PAGAN SON OF A SAINT: OLAF CUARAN AND ST EDITH: A VIEW OF TENTH CENTURY TIES BETWEEN NORTHUMBERLAND, YORK AND DUBLIN

by Michael Anne Guido[1]

ABSTRACT

Though much has been written about Olaf Cuaran little is still known of his origins and his exact place in tenth century history. He has often been confused with his cousin Olaf Guthfrithsson in the early annals and chroniclers. Even his nickname of 'Cuaran' is debated as to its exact meaning. He became a legendary figure when he was incorporated into the twelfth century chanson of Havelok the Dane. The focus of this paper is to examine the life and ancestry of Olaf as it is presented in the Northumbrian Chronicle, Irish Annals and several pre-fourteenth century English histories with particular attention upon the dating and origins of each source, as well as debunking myths that have grown around Olaf and his mother.

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1. Introduction

The period between the late eighth and mid tenth centuries saw one of the largest changes in medieval British history. In this 150 year span England became one nation not a series of kingdoms. Scotland unified southern regions into the kingdom of Alba to protect themselves from the vast northern provinces inhabited by invaders. Ireland became more trade oriented[2] (Hudson, 2005) and nationalism flared in Eire for the first time. All these changes occurred in response to the coming of the Northmen, the fierce raiders who came to plunder, kill and enslave the natives of these lands.

Although a few trading voyages had occurred beforehand (Forte, 2005, pp.125-126) the first real strike at Britain was on 8 June 793[3] (Swanton, 1996, pp.55, 57) when a party of Norwegian Vikings arrived at Lindisfarne Abbey in Northumbria. Lindisfarne the seat of the venerable Bede, writer of the first ecclesiastical history of England, and home to the famed Lindisfarne gospels (Fig.1) contained innumerable relics

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2 Hudson (pp.41-46) relates that during the reign of Olaf Cuaran Dublin became a mercantile centre. Ireland was a large exporter of wooden items including lumber as most of its forests were still intact. Manufactured goods such as shoes, clothes and ploughshares were made for local use and trade. Sitric, Olaf's father, introduced a new style of plough to Ireland. Unlike its predecessor the new plough was much larger than the 'scratch plough' and had a 'coulter' for slicing sod mounted above it.

3 "*Here terrible portents came about over the land of Northumbria, and miserably frightened the people: these were immense flashes of lightning, and fiery dragons were seen flying in the air. A great famine immediately followed these signs; and a little after that in the same year on 8 January the raiding of heathen men miserably devastated God's church in Lindisfarne island by looting and slaughter*." Swanton (p.505) states that *vi id Ianr* was presumably an error for *vi id Iun* (8 June) which is the date given in the *Annals of Lindisfarne*.

Fig 1. ***Front cover of Lindisfarne Gospels***

View in colour on the British Library website (URL link):

including the body of St Cuthbert[4] (Hart, 2006, pp.214-215) when it was attacked by the pirates. Relics were hidden and removed but gold and silver vessels, jeweled book covers and anything else of value was stolen. Monks were killed mercilessly and then the abbey was completely despoiled before the Northmen sailed away[5] (Hart, 2006, pp.136-137). Iona[6] was similarly attacked in 795 with the same outcome; only the relics of St Columba [Colum Cille] were spared (Forte, 2005, p.55) as they were removed from the abbey to Dunkeld for safekeeping[7]. By 820 the entire coast of Ireland was being raided and this pattern continued until the 860s (Forte, pp.82-88). The major purpose of these adventures by the Norse was to reap wealth and whatever spoils there were to take; then board ship again and return to safe harbours. These attacks were done as quickly as possible because the main goal was to loose as few men as necessary. The loss of even 20 men might mean not having enough oarsmen to leave the area and the Norse were dependent on their ships. Fear spread among the villages of the coastal

4 After many invasions and raids in 875 the body of St Cuthbert was removed from Lindisfarne and carried for nine years in secrecy about northern England by Abbott Eadred and Bishop Eardulf. It wasn't until Guthfrith Hardacnutsson became King of Northumbria due to St Cuthbert's intervention [and of Abbott Eadred] that St Cuthbert's body could finally rest in a shrine built at Chester-le-Street near Durham. The body was moved again at the end of the tenth century to Ripon where it remained only a few months. On the way back to Chester-le-Street it was lodged at Durham where it remains to this day.

5 *"In the same year, pagans from the northern regions came to Britain with a naval force, like stinging hornets, and overran the country in all directions, like fierce wolves, plundering, ripping apart and killing not only sheep and oxen, but even priests and deacons, and companies of monks and nuns. As we have related already, they came to the church of Lindisfarne, and laid everything to waste with dreadful plundering; they trampled down the holy places with their unhallowed feet, dug out the altars and looted all the treasures of holy church. Some of the brethren were killed; some they carried away with them in chains; many they drove out, naked and heaped with insults, others were drowned in the sea."*

6 The Abbey at Iona was attacked several times by the Viking raiders. Each time they came seeking the relics of St Columba which were enshrined in a jeweled reliquary covered with gold and silver. The monastery was attacked in 802 and again in 806 when 68 monks were killed (Hall, 2007, p.75). In 825 they tired of the game of seeking the relics. They attacked the abbey killing all the monks and capturing the Abbott Blathmacc whom they tortured to death eventually tearing him 'limb from limb'. The whereabouts of the reliquary was never revealed (Forte, pp.56-57)

7 Dunkeld must have housed the relics before a portion was sent to Downpatrick in Ireland in 830. The relics were transported from Downpatrick back to Iona in 848. The Monymusk Reliquary is dated to c.750 and probably contains a portion of the Saint sent to Dunkeld for safety during the raids. This Reliquary is thought to be the *Brechbennoch* carried at the Battle of Bannockburn.

kingdoms. Most of the Saxons were farmers not warriors. The ruling kings led few trained men most of whom were in their personal guard. The advent of the raids set in motion vast changes in the definition of what was necessary to survive and conquer this new enemy.

In the mid 860s the situation changed again. Instead of the Fionngaill or Norse, the Dubhgaill or Danes came to these areas[8] (Kearney, 2006, p.60). The Danes unlike their predecessors came to conquer and sent for settlers to come and farm the new lands. This became a threat to all the kingdoms in England and Ireland with Dublin being held by the Danes. In 865 a large invasion force led by Ivar the Boneless, Ubba and Halfdan, brothers and supposed sons of Ragnar Lothbrock[9], settled for the winter in East Anglia. In 866 they fought and captured the wealthy city of York (Abels, 2003, pp.266-267; Forte, pp.68-70). In York Ecgbert was set up as a puppet king under the rule of the Danes. This pattern of setting up Saxon pawns as rulers of conquered kingdoms continued wherever they were victorious (Kearney, 2006, p.262). In 870 the Danes returned to East Anglia and killed King Edmund [who later became a saint] (Jones, 1987, pp.219-220). If not for the intervention of fate in the death of King Æthelred in April 871 and the cleverness of his brother and successor King Alfred of Wessex, as well as a great deal of luck, they would have quickly taken all England (Stenton, 2001, pp.249-250).

Alfred of Wessex held out against the invaders and eventually through his victory at Edington in 878 turned the tide of events (Stenton, pp.249-258). He routed the '*Micel Hœðen here*'[10] from Wessex but in 892 met them again and fought on three fronts (Abels, 2003, pp.265-267). Alfred dreamed of a unified England but this was turned into a reality by his son Edward the Elder and grandson Æthelstan.

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[8] The term *Fionngaill* is derived from the Gaelic meaning 'fair stranger' and *Dubhgaill* likewise means 'dark stranger'. These terms referred to hair colour as the Norse were fair haired and the Danes were often dark haired or redheads.

