

PROPAGANDA IN LITERATURE: A STUDY OF THE *ENCOMIUM EMMAE REGINAE*
AND THE WRITINGS OF ROBERT OF TORIGNI AS PROPAGANDA FOR EMMA OF
NORMANDY AND THE EMPRESS MATILDA

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Many contemporary writers wrote accounts of the Norman monarchs and other famous Norman figures in history. The Normans commanded respect throughout Europe, especially in their ability to place themselves in a position of power in many countries, so it is no wonder that they captured the fascination of the writers who were alive to witness the Norman reign. However, in an era when the truth was often altered to fit the narrative, numerous historians were guilty of embellishing their narratives to earn political or moral points. This thesis will examine how bias and propaganda affected contemporary histories written about two key Norman figures: Emma of Normandy and Empress Matilda.

Emma and Matilda were figures who garnered attention from contemporary biographers, in part because they both attempted to seize power in uncertain circumstances. Emma was the daughter of Duke Richard I of Normandy (942-996),¹ and was first married to King Ethelred of England (978-1013, 1014-1016),² until his death, after which she married the Dane Cnut (King of England 1017-1035),³ who had conquered England. She was a shrewd politician, and worked constantly to further her own power and authority through the men in her life. This is evident in

¹ Simon Keynes, introduction to *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, xiii-lxxx, ed. Alistair Campbell, (1949, reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), xvi.

² For the date that Ethelred became king, see *Abingdon Manuscript (C), The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. and trans. Michael Swanton, (London: Orion Publishing Group, 1996), 122. For the date that Ethelred lost England to Svein Forkbeard, (the father of Cnut and Emma's second husband) and later regained the throne, see *Peterborough Manuscript (E), The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 144-145. For the date of Ethelred's death, see *Peterborough Manuscript (E), The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 148.

³ For the date that Cnut became king, see *Worcester Manuscript (D), The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 154. For the date of Cnut's death, see *Abingdon Manuscript (C), The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 158.

the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, which she had commissioned, and which depicted the events of the Danish conquering of England and the struggle for power her sons had endured, in a rather favorable way for herself. In the *Encomium*, Emma had romanticized the Viking heritage of Cnut in order to present her son Harthacnut, as a positive candidate to rule England. It was imperative that Harthacnut be successful, as through him would Emma have been able to hold on to her power. Emma's sons from her marriage to Ethelred, Edward and Alfred, were not the intended heirs to the throne, as that would have emphasized her marriage to Ethelred, the husband who did not respect her,⁴ as opposed to Cnut, with whom she had more power in the role of queen.

In the *Encomium*, Viking culture is romanticized by focusing on aspects such as their battle prowess and the beauty of Viking ships, while also negating the pagan aspects. It is non-religious aspects that are focused on when positively describing Viking characters in her work, except when discussing Harald Harefoot, Cnut's son through his relationship with Aelfifu of Northampton, who is described as "turning from the whole Christian religion",⁵ and referring to the men who served him as "in their actions totally pagan".⁶ It is through the combination of the entirely negative depiction of Harald and the pagan references made to him, and the positive depiction of Viking cultural aspects excluding religion that is described in relation to Cnut and his family members, that one can identify propaganda. The success of the *Encomium* would have had the potential to affect Emma's relationship with her children as well as her power and

⁴ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, vol. I. Translated and Edited by R. A. B. Mynors, Completed by R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom (2006, reprint, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 277.

⁵ *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, ed. Alistair Campbell (1949, reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

influence, as the *Encomium* ends describing how her sons Harthacnut and Edward along with herself, all “enjoy the ready amenities of the kingdom.”⁷ The sentence, “Here there *is* loyalty among sharers of rule, here the bond of motherly and brotherly love is of strength indestructible”,⁸ works to communicate what Emma’s desires were for her position of power in the family, especially when one considers that the work ends prior to Harthacnut’s death,⁹ as Emma’s position would become significantly weakened through the lack of loyalty from her son Edward, as king. The use of written propaganda, with the intention to solidify Emma’s position and influence, is a desire that she shared with her descendant, the Empress Matilda.

Matilda was not the intended heir to the English throne from her birth, but as a result of the death of her brother, her father Henry I made the decision to proclaim her as his heir to the throne of England. He forced his court to swear an oath of loyalty to her in an attempt to secure her the throne with ease, but after his death, many of those same men who swore an oath of loyalty to Matilda later broke their vows and sided with her cousin and rival Stephen of Blois.¹⁰

⁷ Ibid., 53.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ An edition of the *Encomium* with a new ending has been discovered recently by Timothy Bolton, who published it in 2009. According to Bolton, the edition is “the only known complete copy of that version of *Encomium Emmae Reginae* [...] which was rewritten for King Edward the Confessor”, see Timothy Bolton, “A newly emergent mediaeval manuscript containing *Encomium Emmae reginae* with the only known complete text of the recension prepared for King Edward the Confessor,” *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 19 (2009): 211. While I have not been able to access a full translation of the text due to its corrupted nature, based off of Elizabeth Tyler’s summary it mainly consists of a description of the entire country of England, including Emma and Edward, mourning the death of Harthacnut (see Tyler, *England in Europe: English Royal Women and Literary Patronage, c. 1000-c.1150* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 99). Regardless, the content of the ending appears to be largely unrelated to this study.

¹⁰ Marjorie Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda: Queen Consort, Queen Mother and Lady of the English* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1991), 51-52.

As a result, Matilda's power was weakened as she did not have all the support that she was counting on through the oaths sworn to her. Therefore, she had to work with her allies strategically in order to gain control and undermine Stephen's authority. One way she did this was through the church in England.

Matilda had utilized many methods to gain authority through the church, one of which included her attempts to "deny the validity of any gifts made by Stephen out of the inheritance she claimed."¹¹ One example of her doing this can be seen with Bordesley Abbey, where she effectively "took over the abbey and [...] refounded it herself."¹² Matilda was well-versed in church politics to understand how to forward her cause while avoiding going so far as to be excommunicated. If she was to be respected as an authority figure and have a say in church matters in England, she needed a reputation that displayed understanding on Matilda's part of what actions would best be taken for the benefit of the church. This does not indicate that she did not genuinely care about her faith and what was best for the church, rather that she understood the power that she would be able to harness if she had the support of the church for her cause. Therefore, we must view the writings of Robert of Torigni, a monk at the abbey of Le Bec,¹³ as suspect, considering that he depicted Matilda as a devout and faithful woman who loved the church, which he included in his version of the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*.¹⁴ This could have

¹¹ Marjorie Chibnall, "The Empress Matilda and Church Reform," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 38 (1988): 109, accessed June 1, 2019, doi:10.2307/3678969.

¹² *Ibid.*, 110.

¹³ Elisabeth Van Houts, introduction to *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, vol. I, ed. Elisabeth Van Houts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), lxxiv.

¹⁴ William of Jumièges, Robert of Torigni, and Orderic Vitalis, *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, vol. II, ed. Elisabeth Van Houts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 245.

allowed her that reputation she needed to be further involved in church matters. Matilda had ties to the abbey at Le Bec through her father, who cared greatly for Abbot Boso, the abbot of Le Bec during his time.¹⁵ She appears to have had a positive relationship with Robert of Torigni himself, as he wrote in his history *The Chronicles of Robert de Monte* that Matilda and her son Henry II were present at his election of prior for Mont St. Michel in 1153.¹⁶ Considering her ties to Robert of Torigni and his positive depiction of her as well as his support for her claim to the English throne, it is possible to suggest a connection between Robert's writing of Matilda, a depiction of her strong faith and devoutness, and her involvement in church matters. Despite Robert's attempts, Matilda's involvement in the episcopal election of Durham in 1141 greatly hurt her, as she backed an unpopular candidate who was supported by her uncle David of Scotland, one of her most powerful allies.

While the circumstances that these two women found themselves in were not entirely similar, both Emma and Matilda had reason to be concerned over the legitimacy of their claim to rule. As a result, the issue of reputation would likely have been important to them. Due to their gender, they needed as much support as possible, as any attempt they made at seeking power was constantly challenged. Written propaganda was a potential solution.

Research Question:

Taking into consideration the fraught political situations that both Emma of Normandy and Empress Matilda found themselves in, it would not have been unexpected for them to affect

¹⁵ Ibid., 235-255.

