

VIAGGI PER SCENE IN MOVIMENTO

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**Journeys
through Changing Landscapes**

**Literature, Language, Culture
and their Transnational Dislocations**

edited by
Carla Dente and Francesca Fedi

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GENERAL EDITOR PREFACE

The transnational dimension of literature and research in the humanities has increasingly come into focus over recent years, selecting texts and authors and producing new scholarship that promotes dialogue across disciplines, times and boundaries. This series of research books intends to offer a channel for valuable work in this field: it will publish new writings in English, in Italian and in other European languages in areas such as transnational literature, history, language translation and linguistics, theatre and performance, political and cultural studies, history and dissemination of books and ideas. The investigations will suggest a rich web of itineraries and exchanges which have triggered a range of creative interventions in the cultural field, stimulating also the reflections of researchers in order to account for the complexity of cultural and literary phenomena. The emphasis, then, will be explicitly on movements and transformation of stories, texts and ideas across time and space with the aim at throwing new light on some problematic issues within a variety of cultural paradigms, while inviting an integrated approach to the understanding of their meanings and mechanisms.

Carla Dente

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IDENTITY PARADIGMS IN THE PERCEPTION OF THE VIKING DIASPORA

Marco Battaglia

Gothorum gens perfida sed pudica est,
Alanorum impudica sed minus perfida,
Franci mendaces sed hospitales, Saxones
crudelitate efferi sed castitate mirandi:
omnes denique gentes habent sicut pec-
culiaria mala ita etiam quaedam bona.
(Salvianus of Marseilles, *De gubernatione
Dei*, VII.64)

1. The Syndrome of the Other

2015 was the year which perhaps more forcefully than any other in recent history placed before our eyes how the painful issue of refugees fleeing from hunger and from wars great and small foregrounds the matter of ethnic identity. This frequently misunderstood concept has a fraught history, and conflicting emotions have often been engrafted onto it, ultimately favouring an endocentric interpretation of the meaning of the word *society*. One may catch an early glimpse of such an interpretation in the dramatic tones of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (for the year 793) or from Archbishop Wulfstan of York's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* (1014), which are echoed, from a very basic etymological perspective, by the semantic conflict between the Lat. *hostis* and its correspondents in the Germanic languages (Engl. *guest*, Ger. *Gast*, Dan. *gæst*), despite their shared origin in the Indo-European nominal root (*GHOSTI-). In the historically documented episodes of uncontrolled migratory flows that impacted on stabilised societies during periods of crisis, the perception of such complex phenomena as identity, cultural memory and the stereotypes of belonging, tends towards the antagonistic tones of alterity, often succeeding in eroding or bursting the *safety* banks that are human conscience, wisdom and human dignity; of this we are reminded by a rich body of works, amongst which, for example, are Smith 1986, Geary 1983 and 2002, Heather 2008, Assmann 1992

as well as by sociologist Bernhard Giesen's significant body of work on strategies of distinction.

Ethnic identity – which is often confused with nineteenth-century ethnic nationalism and in which Herodotus himself had already shown interest – is an insidious subject also in the field of early medieval cultures, to which it is linked through the very tangible channel of the migration phenomena triggered by the crisis of the Roman Empire. As with many commonplaces, the prolonged misunderstanding regarding the traumatic end of Roman culture and society – fed by the *topos* of the *fall* – and the subsequent arrival of almost a thousand years of *dark age* cultural immobility is based on at least two unproven preconceptions:

a) the idea of the migration of an entire people (a fact that is determinable only on the basis of the dovetailing of regional archaeological discoveries with historiographic sources) and, especially,

b) the contradictory concept of *people* in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, as highlighted by authors such as Ammianus, Priscus and Procopius.

The crisis of *ethnic* archaeology, if not considered in the light of political, cultural, literary and even legendary elements, turns out to be particularly problematical in the case of Scandinavia, which remained excluded from any Roman influence and was only much later Christianized and affected by the related phenomena of literarization. If one adds to this the prolonged absence of any permanent centres of economic and political control, it is easy to see how difficult it becomes to distinguish the main players in those heterogeneous groups which, from the eighth to the eleventh century, thanks to technical revolutions in construction and navigation, took advantage of the sea and river routes of Europe, from the Spain of the Caliphs to the Slav and Khazar plains, as far as Constantinople, developing that particular phenomenon of social, cultural and economical mobility known as the *Viking Age*. Of particular interest is the impact of this phenomenon on the British archipelago. Both England and Ireland were lands populated by Celtic and Anglo-Saxon peoples who had deep ties with Christianity and were integrated into the elegant cultural representations deriving/from classical antiquity.

2. Scoundrels at the oars and other linguistic misunderstandings

Just before the arrival of the fleet of Tiberius in the Danish straits and on the coasts of the North Sea (a. 5 n.e.), Germanic ethnic groups had already displayed their remarkable nautical prowess by anticipating the actions that would render the ‘men of the North’ and the ‘Vikings’ so sadly famous in the Latin chronicles of the early Middle Ages.¹ Anti-Roman actions and piracy – connected to the formation of new power groups (Eruli, Franks, Saxons) fighting for supremacy over the river and sea routes of Northern Europe – increased progressively during the Late Empire and justified the creation in the Channel of that Imperial defence network known as the *litus saxonicum* (cf. Pryor 2005: 296-309).²

Maritime control over men and goods on the Northern and Baltic Seas became an important alternative to expansion over land, and played a decisive role in the economic and political development of segmentary interethnic groupings and organisms that came into being after the fall of Rome. This may be already seen in the process of migration towards Britain of agglomerates of Amsivari, Angles, Cauchi, Franks, Frisians, Jutes, and Saxons, an exodus that was recorded in a traditional and ideological format by Gildas (*De excidio et conquestu Britanniae*, sixth century)³ and later by Bede (*Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, Sims-Williams 1983a; 1983b), and which presupposed a knowledge of navigation techniques.

This period has sometimes been described as ‘proto-Viking’ on account of the great amount of maritime traffic between the

¹ The attacks of the Bructeri are known (12 BC), as are the actions of the Channenefati led by Gannascus (47), the incursions of the Cauchi, the Frisians and the Batavians (41, 47, 55), the circumnavigation of Britain and the raids of the Usipeti desertors (83), Haywood 1991: 2-14.

² The earliest references to Saxon raids are in Eutropius (IX.21; IV century), though already from the end of the third century, the destruction of part of the *classis Germanica* had left the coasts of Gaul and Belgium helpless against piracy.

³ Through the early tradition according to which the Saxons were invited to send mercenaries against the Picts and the Scots, in exchange for lands in Britain; following this invitation, according to Bede, Hengist and Horsa arrived on board three boats.

two shores of the British Channel and, more generally, because of the intense exploitation of a mercantile route that was probably, between the fourth and fifth centuries, safer than the continental ones. It seems that in this period the Saxons were the first to consolidate their image as pirates *par excellence*, establishing bases and settlements also in Gaul until the seventh century, in *enclaves* close to Bayeux, at the mouth of the Loire and the Garonne and in the area around Boulogne. Like those of the Vikings that would come later, these attacks were sudden and planned, even in unfavourable weather conditions, a clear sign of the advancements in ship technology; on the other hand, there is some uncertainty regarding the presumed sacrifices of prisoners to ingratiate the gods before the return journey, a piece of information that comes down to us through Sidonius Apollinaris (*Epist.* VIII.6.15, Luetjohann 1887: 132-33).

In the sixth and seventh centuries seafaring activities, whether peaceful or otherwise, continued undisturbed, accompanied by a series of developments that have not always been correctly interpreted, such as

- a) the creation of Saxon colonies and emporiums in the Bay of Biscay,
- b) the expansion of Frisian maritime power, or
- c) the coeval conversion of the Franks, who disappear from the accounts given in chronicles of acts of piracy.