[9] Ragnar Lothbrock, the hero of the oldest extant Scandinavian Skald poem written in the ninth century by Bragi Boddason for King Bjorn of Sweden, is often referred to as a mythical character. Whether he is mythical or the father of Ivar, Halfdan and Ubba is unknown but relies on oral tradition. This tradition makes Ragnar the victim of King Ælla of Northumbria who killed him by tossing him into a viper pit. Before his death he prophesized the anger of sons and their revenge on Ælla. When Ivar and his brothers came to England, Ivar sought out Ælla and promised to take only enough land as an ox hide would cover. He then proceeded to cut the hide into small strips and took a fortress where he defeated Ælla. After their victory Ivar performed the sacrificial rite of the 'Blood Eagle' on Ælla, cutting his back open and detaching the ribs from the spine then pulling out the lungs to make the shape of wings. This ritual is often debated in modern research as being purely fictitious as there were only two historical examples provided in literature and none corroborated by the chronicles. The chronicles simply report that Ælla and Osbert were killed at York. This ritual was also purported to be used to kill Constantine I, King of Alba 862-877 who died at the hands of Vikings at Inverdovat in Fife (Robertson, 1862, pp.48). The tale of the hide being cut in strips came from Vergil's Aeneid Book 1 lines 365-369. This the story of Dido founding Carthage (Pharr, 1997):

Devenere locos, ubi nunc ingentia cernes
moenia surgentemque novae Kathaginis arcem,
mercatique solum, facti de nomine Byrsam,
taurino quantum possent circumdare tergo

[They have come to places where now you will see the huge walls, and the rising tower of the new Carthage; and have purchased ground called 'Byrsa' from the name of the deed, as much as they might be able to enclose with a bull's hide.]

[10] Great Heathen Army

The final battles in England against the Danes in the tenth century came in Northumbria and York. This area became the final holdout of the Northmen, the Danelaw, where the future of a unified England was decided.

Into this scenario was born Olaf Sitricsson nicknamed 'cuaran', King of Dublin and York. What we know of him historically comes from the early English chronicles and Irish annals. He has been melded into several other individuals also named Olaf in this period so that it is very difficult to separate the real Olaf 'Cuaran' from his cousins with the same forename. He was King of Dublin and York, became a Christian in 943[11], was expelled from Northumbria in 944 by King Edmund brother of Æthelstan, and eventually returned to Dublin. In 949 he again attempted to keep the throne of York by returning to England. In 952 he was finally defeated by Eric 'Bloodaxe' never to see the Danelaw again. In Dublin Olaf was a good king making the city safe for both Christians and Danes. He was a patron of literature and the arts and the man who turned Dublin into a real kingdom (Hudson, 2005, pp.9-10). It ended when he was soundly defeated at the Battle of Tara in 980 by the Irish lords. Olaf then retired to the Isle of Iona where he died in 981 (Holman, 2003, pp.204-5).

The origins of Olaf 'Cuaran' have much to do with the events of his later life and the misinterpretation of later scholars that he was a weak king.

2. 'Cuaran'

Olaf Cuaran was the son of Sitric[12] King of York and Dublin (Hudson, p.19). Various versions of Sitric's ancestry exist in the early sources.

Adam of Bremen[13] in his *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificium* has Sitric along with two brothers Ragnall and Olaf being the sons of Godfrey Hardacnutsson King of Northumbria from 883-896 (Hudson, pp.19-21).

The *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto* relates that Guthfrith [Godfrey] Hardacnutsson was a man picked by Eadred Abbott of Carlisle[14] to be king of Northumbria. St Cuthbert appeared to Eadred in a dream[15] instructing him as to where he could find the man

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[11] Conversion to Christianity was often seen as the real war with the Danes. The '*Pagani*' were perceived as God's wrath vested in human form upon the Saxons because of the people's sins. Only by converting the heathen could there be real peace. This view was expressed by the major clerics of the day including Bishop Asser who wrote the *Life of King Alfred* (Abels, 2003, pp.271-272).

[12] Sitric was also known as Sitric Gale [Sitric the Foreigner] or Sitric Caoch [Sitric one eyed]. He is referred to as Sitric Gale in the Annal of the Four Masters. He was always expressly called a grandson of Ivar (Todd, 1867, p.35).

[13] Adam of Bremen was an 11th century German chronicler. His four volume *Gesta* was written in 1075. He was the first person to describe 'Vinland' which occurred in volume IV of the work.

[14] The text reads '*Eo tempore sanctus Cuthbertus apparuit in nocte sancto abbati de Luercestre nominee Eaddred…*' which translates as '*At that same time St Cuthbert appeared in the night to the holy abbot of Carlisle named Eadred…*' (South, 2002, pp.52-53). The city was originally called Luguvalium by the Romans meaning the place of Lugh, who was one of the Celtic deities. The Anglo-Saxons renamed it Luelchester which was changed to Luercestre a corruption of the Briton name Caer Luel, Castle of Luel or Llewelyn. Caer Luel was pushed together to create Carlisle the name by which the city was known from the 11th century forward.

[15] The appearance of St Cuthbert in a dream to Abbott Eadred as well as his appearance to Alfred the Great at Glastonbury is recorded in the *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*. The latter was a creation of the mid tenth century due to the political climate in this period (Simpson,

who would be the next king. He went to the army and finding Guthfrith, the slave of a certain widow, purchased his freedom. He then placed a golden arm ring, signifying his election, on Guthfrith declaring him king of Northumbria[16] (South, 2002, pp.52-53; Rollason, 2003, p.245). Guthfrith proved to be a very adept king managing to rule Northumbria for thirteen years. He is reported to have died on St Bartholomew's Day 895 [24 August 896] and was buried at York Minster. There the information ceases.

It seems unlikely that Ragnald who was called 'king of the pagans' would be the son of Guthfrith. Ragnald did not receive Guthfrith's kingdom without a fight. It was 913-915 when Ragnald first appeared on the Northumbrian coast where he defeated the army of Constantine II of Scotland and Ealdred, Ealdorman of Bernicia, at Corbridge near Hexham (Anderson, 1908, p.64). In 918 he mounted a huge force at Waterford in Ireland which sailed to England meeting the forces of Constantine II on the banks of the Tyne. The battle was considered a draw with neither side actually winning. Ragnald remained in Northumbria and in 919 marched against the City of York. There he obtained victory and declared himself King of York (Stenton, 2001, pp.332-333). Sitric invaded North-western Mercia in 920 destroying the town of Davenport in Cheshire. This led King Edward the Elder to mobilize his army toward the northern provinces the same year, forcing all of the northern magnates, including Ragnald, to swear allegiance to him (Stenton, 2001, pp.333-334). When Ragnald died in 921, Sitric became King of York in his stead.

The History of Gruffudd ap Cynan lists Sitric as the son of Harold Fairhair. Jones (1910, pp.40-41) states in his rendition of the History that "*upwards of Sitriuc Caoch* [the ancestry of Gruffudd ap Cynan] *is not reliable. It is legendary or fictitious, and can only be accepted as the result of a vague idea prevailing in the twelfth century amongst the Scandinavians of Ireland that there was some affinity of kinship binding their own kings with the royal houses of Lochlann or Norway. The tales embellishing the pedigree may have been gleaned by Welshmen from the Scandinavian mercenaries who were at Gruffydd's side throughout his campaigns, and who presumably settled under him at the peaceful close of his reign*".

The Annals of Ulster, which are the only contemporary source, call Sitric, 'Sitriuc ua h-Imair' indicating that 'Imair' or Ivar was Sitric's grandfather (MacAirt, 1983, p.370). The name of Sitric's father is unknown but it can be surmised that he was one of the sons of Ivar, possibly Sitric d.896 or Sichfrith d.888, both of whom may have acted as king of Dublin[17] (MacAirt, pp.342-343, 347-348).

Whether Ivar and Ivar the Boneless are the same person has been a subject of recent debate. Hudson suggests that Ivar is the king of Dublin who with Olaf the White besieged Dumbarton Castle to defeat Strathclyde in 871 (Hudson, 2005, p.19). Smyth (1975, pp.27-37) on the other hand identifies this Ivar as Ivar the Boneless in

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1989, pp.397-412). Two of Alfred's grandsons, Æthelstan and Edmund, made large donations to St Cuthbert's shrine at Chester-le-Street. These included not only money, jewellery and rich clothing but also the confirmation of church lands which King Edmund granted to the abbey before his journey north in 945 (Bonner, 1989, pp.388-389).

