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To what extent could Queen Emma be described as a ‘kingmaker’?

By Chris Dixon

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ABSTRACT

Emma of Normandy was the daughter of Richard the Fearless, Count of Rouen and leader of the 'Northmen', the Viking dynasty who would subsequently become known as the Dukes of Normandy. In 1002, after the death of her father, Emma was given in marriage to the king of England, Æthelræd II, as part of a treaty intended to help protect England from Viking raids launched from Norman ports. The next fifty years were amongst turbulent in English history. During this period seven different kings reigned over the country, the ruling dynasty switching four times between Anglo-Saxon and Danish. Of these kings, Emma was married to two (Æthelræd and Cnut), the mother of two (Harthacnut and Edward) and the step-mother of two (Edmund and Harold Harefoot). Emma also provided the hereditary justification for William of Normandy's claim to the throne in 1066, as it was through her that William could claim a right to the throne as a relative of Edward the Confessor.

The facts seem to suggest that Emma was indeed a 'kingmaker', succeeding against the odds in seeing two of her sons take the throne of England. The evidence has to be sifted carefully, because most of the primary sources either have little to say about Emma or differ in material respects. However, we are ultimately left with the

conclusion that, whatever her motives, the successes of her sons probably came about despite Emma's actions rather than because of them.

ABBREVIATIONS

AMW – Annales Monasterii de Wintonia by Richard of Devizes

ASC – The Anglo Saxon Chronicles

ASC-C Abingdon Manuscript

ASC-D Worcester Manuscript

ASC-E Peterborough Manuscript

ASC-F Canterbury bi-lingual Manuscript

ASC-1 Original Text

ASC-2 Translation by Benjamin Thorpe

ASC-3 Translation by Michael Swanton

EER – Encomium Emmae Reginae

EER-2 – Encomium Emmae Reginae (revised ending)

EHD – English Historical Documents

FW – The Chronicle of Florence of Worcester

GG – Geffrei Gaimar, Estoire des Engleis

GND – Gesta Normannorum Ducum

HH – Henry of Huntington, Historia Anglorum

KS – The Knytlinga Saga

LE – Liber Eliensis

PASE – The Prosography of Anglo Saxon England

S <nnn> - Electronic Sawyer Charters

TM – The Chronicles of Thietmar of Merseburg

Vita – Vita Eadwardi Regis (The Life Of King Edward Who Resides at Westminster)

WMC – William of Malmesbury, Chronicle Of The Kings Of England

1. INTRODUCTION and SOURCES

This dissertation will examine the extent to which Queen Emma (c986-1002) fulfilled a role as ‘kingmaker’ during one of the most turbulent times in the history of England.

The ASC (C) tells us that in the year 1002:

ðā on ðām ilcan lenctene com seo hlæfdige - Ricardes dohtor – hider to lande¹ [Then in the same spring came the lady - Richard’s daughter - hither to the land].

Just one of the principal texts of the ASC (F – The Canterbury Chronicle written in Latin and English) names ‘the lady’ as ‘Ymma’.²

In the annal for 1052, the ASC (D) reports that:

Her forþferde Ælfgifu seo hlæfdige, Æþelredes laf cygnes & Cnutes cynges on 11. Non. Mar.³ [In this year died Ælfgifu the lady, relict of king Æthelræd and king Cnut, on the 11th of the Nones of March]

Again, the ASC (F) names her as ‘Her forþferde Ælfgiua Ymma þas cinges moder Eadwardes’⁴ [In this year died Ælfgifu Emma, the mother of King Edward].

¹ ASC-1 (C), p. 252.

² ASC-1 (F), p. 251.

³ ASC-1 (D), p. 316.

⁴ ASC-1 (F), p. 317.

These two brief statements mark the career of Queen Emma from her first arrival in England in 1002 to her death fifty years later. She was queen to two kings (Æthelræd and Cnut), the mother of two kings (Harthacnut and Edward), step-mother of two more (Edmund Ironside and Harold Harefoot) and great-aunt to William of Normandy, thus providing for him the hereditary justification to claim the English throne after the battle of Hastings. She therefore played an integral part in half a century of 'kingmaking' in England, but what were her motives, and how successful was she?

The ASC is perhaps the most important source for students of English medieval history but, unfortunately, information directly concerning Emma is sparse. There are no entries for the years 1004 to 1012 and 1024 to 1034 and they are generally skeletal – often not even referring to Emma by name. More detail is to be found in several histories written mostly in the twelfth century. The information contained in these histories varies considerably and the sources used by the various authors have to be inferred from the text. The accuracy and reliability of these sources must always be questioned.

William of Malmesbury, a monk completing his history in c 1125, addressed his readers (quoting Virgil's Eclogue VI), writing:

Should anyone, however, “peruse this work with sensible delight”, I deem it necessary to acquaint him that I vouch nothing for the truth of long past transactions.⁵

His translator, John Sharpe (1769-1859), praises Malmesbury’s ‘love of the truth’⁶, but the work frequently contains the author’s subjective criticisms of people for whom he has little sympathy.

Henry of Huntingdon’s ‘*Historia Anglorum*’ is a huge work written over twenty-five years from 1129-1154. He makes very clear his intended readership by stating that he intended to:

Speak with utter simplicity, so that it may be clear to the many (I mean to the less well educated).⁷

Henry relied on other sources extensively. According to Greenway, his principal editor and translator, about 35% came from Bede, 40% from the ASC and 10% from other sources.⁸ Henry speaks directly to readers from the third millennium 1000 years after he was writing. He asks:

⁵ William of Malmesbury, *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, Translation by Rev John Sharpe edited by J.A.Giles, (London: Henry.G.Bohn, 1847), p. 4.

⁶ WMC (Translator’s preface), p. x.

⁷ Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, Edited and Translated by Diana Greenway, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 165.

⁸ HH (Introduction), p. lxxxv.

If – as my soul strongly desires – it shall come about that this book comes into your hands, I beg you, in the incomprehensible mercy of God, to pray for me, poor wretch.⁹

He has my prayers.

Geffrei Gaimar wrote his '*Estoire des Engleis*' towards the end of the twelfth century.

He was probably an Anglo-Norman living in Lincolnshire. He was not a cleric – indeed, his history is entirely secular in content. In the epilogue, he wrote:

This book is not fiction or fantasy, but is taken from an authentic historical sources concerning the kings of the past.¹⁰

Ian Short, editor and translator of the history, writes that 'accuracy and reliability were not Gaimar's aims'.¹¹

Florence of Worcester wrote his '*Chronicon ex Chronicis*' between the end of the eleventh century and 1118 when he died. The Chronicle is in the form of a series of annals based principally on the ASC but with some notable additional detail.. He was credited with 'selecting his materials with great fidelity, industry and judgment'.¹²

⁹ HH, p. 497.

¹⁰ Geffrei Gaimar, *Estoire des Engleis*, Edited and Translated by Ian Short, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 355.

¹¹ GG (Introduction), p. xiv

¹² The Chronicle of Florence of Worcester, Translated by Thomas Forester (London: Henry G Bohn, 1854), (Preface), p. iii.

Richard of Devizes was a monk from St Swithun's, Winchester, whose annals are also principally taken from the ASC but in his preface to the translation, Christopher Smith comments that 'throughout, Winchester and its cathedral are the centre of everything'.¹³ Most of the work is unremarkable apart from his report of events of 1044 to 1066 which contains a dramatic tale about Emma and her relationship with her son, Edward, told in great detail, but not to be found in any other source.¹⁴ Richard is better known for his *Chronicon de rebus gestis Ricardi Primi*¹⁵.

An important source from Normandy is *Historia Normannorum*, written between 996 and 1015 by Dudo of St Quentin. The work was commissioned by his sponsor, Richard I of Normandy, and was based largely on oral traditions contributed by Richard, his wife Gunnor (Emma's mother), his brother Robert, Archbishop of Rouen and his son Richard II. The work's modern translator described it as 'a powerful work of semi-imaginary history' and warned the unwary reader of difficulties in weaving their way through the author's exuberant imagination and language.¹⁶ Its importance is that it is the first example of a 'history' written as a piece of political

¹³ Richard of Devizes, *Annales Monasterii de Wintonia*, Translated by Christopher Smith, (Internet: Twenty Trees, 2023), (Preface), p. 10.

¹⁴ AMW, pp 37-41. The translation to which I refer in this dissertation is unusual in that it was made using AI tools such as ChatGPT, Google Translate and AI Chat.

¹⁵ 'Chronicle of the reign of Richard I'. I have been fortunate to be able to use the Annals more fully than ever before because of this recent edition which was only published in 2023.

¹⁶ Dudo of St Quentin, *History Of The Normans*, Translated by Eric Christiansen (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1998), (Preface), Title Page

propaganda; a precedent followed by Emma herself when commissioning the EER.

Professor Elisabeth van Houts wrote that:

Dudo's chronicle is very much a work of propaganda written to legitimize the Viking settlement and contains legends that are clearly unreliable.¹⁷

The *Historia Normannorum* was redacted and used as a source and extended by three important Norman chroniclers, William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis and Robert of Torigny whose works were edited and translated by Professor Elisabeth Van Houts as *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*. This composite work together with Van Houts' scholarly notes is arguably the most important Norman source for the period.

Relevant to the story of Emma is the *Knytlinga Saga*.¹⁸ Probably written in Iceland in the middle of the thirteenth century by Olafur Thordarson, it is a typical example of the Icelandic Sagas telling the stories of Norse oral histories. It contains some interesting 'facts' about Cnut and Emma but there are many inaccuracies meaning the text must be relied upon with considerable caution.

¹⁷ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, Edited and Translated by Elisabeth van Houts, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Vol I 1992, Vol II 1995), Introduction, p. lxxxii

¹⁸ [Story of the descendants of Cnut]

Doubtless inspired by Dudo's history, Emma herself commissioned a history the anonymous author of which dedicated the work to Emma herself. Written between 1041 and 1042, this has become known as the *Encomium Emmae Reginae* (in praise of Queen Emma). Although unreliable as a history, it is the most important source for the analysis of Emma's motives, aims and ambitions regarding her potential role as kingmaker. The work, including a dramatic recent discovery of a second version, is discussed in Chapter 6 below.

A similar history is the *Vita Eadwardi Regis*.¹⁹ Written in c.1066, it was written by an anonymous author commissioned by Edward's widow, Edith, and is clearly a panegyric of her. It nevertheless contains useful information about the relationship between Edward and his mother, Emma, at least from his point of view.

In addition to the primary sources, we are able to deduce information by examining the charters of Æthelræd, Cnut, Harthacnut and Edward. Of particular importance is how Emma's status evolved from *conlaterana* [consort] to *regina* [queen] and also how her position in the witness list became more prominent, often listed before the archbishops and the princes and even as an equal to the king.

¹⁹ [Life of King Edward].

Historiography reveals a substantial quantity of writing about England in the eleventh century – even for the period before the Norman Conquest. However, although there exist several biographies of Æthelræd, Cnut, and even Harthacnut²⁰, there are only two published biographies of Emma; one by Harriet O'Brien, written in 2005²¹ and one by Isabella Strachan, written in 2004.²² Neither of these authors is an historian and although credit is due to them for their efforts to introduce the story of Emma to modern readers, the works lack academic weight.

The closest we have to a proper biography is entitled 'Queen Emma & Queen Edith' by Pauline Stafford. This work is a scholarly and well researched history of both these queens. However, none of the above works addresses the question of the extent to which Emma might be considered a 'kingmaker', apart from a note by Strachan suggesting that '[Emma] was a Danish nationalist who wished to see England joined with Viking Denmark'.²³

There have been three recent occurrences which make the study of Emma topical – especially the question of her role. Patricia Bracewell told Emma's story wonderfully in a three volume novel published in 2021. It is well researched and very detailed

²⁰ Æthelræd: Ann Williams (2003), Ryan Lavell (2008), Levi Roach (2016). Cnut: M.K.Lawson (2011), W.B.Bartlett (2018), Timothy Bolton (2019), Ryan Levell (2021). Harthacnut: Ian Howard (2008).

²¹ H.O'Brien, *Queen Emma and the Vikings*, (New York and London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005).

²² I. Strachan, *Emma The Twice Crowned Queen*, (London: Peter Owen Publishers, 2004).

²³ Strachan, p.20.

but, as she herself said in an interview, ‘history tells us about big men with swords and not so big men with tonsures’, ‘there is so little history about Emma, that I had to make it all up’.²⁴

Secondly, when Winchester’s New Minster was demolished towards the end of the eleventh century, the bodies of Emma, Cnut, Harthacnut and a number of other royal personages were carefully disinterred and placed in mortuary chests at the top of the nave columns in the new cathedral. A project commenced in 2021 which would forensically analyse the remains. Using modern technology, more than 1300 fragments were analysed, dated and DNA tested. It proved possible to identify a skull and partial skeleton which is almost certainly that of Queen Emma. In 2023, using forensic facial reconstruction, the team was able to produce a three dimensional representation of what Emma’s face may have looked like from the evidence of the identified skull.²⁵

²⁴ Interview with Patricia Bracewell, YouTube, <<https://youtube.com/watch?v=zKXB2ntm2rc>> [Accessed 3 September 2023] (5.00 mns to 6.00 mns).

²⁵ C.Jarman, *The Bone Chests*, (London: William Collins, 2023), pp 5-6.



Photograph by author

Thirdly, a revised manuscript version of the EER was discovered in 2008, adding an important dimension to Emma's motives especially regarding her relationship with her son, Edward. The text mentions for the first time King Æthelræd, and acknowledges Edward as the rightful heir.²⁶ ²⁷

²⁶ T. Bolton, *A Newly Emergent Medieval Manuscript*, 2009, Academia.edu, <https://www.academia.edu/29475908/A_newly_emergent_mediaeval_manuscript_containing_Encormium_Emmae_reginae_with_the_only_known_complete_text_of_the_recension_prepared_for_King_Edward_the_Confessor>, [Accessed 21 March 2024]

²⁷ This will be considered at length in Chapter 6 below.

Emma can be found in the historiography of the period but only as a background figure without any consideration of her ambitions for her sons. This dissertation seeks to address these omissions and to analyse the extent to which Emma was the agency responsible for the changes which took place during her fifty years of active involvement in the royal houses of England.

The fifty year period of Emma's prominence in the fortunes of English royalty may be broadly split into three distinct phases, each ending with a dramatic fall in Emma's fortunes when she was either forced to flee, or banished from the kingdom. Phase one encompassed her time as King Æthelræd's queen, lasting from their marriage in 1002 to his death in 1016. Emma's life as King Cnut's queen formed the second phase. Cnut took the throne following his invasion in 1016 which led to the death of Æthelræd's son, Edmund Ironside, and then:

'before 1 August [1017] he [Cnut] ordered the widow of the former king Æthelræd, Richard's daughter, to be fetched for him as wife.'²⁸

The third phase was the period following the death of Cnut in 1035 and the seizing of the throne of England by Harold Harefoot, Cnut's son with his previous wife, Ælfgifu of Northampton.

²⁸ ASC-3 (D), p. 154.

To be able to analyse the extent to which Emma was an effective kingmaker, and also to determine what her motives may have been, I shall broadly use these three periods to explore the questions of her role and motives.

2. Emma's Ancestry

This chapter will outline Emma's ancestry to examine if a relationship exists between her heritage and her motivations as a 'kingmaker'.