¹⁶ Robert of Torigni. *The chronicles of Robert de Monte*, trans. Joseph Stevenson (1856, Reprint, Somerset: Llanerch Publishers, 1991), 74-75.

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015025000715;view=2up;seq=6>.

the narratives in contemporary histories that were sympathetic to their cause, whether through active involvement in the creation itself, or with the author. They were likely aware that embodying a certain image would have been vital to their reign. Therefore, my research question is as follows: What is the nature of propaganda surrounding Norman rule, with regard to two women in Norman history who were both plagued by the threat of illegitimacy?

Literature Review:

This literature review will discuss five topics of literature: First is how Norman magnates utilized propaganda. Then, I will review literature discussing the lives of Emma of Normandy and the Empress Matilda. The next topic is the primary sources contemporary to Emma and Matilda. Then, I will review studies done of the writing of Robert of Torigni, and finally, I will discuss studies done on the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*.

Propaganda with Norman rulers:

Propaganda related to Norman rulers and nobles is not a neglected topic of study. Many studies have investigated the possible presence of propaganda in which certain powerful Norman magnates may have been involved. A recent article by Katherine Lack, entitled “The De Obitu Willelmi: Propaganda for the Anglo-Norman Succession, 1087-88?”, discussed the text *De Obitu Willelmi*, which Lack suspected was written prior to the year 1100.¹⁷ The content of the text covers the death of William the Conqueror, the Norman ruler who invaded England in 1066, and claims to relate the words of William on his deathbed, in which he divides the inheritance of his three sons, Robert Curthose, William Rufus, and Henry I. Lack’s argument is that the “*De obitu*

¹⁷ Katherine Lack, “The De Obitu Willelmi: Propaganda for the Anglo-Norman Succession, 1087-88?” *The English Historical Review* 123, no. 505 (2008): 1423. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20485404>.

Willelmi could be one successful example of [William] Rufus's public relations machine that has hitherto gone unnoticed.”¹⁸ Essentially, Lack is arguing that William Rufus, William the Conqueror’s second son used this text as propaganda in his favor in order to strengthen his own claim to the throne of England.

Another source that discusses the theme of propaganda concerns William Rufus’s father, William the Conqueror. An article by George Garnett, entitled “Coronation and Propaganda: Some Implications of the Norman Claim to the Throne of England in 1066: The Alexander Prize Essay”, discusses the implications of the nature of William’s coronation. Garnett states that “the necessity for arguing that Harold [Godwineson, William the Conqueror’s rival for the throne of England] and the English were in rebellion against William before he was crowned led to his being given the title of king in some records at the time of his arrival in the country [England].”¹⁹ Part of William the Conqueror’s argument for entitlement to the English throne was due to an oath of fealty that Harold Godwineson swore to William. After the death of King Edward the Confessor, Harold quickly claimed the throne rather than support William’s claim to rule. Therefore, according to Garnett, William needed to establish his legitimacy and authority quickly, and this argument led to various texts referring to him as king.

The *Gesta Guillelmi of William of Poitiers* was written in the 11th century between 1066 and 1071,²⁰ and depicts the events of 1066, with the intention to “justify his [William the

¹⁸ Ibid., 1444.

¹⁹ George Garnett, “Coronation and Propaganda: Some Implications of the Norman Claim to the Throne of England in 1066: The Alexander Prize Essay,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 36 (1986): 112. doi:10.2307/3679061.

²⁰ R. H. C. Davis and Marjorie Chibnall, Introduction to *The Gesta Guillelmi of William of Poitiers*, ed. and trans. R. H. C. Davis and Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), xx.

Conqueror] succession to the throne.”²¹ The work has now commonly been accepted as a form of propaganda, although there are varying theories of who was specifically involved with the work besides William of Poitiers [WP]. R. H. C. Davis proposed a theory in his article *William of Poitiers and his History of William the Conqueror*, that WP was attempting to protect Odo of Bayeux, William the Conqueror’s half-brother, the earl of Kent and bishop of Bayeux, from the king’s suspicion.²² Around the time when WP was writing, William the Conqueror’s son Robert Curthose was leading a rebellion against his father; Odo of Bayeux was closely associated with Robert Curthose, and later arrested by the king in 1082. Davis states that this would explain why the work seemingly failed, as there were no copies made of the text,²³ and that WP never received any further promotion and later retired from the court.²⁴ He discusses Odo of Bayeux’s possible involvement, as in the text Odo is highly praised.²⁵ However, WP’s intention (according to Davis) was to remind William of his brother’s loyalty, and distract from Odo’s actions that would have displeased him.²⁶ Davis’s theory is one that discusses the creation of propaganda from WP, and elaborates on one other example of propaganda for a powerful Norman figure.

²¹ Ibid.

²² R. H. C. Davis, “William of Poitiers and his History of William the Conqueror,” in *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages*, ed. R. H. C. Davis and J. M. Wallace-Hadrill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 91.

²³ Ibid., 92.

²⁴ Ibid., 93.

²⁵ William of Poitiers, *The Gesta Guillelmi of William of Poitiers*, trans. R. H. C. Davis and Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 165, 167.

²⁶ R. H. C. Davis, “William of Poitiers and his History of William the Conqueror,” 92.

Pauline Stafford describes the *Vita Ædwardi Regis* (or the Life of King Edward who rests at Westminster) in her book *Queen Emma and Queen Edith: Queenship and Women's Power in Eleventh-Century England*, and the present themes of propaganda as it relates to Edward the Confessor's wife, Edith of Wessex. The work was written shortly after the Norman Conquest of 1066, when William the Conqueror invaded England.²⁷ According to Stafford, the work is, in essence, Edith's story rather than Edward's, as "Its pressing contemporary concerns produce its picture of an ideal queen, almost a mirror of queenship."²⁸ Edith used the text as a tool to ensure her own survival and support her claim to power,²⁹ which she likely needed to do considering how her role after the death of her husband was uncertain. While Stafford's book discusses Edith and the *Vita Ædwardi Regis* at length, the other half of the book focuses on Emma of Normandy and the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*.

Studies on Emma and Matilda:

There are a few modern biographies on Emma of Normandy and the Empress Matilda, but other literature dedicated directly to them is scarce. Much of the information about these two women has been published within studies of the men in their lives, or their male rivals. The amount of literature dedicated to the two women individually is not large, however, the literature is well developed and gives an in-depth look into the lives of these women and their endeavors.

Many sources of information on Emma of Normandy can be found within the studies on her husbands and children. Ian Howard published a book entitled *Harthacnut: The Last Danish*

²⁷ Pauline Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith: Queenship and Women's Power in Eleventh-Century England* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1997), 41.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

King of England. The book itself is brief, but filled with detail on the life of Harthacnut, which is ironically fitting, as Harthacnut's life was brief, but eventful. Howard argues that Harthacnut "displayed attributes which, had he lived longer, might have enabled him to emulate his father, Cnut the Great."³⁰ Another book that gives secondary information on Emma is M. K. Lawson's *Cnut: The Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century*. While Lawson discusses Cnut at great length, part of the book is dedicated to the Danes and the Englishmen under his rule. Lawson also published a book entitled *Cnut: England's Viking King 1016-35*, which is a dedicated biography of Cnut. Similarly to Emma, much of the literature published on Matilda may be found as secondary information in literature focusing on others in her life.

One of the many sources of literature published on the men in Matilda's life is R. H. C. Davis's book *King Stephen: 1135-1154*, originally published in 1967. His book follows Stephen of Blois's reign, and in the third edition, Davis does discuss Marjorie Chibnall's findings on Matilda and agrees overall with her statement that Matilda was well-versed in church affairs.³¹ Another is Judith Green's book *Henry I: King of England and Duke Normandy*. Green gives an excellent biography of Henry I, and "argues that although Henry's own outlook was essentially traditional, the legacy of this fascinating and ruthless personality included some fundamentally important developments in governance."³² While there are more examples of literature similar to these, let us now discuss the literature that focuses directly on Emma and Matilda.

³⁰ Ian Howard, *Harthacnut: The Last Danish King of England* (Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2008), 136.

³¹ R.H.C. Davis, *King Stephen: 1135-1154* (Essex: Longman Group UK Limited, 1967; Reprint, Essex: Longman Group UK Limited, 1990), 61.

³² Judith A. Green, *Henry I: King of England and Duke of Normandy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), i.

