1998

Eadric Streona :: a critical biography/

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EADRIC STREONA: A CRITICAL BIOGRAPHY

A Thesis Presented

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CHAPTER I

EADRICH STREONA: AN INTRODUCTION

Within the pages of history there exist no more than a handful of characters sufficiently heinous to merit inclusion in the inner circle of the guild of villainhood. Each nation has its assortment of workaday rogues and recreants who at some time or another have blotted the official record with vicious deeds; the character, however, of the ideal evildoer, remains above the disapproving marks of the chronicler and resides in the intangible realm of legend. Several such figures have from time to time held the imagination of post-conquest England, including George Villiers, the duke of Buckingham, the Gascon freebooter Piers Gaveston, and King Richard III. The Anglo-Saxon age, however, can lay claim to only one character whose perceived depredations rank with these monsters of English tradition. That man is Eadric Streona.

Although the slings and arrows of historians throughout the ages have been aimed squarely at this eleventh-century Mercian ealdorman, Eadric does not have a grip on the English mind commensurate with that of the maligned figures of post-1066 England, perhaps only because he lived in an era that, save for a brief recrudescence in the Victorian Age, holds a lesser station in the historical tradition and popular interest of the English people. While eighteenth-century matrons used even the pope as a bogeyman to frighten recalcitrant children into submission, one would be hard-pressed to find the
name "Eadric Streona" being deployed in a similar manner.\(^1\) The mere passage of time serves only partly to explain this circumstance.

Over the centuries, post-conquest England prodigiously manufactured new reprobates more relevant to the spirit of the age. The quiescence of the evil legend of this ealdorman of the Mercians, however, has led to one further wrong -- no modern historian has fully attempted to rehabilitate Eadric, or even to construct a rational political and social context for his turbulent career as one of England's greatest officials of the immediate pre-conquest era. Modern works, while managing to mellow the febrile condemnations of Eadric written in the decades following his death, still say in a dispassionately erudite, academic manner what Eadric's many enemies were saying in the Dark Ages: that Eadric's unmitigated and consistent treachery was directly responsible for the fall of the House of Wessex in favor of the House of Gorm the viking.\(^2\)

E. A. Freeman, in his quest to exhibit the heroes and villains of early England, characterized Eadric, as have most historians before or since, as the ideal, yet incomprehensible, villain. "The history of Eadric," Freeman declared in his *History of the Norman Conquest*,

is simply a catalogue of treasons as unintelligible as those of his predecessor. Why a man who had just risen to the highest possible pitch of greatness, son-in-law of his sovereign and viceroy of an ancient Kingdom, should immediately ally himself with the enemies of his King and country, is one of those facts which are utterly incomprehensible. Our best authorities for this period, . . . those least given to exaggeration or romantic embellishment, distinctly assert that

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\(^2\)In this essay I will use the term "viking" with a lower-case "v", except in cases when the Norsemen are mentioned in a context that is particularly "Viking", as tradition would have it, such as in piracy, looting, plundering, rape, etc.
it was so, and we have no evidence or reasonable suspicion to the contrary.3

A reconstruction of the political context and social attitudes of the late Anglo-Saxon era, nevertheless, may be drawn from contemporary sources of political history, such as annals, charters, and royal laws, as well as from literature, poetry, and homily. Through the exploitation of these sources one may explain, and at times vindicate, the opprobrious reputation of the most-maligned character in Anglo-Saxon history.

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CHAPTER II

EALDORMAN EADRIC, CIRCA 975-1016

His Origins and Social Position in Anglo-Saxon England

Into a modest Shropshire family Eadric was born in a tenth-century world riven both by the Anglo-Danish ambivalence that resulted from the military gains of the immediate descendants of King Alfred and the political vicissitudes that accompanied the sometimes ill-advised rule of the generations that followed. The energetic decades prior to Eadric's birth had witnessed the strengthening of both monasticism and monarchical authority, but underneath both the superficial political unity that resulted from the West Saxon reconquest of the Danelaw and the relative calm of the reign of King Edgar "The Peaceable," there lay a foundation of disgrace, intrigue, and treason among the fighting classes, and pro-Nordic separatist tendencies among the shire-bound commoners of Northumbria and of Eadric's own home Mercia. Aristocratic conduct, furthermore, was still ideally governed by the same heroic strictures of valor, revenge, honesty, loyalty, and hospitality that were thought to have guided the actions of the followers of Hengest and Horsa at the dawn of the Saxon age. The detractors of Eadric often applied charges of violating these codes of behavior to illustrate Eadric's unfitness in the post of ealdorman. Eadric of Mercia, however, unlike King Æthelred and the numerous other high-ranking schemers and traitors of the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, was born no nobleman, and that very fact explains some of the vituperation and malice that is used to characterize this obscure figure, who, with breathtaking speed, rose to the upper ranks of the Anglo-Saxon political hierarchy.
In a time of the increasing power of the greats and the declining status of
the ceorl in England, Eadric was born into a midland family of presumably
middling status. His father, a certain Æthelric, signed several of the charters of
Oswald, bishop of Worcester and archbishop of York, under the unimposing
titles diaconus, monachus, and clericus. Further suggesting Eadric's humble
origins, nothing is known about his mother, Wynflaed, incidentally mentioned
in the 1015 will of Ætheling Æthelstan. One can also posit that Eadric was of
English blood, and not Nordic, for both his parents possessed Saxon names.

The first credible mention of Æthelric's rising son is found in a 991
charter of Archbishop Oswald, in which three hides of land comprising
holdings in Talton and Newbold were granted to the prelate's "faithful thegn"
Eadric. Oswald, even before acceding to the title of Archbishop of York in
992, was instrumental in advancing the political aspirations of his followers in
Worcestershire. Wulfgeat, the son of similarly obscure Leofsy, by 1006 had
become a prominent Mercian and royal favorite, starting his climb to
prominence as a simple cniht of Bishop Oswald, as seen in a charter from the
mid-970s. Certainly, Eadric's background was not of the basest order, given
that his father, however unimpressive his titles, did after all sign the charters of
the bishop of his home area. One must not assign too much cachet to his
signing of the charters, however, since Æthelric's geographic proximity to

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1 John M. Kemble, *Codex Diplomaticus Ævi Saxonici*, vol. 3. (orig. pub. 1845, reprint, Vaduz: Kraus
Reprint, Ltd., 1964), DCXII-DCLXXXIII, passim.
XX.
4 Ibid., LVI; Dorothy Whitelock, David Douglas, and Susie Tucker, eds., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*
(New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1961), sub anno 1006; Florence of Worcester,
*Florentii Wigorniensis Monachi Chronicex Chronicis*, ed. Benjamin Thorpe, vol. 1 (London:
English Historical Society, 1848), 158.
Bishop Oswald made him a more convenient clericus in signing charters than the slew of other obscure and unnoticed clerici throughout the see.

Before the advent of the Cistercian order in the later middle ages, monks often could not satisfactorily cultivate their own lands to satisfy their own agricultural needs. Monastic communities, especially those with large land holdings, therefore found it economically efficient to lease lands to individuals to facilitate the prompt receipt of food-rents or church dues. Bishop Oswald effected, during his episcopate at Worcester, what became the monastic prototype for the leasing of church lands to maximize the economic production of ecclesiastical property. Sir Frank Stenton, along with "most commentators," asserts that the tenth-century leases of Oswald, of which Eadric was one recipient, modeled the obligations of the lessee on those of the geneat, the "peasant aristocrat" of Anglo-Saxon England. It is clear from the multitude of surviving lease charters that the recipients of Oswald's church lands were not burdened with menial or degrading tasks; those sorts of chores, in fact, were delegated to lesser peasants or slaves. The only surviving written enumeration of the duties of the geneat in late Anglo-Saxon England comes from the generation prior to the Norman conquest. The Rectitudines Singularum Personarum defined the geneat as the highest order of free peasantry, possessing a touch of the qualities of a mounted retainer. Based

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6 Ibid., 484, 472.
7 The Rectitudines Singularum Personarum outlined the position of the geneat as: "Geneat-right is various according to what is fixed in respect of the estate: in some he must pay rent and contribute a pasturage swine a year, ride and perform carrying service and furnish means of carriage, work and entertain his lord, reap and mow, cut deer hedges and keep up places from which deer may be shot, build and fence the lord's house, bring strangers to the village, pay church dues and alms money, act as guard to his lord, take care of the horses, and carry messages far and near wheresoever he is directed." David Douglas and George W. Greenaway, eds., English Historical Documents, 1042-1189, 2d ed. (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1968), 813. Bishop Oswald explains his objectives in his lease-granting in a letter (circa-964) to King Edgar found in Walter De Gray Birch, Cartularium Saxonicum, vol. 3 (London: Charles J. Clark, 1893), MCXXXVI.
upon this evidence, therefore, one can say with reasonable assurance that Eadric was not born of the warrior caste (due to the status of his family), but nevertheless was part of the upper reaches of the peasantry, as defined in the leases of Oswald along the lines of the still-respectable *geneat*.

In the agricultural, aristocratic society that England was throughout most of its history, the greatest social cleavage was that between the warrior and the peasant. The best way, therefore, to gauge in what regard the elites of Anglo-Saxon England held those of Eadric's non-warrior social class is through an examination of the evolution of the social status of the largest class of peasant, the ceorls. The eighth-century societal divisions of the Venerable Bede -- those who fought, those who prayed, and those who worked -- still held true in the tenth-century midlands; but the status of "those who worked" had been in nearly continual decline since the first Teutonic infiltrators entered Britain in the fifth century. Conversely, the status of "those who fought" rose a great deal in social and pecuniary importance in the centuries since the dark forests resounded with the spear-clapping *comitatus* first described by the tendentious Roman historian Tacitus. From the sixth-century laws of Æthelbert of Kent, it is seen that those free peasants who tilled the land formed the much-romanticized sturdy backbone of Anglo-Saxon society, answering to no man save the king himself. Sir Frank Stenton has posited, furthermore, that the circumstances of the Teutonic migration to Britain disrupted any structure of

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8Stenton, _Anglo-Saxon England_, 88.
9Chapter 6 of the laws of Æthelbert stated that "If a man slays a free man, he shall pay 50 shillings to the king for an infraction of his seignorial rights [to drihtinbeage]." Attenborough asserts that this "drihtinbeage" was a "Payment due to a lord for the loss of *one of his men*" (my italics). In any case, no intermediary parties, such as noblemen, are mentioned in this law, thus implying that in the early social structure of Kent, the free peasant was indeed one of the king's men. The remaining laws of Æthelbert are peppered throughout with explicit details of the free peasant's rights over his home, property (including slaves and maidens), and body (including the power of speech and genitals). F.L. Attenborough, ed. and trans., _The Laws of the Earliest English Kings_ (orig. pub. 1922, reprint, New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1963), 4-5, 175n.
non-royal authority among the new settlers of the fifth and sixth centuries, thus allowing for this rather secure and thoroughly respectable position of the free, non-noble, peasant in early Anglo-Saxon society. In fact, it was not uncommon for the Kentish eorls of this early era to possess slaves for their own households.

As this victorious society developed on the former lands of the vanquished British, however, the class hierarchy emerged (or re-emerged), and the distinctions between a non-royal warrior aristocracy and the non-noble free peasant rapidly ossified. As seen in the late seventh-century laws of King Ine of Wessex, for instance, the aristocratic element in English society had begun to achieve greater prominence in an increasingly complex stratification of class. In the preamble to Ine's laws of circa 690, for example, reference is made not only to the bishops of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, but also to the "ealdormen," a "great concourse of the servants of God," and the "chief councillors of my people." By the time of King Ecgbert of Wessex in the first quarter of the ninth century, the royal granting of vast lands to this aristocratic class and to the church through charters was already a common practice. This alienation of land formerly held by royal "folk-right" through the new device of the charter further served to devalue the status of those free peasants who tilled the land. What was once "folkland" held by the king became "bocland," held by an intermediate party through the artifice of letters. Consequently, those attached to the land (and thus theoretically to the royal house) now were under

10Stenton, Anglo-Saxon England, 304.
12Stenton, Anglo-Saxon England, 278.
14Stenton, Anglo-Saxon England, 301.
the jurisdiction of someone else of subregal authority, who himself answered to
the king.

The increasing severity of the Viking incursions starting in the mid-
ninth century and the gradual reconquest of the Danelaw under the banner of
the house of Wessex exacerbated the decline in the status of the commoner.
Due to the mayhem and slaughter in England and the consequent militarization
of society first to defend against and then to subdue the Norse interlopers, not
only was the aristocratic warrior ethos further exalted, but, on a more practical
note, more of the folk-land of the traditional ceorl became subsumed in the
demesne of the territorial noblemen who were best able to defend against and
wage war upon the would-be northern colonizers.\textsuperscript{15} This reinforcement of the
lord's authority over those who worked the land is best attested to during the
English conquest of the Danelaw, in the laws of King Æthelstan. One law
concerning "lordless men from whom no [legal] satisfaction can be obtained,"
required their relatives "to settle them in a fixed residence . . . and find them a
lord . . . ."\textsuperscript{16} If the uncommitted man, however, was not found a lord at the
meeting, the first sub-heading of the law reads, "he shall be henceforth an
outlaw, and he who encounters him may assume him to be a thief and kill
him."\textsuperscript{17} This blunt proscription indeed was symbolic of the degradation of the
Anglo-Saxon commoner and the concurrent exaltation of those set over him.

Both the innovation of \textit{bocland} and the insecurity propagated by the
Danish disturbances depressed what was once the backbone of free Anglo-
Saxon society into a state where the peasant, if completely "free" and not
commended to any particular man, would be subject to death as an outlaw -- as

\begin{footnotes}
\item[16] Attenborough, \textit{Laws}, 129.
\item[17] ibid.
\end{footnotes}
if by upholding his six-century rights as a tiller of the soil, he would somehow be "stealing" from the prerogatives of the tenth-century wielders of the sword. This is not to say that social mobility was entirely impossible. There were cases of individuals, through their own work or fortune, who had either "thriven to thegn-right" or thence "thriven to eorl-right," but one formidable obstacle remained: that of ancestry. As the eminent historian William Stubbs proclaimed, "the ceorl may attain to thegn-right and yet his children to the third generation will not be gesithcund." And for those luckless enough not even to have hurdles the barriers of wealth, things were even harsher. Due to the social changes outlined above, by the tenth century the landless ceorl, in Stubbs's learned opinion, was scant more than a slave.

Vernacular evidence, which serve as living examples of many a development in medieval English social history, further evince the decline of ceorl status. In the generation before the Norman conquest, the once-respectable label of "ceorl" had already sunk into the degraded station that it still occupies. Gone were the days when the appellation was applied to kings and nobles such as Ceorl, the early seventh-century king of Mercia who married his daughter to the great Edwin of Northumbria, or the like-named ealdorman of Devon whom the Parker chronicle describes as having defended his shire against the vikings at the very outset of the escalation of Norse hostility in England. Instead, churl, the modern derivation of the term

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19 Ibid., 87.
"ceorl," now denotes not a neo-Jeffersonian yeoman farmer, but rather something of a clod. This is similar to the devaluation of the status of the geneat from the dawn of Saxon settlement to the Norman usurpation. The Old English term geneat literally means "companion," and there is much evidence, as in the case of the ceorl, that the geneat held a higher position in sixth-century Anglo-Saxon society than the eleventh. On the other hand, the term "earl" rings with as much, or even more, prestige today than it did in Eadric's era. The product of a tenth-century marriage between a shadowy West-Mercian diaconus and an obscure Englishwoman who, if written records are any indicator, moved within the milieu of the "silent masses," while not being strictly a son of the "ceorl" class, definitely was not of the ruling warrior class either.

The value of high birth among the warrior elite in the later Anglo-Saxon era is clearly shown in the poem The Battle of Maldon. When pressed by a Viking assault, one of the harried heroes, Ælfwine, exclaimed:

Now it may be proved which of us is bold! I will make known my lineage to all, how I was born in Mercia of a great race. Ealhhelm was my grandfather called, a wise ealdorman, happy in the world's goods. Thegns shall have no cause to reproach me among my people . . . .

Because of the structural factors in English society whose roots lie as far back as the 600s, therefore, the child of Æthelric suffered the stigma of his non-noble birthright for the rest of time. Unlike the proud Ælfwine of Maldon, Eadric could not even claim descent from a prominent father, much less a noble grandfather. The first, therefore, of the countless denunciations leveled against Eadric of Mercia is that the Shropshire magnate was wholly and inexorably

guilty of "the high crime of low birth." His fellow midlander and greatest detractor, Florence of Worcester, derided him in a manner we usually find endearing when applied to modern figures, in writing that Eadric "was a man, indeed, of low origin."24

While Eadric was still a child, the great landed families of England were busily consolidating power and property during the outwardly tranquil reign of Edgar the Peaceable, often appropriating the king's primary policy of monastic re-establishment to shroud their motives. The tenth century witnessed the nascence of the aggregation of several shires under the same earl. Such was the case with Æthelstan, whose vast holdings lent him the appellation of "Half-King." This trend continued throughout the Anglo-Saxon era, often with royal approbation, such as Canute's creation of the office of earl as something of a "provincial vice-regent" rather than as just the lord of a simple shire.25 Furthermore, the stronger kings of the tenth and eleventh centuries, such as Edgar and Canute, managed to increase royal authority over the realm and the witenagemot, thus in effect competing with the contemporaneous power consolidation of the landed magnates. Instances of newer and direct royal vassalage increased during this period. Powerful and well-respected kings were able more or less to contain the grumbling of the great landed aristocracy at the extension of royal administrative power and the creation of "new men." Weak, young, or incompetent kings, such as Edward II, Æthelred II, and Edward the Confessor, however, could not manage this and carping and rivalry often ensued between the "court thegns" of the royal household and the great magnates in the shires. This rivalry of status sometimes even led to murder, as

23Green, Conquest, 383.
in the third decade of Æthelred's reign, when Ealdorman Leofsige of Essex slew the "king's high reeve" while on a royally-sponsored diplomatic mission. The king became "so incensed" at this yet another aristocratic swipe against the royal court's authority, that he banished the offending nobleman "from the country." In the reign of Edward the Confessor, the violent rivalry was personified on the aristocratic side by the rise and subsequent agitation of the house of Godwine, and during the closing phase of the long and unsteady reign of Æthelred II, this noble animosity toward the king's men was directed toward the high royal confidant of high-peasant birth, Eadric of Mercia.