In this scenario, new economic, technological and political impulses erupted onto the North and Baltic Sea, injected by the descendants of the ancient Scandinavian Bronze Age communities (including the Danish archipelago and Jutland), which had been little, if at all, touched by Roman influence. These developments may still be perceived as part of the backdrop to the main action in *Beowulf*, for example, in the story of Hygelac, king of the Geatas/Gautar (MLat. Chlochilaicus), who died, as we learn from Gregory of Tours (*Libri Historiarum* X, III: 3; Hoffmann 1995: 78) while he was leading an expedition of ‘Dani’, in a Frisia that had by then come under the rule of the Franks.⁴

⁴ In *Beowulf*, instead, as he faced an army of *Hetwaras* (Chattuarii?), cf. vv. 2354-59, 2913-20.

The ambiguous ethnonym *Northmanni*, *Nordmanni*, *Norðmen* ('barbarians/men from the North; Scandinavians'; more restrictedly 'Norwegians') answered the need to distinguish the new principal actors in these piratical and commercial enterprises, until a new motherland was created, thereby marking the conclusion of that identity process which is associated with the concept of *origo gentis*. This was Normandy, traditionally considered a settlement colony extensively inhabited, though not led, by the Danes.⁵ Misunderstandings developed thick and fast: already in the middle of the ninth century, even a skilled cleric such as Rabanus Maurus in his *De inventione linguarum*, a brief treatise on the origin of alphabets, listed a series of runes and their names as deployed by the 'Marcomanni [*sic!*], quos nos Nordmannos vocamus'.⁶ This information may have influenced the thoughts of the (Aquitainian) Benedictine monk Agio of Vabres, the future Bishop of Narbonne, on the dominant character of these 'Normanni', 'saeviores crudelioresque barbaris', in particular where he records that 'ex partibus Europae ab aquilonis cardine diffusa gens Marchomanorum saevissima atque barbarorum immanior' (Migne 1880: 781).

The ethnonym *Dani*, which was first introduced in the sixth century by Jordanes in his *Scandza insula*, and then maintained by Procopius (*De Bellis* VI.15, Dewing 1953: 414-15, 422-23), Gregory the Great (*Hist.* III.3) and by the Geographer of Ravenna (*Cosmographia* I.11),⁷ began to appear more and more frequently next to the ethnonym *Normanni*. This was caused both by the mention made by Jordanes (*Getica* III.23) of *Dani* and *Suetidi* hailing from the *insula* of Scandza/Scandia, and by the Frankish sources, which displayed a more precise knowledge of the pagan chiefdoms in a Jutland that was by then no longer inhabited by Jutes and Angles but fully Scandinavianised ('Dani primitus venerunt in Angliam', *Annales Lindisfarnenses* s.a. 777, Pertz 1866: 505). On the other

⁵ It seems probable that Göngu-Hrólfr/Rollo was originally Orkney-Norwegian; Musset 1997.

⁶ 'Litteras quippe quibus utuntur Marcomanni, quos nos Nordmannos vocamus, infra scriptas habemus: a quibus originem qui theodiscam loquuntur linguam trahunt', Migne 1849-1855: 1581-82.

⁷ 'Quarta ut hora noctis Northomanorum est patria, quae et Dania ab antiquis dicitur', Pinder and Parthey 1860: 27-28.

hand, one cannot ignore the weight of classical tradition fed by the myth of the Greek *Danai*; thus, through the knowledge of works such as the *Aeneid*, two important semantic nuances were added to the label of 'pirates': 'men of the North' and 'pagans'.

There is reason to believe that either territorial vicinity or simple assonance produced significant confusion between *Dani* and *Saxones*, as well as between *Northmen* and *Normans*; the Franks, therefore, whose culture seems to have been troubled by the fluidity of such fragmentary aggregations, began therefore to develop, next to the hypernym *Nordmanni*, two labels, *Dani* and *Sueones*, which corresponded to territorial representations. To the former, however, they attributed greater political importance, following their clashes with *regulus* Godefrith of Denmark (Garipzanov 2008: 118-22, 131-35). With the exception of Abbot of Fleury's surprising parallelism between Danes and Alani [*sic!*] (*Vita Eadmundi* VI, Migne 1853: 511), Normans, Danes and Swedes seem to be grouped together in Eginardus,⁸ Ermoldus Nigellus⁹ and Rimbert (*Vita Ansgarii*, c.870), while the annals and the chronicles of both the kingdom of the Franks (*Ann. Fuldenses*, *Ann. Bertiniani*) and the kingdom of the Asturians (*Chronicon Rotensis*) make a distinction between the two ethnonyms until well beyond the middle of the ninth century – though *Northmanni*/*Nor(d)manni* is the preferred form (Zettel 1977: 41-44) –, and the Old High German encomiastic poem *Ludwigslied* (a. 881) alternates *Northman* (ll. 24, 28, 44) and *heidine man* ('pagani', l. 11). At the end of the tenth century, Widukind of Corvey, who was aware of the difference between *Dani* and *Northmanni* (*Res. gest. Sax.* I.ii, I.xxxiii, Hirsch and Lohmann 1935: 4, 46), calls the inhabitants of Normandy *Northmanni* (II.ix: 99), a mysterious ethnonym with which Thietmar of Merseburg (and 70 years later also Adam of Bremen) identifies the Norwegians, except

⁸ 'Ultimum contra Nordmannos, qui Dani vocantur . . . bellum susceptum est', *Einhardi vita Karoli Magni*, 14, and 'Hunc multae circumsedent nationes; Danes siquidem ac Sueones, quos Nordmannos vocamus', *ibid.*: 12 (Holder-Egger 1911: 17, 15).

⁹ 'Hi populi porro veteri cognomina Deni / Ante vocabantur et vocantur adhuc; / Nort – *quoque* Francisco dicuntur nomine – manni / Veloces, agiles, armigerique nimis', Ermoldus Nigellus, *In honorem Hludowici*, IV.11-14, Pertz 1829: 501.

for the fact that he considers *Dani* to be the Scandinavian colony (*Rus'*) of Kyiv (*Chronicon* VIII.32, Holtzmann 1935: 530).

3. Angelcynn, Ænglaland

The heterogeneous social aggregations of pirates, merchants and farmers hailing from the Scandinavian regions with or without their womenfolk who arrived in the British Isles in two main waves or periods (780-900, 978-1020) left ambiguous and often misunderstood traces of themselves. Despite the clamour excited by their deeds – which culminated in the establishment of vast settlements and the ascent to the throne of England of a Danish king (1017) – , there remain only indirect sources of those largely oral communities and of their identitarian perceptions. What we know comes from Anglo-Saxon literature and Icelandic skaldic poetry – with the exception of a small number of runic epigraphs (on the issues raised by these see Barnes and Page 2006: 19-34; 373-453), a set of archaeological finds which, however, afford little ethnic evidence, and a fragmentary sculptural tradition connected to native myths and legends.

If therefore we exclude folklore and the exotic Victorian re-writings (above all Magnússon, Stephen, Dasent, Morris) and, at the other extreme, the ideological excesses of Anglo-Saxonism criticized by Hugh A. MacDougall (*Racial Myth in English History*, 1981), the most enduring Scandinavian heritage in England is ultimately to be found in the language. Toponyms, anthroponyms and lexemes, recorded in Shakespeare's poetry (Cercignani 1981) or by the first humanists and orthoepists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, were first analysed with a more prudent methodology by Erik Björkmann (1900-1902), but especially by Eilert Ekwall (1930) and Dietrich Hoffmann (1955), all of whom were, however, unfortunately not immune to the pull of the nineteenth-century myth of an uninterrupted continuity (Page 1971; Parsons 2001).

As we know, the British archipelago was the most important site of this heterogeneous Scandinavian settlement and acculturation, second perhaps only to Iceland. Anglo-Saxon England was the site, for example, of the conversion and baptism of certain Norwegian sovereigns (Óláfr Tryggvason and Hákon Haraldsson 'Godson of

Æthelstan') as well as a place of refuge for others (Eiríkr 'Bloodaxe', Haraldr 'Servant of Christ'), while on the Orkney Islands (Orkneyjar), which over time had with the Shetland Islands (Hjaltland) become a major hub of Scandinavian importance, there died the king who more than any other had promoted a philo-European cultural renewal (Hákon IV Hakonarson, † 1263), as well as two members of the local aristocracy (Magnús and Rögnvaldr), who became saints. Nor should one forget the situation in Ireland. In 1014 – almost two centuries after their arrival, the consequent establishment of important coastal centres and the extension of their power as far as western Scotland and the province of York – the governing Scandinavian clans lost their hegemony over the island following their fusion with the resident Gaels with whom they created distinct ethnic-political factions and groups (the Gall-Gáidel, cf. *infra*).