Stafford's book *Queen Emma and Queen Edith* talks in great detail about Emma of Normandy, and is one of the few sources that dedicate the focus to Emma. Although half of the book is about Queen Edith, the format is intended to discuss the two women in equal length and detail, rather than one of them being secondary to the other. Another book that focuses on Emma is Harriet O'Brien's book *Queen Emma and the Vikings: The Woman Who Shaped the Events of 1066*. Through the title of the book, readers are given a hint as to the thesis of the book, which, as O'Brien puts it, is that through the study of Emma's life, "the England that became her home emerges. It was an England that Emma's Norman family was shortly to conquer and change radically, and her story also tells us why that happened."³³ While some aspects of the book play on the drama of Emma's life (as seen through chapter titles such as "Murder and Massacre", "Captive Bride", and "Saints and Sinners"), the content within the book is well-researched and detailed.

Regarding literature on Matilda, it is similar to the literature on Emma in terms of the amount published. While the number of publications is not large, much of it comes from Marjorie Chibnall. She is responsible for much of the known information on Matilda, and her biography entitled *The Empress Matilda: Queen Consort, Queen Mother and Lady of the English* allows for a look at her life that is difficult to ascertain entirely from other sources. Until recently it was one of the only scholarly published books on Matilda, but a book released earlier this year that was published by Yale University is a new edition of a dedicated biography on Matilda. The author is Catherine Hanley, and its title is *Matilda: Empress, Queen, Warrior*. In the book,

³³ Harriet O'Brien, *Queen Emma and the Vikings: The Woman Who Shaped the Events of 1066* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005), 6.

Hanley claims that Matilda “was an able strategist who could understand and take advantage of complex military situations”.³⁴ This is an aspect of Matilda’s power that not many have discussed before, and Hanley’s discussion of it is important, as it allows for further understanding of Matilda.

Primary Sources:

When analyzing sources that describe the lives of Emma and Matilda, it is necessary to look at the primary sources of history. These allow readers to gain an understanding of the mentalities of the time, and by comparing them to each other one can learn which ones contained more bias than others. One notable historian from the twelfth century was William of Malmesbury. He was a monk at the monastery of Malmesbury,³⁵ and had been sent there as a child, a few years after his birth in 1095, until his death in 1143.³⁶ and is generally regarded as a talented researcher and historian. His histories, *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, *Gesta Regum Anglorum* (both completed in 1125),³⁷ and *Historia Novella* (William of Malmesbury stopped writing this work in 1142, and it remained unfinished likely due to his death in 1143),³⁸ are thorough and relatively unbiased. His *Historia Novella* was meant to tell of the events during his

³⁴ Catherine Hanley, *Matilda: Empress, Queen, Warrior* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 12.

³⁵ Edmund King, introduction to *Historia Novella*, ed. Edmund King and trans. K. R. Potter (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), xix.

³⁶ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, vol. II, trans. and ed. R. A. B. Mynors, completed by R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom (Reprint: 2003, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), xxxviii.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, xxxvii.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, xxxviii.

life, and is largely made up of the war between Matilda and Stephen. While the work was commissioned by Robert of Gloucester, Matilda's half-brother and ally, William of Malmesbury manages to avoid major bias in his writing, unlike some of his contemporaries.

Another well-known contemporary historian was Orderic Vitalis who lived between 1075 and c. 1142,³⁹ a monk at the abbey of Saint-Evroul. He is most known for his work, the *Historia Ecclesiastica (Ecclesiastical History)*, which “was written between 1123 and 1137.”⁴⁰ The work is massive, and is separated into eight books. While Orderic's work is filled with detail, it is somewhat chaotic in nature, as there is little organization in his writing. This is reflected by his changing the purpose of his work. Marjorie Chibnall, who translated the entirety of the *Ecclesiastical History*, states that Orderic had been writing the work as a monastic history at first, but then “By the time he reached the end of that book [Book III], some nine or ten years later, he announced his intention of describing the deeds of William and the changing fortunes of the English and Norman peoples more fully.”⁴¹ Orderic's *Ecclesiastical History* is a valuable primary source, but it must be studied somewhat carefully due to the nature of his writing. However, aside from his *Ecclesiastical History*, Orderic was also partially responsible for another primary source made up of multiple revisions from other writers, the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*. The *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* is made up of multiple continuations compiled together, with the first few books in the work having been based on Dudo of

³⁹ C. Warren Hollister, *Henry I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 4.

⁴⁰ Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, vol. I, trans. Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 32.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

Saint-Quentin's *De Moribus et Actis primorum Normanniae Ducum*.⁴² Dudo's work was revised by William of Jumièges, with further information added up until William II, and was written between 1050-1070.⁴³ After William of Jumièges, the work was continued by Orderic Vitalis between 1109 and 1113, and the last person to add to it was Robert of Torigni, who had worked on it until the late 1130s.⁴⁴ While the multiple editions and authors can lead to different areas of focus, the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* is a valuable source of Anglo-Norman history.

The *Gesta Stephani* (written between 1135 and 1154),⁴⁵ unlike the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, was intended to tell of the life of one Norman king, Stephen of Blois. It was written contemporary to the events of the war between Matilda and Stephen, and while there is no author credited, in R. H. C. Davis's new introduction to the work he identifies the author as "Robert of Lewes Bishop of Bath."⁴⁶ The *Gesta Stephani* is filled with bias in favor of Stephen of Blois (although the author does seem to revoke his support of Stephen later in the work),⁴⁷ and thoroughly insults Matilda whenever possible. Although this work is not ideal for knowing the specifics of events compared to other contemporary histories, it is helpful to study, as it gives knowledge on the perspective of Stephen's supporters.

⁴² Elisabeth van Houts, Preface to *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum* of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni, vol. I, ed. and trans. Elisabeth van Houts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), v.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, xx.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, xxi.

⁴⁵ R. H. C. Davis, introduction to *Gesta Stephani*, ed. and trans. K. R. Potter (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), xviii.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, xxxviii.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, xxi.

While the *Gesta Stephani* is riddled with bias, The Chronicle of John of Worcester (written between 1096 and 1140),⁴⁸ was a source that, while not relatively accurate, also featured instances of biased depictions of people and events. The text was written by the monk John of Worcester,⁴⁹ and the work was written intermittently throughout the twelfth century.⁵⁰ The work itself is a valuable primary source, and depicts events prior to the twelfth century, including various episodes from Emma's life. However, it is not completely unbiased, and must therefore be read carefully.

Studies on Robert of Torigni's writing in the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*:

Robert of Torigni was a monk at the abbey of Bec from 1128 until 1149, “when he was advanced to the dignity of prior.”⁵¹ He is most known for his additions to the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*. There are studies into Robert and his writing, some of which deal with the information he gives about family lines in his writing. According to Elisabeth van Houts, “many of Robert's genealogies are corroborated by independent material or by charter evidence, and also that, where definite proof is lacking, circumstantial evidence supports rather than weakens Robert's account.”⁵² Robert gave detailed information about familial lines in his

⁴⁸ Hollister, *Henry I*, 8.

⁴⁹ Martin Brett, “John of Worcester and his contemporaries,” in *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to Richard William Southern*, ed. R. H. C. Davis and J. M. Wallace-Hadrill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981) 102.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁵¹ Robert of Torigni, *The chronicles of Robert de Monte*, 6.
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015025000715;view=2up;seq=6>.

⁵² Elisabeth van Houts, introduction to *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni*, vol. I, lxxxix.

writing, which is valuable for historians, especially considering how accurate most of his genealogies were. Van Houts published an article on the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, in which she discusses the writing of Orderic Vitalis, William of Jumièges, and Robert of Torigni in depth. When discussing Robert of Torigni, she states that his purpose for the writing in the text was that “Robert used his version of the GND as propaganda material supporting Matilda as legitimate heiress against Stephen of Blois.”⁵³ However, while van Houts mentions that Matilda was an important benefactor to the abbey of Bec,⁵⁴ she does not attempt to investigate what Matilda’s potential role in the propaganda might be. In a recently published article, Benjamin Pohl discusses the handwriting of Robert of Torigni, in which he argues that “Robert, despite being the author and intellectual architect of complex and influential historical works, had in fact very little training as a book scribe, which is evidenced by his handwriting.”⁵⁵ This study gives further valuable information on Robert of Torigni, and it is remarkable to consider that, although Robert did indeed have little training as a book scribe, he was still responsible for a portion of the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*.