Eadric's Rise to Power

Before going any further in defining Eadric's background, social status, and the various charges leveled against him throughout the centuries, his actual rise to prominence in the court of Æthelred must be described. As before mentioned, and seen in the charter evidence, Eadric's ascendancy through the political ranks of Mercia most likely was facilitated by the great champion of monastic revival, Oswald, bishop of Worcester and archbishop of York, just as the prelate sponsored Wulfgeat, Mercia's royal favorite prior to Eadric. Even after death of Oswald, Eadric perhaps had a working relationship with a subsequent archbishop of York, Wulfstan. Eadric and Wulfstan both attest a charter of Æthelstan in 1006. In that same year, as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (C) attests, Wulfgeat of Mercia (a man whom Florence of Worcester

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26Whitelock, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, sub anno 1002.
27Florence of Worcester, Chronicon ex Chronicis, 155-56.
described as the king's "principal favorite") was "deprived of all his property." That the thegn lost his entire estate implied the official sanction of the witenagemot in Wulfgeat's degradation. In the next year, Eadric "was appointed ealdorman over the kingdom of the Mercians," and shortly thereafter, this son of the midlands married King Æthelred's young daughter Eadgyth.

Family and blood relations were still considered sacrosanct in late Anglo-Saxon England, as they are in most agnatic societies, and Eadric became a kinsman of the monarch upon his 1007 marriage. This an example of the insecure king's policy of marrying his daughters to prospective allies in order to create new royal kinsmen to dilute the power of the traditional landed aristocracy. It is not clear whether Eadric's rise to the king's confidence resulted immediately in the hysterics that occur in the retrospective accounts of the medieval chroniclers, but it does make practical sense that the arrival of a "new man" late in the reign of any head of state alienates those who have been involved in government for any length of time; and in 1007, Æthelred had been king for twenty-nine years. The arrival of a young, brash upstart from the provinces at this late point in the reign would of course pique many of the nobles from older families who had been waiting quite a while for their own chance to profit from or to betray the feckless king.

In an age branded by the 1014 *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* as one in which "a kinsman does not protect a kinsman any more than a stranger," Eadric himself

34Whitelock, *EHD*, 856.
was loyal to his own family, remaining true to the old Anglo-Saxon importance
of kinship represented in the law of Æthelstan that declared one must seek a
lord for one's brother or find a home for him.\textsuperscript{35} In the aftermath of his elevation
to the post of ealdorman, it is apparent that Eadric found "homes" for his
brothers, for they began appearing in the witness lists of King Æthelred's
charters.\textsuperscript{36} Furthermore, these brothers became sufficiently prominent in
national affairs to merit mention in the chronicle of Florence. Indeed, the
Eadric-hating Florence castigated Bithric with almost the same vehemence he
reserves for Eadric, calling him "an unctuous man, ambitious, and proud."\textsuperscript{37}
Simon Keynes, in his extensive study of the diplomas of King Æthelred,
concluded that "members of Eadric's family were indeed in fairly frequent
attendance at meetings of the witan in the second half of Æthelred's reign."\textsuperscript{38}
Of course, Eadric's familial solicitude, under the above theory that aristocratic
jealousy increases in each passing year of a long monarchical reign, served to
aggravate the enmity of the ancient landed families of England. If one royal
favorite of "low birth" was condemned with such opprobrium, what would the
landed magnates think of three or four of the upstart's likewise "low-born" yet
ambitious brothers meddling in the affairs of the crown?

Amazingly swift was his rise to official prominence in the king's court,
but Eadric prepared for the attainment of his ealdormanry with the sort of
fortitude, loyalty, and prior planning that never comes through in the sparse
entries of the Saxon chronicle. To earn his earldom, Eadric had to commit the

\textsuperscript{35} Æthelstan, cap. 2 declared that "Their relatives shall be commanded to settle them in a fixed
residence...and find them a lord...." Attenborough, \textit{Laws}, 129.
\textsuperscript{36}Simon Keynes, \textit{The Diplomas of King Æthelred the Unready}, 978-1016 (Cambridge: Cambridge
\textsuperscript{37}Bithric is described as "...homo lubricus, ambitiosus, et superbus...." Florence of Worcester,
\textit{Chronicon ex Chronicis}, 160.
\textsuperscript{38}Keynes, \textit{The Diplomas of King Æthelred}, 212-213.
first of many non-noble deeds on behalf of his "non-advised" king that bore out every bit of what Florence disparagingly described as his "subtle genius . . . malice . . . perfidy . . . and cruelty."39 Among the various misfortunes so common in the Chronicle record of Eadric's day, the Deiran Ælfhelm, the ealdorman of Northumbria, was described having been "ofslagen" (killed).40 No mention of Eadric's complicity is recorded in this, the record written closest to the time of the death. Many later medieval chroniclers are likewise silent on the circumstances of this death, save for Roger of Wendover, who, in his vigor to condemn Eadric's participation, confused almost every name and relationship involved, and the usually reliable Florence of Worcester, who can be depended on to blame the "subtle genius" for anything possible within the realm of earthly reason.41 Whether Eadric actually was involved in the demise of Ealdorman Ælfhelm remains a debated topic. Sir Frank Stenton, in his magisterial Anglo-Saxon England, chooses to absolve Eadric of guilt, arguing that the esteemed chronicler of Worcester gets a bit carried away from time to time in writing about Eadric.42 When Florence's account is compared with the evidence found in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (C), however, Eadric's involvement in the murder becomes clear.

What we know from the entry under the year 1006 was that after June of that year, a great Danish army landed in southern England and proceeded to ravage the countryside of Wessex and Kent until well after the coming of winter. Coming hot on the heels of the devastating famine of 1005, this

40 Plummer, Two Saxon Chronicles Parallel, MS E, sub anno 1006. The same events are described in MSS C and D of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.
41 See Roger of Wendover, Flores Historiarum, vol. 1. Rolls Series. ed. Henry Richards Luard (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1890), 529. The entry has Eadric invite "Ethelstan" to his doom, whereafter King Æthelred, in revenge for this deed, has Eadric's own two sons blinded.
42 Stenton, Anglo-Saxon England, 382n.
widespread Viking plundering, burning, and procuring "for themselves everywhere whatever they needed," had dire consequences for the sufficiency of the English countryside.\textsuperscript{43} King \AE{}thelred, having this time chosen to fight rather than to appease the marauders with bribes, commanded "the whole nation from Wessex and Mercia to be called out." These defensive measures, however, availed the Saxons naught, and \AE{}thelred once again assented to collect tribute and supplies for the Vikings in exchange for peace.\textsuperscript{44}

This decision was made, as the \textit{Anglo-Saxon Chronicle} intimates, while the king was collecting his own Christmas food-rents "into Scrobbesbyrig scire."\textsuperscript{45} Shropshire, with its principal city of Shrewsbury, was also the home of the rising Eadric Streona. Florence describes how Eadric "prepared a great entertainment at Shrewsbury" to which \AE{}lhelm of Northumbria was invited. Eadric, after providing the unsuspecting ealdorman with hospitality for a few days, had \AE{}lhelm dispatched (according to Florence) by a "ruffian of Shrewsbury" named "Godwine Port-Hund," who ambushed the noble Northumbrian during a hunting expedition.\textsuperscript{46} This killing is rendered even more foul in the eyes of contemporary Anglo-Saxons, for, as the laws of III \AE{}thelred imply, the woods were regarded "as a place of secret crime."\textsuperscript{47} While assassinations during the course of forest hunting expeditions and the distrust of urban roughnecks are strong traditions in western legend, \AE{}lhelm nevertheless did wind up dead in a shire where both King \AE{}thelred and Eadric were residing at the time.

\textsuperscript{43} Whitelock, \textit{Anglo-Saxon Chronicle}, sub anno 1006.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{45} Plummer, \textit{Two Saxon Chronicles Parallel}, MS E, sub anno 1006.
\textsuperscript{46} Florence of Worcester, \textit{Chronicon ex Chronicis}, 158.
\textsuperscript{47} A. J. Robertson, ed. and trans., \textit{The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I} (Cambridge: University Press, 1925), 322n.16. The explanation refers to III \AE{}thelred c. 16, which concerned surreptitious "moneyers who work in a wood. . . ."
This heinous deed, of course, while probably having received royal encouragement, violated one of the central tenets of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy: that of hospitality. This philosophy of hospitality as it stems from the age of migrations is mirrored in the gnomic verse of the viking north, in the Hāvamál, the "Sayings of the High One" (Odin). This Poetic Edda comprising 164 stanzas survives today in a manuscript from the thirteenth century, but scholars agree that even after having undergone several recensions, it yet preserves much of the heathen tradition of the pre-literate North. It shares, therefore, much the same background with and contains many of the same sentiments whence the Anglo-Saxons derived their own culture. As for hospitality, the Hāvamál instructed the audience that a "guest needs water, towel, and a welcome, a warm word if he can get it, and the right sort of entertainment." Certainly, this "right sort of entertainment" does not include the murder of one's guest. That is, however, exactly what happened with the guests of Eadric in both 1006 and later in his career, and goes to show how Eadric's actions, while undertaken with the complicity of the monarch and the witenagemot, breached not just the letter of the law, but also the sensibilities of his age.

Another literary example of the virtues of hospitality is found in the Danish Knytlinga Saga, a thirteenth-century Icelandic history of the kings of Denmark quite similar to, if not as acclaimed as the Heimskringla of Snorri Sturlason, the Icelandic historian who wrote the legendary history of the kings of Norway. Both works extensively treat England during the tenth and eleventh centuries, and the chapter on the origins of Earl Godwine in the

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49Ibid., 351.
Knytlinga Saga, while of dubious historical value, does bear out the perceived virtues of hospitality. Presumably set in 1016 after the Battle of Sherston, this tale finds one of Canute's lieutenants, Earl Ulf Sveinsson of Denmark, lost deep in the Sussex forests of the enemy after nightfall. This viking soon encountered young Godwine, who, being well aware of the identity of the lost soldier, still takes him to the family's "fine, well-furnished farmhouse . . . ." There Godwine's parents "welcomed their guest warmly," and the Dane "spent the rest of the day enjoying the best of hospitality." This kind deed consequently brought Godwine to the attention of Canute, who later made the honest Sussex lad an earl. Thus, at least as the legend goes, Godwine earned his earldom as a direct result of his hospitality. Eadric, on the other hand, acceded to his post after an egregious violation of it.

Concerning the immediate aftermath of Eadric's ignorance of his proper duties as a host, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle states that "Wulfheah and Ufegeat were blinded." What the annals do not mention is that both of these men were the sons of Ælfhelm of Northumbria. Florence added that the blinding was done "by Æthelred's orders" shortly following the removal of Ælfhelm. Royal sanction for the sons' blinding is found, in much the same manner as for the father's dispatch, in the fact that the deed was done at Cosham, the royal estate in Buckinghamshire where at the time King Æthelred was visiting.

These two luckless sons and their ill-fated father were furthermore mentioned in the will of Wulfric Spot, a nobleman who had died in 1002. In the bequest of this prominent landholder, the lands between the Ribble and Mersey rivers were willed to Ælfhelm and Wulfheah, and several other

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51Whitelock, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, sub anno 1006.
52Florence of Worcester, Chronicon ex Chronicis, 158.
northern and midland parcels were handed down to Wulfheah and Ufegeat. With these characters out of the way, the land would presumably revert to the king, who could then do with them what he wished -- such as, perhaps, to reallocate them to a thegn or thegns more helpful in fighting the Vikings, who earlier that year had been relentlessly plundering southern England. Perchance Æthelred, being in a typically vengeful mood since his grand military defense of all "of Wessex and Mercia" had been handily put to flight by the "proud and undaunted" Viking bands, decided to mitigate his failure with the blood of the Anglo-Danish north which did little to help the southern English cause. Æthelred, while apparently never inflicting much injury on hostile Vikings, nevertheless had a penchant for visiting his wrath, for whatever reason, upon his own realm. While still a young man, the king "laid waste the diocese of Rochester," as Florence explained, "on account of some quarrel." Of course, the St. Brice's Day free-for-all in 1002, while entailing violence of a far greater magnitude, was another, and a more contemporaneous example of the king's willingness to punish or kill those he disliked or distrusted. In any case, partly due to Eadric's deft yet unprincipled execution of his king's wishes, the trio of unwanted Anglo-Northmen lay dispatched at the end of the year. In the place of Ælfhelm, Æthelred appointed Uhtred of Bamburgh to the ealdormanry of Northumbria and promptly gave him his daughter Æfgifu in marriage. Just as with the case of Eadric in Mercia, Æthelred doled out both ealdormanies and

53 Whitelock, ed., Anglo-Saxon Wills, XVII.
54 Whitelock, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, sub anno 1006.
55 Ibid., sub anno 986; Florence of Worcester, Chronicon ex Chronicis, 148. Actually, the king and the bishop of Rochester had an ongoing disagreement for three or four years prior to this incident. Keynes, The Diplomas of King Æthelred, 178-80.
daughters in his quest for reliable and faithful royal underlings. Thus culminated the Mercian's rise to national prominence from his humble beginnings in Shropshire and began his ten-year career as a trusted "hatchet man" of sorts for King Æthelred the Second.

**Mercenarism and Murder in the era of Æthelred II**

Historians portray the elevation of Eadric to this important post as an egregious misstep in judgment in the long list of missteps and miscalculations of Æthelred's reign. The twelfth-century English chronicler Henry of Huntingdon, for instance, branded the freshly-appointed Eadric "a new but outstanding [maximus] traitor." What truly made the Mercian *maximus*, however, was that Eadric was outstanding in that he never betrayed the king, unlike his aristocratic peers since the death of Edgar the Peaceable. In the heroic, noble world into which Eadric had risen by 1007, the greatest treachery was to betray one's sworn lord, and he never did up until Æthelred's death in 1016 -- an outstanding feat, since the inconstant king, in the words of Sir Frank Stenton, "could give no leadership." This sort of unconditional loyalty, however, certainly was not to be found dwelling inside the hearts of many Saxons or Danes of Eadric's era. The political culture in which Eadric made his start under Bishop Oswald and King Æthelred was ridden with many pernicious themes, which included not only the previously mentioned aristocratic-court thegn tensions and the hardening of class lines, but also deadly intra-aristocratic rivalry and a host of betrayals of the crown by the ealdormen sworn to protect it.

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The year 975 simultaneously marked the end of the life King Edgar the Peaceable and the subsequent manifestation of the intrigue and conflict that had been brewing during his generation-long reign. The anonymous version of the *Vita Sancti Oswaldi* defined the reign of Edgar as a *tempus pacificum*, followed by *dissentio et tribulatio* (dissension and trouble) characterized not so much by overt civil wars (*provincia contra provinciam*), but by a perceived breakdown in morality and the sanctity of personal relationships (*sed gens contra gentem, rexque contra regem, duces adversum duces, et . . . plebs contra pastorem sibi . . .*) similar to the kind Archbishop Wulfstan later decried in his *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* of 1014.59 The most outstanding case of *duces adversum duces* was the anti-monastic reaction led by the ealdorman of Mercia, Ælfhere, against Æthelwine, the ealdorman of East Anglia, who wished to continue Edgar's policy of monastic re-establishment. Dunstan, the archbishop of Canterbury, formed an alliance with Ælfhere in 975 to secure the rightful heir to the throne according to the will both Dunstan and Edgar had formulated. This boy was young Edward "The Martyr;" and this unfortunate lad was strongly opposed by the monastic party, whose leader was once married to Ælfthryth, the fetching young mother of Æthelred. Civil war was avoided only when Oswald, the leading ecclesiast of the monastic party, reconciled with Dunstan and thus paved the way for the rightful election of Edward to the English throne.60 The new king only reigned for three years, however, as he was murdered at Corfe, supposedly with the complicity of the mother of Æthelred, his own stepmother. Henry of Huntingdon goes so far as to accuse the noblewoman Ælfthryth of the crime herself, relating through the common caveat of *dictitur*,

60 Green, *Conquest*, 337-38.
how Edward's mater, dum ciffum ei porrigeret, cultello percusserit.61 (It is said that the mother, while offering a goblet to him, struck him with a small knife.)

Concerning the tumultuous days preceding the accession of Edward to the throne, Florence of Worcester described how the Ælfhere was "blinded by presents of value" in his program of expelling the monks that were settled during the reign of Edgar.62 This is but a minor example indicative of the mercenary values growing common in England in the late tenth century. This mercenary culture received both support and legitimacy from the highest reaches of Anglo-Saxon society with the inception of the Danegeld, the bribes given through the witenagemot to the Viking marauders in order to "buy off the spear at your breast."63 The first recorded incidence of this new levy occurred in 991, and is described in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (C) as the "tribute . . . first . . . paid to the Danish men because of the great terror they were causing."64

To be fair, beleaguered rulers throughout history have turned to the payment of tribute to forestall impending doom. Bede relates that in 654, King Oswiu of Northumbria "was at last forced to promise" his enemy, Penda of Mercia, "an incalculable and incredible store of royal treasures and gifts as the price of peace."65 In accordance with the heroic ethos, however, Penda refused the lucrative offer, having desired solely to "destroy and exterminate the whole people."66 Oswiu's desperate offer to the heathen Penda was at best seen as an expedient to ward off an army "thirty times as great," but the dark-age morality

61Henry of Huntingdon, Historia Anglorum, 324.
62Florence of Worcester, Chronicon ex Chronicis, 144.
63Bloch, Feudal Society, 129.
64Whitelock, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, sub anno 991.
66Ibid.
that undergirded the tale was that real leadership is ultimately proven by bloodshed and not by banking.\textsuperscript{67} Oswiu went on to defeat Penda and his much larger force, and thus became the overlord of all Britain.