In the Old English sources (the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* [= ASC], the law codes of kings Eadgar, Æþelred II, and Knútr), the geographical element comes to the fore in the name *Norðmen(n)*, which one find, for example, in the poem (*The Battle of Brunanburh*, next to *guman norþerne* ('men of the North')). Despite the significant presence of Norwegians in England,¹⁰ *Norðmen(n)* alternates – albeit with a lesser degree of success – with the widespread hypernym *Dene* ('Danes; Scandinavians'), who are often accused of various atrocities, on the basis of a linguistic misunderstanding that lasted at least until the first half of the seventeenth century in writers, erudites and antiquaries such as E. Spenser († 1599) J. Weever († 1632) or J. Spelman († 1641), (cf. Fell 1987: 111-12).

During the tenth century, *Dene* became the most frequent epithet used as shorthand for a variety of different Scandinavian individuals, social groups and institutional figures¹¹ – not necessarily linked ethnically – that had settled mostly in the central and north-eastern areas of the island, while the central and north-western areas were more often perceived as Norwegian, without there being, however, any clear-cut distinction. Situations ranged from

¹⁰ Testified by the power of Norwegian clans over Northumbria, and alluded to ll. 8-9 of *The Conquest of the Five Boroughs*, a panegyric poem celebrating the recapture of the provinces, ASC (a. 942).

¹¹ Skalds, missionaries, merchants, mercenaries, scouts, interpreters, etc.

northern Northumbria, under the Hiberno-Norwegian sovereignty of York to the macro-region consisting of southern Northumbria and the Viking portion of the kingdom of Mercia (the 'Five Boroughs')¹² with eastern Anglia, that is to say, the territory which, beginning with the law codes of Wulfstan and Æþelred II (c.1002-1008) took on the name of *Danelaw* (<*Denalagu* '[district subjected to the] law of the Danes', cf. Graham-Campbell et al. 2001).¹³ In this case also, the two distinctions have much more to do with the cultural (and religious) tissue of integration (Welsh, Irish, Scottish or Saxon and Anglian) than with any far-fetched ethnicity markers: the label 'Danelaw' never definitively supplanted the names 'Northumbria, East Anglia and *Norðleoda*' (Hadley 2000: 298-341).

Dene are also (according to the ASC) those Scandinavians living outside the *Danelaw* who were the victims of the bloodbath incautiously ordered by King Æþelred II for the festivity of St. Britius (13/11/1002). In all probability this kind of ethnocentric success, which is still evident in the antiquarian and racial observations made in the seventeenth century by Richard R. Verstegan about a supposed Anglo-Norman-Danish matrix,¹⁴ reflects the generalised use of the adjective 'Danish' also in the Old Norse tongue; this is proved, for example, by the OIc. *ðonsk tunga*, used to describe the most widespread form of super-regional Nordic language, and also confirmed in Ælfric's famous homily *De falsis diis* (beginning of the eleventh century), when he speaks of the dissolute 'Venus, gehaten Frycg on Denisc' (Pope 1967-1968: 685).¹⁵ The *Chronicon* of Æþelweard (c.978-88) is an erudite Latin version of the ASC, in which, though much contempt is conveyed by epithets such as *plebs immunda*, *plebs spurcissima*, *lues*, *pagani*, *squalidae turmae*, etc., the author seems nevertheless to display an understanding of the flexi-

¹² Derby, Leicester, Lincoln, Nottingham and Stamford.

¹³ Laws Edward and Guthrum and VI Æthelred II (1008X1021), Hadley 2002: 46-50.

¹⁴ *A Restitution of the Decayed Intelligence . . .* (Antwerpen, Bruney, 1605).

¹⁵ The adjectival use of *norðmen(n)* meaning 'inhabitants of Norway', may perhaps be detected in the ASC (D) for 1049 and certainly starting from 1066, with reference to King Haraldr Harðráða's unlucky expedition to Stamford Bridge.

ble nature of ethnic identity when he distinguishes between ‘Dani, Northmanni quoque et Sueui’ (I.4).

The ethnonym *Dene*, moreover, prevailed over another enigmatic appellation, the widely discussed but never definitively interpreted, ‘Vikings’. The OIc. nouns *viking* (F) e *vikingr* (M), which have been at the core of many heated debates (Andersson 2007), seem generally to refer to the concept of *expedition* (commercial, piratical or other) and to those involved in it. The terms therefore describe a *status* rather than an *ethnos*, as demonstrated by the various *pre-Viking* acceptations of *wicing* in the Anglo-Saxon translation – dating from the time of King Alfred – of Orosius’ *Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri VII*. The noun *viking(r)* is attested in the Scandinavian area starting from the tenth century in skaldic poetry (in Tindr Hallkelsson’s verses in honour of *jarl* Hákon Sigurðarson, *Hákonardrápa* 5), in runic inscriptions¹⁶ as well as in north-eastern onomastics (**vikingr** appears as a proper name in about twenty inscriptions). Moving from a study by Bertil Daggfeldt (1983), Eldar Heide (2005 and 2006) elaborated a convincing etymological interpretation according to which the noun *viking* is connected to a secondary meaning of the OIc. vb. *vikja*, and indicates both the nautical distance covered by a rowing shift and, by extension, the rowing shift itself.

The consequences of such an interpretation turned out to be extremely important in pinpointing a vast phenomenon which, considered in relation to the existence of the form *wicing* for the Lat. *pyrata* in the Anglo-Saxon glossographic tradition of the seventh and eighth century (mss. *Épinal-Erfurt*, Lapidige 2007: 34-43) led Eric Björkman (1910) to actually hypothesize a Frisian loan to Old English,¹⁷ which later passed into Old Icelandic (Grønvik 2004). The OE. *wicing* would therefore serve to refer both to the act of piracy in the North Sea and to its perpetrators, who used vessels which at the time probably still lacked the revolutionary sailing system that was successfully developed in Scandinavia during the

¹⁶ DR 330 Gårdstånga (Scania); DR 334 Västra Strö (Bornholm); DR 216 Tirsted (Lolland); U 617 Bro kyrka (Uppland).

¹⁷ In the palatalised variant *wi(t)sing*, cf. Vries 2000: 662-63; Wadstein 1925.

eighth century. All this would therefore seem to remove any specific ethnic connotation from the noun,¹⁸ which would seem, albeit with all due caution, to be supported by the *wicinga cynn* in *Widsiþ* 47 (referring to the race of Ingeld) and the *sawicingas* ('raiders') of *Exodus* 333.

From the year 879, the ASC occasionally uses this appellation to refer to characters of Scandinavian origin, though Christine Fell (1986: 310) believes it was used exclusively for small numbers of pirates and raiders and never for larger groups of armed men of any definite nationality. This argument would appear to be confirmed by ms. A of the *Chronicle* (sub a. 917), which distinguishes between a land army (*landhere*) and the *wicingas*, a term alluding to irregular units or armed bands at the service of (also Anglo-Saxon) contractors (Whitelock 1979: 215), something which would seem confirmed by skaldic poetry (in Sighvatr Þórðarson, Óttar svarti, *Liðsmannaflökkur*; Jesch 2001: 50-53).

In the same way, the text of an act of king Æpelstan (dated 997), relating to the involvement of the Essex *caldorman* Æberic in the plan to dethrone the English sovereign, gives no indication of ethnicity for the (Danish) chief Sveinn 'Forkbeard' nor for the fleet associated with him (Thorpe 1865: 539; Whitelock 1979: 215). Thus, the gain in momentum of the second wave of raids on England towards the end of the tenth century might explain the use of the OE. *wicing*, which appears as many as six times in the poem on the *Battle of Maldon* (a. 991) (26 *wicinga ar*; 73 [*flotan* 'the sailors'] *wicinga fela*; 97 *wicinga werod*; 116 *wicingum*; 139 *wlancne wicing*; 322 *wicingas*), while there is only one synonymical use of 'Danes' (129 *on Denon*). The poem, however, was written too soon after the dramatic events it evokes not to bear any emotional or ideological marks, which are indeed still visible in Ælfric (in his *Grammatica* and in his *Letter to Brother Edward*) or in Wulfstan (in his famous sermon to the Anglo-Saxon people).

