
London Under Danish Rule: Cnut's Politics and Policies as a Demonstration of Power

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Abstract: *In 1016 the young Danish prince who was to become Cnut the Great, King of England, Denmark, and Norway, laid siege to the city of London as part of a program of conquest that would see him crowned as King of England by 1017. This millennial year is an appropriate time to reflect on the consequences of London's defiance as a city that was rapidly evolving into the economic capital of a united English polity. As the siege did not end in Danish victory, the resistance of the independent minded Londoners had implications upon how Cnut would conduct juridical, financial and religious policy in relation to the city. Cnut could not allow the city to exert such oppositional autonomy unchecked. Yet the Danish king had ambitions of establishing an Anglo-Scandinavian Empire and London was a strategically important city in that vision, valued for both its continental connections and its wealth. Cnut could not afford to stunt London's economic life through punitive repression. The Danish king's early years were then characterised by a series of carefully balanced retributive policies that were designed to remove London's agency for rebellion, while not crippling it as an established economic and commercial centre.*

Keywords: *London, Cnut, Æthelred II, Anglo-Saxon history, Anglo-Scandinavian history, Siege of London, Anglo-Saxon historiography*

LONDON UNDER DANISH RULE: CNUT'S POLITICS AND POLICIES AS A DEMONSTRATION OF POWER

For the citizens, having given their prince honourable burial, and having adopted a sound plan, decided to send messengers and intimate their decision to [Cnut], that is to say, that he should give them his pledge of friendship, and should take peaceful possession of the city.

*Encomium Emmae reginae.*¹

¹ Alistair Campbell, trans., *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, ii.7, reprint (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998 (1949)), p. 23.

In 1016, London was one of very few English cities of European significance. This reflected London's prominence as a trading port, an economic and administrative hub, and population centre, rather than any status as a nascent capital city. In 1016 it was also the centre of Anglo-Saxon resistance to the campaigns of conquest undertaken by the Danish prince, Cnut (r. 1016-1035). Throughout Cnut's English offensive, London was a base for the Anglo-Saxon king, and the city supported first the incumbent king, Æthelred II (r. 978-1016), and subsequently declared his son Edmund, king of England in the face of Cnut's aggression. This was despite the capitulation of Wessex and Cnut's proclamation as king by a gathering of leading nobles and clerics in Southampton.² The Danish assaults on London took the form of a series of sieges throughout 1016, with the Danes being driven from the walls by Anglo-Saxon forces before later returning to take-up the siege again.³ Ultimately, the independently minded citizens of the city, with the military aid of the Anglo-Saxon claimant to the throne, held out against the besieging Danes and the siege was not ended by force. Negotiators sent out from the city organised a surrender on behalf of its citizens in exchange for Cnut's pledge of friendship, though the garrison held out.⁴ Unable to take full possession of the city, Cnut withdrew his army and London only came under his rule after the death of Edmund later that year. Once under his rule, London presented Cnut with a complex political puzzle. The king could not allow the city to exert the oppositional autonomy it had displayed in resisting his annexation, yet neither could the economic life of the strategically important city be disrupted by punitive repression. As such, Cnut's twenty year reign saw two approaches to exerting royal power over the city, with punitive policies pursued in the Danish king's early years, slowly moving toward conciliatory policies as Cnut established his authority.

LONDON ON THE CUSP OF DANISH RULE

Winchester had been the pre-eminent Anglo-Saxon royal city since the reign of Alfred (r. 871-899) in Wessex. His successors had extended the Wessex hegemony over rival Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Scandinavian territories, culminating in the establishment of a single Anglo-Saxon kingdom under the rule of Æthelstan (r.924-939). In seizing the Anglo-Saxon throne, Cnut inherited this expanded kingdom and maintained Winchester as his capital. Yet wealth and political power was concentrated in London, and the city had been evolving into his new kingdom's primary economic and administrative centre since the late ninth-century. The city was re-established and fortified by Alfred in 886 after a troubled history which saw it variously controlled by

² R. R. Darlington and P. McGurk, eds., *The Chronicle of John of Worcester: The Annals from 450 - 1066, 1015 - 1016*, trans. Jennifer Bray and P. McGurk. vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 480 - 485; Whitelock, ASC, C 1015 - 1016. Both *John of Worcester* and the ASC record that Cnut's dominance of Wessex in 1015 was reversed by his Anglo-Saxon rival in 1016.

³ Dorothy Whitelock, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (ASC)*, C 1016 (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1965), pp. 94 - 96. These sieges are frequently conflated as 'the siege of London,' a convention I will be following.

⁴ For this version of the resolution of the siege of London, see *Encomium Emmae reginae*, ii.7 - 8.

Kent, East Anglia, Mercia, Wessex and the Danes.⁵ The stability that grew from Alfred's reclamation of the city was critical to London's increasing importance throughout the tenth and eleventh-centuries.

By Æthelred's reign the city had become functionally integral in the kingdom's governance, and Barbara Yorke notes that Æthelred increasingly based himself in London, turning it into his military and administrative base during his conflict with Cnut.⁶ Under Æthelred, London became the primary mint of England, producing a quarter of the country's coinage.⁷ This was far above the output of York (9%), Winchester (12%), or any other minting centre, which may explain both the frequent attacks by raiders on London, and London's military preparedness to repel them.⁸ Yet, only fifty years early Chester had been Æthelstan's primary minting city, and the rapid increase of moneys in London may be tied to increasing economic prosperity.⁹ Æthelred's London was trading with the continent to such an extent that the king was using it as a source of revenue, setting in place edicts to regulate tariffs on foreign merchants trading in the city.¹⁰ This is not an action he is known to have taken elsewhere, and it reflects the ease of continental access to London as opposed to other major cities like Winchester and York. Winchester was an inland administrative centre, not a trading centre, and was not directly accessible by sea. Yorke proposes that the shift of royal residence, administration and even burial to London had a tangible effect on Winchester, as the capital of the Wessex dynasty declined in importance.¹¹ In its turn, York was a wealthy trading centre. However, York faced Scandinavia and may not have competed with London for continental trade; it is notable that Æthelred's London trade regulations did not include Scandinavians, who were presumably accessing York as their primary port.¹² As a prominent centre of trade and administration, York was also the only English city approaching London's population. Archaeological evidence points to London as the largest city of eleventh-century England: as London drew in both trade and royal administration, it also drew in people.¹³ A burgeoning economic, administrative and population centre, it is of little surprise that Cnut sought to annex

⁵ Whitelock, *ASC*, A 886.

⁶ Barbara Yorke, *Wessex in the Early Middle Ages* (London: Leicester University Press, 1995), pp. 147 - 148.

⁷ D. M. Metcalfe, 'Continuity and Change in English Monetary History,' *British Numismatic Journal* 50 (1980), p. 32; M.K. Lawson, *Cnut: The Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century* (London and New York: Longman, 1993), p. 203.

⁸ Metcalfe, 'Continuity and Change,' p. 32; Lawson, *Cnut*, p. 185.