Small sums had been appropriated for the Norsemen from time to time in reigns previous to \AE{}thelred, but the initial \textit{Danegeld} payment of 991, which the \textit{Anglo-Saxon Chronicle} (C) listed at 10,000 pounds, was unprecedented in its size.\textsuperscript{68} Of course, these appropriations only encouraged further plunder and soon became a fixture of English court duties. Just three years later another payment of 16,000 pounds was made to the Vikings to end the "indescribable damage" the bandits were inflicting.\textsuperscript{69} Between 991 and 1012, the \textit{Anglo-Saxon Chronicle} (C) reports that a total of 137,000 pounds of tribute had been paid to the Scandinavian pirates. The total payments to the vikings, therefore, in the decade between 991 and 1002 amounted to the vast sum of 50,000 pounds.\textsuperscript{70}

This was but a fraction of the silver turned over to the Norsemen after the resumption of regular appropriations of the \textit{Danegeld} in 1007, which was, perhaps not inconsequently, the year in which Eadric acceded to the ealdormanry of Mercia. The \textit{Danegeld} paid to the vikings in that year alone was 36,000 pounds, a figure 38% greater than the whole of the \textit{Danegeld} ransoms of the entire 990s.

The \textit{Anglo-Saxon Chronicle} (C) stated that the original 991 \textit{Danegeld} was "first advised" by Sigeric, the archbishop of Canterbury.\textsuperscript{71} The 991 laws of \AE{}thelred, which further elaborate the circumstances of the agreement, corroborate this statement and further list two ealdormen in the party that

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{67}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{68}Whitelock, \textit{Anglo-Saxon Chronicle}, sub anno 991; The 991 Laws of King \AE{}thelred described the payment as being "22,000 pounds in gold and silver . . . ." Robertson, \textit{Laws}, 61.
\textsuperscript{69}Whitelock, \textit{Anglo-Saxon Chronicle}, sub anno 994.
\textsuperscript{70}or 38,000 if one employs the figure found in \AE{}thelred's laws.
\textsuperscript{71}Whitelock, \textit{Anglo-Saxon Chronicle}, sub anno 991.
\end{footnotesize}
favored payment. In much the same manner, all of the annals in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* concerning the *Danegeld* levied by the *witenagemot* in the next decade (which amounted to a total of 87,000 pounds) either stress or imply the complicity of Eadric. The (C) entry for 1009 narrates a tale in which the "king had intercepted them . . . [the Vikings], and the whole people was ready to attack them, but it was hindered by Ealdorman Eadric, then as it always was." Instead of attacking the enemy, the English "gave them 3,000 pounds." The record for 1012 furthermore related how "Ealdorman Eadric and all the chief councillors of England, ecclesiastical and lay, came to London . . . and they stayed there until the tribute, namely 48,000 pounds, was all paid." The mid-eleventh century author of the chronicle, in his desire to connect, what was by then, Eadric's bad name with the massive levies of the *Danegeld*, listed Eadric as the only name among England's "chief councillors" of 1012.

With these already immense sums going to the enemy, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (C) of 1014 reported that in addition to the "evils" that had befallen England in that dark year, King Æthelred ordered that 21,000 pounds be paid to his mercenary fleet, captained by Thorkell Hävi (the Tall), at Greenwich. If a payment of 21,000 pounds to their own soldiers (which Florence of Worcester later inflated to the "calamitous" 30,000) was an "evil" to the English, one can imagine with what horror the 48,000-pound payment of just two years earlier was met, especially since that payment was to the enemy. The chronicler, proven meticulous in associating Eadric with large mercenary transfers, does not mention him in the tribute of 1014. Was Eadric not associated with this

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72 Robertson, *Laws*, 57; the two ealdormen are Æthelweard and Ælfric.
73 Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, sub anno 1009.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid., sub anno.
decision to pay Thorkell's fleet this worrisome sum? If Eadric was in any way connected with this "evil" decision the chronicler, based on his past performance, most likely would not have hesitated to blame the decision on the cowardly ealdorman instead of the king who just that year was "gladly received by . . . all" upon his triumphant return from Norman exile. Eadric, however, disappears from the official record from 1013-1015.

This recurring transfer of a sizable portion of the economic production of England to Nordic war-captains of both friendly and hostile disposition, in Sir Frank Stenton's words, "increased the importance of the professional element in the group of men through whom the king governed the country." This statement was in reference to the entrenchment and expansion of a royal bureaucracy charged with the responsibility of procuring vast sums of silver. At the same time, however, this passage mirrors a parallel theme in English administration -- the increased use of the "professional element" in those entrusted with the defense of the realm. Prince Meredydd of Dyfed, Wales, likewise, perhaps being influenced by the groundbreaking pecuniary arrangements of Æthelred's court, according to the Brut y Tywysogion, in 991 "hired the Pagans willing to join him, and devastated Glamorgan." Much has been made of the employment such of mercenary soldiers or swashbucklers in reference to the Norman usurpation of 1066, but Anglo-Saxon England traditionally was defended by its aristocratic element with support from the free peasants pressed into the fyrd or into manual labor under the trimoda necessitas. By the turn of the millennium, however, substantial numbers of

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76 Ibid., sub anno 1014.
77 In a 1014 charter of King Æthelred (S 933), however, Eadric was granted church lands in Dorset.
mercenary warriors were in King Æthelred's employ.\textsuperscript{80} Ironically, among those now paid to fend off piratical attacks from the North were many Northmen themselves, such as Thorkell the Tall. This particular viking chieftain after 1012 commanded an annual payment from the English, which was raised through royal taxes, for his mercenary services.\textsuperscript{81} Needless to say, just as Æthelred's money could not buy faithful peace, it could neither buy faithful warriors, and many of his own vikings deserted him in favor of Scandinavia's vikings. Thorkell the Tall himself switched sides twice during the Anglo-Danish wars of 1012-1016, only to be banished, and then later reconciled, with King Canute in the years after the conquest was sealed. The bloody St. Brice's Day massacre of Danes that King Æthelred ordered in 1002, furthermore, was most likely out of disaffection with or distrust of the Scandinavian mercenaries stationed in England.\textsuperscript{82} The amenability of even the royal house itself to bribes is attested to in Osbern's \textit{Vita Sancti Dunstani}, in which Archbishop Dunstan bribed the monarch with the soon-to-be relatively small sum of one hundred pounds, to halt King Æthelred's 986 siege of Rochester. The indomitable cleric, surprised at such a display of royal avarice, admonished the king, saying, "Since you have preferred silver to God, money to the apostle, and covetousness to me; the evils which God has pronounced will shortly come upon you . . . "\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{80}Bloch, \textit{Feudal Society}, 24.

\textsuperscript{81}Stenton, \textit{Anglo-Saxon England}, 412.

\textsuperscript{82}Green, \textit{Conquest}, 380.


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The pervasive venality of the times is also evidenced in the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, a homily composed circa 1014 by Archbishop Wulfstan of York, who also composed much of the legislation of Kings Æthelred and Canute. In this important primary source lamenting the troubled times of a prolonged Viking invasion of England, the archbishop describes how it was an era of "little loyalty" where even "poor men . . . [are] defrauded." In addition, the churchman noted that the common people were greatly burdened by the taxation imposed for the *Danegeld*. This lust for mercenary gain and oppressive taxation resulted in what the prelate branded as "robbery" by "the powerful," in an era so suffused with the culture of acquisition through money and a devaluation of traditional bonds that fathers were said to have sold their own sons into slavery. While all sermons, and especially those composed during times of social upheaval, are inherently tendentious, these strident accusations are evidenced throughout the decades preceding the homily, the most egregious being the machinations of Ælfhere of Mercia in 975. Not only did that ealdorman scheme to subvert the will and continuing agenda of the deceased king almost to the point of causing civil war, but he did it even as a kinsman of that same monarch.

The general payment of tribute and the arising mercenary culture were an anathema to Anglo-Saxon ideals as expressed in the context of warfare rather than religion in *The Battle of Maldon*. To the Vikings, Britnoth, the virtuous Saxon warrior, exclaimed: "For tribute they [the English] will give you spears, poisoned point and ancient sword, such war gear as will profit you

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84 Whitelock, *EHD*, 854.
85 Ibid., 855-56.
86 Wulfstan declaimed that "monstrous taxes have afflicted us greatly." Whitelock, *EHD*, 856.
88 According to Florence of Worcester, sub anno 983, Ælfhere was "regis Anglorum Eadgari propinquus." *Chronicon ex Chronicis*, 147.
little in the battle . . . peace must be made with point and edge, with grim-battle play, before we give tribute." Nevertheless, this prejudice against the payment of mercenary tribute did not preclude the royal government from following a policy of monetary surrender -- in fact, the witenagemot had an aversion to fighting, a policy that, as we shall see, augmented the wealth of the magnates, like Eadric, who were charged with the military responsibility of defending the kingdom.

Eadric the Acquisitor

While the newly-minted ealdorman never turned on his king, unlike many of his contemporaries, he did profit from his high position, thus acquiring both his nickname of Streona and the lasting hatred of "those who fought" in Anglo-Saxon England. Eadric held office in a time of increasingly high taxation wrought by the revenue needed to support the apparently unpopular crown policy of appeasement through tribute that simultaneously offended the martial ideals of the warrior and the economic well-being of the commoner. The Worcester monk Hemming, writing between 1062 and 1095, lamented how his church had to melt down its crucifixes in order to pay its share of the tribute collected for Swegen. Later, with its precious metals exhausted, the same church had to sell some of its estates to meet yet another tax levy. In the wake of the 1014 payment of 21,000 pounds to the mercenary allies at Greenwich, the Anglo Saxon Chronicle (E) reported that a "great tide of the sea [mycele sæ flod] flooded widely over this country, coming up higher than it had

89Whitelock, EHD, 294.
ever done before, and submerging many villages and a countless number of people."  

This entry is repeated by the twelfth-century chronicler, but in a surprising reverse, the later writers are less loquacious concerning the flood that occurred hot on the heels of the 21,000 pound payment. Perhaps the "great tide" here described by the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was not literally of the sea, but was a metaphor for the inexorable flood of taxation required to support Æthelred's burgeoning expenditures. While 21,000 was not the largest payment to an army under Æthelred's policy, it was the largest recorded payment to a pro-English mercenary contingent, and undoubtedly this large tax burden did "submerge" an innumerable number of common people harassed by not only sanguine Viking plunder but also by rapacious English taxation for any number of years.

While both the people and the church suffered from the swelling tax burden, the ability of the crown to raise such immense sums to fund such a detestable policy was indicative of the power of his laws and administrators.  

Eadric skillfully managed the legal intricacies of the Danegeld to amass great agglomerations of land and cash, which were presumably re-invested in further land ventures. Landowners (churches included) that could not meet the tax levies imposed by the Danegeld had their property confiscated by the royal shire-reeve. Any party who then could pay the requisite tax to the shire-reeve was able to acquire the confiscated property for himself. In this manner, the Shropshire magnate secured considerable amounts of forfeited land. In one royal diploma, S 933, dated after the spring of 1014, Eadric gained possession of church lands in Dorset and sometime thereafter sold it back at a

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91Whitelock, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, sub anno 1014; Plummer, Two Saxon Chronicles Parallel, sub anno 1014.
92Whitelock, EHD, 856.
great price in gold and silver to an agent of the church.\textsuperscript{94} Such self-interested financial manipulation has never been entirely countenanced by the Church, and in this case, Eadric was expropriating, for his own financial benefit, the lands of the Church itself. These sort of crass activities in pursuit of wealth might go far in explaining the hostility of the Church (and thus of the medieval chronicler) toward the speculative wizard of Mercia. Florence of Worcester, Eadric's most vituperative medieval critic, wrote and lived in Eadric's own home area, and thus it would not be surprising if he knew of some past hardships that had befallen his particular monastery from to the acquisitive machinations of Eadric.

The geographic distance of Dorset from his own ealdormanry nevertheless suggests that Eadric's land and pecuniary interests ranged over a wide area. Peter Hunter Blair posits that the irregular boundaries of Gloucestershire also might have been related to Eadric's property exploits.\textsuperscript{95} Both the great power and the property manipulations of Eadric are attested to again by Hemming, in writing that the ealdorman "held dominion...like an under-king, insomuch that he joined townships to townships and shires to shires at his will; he even amalgamated the hitherto independent county of Winchcombe with the county of Gloucester."\textsuperscript{96} These land transactions of the ealdorman were effected, as the dearth of surviving written proof attests, mostly "off the record." The absence of documentation concerning Eadric's acquisitions, therefore, left it to the memory of the deprived parties or the even more-distant memory of their monastic successors to bewail the financial

\textsuperscript{94}Ibid., 734.
\textsuperscript{96}Hemingi Chartularium, 280, as quoted in H. P. R. Finberg, ed. \textit{Gloucestershire Studies} (Leicester: University Press, 1957), 25.
cunning of "the Acquisitor" in a way that left substantial room for embellishment, venom, or outright fabrication. Marc Bloch warned of the pitfalls of accepting the medieval perception of things at face value: ". . . the memory of men is short and their capacity for illusion unbounded." Nevertheless, in the case of Eadric's land speculation, as with almost every aspect of his life, the modern world has not moved beyond the image formulated by the collective medieval memory of dispossessed clerics once (or twice) removed and their high-born patrons in the landed aristocracy.

The property machinations of Eadric gained himself not only profit but also the pejorative nickname of "Streona," which translates roughly into "acquisitor." War was the raison d'etre of leadership in the middle ages, and Eadric's enrichment through investment in others' misfortunes, rather than through provoking others' misfortunes in battle as did those warriors of Maldon, wholly offended the aristocratic ethos of the age. If one considers the nicknames of some of the prominent figures of his era who exemplified valor or virility, such as "The Tall," "Priest-killer," "Blood-Axe," or "Ironside," that of "the Acquisitor" does not ring with the same éclat. That the nickname was contemporary affirms the low regard in which Eadric was held by his peers. Profiting from real-estate speculation and not from the vaunted "fire and sword" of the virtuous Anglo-Saxon indeed makes Eadric Streona seem more like Joseph Kennedy than Alfred the Great, but one must keep in mind that Eadric was never an aristocrat and presumably not raised with the same warrior values as many of his counterparts at Æthelred's court. This son of the

97Bloch, Feudal Society, 40.
98Ibid., 151.
99Hemming, the first writer to employ his nickname, translated Eadric's nickname of "Streona," in Latin, as "adquisitor."
100Lawson, "Collection," 734n.
*diaconus* Æthelric was of middling, non-warrior, stock, and thus operated in a manner divergent from what was expected from a man in his position.

Of course the ruling classes, whose well-born members commanded high positions in both the church and country, had scant respect for these surprisingly modern financial manipulations. William of Malmesbury, himself on friendly terms with the later Anglo-Norman landed aristocracy, affirmed this view in writing of the ealdorman as a man "who had become opulent, not by nobility, but by specious language and impudence." These repeated denunciations of Eadric's ignoble character transcend the deeds of history and enter into the ideals of legend. The churlish Eadric Streona, not simply the character found in the *Chronicle*, but the Eadric of the twelfth century, seems more the medieval villain of romance than an ambitious Anglo-Saxon parvenu. Much like the haughty brute of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Eadric's "churlish crudity and criminality, is opposed to the noble . . . order." But instead of challenging the revered Sir Gawain of the high middle ages, the Eadric of legend, in the low middle ages, was challenging, and mostly subverting, the basic societal preconceptions and values of the aristocratic class itself.

**Eadric and Wales**

Eadric never was recorded to have engaged the Viking attackers and was said in the *Anglo Saxon Chronicle* to have repeatedly advised in the *witan*

101 William of Malmesbury, *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, ed. and trans. J. A. Giles, 169. The original text from the Margram manuscript (Reg. MS 13 D. 2) reads "*cui nobilitas opes pepererat, lingua et audacia comparaverat.*" William of Malmesbury, *De Gesta Regum Anglorum*, 189-90. However, the Claudius C. 9 and Reg. 13 D. 5 MSS insert "*non*" after "*cui*" and "*sed*" after "*pepererat,*" thus rendering the passage more explicable. I have quoted the J. A. Giles translation in this case, as in the last, due to his stylistically superior rendering of the Latin.

against fighting. In those cases the option of paying tribute is implied. Eadric's martial potential, nevertheless, was proven during his campaign against the Welsh in 1012. Early medieval Wales, a collection of disparate principalities whose shared political opportunism frequently outweighed both their inveterate hostility toward the English and their distaste for the occasional depredations of the vikings (and vice versa), presented a chronic diplomatic tangle for the Anglo-Saxons. The Celtic West had been involved in religious disputes, political wrangling, and border skirmishes with the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms since at least the sixth century, but the advent of the vikings in Britain provided a new horizon of diplomatic interplay between the Celts and Saxons. The much-debated Life of King Alfred by the Welsh cleric Asser may in fact have been a propaganda piece written to sway Welsh support toward the House of Wessex. In the early tenth century, the successors of the important Welsh prince Rhodri Mawr formed an alliance with the kings of Wessex when it appeared as if the English were gaining the upper hand on the vikings that were harrying the lands on both sides of Offa's dyke. This military alliance between the British hills and the Salisbury plain reached its symbolic culmination at Chester during the reign of King Edgar, where, according to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (E), "six kings came to meet him, and all gave him pledges that they would be his allies on sea and on land."103 In the early years of King Æthelred's reign, however, the self-serving political interests of the Welsh principalities shifted once again away from England. The son of Owen, Prince Meredydd of Dyfed, in the mid-980s directed the British principalities, under his strong-armed guidance, away from the influence of the Saxon crown.104

103Whitelock, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, sub anno 973. One of the kings, according to Florence of Worcester, Chronicon ex Chronicis, 145, was Howell, prince of Powys and Gwynedd.
The consolidated powers of Wales consequently effected a rapprochement with the vikings, who at the time were sacking East Anglia. Later, in 1012, the chieftains of Wales, under the direction of Prince Meredydd ab Edwin, prince of Deheubarth, in doing what many Englishmen probably wished to do, declined to pay their share of the Danegeld to their inconstant nominal overlord, King Æthelred. In response to this reborn Welsh fortitude, Æthelred, as he so often did, dispatched his loyal hatchetman to rectify this diplomatic tangle by whatever means necessary.