Towards the end of the eleventh century, one should note the hesitation shown by Adam of Breme in describing the northern people in his *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*. If these are

¹⁸ The noun would seem potentially to be referable to a Saxon, an Anglian, a Frisian, as well as a Dane.

collectively described as ‘Yperborei’ (as in the Carolingian sources), ‘Nortmanni, Nordmanni’ is instead used in a strict sense as a label for the inhabitants of Normandy, southern Italy and Norway, while *Gesta* IV.6 uses the appellation ‘Wichingos’¹⁹ to describe the Scandinavian variant of ‘pirates’, integrated by the Low German form *ascomanni* (*Gesta* II.31 (29), 32 (30); 77; IV.6). As a matter of fact, both the compound (“ash’ men, *asc* sailors’ > ‘pirates’, OE. *æscman*, OIc. *askmaðr*),²⁰ and the first element (Germanic **aska-l*aski-*, OIc. *askr*, OE. *æsc*, OSax. *ask*, Old High German *asc* ‘ash’, cf. Gr. ὄξυα ‘birch’, and, by extension, ‘vessel’) are regularly attested in the various Germanic languages (cf. in 1063 the Frisian toponym Asc-mannedelf, today’s Assendelft), and especially in Old English: the ASC (a. 897, *recte* 896) recounts attacks on Wessex (from ‘Danish’ bases in East Anglia and Northumbria) carried out through special raiding ships (OE. *æscas*, OIc. *askar*) to counter which Alfred ordered special interceptor ships to be built.²¹

4. History, contexts and histories of texts

Four texts above all others, amongst the documents in the vulgar tongue that have come down to us, are, I feel, representative of an evolution in the Anglo-Saxon perception of Scandinavian otherness, over a period of two and a half centuries of conflicting relationships.

The first of these examples is in the ASC, where only a few words, containing no particularly fierce judgement, are used to describe military and predatory actions carried out by small units generically describable as ‘Danish’, (*her com / for se here; þa metton hie micelne sciphere wicenga / Deniscra monna*, ‘there moved the [invading] army; they clashed with many ships of the army of the Vikings / the Danes’, etc.). Starting with the entry for the year 920

¹⁹ ‘Ipsi vero pyratae, quos illi Wichingos appellant, nostri Ascomannos, regi Danico tributum solvunt, ut liceat eis predam exercere a barbaris, qui circa hoc mare plurimi abundant’, Schmeidler 1917: 233.

²⁰ In *Maldon* 69, *æschere* refers to the Viking troops who used ships.

²¹ ‘Þa het Alfred cyng timbran langscipu ongen ða æscas’, Bately 1986: 60.

in version *A*, there is, however, a growing recognition of the distinctions between the different communities settled in Northumbria, that is to say *ge Englisce*, *ge Denisce*, *ge Norþmen* (Bately 1986: 69); here *Norþmen* probably serves to mark an ethnic value ‘[of] Norwegian [origin]’, though perhaps not coming directly from Norway.

The second example comes from some of the verse portions of the ASC, which deal with certain historical events.²² The first – and the most ideologically coloured – of these (the [*Battle of Brunanburh*], translated by Tennyson in 1876-1880) describes the victory of king Æþelstan against a coalition of Scots, Welsh and Vikings hailing from Dublin, which would pave the path for the conquest of Northumbria by the powerful Wessex sovereign.²³ Adopting unusually encomiastic tones, the verses celebrate the defeat of the Scandinavian assailers by the local descendants of those very ‘warsmiths’ (that is the Anglo-Saxons) who had, in earlier times, already conquered the Welsh (ll. 72-73). Here the Vikings are depicted through verses charged with insult, a tone which also extends to the fallen, thus diverging from the epic paradigm that always shows indulgence towards those who have sacrificed their lives in battle; this element particularly strengthens the possibility that foreign poetical models may have influenced the work (skaldic poems, for example, such as the OIc. *Höfuðslausn*, or the Old High German *Ludwigslied*). In *Brunanburh*, the Scandinavian forces are described through the (declined) forms *scipflotan* (‘crews’, 11), *guman norþerne* (‘men of the North’, 18), *flotan* (‘sailors’, 32), *Norðmanna* (‘Norwegians? Men of the North?’, 33), *Norðmen* (‘id.’, 53), the two latter referring to the Norwegians of Dublin – both because historically they ruled over the ‘kingdom’ of York, and because *Norðmen/Normen* ‘Norwegians’ are rarely mentioned outside of the ASC. In 942 Viking Mercia and south Northumbria, which belonged to the above-mentioned Five Boroughs, were freed by the new king Eadmund, brother of that Æþelstan who had won the Battle of Brunanburh. In the text

²² In chronological order: (*Battle of Brunanburh* (937), *The Conquest of the Five Provinces* (942), *The Coronation of Edgar* (973), *The Death of Edgar* (975), *The Death of Alfred* (1036), *The Death of Edward* (1065 [1066])).

²³ The first to be called *rex [totius] Britanniae*, on coins and official acts (Grueber 1899: 21, 27, Pl. V.158; Blunt 1974: 55-57).

referring to this event (the *Conquest of the Five Boroughs*) there is a surprising reference (ll. 8b-11a)²⁴ to the freeing of ‘Danish’ settlers and immigrants, Christian allies of Wessex (Abrams 2001), from the prolonged yoke of the powerful Norwegian ‘pagan’ clans, just half a century after the Danes had been singled out in the biography of king Alfred (Asser’s *De rebus gestis Alfredi*) as enemies who were still devoted to paganism (Stevenson 1904: 60).

The third case is a text that was copied just before the original was lost in the fire that destroyed the Cotton Library (1731): (*The Battle of*) *Maldon*. The 324 fragmentary verses describe an episode of English history that took place in Essex in early August 991, when, unfortunately for the soldiers recruited by the incautious local *ealdorman* Byrhtnoþ, the battle favoured an aggressive expedition of Viking assailants, led by the now rich pirate and future *rex christianus* of Norway, Óláfr Tryggvason. The image of defeat is mitigated by the depiction of loyalty to one’s leader and of the ideals that inspire and encourage it, even to the final sacrifice, amongst the warriors who followed the English nobleman. This is ultimately an *exemplum* that may be traced back to both Christian and heroic models, and which may be usefully compared with the Norse *Bjarkamál*, the *Carmen de Hastingae proelio* of Guy d’Amiens and the words of William of Malmesbury in the *Gesta Regum*.²⁵ The poem, which does not heap upon the enemy either anathema or derision, has been analysed from the lexical point of view by Raymond Page (1987) and more recently by Leonard Neidorf (2012: 458-59, 471-73). They demonstrated that, at a time of widespread political and mil-

²⁴ ‘Dæne wæran ær / under Norðmannum nyde gebegde / on hæþena hæfteclommum / lange þraga’, ASC (B), Bately 1986: 73), ‘Before this the “Danes” had been forcefully subjected to the “Norwegians”, and long remained the prisoners of the pagans’.