16 This tale is also related by Symeon of Durham in the *Historia Regum* (Hart, 2006, pp.222-223; Stevenson, 1854, p.495).

17 '*888 Sichfrith m. Imair, rex Nordmannorum, a fratre suo per dolum occisus est* [Sigfrith son of Ímar, king of the Norsemen, was deceitfully killed by his kinsman.] and '*896 Sitriucc m. Imair ab aliis Nordmannis occisus est'* [Sitriuc son of Ímar was killed by other Norsemen.]'

a lengthy proof[18]. It is entirely possible that Ivar the Boneless was one of the conquerors of Strathclyde as nothing seems to indicate there was more than one person named Ivar as King of Dublin in the late ninth century.

The identity of Olaf can also be substantiated by coins issued in York during his reign as well as the strange epithet 'Cuaran' that he bore throughout his life. The coins of York for the years 941-944 and 949-952 show a triquetra (a three lobed banner or insignia) on the obverse and a triangular standard on the reverse (Fig.2). This triangular banner appears to represent a bird enclosed in right isosceles triangle with the hypotenuse having five rays emitting from it. The coins minted by his kinsman Olaf Guthfrithsson show a raven on the obverse[19] (Hadley, 2006, pp.46-49; Rollason, 2003, p.227). The raven banner was first mentioned in the *Anglo Saxon Chronicle* (Swanton, 1996, pp.75-77) for the year 878:

878 …..and that same winter a brother of Ivar and Halfdan was in Wessex in Devonshire, and he was killed there, and 800 men with him and 40 men of his war band; and there the banner which they called 'Raven' was taken. [MSS. E (Peterborough MSS)]

The Olaf Guthfrithsson coin illustrated in the printed edition of this journal may be viewed online through the following link:

Link to image on British Museum website



Fig 2. Two Olaf coins from the tenth century

(L) Silver penny of Olaf Guthfrithsson minted at York 939-941. The raven is clearly seen in the center of the coin. The legend states 'ANLAF CVNVNC' or 'King Olaf'. The Saxon word 'CVNVNC' means king.
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(R) Olaf Cuaran coin from York. It shows the name of the moneyer, Ascolf. The putative raven is shown in the triangular banner with five rays emitting from it. The legend again states 'ANLAF CVNVNCC'.
[Public domain image from Wikimedia Commons http://commons.wikipedia.org/wiki/]

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[18] Smyth makes an entire case for the identification of Ivar with Ivar 'the Boneless' including a refutation of the charge from the *Thattr af Ragnars Sonum* that Ivar was impotent. As Smyth notes the *Annals of Ulster* were written three centuries before the *Thattr* which cannot be considered contemporary to the events.

[19] Hadley believes that the raven imagery may be in honour of St Oswald of Northumbria. Although the Northumbrians were preoccupied with their local saints it seems unusual for Olaf, who wasn't baptized until 943, to use this symbol on his coins from the beginning of his reign.

Ravens were associated with Odin and the banner was carried by Ivar 'the Boneless' and his brothers when they came to England. Various chieftains also used the raven standard but none were recorded in the English chronicles except Ivar, Ubba and Halfdan. Even Bishop Asser in his *Life of King Alfred* mentions the banner as well as the mythical tale that their sisters made the banner in one day and cast spells into the cloth as it was woven[20] (Jane, 1908, p.41). The use of the Raven banner in the coinage may indicate a connection between Olaf and Ivar 'the boneless'. This can further be shown by the use of 'cuaran' with his name.

Andrew Breeze (1997) stated that although the Gaelic word 'cuaran' is translated from modern Irish as 'sandal' and Bartrum in his *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts* declared that 'cuaran' is Norse for 'sandal', this is not the intended meaning in this case. Theories on why this word was used descriptively by Olaf have varied. The etymology of the word proposed by John O'Donovan in his edition of *Annals of the Four Masters* took the derivation back to its root word 'cuar' which means 'crooked, curved, bent'. The word 'cuaran' is derived from 'cuar' and is used in old Irish as 'shoe; sock', the term being taken from the shape. Based on this information Breeze (pp.160-161) deduced that the epithet applied to Olaf was '*little crooked one or little hunchback*'[21]. This nickname demonstrates a possible hereditary link between Ivar 'the Boneless' and Olaf Sitricsson.

Ivar was called 'Boneless' and described as having cartilage instead of bone in his legs. Seedorf (1949)[22] first suggested that he suffered from *osteogenesis imperfecta* (commonly called brittle bone disease). This condition is congenital and in the majority of cases is linked to an autosomal dominant gene. Affected individuals show defects in the production of type 1 collagen, a protein that is necessary for bone development[23]. There is a fifty percent chance of the gene passing from affected parent to child. The possibility that Ivar 'the Boneless' suffered from a severe form of *osteogenesis imperfecta* was further explored by Nabil Shaban in a television documentary broadcast by Channel 4 in the UK in June 2003[24].

The question immediately arises of why Ivar was not killed as a child because deformities such as these were cause for infanticide in the Scandinavian groups of this period. The answer lies in the fact that if Ivar was a type 1 case he may not have exhibited signs of the disease until later as he progressed into puberty (Sillence *et al.*, 1979). The type 1 disease causes a slight curvature of the spine, hypermobility

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[20] *And there took they no small spoil, and in that battle they took also the standard which they call the raven. Now it is told that the three sisters of Ingwar and Hubba, the daughters of Lodbrok, weaved that banner and completed it entirely between dawn and dusk on a single day. Moreover they say in every battle in which that banner goes before them, the raven in the midst of the design seems to flutter as though it were alive, if they were destined to gain the day; but if they were about to be conquered in the coming fight, it would droop down without moving: and this has often proved to be true.*

[21] This epithet was used as early as 1870 by Haigh (1870, p.211).

[22] In a study of the hereditary nature of *osteogenesis imperfecta* in 55 Danish families, Seedorf identified Ivar 'the Boneless' as the only historical personage who may have suffered from this disease. The disease was first described in 1788 in a doctoral thesis by Olaus Jakob Ekman [*Dissertatio medica descriptionem et casus aliquot osteomalaciæ sistens.*Upsaliæ, 1788]. Subsequently Johann Lobstein (1833) did a study of the disease in adults. The disease was originally known as Ekman-Lobstein syndrome.

[23] Sillence *et al* (1979) classified four clinical types of *osteogenesis imperfecta,* explaining the aetiology, symptoms and prognosis at each stage. For further information see also http://www.oif.org/site/PageServer?pagename=AOI_Facts

[24] http://www.channel4.com/history/microsites/H/history/i-m/ivarr.html

and looseness of the joints, blue discoloration of the sclera (whites) of the eyes, early hearing impairment, sometimes poor dentition and multiple bone fractures occurring throughout life. Affected people are usually short in stature, slightly below average height. They live a normal lifespan and fractures heal quickly. Ivar and his sons may all have had *osteogensis imperfecta* which passed onto Olaf Sitricsson causing a slight curvature in his spine, as picked up in his epithet 'little crooked one'. It seems very improbable that any of the descendants of Ivar would have had anything but type 1 as even a mild case of type 4 disease (the next most severe) would have caused bowed legs or extreme spinal curvature leading to the inability to walk without assistance in most cases. Type 2 is the most severe and is usually fatal in the first year of life while type 3 causes severe deformities and shortened life expectancy[25]. The genetic defect may or may not have passed on to Olaf's descendants. At a time of high infant mortality it is possible that the disease could had been self-eliminating from the gene line within several succeeding generations, given its dominant heritability pattern.