Studies on the Encomium:

The *Encomium Emmae Reginae* is a work commissioned by Queen Emma concerning her second husband King Cnut and their son Harthacnut, which was written between 1041 and 1042.

⁵³ Elisabeth van Houts, “The *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*: a history without an end,” in *Proceedings of the Battle Conference on Anglo-Norman Studies*, vol. III, ed. R. A. Brown (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 1980), 113.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Benjamin Pohl, “Abbas Qui et Scriptor? The Handwriting of Robert of Torigni and His Scribal Activity as Abbot of Mont-Saint-Michel (1154–1186),” *Traditio*, vol. 69 (2014): 45, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24712427>.

⁵⁶ There have been multiple studies done on the contents of the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*. In the reprint of the *Encomium*, Simon Keynes added a new introduction in which he determines that “The interest of Emma’s story lies in the way she developed her political strength in her role as a queen, and then sought to extend and to take advantage of that strength in her role as a mother”.⁵⁷ This is similar to the findings of other historians who have analyzed the text, such as Stafford, who states in her book, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, that “from what it [the *Encomium*] omits and elides as well as from what it includes and emphasizes we learn what being a wife and mother meant in practice for a powerful woman.”⁵⁸ However, Stafford goes on to say that “The story she [Emma] tells is not a whole-life narrative but a highly political one, appropriate to a particular stage. She chooses to present herself as the wife of *a king*, not of *kings*, Æthelred and Cnut, and as a mother of all her sons. Emma’s is a Danish story, written in the reign of Harthacnut.”⁵⁹ Stafford’s view agrees with Keynes’s view, but it goes further to identify the *Encomium* as a Danish story, rather than an Anglo-Saxon or Norman view.

Elizabeth Tyler studied the *Encomium* in her book, *England in Europe: English Royal Power and Literary Patronage, c. 1000-c. 1150*. Tyler’s argument is that the use of classical texts as an influence on writing is evident within the text, and “the Roman story it conveyed, had become powerfully attractive both in terms of literary theory and as a political tool.”⁶⁰ Tyler’s

⁵⁶ Keynes, introduction to *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, xiii-lxxx, xxxix.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, lxxix.

⁵⁸ Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 39.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

⁶⁰ Elizabeth Tyler, *England in Europe: English Royal Power and Literary Patronage, c. 1000-c. 1150* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 99.

findings are unique, and demonstrate the multicultural aspects involved with literature during the reign of Harthacnut.

This study will further the knowledge on Emma and Matilda, and any potential areas of propaganda within literature that discusses these two women. Through this investigation, the question that will be answered is: Did Emma of Normandy and Empress Matilda use propaganda? And if so, to what extent? This study will examine the methods that Emma, Matilda, and their supporters used to promote them through contemporary literature. The findings may illuminate the usage of propaganda of other Norman figures of the era and beyond.

Research Design:

Data: I have sought out primary sources of history that discuss Emma of Normandy and Empress Matilda, examples of such being *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum* and *The Encomium Emmae Reginae*.

Procedures: I have gathered data for this study through searching of online scholarly databases, as well as through physical copies of history or biographies. The data has consisted of: 1) descriptions of the character of Emma of Normandy and Empress Matilda, as well as their actions while in a position of power, and 2) whether or not there was any indication of bias with regards to Emma and Matilda on the author's part.

To analyze this data, I have reviewed the literature that is relevant to the study as described previously. These will lead me to gain a better understanding of the context of the data and enable me to analyze them more successfully.

Assumptions: Emma and Matilda were greatly interested in how their reputation affected their power and status. By understanding the importance of public image, they both would have been more likely to promote any form of propaganda in their favor.

Significance:

While the idea of public image and propaganda in history is not a unique area of study, there is often a lack of consideration of the scenario that the powerful figures emerging from Norman rule, such as Emma and Matilda, would have understood the effects that propaganda held. Altered narratives would have likely been one aspect of many that could strengthen their claim to rule. Some historians briefly address the subject, one such example being Elisabeth van Houts, who discusses how certain histories in her anthology *The Normans in Europe* may have altered facts to present a more positive interpretation for Emma or Matilda. However, few other historians have addressed the subject of Norman rulers and public image as related to Emma and Matilda. Therefore, this study attempts to fully understand the importance of image that would have been felt by Emma of Normandy and Empress Matilda.

Outline of the Study:

In this first chapter I have introduced the project, and detailed the history and context of the lives of Emma of Normandy and Empress Matilda. I have also examined the political situation they were involved in, and elaborated on the research question. Chapter two will discuss the propaganda within the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, and introduce the theory that Emma romanticized the Viking heritage of her son Harthacnut in order to depict him as the ideal candidate for rule. Chapter three will focus on Matilda, with regards to the histories written about her character and her role as a political leader. I will identify potential examples of propaganda

concerning Matilda, and whether or not she had any role in their creation. The event of Henry I forcing his nobles to swear loyalty to Matilda will also be addressed, as the contemporary histories written about this event will allude to potential bias on the author's part, as well as the character of Matilda. I will conclude the project in the final chapter and summarize the results of the study.

Chapter 2: Emma of Normandy

The *Encomium Emmae Reginae* was written between 1041 and 1042, “during the reign of [King] Harthacnut”.⁶¹ The author of the work, the Encomiast, was likely a Flemish monk who is thought to have been at the monastery of Saint-Bertin,⁶² although there is some speculation about whether or not the Encomiast was actually in Saint-Omer.⁶³ However, it is clear this work was commissioned by Emma of Normandy, as the Encomiast explicitly states so in the text.⁶⁴ What many historians have attempted to determine is why specifically Emma would have commissioned the text. Most can agree that the work is heavily biased in favor of Emma, but the reasoning behind this on which historians speculate varies. Throughout the text, there are tools that the Encomiast uses that work to describe Emma’s family in a positive light, with many of them being anecdotes that help to romanticize the Viking heritage of Emma’s son Harthacnut. However, it is only the cultural aspects of his Viking heritage that the Encomiast describes, and any reference to paganism (which would have been more prevalent amongst the Vikings) were reserved for Harthacnut’s rival for the throne of England, Harald Harefoot. The Encomiast also claims that when Harthacnut gained the throne (after the death of Harald Harefoot), he acted as co-ruler harmoniously with his half-brother Edward (later known as Edward the Confessor) and

⁶¹ Keynes, introduction to *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, xxxix.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Simon Keynes speculates about this in his introduction to the 1998 reprint of the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, and questions whether or not the Encomiast would have been briefed by Emma for the work while she was in Flanders, or if it was a monk who began his service to her while Emma was in Bruges and later returned to England with her.

⁶⁴ *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, 5.

their mother, in peace. Elizabeth Tyler states that she “[does] not think we have recognized how *openly* and *deliberately* fictional the *Encomium* is.”⁶⁵ The situation was far more complex, and the Encomiast’s account highly biased as will be discussed further below, but in analyzing this text I will be asking if this work is propaganda. I will then endeavor to answer two questions; why did Emma commission a highly inaccurate and biased work? Secondly, was the *Encomium* a successful work of propaganda?

In order to understand why Emma would have wanted this text to have been written, the context of the time must be examined. In his introduction to the reprint of the *Encomium*, Simon Keynes states that the *Encomium* “was written [...] when Harthacnut’s rule was becoming increasingly unpopular, when a cult of the martyred innocent was developing around the atheling Alfred, and when Alfred’s brother Edward had just returned to England, at Emma’s request, in order to take his place as co-ruler”.⁶⁶ The text reflects these issues and the tensions that were beginning to grow from them, but the work was not intended to reassure and pander to its contemporary audience. As Keynes states, the text was meant to “restore political faith in the Anglo-Danish regime established in the first instance by King Cnut, and which would represent her case, and her view of events, to those in positions of power and influence”,⁶⁷ and that the people at the Anglo-Danish court “needed to be told that Emma stood for the furtherance of Cnut’s political intentions.”⁶⁸ The Encomiast makes many decisions with the text on how to

⁶⁵ Tyler, *England in Europe*, 58.