²⁵ The first is a fragmentary poem preserved in XIII-century Icelandic (Snorri Sturluson) and Danish-Latin (Saxo Grammaticus) sources, which deals with the sacrifice of the warriors of the legendary Danish king Hrólfur kra-ki. The second describes a storyteller (*histrío*), who, as the battle of Hastings (1066) neared, apparently spurred on the Franco-Norman army with epic verses that echo the *Chanson de Roland* and the war against the infidels, as would seem confirmed in the *Gesta regum* III, 242 (1125), where it is said that on the eve of Hastings passages from the *Cantilena Rolandi* were recited (See 1976).

itary conflicts, the multiethnic army of assailants, far from being considered repugnant and bloodthirsty cutthroats, possessed the status of warriors. These enemies, pacified by the payment of the tribute called *danegeld*, even proved on occasion to be dependable interlocutors, as is conceded by a reliable document such as the ASC and demonstrated by the facts themselves of the Battle of Brunanburh, during which king Æpelstan received crucial help from many Viking mercenaries and allies, amongst whom the skald Egill Skallagrímsson (Battaglia 2006). This further ideological reinterpretation of the ASC, a document already resolutely in favour of the political hegemony of Wessex, may be detected in the poem's disparagement of the pagans from the north; this Old-Testament *topos* (in Jeremiah) is fed by Asser into his biography of Alfred, and also appears in the rhetoric adopted by the above-mentioned Æpelweard, who is also influenced by the poetry of *Brunanburh* (Page 1987: 9-10, 12-13). Even a commonly more sober scholar such as Henry of Huntingdon exhumes the anachronistic stereotype of the *Daci* (*Historia Anglorum* 1154, Prol. ch. V; Arnold 1879: 137), the Jutland *Dani* of the medieval sources,²⁶ who were often confused with the *Danai* mentioned in Greek texts and in Virgil. As a matter of fact, this misunderstanding – though we should probably call it an *inventio* – was deployed by Dudo of Saint-Quentin (*Libri III de moribus et actis primorum Normanniae ducum*, c.996-1015) to recreate a Trojan *origo gentis* for the new Norman lords (cf. *Norici* for 'Norwegians'), which later also influenced William of Jumièges (*Gesta Normannorum ducum*, c.1070).

The fourth case is the best-known as it regards the poem *Beowulf*, a work that may well be described as an *anthology* of Anglo-Saxon culture, but which contains many details that still remain unclear, beginning with the date of the text itself, which oscillates between the end of the eighth and the first quarter of the eleventh century.²⁷ The poem, which is the emblem of the irrevers-

²⁶ Cf. the *Δαυοί* in Procopius (*De bell. Goth.* II.14-1) and the *Dani* in Gregory of Tours (*Libri Hist.* X, III).

²⁷ On the basis of the codicological and paleographical evidence, and following the reflections in Jacobs 1977 on the level of integration of Scandinavian communities in England in the tenth century, Kiernan 1981 ultimately,

ible crisis of *heroic* pagan society and of the decline of the relationship of loyalty between the lord and his followers, is a masterpiece of English and Christian literary history. Its frequent psychological and ethical insight as well as its elegant classical echoes go hand in hand with a powerful historical re-evocation that make it one of the works through which Tudor and Elizabethan erudites, starting from Tudor and Elizabethan erudites, the value and the national significance of the Anglo-Saxon Middle Ages was finally recognised. *Beowulf*, however, is not set in England, but in the basin between the North Sea and the Baltic, between Denmark and Sweden, close to areas occupied by ethnic potentates from whence (in the fifth century) the intermittent colonisation of post-Roman Britain had started and which would be later Scandinavianised. The action of the poem takes place in these ancient seats of the Anglo-Saxons, where the Swedish prince of the Geats, Beowulf, uses his superhuman strength and determination to fight against equally unnatural creatures, and eventually succumbs to a fatal wound in his last battle against a dragon. The purpose of the work, therefore, if one accepts a later dating, may have been to evoke the common roots of the Anglo-Saxons and the new Danish Norwegian colonisers at the service of Cnut/Knútr, the first Scandinavian king of England.

The many heroes and princes, feuds and conflicts, especially among the Scandinavian people make for a high emotional content; the poem also devotes great attention to the genealogies of the northern macro-region, an interest which is confirmed by the corresponding lists of the rulers of the various Anglo-Saxon kingdoms inserted in the ASC (and in the chronicle of Æþelweard), which trace the legendary genealogies of Hengest, Horsa or Cerdic back to Norse gods such as Odin or Baldr.²⁸

against the canonical dating proposed by Whitelock 1951: 24-25, set a late date for the poem, which, however, aside from a few simple linguistic similarities, does not seem to be traceable with any certainty to a Norse model.

²⁸ ‘. . . hoc est Hengest et Horsa filii Vuyrhtelsi, auus eorum Vuicta, et proauus eorum Vuithar, atauus quidem eorum Vuothern, qui et rex multitudinis barbarorum. In tanta et enim seductione oppressi aquilonaes increduli ut deum colunt usque in hodiernam diem . . . Dani, Northmanni quoque et Sueui’ (I.4); ‘Hengest . . . cuius pater fuit Wihtgels, auus Wicta, proauus Wihter, atauus Wothen, qui et rex multarum gentium, quem pagani nunc ut

Amongst the various possible reasons for such a high degree of interest in foreign affairs may be mentioned the close contacts existing between the Anglo-Saxon clergy and the Scandinavian Churches,²⁹ as well as the presence in England, between the ninth and the tenth centuries, of variously Christianised Scandinavian communities, which established forms of administrative collaborations and matrimonial policies between the local notables and Anglo-Saxon princes and kings (Page 1997: 120-22). Such a historical, linguistic and cultural milieu was profoundly subverted by the circumstances that led to the conquest of the throne of England by Knútr (Cnut), son of Sveinn (Sweyn) Haraldsson of Denmark, a fact that strengthens, as is well known, the argument put forward by Kevin Kiernan (1981). It should not, however, be forgotten that the new Danish ruling class had proved that it could rapidly integrate; this is confirmed by the absence of any trace of the conquerors' language in all official documents, with the exception of a set of skaldic panegyrics in honour of Anglo-Saxon sovereigns which are attested in Norse literature (Jesch 2001).³⁰

It is also in this direction that we should interpret the extraordinary document that is the encomium recited by a singer of Hroþgar at ll. 874b-915 of *Beowulf*, in which Beowulf's victory over Grendel is compared to the killing of the dragon in the Nibelung-Volsung cycle. This is, to date, the oldest attestation of the legend immortalised towards the end of the nineteenth century by Richard Wagner, in whose Old English version, however, the dragon (Fáfnir) is not killed by Siegfried/Sigurðr, as in the Middle High German and Norse traditions, but by his father, Sigemund/Sigmundr. Very probably the reason for this change is to be found in the alteration

deum colunt aliqui' (II.2, AD 596) and ' . . . Cerdic . . . cuius pater fuit Elesa, aus Esla . . . septimus Brond, octavus Balder, nonus Vuothen, . . . nonus decimus Scef . . . ' (III.4, AD 855).

²⁹ Already documented for the tenth century by William di Malmesbury, in relation to the obit of the Glastonbury monk Sigefridus, who had been Bishop of Norway and who died on the *nonae* of April, Migne 1855: 1722.

³⁰ A similar fate is shared by the rich Scandinavian runic tradition, which in the British archipelago has survived in a small number (about 130) of inscriptions Nordic *Fuþark*, including the runic graffiti of Maeshowe and the 26 complex runic monuments of the Isle of Man (Page 1971; Barnes 1993).

that is typical of oral traditions, that were transmitted in England amongst the Scandinavian communities who, according to John McKinnell (2001), also composed (on English soil) parts of the *Poetic Edda*.³¹ In reciprocal contact with the literary testimonies, but in a less complex visual form, there is also the rich iconographic trove on hogbacks, bracteates, crosses and stones,³² among which there stands out the extraordinary *Gosforth Cross* (Cumbria, first half of the tenth century), which features at least seven mythological scenes depicting the End of the World that also appear in the *Edda* poems (McKinnell 2001: 328-29); these scenes are evoked through images that derive from northern paganism (Old Norse *Ragnarök*), which have been linked by Richard Bailey (1980: 20) to the new local interethnic alliances, but also to pre-Christian artistic output and to the monastic practice of contemplating visual art.

The inevitable process of integration did not entirely prevent Scandinavian dialects from surviving within the communities that had settled in the ancient Danelaw and in south-east Northumbria; this was true especially at the courts, which were frequented by figures who were part interpreters, part advisors and part entertainers and who were both laymen and clerics: the skalds. Together with runic epitaphs (frequently Christian) and the sagas, it is skaldic poetry that gives us a sense (often expressed in encomiastic, allegorical, and occasionally even extravagant terms) of the relationship between colonisers and local residents and of the qualities celebrated in a leader or a hero, though the stereotypes adopted may also be found in Anglo-Saxon literature (Page 1987: 5-6). This would appear to be supported by the anecdotes (and the verses) of

³¹ Among these there is, in my opinion, an interesting case of reception of the continental legend matter, which, from the Anglo-Saxon version (*Waldere*) of the Middle Latin poem *Waltharius* may have influenced some of the oldest verses in the *Poetic Edda*, the *Lay of Atli* (*Atlakviða*; cf. Battaglia, forthcoming) through the mediation of Scandinavian poets and storytellers who frequented the English courts of the Viking lords of the tenth century.