Even if the spinal curvature had been pronounced from birth in Olaf Sitricsson there may well be another reason why he was permitted to live and eventually reign as king. It is possible, based upon the information provided in the chronicles, that Olaf may be the only child of Sitric by his wife a daughter of Edward the Elder as supported by Hudson (2005, pp.28-29). If this were the case Olaf was too valuable as a descendant of both Ivar and Alfred the Great. The Danes may have seen him as a stepping stone to the much sought after English throne. In order to explore further the evidence about Olaf's maternal ancestry it is necessary to analyze the early chronicles individually.

3. Chronicles and Irish Annals

3.1. Anglo-Saxon Chronicles (ASC)

MSS. A Winchester MSS.

No entry for 925 or 926

MSS. E Peterborough MSS and MSS. F Canterbury MSS

No entries concerning Sitric or his marriage

MSS. D Worcester MSS

925 Here King Æthelstan and Sihtric, king of Northumbria, assembled at Tamworth on 30 January, and Æthelstan gave him his sister.

926 Here fiery rays appeared in the northern part of the sky. And Sihtric perished and King Æthelstan succeeded to the kingdom of Northumbria; and governed all the kings who were in this island:….

[25] Types 5-8 are also recognised by modern medical science, but require chemical tests to identify them.

MSS. C. Abingdon MSS.

924 Here King Edward died at Farndon in Mercia, and very soon after that his son Ælweard died at Oxford; and their bodies lie at Winchester. And Æthelstan was chosen as king by the Mercians, and consecrated at Kingston; and he gave his sister [26]*

Thus the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles mention the marriage of Sitric and Æthelstan's sister twice, once in the Worcester Manuscript and partially in the Abingdon manuscript.

The Abingdon manuscript was created in the mid-eleventh century. The first portion of it, until the year 1048, was written by two scribes. The first covered 60 BC to 490 AD and the second from 491 to 1048. After the year 915 of the main text the manuscript reverts back to 896 where it follows the exploits of Lady Æthelflæd, sister of Edward the Elder, ruler of the Mercians from 911 when her husband died until her death in 918. The entries in this section continue until the year 924 when this text ends. The main text resumes at the year 956 and continues chronologically (Swanton, 1996, p.xxiv). It is apparent that another source was used that was not available to the other chroniclers dealing with Mercia[27] (Ramsay, 1898, p.281).

The Worcester manuscript was also written in the middle of the eleventh century. The manuscript shows five different scribes that created the work before 1054. The text itself appears to have been copied from an annal now lost that was created in northern England. The information on northern events is what sets this manuscript apart from the others. It may well contain parts of the Mercian sources used in the Abingdon Manuscript because some of the events are mentioned twice, both differing from each other enough to suggest that two sources were used. The later portion of the manuscript displays a keen interest in Scottish affairs especially in relationship to St Margaret, wife of Malcolm III (Caenmore), King of Scotland again attesting to the work's northern roots[28] (Swanton, p.xxv).

3.2. Chronicle of John of Worcester

925 The most vigorous and glorious Æthelstan, king of the English, gave his sister in marriage with great ceremony and splendour to King Sihtric of the Northumbrians, who was of Danish stock.

926 Fiery rays were seen throughout the whole of England in the northern part of the sky. Not much later, Sihtric, king of the Northumbrians, departed this life, and king Æthelstan having

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[26] An asterisk in the manuscript perhaps marks an acknowledged *lacuna*, the content of which may be restored from D. It is at this point that the 'Mercian Register' ends (Swanton, pp.104-107).

[27] Æthelstan was brought up in Mercia by his aunt Æthelflæd and her husband Æthelred, Ealdorman of Mercia. It is also to be noted here that Æthelstan was not immediately proclaimed Edward the Elder's successor upon the death of his half-brother Ælweard in Wessex but he was declared king of Mercia immediately. Æthelstan identified himself with Mercia after this and was buried in Malmesbury Abbey in Wiltshire.

[28] Æthelstan did give books to the shrine at Chester-le-Street forming the basis of a library there which may have been the source of the early Northumbrian and Mercian material in the major chronicles. He also gave a stole and maniple to St Cuthbert which was on the body when the tomb was opened in 1827. These have been dated to the tenth century and the beautiful embroidery was later known as *opus Anglicanum* (Bonner, 1989, pp.387-389).

expelled Sihtric's son, Guthfrith, who succeeded his father as king, added his kingdom to his domain…..[29]

This was the original entry which was written in the second quarter of the twelfth century. Sometime after this[30] a series of additions were incorporated into the copy of John of Worcester's manuscript that was located at Bury St Edmunds. The entry as changed is below[31]:

Added in the lower margin was this entry if slightly mutilated – *Qui propter amorem sancta virginis, culture(am) pagoanorum deriliquit et sanctum baptismum suscepit, sed non multo post (sanct)am virgininem repudiavit, ac religionem sante Christianitatis abiecit, idolorumque culturam restauravit. Ipse itaque demum ut apostate male periit. Sanct(a) virgo namque reversa est ad Merciam regionem, haud longe ab urbe regia que vocata est Tamuurda, ibique in loco, qui dicitur Pollesuvorda, in virgilis et orationibus et elemosiniis et crebris ieiuniis persistens usque ad diem ultimum. Transit autem virgo sancta post aliquot annos die iduum Iuliarum; sepulta est ibidem ubi usque hodie signa atque miracula plura choruscat*[32] (Darlington, 1995, p.635).

This addition matches the entry in Roger of Wendover's annal very closely. Obviously this was a later addition to the facts surrounding the marriage of Sitric and Edward's daughter. As future discussion will show St Edith of Polesworth was not the same person as the daughter of Edward the Elder whom Sitric married.

3.3. Annals of Ulster

917 Sitriuc, grandson of Ímar, landed with his fleet at Cenn Fuait on the coast of Laigin. Ragnall, grandson of Ímar, with his second fleet moved against the foreigners of Loch dá Chaech. A slaughter of the foreigners at Neimlid in Muma. The Eóganacht and the Ciarraige made another slaughter.[33]

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29 The expulsion of Guthfrith is not mentioned by ASC D though E/F refer to it under 927 (without describing his parentage). He was likely Sihtric's brother, not his son (Darlington, 1995, pp.386-387).

30 The actual date when these changes and additions were made is hard to determine. It would seem they were made after the mid thirteenth century as the entries cited mirror Roger of Wendover.

31 This is commonly called the interpolations of Bury St Edmunds.

32 ..who for love of the pious virgin abandoned pagan religious practice and undertook holy baptism; but not much after he repudiated the [holy] young woman, and cast away the sacred Christian religion, bringing back the cult of idols. For this reason only he perished after his wicked apostasy. The venerable maiden returned to the region of Mercia, remaining not long in the king's city called Tamworth, but to that place locally called Polesworth, persevering in good works unto her last day, devoting herself to repeated fasting and alms-giving, watching and prayer. After several years she died on the 15th of July and is buried at the same place, where unto this day crowds witness many miracles.

33 *917 Sitriuc h. Imair cona chobluch do ghabail oc Cinn Fhuait i n-airiur Laigen. Ragnall h. h-Imair cona chobluch ailiu co Gallu Locha Da Chaech. Ár n-Gall oc Neimlid la Mumain. Ár n-aile la Eoganacht & Ciaraidhe.*

917 Sitriuc h. Imair do tuidecht i n-Ath Cliath.

920 Sitriuc ua h-Imair do derghiu Atha Cliath per potestatem diuinam.

921 Goithbrith h. Imair i n-Ath Cliath.

927 Sitriuc h. Imair, ri Dubgall & Finngall, inmatura etate mortuus est.

917 Sitriuc grandson of Ímar entered Áth Cliath[34].

920 Sitriuc, grandson of Ímar, abandoned Áth Cliath, through the power of God.

921 Gothfrith grandson of Ímar entered Áth Cliath.

927 Sitriuc grandson of Ímar, king of the dark foreigners and the fair foreigners, died at an immature age.

930 Gothfrith, grandson of Ímar, with the foreigners of Áth Cliath, razed Derc Ferna—something unheard of from ancient times. (MacAirt, 1983, pp.370-373, 378-381).