For once, Eadric chose the conventional option of a direct military strike, and with another commander whose name has been lost due to the linguistic mangling of the Britons, swept into the hills of Dyfed in that year and devastated the land to Saint David's, which was Bishop Asser's former monastic home on the westernmost tip of southern Wales. The Welsh chronicle declares that "Menevia [Dyfed] was devastated by ... Entris [Eadric]." At Saint David's, Eadric found quite a popular location for rapine and plunder; the Vikings had looted that very spot no less than four times in the preceding century. The Brut y Tywysogion recalls a handful of Viking depredations in Wales, the most recent being in 998, when "Menevia was depopulated by the Pagans." The significance of Eadric's successful

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105Green, Conquest, 359.
106Deheubarth, while once considered simply the "dextralis pars Britanniae," by this time designated a territory composed of Dyfed, Ceredigion, Ystrad Tywi, and Brycheiniog. Lloyd, History of Wales, 256.
107Freeman, The History of the Norman Conquest, 349.
110Brut y Tywysogion, 33.
campaign is apparent for it was the only English victory recorded from 991 until 1033.\textsuperscript{111}

On his expedition Eadric showed the martial daring of a true warrior -- this being the only recorded instance of the ealdorman enriching himself in accordance with the aristocratic ethos, when he, according to E.A. Freeman, "plundered whatever rude forerunners already existed of the most striking group of buildings in Britain."\textsuperscript{112} The retrospective writer of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, however, never felt it important to include this English victory amid his series of English defeats during the era of Eadric and Æthelred. It is certain, rather, that the chronicler felt it important to omit this instance of Eadric following the martial code of the aristocracy, for this lone recorded act of military heroism would tarnish an otherwise perfect portrayal of a cowardly, subversive, Eadric that the medieval writers desired to effect. Eadric, with his own countrymen's bias notwithstanding, was nevertheless fortunate on his choice of targets. Dyfed appears to have been attacked a disproportionate number of times only because it was the principality in which the Welsh annals were written.\textsuperscript{113} If Eadric had launched an offensive against Anglesey, for instance, his victory perhaps would not have been recorded in the Brut y Tywysogion -- and of course the selective memory of the English chroniclers or the anti-Eadric Florence of Worcester could not have been trusted to save the Mercian's military success for posterity. As ealdorman of the Mercians, Eadric was responsible for disciplining the Welsh whenever English interests dictated,\textsuperscript{114} so it is possible that he won other military victories over the stubborn Celts that simply have been lost to history.

\textsuperscript{111}Ibid., 33-37.
\textsuperscript{112}Freeman, The History of the Norman Conquest, 349.
\textsuperscript{114}Lloyd, A History of Wales, vol 1., 350.
Both a proven schemer and fighter, Eadric desired not to fight the Vikings in England, for as a wealthy ealdorman of the realm, he saw each subsequent Danegeld levy as a new opportunity to confiscate and profit from the lands of tax defaulters. As we have seen before, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (CDE) mentions Eadric in the entries of the two large Danegeld levies of 1007 and 1012. It remains uncertain whether Eadric had a prominent role in the decision of 1007, the year in which he was formally invested as ealdorman. Eadric, however, had risen to prominence with Æthelred the year before with the deposition of Wulfgeat,¹¹⁵ thus making the theory plausible. In the case of the payment of 1009, the chronicle explicitly stated that Eadric "hindered" an Anglo-Saxon force that was "ready to attack" the "immense raiding army" headed by Thorkell the Tall.¹¹⁶ These Vikings had recently extorted 3,000 pounds from the citizens of East Kent. Since the chronicle for 1009, however, does not mention the complicity of the witenagemot as it did for larger payments of tribute, the ransom appears to have been a local gesture and not a deliberate royal act. Thorkell's force, nevertheless, began afterwards to plunder throughout Wessex and Sussex. It is likely that Eadric, knowing of both the rapine of the "immense raiding" Viking host and his own rapacity when it came to the profits to be made from the lands of tax defaulters, advised a policy of military non-intervention in order to force the witan to call for another, more generous, tribute payment to Thorkell. Such a payment was not forthcoming that year, however, but one cannot say that Eadric did not do all he could to encourage it short of joining the Vikings themselves. As for the

¹¹⁵Florence of Worcester reports that Eadric, prior to the Christmas deception of Ælfhelm, "prepared a great entertainment at Shrewsbury" (apud Scrobbesbyrig magnum ei paravit convivium) for the Northumbrian. Chronicon ex Chronicis, 158. That Eadric was able to fund and organize such an affair even before acceding to the post of ealdorman hints that he had some official sponsorship at least by 1006, if not earlier.

¹¹⁶Whitelock, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, sub anno 1009.
Welsh in 1012, however, Eadric had little choice but to fight, less because the king ordered it than that the Welsh had rebelled against the *Danegeld* altogether. Eadric benefited from the mechanisms of tribute and possessed a personal financial interest in upholding the smooth functioning of the collection of the *Danegeld*. If the English defaulted on the tax, there existed laws and custom to deal with the situation that the ealdorman used to his advantage. If the Welsh, on the other hand, did not pay the tax, there existed no recourse save that of a most primitive, but yet of a wholly aristocratic sort: that of war.

In medieval Europe, war was indeed an honorable vocation, and even yet a more honorable avocation. In the English court of King Canute this "honor" of the sword was combined with the profession of the mercenary in the formation of his *housecarles*. These monthly-paid, professional retainers of King Canute were not only the recipients of generous tax funding, but also were expected to serve the interests and uphold the honor of the king and of each other.  

A combination of a strictly ordered, nearly modern disciplinary regimen with the medieval ideals of "warfare, priority of service, or nobility of birth" regulated every aspect of the *housecarles'* existence, even down to their seating at the king's tables. Through a strict code of behavior that reflected the heroic ideals of martial valor and loyalty to one's peers, the *housecarles* of the Anglo-Danish royal government reconciled the two conflicting ideas of aristocratic conduct and mercenarism. This was not the case with Eadric, however. The ealdorman clearly possessed a strong mercenary drive, but he never complemented it by subscribing to the traditionally-admired martial

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values of the ruling (and fighting) classes, therefore bringing the condemnation of centuries of traditional "top-down" historiography upon him.

The Danish War of 1013-1016

The most fulminous condemnations of Eadric's conduct concern the last years of his life, when Swegen, the king of Denmark, and his son Canute, were undertaking the final subjugation of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom. During this period from 1013 to 1017 the English suffered many humiliating defeats, a royal abdication, and the death of three kings (Æthelred, Swegen, and Edmund) in a society where the many Danes in the north were so assimilated that the struggle at times took on the characteristics of a civil war. Eadric's lasting reputation for treachery that arose from this confused period mostly was due to his underhanded dealings with Edmund Ironside, the pugnacious ætheling who prematurely snatched royal authority while his father lay upon his deathbed.

To understand more fully this culture of Anglo-Danish ambivalence in which Eadric was able alternately to side with a Saxon against a Dane and vice versa, it is best to examine the settlement of the Danes in the northern part of the realm and the ensuing separatist tendencies of the land beyond the Thames.

Due to the treaty of Alfred and Guthrum in 886, the Danes were allowed the rights of settlement and self-government in what came to be known by the early eleventh century as the Danelaw, which comprised the lands north and east of Watling Street save for the ancient kingdom of Bernicia, north of the River Tees.\(^{119}\) The formal Scandinavian colonization of northern England,

\(^{119}\)The text reads: "First concerning our boundaries: up the Thames, and then up the Lea, and along the Lea to its source, then in a straight line to Bedford, then up the Ouse to the Watling Street." Whitelock, *EHD*, 380.
however, is generally believed to have taken place a decade before. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (C), under the year 876, recorded that "Healfdene shared out the land of the Northumbrians, and they proceeded to plough and to support themselves." The tenth-century descendants of King Alfred undertook both military and diplomatic actions aimed at the subjugation of the Danelaw, and by the time of the expulsion of Eric "Blood-Axe" from Northumbria in 954 during the reign of Eadred, the so-called political unification of England was complete. What most historians call "Anglo-Saxon England," nevertheless, was in the tenth and eleventh centuries an amalgamation of people of Danish ancestry with Angles and Saxons under the domination of the king of Wessex. By the reign of Æthelred II, the Danish population of the midlands and the north was quite substantial, constituting, as it were, "cockles amongst the wheat." Further evidence of an influential viking population in the north and midlands is the distinct Scandinavian influence on the English language and place-names in those areas. The slaughter of these worrisome newcomers in November 1002 implies in itself that substantial numbers of Danes resided in certain towns and boroughs in England, especially those in the north. Henry of Huntingdon relates an anecdote that supports the likelihood of there being a substantial Scandinavian population beyond the Thames. As a boy in the 1090s he had resided in the Danelaw, and as an adult wrote that "in my childhood I heard very old men say that the king had sent secret letters to every city, according to which the English either maimed all the unsuspecting Danes on the same day and hour

120 Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, sub anno.
121 A 1004 charter to St. Frideswide's Abbey, Oxford, tells of "... Dani qui in hac insula velut lolium inter triticum pullulando emerserant ...." Kemble, Codex Diplomaticus, vol. 3, DCCIX.
with their swords, or, suddenly, at the same moment, captured them and destroyed them by fire."123 Killing aside, the very fact that the king sent letters to every city (unamquamque urbem), even if it only meant every city in the Danelaw, attests to the dispersion of the Danish element throughout much of England.124 It is, furthermore, most likely out of kindred concern for the safety of this large Danish population of northern England that the renewed Viking raids of the late tenth century targeted the southern portion of the realm while mostly avoiding the harassment of the more geographically accessible northern shires or East Anglia.125

While the kingdom had been united under the standard of the descendants of King Alfred, it is apparent that some antagonism toward the Saxon House of Wessex lived on in the northern reaches of England. In the struggles over royal succession in 924, 955, and 975, Mercia supported a different candidate for king than did Wessex. In 957, both Mercia and Northumbria, dismayed at the debauched excesses of "impius rex Eadwig" of Wessex, transferred their sovereign power, "super omnes provincias ab Humber magno flumine usque ad flumen Tamisium," (over all the areas from the grand River Humber to the River Thames) to his younger brother Edgar, who had been underking of the Mercians since 955.126 According to Florence of Worcester, who had several saints' lives at his disposal in his re-working of the Chronicle, this division was formed "in such a manner that the river Thames formed the boundary of their respective dominions."127

123 Henry of Huntingdon, Historia Anglorum, 340-41.
124 Ibid.
125 Jones, History of the Vikings, 356; See also the map, "Viking Raids in England 980-1016" found in Larson, Canute the Great, 102.
126 Osbern, Vita Sancti Dunstani, ed. Stubbs, Memorials of Saint Dunstan, 102.
127 Florence of Worcester, Chronicon ex Chronicis, 136-137.
Our main source for the history of the age, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, demonstrates an unremitting hostility toward the vikings from which we derive our idea of the pitched battles, massive bloodshed, and the fear and loathing between the English and the Scandinavians. Written mostly in the south of England, however, the chronicle, in dealing with the vikings, is concerned with their conflicts with the House of Wessex partly either to glorify particular rulers, such as Alfred or Edward the Elder, or to explain the ineptitude of others, such as Æthelred II. The reality, as we have seen, is much more complex. The Norsemen, in the eyes of the northern English, were not the stereotypically bloodthirsty brutes found in the texts of the West Saxons, but sometimes, in the words of viking historian P.H. Sawyer, "even as their allies in domestic disputes, allies who were indeed not unacceptable to the Church."\(^{128}\) This warmer conception of the Scandinavians was reflected in a now-lost "northern chronicle," a source itself used in the common source of the Peterborough and York Chronicles. The twelfth-century northern historian Simeon of Durham and Roger of Wendover in the thirteenth century have also incorporated the "northern chronicle" in their own historical writings.

Along with the pre-unification, non-West Saxon, political consciousness that lived on outside the ancestral domain of Alfred, there can be found a few instances of the integration of Danish customs into everyday English life. In the Bayeaux Tapestry, for example, the Anglo-Saxons are shown using large battle-axes. This weapon was adopted from the Vikings who had wielded the weapon upon the English themselves in the eighth century. The viking battle-axe as used by English troops is traditionally traced back to King Canute's elite fraternity of *housecarles*, but who is to say with any confidence that the

English did not employ this weapon before 1017? During the process of cultural assimilation, many traits and customs, from weapons to names (both personal and place) to fashion, were transmitted from Scandinavia to the eastern shores of England. For instance, a rare and anonymous letter of the era admonishes its recipient, Edward, for dressing his hair like a Dane, namely, "with bared necks and blinded eyes . . . " The line between Saxon and Dane was blurred in upper reaches of society as well as the lower. The house of Godwine, which first rose to prominence under Canute, was an aristocratic personification of the fusion of the English and Danish cultures. Earl Godwine, himself a South Saxon, before becoming earl of Wessex, married Gytha, the sister of the brother-in-law of Canute, Ulf of Denmark. This couple went on to bear numerous offspring, some of them who, such as Swegen and Tostig, grew up to behave more like vikings than Englishmen. This ambivalent culture of early eleventh-century England offered many avenues to success for enterprising individuals whether of Nordic or English stock, without requiring them to pledge allegiance to one particular ethnicity, for there was no longer one ethnicity. The prevalence of mercenarism increased the opportunities for, and paths to, fame, and the war of 1013-1016 between Denmark and England only intensified the exigencies that called men to both arms and lucre under the national banner they most saw fit.

The apostate Danish king met with quick success in his campaigns against England. Swegen Forkbeard graciously received the submission of York and the Anglo-Danish Five Boroughs in 1013, whereupon he, according to Florence,

129Whetlock, EHD, 825.
130William of Malmesbury detailed a story in which Godwine first married "uxorem Cnutonis sororem," a sister of Canute. There exists no other evidence of such a marriage. William of Malmesbury, De Gestis Regum Anglorum, 245.
passed Watling Street, [and] published an order to his troops to the effect that they should lay waste the fields, burn the villages, plunder the churches, slay without mercy all the men who fell into their hands,-reserving the women to satisfy their lusts, and, in short, do all the mischief they could.\footnote{The translation is from Florence of Worcester, \textit{Chronicle}, trans. Thomas Forester (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854), 122. The original text is found in the \textit{Chronicon ex Chronicis}, 166-67, and reads: "pertransita Weatlinga-streta, suis edictum posuit, videlicet, ut agros devastarent, villas cremarent, ecclesias spoliarent, quicquid masculini sexus in manus veniret, sine respectu misericordiae, jugularent, feminas ad suam libidinem explendam reservarent, et omnia quae possent mala peragerent." Once again, in the interests of style, I have deferred to a translation from the Victorian age.}

That the Danish king would show such different faces on different sides of Watling Street affirms the noticeable Danish character of the north of England during the reign of Æthelred. This bloody onslaught then advanced upon London, forcing Queen Emma, with her sons Edward and Alfred, into refuge in Normandy, where the king joined them after Christmas. Roger of Wendover asserts that Eadric also joined the exiled royal household in Normandy.\footnote{Roger of Wendover, \textit{Flores Historiarum}, vol. 1, 537. Roger is the only medieval writer to state that Eadric joined the royal family in Normandy, staying with the exiled queen and her retainers for two years.} Two of the elder Æthelings, the noticeably sanguine and free-willed Æthelstan\footnote{Having died prior to the war between Edmund and Canute, Æthelstan never played a significant part in the martial rancor of 1015-16. Being senior to Edmund and possessing many attributes that hinted at his own pugnacity, however, there is no reason to think that Æthelstan would not have been just as violently undiplomatic as his famed brother. His will evidenced many items befitting a warrior prince, including at least ten swords (including one that "belonged to King Offa"), a coat of mail, four war-horses, and a drinking horn. Whitelock, \textit{Anglo-Saxon Wills}, XX.} and Edmund, never left England with the regal household, instead remaining in the beleaguered country even as their father departed for Normandy.\footnote{Pauline Stafford, \textit{Queen Emma and Queen Edith: Queenship and Women's Power in Eleventh-Century England} (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 222-23.}

Nevertheless, Swegen was the practical ruler of England; the uncrowned tyrant, however, soon died at Gainsborough in February 1014. Canute was elected king of England by the Danish fleet, but, according to Florence, "the elders of all England, unanimously, sent messengers in haste to King Æthelred, saying..."
that they neither did nor should love any one better than their natural lord, if only he were willing to govern them more justly, and treat them with greater gentleness than he had hitherto done." The king acceded to this offer of the witenagemot and "was brought back with the utmost expedition, and received with universal honour."135

The war between England and Denmark escalated upon the return of the rightful king. Canute exhibited the savage tendencies of his Danish ancestors in ejecting his father's English hostages, with slit nostrils and without hands and ears, on a Kentish beach while staging a tactical retreat to his homeland. Eadric shortly thereafter displayed his own cruel methods at the witenagemot in Oxford, a Mercian town on the traditional line of demarcation between what was Saxon and what was Danish in England. Just as in 1006, the meeting was held in Eadric's home territory, and once again the man whom Henry of Huntingdon branded as a "new" but "outstanding" traitor invited nobles into his own house and then executed them. This time the victims were the chief thegns of the "seven boroughs."136 Sigeferth and Morcar, both sons of a man with the unmistakably Danish appellation of "Earngrim."137 That this was done during the meeting of the witenagemot implies, just as in 1006, that Eadric was faithfully executing the order of disappropriation handed down by the king and his great council. The submission of the Seven Boroughs to Swegen in 1013 and their subsequent transferal of the ill-fated hostages to him most likely did

135 Forester, trans., Chronicle, 124; Florence of Worcester, Chronicon ex Chronicis, 169, related in the original form: "At majores natu totius Angliæ ad regem Ægelredum pari consensu nuntios festinanter misere, dicentes, se nullum plus amare vel amautos esse quam suum naturalem dominum, si ipse vel rectius gubernare, vel mitius eos tractare vellet quam prius tractarat. . . . His gestis, ab Anglis in Normanniam mittitur, rex festinato Quadragesimali tempore reducitur, et ab omnibus honorabiliter excipitur."