⁶⁶ Keynes, introduction to *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, xix.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, lxx.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, lxxi.

portray certain events and people that support this statement (as will be explored below), but there is another aspect that needs to be discussed. Keynes hints at this in his statement, “In blatant extension of the process of obfuscation, the Encomiast remarks further that Cnut and Emma sent ‘other noble sons [*alios uero liberales filios*] to Normandy to be brought up’”,⁶⁹ implying that Edward and Alfred were actually the children of Emma and Cnut, and writing out Ethelred, their father, completely. This is something that would have been known to be untrue, as Elizabeth Tyler points out, stating that “the members of Harthacnut’s court, more than any other audience, would have recognized the flagrant nature of many of these fictions. Edward, for instance, knew that Cnut was not his father.”⁷⁰ This falsehood that the Encomiast seemingly implies to be true is important to note, as it brings up the question of what purpose this would have served, if it was known to be false. A hint for this can be found in the beginning of the *Encomium*.

In the beginning of the text, the Encomiast states that, “Who can deny that this book is entirely devoted to the praise of the Queen [Emma], since it is not only written to her glory, but since that subject occupies the greatest part of it?”⁷¹ The Encomiast argues that the purpose of the book is to revere Queen Emma, but after this gives a short synopsis of the text, describing how England was first invaded by Cnut’s father Svein, the king of the Danes, with Cnut fighting Emma’s first husband King Ethelred for control of England and winning, and marrying Emma after the death of Ethelred.⁷² They have multiple children but the son that the text dedicates time

⁶⁹ Ibid., lxi.

⁷⁰ Tyler, *England in Europe*, 58.

⁷¹ *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, 8.

⁷² Ibid., 7.

to is Harthacnut, who became king of Denmark and fought with his half-brother Harald Harefoot who is referred to as “an unjust invader”,⁷³ over England. Harthacnut then becomes king after Harald’s death a few years later. After this synopsis, the Encomiast states;

And so Hörthaknútr, having recovered the kingdom [England], and being in all things obedient to the counsels of his mother, held the kingdom imperially and increased it with riches. Yea and furthermore, exercising admirable liberality, he shared as was fitting the honour and wealth of the kingdom between his brother [Edward] and himself. Noticing these matters, O reader, and having scanned the narrative with a watchful eye, nay more, with a penetrating eye, understand that the course of this book is devoted entirely to the praise of Queen Emma.⁷⁴

By ending the preface to the text in this way, the Encomiast made it clear to the work’s intended audience, those who would have been present at court in England, the purpose of the text. While the *Encomium* does depict Emma and her family in a favorable way that would benefit them at that specific time, by focusing on Emma, the Encomiast is seemingly daring its readers to find fault with the work. The phrase “having scanned the narrative with a watchful eye” appears to invite the reader to hunt out mistakes or falsehoods in the text, which are not difficult to find. However, both Emma and the Encomiast were fully aware of this. What is happening with the text is a form of gaslighting. Regardless of whether or not the falsehoods were discovered and made note of, was irrelevant. Rather, what Emma was attempting to do was communicate to her contemporary audience not to challenge her. The quote above describes Harthacnut as being obedient to his mother, implying that she was the real power behind the throne, not her son. Therefore, her readers were being dared to point out her own as well as her family’s mistakes that they may have been aware of. It is unclear as to why Emma would have chosen to

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 7-9.

communicate this message through a written text rather than in some other way. However, where we might find a hint of this can be seen through the life of Emma's mother, the duchess Gunnor (c. 950-1031).⁷⁵

Little information is known about Emma's early life. It is speculated that her birth was c. 990,⁷⁶ but there is little to no record of a precise birth date. According to the *Peterborough Manuscript* of the *ASC* she first came to England to marry Ethelred in 1002, which would make her around the age of 12 if she was born in 990.⁷⁷ However, in studying Emma and what motivated her decisions throughout her life it is relevant to look at what is known of her mother the Duchess Gunnor, in order to shed light on what environment she grew up in. According to Elisabeth van Houts, "Nothing is known about her parents. Dudo of Saint-Quentin [...] knew Gunnor well. He describes her as being of noble Danish origin [...] Her parents, and certainly her father, were thus of Danish, or Scandinavian, origin and they (or he) may have been first-generation settlers in Normandy."⁷⁸ Gunnor's Scandinavian heritage is important to note, as this points to Emma's shared Scandinavian heritage. Emma's father was Duke Richard I of Normandy, and Gunnor was initially his mistress before they married.⁷⁹ Gunnor was not Richard's first wife,⁸⁰ a trait that Emma's own marriages have in common, as she was also the

⁷⁵ Elisabeth van Houts, "Countess Gunnor of Normandy (c. 950 - 1031)," *Collegium Medievale* 12 (1999): 7.

⁷⁶ Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 4.

⁷⁷ *Peterborough Manuscript (E)*, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 134.

⁷⁸ Van Houts, "Countess Gunnor of Normandy," 7-8.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

second wife or partner for both Ethelred and Cnut. Some information is known about Gunnor's life, such as her monastic patronage. Van Houts (relying on the discussion of the use of Gunnor's dower from another historian Cassandra Potts) describes how,

The drive to donate lands to the Mont Saint-Michel may have been, [...] part of a conscious effort of the then dowager duchess (her husband having died in 996) to persuade her son Richard II to bring the monastery, which under Richard I had looked more to Brittany than to Normandy, into a Norman orbit.⁸¹

She appears to have worked with her son often, as “we find her [Gunnor] as a witness to her son Richard II's charters.”⁸² This is another similarity between Emma and Gunnor, as Emma worked with Harthacnut while he ruled England, and witnessed some of his charters as well.⁸³

Witnessing charters was a significant way to show the level of status that people possessed, as can be seen with Emma, who had never signed “after the bishops [while she was queen], as her husband's mother and great-grandmother” had done.⁸⁴ Another aspect that both Gunnor and Emma have in common is their role in literary patronage. According to Michael Gelting, “Gunver [Gunnor] may have had a reputation as a capable orator, as a patron of learning, or both.”⁸⁵ Potential examples of this can be seen in literature associated with or dedicated to Gunnor. One example of this is the poem “Moriuht”, written by Warner of Rouen, which was

⁸¹ Ibid., 15.

⁸² Ibid., 17.

⁸³ *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography*, ed. P. H. Sawyer (London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1968), 298.

⁸⁴ Alistair Campbell, Appendix II of the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, ed. Alistair Campbell (1949, reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 62.

⁸⁵ Michael H. Gelting, “The Courtly Viking: Education and *mores* in Dudo of Saint-Quentin's Chronicle,” Beretning fra togtredivte tværfaglige vikingsymposium, ed. Lars Bisgaard, Mette Bruus, and Peder Gammeltoft (Højbjerg: Forlaget Wormianum, 2013), 24.

dedicated to Gunnor, the mother of Robert (Emma's brother), the Archbishop of Rouen.⁸⁶ The poem tells the story of Moriuhth searching for his enslaved wife. The text is full of explicit innuendo and crass humor, and according to Michael Gelting, Warner of Rouen intended the work to be satirical of his own teacher named Moriuhth.⁸⁷ However, the person to whom the character Moriuhth asks help for restoring his wife to him is "the leading person in the kingdom, who lived on after the kingship of her celebrated, outstanding, wealthy and dutiful husband, I mean, of course, to [our] lady the countess."⁸⁸ This person is most likely meant to be Gunnor herself, especially considering how the work was dedicated to herself and her son. The 'leading person in the kingdom' is further described as kind and merciful, and Warner's ending dedication to Gunnor praises her as "a source of glory for the realm, [and] brilliant sources of light for their subjects."⁸⁹ These descriptions further strengthen the indication that Gunnor is the unnamed countess in the poem. Although the poem is crude in nature, the depiction of the countess and the dedication to Gunnor and her son point to their knowledge of court literature, and suggests Gunnor's role as a patron.

Dudo of Saint-Quentin wrote a history of the Normans, in which he praises Gunnor highly. This is relevant to note, as van Houts also states that "Dudo of Saint-Quentin [...] came to Normandy in the late 980s and stayed to become ducal chancellor and chronicler, [and] knew

⁸⁶ Van Houts, "Countess Gunnor of Normandy", 18.

⁸⁷ Gelting, "The Courtly Viking", 17.

⁸⁸ Warner of Rouen, "Moriuhth," in *The Normans in Europe*, ed. Elisabeth van Houts (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 93.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 95.

Gunnor well.”⁹⁰ Dudo’s work is another example of where Gunnor may have been involved in some capacity in literary patronage. While the work was, according to Dudo, commissioned by Duke Richard I,⁹¹ Michael Gelting’s belief that Gunnor was involved in oration or a patron of learning,⁹² may be relevant considering that Gunnor and Dudo were familiar with each other.⁹³ This especially comes into play when one reads how Gunnor is described in Dudo’s history.