One of the defining characteristics of the Normans was their obsession with legitimacy. This started with a Viking named Rollo, who was the first Scandinavian to be formally recognised as leader of the 'Northmen' in that part of North-Western France known at the time as Neustria. There exists a charter by King Charles III of West Francia, dated 14 March 918 which refers to an undated grant of part of the lands of the Abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés to 'The Northmen Of The Seine, namely to Rollo and his companions'.²⁹ He assumed the title of Count of Rouen although it was never formally bestowed.

Rollo's grandson was Richard I, Count of Rouen and leader of the Northmen. in that part of France later to be known as 'Normandy'. Richard was sent to Bayeux by his father, William Longsword, to be educated and, in particular, to learn Danish.³⁰ According to William of Jumièges, Richard had been accepted by the Norman and Breton barons as '*dux totius Normannici seu Britannici ducatus est prelatus*'³¹ when still a child not yet ten years of age.³² The turbulence of the first twenty-five years or so of his rule is related in great detail by William of Jumièges's adaptation of Dudo's chronicle.³³

²⁹ GND, Vol I, p. xix.

³⁰ Ibid, Vol I, p.89.

³¹ [He was as the leader of the whole of Normandy and Brittany].

³² GND, Vol I. p. 89.

³³ Ibid, Vol I, pp. 101-115.

By the time Richard reached his mid-thirties, he had been the leader of the Normans and Count of Rouen for about twenty-six years and had taken (or been given) the title of 'Marquis of Rouen'.³⁴

A story is told that, at around this time, Richard was hunting in a forest near Equiqueville near Arques, because he had been told that the wife of one of his foresters was a woman of exceptional beauty. He stayed at the forester's house and commanded that his host bring his wife that night to his bedchamber. The man reported this to his wife, a woman named Sainsfrida. A wise woman, she told her husband that she would send, in her place, her unmarried sister Gunnor, a virgin even more beautiful than she. The next day, when Richard realised that he had been deceived, his reaction was one of relief that the subterfuge had prevented him from committing the sin of adultery. This anecdote was written by Robert of Torigny.³⁵

Richard and Gunnor were married initially under the *More Danico* (Danish Custom). This was a term coined by William of Jumièges describing an informal marriage not sanctified by the Christian religion.³⁶ The union produced at least six children, including Richard (who succeeded as Duke Richard II of Normandy), Robert (who became Archbishop of Rouen in about 989) and Emma (the subject of this essay), as well as other sons and daughters. Robert of Torigny, elaborating on the version written by Dudo of St Quentin, tells us that:

³⁴ D.Crouch, *The History Of A Dynasty*, (London: Hambledon and London, 2002), p. 19.

³⁵ GND, Vol I, p. 96.

³⁶ Ibid, ,Vol I. pp. 58-59.

When Richard wished his son Robert to become archbishop of Rouen, he was told ... that according to canon law this was impossible, because his mother had not been married. Therefore Richard married Gunnor according to the Christian custom.³⁷

The dates of birth of these children are not known but some likely dates can be inferred. Richard could have been born in 969 and Robert the following year, which would make Robert nineteen or twenty at the time of his appointment to the archbishopric of Rouen. Emma was probably born between 984 and 988, in which case she would have been between fifteen and eighteen at the time of her marriage to Æthelræd.

No direct evidence is available about Emma's early life and upbringing. Dudo's chronicle, which had been commissioned by Richard, relied extensively on information provided by Gunnor, Richard's half-brother Rudolphus, and his eldest son Richard.³⁸ Dudo was very impressed with Gunnor, saying that she was

a woman sprung from the most famous stock of Dacian nobles, with a copious store of eloquence and capacious memory.³⁹

It is not unlikely that the language spoken in the household of Richard and Gunnor was Danish. Gunnor was unquestionably Danish and, although her precise ancestry is in some doubt. It seems probable that the young Emma would have been brought

³⁷ GND, Vol II, pp 267-9.

³⁸ GND, Vol I, Introduction, p. xx.

³⁹ Dudo (Christiansen), p. 163.

up speaking Danish and identifying herself and her heritage as Danish rather than Frankish.

Stafford suggests that, although it is impossible to say what Emma might have learnt from observing her mother, 'she could have imbibed her first lessons in female power and regency between 996 (when Richard I died) and 1002'.⁴⁰ Stafford also refers to a court poet, Garnier of Rouen, who described Gunnor as 'virtually a regent' during this time.⁴¹

The years between 970 and 995 brought a period of calm and prosperity to Richard and his dominions. William of Jumièges writes of him at this time:

Meanwhile Duke Richard flourished more and more by virtue of his happy reign.⁴²

The contemporary sources make no mention of any relationship between Richard and King Æthelræd, either friendly or hostile. However, there exists a letter written by Pope John XV in 991 in which he refers to having been informed of

the enmity between Æthelræd, king of the West Saxons, and Richard the Marquis⁴³

⁴⁰ P.Stafford, *Queen Emma & Queen Edith*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), p. 212.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 212.

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 133.

⁴³ *English Historical Documents*, Vol I, Edited by Dorothy Whitlock (Abngdon: Routledge, 1996), p. 894.

The letter also recounts a meeting at Rouen on the 1 March 991 between the two parties at which peace was restored.

Richard I died in 996 and was succeeded by his eldest son, Richard II, whose tenure started with an outbreak of violence by the Norman peasants. William of Jumièges, who is the only source for this incident, writes that this occurred '*in initio sue iuuentutis*' [In his early youth]^{44, 45}. After the suppression of the peasants' revolt, Richard II rewarded some of his relations with the title of 'Count'. It was at about this time that Richard II began to style himself 'Duke of Normandy', probably to establish his higher status. He became known as 'Richard le Bon'. and William of Jumièges becomes quite lyrical when describing some of his better qualities:

He, by his great name scattering the beams of brilliance into the several corners of the world', and 'Under his government many flocks of monks grew and like bees bursting forth from the hives of holy deeds brought delicious honey to the treasures of heaven⁴⁶.

This describes the environment in which Emma grew up until her mid teenage years. She would have experienced the Normans' constant drive for legitimacy and self-improvement. This sometimes required them to be ready to back up their demands and ambition by warlike actions. Orderic Vitalis, writing in the early twelfth century wrote that:

⁴⁴ [In his early youth].

⁴⁵ EHD, Vol I, p. 894.

⁴⁶ GND , Vol II, p. 7.

In all communities, wherever they may be, they strive to rule and often become enemies to truth and loyalty through the ardour of their ambition.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ *The Normans In Europe*, Translated and Edited by Elisabeth van Houts (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000). Chapter 16 (Orderic Vitalis), p. 77.

3. Emma and Æthelræd The Unræd

In this chapter we shall consider the role of Emma during her first marriage and how circumstances might have begun to shape her ambitions.

King Æthelræd II, who was king of England from March 978 until April 1016, became known in the twelfth century as 'Æthelræd The Unræd' which was a pun on his name.⁴⁸ At the age of sixteen or seventeen he married his first wife, Ælfgifu, the daughter of an ealdorman from York. The couple had many children: six sons and three daughters. The marriage was conducted under the *More Danico*. No direct evidence exists for the birthdates of the children, but the charters of Æthelræd provide some clues. One, dated 993 and widely accepted as authentic, is attested by Æthelthryth as Queen Mother, and four of the 'sons of the king' (Æthelstan, Ecgberht, Eadmund, and Eadred).⁴⁹ It would be reasonable to assume that the marriage to their mother took place in c.985 and that the first four princes were born between 986 and 992. There is no mention of Ælfgifu in the ASC, or by any of the twelfth century historians apart from John of Worcester, who identifies her as the daughter of an ealdorman named Æthelberht, and Ælfræd of Rievaulx who describes her as the 'daughter of Thored, Earl of Northumbria' without naming her.⁵⁰

Between the years 991 and 1000 England suffered from repeated invasions by Danish Vikings. To gain some temporary reprieves, King Æthelræd made 'tribute'

⁴⁸ The Old English word 'ræd' means 'counsel' or 'advice'. 'Råd' is the modern Danish word for 'counsel'. 'Unræd' means 'ill-advised' or 'foolish'. The common modern epithet 'Unready' is both incorrect and meaningless.

⁴⁹ S 876

⁵⁰ A. Williams, *Æthelræd The Unready – The Ill Counselling King*, (London: Hambledon & London, 2003), p. 24.

payments of quantities of silver to buy peace. Payments were made in 991 (10,000 pounds), in 994 (16,000 pounds) and in 1001 (24,000 pounds). These bribes did not have the effect of bringing any sort of peace because in 997 the Danish army ravaged South Wales, Cornwall and Devon, and 'carried fire and sword as far as Lydford'⁵¹ before returning to their ships, loaded with immense booty. In 998, the army landed at the mouth of the river Frome and 'laid waste to the greatest part of Dorset'⁵² in addition to raids on the Isle of Wight, Sussex and Hampshire. Attempts to oppose them by Saxon armies were frustrated by treachery and misadventure.⁵³ In 999 the Viking army besieged Rochester in Kent and were victorious after great slaughter on both sides.⁵⁴

Of great significance is that, for the year 1000, the ASC reports that 'the hostile fleet was this summer gone to Richard's dominions [Normandy]'.⁵⁵ It was because the Danish armies were taking refuge in Normandy that Æthelræd went to Rouen in early 1002 with the intention of negotiating a truce with Richard II of Normandy. No record of the nature of these negotiations exists, but it is likely that Æthelræd wished to renew the agreement he had made with Richard's father (Richard I) in 991, which had clearly broken down. We do not know what Richard promised, but the king agreed to take his eldest sister, the teenage Emma, as his wife and queen. She presumably came with a dowry, although there is no record of what or where it might have been.

⁵¹ FW, p. 113.

⁵² FW, p. 113.

⁵³ FW, p. 113.

⁵⁴ FW, p. 114.

⁵⁵ ASC-2, p. 110.

Emma arrived in England in the spring of 1002, was married and consecrated as queen shortly afterwards, and was given the Anglo-Saxon name of *Ælfifu* which was the same name as *Æthelræd*'s previous wife, who had probably died in 1000 or 1001. For the sake of avoiding confusion, I shall continue to use Emma's Frankish name (Emma) rather than her new Anglo-Saxon name.

The precise dates of Emma's marriage and consecration as queen are unknown but her first appearance in a charter dates from 1002 when she is included in the witness list as '*ælfifu conlaterana regis*' [king's consort].⁵⁶ A charter dated 1005 contains the first description of her as '*regina*' [queen] although she appears in the witness list after the *æthelings* [princes].⁵⁷ Henry of Huntingdon wrote that she 'received the crown and title of queen in 1002'.⁵⁸

According to Geoffrey Gaimar, the only source to name the dower gifts Emma received: Winchester, Rockingham, and Rutland.⁵⁹ It is almost certain that Exeter was also included. Emma's manor house in Winchester, Godbegot House, was granted to her by a charter dated 1012.⁶⁰ The richness of these dower gifts certainly suggested both motive and ambition – but the ambitions were probably more those of Emma's brother, Richard II. At this early stage, Emma's status was more that of a pawn rather than a queen.

Emma had barely had time to realise the extent of the devastation which had been inflicted on her new country over the previous decade when an event occurred which

⁵⁶ S 902.

⁵⁷ S 910.

⁵⁸ *HH*, p. 341.

⁵⁹ *GG*, p. 227.

⁶⁰ S 925.

was to make things far worse. Within about six months of her arrival in England, the infamous St Brice's Day massacre took place, on 18 November 1002. This was an attempt to kill all Danes in England, except those occupying the Danelaw, in a single day. How extensive this massacre was is not known; recent archaeology, however, has revealed mass graves in Oxford and Dorset containing skeletons indicative of violent deaths and Scandinavian heritage.⁶¹ William of Jumièges reported the event by writing that:

Æthelræd, king of the English, defiled a kingdom that had long flourished under the great glory of most powerful kings with such a dreadful crime that in his own reign even the heathens judged it as a detestable, shocking, deed.⁶²

It is not surprising that the reaction of the Danes, led by their king Sweyn Forkbeard, was to embark on a protracted campaign of extreme violence against the entire kingdom lasting for ten years.

It started in 1003 with an attack on Exeter, a city owned by Emma herself and guarded by Hugh, a Norman appointed by Emma as her reeve (bailiff). It was taken by storm and the army then 'totally ruined the town'.⁶³

In addition to the ferocity of the Danish aggression, Æthelræd was hampered by the treachery of his own nobles, weather, natural phenomena, and his own incompetence or idleness. The ealdorman Ælfric of Hampshire betrayed his own

⁶¹ Museum of Oxford, *The St Brice's Day Massacre*, <<https://museumofoxford.org/the-st-brices-day-massacre>>, [Accessed 17th November 2023].

⁶² GND, Vol II, p. 15.

⁶³ ASC-2, p. 111.

army in 1003 in Wiltshire by 'feigning himself sick and so deceived the people he should have led.'⁶⁴ In 1005, there was a pause in the fighting because England 'sustained a great famine that no man ever before remembered one so destructive'.⁶⁵ A fleet of ships which Æthelræd had ordered and took part in an engagement at Sandwich in 1009 was destroyed by 'a fearful and extraordinary wind'.⁶⁶

During the winter of 1006 the Danish army made progress through Hampshire and Berkshire. 'Wherever they passed they ate joyfully what had been prepared, and when they departed they made payment for their keep by murdering their host and setting fire to their lodging place'.⁶⁷ According to William of Malmesbury (no admirer of Æthelræd):

The king, admirably calculated for sleeping, did nothing but postpone and hesitate, and if ever he recovered his senses enough to raise himself upon his elbow, he quickly relapsed into his original wretchedfulness, either from the oppression of indolence, or the adverseness of fortune.⁶⁸

By the year 1011 the list of the places plundered by the Danes had grown to include sixteen counties (out of a total of thirty-two). But then they laid siege to Canterbury which quickly fell (due possibly to the treachery of Ælfmær, Bishop of Selsey).⁶⁹ The Danes captured Ælfheah, Archbishop of Canterbury, together with several other

⁶⁴ ASC-2, p. 112.

⁶⁵ ASC-2, p. 112.

⁶⁶ HH, p. 347.

⁶⁷ HH, p. 345.

⁶⁸ WMC, p. 168.

⁶⁹ HH, p.351.

senior clerics, and returned with them to their ships. Henry of Huntingdon describes the scene of devastation they left:

You would have seen a terrible sight: the whole of the ancient and beautiful city reduced to ashes, corpses of citizens lying packed together in the streets, the ground and the river blackened with blood, the lamenting and wailing of women and children to be led into captivity and the head of the English faith and the source of Christian doctrine taken in chains and shamefully dragged away.⁷⁰

The intention of the Danes was to attempt to obtain a huge payment as ransom for the captured archbishop. However, Archbishop Ælfheah absolutely refused to be ransomed whereupon the Danes, who were also drunk, tortured him by throwing bones and the heads of oxen at him and finally killing him with an axe.⁷¹

The Danish fleet responsible for this incident consisted of forty-five ships led by Jarl Thorkell the Tall. His next action must have taken everyone by surprise. He surrendered himself and his ships to the service of King Æthelræd. It is possible that he wished to atone for the outrage committed against the archbishop. Thorkell remained loyal to Æthelræd until the end of his reign. Convincing the royal party of the purity of his motives must have been difficult due to language barriers, if nothing more. It is possible Emma served a useful purpose as an interpreter.

⁷⁰ HH, p. 351.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 351.