136 Most likely designating the "Five Boroughs" of the Danelaw: Lincoln (Lindsey), Leicester, Nottingham, Stamford, and Derby, with the addition of York and Torkesey.

137 Freeman, The History of the Norman Conquest, 371; Larson, Canute the Great, 70.
not sit well with the vengeful Æthelred. Once again, the ignoble "dirty work" was turned over to the nobleman of "low birth," Eadric. After the murders were committed, the king took direct possession of the lands formerly held by the two thegns.\textsuperscript{138} Æthelred's ravaging of Lindsey, one of the "Five Boroughs," in a preemptive strike against Canute in the year before bears out both the king's malice toward those he felt he could not trust, and the fact that those of the north, including the thegns of the Seven Boroughs, could not be trusted.\textsuperscript{139} Concerning his concluding part in this episode, as with the other maleficent tasks the king had commanded in the past, Eadric refused to betray his lord and instead carried out his orders with a lethal efficiency. Nevertheless, through his ignoble origins, repeated breaches of hospitality, his smooth-tongued deceit, and his land speculation, Eadric, perhaps to the greater dismay of the ruling classes, betrayed the aristocratic rules of both ancestry and conduct with which he, holding the post of ealdorman, was expected to comport.

After the dispatch of the thegns of the Seven Boroughs, Edmund the Ætheling married Sigeferth's widow, according to Florence, against the king's will.\textsuperscript{140} Later in 1015, Edmund seized the lands of the Seven Boroughs from the crown and "compelled the villeins to acknowledge him as their lord."\textsuperscript{141} This act, in effect, was one of outright rebellion against his father, who, being ill, was in no position to stop him.\textsuperscript{142} As one of Æthelred's chief thegns, Eadric made plans to subjugate this truculent prince. Showing his penchant for the

\textsuperscript{138} Whitelock, \textit{Anglo-Saxon Chronicle}, sub anno 1015.

\textsuperscript{139} The chronicle records that Canute "and the people in Lindsey came to an agreement that they would provide him with horses and then go out and ravage all together. Then King Ethelred came there to Lindsey with his full force before they were ready, and it was ravaged and burnt, and all the men who could be got at were killed . . . ." Whitelock, \textit{The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle}, (CDE) sub anno 1014.

\textsuperscript{140} Florence of Worcester, \textit{Chronicon ex Chronicis}, 125.

\textsuperscript{141} Ibd.

\textsuperscript{142} William of Malmesbury added that Edmund hid his marriage from his father, who was ill-respected by his own family. ". . . qui domesticus ut alienis esset ridiculo." William of Malmesbury, \textit{De Gestis Regum Anglorum}, 213.
underhanded tactic, Eadric raised an army and joined Edmund with the intention of murdering him. The ætheling Ironside, however, discovered Eadric's plot, thus surviving to spite further both his father and brother-in-law. With the king prostrate at Cosham, hostilities flared between Edmund Ironside and Canute. Eadric, along with forty ships from the royal fleet commanded by Thorkell the Tall, immediately switched sides to Canute against this reckless youth in order to accomplish through the Danish sword what he could not through his own cunning. Wessex, the ancestral kingdom of Alfred the Great, was the first area to submit to the allies. This situation markedly bears out the ambivalence and confused nature of Anglo-Danish society of the age. While the reigning king was still alive, southern England, normally a bastion of Saxonism, submitted to a Dane and a Mercian, while heavily-Danish Northern England came under the control of an unfilial prince from the House of Wessex.

Edmund Ironside, the usurper of the Seven Boroughs, has been given glowing reviews from the medieval chroniclers and thus also from modern historians. England's preeminent Saxophile, E. A. Freeman, fabricated the brash ætheling in the traditional manner in his account of the "short and glorious career of the hero Edmund." Both Roger of Wendover and William of Malmesbury nevertheless related that this "hero" was sprung from King Æthelred and a woman of low birth. Roger of Wendover went on to state, however, that Edmund vindicated his supposedly degraded sanguinity through

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143Whitelock, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (CDE), sub anno 1015.
144Ibid., the West Saxons "submitted and gave hostages and supplied the Danish army with horses..."
a "nobleness of mind" and "vigor of his body."

Of course Eadric, tainted with a similar ignobilitas of birth, was never able to earn respect from his aristocratic contemporaries, for his vigor and mind were directed primarily to capital acquisition and the silencing of enemies and not to the sword in "hard strife and grim battles." Conversely, Edmund, brave and persistent in battle, appealed to the prevailing aristocratic values of medieval society much in the manner of a Richard the Lionheart. Like Richard, however, once you strip away his veneer of a fighter, not much remains. In fact, Edmund became a traitor both to the crown and the witenagemot through his impetuous appropriation of both the Seven Boroughs and Sigeferth's widow. Of course it is easy to overlook his rash behavior when you consider that he was defending his kingdom against a ruthless invader and an ignoble parvenu, but he did rebel against his father while he was still alive, and Edmund thus began his career as a recreant.

The war continued between the two sides until the Battle of Assandun, in which Eadric, having deceived Edmund into accepting his aid against Canute, led a last-minute retreat of the English army that threw the forces of Edmund into confusion and mass slaughter. Henry of Huntingdon relates that Eadric accomplished this trickery through displaying a human head that resembled Edmund and exhorting his troops, "Flet Engle, Flet Engle, ded is Edmund." Florence of Worcester further embellishes this claim (but moves the scene to Sherston) and accuses the "perfidious" Eadric of having struck off the head "cujusdam viri, regi Eadmundo facie capillisque simillimi, Osmeari

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147 Roger of Wendover, Flores Historiarum, 539. The text reads: "Erat autem Eadmundus iste non ex Emma regina, sed ex quadem ignobili femina, generatus; qui utique matris suae generis ignobilitatem mentis ingenuitate et corporis strenuitate redintegrando redemit."
148 Ibid.
149 Whitelock, EHD, 296.
150 Henry of Huntingdon, Historia Anglorum, 358.
nomine" (of a certain fellow, by the name of Osmear, who was similar in both face and hair to King Edmund) to provide the necessary prop for the ruse.\textsuperscript{151} This defeat forced Edmund to negotiate peace with Canute, and on the River Severn the two parties concluded the Treaty of Olney. This agreement, concluded in Eadric's territory of Gloucestershire whither Eadric and Edmund retreated after Assandun, re-established the natural political boundaries of England. King Edmund was granted Wessex, East Anglia, Essex, and London, while Canute, the Dane, claimed the remaining land north of the Thames.\textsuperscript{152} Florence, as well as the voice of the \textit{Encomium Emmae}, depicted Eadric as strongly pressuring the reluctant warrior for a compromise.\textsuperscript{153} Of course this settlement benefited Eadric since it gave his actual ally Canute control of Mercia, which could be legitimately returned to Eadric's oversight. Shortly afterwards, King Edmund died in London and was buried at Glastonbury. Less than a month later, Canute was proclaimed the legitimate king of all England, and granted Eadric the new title of Earl of Mercia.

\textsuperscript{151}Florence of Worcester, \textit{Chronicon ex Chronicis}, 175.


Concerning this campaign, Eadric has not been castigated so much for allying himself with a Dane as much as for his trickery. Both the political and cultural boundaries between what was English and what was Danish in this time had become confused and ambiguous, as we have seen. Furthermore, both sides in the war were (nominally) Christian. This was probably, in the eyes of the Church (and therefore of the chroniclers), the most significant difference between the Norse marauders of the eighth and ninth centuries and the vikings of Canute's era. It has been well-documented that while king, Canute was in fact quite solicitous of the English Church.

It is, then, this deceit, and most of all the trickery at Assandun, that earned Eadric his reputation as aristocratic England's greatest moral offender. Some insight into this view can be found in the *Encomium Emmae*, a panegyric composed between 1040-42 under the watchful eye of the strong-willed wife of both Æthelred and Canute. Composed by a monastic inmate, whom Emma explicitly selected, whose monastery still remembered the good-will and material liberality of the English royal house, the *Encomium* was ostensibly written to laud the Anglo-Danish royal line and not to define the exact political situation in England. Therefore one must use its passages with care. The ideas and values implicit in this work written by and for the upper reaches of society, however, may be used to illustrate the medieval value structure that Eadric so

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154 *Encomium Emmae*, xxii.
156 The writer, at St. Omer, described at length Canute's friendly disposition and his gifts, and exhorted other kings to be as generous to the church, in relating that: "Haec et alia his mirificentiora a domno Cnutone gesta uidi ego, uester urnula, Sancte Audomare, Sancte Bertine, cum fientent uestris in caenobis : pro quibus bonis tantum regem impertrate uiuere in caelestibus habitaculis, ut uestri famuli canonici et monachi sunt orantes orationibus cotidianis. Discant igitur reges et principes huius domini imitari actiones . . . ." *Encomium Emmae*, 36-38.
egregiously offended. In this work, the ealdorman was depicted in his usual manner, as *consiliis pollens sed tamen dolositate versipellis* (skillful in council but treacherous in guile).\(^{157}\) This sly magnate then treacherously insinuated himself in Edmund's favor by saying that he knows "the hardihood of the Danes."\(^{158}\) Of course this skillful talker knew the Danes for he was conniving with Canute against Edmund the whole time. It becomes apparent that Eadric's interests still lay with the Danish camp when, even prior to Assandun, he hindered Edmund's all-but-sealed victory at Otford.\(^{159}\) This theme of Eadric's trickery against the noble Edmund was repeated when the encomiast has Eadric reveal to Edmund after the defeat at Assandun, that he had "sufficient experience of Danish success."\(^{160}\) Once again Eadric, in his false alliance with Edmund, plays the part of the ignoble "hatchet man," but this time for Canute.

His clever, however deceitful ploy at Assandun not only struck against the aristocratic soul, but also against the aristocratic flesh, as a nearly unprecedented number of England's greatest men were slain in the chaos that ensued after Eadric's theatries.\(^{161}\) As seen in the Anglo-Saxon poem the *Battle of Maldon*, medieval battles should be won by strength, courage, and valor, and not *fraude*,\(^{162}\) so a military engagement won through an underhanded trick that led to a near annihilation of the warrior aristocracy was especially distasteful to the elites of the realm. While Eadric, a notorious example of the possibility of social mobility in the late Anglo-Saxon era, had come far in life from

\(^{157}\)Ibid., 26-27.

\(^{158}\)Ibid.

\(^{159}\)Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest*, 386.

\(^{159}\)Encomium Emmæ, 28-29.

\(^{161}\)The Chronicle (C) reveals that "There was Bishop Eadnoth killed, and Abbot Wulfsige, and Ealdorman Ælfric, and Godwine, the ealdorman of Lindsey, and Ulfætel of East Anglia, and Æthelweard, son of Ealdorman Æthelwine, and all the nobility of England was there destroyed." Whitelock, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, sub anno 1016.

\(^{162}\)Encomium Emmæ, 31.
Shropshire to Assandun, his accomplishments are discredited not by their own qualities (for they were quite impressive), nor by the actions of others, but by the medieval strictures of perception contained in and perpetuated by both the writers of Anglo-Danish England, and the modern observers who yet subscribe to the still-powerful notions of military honor and the rule of the elites of blood, whether Dane or Saxon.
CHAPTER III

EARL EADRIC, 1016-1017

Eadric's Position in late 1016

The midwinter witenagemot of 1016 conferred monarchical authority over all England on the King of Denmark, Canute. While not an election in its pristine sense, this acclamation of the young Nordic warrior put to rest a nearly four-year period of upheaval, uncertainty, and civil war in England. Still smarting from these years of war and rapine, the English did not exactly hail Canute as a deliverer, but were indeed in a quite sour, even if safer, state of mind over the whole affair. Florence of Worcester augmented the sparse Anglo-Saxon Chronicle account of the accession of Canute in imputing Danish deception at the meeting of the gemot, relating that "God knows, they bore false witness and fouly lied . . . ."¹ Perjury or not, England by 1017 could settle down to a more orderly, peaceful, and highly taxed pace of life under the Danish sword, and the detested Eadric could legitimately reclaim his seat as the chief officer of Mercia from the Humber to the Bristol Avon, this time with the Nordic title of earl (jarl), under the Danish King Canute.² As with modern fascism, a people traded a bit of freedom in exchange for security and stability, and the new order of life under the menacing blades of the housecarles was not all too bad for the upper ranks of English society that managed to avoid immediate execution in the days following the Christmas council of 1016.

²Canute divided England into four districts in 1017, each governed by an earl. Eadric was appointed to Mercia, while Thorkell the Tall was given East Anglia; Eric Hlathir was reaffirmed in Northumbria, and the king himself retained supervision of Wessex.
Commerce and trade resumed in peacetime, as they usually do, and brought newfound prosperity to the realm. The English Church, which found itself under the authority of a heathen only once-removed, was well cared for, and like the merchants, found the reign of Canute a propitious time to engage in its particular trade. The aristocracy was not left out of this happy picture either. Sir Frank Stenton described the new king of England and Denmark as giving "the chance of an exciting career to young noblemen."3 This pandering to the native power structure, and especially to its literate arm, the Church, explains why a ruthless Scandinavian conqueror is so lauded by his subjugated contemporaries, while Eadric, branded as a delinquent ever since his first days by the side of the discredited King Æthelred, seems to come back for more abuse at each turn of history. Nevertheless, Eadric's career as an officer of state resumed in 1017, and presumably the Mercian looked forward to future years of "excitement" through the reign of the naturalized viking in England.

Eadric did not know that this was to be the last year of his life. What nobody else has been able wholly to decipher concerning the earl's final months until Canute had him murdered on Christmas, furthermore, is why exactly Eadric sided with Canute against Edmund beginning in 1015, and why Eadric, who was first rewarded with the earldom of Mercia, was later executed almost one year later, on Christmas 1017. The ambivalent Anglo-Danish culture of England of the time could justify an alliance between Canute and Eadric, but it is not certain why Eadric turned his back upon the son of the man he himself had served for almost a decade. Was it because Edmund, in his display of complete disregard for his father's authority and will, made it clear to Eadric that, if Edmund were to emerge from the events of 1015-16 victorious,

he would not be retained in the lucrative appointment that King Æthelred had granted him? If this was the case, Eadric must have broken with the Ætheling at the moment of his seizure of the Seven Boroughs in 1015, for, as the will of Æthelstan Ætheling affirms, Eadric was still in the favor of the elder sons of Æthelred II around the time of the Emma's 1013 flight to Normandy with the royal household.4 A charter that granted land to Eadric, furthermore, is witnessed by Edmund, thus showing that Edmund's disaffection with Eadric and the legitimate royal authority of his father had yet to manifest itself in the spring of 1014.5 Edmund's rebellion against the king and witenagemot in the following year came as a surprise to Eadric, even if it has gained the approval of the generations of subsequent observers who still sing the praises of the headstrong prince while at the same time condemning Eadric for his defiance of the Ætheling. That Edmund became openly antagonistic toward his own father in the aftermath of the Oxford gemot (and logically also to Eadric), however, only partially explains why the ealdorman, who at the time must have been in his forties,6 and had never, aside from an expedition in Wales, shown any military capacity, decided to bear the sword against the prince. The circumstances behind Eadric's oft-maligned decision lie further in the past than 1015, however. To understand them, one must gaze back at least three years, even before the murky and sometimes indiscernible events that transpired during the continental flight of the royals in the fall of 1013.