The first reference to Gunnor comes from a poem in the text shortly after Duke Richard has married his first wife, Emma. In the poem, Dudo claims that Emma will not have children, but later on he states that:

One day a heavenly girl will come,
Of Dacian [Danish] lineage, noble, kind,
Fair, widely famed, and revered,
Worthy, most choice, and admirable,
Discreet, and provident, and wise,
Whom the just marquess, duke Richard
As one of many will select,
And join in wedlock and alliance;
And from her, in due season, will
A true heir to the dear line be born.⁹⁴

This is clearly meant to praise Gunnor as a woman worthy to be the wife of Duke Richard I, considering how Dudo mentions their children (Emma and Richard I never had children together,

⁹⁰ Ibid., 7.

⁹¹ Dudo of St Quentin, *History of the Normans*, trans. Eric Christiansen (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998), 6.

⁹² Gelting, “The Courtly Viking”, 24.

⁹³ Van Houts, “Countess Gunnor of Normandy,” 7-8.

⁹⁴ Dudo of St Quentin, *History of the Normans*, 139.

⁹⁵ and she died in 968).⁹⁶ The poem does not depict Richard's first wife Emma badly, rather it praises Gunnor and declares that she will be the one to give Normandy an heir. In this way, Dudo would have managed to avoid offending anyone by insulting Emma in some way, while still praising Gunnor. Later on in the text, Dudo continues his praise of Gunnor by introducing her as "a young woman of radiant majesty, sprung from the most famous stock of Dacian [Danish] nobles: she was (called Gunnor), the loveliest of all young Norman women, the wisest in the changes and chances of civil and forensic affairs, schooled in the capacity for womanly artifice".⁹⁷ He goes on to claim that even the Norman nobles think highly of her, as they describe her as a worthy woman when convincing Richard I that he needed to marry: "For she is born of a proud lineage, graceful and lovely to look at, cautious and far-sighted in counsel, industrious and wise in all things."⁹⁸ These are great praises for Gunnor, and it indicates Dudo's high opinion of her, or that he was aware of how it would be a bad idea to not praise Gunnor. While Eric Christiansen does not believe that Gunnor was involved in Dudo's writing,⁹⁹ considering that Gunnor may

⁹⁵ Van Houts does discuss a theory presented by historian D. Jackman that the phrase 'absque liberis' which was used by the chroniclers meant that Emma died without sons, although according to Van Houts the literal translation is 'without children'. However, Van Houts disagrees with this theory, arguing that Emma of Normandy would have been in her late forties when she had her children with Cnut, which would put Emma of Normandy's age between thirty-two and thirty-nine when she married Ethelred. While this is not biologically impossible, as Van Houts states, it is highly unlikely considering how the norm was for childbearing and aristocratic marriages to begin in early teenage years. See Van Houts, "Countess Gunnor of Normandy," 10-11 for this full discussion.

⁹⁶ Van Houts, "Countess Gunnor of Normandy," 10.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 163.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 164.

⁹⁹ Eric Christiansen, introduction to *Dudo of St Quentin: History of the Normans*, ed. Eric Christiansen (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998), xxvii.

have been reputed for her role in literature and education, that the poem *Moriuht* was dedicated to her, and how Dudo wrote of her in his work, it is not unlikely that Gunnor may have played a role in Dudo's writing of his history.

Gunnor's involvement in some of the written literature at the Norman court is very similar to how the *Encomiast* depicts Emma, as a noble and excellent woman. He praises Emma highly, and just as Emma commissioned the *Encomium* to be written,¹⁰⁰ involvement in Dudo's written work by Gunnor seems likely. For Emma, the *Encomium* was a tool used to convince people of the superiority of her son compared to his predecessor, Harald Harefoot. The text emphasizes this strongly, as will be discussed further below. However, the descriptions of Emma are similar to Dudo's portrayal of Gunnor in his work, and while it is difficult to prove this directly, the comparability between this and the *Encomium* are striking when viewed in this way.

All of the similarities between Emma and Gunnor described previously are relevant, as they point to what Emma learned from her mother. They indicate what Emma learned, and even if she was not physically with her mother for a large part of her life [as she was sent to England in 1002, around the age of 12],¹⁰¹ she could have been aware of her mother's actions, and may have been taught by her mother that actions such as these are what make a powerful woman. Being aware of these similarities helps to understand the motivations behind Emma's own decisions in adulthood, and how she approached obstacles that she faced throughout her life.

¹⁰⁰ *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, 5.

¹⁰¹ For the year that Emma was sent to England, see *Peterborough Manuscript (E)*, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 134. For the age that Emma was when she went to England, see Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 4.

Emma's first marriage to King Ethelred in 1002,¹⁰² produced three children, two sons (Edward and Alfred) and one daughter (Godgifu).¹⁰³ However, after the death of Ethelred and Emma's remarriage to Cnut, she gave birth to two more children, a son (Harthacnut) and a daughter (Gunnhild).¹⁰⁴ Emma had sent her sons Edward and Alfred [from Ethelred] to Normandy to be raised when she married Cnut in 1017,¹⁰⁵ and stayed in England to rule as queen. One possible reason she may have done this is for their own safety. As children of the previous king, they could have posed a threat to Cnut and any children Emma had with him, as they had a claim to England through Ethelred. Sending them away would keep them from being a target of Cnut's allies, as they would be better protected by Emma's brother in Normandy, Duke Richard II. However, it is also possible that Emma may have been more focused on the protection of any sons she had with Cnut, from the threat of their elder brothers. Harthacnut is depicted in the *Encomium Emmae Reginae* as being the intended heir to the throne after Cnut, rather than Edward or Alfred.¹⁰⁶ Edward and Alfred may have also been an unpleasant reminder of their father, as Emma's first marriage was tumultuous. William of Malmesbury wrote in the

¹⁰² *Peterborough Manuscript (E), The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 134.

¹⁰³ According to the *Gesta Regum Anglorum* (Malmesbury, ii. 199.1), the daughter of Ethelred and Emma, Godgifu, went on to marry Eustace, count of Boulogne.

¹⁰⁴ According to the *Gesta Regum Anglorum* (Malmesbury, ii. 189.7, 189.8), the daughter of Cnut and Emma, Gunnhild, married Henry, the emperor of Germany. She was accused of adultery, so a representative for her dueled with the accuser, and won. After, she divorced Henry and became a nun.

¹⁰⁵ See Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 4, for Edward and Alfred being sent to Normandy. See *Worcester Manuscript (D), The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 154, for the year that Emma and Cnut were married.

¹⁰⁶ *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, 35.

Gesta Regum Anglorum that Ethelred “was so offensive to his own wife [Emma] that he [...] brought the royal majesty into disrepute by tumbling with concubines. She on her side, well aware of her own high birth, was indignant with her husband”.¹⁰⁷ Whatever the exact reasoning on her part, Emma sent her other children away and remained in England with her second husband.

Pauline Stafford estimates that Edward was born by 1005 and Alfred by 1013.¹⁰⁸ This would mean that when Emma sent them away, Edward would have been around the age of twelve and Alfred would have been about four years old.¹⁰⁹ They would have both been very young, and while one cannot know exactly how they felt about going to Normandy, it is likely that this did not help their relationship with their mother. The Norman duke was apparently unhappy about this, and believed the aethelings (Edward and Alfred) were being cheated out of their birthright to the English throne. According to William of Jumièges, Duke Robert (Robert I of Normandy, who was duke from 1027 until his death in 1035,¹¹⁰ and the cousin of Edward and Alfred) organized a fleet to restore Edward and Alfred to England after Cnut refused to allow them to return (which Elisabeth van Houts estimates as possibly occurring “after Easter 1033”),¹¹¹ but the fleet was unsuccessful.¹¹² This could have created emotional distance between Emma

¹⁰⁷ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, vol. I, 277.

¹⁰⁸ Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 221.

¹⁰⁹ I estimated the ages of Edward and Alfred based off of the earliest mentions of them in the *ASC*, as well as the date that Emma is stated to have first arrived in England.

¹¹⁰ Marjorie Chibnall, *The Normans* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 22.