Æthelræd had been obliged to pay huge amounts of 'tributes' in order to buy some temporary cessation of the violence. In 1007 30,000 pounds was paid (two versions of the ASC report it as 36,000).⁷² In 1012 48,000 pounds was paid.

The sources are silent as to what Emma had been doing during these ten years. However, we know that she gave birth to three children. Her eldest, Edward, was probably born in c 1005 in Islip in Oxfordshire. Barlow infers this from the fact that Edward is not included as a witness in any charters up to and including 1004, and it was Æthelræd's practice to include his sons as witnesses even when they were infants.⁷³ Very soon after his birth, Edward was taken by his parents to Ely Abbey 'in his cradle' and was brought up in the monastery 'for a long time with the boys'.⁷⁴ Barlow questions the reliability of this account, especially as there is no mention of it in the *Vita Ædwardi Regis*; a biography of Edward written in c 1068, probably at the instigation of Edward's queen, Edith.⁷⁵

At this time, any hope that Emma may have entertained that her son might become king of England must have seemed remote. Æthelræd still had six sons living from his previous marriage, who would presumably take precedence. However, the anonymous author of the *Vita Ædwardi Regis* claims that when Emma fell pregnant 'all the men of the country took an oath that if a man-child should come forth ..., they would await him as their lord and king who would rule over the whole race of the

⁷² ASC-1, p. 258

⁷³ F.Barlow, *Edward The Confessor*, (Yale: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 29.

⁷⁴ *Liber Eliensis*, Translated by Janet Fairweather, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2005), Book II, C.91, p. 191.

⁷⁵ Barlow, *Edward The Confessor*, p.33.

English'.⁷⁶ No other source confirms this claim, although Barlow accepts the possibility that 'Count Richard II proposed these terms'.⁷⁷ In the EER, the Encomiast reports that Edward himself later denied that any such oaths took place.⁷⁸

Emma's second child was her daughter Godgifu, known as Goda, born c 1008, followed by Ælfred born probably between 1010 and 1012. It is not known for sure where Emma was resident between the years 1002 and 1012, but it is likely to have been mostly in Winchester.

Emma is unlikely to have enjoyed marital bliss even if William of Malmesbury's comments may be biased. He wrote about Æthelræd that:

he was so inconstant towards his wife that he scarcely deigned her his bed, and degraded the royal dignity by his intercourse with harlots. She too, a woman conscious of her high descent, became indignant at her husband as she found herself endeared to him neither by her blameless modesty nor her fruitfulness.⁷⁹

Her name and status appear only erratically in Æthelræd's charters between 1002 and 1012. There are twenty-nine charters recorded between these dates. On nineteen of these she does not appear as a witness. She was first described as

⁷⁶ *Vita Eadwardi, The Life Of King Edward Who Rests At Westminster*, Edited and Translated by Frank Barlow, 2nd Edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 13.

⁷⁷ Barlow, (Edward The Confessor), p. 32.

⁷⁸ *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, Edited by Alistair Campbell with supplementary introduction by Simon Keynes, (Cambridge: The Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1998), p. 48

⁷⁹ WMC, p. 171.

'*regina*' in charters of 1005 and 1007, but then not again until 1012.⁸⁰ She was four times described as '*conlaterana regis*' [king's consort],⁸¹ and once given the status of '*thoro consecrata regio*' [consecrated to the royal bed].⁸² As a witness, she sometimes appears immediately after the king, sometimes after the archbishops, and sometimes after the princes. She appears as a joint grantor together with Æthelræd in an undated charter in which she appears as '*Ymma regina*' but this may be spurious.⁸³

Emma could do nothing at this time to further any ambitions she might have entertained with regard to the founding of a Norman dynasty or even securing the succession for one of her own sons. Her role was entirely passive, and there is no evidence of any influence she might have exerted at court.

In the year 1013, King Sweyn Forkbeard of Denmark mounted a concentrated attack, starting in Gainsborough, Lincolnshire, and obtained the submission of the people of Northumbria, followed by the Five Boroughs of The Danelaw (Lincoln, Derby, Nottingham, Leicester and Stamford), down to Oxford and then to Winchester. All these places quickly submitted to Sweyn and gave hostages. He then turned his attention to London, where the inhabitants also submitted. The ASC(E) comments that 'The whole nation had him [Sweyn] as full king.'⁸⁴ Sweyn was never consecrated as king or crowned. Æthelræd must have known that he had little chance of defending the capital, so in 1013 he arranged for Emma to be escorted to her brother Richard in Normandy, together with her sons, for their safety.

⁸⁰ S 910, S 911 and S 916

⁸¹ S 902, S 918 and S 923

⁸² S 909.

⁸³ S 941.

⁸⁴ ASC-3 (E), p. 144.

According to the ASC, Emma did not travel with her sons. She was accompanied by Ælfsige, Abbot of Peterborough but Edward and Ælfred were accompanied by the Bishop of London.⁸⁵ This fact might imply that Emma was not at the time living with her children, who may well have still been at Ely. Æthelræd himself escaped to the Isle of Wight before also retreating to Normandy.⁸⁶

This represented what must have seemed a sorry end to Æthelræd's rule in England and thus also to Emma's prospects of playing any significant role in the royal family of England. It had been the first time that any English king had lost his kingdom to a foreign invader.

Sweyn Forkbeard was declared king of the English by his own *jarls* in Gainsborough in December 1013 but, though only 51 years of age, he died suddenly on 3 February 1014, having reigned for just five weeks. Although there must have been many with a strong motive to wish his death, there is no source which suggests he was assassinated.

The Danish 'fleet', as the ASC(E) describes the Danish nobles at Gainsborough, 'all chose Cnut [Sweyn's son] for king'.⁸⁷ Cnut, who was at Gainsborough, had also inherited the kingdom of Denmark and a share in the kingdom of Norway. The English *witan*, however, advised that Æthelræd should be sent for declaring that 'no lord was dearer to them – if he would govern more justly than he did before'.⁸⁸ When Æthelræd received this invitation he sent back messengers – including his son

⁸⁵ ASC-3 (E), p. 144.

⁸⁶ ASC-3 (E), p. 144.

⁸⁷ ASC-3, (E) p. 144. (the Latin version of redaction F calls them 'the king's chief men and those who had come with him to England')

⁸⁸ ASC-3 (E), p. 145.

Edward – made his promises to change his ways and ‘full friendship was confirmed with word and pledge on either side’.⁸⁹ Barlow expresses the view that this implied that ‘[Æthelræd] must have regarded Edward as at least a possible heir to the throne’.⁹⁰ Maybe it is just as likely that he regarded Edward as expendable – there were, after all, no other suitable candidates for this mission other than Emma herself, and the enterprise was not without risk.

The embassy was successful, so Æthelræd returned to England with Emma, and was restored to the throne. The king was as good as his word for when he heard that Cnut was preparing to claim his inheritance he:

came down with a very great army, burnt the district [Lincoln], and put to death nearly all the inhabitants of the area.⁹¹

These inhabitants would have been Danish, because Lincoln was part of the Danelaw. Cnut escaped with his fleet to Sandwich where he freed the English hostages whom his father had taken, though not before cutting off their hands and noses, and then returned to Denmark.⁹²

The royal princes by Æthelræd’s first wife had remained in England, but Ecgberht, Eadred and Edgar all died of natural causes before 1013. The eldest, Æthelstan, also died in 1014. The effect of these deaths was to promote Emma’s son, Edward, to third in line to the throne of England. This may well have kindled Emma’s

⁸⁹ ASC-3 (E), p. 145.

⁹⁰ Barlow, (Edward The Confessor) p. 35.

⁹¹ HH, p. 353.

⁹² ASC-3 (E), p. 144.

ambition for her own sons. Cnut returned to England with an army in 1015 and commenced raids in Dorset, Wiltshire and Somerset. By this time Æthelræd was lying sick at his palace in Corsham, Wiltshire.⁹³

Æthelræd's efforts to restore his kingdom were hampered by his son-in-law, an ealdorman of Mercia named Eadric Streona. This was a man whose repeated acts of treachery over a period of ten years led William of Malmesbury to describe him as 'the refuse of mankind'.⁹⁴ Æthelræd's eldest surviving son, Edmund, had joined forces with Eadric to raise an army to repulse the Danish advances, but almost immediately Eadric had betrayed Edmund, hijacked forty of Æthelræd's ships and defected to Cnut.⁹⁵ Cnut, assisted by Eadric, now commenced hostilities in Mercia 'laying waste and burning many vills in Warwickshire'.⁹⁶ Edmund gathered his army but they insisted on being led by the king himself. Edmund requested his father's assistance, but Æthelræd had been warned of treachery and returned to London where, on 23 April 1016, he died 'after a life of severe toils and tribulation'.⁹⁷

⁹³ The ASC-3 (E) says this was Cosham near Portsmouth but that and Corsham in Wiltshire were both written as 'Cossenham' in the Domesday book and Æthelræd was known to have a seat at Corsham.

⁹⁴ WMC, p. 169.

⁹⁵ ASC-3 (E). p. 146.

⁹⁶ FW, p. 126.

⁹⁷ FW, p. 127.

4. Emma and Cnut The Great

In this chapter we shall analyse how Emma reacted to her first significant opportunity to promote the interests of her son; the death of Æthelræd. We shall also determine how an entirely new, and unexpected, change in her fortunes may have dramatically altered her ambitions.

The year 1016 was a momentous one in English history. The entries for this year in the ASC are the longest for any year in the entire text.⁹⁸ Beginning with Cnut's invasion, it goes on to describe Edmund's raising of an army, Æthelræd's death (24 April), the election of Edmund as king, Cnut's siege of London (7-9 May), pitched battles between Edmund and Cnut culminating in the battle of Assundun (October), the treachery of Ealdorman Eadric (Edmund's brother-in-law) and the pact between Cnut and Edmund, culminating in the death of Edmund (30 November).⁹⁹

Emma's prospects of founding a dynasty seemed to be once again at an all time low. Although four of Æthelræd's sons with his previous wife had died, leaving just Edmund and his younger brother Eadwig, Emma's position at court was at best

⁹⁸ ASC-1 (C), pp. 276-284.

⁹⁹ ASC-3 (D), pp. 146-152.

precarious. Edmund had been chosen as king 'by all the councillors who were in London and the garrison'.¹⁰⁰ However, in the rest of the country:

the bishops, abbots, ealdormen and all who ranked as nobles in England, assembled together [in Southampton] and unanimously elected Cnut their lord and king and renounced and repudiated all the descendants of Æthelræd.¹⁰¹

There is some evidence that Edward, too, returned to England and that not only did he assist his half brother, Edmund, in his military operations, but that the brothers were regarded as co-kings. Barlow refers to *Olaf's Saga Helga* which states that 'his [Æthelræd's] sons *Eathmundr* and *Eathvathr* succeeded to the kingdom'.¹⁰² Since Edward would have been about twelve years old at the time this seems improbable, although Barlow states that 'the tradition that Edward had been sent to serve Edmund ... is probably sound'.¹⁰³ There is no evidence in any of the sources that Emma had taken any steps to attempt to promote the interests of her son, Edward, to succeed pursuant to the oaths claimed later to have been taken to support his right to precedence over Æthelræd's other sons.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ ASC-3 (E), p. 149

¹⁰¹ FW, p. 127.

¹⁰² Barlow, *Edward The Confessor*, p. 35 (fn 4).

¹⁰³ *ibid*, p. 36.

¹⁰⁴ Vita, p. 13.

The decisive battle between the forces of King Edmund Ironside and the invader, Cnut, took place on 18 October 1016 at a place called Assundun (probably Ashingdon in Essex).¹⁰⁵ Accompanying Edmund was the treacherous Ealdorman Eadric, acting as his advisor and counsel. His advice was described by Henry of Huntington (quoting the ASC) in scathing terms: 'worse advice had never been given in England'.¹⁰⁶ The battle was evenly fought for a while, but Edmund suddenly advanced towards Cnut's front line brandishing a 'sword chosen and worthy of the arm of Edmund'.¹⁰⁷ This led to the imminent downfall of the Danish army but Ealdorman Eadric shouted to the English soldiers 'Flet Engle, Flet Engle. Ded is Edmund'.¹⁰⁸ He was the first to flee, followed by all the English. Edmund retreated to Gloucester with his rallied forces and Cnut followed for a final showdown. They met at Deerhurst, and what happened there was to have a significant effect on the future of the English kingdom. Rather than fighting another pitched battle, which Edmund's forces would have been expected to win, it was suggested that the dispute be settled by single combat between Edmund and Cnut. When their preparations were finished, they stood staring at each other until Cnut, with great wisdom, made an offer of peace by dividing the kingdom between them: 'Let us be brothers by adoption'.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ ASC-3 (D), pp 151-2,

¹⁰⁶ HH, p. 359.

¹⁰⁷ HH. P. 359.

¹⁰⁸ [Flee English, Flee English, Edmund is dead].

¹⁰⁹ GG, p. 235-7

The version in the *Knytlinga Saga* does not mention the single combat, but does report the agreement between Cnut and Edmund, including the term that if either were to die without issue, the survivor was to inherit the whole kingdom.¹¹⁰ If that was indeed the agreement, it would provide Cnut with a strong motive to dispose of Edmund and his two children as soon as possible. And that is precisely what happened. Within six weeks Edmund died, in all likelihood brutally murdered by Eadric himself.

In 1017 Cnut moved very quickly. He executed Eadric as a punishment for his treachery.¹¹¹ He then drove Eadwig (Æthelræd's fifth son) out of England and commanded that he be slain.¹¹² He also ordered that Edmund's two infant sons (Edmund and Edward) were to be:

'sent to the king of Sweden to be put to death, but by being preserved by his mercy, they went to the king of Hungary where they were kindly treated. The elder died (Edmund the Ætheling) and the younger (Edward the Exile) married Agatha, sister of the queen of Hungary'.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ *Knytlinga Saga, The History Of The Kings Of Denmark*, Translated by Herman Palsson and Paul Edwards, (Odense: Odense University Press, 1986), Electronic Version
<<https://dokumen.pub/knytlinga-saga-the-history-of-the-kings-of-denmark-87-7492-571-7.html>>, [Accessed 19th September 2023], p. 39.

¹¹¹ FW, p. 134.

¹¹² ASC-2 (C). p. 124.

¹¹³ WMC, p. 196.

Gaimar actually places the blame for this action firmly on Emma, writing that she had persuaded Cnut that the two boys were about to be brought back 'with a huge retinue', and should be sent to Denmark with instructions for their murder.¹¹⁴

Campbell, in his introduction to the EER, dismisses this as 'nonsense'.¹¹⁵ Cnut's actions effectively removed all potential challenges to his position as king with the exception of Emma's sons, Edward and Ælfred, who were under the protection of their uncle, Duke Richard II of Normandy, in Rouen.

There is some doubt about where Emma was at this time. Stafford considers it very likely that she was with Æthelræd at his death, and there is no reliable evidence that she returned to Normandy, although her sons Edward and Ælfred were reportedly in Ghent by Christmas 1016.¹¹⁶ During the period of Edmund's military campaigns in 1016, it is probable that Emma remained in London acting as Edmund's representative - but it is possible that she had fled the city. Stafford tells us that although Emma's role in the events of 1016 is unknown, she is associated with London, making it more likely that she was captured during the temporary or final occupation.¹¹⁷ This is confirmed by the *Knytlinga Saga*, which states that Emma

¹¹⁴ GG, pp 247-9.