The Irish Annals can be taken as factual.

3.4. Symeon of Durham

De Norhymb' Regibus

…….Post hunc Sichtricus ex Danico genere. Huic Eathelstanus rex, monarcha totius Angliæ, regnanti sub se, sororem suam dederat uxorem. Cui defuncto, filius suus Guthferth successit. Quo, Eathelstanus, expulso de regno, sibi deinceps retinuit Northymbriam[35].

This is very similar to the entry by John of Worcester. Guthfrith again is called the son of Sitric which as related before is not the case. Symeon of Durham wrote in the first quarter of the twelfth century. He incorporated earlier chroniclers that were contemporary with Æthelstan in his text[36] (Hart, 1982, pp.558-582; Lapidge, 1982, pp.97-122).

3.5. William of Malmesbury

126. The king [Edward the Elder], having many daughters, gave Eadgifu in marriage to Charles king of Franks, son of Louis who was son of Charles the Bald; whose daughter, as I have said more than once, King Æthelwulf had married on his way back from Rome. And since the opportunity offers, the kind reader will not think it out of place if I list his wives and children by name. His first-born son was Æthelstan, born of a noble lady called Ecgwynn[37], *together with a*

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930 Gothfrith h. Imhair co n-Gallaib Atha Cliath do thoghail Dercca Ferna, quod non auditum est antiquis temporibus.

[34] *Ath Cliath* is the Gaelic name of Dublin which means "Ford of Hurdles".

[35] …..after this Sichtric, out of Danish extraction [a Dane]. Then King Æthelstan, monarch of all England, who was his overlord, gave his sister to Sichtric for his wife. When he [Sichtric] died his son Guthferth succeeded him, whom Æthelstan expelled from his kingdom and successively kept Northumbria (Hinde, 1868, pp.209-211).

[36] The earlier portion of the *Historia Regum* was written by Byrhtferth of Ramsey in his Northumbrian Chronicle. Byrhtferth held the position of schoolmaster at Ramsey Abbey in the later half of the tenth century. The chronicle was 'found' by both Michael Lapidge and Cyril Hart both publishing major articles on the subject in 1982. Byrhtferth had many unique markers that he left in his material including his familiarity and use of Greek nouns which was not common in this period among the other chroniclers.

[37] Edward the Elder had two children by Ecgwynn, Æthelstan and the wife of Sitric, King of Northumbria. Some modern historians depict Ecgwynn as little more than a concubine which can possibly be substantiated based on Æthelweard's ascension to the throne upon Edward the Elder's death. This charge of Illegitimacy was made against Æthelstan when he assumed the throne but was later dismissed. Æthelstan was succeeded by his half-brother Edmund

daughter whose name I do not find accessible in written record; she was given in marriage by that same brother to Sihtric king of Northumbrians. Edward's second son was Æthelweard by Ælfflæd daughter of Ealdorman Æthelhelm; he had a very good education and recalled Alfred his grandfather in both looks and character, but was removed by an early death soon after his father. By the same wife he had Edwin; I shall later give a hesitating rather than confident account of the popular belief about his death. He also had by the same wife six daughters: Eadflæd, Eadgifu, Æthelhild, Eadhild, Eadgyth, and Ælfgifu. The first and third took a vow of virginity and spurned the pleasures of earthly marriage. Eadflæd taking the veil and Æthelhild in lay attire; both lie at Wilton, buried next to their mother. Eadgifu was given in marriage by her father to King Charles, as I have said, Eadhild by her brother Æthelstan to Hugh; Eadgyth and Ælfgifu were sent by the same brother to Henry emperor of Germany, who married the second of them to his son Otto and the other to a certain duke near the Alps. He also had by a third wife called Eadgifu two sons Edmund and Eadred, who both reigned after Æthelstan, and two daughters Eadburh and Eadgifu. Eadburh became a nun and lies at Winchester; Eadgifu was a famous beauty, and was given in marriage by her brother Æthelstan to Louis prince of Aquitaine. All the daughters had been brought up to devote most time in their childhood to letters, and thereafter to acquire further skill with distaff and needle, that with the support of these arts they might pass their girlhood in chastity; the sons had been educated so that having first received a thorough immersion in book-learning, they could then proceed no longer like rustics but like philosophers to govern the commonwealth (Mynors, 1998, pp. 199-201).

131…….With Sihtric, king of Northumbrians, he [Æthelstan] made a lasting peace, giving him one of his sisters in marriage; but on Sihtric's death a year later he subdued the whole province, and driving out a certain Eadwulf who was in revolt (Mynors, pp.206-207).

William of Malmesbury was a contemporary of Symeon of Durham. He had access to a source which was extremely detailed about the life of Edward the Elder and Æthelstan[38] (Duncan, 2002, p.38). Other than William of Malmesbury there is little written about Æthelstan's life[39].

3.6. Roger of Hoveden

By Egewinna, a most noble lady, he had Ethelstan, his eldest son; by his wife Edgiva he had three sons, Edwin, Edmund, and Eadred, and a daughter named Eadburga, a virgin most strictly consecrated to God, with three other daughters; one of whom, Otho, the eighty-ninth emperor of the Romans, and another, Charles, king of the West Franks, took to wife; whose father's sister, that is to say the daughter of the emperor Charles, Ethelwulph, the king of the West Saxons, had married; the third daughter was married to Sithric, king of Northumbria (Riley, 1994, pp.59-60).

In the year 920, Ethelstan, the illustrious and glorious king of the English, with great pomp and state, gave his sister in marriage to king Sithric, who was of Danish origin. In the year 921, king

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(whose mother was Edward's third wife) as Æthelweard's full brother Edwin drowned (Yorke, 2001, p.33).

[38] Duncan also theorized that William of Malmesbury had an entire corpus of lost sources including a now non extant version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle that was related to MSS C and D. His information on tenth century Scotland was far superior to what we have in other sources today.

[39] A point also made by Wood (1983).

Sithric departed this life, and king Ethelstan having expelled his son Cuthred, who had succeeded his father, added his kingdom to his own dominions (Riley, p.63).

Roger of Hoveden wrote his chronicle *c.*1192-1211. He went on the third crusade with Richard I of England and started this annal when he returned in the retinue of Phillip II of France in 1192. He seems to be using a source which is off by five years. He also wrongly makes Guthfrith the son of Sitric.

3.7. John of Wallingford

King Edward had by marriage, during these troublous times, three sons, and one daughter named Orgiva; her the king of Franks Charles, married for two reasons. In the first place, he hoped that he should no longer have to fear the Angles, whose assistance Rollo and his followers had often invoked in their contests with him. This chief, however, died a Christian, in the time of Eadward, and was succeeded by his son Wilhelm. In the second place, Charles trusted that he should be able to recruit his army from Eadward's subjects, if he should be in need of men. The first-born of Edward's three sons was Ealstan, the second Eadmund, and the third Eadred; and in their hands he left the entire disposition of the kingdom (Stevenson, 1854, p.545).

He [Æthelstan] began to reign in the nine hundred and twenty-fifth year after the incarnation of our Lord. Then came to him Louis, with his mother Orgiva, having fled in fear from France, because king Charles, the father of Louis, having a misunderstanding with his subjects was put to death by them. His son, fearing a like fate, betook himself to his uncle Ealstan, who received him honorably, as was meet, and did not delay to bring about peace; for he sent ambassadors to William, duke of Normandy, the son of Rollo, and by his mediation reconciled all differences. Moreover, he gave his sister Orgiva[40] *in marriage to Sictric the Dane, and also conferred on him the title of king, that his sister might not descend from the rank of queen to that of countess. Sictric received for his kingdom the tract of land lying between the river Tees and the town of Edinburgh. It was in this king's reign that the Danes first had freedom of approach in England: for those of that nation, who, in the reigns of the proceeding kings, wandered like strangers through England, had in Elstan's reign settled possessions; for both Gytrus in East Anglia, and Sictric in Northumbria, as was to be expected, were careful of furthering the liberty of their nation; and their object was much aided by the very excellent harbours, which were directly opposite to the land of Denmark, and furnished its inhabitants with a very easy means of approach or departure. Moreover Sictric and Gytrus obeyed Ealstan faithfully all their days* (Stevenson, p.546).