¹¹¹ Elisabeth van Houts, Footnote 5 in book 10 from William of Jumièges, Robert of Torigni, and Orderic Vitalis, *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni*, vol. II, ed. and trans. Elisabeth van Houts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 77.

and her sons, especially considering how Edward and Emma's relationship appears to become more strained as they grew older (as will be discussed later).

Harthacnut was likely born around 1018,¹¹³ as Emma and Cnut were married in 1017. The earliest mention of Harthacnut can be seen in the *ASC* in 1023 when, while accompanying his mother to a ceremony he is described as the "royal child Harthacnut".¹¹⁴ However, only a few years later Cnut "entrusted Denmark and his son to Thorkil [a Danish military leader who had fought with Cnut and his father],¹¹⁵ to guard, and the king took Thorkil's son with him to England."¹¹⁶ This practice occurred in Viking society often,¹¹⁷ and was likely the beginning of Harthacnut's immersion into Viking culture and upbringing. He would not return to England until after 1037, when Cnut's son by Ælfgifu (Harthacnut's half brother), Harald Harefoot, challenged his claim to the throne.¹¹⁸

¹¹² William of Jumièges, Robert of Torigni, and Orderic Vitalis, *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, vol. II, 77, 79.

¹¹³ I estimated the birth year of Harthacnut using the dates when Emma and Cnut were married, and the earliest mention of Harthacnut, in the *ASC*.

¹¹⁴ *Worcester Manuscript (D)*, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 156.

¹¹⁵ According to Ian Howard (*Harthacnut: The Last Danish King of England*, 15), Thorkell the Tall had originally fought with Cnut's father Svein but defected to Ethelred, then finally returned to fight with Cnut.

¹¹⁶ *Abingdon Manuscript (C)*, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 157.

¹¹⁷ Jesse Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 281. Jesse Byock (Byock, 281) describes an example from the *Laxdæla Saga* of a character fostering the son of a chieftain, thereby earning himself the chieftain's protection.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 160.

Emma's marriage to Cnut appeared to have been more successful and happier than her first one, as the *Encomium* would have the reader believe, considering that the Encomiast states that "the king [Cnut] rejoiced that he had unexpectedly entered upon a most noble marriage; the lady [Emma], on the other hand, was inspired both by the excellence of her husband, and by the delightful hope of future offspring."¹¹⁹ The happy marriage as portrayed by the Encomiast may have been exaggerated. However, other sources support the partnership that Cnut and Emma may have shared. The "Grant of Lands by Eadsige to Christchurch, Canterbury" states that "Here it is declared in this document how King Cnut and the Lady Ælfgifu [Emma] granted permission to Eadsige their priest, when he became a monk, to dispose of the estate at Appledore as pleased him best."¹²⁰ Another book of Anglo-Saxon charters compiled by P. H. Sawyer lists the same charter,¹²¹ and dates it to A.D. 1035.

William of Malmesbury writes in detail about Cnut's reign. While it is clear that Malmesbury himself did not approve of how Cnut became king as well as Emma's marriage to him,¹²² he does acknowledge the good that was accomplished during this time. One example that Malmesbury describes:

At Winchester especially he [Cnut] exhibited the munificence of his generosity, where his offerings were such that strangers are alarmed by the masses of precious metal and their eyes dazzled as they look at the flashing gems. This was prompted by Emma, who lavished her treasure on such things with holy prodigality, while her husband was planning hard campaigns in foreign lands¹²³

¹¹⁹ *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, 35.

¹²⁰ *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, ed. and trans. A. J. Robertson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 171.

¹²¹ *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography*, ed. P. H. Sawyer, 451.

¹²² William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, vol. I, 323.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 323.

The generosity of this donation was credited mostly to Cnut, but Malmesbury does note that Emma had prompted Cnut to do this, which sheds light on what their relationship was like--that it was cooperative, and that Emma was advising Cnut, and he was listening. Malmesbury also prefaces this statement by stating that Cnut was trying to “correct all the misdoings of himself and his predecessors, and wiped away the stain of earlier injustice, perhaps before God and certainly in the eyes of men.”¹²⁴ This suggests the role that Emma played in her relationship with her husband. Cnut was a member of Danish royalty, and was unfamiliar with how Anglo-Saxon politics worked. However, he had an advantage being married to Emma, who had been witness to the reign of her first husband Ethelred, and the mistakes that he had made. Emma would have been aware of how important it was for Cnut to establish himself as a Christian king, in order for his reign to not be tumultuous and brief. Emma’s awareness of this is also seen in the *Encomium*, with how her family is depicted as good and just Christians in comparison to the cruel and un-Christian nature of Harald Harefoot (as will be discussed below). Emma was likely advising Cnut on how to be a good Christian king. This would also have suited Emma, who appears to have been very unhappy in her marriage to Ethelred, as established previously. It would have allowed her more authority, and granted her more of an equal position in her relationship with Cnut.

While it is difficult to determine Emma’s personal feelings towards her second husband, the *Encomium* heavily implies that the two cared for each other. After the death of Cnut, the *Encomium* states that “The Lady Emma, his queen, mourned together with the natives [of

¹²⁴ Ibid.

England].¹²⁵ Emma may have mourned the death of her husband, but one consequence that is not listed in the *Encomium* is how Cnut's death would have affected her politically. While Harald Harefoot, who became king after Cnut, was in power, Emma's own position was in jeopardy. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* states that "Harold was everywhere chosen as king, and Harthacnut forsaken because he was too long in Denmark; and his mother, Queen Ælfifu [the Anglo-Saxon name for Emma], was driven out without any mercy to face the raging winter".¹²⁶ The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* also states that "there was a meeting of all the councillors at Oxford, and Earl Leofric and almost all the thegns north of the Thames [...] chose Harold as regent of all England, for himself and his brother Harthacnut [...] And Earl Godwine and all the foremost men in Wessex opposed it."¹²⁷ (It is relevant to note that the *Peterborough Manuscript (E)* uses the word 'regent' in relation to Harald, however both the *Abingdon Manuscript (C)* and the *Worcester Manuscript (D)* imply that Harald was chosen as king, not regent). The *Encomium*, however, describes this event in more dissatisfied terms, as "certain Englishmen [...] deserted the noble sons of the excellent Queen Emma, choosing as their king one Haraldr".¹²⁸ Disregarding the clear negative language attached to the Encomiast's statement, the event described in both the *Encomium* and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is the same, corroborating the fact that Harald was chosen to become the king after the death of Cnut. It is important to note that, as mentioned previously, Godwine is referred to in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* as being against the decision

¹²⁵ *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, 39.

¹²⁶ *Abingdon Manuscript (C)*, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 160.

¹²⁷ *Peterborough Manuscript (E)*, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 159.

¹²⁸ *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, 39.

for Harald to become king. This is possibly due to familial loyalty, as Godwine had married Cnut's sister-in-law¹²⁹, Gytha.¹³⁰

At this point in the text is where the *Encomiast* uses language that indicates to the reader that Harald is, in fact, not a legitimate heir. According to the *Encomiast*, Harald was,

owing to a false estimation of the matter, to be a son of a certain concubine of [...] King Knutr; as a matter of fact, the assertion of very many people has it that the same Haraldr was secretly taken from a servant who was in childbed and put in the chamber of the concubine, who was indisposed; and this can be believed as the more truthful account.¹³¹

The 'concubine' that was referred to is Ælfgifu of Northampton; Cnut had been with Ælfgifu before Emma, and had children with her. However, his relationship with Ælfgifu could not give Cnut as much legitimacy as his marriage to Emma would, as Pauline Stafford explains,¹³² and so he sent Ælfgifu with their son, Swein, to rule Norway after the battle of Sticklestad in 1030.¹³³

Ælfgifu's children were not completely disinherited after Cnut's marriage to Emma, however. Children of Scandinavian couples that were unmarried were often still considered legitimate, and had as much right to their inheritance as any 'legitimate' children if their father recognized them.

¹³⁴ In this way, Ælfgifu had a Danish marriage with Cnut, which could have threatened Emma's

¹²⁹ Ian W. Walker, *Harold the Last Anglo-Saxon King* (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 1997), 10.

¹³⁰ According to Pauline Stafford (*Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 256), Gytha and Godwine's marriage was intended to strengthen loyalty for Godwine to Cnut, and they had nine children together. Gytha outlived her husband, and is most commonly seen depicted after the Battle of Hastings, when she goes to William the Conqueror to ask that he let her have the body of her son, Harold Godwinson (*Orderic Vitalis*, vol. II 179-181).