¹¹⁵ EER (Campbell introduction), p. li

¹¹⁶ Stafford, p. 224-5.

¹¹⁷ Stafford, p. 225.

prepared to leave for Normandy after the death of Æthelræd but Cnut's men arrived, seized the ship and brought Emma to Cnut.¹¹⁸

After the death of Æthelræd, Emma must have felt that her future looked bleak – as did any prospects of seeing either of her sons become king of England. The throne had been taken by Edmund, who was married and possibly already had a son, and one of his brothers was still alive. England had been invaded by Cnut, who sought to claim the throne. Were he to be successful, Emma and her sons would be lucky to escape with their lives, let alone to retain any prospects of a future on the English throne.

Then it all changed. By the spring of 1017 Cnut was established as king of all England. Edmund had been murdered as had his brother, Eadwig, and Edmund's sons had been sent to Sweden to be disposed of. Out of the blue, Emma was thrown a lifeline; Cnut sent for her and took her as his wife and queen - she probably had no choice in the matter - and they were married before August 1017.¹¹⁹

The ASC(D) merely comments that 'Before the Kalends of August [1 August] he [Cnut] commanded the relict of King Æthelræd to be fetched for him to wife.'¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ KS, p. 31.

¹¹⁹ ASC-3 (D), p. 154.

¹²⁰ ASC-2 (D), p. 124.

The author of the EER writes that when Cnut was seeking a 'noble wife' he sought far and wide but that ultimately 'The imperial bride was, in fact, found within the bounds of Gaul, and to be precise in the Norman area'.¹²¹ Campbell, in his introduction to the EER, infers from this 'direct statement by the Encomiast' that the ASC compilers' use of the expression 'had her fetched' could only imply 'fetched from Normandy', placing it beyond doubt that Emma was there.¹²² I disagree with his conclusion firstly because the Encomiast's story is too improbable to be given much credence, and secondly because I agree with Keynes, who writes in his introduction to the EER that it is just as likely that 'fetched' could mean from 'safe-keeping of some kind in England'.¹²³

William of Jumièges states that '[Cnut] took Queen Emma from the city and married her a few days later by the Christian rite. In return for her, he handed over her weight in gold and silver to the army'.¹²⁴ William of Malmesbury writes that '[Cnut] sent for the wife of the late king out of Normandy'.¹²⁵

Cnut's motive was probably political: to prevent any future challenges for the throne from Emma's two sons Edward and Ælfred. There were other reasons why the

¹²¹ EER, p. 34.

¹²² EER (Campbell Introduction), p. xlv.

¹²³ EER (Keynes introduction), p. [xxiv].

¹²⁴ GND, Vol II, p. 21.

¹²⁵ WMC, p. 195.

union made good sense for Cnut. Firstly, Emma spoke Danish; and secondly, she had experience in the governing of England. Emma was prepared to throw herself wholeheartedly into being a good queen and determined to succeed in her most important task: that of giving Cnut a son.

The version of events reported by the Encomiast in the EER includes one highly significant detail – notably absent from all other sources. It is claimed that:

[Emma] refused ever to become the bride of Cnut unless he would affirm to her by oath, that he would never set up the son of any wife other than herself to rule after him, if it should happen that God should give her a son by him'.¹²⁶

It is not likely that Emma would have been in any position to impose such conditions. However, the fact that she claimed that she had done so is a clear indication that she entertained an ambition for any future sons she might have with Cnut.

Cnut was generally welcomed as king of England, as he represented a prospect of relative peace – albeit at a cost. One of his first actions in 1018, was to levy taxes amounting to 72,000 pounds – in addition to 10,500 pounds from London alone.

¹²⁶ EER, p. 33.

Henry of Huntingdon had little sympathy with the English, commenting that 'In this way the just Lord imposed on the English the tax gatherer they deserved'.¹²⁷

By 1019, Emma had given birth to the first of her two children with King Cnut. He was named Harthacnut, and even as a child he was involved with the affairs of state. At a grand occasion in 1023, the relics of Saint Ælfheah, the archbishop kidnapped and murdered by Danish invaders in 1011, were taken from their burial place in St Paul's Minster in London and translated to Rochester. Emma attended together with her son Harthacnut (then aged about five).¹²⁸ It is probable that any ambitions Emma might still have retained for any of her sons to become king of England would now have been firmly focussed on Harthacnut. It must have seen a long way off for her, as Cnut was at this time just twenty-one years old.

On the death of his brother, Harald, in 1018, Cnut inherited the kingdom of Denmark, which formed the start of his Anglo-Scandinavian empire. Cnut now experienced at first hand the difficulties of ruling multiple kingdoms and so, in order to protect and expand this empire, he was obliged to spend much time away from England. In 1025 Cnut decided to take his son, Harthacnut - then aged about eight - to Denmark to appoint him as 'king-designate'. Howard considers it likely that Emma

¹²⁷ HH, p. 363.

¹²⁸ ASC-3,(D), p. 156.

accompanied them to Denmark but there is no reliable source confirming this.¹²⁹

For most of 1027 Cnut was occupied in a grand pilgrimage to Rome.

There is no record of Emma ever accompanying Cnut on his long absences from England, and it is likely that she was acting as his representative in England, since there is some evidence that she was more than a queen in name alone. Howard states that 'The Queen was at the centre of royal government with increased authority during her husband's absences abroad'.¹³⁰

A problem for Emma was that on her marriage to Cnut in 1017, he was already married, albeit by *More Danico*. His wife was Ælfgifu of Northampton with whom he had two sons, Swein and Harold. She was still alive in 1017 and there is no record of her being 'set aside' by Cnut, nor of her sons being formally disinherited, despite Emma's claim of the agreement in 1017 regarding the precedence of her own son with Cnut. This fact speaks strongly of Emma's motive of having this claim set down in writing after the death of Cnut. Ælfgifu was sent to Norway with her sons in 1030 where, after the death of King Olaf II, Ælfgifu and Swein jointly ruled. At this time, Swein was about fourteen years old.¹³¹ These events were damaging to any prospect which Emma might have been entertaining of her son, Harthacnut,

¹²⁹ I.Howard, *Harthacnut – The Last Danish King Of England*, (Stroud: The History Press, 2008), p. 30.

¹³⁰ Howard, p. 28.

¹³¹ F.Stenton, *Anglo Saxon England*, 3rd Edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 398.

inheriting the kingdom of England, although she may have been encouraged that his position as future king of Denmark seemed to have been established.

Emma's undoubted influence at court and the respect afforded to her by Cnut can be seen by referring to the charters and some other documents. There exist thirty-five charters executed by Cnut between 1018 and 1035 (excluding two widely accepted to be forgeries).¹³² As early as 1018 a charter exists of a grant by King Cnut of Archbishop Æthelstan (more usually named Archbishop Lyfing) of a copse in Sussex in which the preamble describes the grantor as 'King Cnut at the request of Queen Ælfifu'. Emma is also included in the witness list as '*Ælfifu regina*' (queen) after the archbishops.¹³³ Emma is described as a joint grantor in a charter of 1020 granting land to Evesham Abbey 'King Cnut and Ælfifu [Emma] his wife'.¹³⁴ Apart from these charters, there exist four without witness lists¹³⁵, one from 1033 where Emma appears as a joint witness with King Cnut (*Ego Cnut rex Anglorum cum regina mea Ælfifu*),¹³⁶ and seven where Emma does not appear as a witness.¹³⁷ She is described as '*regina*' (queen) in eighteen of these charters, and as '*conlaterana*' (consort) in four. The *ætheling* Harthacnut never appears as a witness,

¹³² S 965 and S 966 generally accepted as forgeries.

¹³³ S 950.

¹³⁴ S 957

¹³⁵ S 951, S 953, S 978 and S 985

¹³⁶ S 972

¹³⁷ S 954, S 959, S 961, S 969, S 970, S 974, S 979

although Æthelræd had frequently included his children as witnesses even as infants.

From these charters, we can see that the status of Emma was as a queen, not merely a queen consort and she was frequently (on ten charters) included as a witness ranking next after the king and before the archbishops.

Some writs were addressed to King Cnut and Queen Emma offering further evidence that they were sometimes regarded as effectively ruling jointly. One example is a writ by the Archbishop of York (Wulfstan) from 1020, notifying the consecration of Æthelnoth as Archbishop of Canterbury. The writ, in English, starts: '*Wulfstan arcebiscope gret Cnut cyning his hlaford & Ælfgyfe þa hlæfdian eadmodlice*'.^{138, 139}

There exists a further writ (dated 1032 or 1035) in which Cnut and Emma jointly give consent for the disposal of certain lands by one of their priests.¹⁴⁰ A will (undated) by a certain Mantat Ancer (a recluse) is in the form of a writ in which the greeting is to 'King Cnut and Queen Emma'.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ [Archbishop Wulfstan humbly greets King Cnut his lord and Emma his lady].

¹³⁹ S 1386

¹⁴⁰ S 1465

¹⁴¹ S 1523

There is also evidence that Emma was a significant benefactor to religious institutions. Several examples can be found in the *Liber Eliensis*, the history of the Benedictine monastery of the Isle of Ely. Reference is made to Emma 'adorning the church of Ely with gifts and honours in the other king's time [Æthelræd] and similarly under the present one [Cnut] making it her aim to augment its grandeur'. It goes on to list many wonderful gifts.¹⁴² King Cnut and Queen Emma presented a large gold cross to Winchester in 1032, an act which is recorded in the *liber vitae* of the New Minster together with one of only two contemporary images of Emma.

¹⁴² LE, p. 176.



Image from the British Library digitised manuscripts. Accessible online from
<<https://blogs.bl.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2011/06/the-new-minster-liber-vitae.html>>
[Accessed 02/01/2004].

It is clear that, despite the absence of information about Emma in the ASC, she was recognised as an important figure at court and with the religious community in England. Bolton expresses the opinion that Emma was 'paramount among Cnut's

courtiers' who 'asserted herself as an important court figure'.¹⁴³ According to Richard of Devizes, when Cnut departed on his pilgrimage to Rome 'he entrusted the kingdom of England to Emma'.¹⁴⁴

Meanwhile, at the court of Duke Richard II of Normandy, Emma's two sons with Æthelræd, Edward and Ælfred, were still living in effective exile, probably also with their sister Godgifu. By the year 1026, they had been there for thirteen years and Edward was in his early twenties. Crouch writes that Godgifu was married to Count Drogo of the Vexin 'long before 1033'.¹⁴⁵ There is no record that after Emma's marriage to Cnut in 1017 she ever travelled to Normandy to visit them or had any contact with them. They may well have felt abandoned by their mother, which may explain the hostility shown by Edward when he later became king of England in 1042. The Anglo-Saxon chroniclers and historians do not mention Edward or his siblings. Even the EER, effectively authored by Emma herself, does not mention her two sons until after Cnut's death in 1035 and even then it is implied that they were her sons with Cnut.¹⁴⁶

Meanwhile, in Normandy, Richard II had died in 1026 leaving two sons, Richard – who inherited as Duke Richard III – and Robert, who succeeded in 1027. However

¹⁴³ Bolton, p. 173.

¹⁴⁴ AMW, p. 30.

¹⁴⁵ Crouch, p. 51.

¹⁴⁶ EER, p. 39.

well the *æthelings* Edward and Ælfred had been treated during their period of exile, according to William of Jumièges they were treated by Robert ‘with so much honour that, bound to them by great love, he adopted them as brothers’.¹⁴⁷ Some time later, Duke Robert sent envoys to King Cnut requesting that he should be merciful and return to them [Edward and Ælfred] ‘what was theirs for the love of him’.¹⁴⁸ Robert received no response to this request and the envoys returned empty handed. If this happened, and we must be aware that William of Jumièges is the only source to describe this embassy,¹⁴⁹ then it is almost certain that Emma would have been aware of it, in which case it confirms her intention to abandon her children with Æthelræd. Duke Robert, enraged at being ignored:

called together the magnates of his duchy and gave orders that a great fleet should instantly be formed. From all coastal areas of Normandy ships were brought together and ... supplied with anchors, weapons and strong men and stationed at the shore of Fécamp.¹⁵⁰

It took a storm to frustrate this attempted invasion – the ships were driven onto Jersey, where they were detained by the inclement weather. Eventually the enterprise was abandoned and the ships returned to Mont-Saint-Michel. The source

¹⁴⁷ GND-2, p. 77.

¹⁴⁸ GND-2, p. 77.

¹⁴⁹ GND-2, p. 77 (footnote 2)

¹⁵⁰ GND-2, p. 79.

does not specify the date of this incident, but Van-Houts considers it likely to have been after Easter in 1033, when a large number of Norman magnates were assembled at Fécamp.¹⁵¹

William of Jumièges continues by describing how some time later, probably in 1034 or early 1035, King Cnut sent a message to Duke Robert saying that he would be willing to return half the kingdom of England to the sons of King Æthelræd. His reason was that he was seriously ill (Cnut died in November 1035). When the message was received, Robert had already finalised plans for a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for which he departed in January 1035. He did not return as he died in July of that year.¹⁵² William of Jumièges is the only source for these three episodes. Crouch comments that although he is the sole source, he is ‘nonetheless a good source’.¹⁵³

The incidents which took place between the years 1025 to 1029, were reported in the ASC, the Scandinavian Sagas, English twelfth century chroniclers, The EER, and modern biographies of Harthacnut, Cnut and Emma. Unfortunately there is wide divergence about the dates and details making it hard to be definitive about the sequence of events. However, it does seem virtually certain that by the year 1030,

¹⁵¹ GND-2, p. 77 (footnote 4)

¹⁵² GND-2, pp. 79-81.

¹⁵³ Crouch, p. 51.

Harthacnut was still in Denmark. Although he was not technically king of Denmark (and would not become so until the death of Cnut in 1035), Howard is of the view that he was de facto king, and refers to him as 'King Harthacnut'.¹⁵⁴ It is probable that he was acting as regent on behalf of his father, Cnut, with the assistance of a council of advisors. Despite some reports to the contrary, I do not believe that there is any reliable evidence that Emma left England during this period.

Cnut and Emma, between them, were remarkably successful in transforming life in England from the devastation and chaos which accompanied the reign of Æthelræd to a period of relative calm, peace and prosperity. Henry of Huntingdon wrote that 'Before him there never had been in England a king of such great authority ... who performed fine and magnificent deeds'.¹⁵⁵ Bolton writes that 'When Cnut returned to England from Norway in 1029 he came back to the first period of peace, prosperity and stability he had known in his adult life'.¹⁵⁶ King Cnut died suddenly on 12 November 1035 at Shaftesbury in Dorset. He was about forty-five years old.

This represented the first time that Emma had a chance of seeing one of her sons actually succeed to the English throne. What must have seemed a only a remote dream was now a very real prospect as her son, Harthacnut, was the front runner.

¹⁵⁴ Howard, pp. 28-49.

¹⁵⁵ HH, p. 367.

¹⁵⁶ T.Bolton, *Cnut The Great*, (Yale: Yale University Press, 2019), p. 172.

5. Emma as Kingmaker

In this chapter we determine how the unexpected death of King Cnut gave Emma the opportunities she may have been hoping for, to see at least one of her sons become king of England.