⁹ Peter Sawyer, *The Wealth of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 93.

¹⁰ Æthelred IV.II, in *The Ancient Laws and Institutes of England*, ed. and trans. Benjamin Thorpe, vol. 1 (Printed by command of his late Majesty William IV, 1840), p. 127. For the dating of the law code, see Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century, Legislation and Its Limits*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 443.

¹¹ Yorke, *Wessex in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 324 - 325.

¹² Derek Keene, 'London from the post-Roman period to 1300,' in *The Cambridge Urban History of England*, ed. D. M. Palliser, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 91 - 92.

¹³ Christopher Brooke and Gillian Keir, *London, 800 - 1216: The Shaping of a City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), pp. 70, 100 - 101, 110; Richard Hall, 'York,' in *The Viking World*, ed. Stefan Brink and Neil Price (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), p. 379; Pamela Nightingale, 'The Origin of the Court of Husting and Danish Influence on London's Development into a Capital City,' *English Historical Review* 52 (1987), pp. 563 - 564.

London, and similarly little surprise that the citizenry had both the desire and resources to fight his aggression. Having gathered wealth and political power within its walls, the populous city had the strength to shape its own future. This made London a key economic and military force in Cnut's Anglo-Scandinavian Empire, yet also provided the city with an unrivalled level of self-determination that was politically problematic for the Danish king.

As this discussion portrays London as a unitary body in its relationship with Cnut, it is worth briefly considering the nature of 'London' as conceived as a conglomeration of citizens. While it can be problematic to discuss 'citizenry' in an eleventh-century English city, it is less so with London. Though the citizenry comprised multi-layered social groups with independent needs and opinions, a unity of purpose in protecting their city's interests can be seen in their resolve to keep the Danes from their gates. Already within Æthelstan's reign the city had set out its autonomy, putting in place its own ordinances.¹⁴ These ordinances pledged to follow the king's law, but also put in place rules for the provision of aid and self-policing within the city through a 'peace-gild,' an innovation not seen in any other English city of the early tenth-century.¹⁵ From this time chronicles begin to mention the 'citizens of London' as a body - a term not often associated with other English cities. For example, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* tells us that in 994 the citizens of London brought 'harm and injury' on a fleet of Viking raiders, while the entries relating the raid of Ipswich in 991 and Bamburgh in 993 discuss only the deeds and death of nobility.¹⁶ Similarly, in discussing the siege of London and the city's capitulation, the *Encomium Emmae Reginae* does not isolate a delegation of nobles or clerics, but declares that it was the 'citizens' who organised the treaty.¹⁷ The establishment of a formal London commune 1215 does not reflect a temporally isolated event, but rather the culmination of the city's journey toward self-governance.

THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF CNUT'S RELATIONSHIP WITH LONDON

Recent studies of Cnut's reign as king of the English have lamented the apparent paucity of sources for the Danish king's rule. In his biography of Cnut, Lawson notes that the lack of sources, and their often dubious veracity, limits their facility in establishing any conclusive portrayal of his reign.¹⁸ It is a view that is not without merit, yet relies on comparison with Cnut's immediate predecessor and successors for its verisimilitude. In comparison with the administrative documentation of Æthelred's reign, Cnut may seem poorly served by legislative records, yet it remains that the rich assortment of sources for the Danish king is unrivalled before the late tenth-century. Timothy Bolton highlights Lawson's avoidance of Scandinavian sources in his biography, a conscious decision which facilitates a streamlined analysis, yet comes at

¹⁴ VI Æthelstan, in *English Historical Documents (EHD)*, ed. Dorothy Whitelock, 2nd edn, vol. 1 (London: Eyre Methuen, 1979), pp. 423 - 427.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*; Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, pp. 297 - 298.

¹⁶ Whitelock, *ASC*, C 991, 992 - 994.

¹⁷ *Encomium Emmae reginae*, ii.7.

¹⁸ Lawson, *Cnut*, pp. 66, 214.

the cost of a richer understanding of Cnut's legacy as a figure of inter-cultural importance.¹⁹ Cnut's status as an international monarch provides for a geographically and culturally diverse set of sources, derived from not only Anglo-Saxon England, but also Scandinavia and the Holy Roman Empire. Elaine Treharne in turn correctly asserts that the lack of evidence perceived by Lawson can be characterised by as a lack of administrative evidence.²⁰ While the charters may be few and the law codes derivative, these administrative documents are augmented by chronicles and literary sources such as sagas, biographies and hagiographies. Such sources should be treated with nuance and even scepticism, but they cannot be dismissed outright. It must be concluded that, while the sources for Cnut's kingship are diverse in both nature and quality, there is no shortage of documentation for the reign once chronicles and literary narrative are taken into account.

Cnut's siege of London is particularly well recorded. In England, the siege was reported contemporaneously in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and the praise narrative commissioned by Cnut's wife, *Encomium Emmae Reginae*.²¹ In the Holy Roman Empire, another contemporary chronicler, Thietmar of Merseberg, also made a record of the event, which, while erroneous in detail, corroborates the native sources.²² This distant account is evidence of the significance of Cnut's campaigns in England to the intra-European political landscape. Cnut does not otherwise appear as a major figure in Thietmar's *Chronicon* - the entry for the siege of London is the only record committed to Cnut's activities and contains the *Chronicon*'s sole mention of the city.²³ This can be contrasted with the *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, penned by Adam of Bremen fifty years after the siege, which places the event within a broader narrative of conquest.²⁴ Writing with the benefit of the passage of time, Adam already knew the outcomes of Cnut's campaigning and, from that distance, was able absorb the legacy of a king who had held unrivalled dominance in Northern Europe.

It is unsurprising that later Anglo-Norman chroniclers, similarly writing with knowledge of the key events of Cnut's reign, place the siege of London within the context of Cnut's wider achievements as both conqueror and king. However, while Adam was writing from a location geopolitically removed from Cnut's empire, the English chroniclers were writing in territory still feeling the effects Cnut's reign. As such, they bring an understandable Anglo-centric focus to the narrative, often seemingly disinterested in event elsewhere in Cnut's territories. This fixation on the Cnut's English conquest is also as a result of the near universal dependency of the *Chronicle* for the details of the siege, though it is true that differing accounts of Cnut's

¹⁹ Timothy Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great: Conquest and the Consolidation of Power in Northern Europe in the Early Eleventh Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 1 - 2.

²⁰ Elaine Treharne, *Living Through Conquest: The Politics of Early English, 1020 - 1220* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 10 - 11, 56 - 58.

²¹ *Encomium Emmae reginae*, ii.7 - 8; Whitelock, ASC, C 1016.

²² Warner, David A., trans., *Ottonian Germany: The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg*, 7.40 (1016) (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 335.

²³ *Thietmar of Merseburg*, 7.40 (1016); Thietmar makes brief reference to Cnut at 1.17 and 8.7 (1018), in the latter not mentioning the Danish king by name.