The son of his sister and of Sictric, whom Ealstan had maintained under the title of king, for the reason above mentioned, now that his father was dead rebelled against his uncle. The revolt of Guttred was caused by a suggestion made to him by the Northumbrians, that their country had always been wont to have a king of their own, and be tributary to none of the south Angles (Stevenson, p.547).

Notwithstanding, however, Eadmund was soon after conspired against by Olaf, the second son of Sictric, and of Orgiva, the king's sister, and Reginald, the son of Guthred, whom as I have already said, Ethelstan drove from his kingdom (Stevenson, p.548).

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[40] In the original manuscript the line reads *'Porro sororem suam Orgivam dedit Sittrico ex Danorum genere in uxorem,'* (Vaughan, 1958, p.41). Only John of Wallingford and Roger of Wendover name the wife of Sitric.

The author of this work, John of Wallingford, was one of two men with this name who wrote in the first half of the thirteenth century. John became a monk at St Albans in 1231 and was appointed Infirmer of the abbey in 1246. He died at Wymondham Priory in Norfolk on 14 August 1258[41]. His Chronicle exists in the *Cottonian MS Julius D vii* (Vaughan, 1958, pp.66-67).

This chronicle is unique in that it makes the son of Sitric by a daughter of Edward the Elder the king who rebels against Æthelstan. Later in the same chronicle Olaf 'Cuaran' is called the 'second' son of Sitric by Orgiva. It also defines Ragnald as the son of Guthred and with the exception of Roger of Wendover's *Flowers of History* is the only source that names the sister of Æthelstan who married Sitric, Orgiva.

3.8. Roger of Wendover

AD 925 Ethelstan, king of the English, honourably married his sister Eathgita to Sithric, king of Northumbrians, a man of Danish origin; who for love of the damsel renounced paganism and embraced the faith of Christ; but not long afterwards he repudiated the blessed virgin, and abjuring Christianity, restored the worship of idols, and miserably ended his life shortly after his apostasy. The holy damsel thereupon, having preserved her virginity, abode at Pollesbury [Pollesworth], preserving in good works unto the end of her life, devoting herself to fasting and watching, alms-giving and prayer; and after a praiseworthy course of life she departed out of this world on the 15th of July at the same place, where unto this day divine miracles cease not to be wrought.

AD 926 Fiery rays were seen throughout the whole of England in the northern quarter of the heavens, portending the disgraceful death of the aforesaid king Sithric, who came to an evil end shortly afterwards; on which king Ethelstan expelled Guthferth his son from his kingdom which he annexed to his own dominions…. (Giles, 1849, p.245)

Roger of Wendover was also a monk at St Albans Abbey but preceded John of Walingford as he died 6 May 1235. Roger states in his preface to his work that he used as sources *'books of catholic writers worthy of credit, just as flowers of various colours are gathered from various fields.'* The reliability of the information he records about Sitric is dubious as it agrees with no other chronicle and is laced with the hagiography of Edith of Polesworth.

3.9. Interpretation

By analyzing and comparing all the chronicles and annals before the mid thirteenth century, facts about the origin of Olaf 'Cuaran' emerge. First, all the chronicles testify that Sitric married a daughter of Edward the Elder. Second, all but one state that Sitric died in 927. Thirdly, most of the chronicles tell of Guthfrith, probably Sitric's brother[42], who took charge of Sitric's kingdom and was expelled by Æthelstan[43]. So these statements appear to be fact.

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[41] Inscribed in the manuscript in another hand under the year 1258 (folio 113v) *'xix kal. Sept. Apud Wymund' obit Johannes de Wali[n]gford, sacerdos, dominus et scriptor huius libri'* (Vaughan, 1958, p.ix)

[42] The Annals of Ulster state that Guthfrith was also the grandson of Ivar (MacAirt, 1983, pp.370-373). It is probable that he was the brother of Sitric as he succeeded him on the throne of Dublin when he invaded England in 920. Guthfrith was also the successor of Sitric in Northumbria upon his death in 927. The Vikings did not have infant rulers. When a king died

Nothing specific is said about the maternity of Olaf Sitricsson[44] (Stevenson, 1854, p.548) but it can be postulated from the material. The key to this is in the Annals of Ulster where it is stated that Sitric died at an immature age in 927, '*inmatura etate mortuus est'*. This has a significant impact on the facts. Obviously Sitric was a young king. This could mean he had not attained the age of 21 when he died. If this is true then the possibility that he had a prior wife and children before his marriage to Æthelstan's sister becomes unlikely.

The second factor to consider is the actual chronology of Olaf 'Cuaran'. Beaven (1918) addressed this problem and supplied many of the answers, untangling a complex web that had grown around Olaf. His conclusions are still valid. Olaf 'Cuaran' was an infant when his father died. He was taken to Dublin and grew up there. We do not know if his mother was still alive as the chronicles are silent about her after marriage. Guthfrith became king due to the minority of Olaf. Guthfrith was expelled from York by Æthelstan who on 12 July 927 was proclaimed king of Northumbria. Guthfrith returned to Dublin and died there in 934 (Hudson, 2005, pp.28-29). Guthfrith had a son named Olaf Guthfrithsson. It was Olaf Guthfrithsson, not Olaf Sitricsson, who fought at Brunanburh in 937[45] (Beaven, pp.1-9; Hudson, pp.30-31). It was also Olaf Guthfrithsson who was married to a daughter of Constantine II, King of Alba which helped cement the alliance that fought against Æthelstan[46]. Æthelstan won the greatest victory of his career at Brunanburh[47], but less than two years later, on 27 October 939, died without issue leaving his brother Edmund to rule England.

In early 940 Olaf Guthfrithsson, who was considered a very strong king, returned to Northumbria where he forced king Edmund into a treaty which gave him Northumbria and a portion of Mercia. He did not long enjoy his kingdom as in 941 he was dead (Haigh, 1870, pp.210-211) and Olaf 'Cuaran' succeeded him. In 942 Olaf lost all the gains made by his predecessor to King Edmund of England. This was due to Olaf's youth and inexperience in battle as well as his naiveté in negotiations. Although Olaf ruled York from 941-944, Ragnald acted as co-ruler from 943-944. This situation arose because Olaf was untried in governing a kingdom, which precipitated his

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his closest adult kin was made his successor. This inheritance pattern was first written down in the Gulathing Law of the 11th century, which were based on the ancient tribal customs, and later made into common law in Norway by Magnus 'the Law Mender' in 1274 (Vestergaard, 2002, pp.60-63).

43 John of Wallingford, as well as other early chroniclers from John of Worcester forward, mistakenly believed that Guthfrith was the son of Sitric. As shown in the Irish Annals this is incorrect. The early chroniclers confused the Anglo-Norman system of primogeniture and the concept of having a regent for a minor ruler with the Scandinavian system which is why they referred to Sitric's successor as his son. See footnote above.

44 The exception to this is John of Wallingford who calls Olaf 'Cuaran' the second son of Sitric and Orgiva. See previous footnote.

45 Much of this confusion began when William of Malmesbury, unaware of the duplication, confused the two men in his chronicle. After that historians simply repeated it.

46 John of Worcester cites "*Hiberniensium multarumque insularum rex paganus Anlafus, a socero suo rege Scottorum Constantino incitatus, ostium Humbre fluminis ualida cum classe ingreditur.*" [The Heathen king of the Irish and of many islands, Olaf, at the instigation of his father-in-law Constantine, king of the Scots, entered the mouth of the River Humber with a strong fleet]. John of Worcester is the only source for this statement. (McGurk, 1995, pp.392-393).