By November 1035, Emma was about fifty years old and a widow for the second time. It was common for dowager queens to retire to a nunnery and pass the remainder of their lives in relative calm and peace. Emma was not ready for this as she still had work to do to realise her ambitions. A council meeting was held in Oxford in early 1036, and it was widely expected that Harthacnut would be accepted as king of England following the commitment made to Emma as a condition of her marriage to Cnut in 1017. The promise, according to Emma, was that Cnut would 'never set up the son of any wife other than herself to rule after him'.¹⁵⁷ Cnut's sons from his previous wife, Swein and Harold, had been in Scandinavia since 1030.¹⁵⁸ It is said that negotiations took place between Swein and his half-brother, Harthacnut, regarding a method of sharing the inheritance of their father, Cnut. Harthacnut would retain the kingdom of Denmark, Swein would retain Norway, which he was effectively ruling jointly with his mother (Ælfgifu), and they would divide England

¹⁵⁷ EER, p. 33.

¹⁵⁸ Stenton, p. 398.

between them, the northern part going to Swein and the southern part to Harthacnut.¹⁵⁹ Harold and his mother, Ælfgifu, returned to England in 1035, possibly before his father's death, but certainly both were present at the Council assembly at Oxford in early 1036. No detail exists of the discussions or agreements reached at Oxford, but the causes of Harthacnut and of his mother, Emma, were severely hampered by Harthacnut's absence. He was, after all, struggling in Denmark to withstand the aggression and threat of imminent invasion by Magnus of Norway.¹⁶⁰ The eventual decision reached by the magnates in Oxford was one of compromise and, yet again, an attempted division of the kingdom. Harold was accepted as King of Mercia and Northumbria, and Harthacnut as King of Wessex, with his mother Emma acting as her son's regent.

The Council assembly at Oxford was attended by the two most powerful English nobles. Leofric was appointed as earl of Mercia in 1032. He was possibly related by marriage to Ælfgifu of Northampton, the mother of Harold Harefoot, who supported his interests. The other important noble was Earl Godwin of Wessex, who had held the title since 1020 and was more sympathetic to the interests of Harthacnut and Emma. The importance of these two nobles cannot be over-estimated. Stenton takes the view that 'Through its ultimate consequences the promotion of Godwine

¹⁵⁹ Howard, p. 52.

¹⁶⁰ Howard, p. 53.

and Leofric was of momentous significance for English history'.¹⁶¹ It seemed as if, after the council of Oxford, Harthacnut's claim to the throne of England was still hanging on, albeit by a slender thread.

There was, however, another 'kingmaker' around, determined to challenge Harthacnut and Emma. Fierce and uncompromising, she was also a woman – but a woman scorned. Her name was Ælfgifu of Northampton and she was the first wife of King Cnut. There are no mentions of Ælfgifu in any of the English or Norman sources between the death of Sweyn Forkbeard and the death of Cnut some twenty-one years later. It was reported by Thietmar that, after the death of Sweyn, 'A certain woman, warned of King Æthelræd's intentions [to disinter the corpse], ... had the corpse raised from the earth. She returned Sweyn's body to his homeland'.¹⁶² Ann Williams considers it tempting to assume that this woman was Ælfgifu.¹⁶³ It seems as if she was not 'put aside' completely by Cnut after his marriage to Emma. Nothing much is known about her until 1029 when, after the expulsion of Olaf II of Norway, Cnut decided to send his eldest son, Swein, together with his mother

¹⁶¹ Stenton, p. 416.

¹⁶² *The Chronicles Of Thietmar Of Meresburg*, Translated and annotated by David Warner, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001) , p. 333.

¹⁶³ Williams, p. 127.

Ælfifu, to Norway to act as regents on his behalf.¹⁶⁴ It is probable that Swein's younger brother, Harold, accompanied them.

The negotiations at Oxford in 1036 did not suit Harold at all. He was not happy about sharing the kingdom with his half-brother; even less still was he prepared merely to rule as regent. He responded quickly but it was the actions of his mother, Ælfifu, which had the desired effect. It would be necessary for her to obtain the support of the majority of the magnates in England, especially those in Wessex who remained loyal to Emma and her son. This would be difficult as Ælfifu was unpopular and rumours were increasingly circulating about the legitimacy of her son. The ASC wrote disparagingly of him in the annal for 1035:

Some men said of Harold that he was the son of King Cnut and Ælfifu, daughter of Ealdorman Ælfhelm, but to many men this seemed unbelievable.¹⁶⁵

Florence of Worcester went further, actually saying that:

¹⁶⁴ T. Bolton, *Ælfifu of Northampton, Cnut the Great's other woman*, Nottingham Medieval Studies, Vol 51 (BREPOLS Online, 2007), p. 263.

¹⁶⁵ ASC-3 (E), p. 161.

Some asserted that this Ælfgifu desired to have a son by the king, but as she could not, she caused the new-born child of a certain priest to be brought to her, and made the king fully believe that she had just borne him a son.¹⁶⁶

This story is repeated in the EER in which the Encomiast cannot even bring himself to utter the name of Ælfgifu of Northampton, just calling her ‘a certain concubine of King Knut’.¹⁶⁷ In 1036, a priest named Immo from the court of Holy Roman Emperor Conrad II wrote that:

An unnamed wretched and wicked step-mother of Gunnhild was attempting to deprive Harthacnut of his English throne, and had arranged a great party for the leading men of England at which she attempted to secure their support by entreaties and bribes.¹⁶⁸

Emma desperately needed Harthacnut to come to England to protect his own interests, but the instability of the situation in Denmark prevented him from making the journey. Stenton is of the view that had Harthacnut been able to appear in England within a few weeks of the Oxford assembly, he would probably have been

¹⁶⁶ FW, p. 140.

¹⁶⁷ EER, p. 41.

¹⁶⁸ T.Bolton, *Ælfgifu of Northampton, Cnut the Great's other woman*, Nottingham Medieval Studies, Vol 51 (BREPOLS Online, 2007), p. 265.

received everywhere as the rightful heir of Cnut.¹⁶⁹ Instead, it seems as if Ælfgifu's strategy had succeeded.

According to the EER, Harold Harefoot approached Ælthnoth, archbishop of Canterbury in 1036, and commanded his consecration as king. This was refused, and the archbishop also forbade any other bishop to carry out the consecration.¹⁷⁰ Harold then apparently 'turned away from the whole Christian religion'.¹⁷¹

Bolton writes in his conclusion to his essay about Ælfgifu that W.H.Stevenson, writing in 1913, considered Ælfgifu as 'an equally ambitious, stronger, and more ruthless woman [than Emma]'. Bolton does not entirely share this view and thinks the two women should be seen as 'remarkably similar aristocratic women, queens and royal mothers'.¹⁷²

The year 1036 witnessed a dreadful episode which was to have a considerable effect on the future. What is known is that Emma's sons, Edward and Ælfred, simultaneously but independently travelled to England from Normandy by different routes. According to William of Jumièges, Edward sailed with forty ships full of soldiers to Southampton, commencing battle as soon as he landed commenced. He

¹⁶⁹ Stenton, p. 420.

¹⁷⁰ EER, p. 41.

¹⁷¹ EER, p. 41

¹⁷² Bolton, *Ælfgifu of Northampton*, Vol 51, p. 268.

enjoyed some success but, realising that his army was not large enough to win the kingdom, returned to Normandy'.¹⁷³ Considerably more has been written about Ælfred's ill-fated expedition. What the sources agree on is that Ælfred came by a different route, crossing at Boulogne, with a band of armed men. He got as far as Guildford, possibly on his way to London to confer with King Harold Harefoot,¹⁷⁴ or having lost his way to Winchester,¹⁷⁵ but was captured by Earl Godwin, acting on the instructions of the king. Ælfred and his soldiers were taken to Ely, and subjected to a kangaroo court which decreed that he be blinded. He was then either murdered,¹⁷⁶ or, more likely, taken to the monastery in Ely where he shortly afterwards died of his wounds.¹⁷⁷ One version of the *Liber Eliensis* (Blake's edition) suggests that Ælfred was taken to London and seen by Harold who ordered the torture and murder of Ælfred's forces.¹⁷⁸ William of Jumièges tells a slightly different story that Ælfred crossed from Wissant (near Calais) to Dover and later was welcomed as a friend by Earl Godwin, who gave him the kiss of peace and dined with him, but then captured him in the middle of the night. William confirms that Ælfred was taken to London and that his torture and the execution of his companions were personally ordered by Harold.¹⁷⁹ The author of the ASC(C) was so inspired by what he described as 'no

¹⁷³ GND, Vol II, p. 107.

¹⁷⁴ FW. P. 239.

¹⁷⁵ EER, p. 42.

¹⁷⁶ EER, p. 45.

¹⁷⁷ LE, p. 189

¹⁷⁸ LE, pp. 189-190.

¹⁷⁹ GND, Vol II, p. 107.

more horrible deed was done in this country' that his chronicle for the year 1036

includes a twenty line poem entitled 'The Death Of Ælfred'.¹⁸⁰

The sources say much about this incident but we are left with two unanswered questions. Firstly, what were the intentions of Edward and Ælfred (either independently or jointly) for their expeditions? Were they to visit and support their mother, Emma, or were they attempting to mount invasions to claim what they regarded as their rightful inheritance? The second unanswered question is: at whose instigation did the brothers cross over to England? There seem to be three possibilities. Firstly, they may have made the journey on their own initiative (possibly on the advice of their Norman retinue). Secondly, Emma could have contacted them to ask them to make the journey. Thirdly, they could have been persuaded to come upon receipt of a letter purporting to be from their mother, which was in fact a forgery issued on the instructions of Harold Harefoot. This third possibility is the one claimed in the EER, which also includes the text of the alleged letter.¹⁸¹

We shall never know the real answers but it seems reasonable to assume that Emma, her prospects of seeing her son Harthacnut on the throne of England much diminished, encouraged Edward and Ælfred to mount a challenge to Harold Harefoot

¹⁸⁰ ASC-3 (C), pp. 157-158

¹⁸¹ EER, pp. 41-42 (translation reproduced in Appendix 1 below)

which failed with tragic consequences. This view is shared by Keynes who wrote, 'It is entirely likely that it was Emma who encouraged Edward and Ælfred to return to England'.¹⁸²

What happened next was a further major setback for Emma. Harold Harefoot, now calling himself king of England, reacted to the 'invasions' of Emma's sons by promptly travelling to Winchester, appropriating the royal treasury and Emma's personal valuables, and forcibly banishing her from the country. The chronicler from Abingdon, in his annal for 1037, clearly had sympathy for Emma because he wrote:

'Queen Ælfifu [Emma] was driven out without any mercy to face the raging winter and she then came beyond the sea to Bruges, and there Earl Baldwin [Count of Flanders] received her well and kept her there as long as she had need'.¹⁸³

It is quite probable that Ælfifu of Northampton was involved in this act. Perhaps she accompanied Harold to Winchester, where she would have witnessed Emma's fall from power with considerable glee. Stenton takes the view that as Harold

¹⁸² EER, (Keynes introduction), p. [xxxiv].

¹⁸³ ASC-3 (C), p. 160.

Harefoot was a somewhat weak character, the real ruler of England for the whole of his reign was his mother, Ælfgifu.¹⁸⁴

Emma had now reached the absolute nadir of her fortunes. She was over fifty years old, twice a widow, her fortune and possessions confiscated. Any ambitions she may have entertained for her sons to inherit the throne of England were in tatters. Her son Ælfred had been murdered, her son Edward all but forgotten, and her son Harthacnut disinherited by her stepson, Harold Harefoot, who seemed to have been accepted as king of the whole of England.¹⁸⁵ She had summarily been forced into exile. It would not have been unusual had Emma decided to follow the example of many medieval royal widows and retreat gracefully into retirement to a convent. What happened next showed that Emma's energy and determination to fulfill her role as kingmaker were unabated.

Emma had decided to pass her exile in Flanders for three main reasons. Firstly, the situation in Normandy was unstable. Emma's brother, Duke Richard II, had died about eleven years earlier. Both his sons, Richard and Robert, died before 1035.¹⁸⁶ The effect of this was that the title of Duke of Normandy had been inherited by Robert's illegitimate son, William, who was only eight years old. William was

¹⁸⁴ Stenton, p. 420.

¹⁸⁵ ASC-3 (C), p. 160.

¹⁸⁶ GND, Vol II, pp 45, 85.

unflatteringly known as 'William the Bastard'; later, of course, he became known as 'William the Conqueror'. The second reason was that the rulers of Flanders were, as Keynes comments, 'instinctively sympathetic to the Anglo-Danish interests in England'.¹⁸⁷ The third reason was that Bruges, situated in the north-east of Flanders, was geographically convenient for Emma to keep in touch with her son, Harthacnut, and other friends and supporters.¹⁸⁸

Immediately after settling in Bruges, Emma made contact with both her surviving sons. Firstly, she asked Edward to visit her in Bruges. The only source from which we learn this is the EER which confirms that Edward did respond and visited his mother, but told her he was unable to help since 'the English nobles had sworn no oath to him'.¹⁸⁹ There is considerable doubt as to whether this ever happened. Edward had already attempted an armed invasion (even receiving assistance from Flanders) less than a year previously. He had known of the disaster and brutal murder of his brother, Ælfred, and probably blamed his mother for her part in precipitating these events. It is unlikely that Emma would have made contact so soon and, if even she did, it is also improbable that Edward would have come to Bruges. Campbell comments that 'Edward's visit to Flanders may be apocryphal'.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ EER (Keynes introduction), p. [xxxv]

¹⁸⁸ *ibid*

¹⁸⁹ EER, p. 49.

¹⁹⁰ EER (Campbell Introduction), p. lxxvii.

However, Barlow is of the view that 'It is very likely that Edward did go to meet Emma in Flanders in 1038 and that they discussed the future'.¹⁹¹

Emma also made contact with her son Harthacnut, whose problems in Denmark were easing following a treaty signed in 1038 or 1039 between Harthacnut and Magnus of Norway.¹⁹² The effect of this was that Harthacnut would have been in a position to engage in a full-scale invasion of England to overthrow Harold Harefoot and take his rightful inheritance. Emma must have been mindful of the recent inept and ineffective attempted invasions of Edward and Ælfred and she knew that, by contrast, her son Harthacnut had the experience and resources to be able to launch a major offensive. Their meeting probably took place some time in 1038, although the ASC records it as 1039.¹⁹³ It seems to have been at this meeting that Harthacnut first became aware of the murder of his half brother Ælfred, which affected him deeply.. 'The horror of so great a crime made his ears tremble ... and he burned in his heart to avenge his brother's injuries and to obey his mother's message'.¹⁹⁴ On his return to Denmark, Harthacnut assembled a fleet of some sixty-two ships and an army of 5,000 men in preparation for the invasion.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ Barlow, *Edward The Confessor*, p. 47.

¹⁹² Stenton, p. 421-2.

¹⁹³ ASC-3 (C) , p. 160.

¹⁹⁴ EEC, p. 49.

¹⁹⁵ Howard, p. 109.

By early 1040 he was ready to launch his attack. He travelled to Bruges to fetch his mother, but then news arrived that Harold Harefoot had fallen seriously ill, and that on 17 March 1040 he had died. Unsure of exactly how his claim to the throne of England would be received, Harthacnut landed in England in June 1040, together with his full invasion force. He was readily accepted as rightful king by both Danes and English,¹⁹⁶

But this was not enough. Emma needed to restore her own reputation, to paint Harold Harefoot in the worst possible light, and to emphasise the suitability of her son Harthacnut for the English throne. She attempted to achieve this by commissioning a manuscript which has become known by the title '*Encomium Emmae Reginae*' [In Praise Of Queen Emma].

