Instead, redeem the holidays (forms) and change the meaning of the celebrations. Let the Anglo-Saxon Christians remember the Christian God and the saints in their festivals rather than various members of the heathen pantheon (Bede 92). Gregory supports a gradual transition from one religion to the other. He writes to Augustine that “whoever wishes to climb a mountain top climbs gradually step by step, and not in one leap” (Bede 92). On

fashioning the English church, Pope Gregory I offers the following advice to St. Augustine:

. . . if you have found customs, whether in the Church
of Rome or of Gaul or any other that may be more
acceptable to God, I wish you to make a careful
selection of them and teach the Church of the English,
which is still young in the Faith, whatever you have
been able to learn with profit from the various Churches.

(Bede 79)

Gregory encouraged Augustine to take whatever forms proved useful and construct the English church from those materials.

In later generations, French and English hagiographers would continue this practice of collecting and recycling in fleshing out lives of the saints. In the Passio, Abbo, Cuthbert, the sword bearer, or perhaps all three, participate in salvaging or redeeming an oral text. In the Passio, as in the Legend of St. Edmund, the narrator instructs the reader, from a Christian point of view, how to understand the events as they happen. In some cases, the narrator obscures the heathen elements by masking them in Christian glosses. The narrator adds meaning to the text by giving the reader a set perspective from which to view the text. Aelfric both adds and obscures meaning by omitting passages from his text. Aelfric further participates in the redeeming of the oral text by selecting for his sources what he believes are the best authorities and by simplifying and translating Abbo's language so that anyone who cares to read the text can do so without difficulty. Though his paraphrasing changes meaning, Aelfric credits himself with rescuing the sense of Abbo's Passio.

The redemptive process continues with the work of readers and scholars. The reader, particularly the student of Anglo-Saxon saints' lives, also participates in redeeming the text by making it useful to the next generation of scholars. Each student or scholar

who contributes to understanding the meaning of the legends salvages the work of the hagiographer and older scholar, recycles it, and presents his or her work as further validation for the study of English hagiography. The relevance of Aelfric's Legend of St. Edmund is only partially contained in its blending of religious and cultural forms and in its layering of meaning. The study of Aelfric's work, or the work of any other hagiographer, is not confined to these avenues. There is still a need for good scholarship in the area of Anglo-Saxon hagiography.

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