²⁴ Adam of Bremen, *The Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, 2.lii - 2.lv, ed. and trans. Francis J. Tschan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), pp. 91 - 93.

subsequent actions as king are evidence of multiple textual traditions. An example of this can be seen in the entries for 1017 in the chronicle of John of Worcester and the commensurate passage in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta regum Anglorum*.²⁵ John and William were Anglo-Norman historians writing in the early twelfth-century, and both began their entries for 1017 with identical introductions to Cnut's reign. William, however, editorialises, adding that, "there was not justice to his succession, but he arranged his life with great statesmanship and courage".²⁶ Whether William's additional judgement echoes a preserved social memory at Malmesbury Abbey, or an opinion expressed within his sources for Cnut's reign, he does reflect a tradition within English accounts of Cnut's kingship that displays an inherent tension. Cnut would prove himself as a capable, Christian king in the Anglo-Saxon mould, yet his reign began with war and accompanied heavy taxation for his new subjects.

As such, these Anglo-centric traditions of Cnut's conquest and rule reflect Anglo-Saxon narratives that are distinct from those that informed the Scandinavian sagas and historical compilations, our latest written sources. Cnut's appearances in the sagas are not limited to events of historical veracity and, as a Scandinavian king increasing his hegemony and power, Cnut is frequently written into literary sources to fulfil the trope of an unambiguous warrior king, rewarding the deeds of his great men.²⁷ Even Snorri Sturluson, writing the ostensibly historical saga *Óláfs saga Helga*, the story of the sainted king of Norway and rival to Cnut, Olaf (r. 1015-1028), portrays Cnut and his military dominance in a positive light.²⁸ Yet such literary eulogies do not mean that Scandinavian narratives are devoid of historicity and, as Gabrielle Turville-Petre has deftly stated, "*scaldic* verse can tell us little about the history of England, but the history of England may give us confidence in the authenticity of some *scaldic* verses".²⁹

Such is the case with *Knýtlinga saga*, a thirteenth-century compilation recording the history of Cnut's Danish successors, and *Liðsmannaflokkr*, a *skaldic* poem that Russell Poole has suggested was composed by a witness to Cnut's entry into London.³⁰ Both texts are equally intent on eulogising the Danish king. Though Cnut's descendants are the central concern of *Knýtlinga saga*, the introductory chapters celebrate his career through a brief history of his conquests, with his campaigns in England comprising the majority of that history.³¹ Sitting amongst the details of successive battles is a description of the unsuccessful siege of London which, though sparse, does not differ

²⁵ John of Worcester, 1017; William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ii.181.1, ed. and trans. R.A.B. Mynors, R.M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 321.

²⁶ *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ii.181.1.

²⁷ See for example: Alison Finlay, trans., *The Saga of Bjorn, Champion of the Hitardal People*, in *The Complete Sagas of the Icelanders*, ed. Viðar Hreinsson, vol. 1 (Reykjavik: Leifur Eiríksson, 1997), p. 262, in which Cnut's party is saved from dragon attack by Björn Arngeirsson hitðœlakappi, who is richly rewarded for his deed.

²⁸ See for example: Snorri Sturluson, *Óláfs saga Helga*, 221 - 227, in *Heimskringla*, trans. Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulks, vol. 2 (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2014), pp. 147 - 215.

²⁹ E. O. G. Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. lxx.

³⁰ For a full discussion of *Knýtlinga saga* and *Liðsmannaflokkr* as historical sources, see Russell Poole, 'Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History: Some Aspects of the Period 1009-1016,' *Speculum* 62 (No. 2, 1987), pp. 265 - 298. See especially pp. 283 - 286 for his analysis of the dating of *Liðsmannaflokkr*.

³¹ Hermann Palsson and Paul Edwards, trans., *Knýtlinga saga* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1986), pp. 26 - 42.

so much from English records to be considered entirely fabricated.³² *Liðsmannaflokkr* does differ, as in form it is intended as praise poetry and has an explicit concern with Cnut's siege of London.³³ Conforming to *skaldic* artistic conventions, the poem deals in complex imagery and tangible detail is elusive. The *skald* does name England three times and the Thames twice, while the only mention of the city name in the final line, "we can settle down now, lady, in beautiful London", has a sense of deliberate revelation as the culmination of the poem's suspense.³⁴ It is clear that *Liðsmannaflokkr's* intent to praise Cnut for his conquest of London. Yet for what the *skaldic* verses of both documents lacks in logistical detail, they make up in extolling the courage and vigour of the warrior king, which is the *skald's* primary concern.

As later literary constructions, such historical sagas and verses do lean toward a slightly more nuanced narrative than the English chronicles. Though paying little attention to political or legislative arrangements in new territories, the saga sources look beyond a simple retelling of the actions of the opposing kings and their faceless armies, and are interested in the roles of other Scandinavian participants in events. This is demonstrated in Snorri's brief mention of the siege of London which is written about the experience of Jarl Eirik, a significant figure in Scandinavian politics, as opposed to those that the English chroniclers considered the main protagonists. Snorri relates Eirik's personal triumph in the conquest of London while providing little practical detail of the siege.³⁵ With this in mind, it is an appropriate place to turn from the historiography of Cnut's relationship with London. For this discussion is not intended to focus on the details and mechanics of Cnut's siege, but is instead interested in how it affected Cnut's attitude to London and his subsequent policies in dealing with its recalcitrant citizenry.

PRE-CNUT SCANDINAVIAN INFLUENCE IN LONDON

Though London had officially been in Anglo-Saxon hands and under the rule of the Wessex dynasty from 886, the city was not devoid of Scandinavian influence at the time of Cnut's conquest.³⁶ In 886, the city had been reclaimed from Viking invaders whose descendants, by 1016, still resided in the Danelaw of northern England. London not only had cause to deal with its Anglo-Scandinavian neighbours, but as a trading port undertook commercial enterprise with Scandinavian merchants and was home to residents of Scandinavian descent.³⁷ Yet, while the evidence for Scandinavian presence in pre-conquest London may be compelling, as Pamela Nightingale has argued, their

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 35 - 37; Alistair Campbell, *Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History* (London: University College London, 1970), pp. 14 - 16; Poole, 'Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History,' pp. 274 - 278.

³³ For a transcription and translation of *Liðsmannaflokkr*, see Poole, 'Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History,' pp. 281 - 283.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Óláfs saga Helga*, 31 - 32 (verse 28).

³⁶ Whitelock, *ASC*, A 886, for Alfred's reclamation of London.