¹⁹⁶ ASC-3 (E), p. 161.

6. Encomium Emmae Reginae

About sixty miles to the west of Bruges lies the small village of St Omer where two important religious establishments were located. One was the collegiate church of Notre Dame; the other a Benedictine abbey and monastery dedicated to St Bertin which was probably where she encountered the monk whom she would commission to write a record of the Danish conquest of England from the invasion of Sweyn Forkbeard in 1013. This record is the book which came to be known as the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*. We are unsure of when the concept of the work arose, but it is known that it was completed after Harthacnut's return to England in June 1040. The book did not originally have a title, and the name by which it is known today is taken from an edition transcribed in the early seventeenth century by the French historian Andre Duchesne.¹⁹⁷ The work consists of a Prologue, an Argument (in the sense of a motif), and three 'Books'. The anonymous author, known as 'The Encomiast', used the Prologue to describe how he intended to write the history, making it clear that he wrote on 'things enjoined upon me by you, Lady Queen' although he anticipated that doing so that would subject him to 'a variety of criticisms by men'.¹⁹⁸ The second section, entitled 'The Argument', expounds at length about his pledge to 'devote this book to the praise of the Queen',¹⁹⁹ though he is aware that he does not even mention Emma until late in Book III – and then only to describe a

¹⁹⁷ EER (Campbell introduction), p. xviii.

¹⁹⁸ EER, p. 5.

¹⁹⁹ EER, p. 7.

strange version of how Cnut came to take Emma as his wife and Queen. The Encomiast employs two analogies to excuse himself for this omission, for example comparing his starting and ending with the praise of the queen to the drawing of a circle.²⁰⁰

Most of the text (Books I and II) is effectively a history of the Danish invasion of England, starting with Sweyn Forkbeard and ending with Cnut's death. But it is a strange version of the history indeed. Nowhere does the Encomiast even mention the existence of Æthelræd. He does later describe the conflict with Edmund Ironside but calls him a 'prince', not a king, claiming that the whole of England had accepted Cnut as king.²⁰¹ Sweyn is described as being 'enthroned over the whole country of the English' for 'a glorious period'.²⁰² The truth is that Sweyn was not accepted by the English, was certainly never crowned, and survived as self-appointed king of England for a mere five weeks. In the opinion of Campbell, the Encomiast's depiction of the reign of Sweyn 'shows little regard to historical accuracy'.²⁰³

Book II describes Cnut's return to Denmark after Sweyn's death, and reports in some detail the discussions and negotiations between Cnut and his brother, Harald Svendsen, who was king of Denmark at the time. Cnut is said to have offered to

²⁰⁰ EER. p. 7.

²⁰¹ EER. p. 27.

²⁰² EER. p. 15.

²⁰³ EER (Campbell introduction), p. li.

divide the kingdoms of Denmark and England between himself and his brother, but his offer was rejected.²⁰⁴ This is interesting, and quite possibly true, because there are three subsequent occasions on which Cnut was also reported to have made an offer to share a kingdom. The *Encomiast* writes much of Thorkell, the Danish warrior who had defected to the English in 1012. Campbell, analysing this, concludes that 'it is obvious that the *Encomiast* was not honest in his account of Thorkell'.²⁰⁵

What seems clear is that, for whatever reason, it would be very dangerous to rely on the EER as an accurate historical source. Stenton describes it as being 'in effect a panegyric of Cnut and completely unreliable on points of fact'.²⁰⁶

Book III of the EER is quite different. It starts with the choice of Harold Harefoot as king by 'certain Englishmen forgetting the piety of their lately deceased king (Cnut) and preferring to dishonour their country and desert the noble sons of the excellent Queen Emma'.²⁰⁷ The *Encomiast* then claims that Harold was not actually the son of Cnut's concubine (*Ælfgifu* of Northampton), but was the baby of a servant taken from her childbed.²⁰⁸ The *Encomiast* reports that when Harold demanded the coronation regalia, archbishop *Æthelnoth* of Canterbury absolutely refused to comply, laying the

²⁰⁴ EER, p. 17-19.

²⁰⁵ EER (Campbell introduction), p. lvii.

²⁰⁶ Stenton, p. 697.

²⁰⁷ EER, p. 39.

²⁰⁸ EER, p. 41.

regalia on the altar at Canterbury Cathedral and expressly forbidding all bishops to remove them or to consecrate him as king.²⁰⁹

The Encomiast then, in graphic detail, tells the story of the torture and murder of Emma's son Ælfred and his soldiers. He claims, however, that the incident was part of an 'unrighteous scheme' to kill Emma's sons. What the king did was send a forged letter to Emma's sons, purporting to be from Emma herself, which entreated them to come to her at Winchester.²¹⁰ The full text of the translation of this letter can be seen in Appendix I (below, p. 91). Modern historians are generally of the opinion that no evidence exists to support any factual basis for the story of the forged letter.

The EER suggests that the departure of Emma following the incident described above was a decision made by her 'with shrewd judgment'.²¹¹ The ASC(C) states that she 'was driven out without any mercy'.²¹² The work concludes with the accession of Harthacnut, the journey to England of Edward and Emma, and the implication of a triumvirate rule by the three of them as 'sharers of rule' stating that

²⁰⁹ EER, p. 41.

²¹⁰ EER, pp. 41, 43.

²¹¹ EER, p. 47.

²¹² ASC-3 (C), p. 160.

‘the bond of motherly and brotherly love is of strength indestructible’.²¹³ Other sources suggest that Edward did not come back to England until 1041.²¹⁴

We can conclude that the final part of the EER did, to an extent, live up to the Encomiast’s ‘pledge to devote this book to the praise of the Queen’.²¹⁵ The most interesting aspect of the EER is the reason why it was written. One motive could have been to justify the Danish conquest of England; another to emphasise the legitimacy of Harthacnut’s claim to the throne of England or maybe just to paint Emma herself in the most positive light.

It does seem clear that the work was completed after the death of Harold Harefoot and the accession of Harthacnut. The Encomiast’s statement that Harthacnut was ‘most gloriously received’ and the rule was ‘in the calm of peace’ is yet another false claim.²¹⁶

The standard version of the EER is a manuscript from the eleventh century. This manuscript, currently held at the British Library, is not the author’s autograph but probably a very early copy of it.²¹⁷ It is quite possibly that given to Emma herself as

²¹³ EER, p. 53.

²¹⁴ FW. P. 144.

²¹⁵ EER, p. 7.

²¹⁶ EER, p. 53.

²¹⁷ EER, (Campbell Introduction), p. xii.

it includes an illustration of the presentation showing a monk handing the manuscript to Emma with her sons, Harthacnut and Edward, looking on.



British Library (resource currently unavailable online due to cyber attack).

Campbell, in his introduction to the EER, refers to a sixteenth century manuscript copy of it. This copy is heavily abridged but, interestingly, the conclusion of the final chapter is replaced by a brief account of the death of Harthacnut and the accession of Edward.²¹⁸ The editors of the EER, Keynes and Campbell, are agreed that there was another version of the EER written after the death of Harthacnut, but the original was lost and no reliable copies existed. Until now.

By an extraordinary twist of fate, a fourteenth-century English manuscript was unexpectedly offered for sale at Sotheby's in December 2008. The manuscript consisted of nine separate medieval documents copied without pagination or headings. One of these documents is a complete copy of the EER, though with a different ending. The revised ending was clearly written after the death of Harthacnut, and references to earlier parts of the text imply that it was almost certainly written by the Encomiast himself. It has a rubric at the end of the text: '*Explicit Tractatus de Gestis Regis Chutonis*'. The revised ending is interesting in that it is the only part of the EER to mention King Æthelræd by name, praising his nature and confirming that he had named his son as successor. I am sure that the Encomiast was referring to Edward here, and he describes him as 'the legitimate heir of a man eminent among men'. The author also refers to the 'full circle' analogy which he explained in the Argument.²¹⁹ A reproduction of the manuscript, its transcription and translation of the revised ending can be seen in Appendix II (Page 92).

²¹⁸ EER (Campbell introduction), p. xvi-xvii. and (Keynes introduction), p. [xliv]

²¹⁹ *Explicit Tractatus de Gestis Regis Chnutonis*, (Royal Danish Library), <<http://www5.kb.dk/vmanus/2011/dec/ha/object78526/da#kbODS0=page:222>>, [Accessed: 19th January 2024].

7. EMMA AS QUEEN MOTHER

In this chapter we analyse how Emma reacted to having her ambition of seeing one of her sons on the throne of England achieved, but we must question if this occurred because of her efforts or despite them.

The first action by Harthacnut after arriving in England with his invasion force was to avenge the murder of his half-brother, Ælfred, by ordering that the body of Harold Harefoot be disinterred, beheaded, thrown into a sewer and then dragged into the River Thames.²²⁰ He then raised a tax to pay the oarsmen and steersmen of his fleet. This was described as 'a tax so burdensome that scarcely anyone would pay it, and he became thoroughly detested'.²²¹ A further onerous tax of more than 30,000 pounds was raised the following year (1041).²²² Henry of Huntingdon has a rather more positive opinion of Harthacnut saying that 'He had been honourable by nature and ... his generosity was so great that he ordered royal meals to be served four times a day to all his court'.²²³ The end of the EER paints a rosy picture of a united and popular leadership by Harthacnut, Edward and Emma, but other sources reveal this to be very far from the truth. According to Howard, Harthacnut and his mother were unpopular.²²⁴ Keynes is also of the opinion that 'it was evident that

²²⁰ FW, p. 143.

²²¹ FW. P. 143.

²²² ASC-3 (E), p. 163.

²²³ HH, p. 371.

²²⁴ Howard, p. 123.

Harthacnut's reign was profoundly unpopular'.²²⁵ When Harthacnut first arrived to take the throne, he was not accompanied by Edward. It was not until 1041 that Harthacnut, not Emma, invited Edward to join him in England, effectively invited him to share the rule. The ASC(C) records that in 1041 Edward was 'sworn in as [joint] king'.²²⁶ There is conflicting evidence which suggests that Edward did not in fact come to England until after Harthacnut's death.²²⁷

It is clear that Harthacnut was deeply sympathetic to the injustices suffered by his half-brothers – in particular the murder of Ælfred. Holding Earl Godwin chiefly responsible, he arranged for his prosecution. The king and members of his council sat in judgment at a trial which lasted several days, Emma being the chief accuser. Godwin's defence was that he was bound by his oaths to his lord (Harold Harefoot), a defence he accompanied by his own oath and the oaths of his supporters. Because of his position, this led to a technical acquittal.²²⁸

Emma was more powerful and influential as queen mother than she had ever been as queen. There are only three charters of the reign of Harthacnut. In all of them, Emma is the first named witness after the king. In two, from the year 1042, she is

²²⁵ EER (Keynes introduction), p. [xxxvii].

²²⁶ ASC-3 (C), p. 162.

²²⁷ FW, p. 144.

²²⁸ Howard, pp. 112-115.

described as '*Ælfgyfu Regis Mater*'²²⁹; in the third, which is undated and possibly spurious, as '*Ymma regina mater*'.²³⁰

The fortunes of Emma had been restored as suddenly and dramatically as they had been lost four years previously. She must have felt that she had achieved her destiny as 'kingmaker', at last seeing one of her sons sitting on the throne of England. But her glory was to be shortlived. At a wedding celebration in Lambeth in the summer of 1042, the king suddenly collapsed. He died a few days later, having reigned for a period of less than two years.²³¹

Harthacnut is known to have had friendly negotiations with Magnus I, king of Norway. It is thought that at one of their many meetings they had come to an agreement that Magnus should succeed him as king of Denmark if he were to die without male issue.²³² Although this agreement was made before Harthacnut succeeded as king of England, there is some evidence that Magnus felt that the agreement should include succession to the throne of England.

The death of Harthacnut placed Emma in a difficult situation. Her propaganda document, the EER, promoted the cause of Harthacnut and virtually ignored Edward's potential claim to the throne. It was at this time that she apparently

²²⁹ S 994, S 995.

²³⁰ S 996.

²³¹ ASC-3 (E), p. 163.

²³² Howard, p. 106.

commissioned the revision of the EER which, for the first time, recognised the existence of Edward as her son with Æthelræd and the rightful heir to the throne.

Her actions were unnecessary and irrelevant because immediately after the death of Harthacnut, according to the ASC, 'all the people chose Edward as king in London – may he hold it as long as God grants it.'²³³ He was formally consecrated as king on Easter day 1043 by Eadsige, archbishop of Canterbury. Florence of Worcester tells us that this was 'chiefly by the exertions of Earl Godwin and Living, bishop of Worcester.'²³⁴ It certainly was not by the exertions of Emma herself.

If Emma had hoped that she would be able to spend the rest of her days as an active queen mother, she was to be disappointed. She must have known that her relationship with Edward was virtually non-existent. She had sent him to Ely Cathedral as a small child for his upbringing. He had been taken to his uncle in Normandy after Sweyn Forkbeard's invasion – not travelling with his mother. After Emma's marriage to Cnut and her return to England, Edward and his brother were left in Normandy and had minimal contact with his mother – if any. After Cnut's death, Emma probably encouraged the ill-fated expeditions by Edward and his brother, and it subsequently became clear that she favoured her son Harthacnut for the succession to the English throne. It was Harthacnut, as king of England, who possibly initiated a relationship with Edward, effectively allowing him to participate in a joint rule. Now, after the death of Harthacnut, Edward was sole ruler and Emma's position was very weak.

²³³ ASC-C (E), p. 163.

²³⁴ FW, p. 144.

Possibly she made her position weaker still by actually offering support to a claim for the kingdom of England by Magnus the Good, king of Norway and Denmark. The source for this story is a hagiography of Saint Mildred written by a monk from St Bertin named Goscelin. An extract from this is quoted by Douglas and Greenaway:

While he [Edward] 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 along with her support. 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.²³⁵

Goscelin does not reveal his sources for this episode and no independent verification exists. However, a few months after his accession, Edward went:

suddenly and unexpectedly to Winchester, accompanied by the earls Godwin, Leofric and Siward, and by their advice took from his mother all the gold, silver, jewels, precious stones and other valuables she possessed, because she had been less liberal to him than he expected, and had treated him harshly both before and after he was king. Notwithstanding, he gave orders for her to be supplied with all necessities, and ordered her to remain there quiet.²³⁶

²³⁵ EHD, Vol II p. 105 (fn 7).

²³⁶ FW. P. 145.

The ASC adds that the seizure also included ‘all the lands which his mother had owned’, together with the possessions of Emma’s closest advisor, Bishop Stigand.²³⁷

Richard of Devizes, in his annal for 1043, lays the blame for this action on Bishop Robert of London (later archbishop of Canterbury), going on to report that

[Edward] took everything his mother, Queen Emma, possessed in this world, down to the value of a farthing, and had her placed in the abbey of Wherwell [a Benedictine nunnery founded in 986], where she was treated with great austerity.²³⁸

Emma’s loss of standing at court can be seen by the fact that she ceases to be a witness to charters after early 1044. She appears on one in 1043 and three in 1044, described as ‘*mater regis*’ and in a prominent position next after the king.²³⁹ She is once named on a charter dated 1045 as ‘*Imma mater regis*’, but this charter is widely suspected of being spurious.²⁴⁰ Emma never again appears as a witness to charters.