³² For example at Kirkby Stephen (Westm.), Kirk Andreas (Man), Bingham (No.), Ovingham (North.), Sockburn (Du.), Saxlingham Nethergate, Attleborough and Reepham (E. Anglia), Kirk Levington and Skipwith (York.), cf. Margeson 1980: 183-91; Bailey 1980 and 2000; McKinnell 2001: 342-43; Lendinara 2010; Battaglia 2014: 169-75.

skalds such as Egill Skallagrímsson at the court of Eiríkr ‘Blood-axe’, Gunnlaugr ‘Serpent-tongue’ at the court of king Ælþelred or Sneglu ‘the Thorn’ at the court of Cnut. This cultural heritage was transmitted through a common oral vehicle and re-elaborated in literary and theatrical form in works such as the *Vita Waldevi*, and by writers such as Orderic Vitalis and Raphael Holinshed, as well as, of course, by Shakespeare (*Eadmund Ironside*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*), and later by Thomas Percy, Thomas Gray, William Blake, William Herbert, Walter Scott, Charles Kingsley and William Morris.

Finally, the prestige attained by Scyld (cf. Scyld Scefig in *Beowulf*), a character in Anglo-Norse epic, is testified by the insertion of his name (in the form Skjöldr) in Icelandic documents as late as in the seventeenth century, as well as in another set of genealogical sources.³³ The transmission of genealogical memory is part of a cultural consensus that aimed not just to preserve the rich heritage of these people, but also to honourably integrate the Christian tradition, so as to legitimise and fuse into a single official version history, politics and religion (Frank 1991: 92-95; North 1997; Anlezark 2002). Anglo-Saxon sources, however, cast some doubt over the hypothesis that *Scyld* (with his descendents the *Scyldingas*) played a central role as a possible forebear of the kings of England and of other legendary characters (cf. *Beowulf*). The fact that in Scandinavia the use of names and appellations linkable to this root is later than the tenth century suggests the possibility that it was precisely in the ninth/tenth-century Viking settlements in the north-east of England that there arose an independent tradition on the legendary Scyld/Skjöldr – *Scyldwa/Sceldwea* in the ASC (Bruce 2002: 15-54).

³³ Amongst these are Asser’s life of King Alfred, in which a certain Sceldwea is amongst the ancestors of the famous king, as in the ASC, which under the year 855 names Scaef and Sceldwea amongst king Æthelwulf’s ancestors; Æthelweard’s *Chronicon* includes Scef and Scyld in the Wessex dynasty, while William of Malmesbury’s *Gesta regum Anglorum* include in it Sceldius and Scaef.

5. Black or white . . . always foreigners

The presence of Vikings, as recorded in Ireland from 793 (794, *Annals of Ulster*) down to the middle of the ninth century was characterised by a series of intermittent raids aimed especially at religious centres, in particular on the northern and eastern coasts. These raids started from bases on the mainland and on the islands of the Viking 'kingdom' of Lothlend/Laithlind (probably Scotland), and later developed into groups of settlements and political and commercial networks,³⁴ which ultimately favoured the formation of a Scoto-Norwegian potentate in Dublin. Often, however, it was not just the Vikings who attacked the rich monastic centres of Europe, especially those that were isolated and defenceless, and there is frequent mention of attacks carried out by Irish raiders that precede the first Viking raid (possibly carried out by Norwegians) on Rechrú (Rathlin Island).

The submission of the greater part of the island and the settlement in Dublin of the dominant clans initiated an inevitable process of integration and a progressive detachment from the expansionistic interests of the motherland. Within the space of half a century, new Scandinavian settlements, based on the traffic of goods and slaves, on mercenarism and on shipbuilding, led to a set of political and military alliances, strengthened by interethnic marriages between members of the aristocracy and by the progressive conversion to Christianity. Despite this, the memory of individual ethnic identity persisted, as is proved by the extraordinary bilingual inscription at Killaloe (Co. Claire, IR-2, where the Norse inscription reads <[Th]orgrím risti // krus þina 'Thorgrímr had this cross erected'). Such alliances progressively aimed at achieving dominion over vast areas of Scotland and Strathclyde right to the lands of the Picts, thus laying the ground for a Scandinavian-led potentate, which ultimately collapsed as a result of the battle of Clontarf (Dublin; Good Friday, 1014).

It should come as no surprise that in juridical, hagiographic and prophetic treatises, as well as in the annals, the Viking presence on

³⁴ Led by the obscure Amlaíb *Conung* (Óláfr in hvíti, Smyth 1977: 101-16), where *conung* expresses the OIc. *konungr* 'Lord, king'.

the island is read through a Christian lens, portraying the invaders as the scourges of God, heralds of the Apocalypse. The Vikings are referred to by at least two names marking them out as 'foreigners', *ge(i)nt(i)* ('foreigner/-s non-Christian'³⁵ < Lat. *gentes, gentiles*, frequent in the Old Welsh forms *gint, gynt*)³⁶ – in use until the middle of the tenth century – and *gall* (pl. *gaill*), originally 'Gaels; continental foreign people', later used both for the Scandinavian settlers (cf. *Insi Gall* 'Islands of the Foreigners', the Hebrides) and for the Norman conquerors. These names, in turn, are linked in ways that are not entirely clear to the adjectives referring to 'white/light' or 'black/dark' (*Finnngailll-genti* vs. *Dubngailll-genti*), appellatives which for a long time have lacked a convincing explanation. The two concepts begin to appear in the second half of the ninth century, when the 'Danish' conquerors of Northumbria and York (866-954), begin in the Gaelic sources to be clearly distinguished from the *Finnngaill* (or simply the *Gaill*) – who had already for some time infested the Irish coasts – under the name of *Dubgaill* (*Annals of Ulster* a. 866); analogously with the Welsh annals (*Annales Cambriae*, a. 853, mss. A, B: *Mon vastata [est] a gentilibus nigris*).

From the middle of the ninth century (and up to the end of the twelfth), to further complicate the already slim factual evidence, yet another indecipherable faction makes its entry into the Irish annals, the result of an ethnic and cultural hybridization that had been taking place over a couple of generations: the so-called *Gall-Gáidel* (or *-Goidil*) 'Foreigner-Gaels', 'mixed Gaels', whose origins are far from being evident (the ancient Dál Riata? The Scottish region of Galloway?, Jennings and Kruse 2009), and who had their own independent interests at heart when they intervened in the political struggle

³⁵ The *Annales Xantenses* and the *Liber Historiae Francorum* define non-Christian foreigners as *gentili*, people without law, following the definition given by Isidorus (*Etym.* VIII.10.2). The discontinuation of its use in tenth- and eleventh-century chronicles and annals was probably caused by the process of conversion.

³⁶ In addition to *kenedloedd* 'pagans' (Old Irish *cenél na pagán*) and *kenedloedd duon* 'black pagans', in the *Chronicle of the Princes* (*Brut y Tjwysogion*, cod. *Peniarth MS. 20*, fourteenth century), the continuation of the *Historia Regum Britanniae* perhaps based on an eleventh-century codex.

on the island against the Viking factions, occasionally striking up an alliance with the Irish (*Annals of Ulster* a. 855-58).³⁷

This enigma was plausibly solved in the mid 1970s, when Alfred Smyth compared this data with that of the *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, an eighteenth-century translation of a collection of Gaelic annals, amongst which are the *Annals of Ulster*. Here, in the year 922, we find a reference to the ‘new’ and the ‘old’ Danes, something that suggested the possibility of a distinction between the ‘dark/new Foreigners’ – the Danes, that is – and the ‘light or old/known Foreigners’ – the Norwegians (of Scotland and Northumbria), which indirectly referred to the more recent and the older overlords of Dublin (Dumville 2004; Downham 2011). In this way the annals established an ethnic subdivision which has in any case – in the light of the fluidity of ethnic relationships in the European and Scandinavian Middle Ages (Downham 2012) – proved to be both an oversimplification and an anachronism. As regards the two appellations, it should be noted that the anthroponym «*tufgal*» (= Dubhgal) appears on the back side of the Kirk Michael cross slab (MM 130, Isle of Man; Page and Parsons 1995: 239), while the success of the name Fingal, echoes down to the eighteenth century, when James Macpherson – following the excitement that developed around the *Fragments of Ancient Poetry collected in the Highlands of Scotland* (1760) – published in the *Works of Ossian* (1765) the translation of a purported epic poem by the equally purported bard Ossian, and dedicated to the hero Fingal who was celebrated in the arts and in the literature of the nineteenth century.