4The Ætheling, in his will made shortly before his death, bequeathed to Eadric one of his many swords. Dorothy Whitelock, ed., Anglo-Saxon Wills (orig. pub. 1930, reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1973), XX.
5John M. Kemble, Codex Diplomaticus Ævi Saxonici, vol. 6. (orig. pub. 1845, reprint, Vaduz: Kraus Reprint, Ltd., 1964), MCCCIX.
6The earliest creditable mention of Eadric is found in a 991 charter of his original sponsor, Bishop Oswald of Worcester. A. J. Robertson, Anglo-Saxon Charters (Cambridge, England: University Press, 1939), LXVII; See above, 5.
Eadric in Normandy

Amid the unmitigated Viking plunder that formed the visible manifestation of what in reality was a national war between Denmark and England, Queen Emma, as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle reports, "went across the sea to her brother Richard, and with her Abbot Ælfhsige of Peterborough . . . ."7 The chronicle further states that "the king sent Bishop Ælfhun across the sea with the Æthelings Edward and Alfred . . . ."8 The king himself joined the royal family in exile after spending Christmas on the Isle of Wight.9 The eldest sons from his first marriage, Æthelstan and Edmund, were left to their own devices in England during this interregnum. The movements of the individuals who withdrew to Normandy are hard to follow up until the time of Emma's marriage to Canute in July 1017.10 Roger of Wendover added Eadric of Mercia to the train of high-ranking defectors to Normandy, asserting in his Flores Historiarum that Eadric accompanied the queen and her two children to Normandy and resided with them for two years.11 This claim is not as far-fetched as one might first believe, especially since Eadric, as a kinsman of the monarch due to his marriage to Æthelred's daughter, Edith, was a member of the same royal household that included Emma, Edward, and Alfred. Furthermore, Eadric's well-documented aversion to fighting the Danes in England lends credence to his supposed flight from the country, especially

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7 Dorothy Whitelock, David Douglas, and Susie Tucker, eds., The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1961), sub anno 1013. The version quoted here is C (D,E). This recension, which is the best authority on the reign of Æthelred II, will be used henceforth in this work unless otherwise stated.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 The most recent analysis of this subject is by Simon Keynes, "The Æthelings in Normandy" Anglo-Norman Studies 13 (1990), 173-200.
since the enemy appeared unstoppable, just having subjugated the traditionally stalwart city of London. Roger added that during the two years in which Æthelred's son-in-law reputedly stayed with the royal household-in-exile, Eadric personally attended the queen herself in a resplendent manner (ei magnifice ministravit). Roger's assertion is furthermore believable in that Eadric had had contact with Emma at least since 1007, with his accession to the ealdormanry of Mercia and his subsequent marriage to Emma's step-daughter. Eadric and Emma also both witnessed two royal charters together in that same year. Emma, a vivacious and noble lady whom Henry of Huntingdon rhymingly dubbed Emma Normannorum gemma, surely made an impression on the newly-elevated Mercian, just as she did on almost everyone with whom she came into contact. Domineering, ambitious, and of an unsurpassed beauty, Emma was described by her panegyrist in the Encomium Emmae as "a lady of the greatest nobility and wealth, but yet the most distinguished of the women of her time for delightful beauty and wisdom..." Of course, since the queen had commissioned her own Encomium, the claims of her distinguished beauty may be exaggerated. However, the panegyrist must have known that the queen was of a truly imperious and controlling nature, or else he would have not felt the need in the first place to insert such adulatory remarks on his patron. When it is also taken into account that, by 1013, Emma certainly must have been able

12Whitelock, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, sub anno 1013.
13Roger of Wendover, Flores Historiarum, 537.
15Kemble, Codex Diplomaticus, vol. 6, MCCCIII, MCCCIV.
18The encomiast explicitly states this, calling himself "Ego servus tuus," and relating how she enjoined him to write certain things. "de his, quae mihi a te, domina regina, precepta sunt." Ibid., 4.
to speak English proficiently enough to allow the midlander *magnifice ministrare* in a coherent fashion, Roger of Wendover's thirteenth-century claims of Eadric's voyage to Normandy and his lengthy solicitude of the queen are tenable, although undocumented.

It is interesting to note that in Roger's terse entry, Eadric is acting in a manner inconsistent with the Eadric Streona that history knows: namely, a murderous villain. In saying that this ealdorman, known more for treachery and deception, indeed served a great queen in exile, this passage of Roger counters what was by then a two-century old portrait of Eadric painted by the historical tradition of the Anglo-Danish, and later Anglo-Norman, aristocratic power structure. If anything, this Eadric, the chief delinquent of Anglo-Saxon England, should have been self-servingly ministering to the pliable minds of the young princes, Edward and Alfred, for those two years he supposedly spent with the family from 1013 until his return at the Oxford *witenagemot* of 1015. What exactly was Eadric attempting to gain through his succor to Emma while the king was in England, attending to the twin problems of a ravaging Viking, Canute, and the depredations of an Englishman who acted like a Viking, Edmund? Probably not much, other than that he would be fulfilling his traditional duties as one of the king's leading thegns in looking after interests of the head of the royal household in exile, Emma. Of course this Eadric found in this particular page of the *Flores Historiarum* comports not with the Eadric Streona vilified in the written discourse of official England, whether in the selectively laconic *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* or by the flag-waving exemplar of Victorianism, E.A. Freeman. This other Eadric -- not *Eadric Streona* -- but the Eadric found by the side of Queen Emma in Normandy, lives for a brief moment only in the pages of Roger of Wendover, a small individual blot on the
common portrait painted by the *Streona-ist* historiography too readily accepted even today.

Another piece of evidence that supports Roger's claim of Eadric's two-year sojourn in Normandy is that Eadric disappears from the official record from 1013-15. The *Chronicle* entry for 1014 contains no mention of its favorite homegrown villain, Eadric. That year, however, was yet a calamitous one for England, with the return of King Æthelred accompanied not by Eadric, but by young Edward, a 21,000 pound tax levy, and a great flood that "submerged many villages and a countless number of people."\(^{19}\) The chronicle had taken care to link Ealdorman Eadric with every large tax levy in the past, but in 1014 no mention is made of the man so associated with mercenary transfers and such "evils."\(^{20}\) Eadric not being present in England for the events of 1014 is consistent with Roger of Wendover's assertion that Eadric was in Normandy with Queen Emma.

The movements of the members of the English royal household in Normandy are difficult to trace, and there could have been substantial back-and-forth movement between the continent and England by any of the individual characters during the years 1013-1017. One must remember that Emma and her sons fled to Normandy in separate ships, and thus could return separately as well. Edward Ætheling, the future Edward the Confessor, is known to have been sent back to England before his father's return in 1014, only to return to Normandy upon Canute's eventual victory in 1016.\(^{21}\) The whereabouts of Emma herself during this period is a topic still unresolved. Thietmar of Merseburg, a nearly contemporary writer for the period, propounds

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\(^{19}\) Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, sub anno 1014.

\(^{20}\) Ibid.

\(^{21}\) Ibid.
that Emma, following the April 1016 death of her husband, remained in London for six months.\textsuperscript{22} This version is seconded by another historian, William of Jumièges, in his eleventh-century \textit{Gesta Normannorum Ducum}.\textsuperscript{23} The \textit{Anglo-Saxon Chronicle} (E) simply reports that Canute had Emma "fetched" (feccean) for his wife\textsuperscript{24}; the reader is left to presume that Emma would be brought from Normandy, since that is where the chronicle last placed her in 1013.\textsuperscript{25} Her location, however, is not explicitly stated, even with the retrospective vision of the work. Moreover, the use of the term "fetch" rather than the more restrictive "bring" raises questions. To "fetch" connotes to bring something back from an unspecified or unknown location,\textsuperscript{26} while "bring" presupposes a specific location from which something is to be procured. In any case, Emma's unspecified whereabouts at any given time, compounded with Edward's known whereabouts outside of Normandy from 1013-1017 confirm that individual, and also unrecorded, movement across the Channel was possible.

If one cannot wholly accept Roger's assertion that Eadric served Emma in Normandy for two whole years, one still cannot deny that Eadric attended the queen at intervals. Anything else would imply that Eadric remained in England while Swegen and Canute ran amok, and even the king absconded -- an assertion that, given Eadric's own aversion to warfare, is hardly believable.

\textsuperscript{22}\textit{Chronicon} of Thietmar of Merseburg, VII:40, as quoted in Dorothy Whitelock, ed., \textit{English Historical Documents, circa 500-1042} (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1955), 320.
\textsuperscript{24}Charles Plummer and John Earle, eds., \textit{Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel}, vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1892), sub anno 1017.
\textsuperscript{25}ibid., sub anno 1013.
\textsuperscript{26}The \textit{Oxford English Dictionary}, 2d. ed., s. v. "fetch", defines the term as "to go in quest of, and convey or conduct back."
by even the most die-hard of Eadric-haters. There is reason, in fact, to believe
that Eadric came back to England at least once, following the return of his lord,
King Æthelred, in the spring of 1014. A charter produced in the summer after
his return granted to Eadric church lands in Dorset. Eadric, along with
"Eadweard eytheo" and "Ælfred eytheo," is among the witnesses of the
document.\(^{27}\) This charter proves not only that movement occurred between
England and Normandy that escaped the record of the chronicler (for Alfred,
whom no writer ever mentioned as having left Normandy, was present), but
also that Eadric returned to England to seal a transaction of the kind for which
he is known best: that of property acquisition. Of course, if the ealdorman
were to leave his safe position in Normandy for any reason, it would be for that
which Eadric most held dear, capital gain. Perhaps Eadric was also in England
for the funeral of Æthelstan ætheling, who died in June 1014. The signature of
the eldest prince was not among those in the witness list; his last subscription,
in fact, was of KCD 1308, in the late summer of 1013.\(^ {28}\) Of course, while
Eadric was visiting England he could have, in addition to the Dorset properties,
also acquired the sword that the deceased prince had bequeathed to him.
Whatever Eadric's reasons for returning, the witness list of one of two royal
charters of 1014 proves that silent movement between England and the
continent did indeed take place in the last years of Æthelred's reign.

\(^{27}\) Kemble, *Codex Diplomatarium*, vol. 6, MCCCIX.

\(^{28}\) Until the recent treatment of Keynes, most historians had assumed that the ætheling had died in
1015. For the chronology of Æthelstan's death, see Simon Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred
The Royal Succession

The Anglo-Saxon poem, *The Wanderer*, in its first part depicts the barren nature of a lordless existence. A man who has lost his lord recalls the retainers and the receiving of treasure, how in his youth his generous lord entertained him with feasting; joy has all passed away. For this he knows who must long forgo the counsel of his dear lord, when sorrow and sleep together lay hold on the wretched solitary man, that it seems in his mind that he is embracing and kissing his liege lord, and laying hands and head on his knee, as sometimes in days of yore he enjoyed the bounty from the throne. Then the friendless man awakens; he sees before him the dark waves, the seabirds dripping, and spreading their wings, frost and snow falling, mingled with hail. Then the wounds of his heart are the heavier, in grief for his loved one.29

Eadric lost his lord, Æthelred, on 23 April 1016, after the king had been lying sick at Cosham since the summer of 1015.30 Now Eadric would no longer enjoy the "bounty from the throne," as he had under King Æthelred, but had to face the future as a "friendless man." Since the king had been incapacitated for such a long time preceding his death, Eadric presumably had to "forgo the counsel of his dear lord" for any number of months. The king and those in his immediate household were Eadric's only known supporters during his political career, and now with Æthelstan dead, the king dying, Edmund in open rebellion, and the rest of the clan based across the Channel, Eadric certainly realized that he was a hated man without any friends -- a fatal position in the Anglo-Saxon world. His alliance with the impetuous Edmund had quickly evaporated in 1015, when Eadric chose to side with Canute to put an end to the defiant Ætheling in the north during Æthelred's long slide into morbidity.31 To side with a Dane in opposition to one in open war against his king was Eadric's duty as a royally-appointed ealdorman, but after April 1016, Eadric would have

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29 Whitelock, *EHD*, 801-802.
31 Ibid., sub anno 1015.
been free to side with whomever he pleased. Selfish political interests could have dictated his actions past this point in time; however, other considerations factored into his course of action. In deciding to continue the war against King Edmund, Eadric of Mercia was in fact honoring his attachment to what remained of the household of Æthelred the Second -- the household that he had grown to know in Normandy while he ministered to Queen Emma in great state. Eadric, no longer assured of his position after the death of his sponsor, and certain that he had scant few allies left in the realm, took up arms in 1016 on behalf not of his personal political interests, but on behalf of the closest representative of what Eadric knew of King Æthelred's legacy.

This legacy, as Emma would have it in the summer of 1016, did not include the elder sons of Æthelred, but instead centered on the two young Æthelings in Normandy, Edward and Alfred. Emma in the next year would abandon the claims of these lads upon her marriage to Canute, only to manipulate them in the following decades when it best served her interests. In 1036, she summoned both of them from Normandy to challenge Harold Harefoot, whom she detested, only to abandon them in 1040 upon the accession of her son by Canute, Harthacanute. Shortly thereafter, when Harthacanute and Emma faced an uncertain political future,\textsuperscript{32} Emma had Edward recalled to England. (Alfred had been murdered in 1036 while on his ill-fated expedition on behalf of his mother). In 1016, as in 1036, Edward and Alfred were the best hopes of Emma and Eadric in securing their respective futures in England.

Both Eadric and Emma attempted to take advantage of the split in the royal family between those young children of Æthelred and Emma and those

\textsuperscript{32} See Frank Barlow, Edward the Confessor (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 1970), 49, for the circumstances surrounding the 1041 end of Edward's exile in Normandy.
older ones of Æthelred and his first wife.\textsuperscript{33} Tension between these two camps had been brewing since Emma began to add to the royal brood with the birth of Edward between 1003 and 1005.\textsuperscript{34} This schism in the household of Æthelred was widened with the militarization of the court following the escalation of war between England and Denmark in 1013. Æthelstan and Edmund were to make a substantial royal contribution in fighting the Viking invaders. On the other hand, the two sons of Emma, while bearing the names of the two West Saxon kings that successfully resisted the first wave of Viking attacks in England, were too young effectively to take up arms against the enemy. When Æthelstan and Edmund remained in England while the rest of the family fled in 1013, their position as the chief Æhelings in the realm appeared unquestionable.

Chief princes or not, both of these daredevils were just as much a threat to the royal house of England as they were to that of Denmark. As we have seen, Edmund was in armed defiance against the witenagemot before the end of 1015, challenging not only his father, but also the aspirations of Emma, Eadric, and the young princes in exile. Any hopes that Emma would one day see her sons crowned king of England appeared, after April 1016, as dead as the husband whom she detested. Emma's expectation that one of her children by Æthelred possibly could be selected king over the elder Æhelings is not without historical support. One of her terms of marriage to Canute, for instance, was that her future children by him would take precedence in royal succession over his children by his wife more Danico, Ælfgifu of

\textsuperscript{33}William of Malmesbury, as well as Roger of Wendover, posits that this first wife was of ignoble status. Malmesbury writes "Erat istic Edmundus non ex Emma natus, sed ex quadam alia, quam fama obscura recondit." William of Malmesbury, De Gestis Regum Anglorum, ed. William Stubbs. vol. 1. Rolls Series. (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1887), 213.

\textsuperscript{34}Edward's parents were married in 1002, and his name first appeared on the witness list of a 1005 charter (KCD 1301), which was written before 16 November.
Northampton. Edward's putative precedence over Edmund in the royal succession, furthermore, is bolstered by a claim in the *Vita Edwardi Regis* that "When the royal wife of old King Æthelred was pregnant in her womb, all the men of the country took an oath that if a man-child should come forth as the fruit of her labour, they would await in him their lord and king . . . ."36 Whether this tale is true or not, the expectation it engenders comports with what we know of Emma's attitudes concerning such matters. Nevertheless, Edmund's wartime confirmation as king in 1016 dashed all current hopes for Edward's quick accession that Canute's invasion had already placed in jeopardy. Eadric by that time knew that he held no further hopes for his own political future with Edmund, as he, immediately preceding his 1015 alliance with Canute, had attempted to murder the Ætheling.37 As under Æthelred, Eadric undertook the "dirty work" of dissimulation and trickery while those others who benefited from his actions, in this case Queen Emma, remained safely at home.

If Eadric used his alliance with Canute to prosecute his personal cause against Edmund in 1015-16, and allowed himself to be used by Emma to contest King Edmund on behalf of the ætheling Edward, how does one reconcile this with the fact that even if Eadric was successful (which he was up until his murder in 1017), there was yet Canute to be dealt with? This is a pressing question, but not one with which the participants of the Danish wars

35*"Sed abnegat illa, se unquam Cnutonis sponsam fieri, nisi illi iusiurando affirmaret, quod numquam alterius coniugis filium post se regnare faceret nisi eius, si forte illi Deus ex eo filium dedisset." Encomium Emmae, 32. This agreement furthermore, as was typical of Emma's self-serving manipulation of the existing and potential products of her womb, ignored the claims of Edward and Alfred.


37Whitelock, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, sub anno 1015.
necessarily concerned themselves. Canute's thoughts on royal succession -- which, amidst the events of 1015-16 were yet only theoretical (for Canute had only a wife more Danico and no legitimate children) -- could not have been a great preoccupation during the chaos of war;\(^{38}\) the threat Edmund posed to the line of Emma and Æthelred by his very existence, however, was clearly felt across the channel. If Eadric wanted to retain his ealdormanry (and possibly even his life), and if Emma wanted, as her own Encomium states, to retain "a hope of saving what was left of her position," King Edmund had to be eliminated first, without exerting themselves in divining the specifics of Canute's views on linear succession.\(^{39}\)

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Queen Emma

While Emma's propagandist claimed that "... the bond of motherly and brotherly love is of strength indestructible," Emma's actions clearly revealed otherwise.\(^{40}\) Throughout her life, Emma repeatedly demonstrated that she possessed little concern for anyone but her own children, whom she loved only enough to manipulate in her own interest. In both the extended families of Æthelred and her subsequent husband, Canute, a rigid line separated Emma's own children from the "other" potential heirs in the household. Emma divided her own children, furthermore, into two camps, one of which formed the "other"; she favored her offspring with Canute while relegating the sons of her previous marriage to second-class status. William of Malmesbury asserted that

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\(^{38}\)Emma learned of the existence of Ælfgifu and her son Harold during her 1017 marriage negotiations with Canute. "Dicebatur enim ab alia quadam rex filios habuisse . . . ." Encomium Emmae, 32.