³⁷ Brooke and Gillian, *London, 800 - 1216*, pp. 139 - 142, 264 - 265.

economic importance and political clout can be easily overestimated.³⁸ In laying out the trading regulations for the city, the law code *Æthelred IV* lists the merchants of Flanders, Ponthieu, Normandy and Frankia while making no note of Scandinavian traders.³⁹ The argument that the husting court, the commercial court of London, represented a Scandinavian innovation and basis for power has been neatly dismantled by Nightingale as dependent upon a single anachronistic reference.⁴⁰ Certainly it must be understood that, given the troubled and violent relations between the English and the Danes through the reign of *Æthelred*, Anglo-Scandinavian trade cannot be seen as a key economic factor underpinning the city's commercial strength. However, the presence of six moneyers with Scandinavian names in London during *Æthelred's* kingship must be noted.⁴¹ Nightingale and Lawson both present the presence of only six men of Scandinavian descent amongst the plethora of London moneyers in the period as evidence of the weakness of Danish influence in the city.⁴² Yet it could also be argued that, in the light of the mutual aggression between London and invading Scandinavians, it is a surprise to find any Danish moneyers amongst the Londoners. The minting of coins was a heavily legislated occupation in both the law codes of *Æthelred* and *Cnut*, and the presence of Scandinavian moneyers implies a level of integration and trust, if not influence.⁴³ Nonetheless, whatever the role of the Scandinavian residents of London, they were unable to bring any influence to bear upon the city's Anglo-Saxon elite to declare for *Cnut* on the death of *Æthelred*.

Despite the presence of an integrated Scandinavian population in London, when *Cnut* arrived outside the city in 1016, the citizenry had little reason to hold affection for the Danes within their midst and the king at their gates. With its Anglo-Scandinavian communities, strong Scandinavian trading links out of York and multiple treaties with Scandinavian elites, pre-Norman England is often presented as a part of the Scandinavian North Sea world, yet this was a relationship defined by conflict.⁴⁴ A hyperbole laden record of 793, decrying the depredations of Viking raiders, announced the arrival of the Scandinavians in the pages of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.⁴⁵ The following sixty years saw increased Viking raids which soon turned to settlement and conquest across the British Isles. The Vikings reached the zenith of their power in England in 878, and seeming to have dismantled all of the ancient Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, they extended their hegemony to include the southern territories of Alfred of Wessex. This victory was fleeting: later in that same year Alfred met the Viking

³⁸ Nightingale, 'The Origin of the Court of Husting,' pp. 559 - 561.

³⁹ *Æthelred IV*.II.

⁴⁰ Nightingale, 'Court of Husting,' pp. 559 - 562; Nightingale's refutation is against the argument as presented in: Frank Stenton, 'Norman London,' in *Preparatory to Anglo-Saxon England: Being the collected papers of Frank Merry Stenton*, ed. Doris May Stenton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 30 - 31.

⁴¹ Veronica J. Smart, 'Moneyers of the Late Anglo-Saxon Coinage: the Danish Dynasty, 1017 - 1042,' *Anglo-Saxon England* 16 (1987), pp. 273 - 279.

⁴² Lawson, *Cnut*, p. 206; Nightingale, 'Court of Husting,' p. 560.

⁴³ *Æthelred IV*.26.1, in *EHD*, vol. 1, p. 445 (and n.5); *Cnut II*.8 - 8.2, in *EHD*, vol. 1, pp. 455 - 456.

⁴⁴ See for example: Peter Johaneck, 'Merchants, Markets and Towns,' in *The New Cambridge Medieval History: Volume III, c.900 - c. 1024*, ed. Timothy Reuter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 87 - 90.

⁴⁵ Whitelock, *ASC*, D 793.

armies of southern England in battle and, in defeating them, forced their capitulation and exit from the south of the island.⁴⁶ While London was part of the territory apportioned to Alfred in the subsequent treaty, the city remained in Viking hands for another ten years.⁴⁷ Meanwhile, the Danish presence in northern and eastern England proved to be permanent. A Scandinavian king continued to reside in York and the idea of an autonomous Scandinavian kingdom proved tenacious and a constant threat to the Wessex hegemony. Alfred's descendants were in frequent conflict with the Anglo-Danish leaders as they sought to establish Anglo-Saxon dominance in the north, and the northern chronicles reports that Anglo-Scandinavian Northumbria only became an integrated part of Anglo-Saxon England in 950s. Entries for the period 948-954 in both the *Gesta Regum*, traditionally attributed to Symeon of Durham, and the D-text of the *Chronicle*, describe the overthrow of Eirik Bloodaxe, the incarceration of the Archbishop of York, and imply the installation of earls as rulers of York in the stead of a king.⁴⁸

Closer to the events of Cnut's conquest, the raiding Vikings of Thorkell the Tall landed in Sandwich in 1009 and, over the subsequent two years, the Danes raided Anglo-Saxon territories with impunity.⁴⁹ Though the *Chronicle* entry for 1010 records the Vikings as having "often attacked the borough of London", the city remained impenetrable.⁵⁰ This was not the case with Canterbury, which was betrayed into their hands and raided for wealth and hostages, amongst whom was Archbishop Ælfheah.⁵¹ Æthelred had already opened negotiations with Thorkell's army, yet this event seems to have forced the capitulation, and London held the dubious honour of being the place where the Anglo-Saxon king paid a tribute of 48,000 pounds to the Danes for peace. Requesting an additional 3,000 pounds for the release of the Archbishop, Ælfheah declined to be ransomed and the angered Danes martyred him, with the Anglo-Saxons bearing his body back to London in honour and interring it at St Pauls.⁵² Yet neither the tribute, nor this final burst of violence brought London peace from the Viking raiders.

In 1013, Cnut's father Sweyn, the King of Denmark and Norway, invaded England. While Sweyn's own siege of London failed, with the *Chronicle* declaring that "the citizens...resisted with full battle", his depredations of the rest of England soon convinced the Londoners that resistance was unprofitable and induced their

⁴⁶ Whitelock, *ASC*, A 878.

⁴⁷ Whitelock, *ASC*, A 886; 'The Treaty between Alfred and Guthram,' in *EHD*, vol. 1, pp. 416 - 417.

⁴⁸ Thomas Arnold, ed., *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia*, 948 - 952, vol. 2, reprint (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012 (1885)), pp. 126 - 128; Whitelock, *ASC*, C 948 - 954. For a detailed discussion of the discrepancies in the chronology of Eirik's reign between these two sources, see Clare Downham, 'The Chronology of the Last Scandinavian Kings of York, AD 937 - 954,' *Northern History* XL (no. 1, 2003), pp. 43 - 49.

⁴⁹ Whitelock, *ASC*, C 1009 - 1011, the entry for 1011 itemises the territories overrun by the marauding Danes.

⁵⁰ Whitelock, *ASC*, C 1010.

⁵¹ *John of Worcester*, 1011; *Thietmar of Merseburg*, 7.43; Whitelock, *ASC*, C 1010. Thietmar erroneously names the Archbishop as Dunstan.