The first real local equation between dark Foreigners and Northumbrian ‘Danes’ (*Duibgenti Danarda*) is, however, found in the *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib* (‘The Gael’s war against the foreigners [*scil.*: Scandinavians]’, Todd 1867), a Middle Irish propaganda work, taken for the most part from the earlier annal tradition; here the appellation *Danair* (Todd 1867: 150-53, 208-09) refers in any

³⁷ Their disappearance as a distinct group during the following century may indicate that all ethnic distinctions had been superseded, while their intermittent re-appearance in the eleventh-twelfth-centuries annals may point to stabilised regional settlements where the ethnic factor played no significant role.

case to Scandinavians who are local and who do not come from abroad. The work, which is made up of long sections of alliterative prose, and is attested from the twelfth century onwards (*Book of Leinster, Lebor na Núachongbála, c.1160*), deals with the struggle between Danish and Norwegian factions for the control of Dublin in the middle of the ninth century.

The geographical name ‹Laithlind› vs ‹Lochla(i)nn› (later), which appears in the ninth and tenth centuries as a centre of Viking settlements, is controversial. It appears both in local annals and in a famous verse copied in the margin of the *cod. Sangallensis 904, f. 112* (middle ninth century). The two toponyms, which probably should not be associated etymologically, have been with various degrees of success called upon to represent Dublin, the Norwegian Rogaland or the Hordaland, the Hebrides, certain areas of Scotland, or, from the eleventh century onwards, Norway in general (Lochla(i)nn ‘land of the lakes/fjords?’). However, the absence of any real or regular contacts with Norway in the first half of the ninth century, the analysis of onomastic data, the epic poems and the literary allegories (*Cath Maige Tuired, Cath Ruis na Ríg*) suggest that the Scottish settlements belonged to the powerful lords of York (Ó Corráin 1998: 306-313), who were originally Norwegian but independent from the local kings.³⁸

Amongst the annalistic and historiographic sources from the twelfth-thirteenth centuries, the interpretation chosen by Giraldus Cambrensis (*Topographia Hibernica/Hiberniae, III.xliii, ca. 1187*) to illustrate the Viking hegemony over Ireland is decidedly singular. The name employed in this case is *Oustmanni* (‹Houstmanni›, ‹Nosmani›, etc.), an epithet that reappears in the toponym Ostmaneby (< **Austmannaby*-) or Ostmanstonry (today Oxmantown, near Dublin), which bears a resemblance to the appellation *Austmaðr* found in some Icelandic sagas, in the *Ísledingabók* and

³⁸ None of these can be traced directly back to Norway, and the connection is established mainly by Norse sagas and genealogical lists starting from the twelfth century; these in turn echo matter found in Gaelic poetry and annals, which, from the end of the eleventh century, extend the toponym *Laithlind/Lochlainn* to Norway, concomitantly with the expansionistic threats of king Harladr Hardráða (Ó Corráin 1998: 318-20).

in the *Landnámabók*.³⁹ The settlement of the Norwegian Turgesius/Dorgeirr is followed by the fraudulent arrival of the *Ostmanni* ('gens igitur hæc, quæ nunc Ostmannica gens vocatur . . . dicti sunt autem Ostmanni lingua ipsorum') in the guise of merchants ('non in bellica classe, sed sub pacis obtentu, et quasi mercaturæ exercendæ prætextu', Dimock 1867: 187). The episode is reinterpreted in the light of the *topos* of the invitation made to new colonisers from Scandinavia (*de Norwagiæ et insularum borealium partibus*, cf. the ancient Slavic legend in *The Tale of Past Years*), who are here conceived on the basis of the customary pattern of three ('Fuerunt autem duces istorum tres fratres, Amelavus scilicet, Sitaracus, et Yvorus. Constructis itaque primo civitatibus tribus, Dublinia, Waterfordia, Limerico, Dubliniæ principatus cessit Amelavo, Waterfordiæ Sitaraco, Limerici Yvoro', *ibid.*: 187), which produces an equal number of feudal lords (Óláfr, Sigtryggr and Ívarr), attested in Ireland around the middle of the ninth century.

6. Saracens of the North and infidels

The appearance of Scandinavian characters in various texts of historiographic and hagiographic literature in Langue d'Oïl or Anglo-Norman is often accompanied by adjectives deriving from the epic register of the *chanson de geste* and usually describing attitudes towards war or religion unlike those of the Vikings (for example 'fellons', 'repugnant' 'infidels', 'renegades', 'demons', cf. *Gormont et Isebart*, *L'Estoire des Engleis*, *La Estoire de Seint Aedward le Rei*). This is rather surprising, in light of how much more widespread Christianisation was at that time as compared with the milieu described by poems such as *Ludwigslied*, (the *Battle of Brunanburh* or (the *Battle of Maldon* (ninth-tenth centuries). In addition to this one should also consider the substantially benevolent tradition inaugurated by the Franco-Norman historiography of Ademar of

³⁹ Used to describe men who came from Gotland, Jämtland or Norway, who appear from the sources to have proudly held on to their ancient legal customs (in Wexford, Waterford and Limerick) well into the fourteenth century (Bugge 1921: 206-08).

Chabannes († 1028) and Dudo of S. Quentin († 1026), later continued by such followers as William of Jumièges, Robert of Torigny, and William of Poitiers, who invented, as it were, a Norman identity that was not associated with the Vikings.

A yet more favourable perception of this ethnicity, a sort of *Danomania* almost, may be found in Stephen of Rouen's bombastic poem *Draco Normannicus* (c.1168). In this Latin text, based on obscure but very specific sources describing the Danish kingdom of Valdemar the Great, the use of the adjective *Danus* for William the Bastard (I. XXXV.1628; and of the epithet *Danorum dux*, II.VI-II.479 for the Plantagenet Henry II!) underscored a connection that went as far back as Rollo (who in fact probably hailed from the Orkney Islands) and therefore between Normandy and the Scandinavian aristocracy, thereby perhaps testifying to still widespread anti-French feelings (Abrams 2007; on the other hand cf. McNair 2015).

From the second half of the eleventh century – on a scene now dominated by the new *pagans* the Saracens – , the Danish protagonists of the by then concluded Viking era step into the realm of imagination (Levy 2004). Thanks to a process of revision that owed much both to antiquarian interest and the search for analogies, the 'Northmen' were now likened to the antagonists of contemporary Western civilisation (the Arabs, the Persians, the Turks), and made to fight alongside those armies and even occasionally to share in the cult of an equally imaginary triad of divinities (Apollin, Mahom(et) and Tervagant). In this light mention should be made of the *Romance of Horn* (second half of the twelfth century, a forerunner of the later *King Horn*), in which the names of some Saracen warriors (Persians and Africans) betray their Scandinavian origin (Egolf, Gudbrand, Rodmund, Gudolf).