\(^{39}\)Ibid., 47.

\(^{40}\)The text reads "Hic fides habetur regni sotiis, hic inuiolabile uiget faedus materni fraternique amoris." Ibid., 52-53.
Emma transferred her hatred for Æthelred to the sons she had by him.\footnote{In reference to Edward, William writes: "Mater 'Angustos filii jamdudum riserat annos,' nihil unquam de suo largita, hereditario scilicet odio parentis in prolem; nam magis Cnutonem et amaverat vivum, ed laudabat defunctum." William of Malmesbury, De Gestis Regum Anglorum, 237.} However, these "other" sons, Edward and Alfred, did not bear the brunt of her wrath. The "other" children born of previous wives to her husbands were the objects of her primary detestation.

Further historical evidence that supports these two generalizations of Emma's household preferences and prejudices is uncovered through an examination of her relations with her sons after 1016, as drawn from the eleventh-century works *Encomium Emmæ*, *Vita Edwardi Regis*, and *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* of William of Jumièges. Following the death of Edmund and the election of Canute as king of all England, the first instance of her selfish indifference to the fate of Edward and Alfred becomes clear. When Emma, who once again became queen through her marriage to Canute in July 1017, had attained what she wanted without the intercession of her first sons, she abandoned them to a life of continued exile at the Norman court. All went well without the Æþelings by her side for eighteen years, until 1035, when her husband passed away. While the threat of Norwegian invasion immobilized Emma's own Harthacanute in Denmark, Canute's son by Ælfgifu of Northampton, Harold, was making a strong bid for the English crown. At this juncture Edward and Alfred suddenly became Emma's worthy princes once again. Emma, just as was the case with Edmund, reviled both Harold and his mother, and advanced the claims of her sons when she had no alternative to hold onto power.\footnote{Ibid., xiii. Both æþelings, however, possibly had their hopes of accession to the English kingdom piqued by Canute when, according to William of Jumièges, he, sometime before January 1035, offered the exiles half the kingdom of England. Van Houts, *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, vol. 2, 78-79.} Both æþelings, at their mother's behest, launched expeditions to England to uphold Emma's honor as queen of the realm. The
voyage of Alfred, recorded in all the relevant sources, ended with his capture by Earl Godwin and his subsequent blinding and death. Only the Norman sources record the tale of Edward's counterpart "invasion" of England. William of Jumièges wrote that Edward, chomping at the bit for the crown, landed at Southampton with forty ships, but soon realized that "he could not possibly obtain the kingdom of the English without a larger army, [and] turned the fleet about." All of the machinations of Emma could not prevent Harold Harefoot, with the aid of Earl Godwine, from capturing the throne of England. In the winter of that same year, with her plans and reputation in tatters, Emma was expelled from the country and sailed to Flanders. If she had been aggrieved for the fate that befell her sons as her Encomiast would have us believe, Emma would not have withdrawn to Flanders to await the intervention of Harthacanute, but to her son Edward in her home of Normandy. With Edward and Alfred both having failed to varying degrees in their attempted incursions, however, they were of no use to their mother while King Harold resided safely in England.

The events of 1036 clearly demonstrate the prejudice Emma felt toward the royal contenders sprung not of her own womb. The queen, however, also evinced a general favoritism toward her son by Canute over her sons by Æthelred. Independent of her shoddy treatment of these exiled sons after the death of her second husband, documentary sources of the era point out the malice Emma felt toward her first spouse. The Encomium Emmae contains, as if she never had anything to do with Æthelred, no mention of the monarch who

43 Whitelock, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, sub anno 1036; Encomium Emmae, 41-47.
45 Whitelock, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, sub anno 1037.
46 The Encomium Emmae, 46, describes Emma as "... regina tanti sceleris noutate percusla..." after the death of Alfred.
ruled England for thirty-eight years. William of Malmesbury furthermore stated that the royal family (Emma included) despised the long-standing monarch.\textsuperscript{47} When Harold died on 17 March 1040, it was not the son of \textit{Unraed} whom she beckoned to the throne, but Harthacanute, the son of the North. This man, the reigning King of Denmark and Emma's favorite, sailed first to Bruges, and then with Emma, made the crossing to his new kingdom with a fleet of sixty ships.\textsuperscript{48} Edward would simply have to wait for the next time when his mother needed his shelved legitimacy to advance her fortunes -- but that time was not in 1040.

The \textit{Encomium Emmae}, composed during the reign of Harthacanute, makes it clear throughout that Edward possessed a weak claim to the title of king. That the work was written to justify the accession of the Dane nevertheless shows that Emma indeed desired for Harthacanute to be the king of England, since she herself commissioned the work.\textsuperscript{49} Concerning events prior to the accession of Harold, for instance, the \textit{Encomium} has Edward send Alfred in his place on the English expedition of 1036.\textsuperscript{50} The same work, furthermore, gainsays the later statement concerning the oaths the English nobles took to a foetal Edward,\textsuperscript{51} in asserting that "the English nobles had sworn no oath to him . . . ."\textsuperscript{52}

The queen mother's aversion to the prospect of Edward acceding to the throne is demonstrated even outside of the pages of her short apology for King

\textsuperscript{47}Ethelred "qui domesticis ut alienis esset ridiculo." William of Malmesbury, \textit{De Gestis Regum Anglorum}, 213.

\textsuperscript{48}Whitelock, \textit{Anglo-Saxon Chronicle}, sub anno 1040.

\textsuperscript{49}Sten Körner, \textit{The Battle of Hastings, England, and Europe, 1035-1066} (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1964), 47ff; see also above, 57.

\textsuperscript{50}\textit{Encomium Emmae}, 42-43.

\textsuperscript{51}See above, 65.

\textsuperscript{52}The text reads "... cum Angliorum optimates nullum ei fecerint iusciurandum. . . ." \textit{Encomium Emmae}, 48-49.
Harthacanute in the *Encomium*. With Edward back in England, Emma, with the treasure of Harthacanute in hand, supposedly invited the half-brother of Harald Hardrada, Magnus, to become the king after her favorite son's death in 1042.\(^5\) Sir Frank Stenton, in his *Anglo-Saxon England*, takes this claim seriously, while the preeminent authority on Edward's reign, Frank Barlow, assigns this accusation lesser cachet.\(^4\) I personally agree with Barlow's conclusion that Emma, flustered over the demise of the son in whom she placed such hope, "may possibly have said . . . things which were repeated and perhaps exaggerated; but it is most unlikely that she . . . would ever have seriously plotted a Norwegian invasion in order to keep Edward off the throne."\(^5\) In a court milieu in which "Simulation and dissimulation were political skills that were highly prized,"\(^5\) Emma sincerely did not wish that Magnus invade England, but the kernel of truth carried within these rumors shows that she was not overjoyed either at the prospect of Edward becoming king. Edward twice had been enlisted on behalf of Queen Emma -- the first time in 1016 and the second time twenty years later. On both occasions, the Ætheling's "influence" availed her naught. In 1016, she became queen in her own right, and in 1036, Edward's putative raid, which the English sources did

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\(^5\)The *Translation of St. Mildred*, the lone source for this claim, stated: "So according to the dispensation of God who governs all things, England received the native-born Edward for king. He was the offspring of King Ethelred and Emma. While he was reigning in peace like unto Solomon, his own mother was accused of inciting Magnus, king of Norway, to invade England, and it was said that she had given countless treasures to Magnus. Wherefore this traitor to the kingdom, this enemy of the country, this betrayer of her own son, was judged, and everything she possessed was forfeited to the king." T. D. Hardy, *Catalogue of Materials*, vol. 1, 381, as quoted in Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (CDE), note, sub anno 1043.


\(^6\)Ibid., 93.
not even bother to record,\textsuperscript{57} ended in a slapstick fiasco reminiscent of his father's martial endeavors. Twice she had turned to Edward, and twice he had disappointed her. The ambitious "Gem of the Normans" could not countenance ineptitude and thus had her feckless first husband essentially banished from the record. Likewise Edward, who was in 1041 recalled to England only to serve as a prop for Harthacanute's legitimacy, could evoke little warmth in the heart of the woman he had already twice failed.

The royal succession of 1016 and the war between Edmund and Eadric therefore witnessed a convergence of the two concurrent themes in Emma's family preferences: 1) A dislike for the children of Æthelred that sprung from her ill-will toward her former husband, and 2) a hatred for the offspring of both her husbands' prior marriages. Edmund Ironside fell into both of these categories. In addition to disdaining Edmund, the son of Æthelred and Ælfgifu, Emma supported the shaky claim to the throne of young Edward, for it was reciprocally her only claim to queenship in 1016. Emma, the surviving head of the royal household that Eadric had faithfully served through his necessary but bedeviled guile and treachery, presumably impressed upon the ealdorman her own preferences for the English succession during the two years he spent with her and her two sons, on and off, in Normandy. By the time of his permanent return to England sometime in early 1015,\textsuperscript{58} Eadric probably agreed with Emma that Edward, then twelve years old at most, would be a suitable successor to the aging king, if only because of the traditional pliability of young rulers. The personal interests of Emma and Eadric also converged in the campaign against Edmund because he, first as Ætheling and later as king, stood as an obstacle to the careers of both individuals. This is not to say that Eadric,

\textsuperscript{57}Ibid., 45.
\textsuperscript{58}See the Chronicle (CDE), sub anno 1015, for Eadric's involvement in the gemot at Oxford.
however, being the sly fellow that he was, only supported Emma's will to advance his own, personal, ends. There possibly was room in the mind of the ealdorman for a personal attachment to the queen with whom he spent many unknown days in safety and splendor -- an attachment that served as a replacement for the guidance and friendship of the "generous lord"59 he had lost in the spring of 1016.

How strong this attachment was in 1016 we shall never know, for the marriage of Canute and Emma in July 1017 rendered further maneuvers on behalf of the exiled princes moot. Emma, by marriage to the triumphant Dane, had at last attained what she wanted: a new lease on queenship. Reciprocally, this marriage, by annulling the claims to the throne of the æthelings in Normandy, gave Canute what he desired as well --security from counterrevolution or Norman invasion. Eadric probably did not consider his support of Emma as anything more than a secondary motive in his opposition to Ironside, for, while it fitted with his goal of self-preservation, his alliance with Canute in the war against Edmund was waged over more than the machinations of the former wife of his deceased king. For Eadric, too, the year 1017 rendered his shared ambitions with Emma moot, since Canute rewarded him with the newly created earldom of Mercia notwithstanding the past motives and lubricious deeds of the man whose self-aggrandizing nature had been employed by Æthelred, and later exploited by Emma.

59From the "Wanderer," see above, 62.
The Royal Transition of 1017

An encomium written for King Canute shortly following his 1027 pilgrimage to Rome, the Togdrápa, recounted how, after first securing the English throne,

... Canute slew or exiled one and all of Æthelred's sons.60

This statement, unlike so many other assertions in Nordic verse, is independently verified by the English sources.61 Within a year of Canute's accession to the diadem, all of the royal sons or sons-in-law of the two preceding kings of England were disposed of by banishment or execution, or in the case of Edmund's brother, Eadwig, both. The only thing that mitigated this bloodbath was that most of Æthelred's first batch of Æthelings died young and that his sons by Emma were already in exile.

Eadric, himself a son-in-law of Æthelred II, was appointed earl of Mercia and allowed to live for about one year before Canute, at the Christmas gemot of 1017, ordered him slain. Why did Canute wait so long to terminate Eadric -- long enough even reputedly to have solicited advice from him concerning other executions in 1016 and 1017?62 This is a question that has never been satisfactorily answered, although all historians of the era have promoted their own theories on the subject. The simplest, and most obvious, explanation of Canute's execution of Eadric is that it formed part of a purge of the old order in England. The chronicle of Florence of Worcester lends credence to this view in enumerating three other Englishmen who were

60Both the original and translation are found in Gudbrand Vigfusson and F. York Powell, Corpus Poeticum Boreale: The Poetry of the Northern tongue from the earliest times to the thirteenth century, vol. 2 (orig. pub. 1883, reprint, New York: Russell and Russell, 1965), 135.
61See Whitelock, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (CDE), sub anno 1017; Florence of Worcester, Chronicon ex Chronicis, 179-182.
murdered, without just cause, at the same time as Eadric.63 At the beginning of
his reign at least, Canute showed preference for Norsemen over Englishmen
when organizing his government. This is seen not only through his
appointments and executions, but in the fact that Danish names precede Saxon
names in the witness lists of Canute's royal charters.64 Certainly the murder
and banishment of the surviving æthelings in the days following Canute's
election constituted a necessarily political and impersonal purge of sorts, as did
the elimination of the three men executed along with Eadric. If Eadric had
been merely eliminated due to political circumstance, however, Canute would
not have waited until Christmas to do so, but would have killed Eadric along
with the first purge of royal kinsmen in 1017. It is interesting to note,
furthermore, that Florence added that Canute appointed Leofric to the vacant
earldom of Mercia, and treated him henceforth "with great kindness."65 This
fact invalidates the theory that Eadric was simply murdered in a purge of the
old order, for if Canute truly desired to free Mercia from the control of
holdovers from Æthelred's reign, he would not have appointed Leofric as earl.
Being the son of the ealdorman of the Hwicce under Æthelred, Leofric was just
as much a part of the old guard as Eadric.

Another political motive ascribed to the murder of Eadric is that the earl
was either guilty or suspected of treason against his new master.66 The
Encomium Emmae advances this argument, setting side by side a deceitful
Eadric and an honest Canute. Canute, according to the Encomium, "hated those

63"cum quo dux Nortmannus, filius Leofwini ducis, frater scilicet Leofrici comitis ; et Æthelwardus,
filius Agelmari ducis ; et Brihtricus filius Alphegi Domnaniensis satrapæ, sine culpa interfecit sunt." Ibid., 182.
64Laurence M. Larson, Canute the Great (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912), 122.
65"Leofricum ... rex constituit ducem, et eum postmodum valde carum habuit." Ibid. For the
appointment of Leofric, see also Stenton, Anglo-Saxon England, 416, and E. A. Freeman, The History
66Stenton, Anglo-Saxon England, 399; Larson, Canute the Great, 123.
whom he knew to have been deceitful”, and supposedly executed "many chiefs for deceit." Eadric, with his proven record of treachery, not toward his sworn lord, but nevertheless to others (and especially Edmund), certainly fell into the category of those Canute knew as treacherous. Historical evidence shows that Canute indeed killed those he judged guilty of treason, such as Earl Ulf, who was Canute's lieutenant in Denmark as well as the husband of the king's own sister, Estrith, and brother-in-law of Earl Godwine. Ulf had plotted to supplant the king's rightful control of Denmark, and around 1026, as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (E) asserts, engaged Canute in the battle of Holy River.

While Ulf apparently survived the battle, the Scandinavian king avenged this patent violation of his trust by having the turncoat murdered. Earl Ulf, a proven traitor, was therefore killed on the orders of a monarch who, as his son's paid apologist asserted, hated those he knew to have been untrustworthy. His officers guilty of treason he did not hesitate to kill, regardless of their connections to his own family or to his earls. Eadric, nevertheless, never was proven guilty of any treason toward Canute. None of the sources, not the Encomium Emmae, nor even the consistently accusatory chronicle of Florence even hint at a specific treason of Eadric. The theory, therefore, that Eadric was murdered on account of some treason remains weak at best.

67... eos quos subdolos scierat... odio haberet. adeo ut multos principum quadam die occidere pro huiusmodi dolo iubet. Encomium Emmae, 30-31.
68See Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, sub annis 1015, 1016; Florence of Worcester, Chronicon ex Chronicis, 170-180, passim.
69"Her for Cnut cyng to Denmearcon mid scipon to am holme æt ea ære halgan. ær comon ongean Vlf Eglaf." Plummer, Two Saxon Chronicles, sub anno 1025.
71Encomium Emmae, 30.
72Florence of Worcester only states that Canute was wary of future treachery: "timeabat insidiis ab eo aliquando circumveniri . . ." Chronicon ex Chronicis, 182.
Other even weaker theories abound concerning the banishments or executions of Canute in 1017. Laurence Larson hinted, for instance, that some significance lies in the timing of the executions at Christmas, the one-year anniversary of his accession.\textsuperscript{73} E. A. Freeman, on the other hand, commented that "The marriages of Emma would seem to have required a blood-bath as their necessary attendant."\textsuperscript{74} It is true that both the years of 1002 and 1017 witnessed great bloodshed, but which years in the English history of the early eleventh century did not? Freeman, a historian who plumbed the depths of the written sources of the era and beyond, was presumably influenced in this statement by a twelfth-century chronicler likewise known for his colorful writing, Henry of Huntingdon. The Anglo-Norman writer states that the St. Brice's Day massacre of the Danes in 1002 was directly connected to the increased pride and perfidy that arose in King Æthelred following his marriage to Emma.\textsuperscript{75} While these theories linked with timing and marriage serve as good literary devices, they do not make for plausible history.

While the supposition of Huntingdon, amplified and re-applied by Freeman seven centuries later, may seem like the most specious of the many unsatisfactory explanations regarding the execution of Eadric, it does nevertheless strike at what historians like to call the "higher truth above the facts." While Emma's marriages to Canute or Æthelred had, in all likelihood, nothing to do with the rash of deaths in either 1017 or 1002, the mere supposition that Emma influenced the actions of her husband points at the fact that women indeed do play an often overlooked role in the decisions of kings.