⁵² Whitelock, *ASC*, C 1011 - 1012; Osborn, *Translatio Sancti Ælfegi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi et matris*, O.2, trans. Rosemary Morris and Alexander R. Rumble, in *The Reign of Cnut: King of England, Denmark and Norway*, ed. Alexander Rumble (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1994), p. 295.

capitulation.⁵³ Nonetheless, it is reasonable to assume that the Londoner's reluctant submission only entrenched a burgeoning resentment to Danish rule. While Sweyn was declared King of England, when he died five short weeks later it was Æthelred that was returned to power, rather than Sweyn's son Cnut.⁵⁴ Here, in Sweyn's kingship, we see both the basis for the legitimacy of Cnut's claim to the English throne and the genesis of his military and political conflicts with the citizenry. In London's history of dogged resistance to foreign aggression from 1009 up to Cnut's siege, Cnut would have seen evidence of an intolerable intransigence.

CONTROLLING LONDON: CNUT'S PUNITIVE POLICIES

In considering Cnut's early policies in relation to the city and their potentially punitive nature we will consider the charters, taxes, and juridical and religious policies that either guided or reacted to events in London. In the case of the charters of Cnut's reign, Lawson's lament as to the paucity of administrative evidence certainly holds true.⁵⁵ There are forty-six extant charters and writs that reference Cnut, and of these only twenty-three are deemed to be unquestionably authentic, and only one relates to London and this to the city's bishop.⁵⁶ This raises three possibilities which must be examined. Firstly, the lack of charters may represent a conscious punitive policy in which Cnut determined to give nothing of benefit to the lay people of London. Alternatively, the scarcity of grants could represent a recognition of London's pre-conquest status as an economic and political centre, and as the kingdom's primary trade port, and a desire to maintain the status quo. In this case, Cnut may have deliberately avoided any partisan show of favour, any gift of wealth or land, which had the potential to effect an abrupt shift in the balance of power that would disrupt the city's operations. Or lastly, the paucity of documentation may simply reflect a different cultural attitude to record keeping being imposed on the Anglo-Saxon administrators by a new Scandinavian elite.

Turning to the latter hypothesis first, the dearth of English governmental charters and writs in this period certainly seems commensurate with the semi-literate style of administration in Cnut's other kingdoms.⁵⁷ While no charters exist that record immediate post-conquest transfers of land to Scandinavian elites, it is reasonable to assume that land grants did occur as the Danish king rewarded his followers and established Danish hegemony.⁵⁸ Though Anglo-Saxon clerical administration was maintained largely intact, Lawson suggests that grants to Scandinavians may not have

⁵³ Whitelock, *ASC*, C 1013; Gwynn Jones, *A History of the Vikings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 366 - 369.

⁵⁴ Whitelock, *ASC*, C 1014; Ian Howard, *Swein Forkbeard's Invasions and the Danish Conquest of England, 991 - 1017* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003), pp. 133 - 135.

⁵⁵ Lawson, *Cnut*, p. 206.

⁵⁶ King's College London, *The Electronic Sawyer: Online catalogue of Anglo-Saxon charters (ES)*, accessed 20 January 2016, <http://esawyer.org.uk/about/index.html>, S 949 - 992, S 1463, S 1642 - 1643.

⁵⁷ Lawson, *Cnut*, p. 66; Treharne, *Living Through Conquest*, pp. 80 - 81.

⁵⁸ Ann Williams, 'The Spoliation of Worcester,' in *Anglo-Norman Studies* 19, (1997), pp. 383 - 384.

been recorded as their shared culture with the king was one in which such administrative formalities were not established.⁵⁹ In an innovative and detailed analysis of onomastic evidence in the Domesday Book, Lewis has argued for a significant reallocation of land to Danes in the years 1016-1066 throughout the traditional Anglo-Saxon territories in the south-west.⁶⁰ Any distribution of lands to his followers in this territory would have been politically astute for Cnut: south-western England traditionally been firmly held by Anglo-Saxon with little Danish influence. In considering that little direct evidence survives to give evidence of such grants, Lewis' and Lawson's hypotheses complement each other; unrecorded grants to Cnut's followers were likely. Turning to those charters that do survive, although they do not provide direct insight into Cnut's relationship with the institutions of London, they do show evidence of a similar southern territorial focus and preponderance towards ecclesiastical land-holdings. Most of the authentic charters relate to the area of wider Wessex, including both Kent and Cornwall, with fifteen of these being ecclesiastical grants.⁶¹ The only charter made to a London institution is made to the bishop of London and is merely a confirmation of lands held by St Pauls, not a grant of additional land.⁶² Just as the greater number of formal charters in the south seem to relate to a greater number of unrecorded grants, it can be conjectured that the single London charter relates to a limited number unrecorded grants in London.

Having established that a cultural reticence to administrative documentation may indeed be at play, we can now consider whether the lack of charters may also represent a punitive or practical political policy toward London. As reflected by William of Malmesbury's assertion that Cnut "arranged his life with great statesmanship and courage", Cnut's administration of England was remembered for the king's ability to adapt to the mould of Anglo-Saxon kingship and establish stability by appealing to the established power-structures of his new realm.⁶³ John of Worcester supports this tradition of Cnut's kingship, telling that, in 1017, Cnut, "concluded a treaty with the nobles and the whole people ... confirmed a firm friendship between them with oaths ... and set at rest all their own animosities".⁶⁴ As Bolton has highlighted, Cnut's preferred method of administrative control throughout England was to establish a small contingent of Scandinavian elites above local Anglo-Saxon nobles and administrators who retained their pre-conquest positions.⁶⁵ It can, therefore, be posited that Cnut followed a similar approach in London and it is difficult to argue that Cnut was undertaking a punitive policy by denying citizens access to land grants and rights. To upset the balance of power amongst the city's powerful citizens and institutions by

⁵⁹ Lawson, *Cnut*, p. 66.

⁶⁰ C. P. Lewis, 'Danish Landowners in Wessex in 1066,' in *Danes in Wessex: The Scandinavian Impact on Southern England, c. 800 - c. 1100*, ed. Ryan Lavelle and Simon Roffey (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2016), pp.172 - 211. See particularly pp. 196 - 198 for a summation of his argument.

⁶¹ S 949 - 950, 955 - 956, 960 - 961, 963 - 964, 969 - 972, 974 - 975, 978 - 979, 983, 1642 - 1643, for southern charters. S 949 - 950, 956, 964, 967 - 968, 972 - 975, 977 - 979, 1642 - 1643, for ecclesiastical charters.

⁶² S 978, in consideration of those charters deemed of unquestioned authenticity only.

⁶³ *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ii.181.1.

⁶⁴ *John of Worcester*, 1017.

⁶⁵ Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great*, p. 69.

altering rights and territorial holdings would have been counter to his broader administrative policies and resulted in the disruption of the economic life of the city.⁶⁶ Though the city was garrisoned by Danish troops, Cnut could not have governed such a large and autonomously minded populous by coercion alone, without the support of the London's leaders, and as such, it seems likely that the existing system of city governance was retained.⁶⁷ With this in mind, it seems that the few extant charters are symptomatic of political practicalities and Cnut sought to ensure that whatever punitive measures he would undertake against the city, London remained a vibrant trading port.