Emma’s disgrace was short lived and, within a year, she had been restored to favour, though not allowed any authority. It was claimed that intercession on

²³⁷ ASC-3 (C), p. 162.

²³⁸ Richard of Devizes, *Annales Monasterii de Wintonia*, Translated by Christopher Smith (Twenty Trees, 2023), p. 36. (the abbey is named as ‘Warewella’ in Latin which was translated, I believe incorrectly, as ‘Wareham’).

²³⁹ S 1000, S 1001, S 1002 and S 1006.

²⁴⁰ S 1011.

Emma's behalf by Saint Mildred herself, appearing to Emma in a dream, had led to the 'miracle' of Edward's change of heart.²⁴¹

Modern historians have somewhat different views about this episode. Campbell, in his introduction to the EER, does not consider it to be 'serious history', suggesting it was possible that, in her dotage, Emma might have dreamed of a recovery of her position.²⁴² Stenton considers that the charge against Emma is 'by no means incredible'.²⁴³ Barlow comments that the legend 'probably exaggerates Emma's disgrace and her subsequent return to favour'.²⁴⁴

Edward is reported to have assembled a very powerful fleet in 1045 to oppose the threat of invasion by Magnus the Good.²⁴⁵ This seems to have been effective because no invasion took place. Magnus died (or was killed) in 1047.

The Annals of Winchester tell an extraordinary story, in literally incredible detail, to explain the disgrace of Emma and her sudden re-instatement less than one year later. Most of the Annals, up to 1066, are just what one would expect, with a few lines describing the most important event or events of that year. But there are no dated entries for the text between 1044 and 1046. The manuscript relates certain events in extensive detail, the most extraordinary of which is Richard's account of the disgrace and expulsion of Emma and her return to favour the following year.

²⁴¹ Stafford, p. 170.

²⁴² EER (Campbell Introduction), p. xlix (fn.4).

²⁴³ Stenton, p. 426.

²⁴⁴ Barlow, Edward The Confessor, p. 77.

²⁴⁵ FW. P. 147.

The story starts with accusations by Robert, Bishop of London, who was outspoken in his criticisms of Emma; 'more like a wild beast than a woman', 'the most shameless of women', 'who hurls threats of defamation at the king'.²⁴⁶ He refers to acts of treachery by Emma and Ælfwine, Bishop of Winchester, (presumably relating to their support of Magnus I), and accuses them both of adultery and fornication.²⁴⁷ It was on the advice of bishop Robert that Edward had confiscated all Emma's property and despatched her to the nunnery at Wherwell.²⁴⁸

There is a possible corroboration of this story in an extraordinary eleventh century image in one of the panels of the Bayeux Tapestry:

²⁴⁶ AMW, p. 37-8.

²⁴⁷ AMW, p. 38.

²⁴⁸ AMW, p. 36.



Image from the website of The Bayeux Museum

<<https://www.bayeuxmuseum.com/en/the-bayeux-tapestry>>[Accessed 22nd February 2023]

The image shows a woman being touched by a cleric (tonsured but not wearing the habit of a monk). The heading reads: '*Ubi Unus Clericus et Ælfgyva*'²⁴⁹. Underneath is shown a naked and well endowed man almost mirroring the posture of the cleric. It is quite probable that this image was designed to represent the allegation of fornication.

²⁴⁹ [Here a cleric and Ælfgifu].

Finally, Richard describes the punishment, or trial, which Emma was to endure:

That infamous woman should undergo for herself and on behalf of the bishop a trial on a line of nine consecutive heated ploughshares, with her bare feet. If she falters, if she does not touch each of the ploughshares with a full foot, if she is harmed in the slightest, the sentence should be carried out as if she were an adulteress and fornicator.²⁵⁰

The sentence was carried out in front of many witnesses, including King Edward. Richard describes the scene, which took place in the nave of the church of St Swithun on Winchester, in great detail.

Behold the miracle. With the bishops guiding her steps, she takes nine steps over the nine ploughshares, pressing her full weight on each of them.... She neither saw nor felt the iron or the fire.²⁵¹

King Edward was so affected that he fell at his mother's feet and asked for forgiveness, which was granted, even though he had to submit to being beaten by the bishops and even by his mother: 'What had been taken from the queen and the bishop was returned to them'.²⁵²

No other contemporary source mentions this story and its value as a historical record is doubted by most modern historians. Campbell, in his introduction to the EER,

²⁵⁰ AMW, p. 38.

²⁵¹ AMW, p. 40.

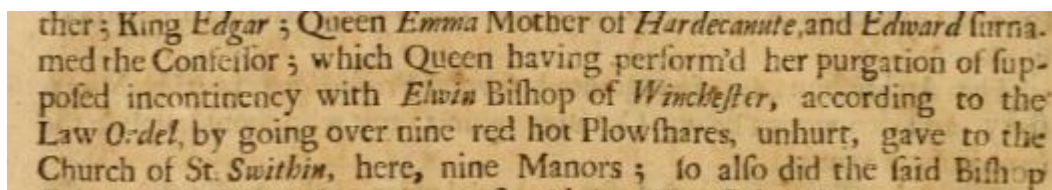
²⁵² AMW, p. 41.

calls it a 'mere foolish story'.²⁵³ Stafford takes it more seriously but nevertheless describes the story as: 'far from any simple record of eleventh-century events', although she also suggests that 'at Winchester, where Richard wrote, some elements of accusations against Emma in 1043 may have been preserved'.²⁵⁴

Nowhere else in Richard's chronicle or annals does he go into such detail about a single event. To treat the story as reliable history is clearly impossible, but it is also inconceivable that the story does not have some basis in fact. Stafford concludes that:

the story brings together eleventh century facts and twelfth century romanticization into a somewhat inconsistent tale of false accusations and innocence exonerated.²⁵⁵

Dugdale, in his history of ancient abbeys and churches in England, includes, in just twenty-nine lines about Winchester Cathedral, these comments²⁵⁶:



This suggests that the story, in some form, may well have been part of the history of Winchester.

²⁵³ EER, Introduction by Campbell, p. 1.

²⁵⁴ Stafford, p. 21-2.

²⁵⁵ Stafford, p. 21.

²⁵⁶ W.Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicorum*, (London: Sam Keble: Hen Rgones, 1693), Vol. 1, p. 6.

What is known is that sometime in 1043 or 1044, Emma was permitted to return to her home in Winchester and the property which had been confiscated was returned to her. But she is never known to have exerted any further influence at court. She disappears from witness lists, apart from one where she appears as a witness alongside Edward's queen, Edith, but historians generally consider this charter to be extremely suspect.²⁵⁷ For the last nine years of her life nothing about her is recorded in any of the sources. By 1052, she was probably aged between sixty-six and sixty-nine, and on 6 March she died and was buried alongside her husband, Cnut, and her son, Harthacnut, at Winchester Old Minster. The chronicles do not record any reaction by her son, King Edward.

Emma was criticised for her acquisitive nature, for her lack of generosity to the needy and for her treatment of her children.²⁵⁸ She is remembered, however, as a generous patron of religious establishments, especially Winchester and Ely. She 'adorned the church of Ely with honours and gifts' both during her time as Æthelræd's queen and and Cnut's. The textiles she donated were described as being of exceptional quality and richness.²⁵⁹ She also donated an altar frontal exquisitely decorated with gold and silver.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁷ S 1011.

²⁵⁸ WMC, p. 215

²⁵⁹ LE, p. 176.

²⁶⁰ LE, p. 357.

CONCLUSION

There can be no doubt that Emma of Normandy was a person of exceptional importance in the history of the English monarchy during the first half of the eleventh century.

If Emma's intention had been to see one or more of her own children accede to the throne of England, then this was certainly achieved and so, in a literal sense, Emma was assuredly a 'kingmaker'. If her ambitions lay in the direction of seeing the House of Denmark overthrow the Wessex kings of England then again, this was (at least temporarily) achieved. A third possibility is that her long term ambition was to see her own house (The House of Normandy) take the throne of England; if so this was also achieved, albeit fourteen years after her death. When we come to analyse the extent to which Emma's actions and influence had the effect of bringing any of these outcomes to fruition, we are left with the inescapable conclusion that it is difficult to ascribe to Emma any ambitions other than her own personal wealth and advancement. It also becomes apparent that the extent to which her influence was a contributory factor in the events of the period is negligible. The progression of royal history happened by a succession of fortunate marriages, invasions, and unexplained deaths of kings and princes. Emma found herself carried along by the tide of events, for better or for worse.

The evidence (or lack of it) suggests that at no time did Emma have any ambition or take any action to promote the interests of her sons with Æthelræd (Edward and Ælfred) to take the crown of England, with the exception of the ill-fated adventures which she may have encouraged them to undertake in around 1036. The revised

version of the EER, written after the death of Harthacnut in 1042, belatedly attempted to champion Edward's cause, but one cannot really deduce that this had any effect whatsoever in Edward becoming king in that year. It would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that Edward became king despite Emma's efforts, not because of them.

On the death of king Cnut in 1035 it seems as if Emma rather assumed that her son with him, Harthacnut, would be offered the English crown. If one could accept that the succession became a battle between her son and Cnut's other son, Harold Harefoot, whose mother was Ælfgifu of Northampton, then this resulted in complete failure for Emma, as Harold was declared king instead of Harthacnut. The determined efforts of Ælfgifu may well have been influential in this outcome. Emma, it seems, did nothing to promote her own son's cause and was ignominiously banished from the kingdom by Harold Harefoot. If there was any truth in the rumours of Emma's offer to help an invasion by Magnus the Good of Norway, then this could surely only have been a last ditch attempt to restore her own position.

After the death of Harthacnut, Edward became the second of Emma's son to take the throne of England but despite claims in the EER, it seems clear that Emma was not responsible for bringing Edward to England to claim his inheritance. As mentioned above, Florence of Worcester writes that 'Edward was proclaimed king at London, chiefly by the exertions of Earl Godwin, and Living, bishop of Worcester'.²⁶¹ This was confirmed in part by Richard of Devizes who tells of Edward returning to England after the death of Harthacnut but 'fearful of hoping for mercy from his

²⁶¹ FW, p. 144.

mother' went to plead his cause with Harold Godwinson who was 'caring for the kingdom until a worthy successor could be found'.²⁶²

There is a great deal of doubt about what really happened during the fifty years of Emma's involvement with the English throne, but I believe that the evidence shows that she was interested mainly in promoting and furthering her own wealth, position and security, and that any attempts she may have made to fulfill the role of kingmaker were clumsy, poorly planned and ineffective.

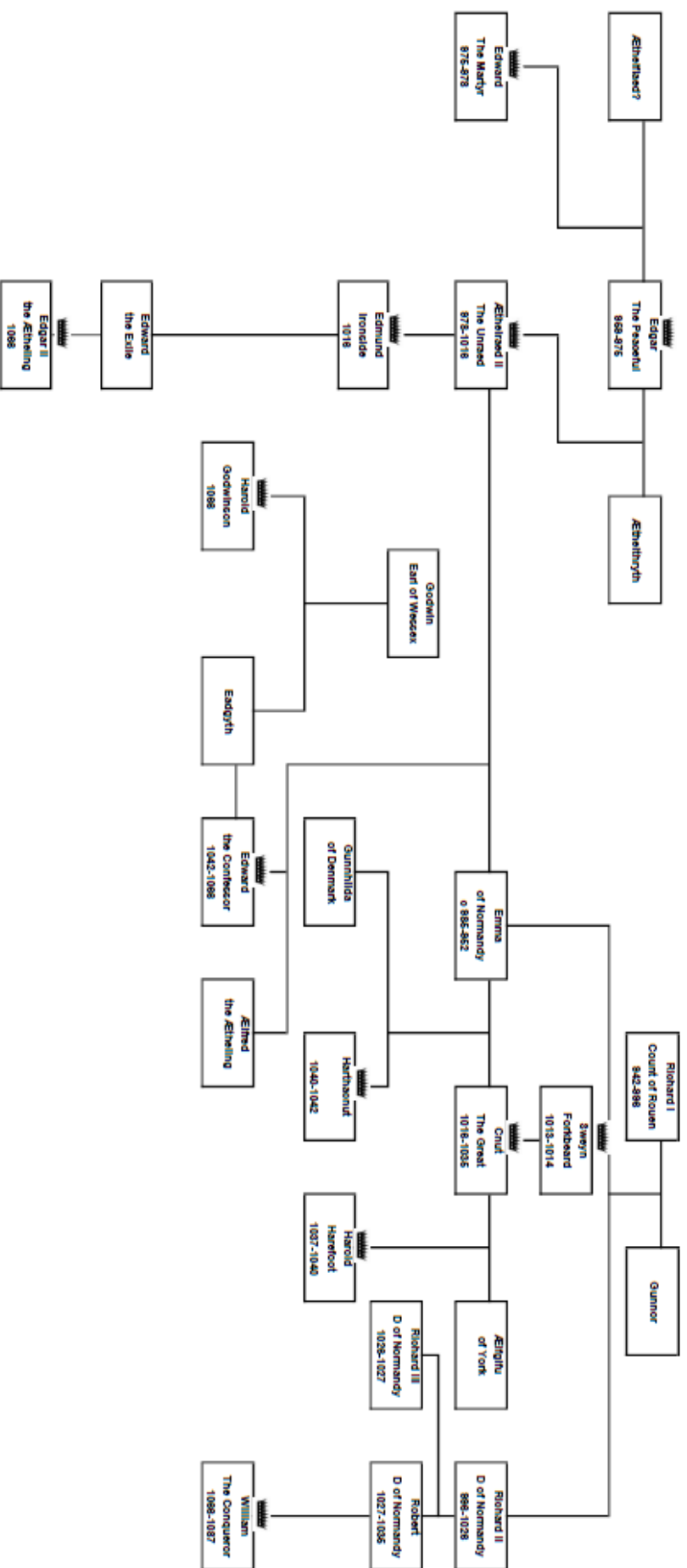
Chris Dixon (2114844)

University of Wales, Trinity St David

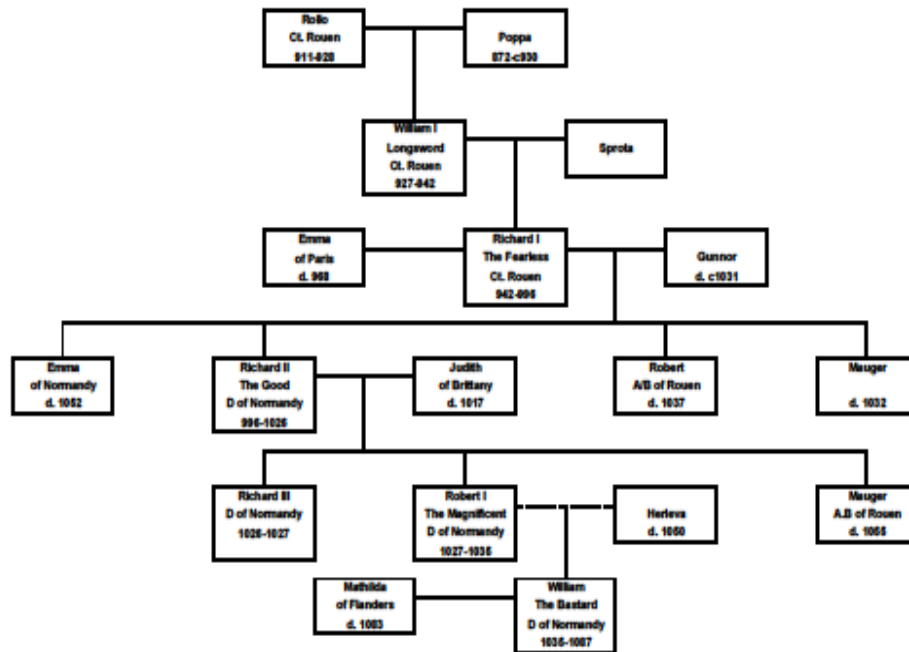
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²⁶² AMW, p. 34.