Similar observations may be made about the poetic fragment known as *Gormont et Isembart*, the former of whose protagonists is presented as a Saracen (*cellcist d'Oriente, Arabis*, ll. 69, 78 ll. 186, 443) or a Lord of the Lusatian Slavs (*emperere de Leutiz*, l. 444), a leader of Arab troops and 'Antichrist' (l. 204) or 'Satan' (l. 507). He is at times connected to the Guthrum/Guthorm/Godorm, who was defeated and converted by Alfred the Great at Edington (878), at other times with the Guaramundus (Hariulf, *Chronicon Centulense* III.20) who was overpowered in a small clash at Saucourt in 881,

which is emphatically celebrated by the Old High German *Ludwigslied*. Less well-known, but no less important, is the text known as the *Chanson* (or *Roman*) *d'Aiquin*, which deals with the freeing of Brittany by Charlemagne (and a multi-national army of Bavarians, Alemans, Frisians, Angevins and . . . Normans). The region had treacherously been occupied by 'Saracen' conquerors 'de Nort-pays' (ll. 230, 429, etc., in particular by *Norreins*, l. 399, *Norois*, l. 486, *Noreys*, l. 1246 etc.) led by Aiquin, a probable romance adaptation of Incon, a Viking leader who is attested in the annals of Flodoard (s.a. 931). In a similar manner, in the *Roman de Brut*, Robert Wace asserted that the line separating civilisation from barbarity was to be the sharing of the Christian faith, a useful mark of distinction between the integrated Normans led by Prince Rou and the fierce Vikings under his predecessor Hastings.

Versions of this scenario that are less ideologically clearcut can only be found in romance poems composed from the thirteenth century onwards. Among these we find the *Lai d'Haveloc*, the over 20,000 verses of the *Roman de Waldef*, an amalgam of epic deeds and names (King Atle, the usurper Frode, the 'Saracen' kings of Dublin) and the *Chevalerie d'Ogier*, which deals with the deeds of the brave Ogier *le Danois*, a character who also puts in an appearance in the *Nota emilianensis* and in the *Chanson de Roland*. In this case the reference to Denmark is probably justified by the need to underscore his decidedly unorthodox behaviour.

In the most famous of the fourteenth-century⁴⁰ Middle English chronicles, *The Brut or the Chronicles of England* (Brie 1906, an adaptation of Wace's *Roman de Brut*, c.1155) there do not seem to be many differences between the *Danoys* in the service of the greedy and disloyal Knoght (Cnut), the foreign usurper of the kingdom, and the bloodthirsty pagans 'tamed' by king Alfred; after their defeat, their king (who is not named here) and the royal retinue agree to be baptised, abandoning all vestige of northernness and adopting Anglo-Saxon names, beginning with their king, who takes on the name of Athelston (Brie 1906: 110, he who famously triumphed over the Norwegian Vikings at Brunanburh in 938). Again in the

⁴⁰ Although the oldest core of the text probably dated back to 1333 (Matheson 1998: 3), it was printed in the fifteenth century.

Middle English *Brut*, we find that, in order to ‘destroie þe Cristen peple of Engeland fram place unto place’ (ibid.: 111), a faction of the first pagan assailants of England, the *Danoys* of Northumbria, had earlier asked for the help of the Viking Gurmonde d’Aufrik, captain of an army of Africans (ibid.: 94).⁴¹ On the basis of these traces, it seems therefore possible to postulate a process of ethnic transfiguration that reveals the sense of extraneity and indetermination surrounding the Scandinavian settlers in England; this emerges in Robert of Gloucester’s *Chronicle of England* (1338), which shows a lack of true knowledge and more generally a sense of the alterity ‘Of þe folc of denemarch þat ne bep noȝt ȝvt isome’, v. 52, Wright 1887: 4. The strong anti-Danish feeling in *Brut* triumphs despite the good government of both Cnut and his successor Harthcnut, at whose death

þe erles and barons assembled and maden a counseil; and neuer-more after þat tyme no man þat was a Danois, þouȝ he were ner so grete a man amonges ham, he shulde neuer bene Kynge of Engeland, for þe despite þat þe Danois hade done to þe Englisshemen (Brie 1906: 126)

a stance which is the opposite of that expressed in well-known romance *Havelok the Dane*, which is mentioned and in the *Lai d’Haveloc* (beginning of the thirteenth century). The Middle English text emphatically re-reads the history of the ascent to the throne of the Dane Cnut, who is celebrated as the pacifier of English society (cf. the Prologue to the 1018 statute and the letters to the English people of 1019-20 e 1027), as well as the deserving husband of the legitimate heiress of the English crown, thus showing its support of inter-ethnic marriage policies. The text defends the *exemplum* of Christian life, the cultural integration and the good government of its Danish protagonist, by deploying the *topos* of betrayal and consequent loss of *status*, and the vicissitudes patiently borne that ultimately lead him back to the conquest of the throne which unites ‘Hengliche and Denshe, heye and lowe’ (2946). These are all expressions of an *ex post* ideological legitimation addressed to an audience consist-

⁴¹ The predominant virtue of the Kenut (Cnut) of Gaimar’s *L’Estoire des Engleis* (ll. 4300-52) seems instead to be wisdom (Bell 1960: 137-38).

ing of the ancient Anglo-Scandinavian aristocracy of Lincolnshire and more generally of Northumbria, areas where the Scandinavian language and traditions were maintained well beyond the chronological limits defined by the Norman presence or by representative figures such as Siward e Waltheof.

Finally, it is worthwhile to quote the comedy of *Edmund Ironside* (*War Hath Made All Friends*), which has been the focus of intense debates concerning both its uncertain dating (c.1588-c.1647), and its relationship with Shakespearean tradition (Scragg 2000). Often attributed to Shakespeare also on the basis of an in-depth lexical analysis, the anonymous work reveals the influence of Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577, 1587). It is, moreover, the only Renaissance work in its genre that centres on Anglo-Saxon England, and in particular on the fraught period that followed the death of Æthelred II (1016), when there emerged the conflict that saw Edmund 'Ironside' oppose Canute. The comedy foregrounds nationalistic and ethical themes and strongly underscores the ideas (which were dear to Shakespeare) of the legitimacy of the crown, of loyalty and betrayal, here embodied, in the style of the Morality Plays, by the greedy villanous traitor Edricus of Mercia. The core of the work, furthermore, is the deplorable rivalry between the Archbishop of Canterbury, who supports Canute, and the Archbishop of York, who favours Edmund and an England free from the Papal yoke (814-859). Such themes are perfectly in line with English theological thought during the sixteenth century, which was greatly interested in Anglo-Saxon translations of the Bible and which interpreted the Danes through the allegorical lens of the Jews as persecutors of Christ-Edmund (1615-45). The outcome of the play is entirely to the advantage of the 'foreigner' (178-202, 854) and to the loss of the glorious sovereign and the 'English' warriors, whose courage Canute greatly honours, mercilessly stressing by contrast the cowardice of many of his own soldiers (1065-86). The Danish king himself, however, is described somewhat ambiguously: seen alongside the noble and magnanimous Edmund, the new Scandinavian co-sovereign, the illegitimate pretender who inevitably suggests parallelisms with the Catholic enemy, Spain, Canute emerges as a cruel sociopath. At the same time, however, his cunning cannot but benefit the English kingdom, to the point that, within the subtle but inescapable xen-

ophobia that surrounds his figure, his uglier side is justified as the result of the advice of his wicked counsellors.

7. Conclusions

In the Early Medieval Western world, the formation of ethnic identities closely followed the development from a dynamic system of fluid (*situational*) conglomerations into stable centres of power supported by ecclesiastical authority; these formations were based on forms of identification that were political even before they became geographical. In Scandinavia, the growing degree of competition for an economic leadership that was not yet concentrated in super-regional political bodies often produced conflicts that exploded in foreign settings, and in which Christianisation played a decisive role. The new and as yet uncertain, interethnic situations that were determined by this state of affairs often became the subject of ideological representations that went hand in hand with a series of consolidated cultural stereotypes. Unlike what happened, for example, in the Baltic and Slav areas, where the dissemination of a mercantile class with uncertain ethnic features was perceived by the Slavs, Arabs and Byzantines as functional (independently of this class' ability to create elastic and durable political structures, where the Scandinavian communities succeeded in reproducing stable forms of political organisation), their identity underwent a process of neutralisation and reconstitution that aimed to erase geographic origins (the *Normands* of the *chanson de Geste*, the *Dene* of the *Danelaw* and of the Anglo-Saxon laws, the *Gaill* in Ireland). Elsewhere, the alleged Viking ethnicity remained confined by vagueness or gruesomeness within definitions that were shaped principally by religious otherness, such as that, for example, evoked in the charming *ioca poetica* composed by Peter of Pisa and Paulus Diaconus at the 'schola' of Aachen (Dümmler 1881: 50-53).

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