Yet London's importance as an economic centre could not insulate it entirely from any retributive action for its resistance to Cnut's conquest. Hill has argued that Cnut, through his "efforts to embellish Winchester as capital", immediately undertook a punitive program to marginalise London's political influence and demonstrate his power over the future of the city.⁶⁸ This view of Cnut's policies toward London is perhaps taking the argument for punitive measures a little far. As a conquering king and an outsider, legitimacy was an important concern for Cnut and, by establishing a court based in the ancient city of the Anglo-Saxon kings of Wessex, Cnut was associating himself with the native dynasty he had displaced, thereby maintaining an illusion of continuity. Cnut's punitive policies are clearer in his demonstrations of juridical, financial and religious power over the city. In order to examine these factors I will examine three events from early in Cnut's reign: the execution of the treacherous Eadric Streona, the levying of a *geld* from London independent of that paid by England collectively, and the translation of the relics of St Ælfheah from London to Canterbury.⁶⁹ These represent the few political events that are firmly set within the city during the early years of Cnut's reign and, as such, all three are frequently referred to in scholarship to establish Cnut's attitude towards the administration of London.⁷⁰ That throughout Cnut's first decade of kingship the chroniclers deemed these three incidents alone of suitable significance to warrant record speaks to the political importance of the events within his reign.

A DEMONSTRATION OF JURIDICAL POWER

The execution of Eadric Streona in 1017 was a political action which was as much practical expedient as juridical demonstration. Eadric was an Ealdorman in the Anglo-

⁶⁶ Pamela Nightingale argues strongly for the increasing importance of London from Cnut's reign and its importance as a political, military and revenue centre throughout the reign of Cnut, Nightingale, 'Court of Husting,' pp. 566 - 570.

⁶⁷ Nightingale, 'Court of Husting,' pp. 563 - 564; Matthew Townend, 'Contextualizing the Knútsdrápur: skaldic praise-poetry at the court of Cnut,' *Anglo-Saxon England* 30 (2001), pp. 167 - 168.

⁶⁸ David Hill, 'An Urban Policy for Cnut?' in *The Reign of Cnut*, ed. Alexander R. Rumble (London: Leicester University Press, 1994), pp. 103 - 104.

⁶⁹ *John of Worcester*, 1017 and Whitelock, ASC, F 1017 for Eadric's execution; Whitelock, ASC, C 1018 for the payment of the *geld*, Osborn, *Translatio* and Whitelock, ASC, D 1023 for the translation of St Ælfheah.

⁷⁰ Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great*, pp. 86 - 88; Hill, 'An Urban Policy,' pp. 103 - 104; Brooke and Keir, *London, 800 - 1216*, p.24; Townend, 'Contextualizing the Knútsdrápur,' p.167.

Saxon territory of Mercia and proved to be a politically problematic figure for both the Anglo-Saxon and Danes. The *Chronicle* records that, at the start of Cnut's campaign in 1015, Eadric was fighting for Æthelred.⁷¹ By the end of the year he was fighting for Cnut. In 1016, after Æthelred's death, Eadric ostensibly returned to the Anglo-Saxon fold, only to betray Æthelred's successor on the field of battle and grant the victory to Cnut.⁷² Throughout the two year campaign, the C-text of the *Chronicle* lays the blame for the betrayal and execution of four rival thegns at Eadric's feet.⁷³ By 1017, having taken control of all England, Cnut divided England into four administrative districts and gave overlordship of Mercia to Eadric. Yet by the end of the year Eadric was executed in London; his king, in the words of John of Worcester, "fear[ing] that someday he would be entrapped by Eadric's treachery, just as Eadric's former lords Æthelred and Edmund".⁷⁴

The political expedient of executing a powerful thegn who had proved himself capable of treachery on numerous occasions is clear. Yet such an execution was not a simple matter of nullifying an individual rival for power. For, to publically execute a powerful thegn, one who had both served and betrayed the previous administration, was to demonstrate both Cnut's juridical power of life and death over his new subjects of all ranks. As such, we must give consideration to the staging of the execution and the message Cnut was providing to his new subjects in doing so. The evidence is that Eadric's execution took place in London with the traitorous thegn executed to the instruction of the intransigent city. The little studied F-text of the *Chronicle* provides the earliest reference to the execution occurring in London and indicates that he was "killed most justly".⁷⁵ The F-text of the *Chronicle* is a late eleventh-century redaction based primarily on the E-text with interpolations from the A-text, neither of which references the execution occurring in London.⁷⁶ This likely reflects an extant tradition present either in local oral narrative or antecedent texts that do not survive, rather than authorial invention; the F-text author was based at Canterbury, in geographical proximity to London and with access to regionally specific sources.⁷⁷ More importantly, the nomination of London as the location of Eadric's execution proved tenacious in later chronicles with no dependency on the F-text.

There is significant variety in the records of Eadric's death. Of note, and the guide in this discussion, is John of Worcester who, writing in the early twelfth-century, was a vociferous critic of the Mercian Ealdorman that "surpassed all men of that time, both in malice and treachery and in arrogance and cruelty".⁷⁸ John reveals that Eadric was executed in London due to Cnut's fears of his inconstant nature, and that Cnut further

⁷¹ Whitelock, *ASC*, C 1015.

⁷² Whitelock, *ASC*, C 1016.

⁷³ Whitelock, *ASC*, C 1015 - 1016, Sigferth and Morcar in 1015, Uhtred and Thurcetel in 1016.

⁷⁴ *John of Worcester*, 1017.

⁷⁵ Charles Plummer, ed., *Two of the Saxons Chronicles Parallel*, F 1017 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), p. 154 (n. 2), my translation from Latin text.

⁷⁶ Whitelock, *ASC*, xvii, E 1017 (especially n. 4).

⁷⁷ Whitelock, *ASC*, xvii.

⁷⁸ *John of Worcester*, 1007.

ordered that Eadric's body be "thrown over the city wall and left unburied".⁷⁹ The publically visible body of the traitor served as an unambiguous warning. William of Malmesbury, writing around the same time as John and from similar sources, goes further than John in his impassioned denunciations of the Mercian.⁸⁰ However, contrary to John, William declares that the act of ensuring that Eadric's "disgusting spirit was transferred to hell" was a private affair and his body disposed of in the Thames.⁸¹ Yet in his vehemence, William's narrative takes on a semblance of hagiographical polemic with which it is difficult to credit any truth without any extant correlating record. The *Encomium Emmae reginae*, our most contemporary account of Eadric's execution, is also a difficult source. Having been commissioned by Emma of Normandy, queen to both Æthelred and Cnut and mother of two kings, it is intended to both praise and absolve the events of her difficult political life.⁸² Nonetheless, in narrating Eadric's death, the *Encomium* does reflect English traditions that Eadric was central to the English defeat and correlates with John's assertion that the execution was a punitive exemplar, though it does not provide a location for the event. The *Encomium* declares that Eadric was beheaded "with a mighty blow, so that soldiers may learn from this example to be faithful, not faithless, to their kings".⁸³ John further records that six other English thegns died alongside Eadric and that they were subjected to the same treatment.⁸⁴ It is evident that this was a political purge, and an implicit visual warning to the citizens of London. The rotting corpses of seven English lords their new king had deemed traitors could leave the citizenry in no doubt of their fate were they to renew hostilities with their Danish overlord.