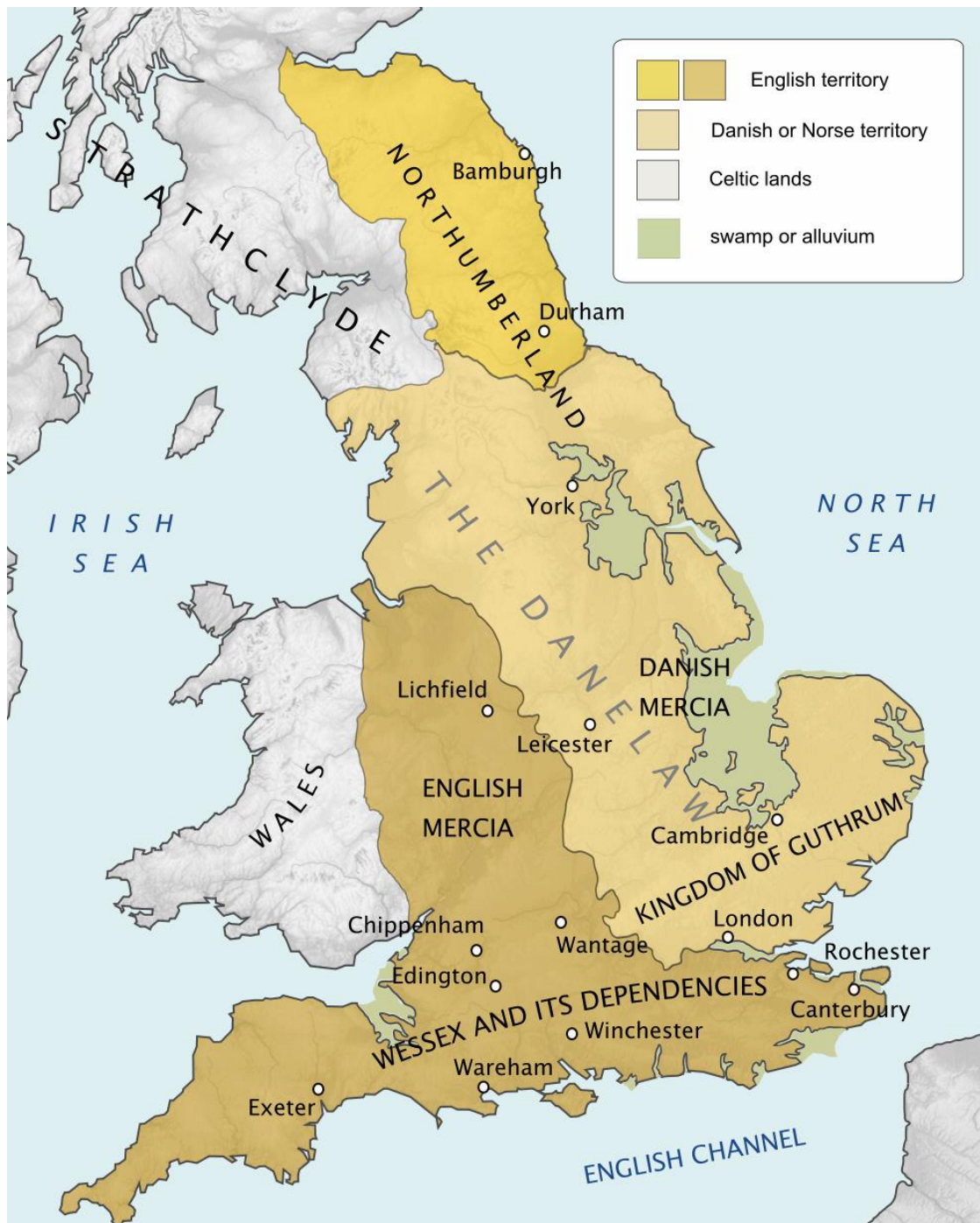
KINGS OF ENGLAND 959 - 1087



COUNTS OF ROUEN AND DUKES OF NORMANDY 911 - 1087



Map of tenth century England



Map by courtesy of TheHistoryOfEngland.co.uk

<https://thehistoryofengland.co.uk/resource/maps-500-1000/>

Appendix 1

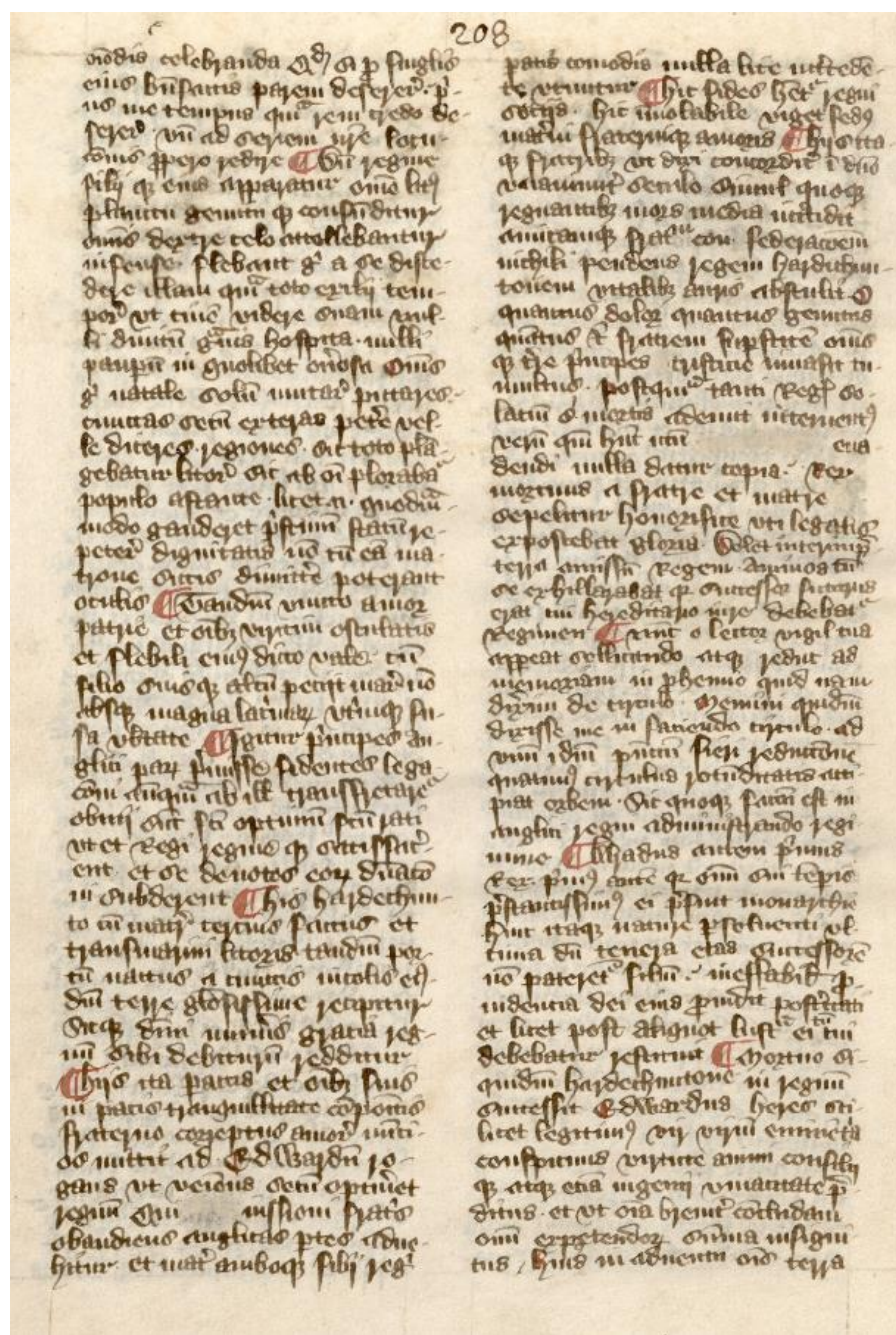
This is the translation of the allegedly forged letter claimed to have been sent to Edward and Ælfred as part of Harold Harefoot's 'unrighteous scheme'.²⁶³

'Emma, queen in name only, imparts motherly salutation to her sons, Eadweard and Ælfred, Since we severally lament the death of our lord, the king, most dear sons, and since daily you are deprived more and more of the kingdom, your inheritance, I wonder what plan you are adopting, since you are aware that the delay arising from your procrastination is becoming from day to day a support to the usurper of your rule. For he goes round hamlets and cities ceaselessly and makes the chief men his friends by gifts, threats and prayers, But they would prefer that one of you should rule over them, than that they should be held in the power of him who now commands them. I entreat, therefore, that one of you come to me speedily and privately, to receive from me wholesome counsel and to know in what manner this matter, which I desire, must be brought to pass. Send back word what you are going to do about these matters by the present messenger, whoever he may be. Farewell beloved ones of my heart.'

²⁶³ EER, pp.41,43.

Appendix 2

Conclusion of the Encomium Emmae Reginae (revised edition).



Digitised copy of original manuscript from DET KGL Bibliotek (Royal Danish Library), <<https://www.kb.dk/en/find-materials>>, [accessed 21 March 2024]

Hic fides *habetur* regni sociis, hic *inviolabile* uiget *fedus* materni fraternique amoris.

Hiis itaque *fratribus* ut dixi *concorditer in domino* unanimiter seculo summis quoque regnantibus mors media intercidit amitemque *fraternam* confederationem nichili pendens regem Hardechnutonem uitalibus auris abstulit. O quantus dolor quantus gemitus quantus *etiam* fratrem superstitem omnesque terre principes tristitie inuasit tumultus, postquam tanti regis solatium *sibi*²⁹ mortis ademit interuentus uerum quem *habent* iitii³⁰ euadendi nulla datur copia. Rex mortuus a fratre et matre sepelitur honorifice uti legalis exposcebat gloria.

Dolet interim *pre* terra amissum regem. Animos tum se exillarabat quia successor futurus erat *tantum*³¹ hereditario iure debebatur regimen.

Tunc o lector uigil tua appareat sollicitudo atque rediit ad memoriam in *prohemio* quid nam dixerim de circulo. Memini quidem dixisse me in satiando circulo. Ad unum idem punctum fieri *reduccionem* quatinus³² circulus rotunditatis accipiat orbem. Sic quoque factum est in anglici regni administrando regimine.

Alradus autem primus rex . *primus* autem quia omni sui temporis *prestantissimus* ei *prefuit* monarchie hinc itaque nature *persoluenti* ultima dum tenera etas successorem uero pateretur *filium*: ineffabilis *prouidencia* dei eius *prouidit* posteritati et licet post aliquot lustra ei 'tum'³³ cui debebatur restituit.

Mortuo siquidem Hardechnutone in regnum successit Edwardus heres scilicet *legitimus* uir uirium *eminens* i'a conspicuus uirtute animi consiliique atque etiam ingenii uiuacitate *preditus* et ut *omnia* breuiter concludam omni expetendorum *summa* insignitus. Huius in aduentu *omnis* terra (p. 209a) siluit, eiusque *dominio* coll'n³⁴ calcabile supposuit.

Dominacionis enim eius milies mille uotis ante desiderauerat diem, *omni* est eo *paterne* bonitatis uideret ac sapientie elucere³⁵ *specimine*.

Ad laudem dei *nominis* cui est honor et gloria *per* infinita secula. Amen.

Explicit Tractatus de Gestis Regis Chnutonis.

Translation

Here faith is held by the associates of the kingdom, here the faith of motherly and brotherly love grows inviolable.

Therefore, as I have said, in accord with the Lord, with one accord in the reign of the chiefs, death cut off the middle, and the uncle of the fraternal confederation, hanging on nothing, acquitted the king

Oh, how much sorrow, how much lamentation, how much grief, even the surviving brother and all the princes of the earth were filled with sadness, after the death of such a king took away the comfort of his death. The dead king was buried with honor by his brother and mother, as was the legal glory. In the meantime, the land is saddened by the lost king. He then raised his spirits, because he was to be the successor, and the government was owed only by hereditary right

Then, O reader, let your concern appear, and he returned to the memory of what I had said in the prologue about the circle.

I remember saying that I was in a full circle. To be reduced to one identical point, let the sphere receive a circle of four times the roundness.

This also happened in the administration of the English kingdom

And Athelred was the first king, and the first, because he had been most devoted to him in all his time, and therefore, by his nature, the last, while he was still tender, he allowed a son to be his successor.

The ineffable providence of his god provided for his posterity, and although after some surveys he restored it to whom it was owed

After the death of HC, ED succeeded to the throne, namely, the legitimate heir of a man eminent among men.

At his arrival all the earth was silent, and his dominion was considered to be trampled upon

For he longed for a thousand years before the day of his dominion, when he would see the fatherly goodness and shine with the example of wisdom.

To the praise of the name of God, to whom is honor and glory for ever and ever

An Explicit Treatise on the Acts of King Cnut

GLOSSARY

Conlaterana	Consort
Dacia	An area of Romania but often used (erroneously) to refer to Denmark and part of Norway.
Danelaw	Part of Mercia occupied by Danes and incorporating the five boroughs of Leicester, Nottingham, Derby, Stamford and Lincoln.
Ealdorman	A high noble rank, later known as 'earl'
Encomium	In praise of a person or thing (from Greek)
Jarl	Scandinavian high rank of nobility
Liber Vitae	Ecclesiastical Book of Life
Minster	A monastery or nunnery church.
More Danico	Informal marriage
Neustria	Part of France now known as Normandy
Reeve	A bailiff or land manager
Saga	Scandinavian histories based on oral tradition
Skaldic	Type of Norse verse
Tributes	Ransom payments to the Vikings, in pounds of silver
Unræd	Ill-advised or foolish
Vill	A hamlet or parish
Witan	Royal Council
Witenagemot	Council Assembly

NAMES

Ælfgar	Elf Spear
Ælfgifu	Gift of the Elves
Ælfheah	Tall Elf
Ælfmær	Elf Leader
Ælfred	Elf Counsel
Ælfric	Elf Ruler
Ælfsige	Elf Victory
Ælfthryth	Noble Strength
Ælraed	Noble Counsel
Æthelbald	Noble and Bold
Æthelberht	Noble Brightness
Æthelnoth	Noble Courage
Æthelraed	Noble Counsel
Æthelstan	Noble Stone
Æthelwulf	Noble Wolf
Cnut	Knot
Eadgar (Edgar)	Spear of Wealth
Eadgyþ (Edith)	Battle of Wealth
Eadmund (Edmund)	Protector of Wealth
Eadward (Edward)	Guardian of Wealth
Eadræd (Edræd)	Wealth Counsel
Eadric (Edric)	Wealth Ruler
Echberht	Bright Sword Edge
Emma	Whole, Universal
Godgifu	Gift of God
Godwin	Friend of God
Harold	Military Ruler
Harthacnut	Hard Knot

Leofric

Friend and Ruler

Sweyn

Worker

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