47 The exact site of the Battle of Brunanburh is unknown. There are many variations in spelling depending on the source material cited (Collingwood, 1908, p.133).

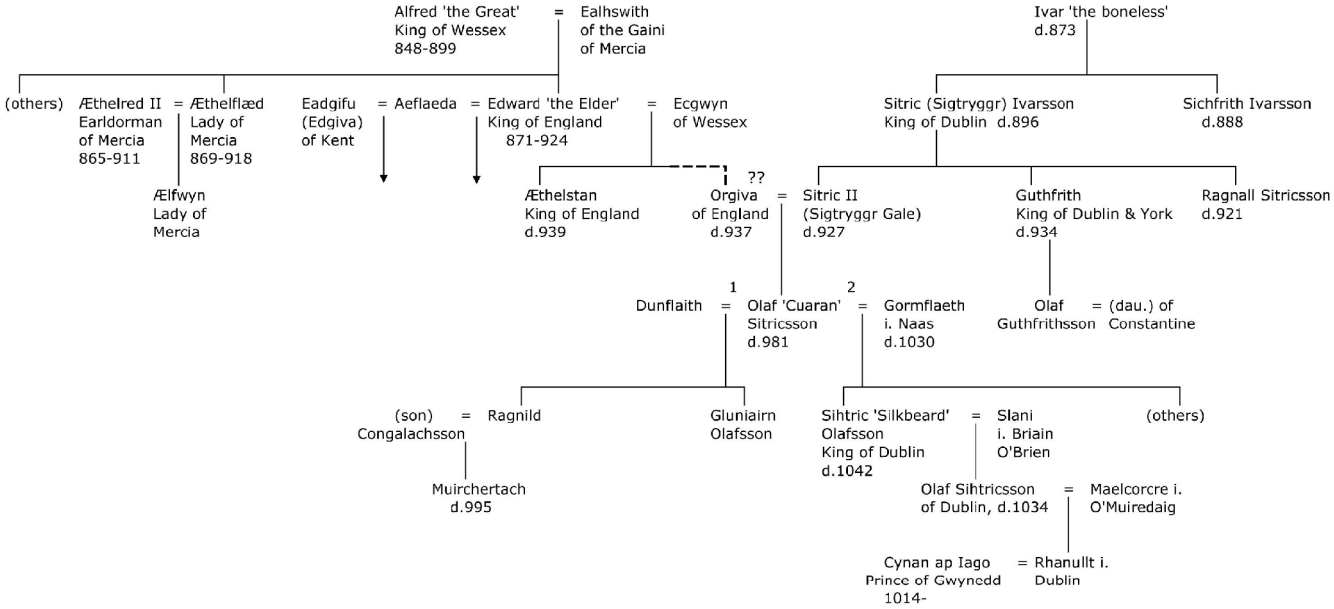


Fig 3. *Genealogical chart centred on Olaf 'Cuaran', including the putative link to the Wessex dynasty*

unpopularity in Northumbria. In 943 Edmund stood as godfather to Olaf Cuaran[48] and sponsor to his cousin Ragnald[49] (McGurk, 1995, pp.396-397; Angus, 1941, pp.134-135). King Edmund, taking advantage of the rivalry between Olaf and Ragnald, tried to keep Northumbria unstable. In 944, Olaf 'Cuaran' fled his kingdom and sought the protection of the Scots. He was given refuge by Donald king of Strathclyde who was attacked by Edmund the following year in retaliation for this[50] (Giles, 1849, pp.252-253). Olaf then returned to Dublin. In 949 a slightly older and more battle seasoned Olaf regained his lands in Northumbria which he held until 952 when he was defeated by Eric Bloodaxe[51]. Olaf never returned to England again.

Olaf 'Cuaran' was married twice. He wed his first wife Dunflaith *c.*953. This marriage provided an alliance with the *Cenel nEogain* in the north of the island. This union was particularly beneficial to *Cenel nEogain* as they now had an ally on the border of *Ui Neill* territory, their chief rival. Olaf and Dunflaith had two children: a son Gluniairn who ruled Dublin after his father retired to the Isle of Iona in 980, until Gluniairn's death in 989; and a daughter Ragnild.

In both 964 and 967 Olaf went south and raided the abbey of St Brigit in Kildare[52]. As he had set his sights on Leinster the need for the family connection provided by his first wife had outlived its usefulness. The marriage ended in 967 and Olaf took for his second wife Gormflaith, daughter of Murchad mac Find. Gormflaith was also married to Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill, King of Meath and Brian Boru. She died in 1030 and was the mother of Sihtric Silkbeard, the heir to his half-brother, in 989 (Hudson, pp.38-55).

The period between 955 and 970 saw the beginning of heavy commercial trade in Ireland. Olaf was the principal motivator of this movement. Wood, wool, fur pelts and other raw materials were turned into products for export. Marten furs from Ireland were sought throughout Europe. It was also during Olaf's reign that exotic foodstuffs such as walnuts and wine began to be imported in quantity into the kingdom as well as jet and amber for jewellery. The slave trade flourished in the kingdom until after the eleventh century making some Dublin merchants very wealthy (Hudson, pp.41-46).

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[48] *In the same year [943] the king received King Olaf, whom we have mentioned above, from the font of holy regeneration, and gave him a royal gift.*

[49] John of Worcester relates that Ragnald son of Guthfrith, King of Northumbria was also adopted as a son to king Edmund. This may be due to Ragnald being older than Olaf and the senior co-ruler. This event is not mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon chronicles. The Parker manuscript (Winchester MSS A) has two illegible lines after the entry in 942 for the baptism of Olaf. Originally all of 943 was left blank which the eighth scribe who wrote this section intended to complete later but never finished. It was added to by early twelfth century scribes and the interpolations are all that is written there.

[50] *In the same year king Eadmund with the aid of Leoling, king of South Wales, ravaged the whole of Cumberland, and put out the eyes of the two sons of Dummail, king of that province. He then granted that kingdom to Malcolm, king of the Scots, to hold of himself, with a view to defend the northern parts of England from hostile incursions by sea and land.*

[51] Eric Bloodaxe was the youngest son of Harold Fairhair king of Norway. He succeeded his father in 930. Eric killed several of his brothers to remove their threat to his throne. Due to his stringent rule he was replaced as monarch in 934 by his brother Haakon. Eric then went to the Orkneys and eventually came to York.

[52] Hudson states *"Olaf Cuaran was a complex man…He was a Christian, who enriched himself by pillaging churches, yet he chose to die in religious retirement."*

In 975 Mael Sechnaill attacked Dublin. Although he could not take the fortress he continued to cause upheavals for Olaf. In 980 Olaf 'Cuaran' decided to end this problem by fighting Mael Sechnaill. They met on the plains of Tara. The Viking force was comprised of an army conscripted from both Dublin and the Hebrides. It was commanded by Ragnall, a son of Olaf, who was killed in the battle (Hudson, pp.51-52). The disastrous battle of Tara brought an end to Olaf's reign. He then abdicated to his son Gluniairn and retired to the Isle of Iona where he died the succeeding year in 981 (Haigh, 1870, pp. 212). He lived a long life; for example King Alfred was considered a very old man upon his death at the age of 51 on 26th October 899 (Swanton, 1996, pp.91-95). Olaf 'Cuaran' was about 55 when he died on the Isle of Iona.