\textsuperscript{73} Larson, \textit{Canute the Great}, 122.  
\textsuperscript{74} Freeman, \textit{History of the Norman Conquest}, 409.  
\textsuperscript{75} "Quo [Emma] prouentu rex Adelred in superbiam elatus et perfidiam prolatus, omnes Dacos qui cum pace erant in Anglia clandestina prodicione fecit mactari una eademque die . . . ." Henry of Huntingdon, \textit{Historia Anglorum}, 340.
For the conclusion of this paper, I would like to posit that not Emma, but another partner of Canute, influenced Canute's belated decision to murder Eadric. That woman was Canute's first wife, *more Danico*, Ælfgifu of Northampton.

The Vengeance of Canute

Ælfgifu of Northampton, so known since her father, ealdorman Ælhelm of Northumbria, possessed large holdings in Northamptonshire, retains a historical significance that bestrides the North Sea. In Norway, where she was regent along with her son Swegen from 1030-1035, she is remembered as an overtaxing tyrant unsympathetic to local customs. In England, where she nearly evades mention in the national histories and chronicles of the land, Ælfgifu is known as Canute's concubine and the queen mother from 1035-1039, much to the dismay of Queen Emma. Ælfgifu, as deduced from the written evidence, probably became Canute's consort in the late summer of 1013, or shortly thereafter, when Swegen and Canute, after having planted themselves at Gainsborough (Lincolnshire), received the submission of the Five Boroughs. That Ælfgifu and the yet-teenage Canute married at this point in the Danish conquest of England bespeaks an alliance between Swegen and the Northumbrian family of Ælfgifu. Although this marriage never received

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77 "And in this same year, before the month of August, King Swein same with his fleet to Sandwich, and then went very quickly round East Anglia into the mouth of the Humber, and so up along the Trent until he reached Gainsborough. And then at once Earl Uhtred and all the Northumbrians submitted to him, as all the people of Lindsey, and then all the people belonging to the district of the Five Boroughs." Whitelock, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, sub anno 1013.

Church sanction, Ælfgifu of Northampton had a role in English politics in the period 1013-1017 as active as her participation in the government of Norway over ten years later. That Canute was influenced by Ælfgifu regardless of Church blessing or his marriage to Emma, and that he also trusted her political judgment, is borne out by her regency in Norway. If she had not been taken seriously, Canute would have commissioned Swegen alone to manage his power in Norway in 1030, or sent someone else along with him in the role of tutor.

According to the barbarian mindset of Dark Age Scandinavia, all of one's children and wives deserve to be treated equally, despite the prescriptions of faraway Rome. Ælfgifu of Northampton, while E. A. Freeman described her as "at most a Danish wife after the manner of Popa and Sprota . . .," was therefore accorded the same importance in Canute's mind, if not at his court, as his legitimate wife Emma. It is not unreasonable, then, to think that Ælfgifu used her uxorial position to register her displeasure with certain figures in Canute's circle, both before and after his accession as king. While her husband was still engaging the English in battle, she exercised her influence in the removal of Uhtred of Northumbria after the ealdorman had given hostages and submitted to Canute's authority around April 1016. Only MS "C" of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle implicated Eadric in Canute's decision to kill Uhtred; the

79Larson, Canute the Great, 129, states that Ælfgifu was sent to Denmark upon Canute's legitimate marriage to Emma in July 1017. As in the earlier case of Emma and the æthelings, however, she could have moved between the conjoined nations England and Denmark without any historical notice.
80Polygamy was a not uncommon practice in viking Scandinavia. Adam of Bremen shed some light on the viking attitude concerning illegitimate children in writing that "...Svein and Harold had been born of a concubine; but they, as is the custom with the barbarians, were then allotted an equal share of the patrimony with Canute's legitimate children." Adam of Bremen, History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen, trans., with an introduction by Francis J. Tschan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 107.
81Freeman, History of the Norman Conquest, 715.
82Whitelock, The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, sub anno 1016.
other recensions (D,E) do not state on whose encouragement the murder was committed. Charles Plummer concluded that the mention of Eadric in MS "C" was simply "designed to throw the blame on the national scapegoat . . . ." The chronicle of Florence, which often provides useful supplementary information to the eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon chronicles, only mentions that Uhtred was eliminated "by Canute's command or permission." It is quite possible that this "command" was inspired by none other than Ælfgifu of Northampton, who was by then in her third year as Canute's mistress. After the murder of Ælfgifu's father, Ælfhelm of Northumbria, after the Christmas festivities of 1006, and the blinding of two of her brothers, King Æthelred capped the degradation of Ælfgifu's family fortunes by transferring the northern ealdormanry to Uhtred of Bamburgh. When Uhtred had fallen under Canute's (and therefore her) power in 1016, the vengeful desire that had been simmering for ten years was finally fulfilled through the sword of a Danish warrior viewed by many in the north as not an enemy, but as a deliverer.

Canute then quickly appointed one of his own lieutenants, Eric of Hlathir, to the earldom of Northumbria.

If Ælfgifu's desire for revenge led to the death of Uhtred of Bamburgh, a proven warrior, provider of hostages, and a man who had nothing to do with the death of Ælfhelm save that he was appointed as his replacement, it would have certainly precipitated the supposed decapitation of Eadric, who was

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83 Plummer, *Two Saxon Chronicles*, sub anno 1016.
84 Ibid., vol. 2, 195.
directly responsible for the death of the Northumbrian ealdorman in 1006.\(^{88}\)

Eadric's hold of the earldom of Mercia in 1017 must have been a year-long reminder to Ælfgifu of the decade-old crime that prefigured the rise of Eadric under the reign of King Æthelred. Just as was the case with Uhtred of Bamburgh, Canute had executed an Englishman from the previous reigns and replaced him with a man of his own choosing. More importantly, like Uhtred, however, on Christmas 1017, Canute executed an Englishman at the behest of his first wife, Ælfgifu of Northampton.

Michel Foucault defined execution in the middle ages as a process that "did not re-establish justice . . . [but] reactivated power."\(^{89}\) This power was exerted not just to a degree commensurate with the crime itself, but restored itself to its own natural balance after the infraction only through the infliction of vengeance. Canute and Ælfgifu, wielders of a "power that presented rules and obligations as personal bonds, a breach of which constituted an offence and called for vengeance . . . ,"\(^{90}\) surely felt that Eadric's glaring breach of his obligations of conduct in 1006 (and throughout his career for that matter) called for a vengeance that could not be fulfilled, as was the case with Uhtred of Bamburgh, by anything short of death. Allowing such a person to exist at the court of Canute, and in possession of the earldom of Mercia no less, would have been a perpetual challenge to the power of the king -- not only to his political power, but also to the moral power Canute claimed to administer when he announced to the whole nation that "... even if anyone sins and commits

\(^{88}\)See above, 15-17.


\(^{90}\)Ibid., 57.
grievous crime, the punishment shall be ordered as shall be justifiable in the
sight of God and acceptable in the eyes of men." 91

While King Canute was by birth and upbringing a Dane, his exaction of
vengeance on the enemies of his mistress had many precedents in Anglo-Saxon
society. The prerogative of the sovereign not merely to punish, but to gain
vengeance upon those whose actions, through the breaking of king's laws,
challenged royal power, is clearly seen in both English history and law.
Concerning the events of 1006, Roger of Wendover states that in revenge (in .
ulsionem) for the murder of Ælfhelm, the king ordered that two of Eadric's
sons be blinded. 92 While a bit confused about the facts, this passage still
manages to relate that an eleventh-century English sovereign possessed the
rightful recourse to vengeance in punishing deeds he thought criminal. Also
relevant to the plight of Eadric, the laws of Æthelred set a legal precedent
for the king's prerogatives over life and death. Chapter sixteen of these laws
states, in regard to counterfeiters, that they "shall forfeit their lives, unless the
king is willing to pardon them." 93 This statute implies that an offender can
have his life terminated by the power of the sovereign, who alone also reserves
the power to re-issue life to the condemned. The execution of Eadric
confirmed the themes of revenge and the power of the monarch over life. Both
intersected in the body of Eadric, which was, once the appropriate punishment
had been exacted (as William of Malmesbury states), tossed into the River
Thames. 94

91II Canute c. 2. A. J. Robertson, ed. and trans., The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund
92"In ejus rei ultionem, duo filii ejus, jussu regis Ethelredi, excæcati sunt." Roger of Wendover,
Flores Historiarum, 529.
93Robertson, Laws, 70-71.
The death sentence that Ælfgifu and Canute imposed upon Eadric, while in some ways an example of the manifestation of sovereign revenge, also possessed the attributes of a military vengeance. Canute, as well as being the lawful ruler of England since 1016, was at the start of his reign still a warrior, governing a conquered territory through his new earls and housecarles. Revenge and the justifiable re-imposition of power under martial circumstances found validation in Anglo-Saxon tradition. King Edmund I, whom a robber killed in 946 at the feast of Saint Augustine, for example, was quickly avenged by his thegns. William of Malmesbury related how "The robber was shortly torn limb from limb by the attendants who rushed in, though he wounded some of them ere they could accomplish their purpose."

95 Their aim was, of course, none other than the corporeal mutilation of the regicide not out of concern for justice per se, but out of the desire for revenge. This sort of warrior revenge was enacted also with Eadric: in return for his murder of Ælfhelm, he was not only murdered, but as the legends would have us believe, the body was mutilated in various ways. 96

Finally, the aspect of divine revenge should be explored in relation to the death of Eadric. As the laws of II Canute made clear, "punishment shall be ordered as shall be justifiable in the sight of God . . . ."

97 Although Canute was never consecrated king, he was nevertheless a Christian and a patron of the English Church, and therefore at least sympathetic to the more useful points of divine vengeance such as invoked in the passages of The Battle of Maldon. In


96 See Freeman, History of the Norman Conquest of England, 720-22, for an enumeration of the various legends, both English and continental, surrounding the execution of Eadric.

97 Robertson, Laws, 174-75.
a mixture of martial and religious thought that would have appealed to Canute. The poetic Anglo-Saxon warriors of 991 "prayed God that they might take vengeance for their lord . . . " whom the Vikings had cut down.98 Another tale of divine vengeance, concerning Canute's own father, is found in the Chronicon of Florence. Swegen, according to the Worcester monk, in 1014 attempted to extort money from the town that housed the relics of St. Edmund, and threatened, if the tribute were not paid, to torch the village and raze St. Edmund's church to the ground. However, "divine vengeance did not suffer the blasphemer to continue in existence," and the impious Dane was soon killed by the ghost of the aggrieved St. Edmund himself.99

It is unlikely that either Ælgifu of Northampton or Canute was aware of any specific divine or legal philosophies or precedents in the execution of Eadric. The desire for revenge was probably rooted in human emotion and practicalities rather than in abstract concepts and historical anecdote. These abstract concepts and examples of history, however, did help produce the decision-making framework of the eleventh-century mind. If Canute knew not exactly why warriors, kings, and God felt the need for revenge, he did know, from his background in the elite milieu of Anglo-Danish England, that vengeance was still the essential recourse in situations such as the ones he, being influenced by Ælfgifu of Northampton, faced in 1016 with Uhtred of Northumbria and in 1017 with Eadric of Mercia.

98Whitelock, EHD, 297.
CHAPTER IV

CHURL EADRIC

When Merlin the magician was still a boy in Wales, the twelfth-century romantic propagandist Geoffrey of Monmouth relates, he found himself in an argument with another lad over a game the two were playing. "Why do you try to compete with me, fathead?" the boy Dinabutius taunted Merlin, and then offered aristocratic words of advice to the youthful prophet. "How can we two be equal in skill?" the prince chided. "I myself am of royal blood on both sides of my family. As for you, nobody knows who you are, for you never had a father!" The traditional landed aristocracy of England could have said much the same thing to Eadric during his tenure as ealdorman and earl of the Mercians. From the virtual status of a geneat to what Freeman called "the viceroy of an ancient Kingdom," Eadric suffered the handicap of being essentially a peasant in a warrior milieu. Just as a ceorl is more interested in the roof repairs of his own cottage than the state of nations, Eadric Æthalricsson was more concerned with property acquisition than with sanguine exploits. The sword-wielding that Eadric did undertake, however, was mostly of a nature that offended the prejudices of the age. In his murders at home and his trickery on the battlefield, the Shropshire-born magnate usually was following the interests of a superior party, whether Æthelred, Emma, or Canute. Until his own murder in 1017, Eadric's lords remunerated him with wealth, influence, and titles. Nevertheless, because of the conduct required to


gain these rewards, the mercenary Mercian more lastingly earned the opprobrium of medieval writers concerned not a whit with his material achievements, but with the methods he employed.

As for Eadric, nobody really knew who he was, either, since little was sure about his father. The Eadric, nevertheless, that lives on in the pages of the medieval chroniclers is essentially a character manufactured by the prejudices of the age. Those chroniclers of the middle ages, always writing in retrospect, cast their gaze back upon the "new man" of King Æthelred and created, out of the person of Eadric, another "new man" -- the "Eadric Streona" of history. The earliest written English account of the second half of the reign of Æthelred, MS C of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, was written in several hands of the mid-eleventh century, that is to say, well after the accession of Canute and the departure of Eadric from the scene in 1017. The entries from 1002 to 1016 in MSS C, D, and E of the Chronicle are derived from the same source, a now-lost document that was composed between 1017 and 1023. This was not enough time, however, to adequately create the Eadric of historical discourse. That particular character came to fruition in the twelfth century, when writers such as William of Malmesbury, Florence of Worcester, and Henry of Huntingdon held Eadric responsible for myriad things not found in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, while being careful, like the Chronicle, to leave any record of Eadric's honest successes (like his Welsh victory) unstated.

The medieval thinkers looked back upon this non-noble creature from the west Midlands, and through their corporate preconceptions, whether adverse to him from aristocratic bias or out of reservations of an ecclesiastical

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nature, fabricated a coward of "low birth" who repeatedly hindered English military offensives against Danish incursions. These chroniclers who originated this damning discourse on Eadric were the literate arm of the medieval Anglo-Danish power structure in an era when, as Michel Foucault asserted:

The blood relation . . . remained an important element in the mechanisms of power, its manifestations, and its rituals. For a society in which the systems of alliance, the political form of the sovereign, the differentiation into orders and castes, and the value of descent lines were predominant; for a society in which famine, epidemics, and violence made death imminent, blood constituted one of the fundamental values.4

And in the era of renewed Viking rapine, cattle murrains, famine, high taxation, and the eventual crumbling of the House of Alfred the Great, the adventitious entry of Eadric in the upper stratum of English society offended the sensibilities of anyone with a stake in preserving the "blood" of aristocratic England. Nevertheless, as many modern historians know, the medieval creators of "Eadric Streona" did not attempt to make his evils comprehensible to the following generations, but related them in a broken narrative that lets the reader come to his own (often bad) conclusions. These chroniclers never attempted to explain the actions of Eadric Streona, but instead let them stand as beacons of unmitigated malice and treachery and a warning to all future "low-born" usurpers of aristocratic prerogatives in the realm. Unfortunately, that image is one that persists even today.

# APPENDIX
## THE CHRONOLOGY OF EADRIC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>circa 975-980</td>
<td></td>
<td>Eadric born in western Mercia to Æthelric and Wynflæd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>975</td>
<td>8 July</td>
<td>Death of King Edgar</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Beginning of the anti-monastic reaction led by Ælfhere of Mercia</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Accession of King Edward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>978</td>
<td>18 March</td>
<td>Murder of King Edward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Accession and consecration of Æthelred II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>983</td>
<td></td>
<td>Death of Ælfhere of Mercia. His son, Ælfric cild, succeeds to the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ealdormanry of Mercia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>985</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ealdorman Ælfric banished; the post of ealdorman of Mercia lies vacant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>until 1007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>987</td>
<td></td>
<td>Great cattle plague in England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>988</td>
<td></td>
<td>Renewal of sporadic Viking raids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>991</td>
<td></td>
<td>First surviving mention of Eadric, in a charter of Bishop Oswald (S 1366)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Battle of Maldon</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>First great Danegeld payment (16,000 pounds)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1002</td>
<td>13 November</td>
<td>St. Brice's Day massacre of Danes in England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1006</td>
<td>around Christmas</td>
<td>Ælfhelm of Northumbria murdered</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1007
Eadric appointed ealdorman of Mercia
Danegeld levied (36,000 pounds)

1012
Danegeld levied (48,000 pounds)
Defection of Thorkell the Tall to Æthelred
Eadric's successful attack on Wales

1013
Swegen commences a large-scale war of conquest in England
Canute takes Ælfgifu of Northampton as his wife, more Danico
The royal household begins its flight to Normandy
King Æthelred joins his household in Normandy. Æthelstan and Edmund "Ironside" remain in England

1014
3 February
Death of Swegen at Gainsborough
Æthelred II returns to England with Edward the ætheling
25 June
Death of Æthelstan--Eadric apparently in England at the time Æthelred orders 21,000 pounds to be paid to Thorkell's allied forces

1015
Oxford witenagemot and murder of Sigeferth and Morcar
Rebellion of Edmund Ironside
Eadric allies with Canute

1016
Death of King Æthelred II, following a long illness
Battles of: Selwood (Victory to Edmund),
Sherston (Victory to Canute),
London (Victory to Edmund),
Brentford (Victory to Edmund),
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1016</td>
<td>Autumn</td>
<td>Treaty of Olney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Death of Edmund Ironside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>November</td>
<td>Canute proclaimed king of all England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1017</td>
<td>July</td>
<td>Eadric made Earl of Mercia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christmas</td>
<td>Canute marries Emma; Ælfgifu sent to Denmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christmas</td>
<td>Execution of Eadric at London</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Otford* (Eadric retards Edmund's triumph), and *Assandun* (Eadric tricks Edmund, leading to a total victory for Canute)
Primary Sources -- Chronicles:


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