A DEMONSTRATION OF FINANCIAL POWER

John of Worcester's subsequent entry demonstrates Cnut's continued retributive attitude to the city, for in 1018 the citizenry was required to pay a tribute of £10,500 to the Danish army.⁸⁵ This *geld* was in addition to the £72,000 required from the rest of Cnut's English territories.⁸⁶ In monetary value, this *geld* dwarfed any payment to Scandinavian kings before or after Cnut's reign, and the amount paid by London would be unequalled throughout the medieval period.⁸⁷ As such, it is natural that historians have cast doubt on the veracity of either figure.⁸⁸ In addressing the larger figure, Gillingham posits that the author of the 1018 *Chronicle* entry, as a later redactor, is

⁷⁹ *John of Worcester*, 1017.

⁸⁰ See for example: *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ii.165.9, ii.180.6 - 7.

⁸¹ *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ii.181.1.

⁸² Elizabeth M. Tyler, 'Talking about history in eleventh-century England: the *Encomium Emma Reginae* in the court of Harthacnut,' *Early Medieval Europe* 13 (No. 4, 2005) pp. 359 - 360.

⁸³ *Encomium Emmae reginae*, ii.15.

⁸⁴ *John of Worcester*, 1017.

⁸⁵ *John of Worcester*, 1018; Whitelock, *ASC*, C, D 1018 (E, F erroneously state 11,000 pounds).

⁸⁶ Whitelock, *ASC*, C 1018.

⁸⁷ Nightingale, 'Court of Husting,' pp. 573 - 574.

⁸⁸ See for example: Brooke and Keir, *London, 800 - 1216*, p.24; John Gillingham, "'The Most Precious Jewel in the English Crown": Levels of Danegeld and heregeld in the early eleventh-century,' *English Historical Review* 104 (No. 411, 1989), pp. 383 - 384.

imposing a plausible fiction on the past. Aware of Cnut's reputation for heavy taxation, the chronicler continues the upward trajectory of *geld* amounts imposed throughout the reign of Æthelred into that of Cnut.⁸⁹ On the specific matter of the London *geld*, Gillingham speculates that the chronicler may have mistook a record of an agreement made *in* London for the payment of £10,500 as an agreement *by* London to pay that amount.⁹⁰ Though such assertions are impervious to tangible proof, they are nonetheless logical and plausible. Gillingham is reminding us that the records for Cnut's reign were often written at a temporal or chronological remove, or with a specific ideological focus, and as such they must be read with caution and even scepticism.

Nonetheless, Yorke has asserted that 'the amounts seem feasible in terms of the country's wealth and the amount of coin in circulation' and, in their biographies of Cnut, both Lawson and Bolton, have accepted the veracity of London's £10,500 *geld* without debate.⁹¹ However, Lawson has written extensively on the London *geld* elsewhere, suggesting that the £10,500 has the semblance of a precise figure derived from the pre-conquest Anglo-Saxon administrative system.⁹² He further argues that, given the city's regular resistance to raiders, the *geld* placed on the city reflected the resources the Scandinavians thought it to contain.⁹³ Considering London's role as the kingdom's key trading port and its large minting program, alongside an otherwise unsupported record of a *geld* in 1016 in Thietmar's *Chronicon*, Lawson ultimately declares the £10,500 "squeezed London very hard", but was not "an impossibility".⁹⁴ Gillingham's contrasting exhortation to caution notes that, even in the larger and wealthier London of the late thirteenth-century, the crown could only rely on formal taxation of up to £2,860.⁹⁵ Yet Cnut's one-off *geld* is not commensurate with an established property tax, and the direct payment of the latter by effected citizens has no bearing on the city's collective ability to raise the former. Any direct analysis as to the proportion of the *geld* against either city revenues or set taxation in 1018 would be speculative, the paucity of documentation for Cnut's reign has already been noted. It is likely that London was already supplying a significant amount to the *gelds* raised throughout Æthelred's reign, and London *geld* may simply be the first instance of this in the written record.

That Cnut felt the imposition of such a large tax on his new territories was necessary was a result of his need to reward his conquering army.⁹⁶ As such the tax was at once punitive and practical. While the financial burden on the city must be viewed in part as a retributive act, the specific imposition of such a proportionally large tax on the Londoners also represented the proportionally large effort besieging London required

⁸⁹ Gillingham, 'The Most Precious Jewel,' p. 383.

⁹⁰ Gillingham, 'The Most Precious Jewel,' p. 383 (n. 6).

⁹¹ Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great*, pp. 86 - 87; Lawson, *Cnut*, p. 83; Yorke, *Wessex in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 140 - 141.

⁹² M. K. Lawson, "'Those Stories Look True': Levels of Taxation in the Reigns of Aethelred II and Cnut," *English Historical Review* 104 (No. 411, 1989), pp. 391, 395.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 400.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*; Thietmar of Merseburg, 7.40 (1016).

⁹⁵ Gillingham, 'The Most Precious Jewel,' p. 383 (n. 4).

⁹⁶ Lawson, *Cnut*, p. 83; Lawson, 'Those Stories Look True,' p. 395.

in Cnut's campaign of conquest. Bolton has posited that the *geld* fell foremost on the church in retribution for the clergy's support of Æthelred and, more specifically, the bishop's role in encouraging the resistance in his episcopacy.⁹⁷ There is little evidence to support this view and, though the church undoubtedly provided a portion of the required money, it seems likely that Londoners, as a theoretical economic community, were made to pay collectively for their intransigence. Which is to suppose, not unreasonably, that by 1018 Cnut had an understanding of the economic wealth in which the city's power was based, which was not merely invested in the church. It also supports the idea presented by Lawson that Cnut came to the kingship with an impression of the city's wealth from past Scandinavian raiding experiences.⁹⁸ That there is no record of resistance to the collection of the *geld seama* to indicate that both the king and the city felt the amount was payable. It is unlikely that Cnut would have imposed a *geld* that risked inciting an uprising in the city that had so successfully held out against him in 1016. This line of reasoning brings us to the conclusion that the *geld* was not intended only as a punishment or a financial expedient, rather it was a tool to proactively arrest London's ability to resist Danish rule. To once more quote Lawson, £10,500 "squeezed London very hard", but it was payable. The amount was significantly high in order to damage the city's ability to finance rebellion, but not so high as to cripple the entrepreneurial ventures of the city's merchant elites.