The question of whether Sitric's wife was a religious or secular personage has confused many scholars. The story of St Edith of Polesworth must have started in a hagiographic source that was used by Roger of Wendover (Thacker, 2001, p.257). He is the only chronicler to mention this[53] (Yorke, 2003, pp.77-78) stating that he relied on information from '*catholic writers worthy of credit*'. St Edith is a conflation of other women in Alfred's family. Edith daughter of King Egbert is related by Dugdale (1820) to have gone to Polesworth when St Modwenna[54] founded a nunnery there. This Edith became the first abbess and died there on 15 July 871 (Stanton, 1887, p.337). Edith is also named as being enshrined at Polesworth in the *Secgan* (Yorke, 2003, p.21), a late Anglo-Saxon list of saints' burial places, in the same section as St Edmund of East Anglia who died in 870 (Thacker, 2001, p.258). Her identity has been disputed in recent scholarship[55] by Barbara Yorke (1998) who maintains that she was a Mercian saint of the 7th or 8th centuries contemporary with St Osyth and St Modwenna, probably St Edith of Aylesbury; not the daughter of Egbert (Yorke, 2003, pp.77-78). Thacker (pp.257-258) identifies her with Ite the heroine of Conchubran's *Life of St Monenna*. Dugdale based his history of the abbey upon John of Tinemouth, writing in the mid 14th century, who used Goscelin and other earlier sources.

Another possibility is that Edith is a conglomerate of herself and her half-sister Eadburh who had a well known diocesan cult by the end of the tenth century. Eadburh was reared and became a nun at Nunnaminster in Winchester. She was declared a saint as her body was incorruptible and many miracles were said to occur at her tomb. She became a very well known saint in the eleventh century and had a large following. Her hagiography was written by a twelfth century monk, Osbert of Clare (Thacker, pp.259-260). It is probable that Roger of Wendover used Osbert of Clare as one of his sources and not realizing that Æthelstan had numerous sisters may have confused the facts about Edith and Eadburh.

4. Havelok the Dane

There are several versions of Havelok all of which were written by the fourteenth century. One of these, the *Lai d'Haveloc* of Geoffrey Gaimar[56], was written *c.*1150.

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[53] Yorke notes that not only is Roger of Wendover the sole source for this rendition but William of Malmesbury, who had very detailed sources on both Aethelstan and his father and related much information about each of Edward the Elder's daughters, did not mention this tale.

[54] St Modwenna of Burton-on-Trent was often confused with the Irish St Monenna. Conchubran's *Vita S. Monenna*, which was written before 1120, was used by Geoffrey, Abbot of Burton-on-Trent, the compiler of the Life of St Modwenna between 1114-1153. The hagiography of the two women became combined due to this.

[55] Edith also appears as Egbert's daughter in Weir (1999).

[56] This work opens the *l'Estoire des Engleis.*

This is in the form of an Anglo-Norman romance containing 816 octosyllabic lines in rhymed couplets (Smithers, 1987, pp.xvi-xvii) [57]. As with all romances the setting is exaggerated; in this case the reign of Constantine, nephew of Arthur. By locating the chanson in the far past it takes on mythical qualities.

The essence of the story is very simple. There were two kings the first of which was King Adelbriht, a Dane, who held land from Norfolk to Lincolnshire and also four counties in Denmark. The second ruler was King Edelsi, a Briton, who held Lincoln and Lindsey as well as the land between the Humber and Rutland. King Edelsi marries his sister Orwain to King Adelbriht and they have a daughter named Argentille. Her parents die and she becomes the ward of her uncle Edelsi who wants to annex Adelbriht's kingdom to his own. To accomplish this he has to disinherit Argentille which he does by marrying her to a kitchen scullion named 'Cuaran'. She sees a flame that issues from Cuaran's mouth in his sleep and persuades him to return to Grimsby where his family lives. His parents, Grim and Sebruc, have died but his sister, Kelloc, and her husband, a merchant, still live there. They reveal to Cuaran that his real name is Haveloc and that he is the son of King Gunther of Denmark and his wife Alvive, the daughter of King Gaifier. King Gunther was killed in battle when King Arthur invaded Denmark to exact tribute that had been withheld. Gunther's lands were then given to Odulf, an ally of Arthur's, who still holds them. They explain that after Gunther's death Queen Alvive escaped with Haveloc in one of Grim's ships heading to England. They were caught in a pirate raid and all on board were killed except Grim and his family. The raiders assumed Haveloc was Grim's son and that is why he eluded harm. Haveloc and Argentille leave England and arrive in Denmark. Sigar the former seneschal of King Gunther sees Haveloc and notices the family resemblance. That night Sigar sees the flame emit from Haveloc's mouth in his sleep. This was a sign Haveloc's old nurse confided to Sigar who then declares Haveloc the rightful king. The army unites with him to defeat king Odulf. Haveloc returns to England with his men where he defeats Edelsi, who dies shortly thereafter. Haveloc and Argentille become monarchs and reign for twenty years (Smithers, pp. xviii-xix).

The *Lai d'Haveloc* cannot be taken as historical fact but as a legend that includes real but distorted historical events. It is easy to see name associations with actual people. Haveloc is a derivation of the Welsh 'Abloyc' which in Old Irish is 'Amlaibh'. Amlaibh and Olaf are equivalents (Smithers, p.lv). Cuaran is definitely the epithet Olaf Sitricsson used throughout his life. The name Alvive is similar to Orgiva the name given in John of Wallingford's Chronicle for Olaf's mother. King Gunter could well be Guthfrith, Sitric's presumed brother, who succeeded Sitric as king of York.

The story itself is garbled history. Several events are pushed together to create the narrative in the form it appears in by the fourteenth century. It seems likely that Argentille may have been Ælfwynn, the daughter of Æthelred, Earldoman of Mercia and his wife Æthelflæd, daughter of Alfred the Great. She did become ruler of Mercia upon her mother's death on 12 June 918 and held this position until the winter of 919 when she was disinherited by her uncle Edward the Elder. Three weeks later she was marched into Wessex and history then loses track of her. It is feasible that she entered a nunnery as a charter of 948 mentions a nun with her name who was a beneficiary of King Eadred. After her withdrawal from secular life Edward annexed Mercia to Wessex (Kleinman, 2003, pp.260-261; Stenton, 2001, pp.329-330).

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[57] There is in addition to the *Gaimar's chanson*, another *Lai d'Haveloc* containing 1112 octosyllabic lines of rhymed couplets written 1190-1220 , a *Brut* version in prose (Marvin, 2005, pp.280-306) and the well known version *Havelok the Dane* which was translated by Smithers in 1987.

The next event portrayed was the usurpation of Northumbria by Æthelstan upon Sitric's death. This event is depicted in several ways in the *Lay* as Lincoln/Lindsey was the place where Sitric had his coins minted when he was King of Northumbria (Hall, 2001, pp.190-191). Olaf Cuaran had his lands taken by his supposed uncle Æthelstan when he was an infant. His mother may have fled with him also but to Ireland (Ramsay, 1898, p.284). When Olaf became a man he did regain his lands in Northumbria, but only from 941-944 and 949-952. He was the king of Dublin for many years and did much to establish the kingdom as a thriving mercantile marketplace and a home for literature and the arts.

Havelok may recall these events in a legendary manner with other romantic elements added. It is here that the similarities stop and the remainder of the work is complete fantasy. It may have been created by the Cumbrians who disliked both the Saxon and Norman rulers. They may have embellished tenth century events to develop a nationalistic piece that wishfully saw the usurpers thrown out of their lands (Smithers, pp. lvi).

5. Conclusion

Olaf Sitricsson was perceived as a weak king by later historians who could not see his accomplishments. They based their assessment on his loss of Northumbria. His tenure in England was short, only reigning for a total of seven years in two attempts at holding the throne. He was too young to possess the diplomatic skill and the fighting ability necessary to redeem his kingdom. Later as a mature King of Dublin, he was celebrated as a patron of the arts and possibly immortalized in the great romance *Havelok the Dane* which later led Saxo Grammaticus to utilize a portion of the story in his history. It was this history which Shakespeare used as a basis for his *Hamlet*. Olaf was bilingual in Irish Gaelic and Old Norse. He loved poetry and understood the subtlety of various types of verses (Hudson, 2005, p.55). He saw the establishment of economic security and prosperity in Dublin. Olaf lived his life with a disability but still held his kingdom in Ireland together until he was a very old man. His descendants ruled the Isle of Man, Wales and Ireland and he is remembered in their histories. His legacy lives on in the books he helped create and the literature of that period.

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