A DEMONSTRATION OF RELIGIOUS POWER

This is not to say that the London church was not a target for Cnut's punitive measures, for the church was certainly an integral part of the community that had resisted Cnut's kingship. Yet it was in targeting the symbols of power of the London episcopacy that Cnut evidently saw the greatest potential for the re-ignition of the city's hostilities. In 1023, Cnut determined to translate the relics of the martyred Archbishop Ælfheah to Canterbury, the seat of Ælfheah's archbishopric.⁹⁹ The motivation was fourfold. First, through the practice of pilgrimage, relics were a source of income to a church and by relocating the cult of Ælfheah to Canterbury, Cnut was removing a revenue stream from the London bishopric.¹⁰⁰ Secondly, the circumstance of Ælfheah's death meant that his cult was necessarily anti-Scandinavian. This made the saint's cult a natural rallying point for a city already inclined toward resistance to Danish rule; Cnut's removal of Ælfheah's relics removed this focal point.¹⁰¹ Thirdly, the choice of Ælfheah's new home will have been seen as a respectful nod to his status in life as Archbishop of Canterbury. Cnut's professed dedication and respect allowed the cult to be appropriated by the King, reorienting it to a more Cnut-friendly footing, if not

⁹⁷ Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great*, pp. 86 - 87.

⁹⁸ Lawson, 'Those Stories Look True,' p. 382.

⁹⁹ Whitelock, *ASC*, D 1023.

¹⁰⁰ Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great*, p. 87.

¹⁰¹ Alexander R. Rumble, 'From Winchester to Canterbury: Ælfheah and Stigand - Bishops, Archbishops and Victims,' in *Leaders of the Anglo-Saxon Church: From Bede to Stigand*, ed. Alexander R. Rumble (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012), pp. 171 - 172.

necessarily a Scandinavian-friendly footing.¹⁰² Lastly, we must not lose sight that both the removal of revenue and the appropriation of the cult coalesce in Cnut's continued desire to enact "political gestures of potency" over the city.¹⁰³ It is unlikely that such inimical gestures will have gone unnoticed by the citizens and, according to Osbern's *Translatio Sancti Ælfegi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi et matiris*, Cnut had to plan the removal of the saint's body with the precision of a military campaign for fear of aggressive resistance by the Londoners.¹⁰⁴

Yet there is a duality in the presentation of the translation narrative. Osbern informs us that Cnut sent his Danish troops to the gates of the city to provide diversions and set others to guard "the bridge" and the banks of the Thames "so that the people of London would not be able to stand in the ways of those leaving with the saint's body".¹⁰⁵ He further records the reaction of the serving archbishop, who had been called by Cnut to London, upon hearing the king's intent:

Let Almighty God not blame you, my Lord King, for wishing to do this and for not telling me the purpose of your mind, so that I might have come better equipped and better prepared for it all, lest I should be cut down and die in the middle of such a great city.¹⁰⁶

However, these representations of a city prepared for revolt do not have a bearing upon the moral rectitude of the *dramatis personae*. Cnut's act, couched in terms of a vision from the saint, is enacted with the aid of miraculous feats of strength and upon arrival in Canterbury the citizens run in joy to greet their "father in life and companion in death".¹⁰⁷ This attitude to the translation as a just act is similarly presented in our companion sources, the *Chronicle*, John of Worcester and William of Malmesbury.¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, it is probable that the removal of Ælfheah's relics from London was a punitive measure.¹⁰⁹ The reasons for Cnut relocating the saint's cult to Canterbury are logical and compelling. That these motivations are mixed in with hagiographical rhetoric means the increased difficulty of the act bestows both enhanced power on the saint and evidences the sanctity of the participants. The details of the translation recorded in the *Translatio Sancti Ælfegi* are not elsewhere independently attested, with other sources simply noting that Ælfheah's relics were removed to Canterbury without embellishment. Yet it remains that, whether or not the citizens of London intended to resist Cnut's decision to move the remains, it was nonetheless a political act motivated by Cnut's desire to impose his rule on the city.

¹⁰² Lawson, *Cnut*, p. 140 - 141.

¹⁰³ Townend, 'Contextualizing the Knútsdrápur,' p.167.

¹⁰⁴ Osbern, *Translatio*, T.3 - T.6.

¹⁰⁵ Osbern, *Translatio*, T.4.

¹⁰⁶ Osbern, *Translatio*, T.6.

¹⁰⁷ Osbern, *Translatio*, T.2, T.7 - T.8.

¹⁰⁸ *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ii.181.5; *John of Worcester*, 1023; Whitelock, *ASC*, D 1023.

¹⁰⁹ See for example: Hill, 'An Urban Policy,' p. 103; Lawson, *Cnut*, p. 140 - 141; Rumble, 'From Winchester to Canterbury,' pp. 171 - 172; Townend, 'Contextualizing the Knútsdrápur,' p.167.

CONCLUSION

The translation of Ælfheah's relics in 1023 seems to have been among Cnut's final depredations of the Londoners. Subsequently, a charter that has been noted was promulgated to reaffirm the holdings of St Paul's, and a writ of the 1030's confirmed its financial and juridical rights.¹¹⁰ A decade after conquering England it seems that Cnut understood himself to hold enough authority with the people of London to once again allow its enterprising citizens to forge their own way. It is worth reiterating that it was not in Cnut's interest that the economic life of his new kingdom's foremost city be crushed by punitive repression. Cnut's selected methods of didactic retribution seem to have been calculated to punish, but not cripple. The execution of Eadric, the removal of Ælfheah's remains and the levying of the *geld* were all repressive exemplars, and the latter two were undoubtedly financially disruptive, yet none stopped the city's operations as an economic and political centre.

Cnut, Æthelred and London itself had all understood the intrinsic importance of the city to England's prosperity and rule. As both an economic and population centre unrivalled elsewhere in the country, the city was a critical holding for both the Anglo-Saxon king and the Danish king. Yet the power and autonomy that the population and wealth engendered allowed London to forge its own way in what were perceived to be its best interests. Indeed, for all Cnut's endeavour, he never conquered the city through siege and it was, in each instance, the decision of the city to capitulate that placed it at the Danish king's mercy. Cnut's success in bringing England into his Anglo-Scandinavian empire was not to be foreseen and, given London's dogged resistance to the Viking raiders of earlier times, it is understandable that the Londoners sought to hold out against yet another invading army. Yet Cnut could not allow the city to exert such oppositional autonomy and, in the early years of his reign, Cnut sought to break that autonomy without breaking balance of power in the kingdom's burgeoning economic centre of power. Cnut's demonstrations of political power over London were facilitated through his juridical, tax and religious policies in the city. None of the resultant events seemed to destabilise the city and there is no noted instance where, after 1016, the city ever rose up in opposition to Cnut's punitive policies. Whether the city was cowed by the retributions pursued in the Danish king's early years, or determined to preserve its pre-eminence through a semblance of compliance, Cnut seemed satisfied by the comportment of the Londoners and began the move toward conciliatory policies. Yet despite all of Cnut's activity, the intrinsic character of the city remained unchanged. At Cnut's death in 1035, London remained as it had been in 1016: an independently minded city, an economic centre of power, and determined to write its own destiny.

¹¹⁰ S 978, S 992. S 992 holds some anachronistic properties, however is likely a copy of an earlier document, Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great*, p. 88.

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