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹³² Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 234.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.

relationship with Cnut, as well as their children. Therefore, the anecdote of Harald's birth in the *Encomium* appears to be propaganda.

The statement in the *Encomium* of Harald's illegitimacy is questionable, and Harriet O'Brien describes the unlikelihood of Harald not being the son of Cnut, asking the question, "Was this a popular myth, or even a slanderous tale concocted by Emma herself?"¹³⁵ This is a likely scenario considering how the *Encomium* is the earliest source to mention this. If this is the case, then the story surrounding Harald's birth likely had the intention to spread doubt about Harald's right to rule. It was successful to feature in the *Worcester Manuscript (D)*,¹³⁶ and the *Abingdon Manuscript (C)*,¹³⁷ of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, as well as in *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*.¹³⁸ However, not many other primary sources make note of this, further indicating the likelihood of this story about Harald's birth being a rumor.

Spreading rumors was not the only attempt that Emma made to de-legitimize Harald. In the *Encomium*, Harald's character is constantly slandered. The main way that the Encomiast achieves this is by relating Harald to the negative aspects of his Viking heritage. This can be seen when the Encomiast describes Canterbury Archbishop Æthelnoth refusing to officially consecrate Harald as king of England, and declaring that he would only crown the sons of Emma as king. In response, Harald "departed in despair, and so despised the episcopal benediction, that

¹³⁵ O'Brien, *Queen Emma and the Vikings*, 167.

¹³⁶ *Worcester Manuscript (D)*, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 159.

¹³⁷ *Abingdon Manuscript (C)*, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 160.

¹³⁸ John of Worcester, *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, vol. II of *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, trans. Jennifer Bray and P. McGurk, ed. R. R. Darlington and P. McGurk (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 521.

he hated not only the benediction itself, but indeed even turned from the whole Christian religion.”¹³⁹ Shortly thereafter, the Encomiast discusses Harald’s role in the death of Emma’s son Alfred, in which Harald is the sole party responsible. The Encomiast relates that Harald forged a letter from Emma to Edward and Alfred with the intention of bringing them to England so that Harald could kill them.¹⁴⁰ Upon his arrival, Alfred was initially met by Earl Godwine, who vowed to protect him. However, Harald captured Alfred and his men. The Encomiast then compared Harald to “that murderer of the Theban Legion [...] that utterly pagan ruler”, and further stated that Harald’s men “though there were in name Christians, were nevertheless in their actions totally pagan, and butchered the innocent heroes [Alfred’s men]”.¹⁴¹ Then, according to the Encomiast, Harald’s men declared that “both his eyes should be put out [...] and after his eyes had been put out was most wickedly slain.”¹⁴² Alfred’s death is depicted as violent and cruel, and Harald’s involvement is meant to point to a cruel and un-Christian character. The Encomiast, while describing Alfred’s death, writes “Why do I linger over this sorrow? As I write my pen trembles, and I am horror-stricken at what the most blessed youth suffered.”¹⁴³ The answer to the previous question is likely that the Encomiast is attempting to paint Alfred as the martyr and Harald as the evil pagan murderer. The word “blessed” is used in the previous quote, and shortly after the Encomiast states that Alfred was martyred after his death.¹⁴⁴ This is clearly

¹³⁹ *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, 41.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 41, 43.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

an attempt to de-legitimize Harald, and combined with how Harald is described previously as abandoning Christianity, displays a clear intention to associate Harald with paganism and declare him as someone who had seized the throne despite not being fit to rule as a Christian king. Communicating this through the text would have been something that Emma could potentially have benefitted from. It is unclear if Emma herself requested this, or if the *Encomiast* wrote the text in such a way as to impress Emma, but it is clear that the purpose of the text is to argue against Harald as king, through associating him with the pagan aspects of Viking society. This becomes more evident when compared to how Viking cultural aspects are described in relation to Cnut and Harthacnut.

In the *Encomium*, descriptions of the Danes when related to Cnut or his family are largely positive. One example can be seen near the beginning of the work, when Cnut's father Svein Forkbeard is preparing to invade England. His fleet is described in great detail, especially focusing on the beauty of the ships:

On one side lions moulded in gold were to be seen on the ships, on the other birds on the tops of the masts indicated by their movements the winds as they blew, or dragons of various kinds poured fire from their nostrils. Here there were glittering men of solid gold or silver nearly comparable to live ones, there bulls with necks raised high and legs outstretched were fashioned leaping and roaring like live ones. One might see dolphins moulded in electrum, and centaurs in the same metal, recalling the ancient fable. In addition, I might describe to you many examples of the same creature, if the names of the monsters which were there fashioned were known to me. But why should I now dwell upon the sides of the ships, which were not only painted with ornate colours, but were covered with gold and silver figures? The royal vessel excelled the others in beauty as much as the king preceded the soldiers in the honour of his proper dignity, concerning which it is better that I be silent than that I speak inadequately.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

The *Encomiast* includes a large number of highly detailed descriptions of Svein Forkbeard's Viking ships, an example of how the Viking cultural aspects (not associated with paganism) that are tied to Cnut's family are romanticized. Another example of the Danish fleet being described in a similar way can be seen later in the *Encomium* when Cnut is preparing to invade England after the death of his father. The *Encomiast* wrote that "here was so great a quantity of arms, that one of those ships would have very abundantly supplied weapons [...] So great, also, was the ornamentation of the ships, that the eyes of the beholders were dazzled, and to those looking from afar they seemed of flame rather than of wood."¹⁴⁶ The *Encomiast* goes on to say that,

So great, in fact, was the magnificence of the fleet, that if its lord had desired to conquer any people, the ships alone would have terrified the enemy [...] Furthermore, in this great expedition there was present no slave, no man freed from slavery, no low-born man, no man weakened by age; for all were noble, all strong with the might of mature age, all sufficiently fit for any type of fighting, all of such great fleetness, that they scorned the speed of horsemen.¹⁴⁷

The focus on ships and the Danish fleets is not surprising. Ships played a large part in Viking culture, and was one aspect that could be praised without much attention devoted to the pagan aspects of Viking society. This was not the only aspect of Viking culture that was praised by the *Encomiast*. When describing the birth of Harthacnut, his name is discussed in relation to his heritage;

For indeed he was called Hörthaknútr, which reproduced his father's name with an addition, and if the etymology of this is investigated in Germanic, one truly discerns his identity and greatness. 'Harde', indeed, means 'swift' or 'strong', both of which qualities and much more could be recognised in him above all others, for he excelled all the men of his time by superiority in all high qualities.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

The Danish origins of Harthacnut's name is investigated by the Encomiast, in order to further praise Harthacnut's character. This is another example of an aspect of Viking culture that is not necessarily related to Viking religion that is discussed and praised in relation to Harthacnut or his family, whereas any reference to paganism is given to Harald Harefoot. It is not an accident that this is the case. The Encomiast had attempted, on behalf of Emma, to de-legitimize Harald and depict Harthacnut as the more rightful and legitimate ruler of England.

Harthacnut was able to obtain the throne of England after the death of Harald. However, his actions as king had many people concerned, including the later writers. William of Malmesbury described Harthacnut as

a young man who showed an outstandingly affectionate disposition towards his brother and sister [...] He was, however, immature in other respects, and through the agency of Ælfric archbishop of York and others whom I would rather not name he ordered that Harold's [Harefoot] corpse should be exhumed and beheaded, and his head (a pitiable spectacle to men) thrown into the Thames.¹⁴⁹

While William of Malmesbury's work depicts Harthacnut as a hot-headed and immature young man, his actions are not out of character for a Viking man. Harthacnut was raised from a young age in Denmark and would have been exposed to Viking culture and society, which valued physical strength and prowess, and exacting justice was not uncommon. A similar example of this can be seen in *Egil's Saga*, a 13th century work of Viking literature written by Snorri Sturluson. One scene depicts the main character Egil who, when he was a child, killed another young boy who had been making fun of him. Upon learning of what had happened, Egil's mother stated that "Egil had the makings of a real viking".¹⁵⁰ Another work, the *Saga of Olaf*

¹⁴⁹ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, vol. I, 337.

¹⁵⁰ Snorri Sturluson, *Egil's Saga*, trans. Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (England: Penguin Books, 1976), 94.

Tryggvason describes the main character King Olaf as “the most cheerful and high-spirited of men. [...] When he was angry, he was very savage and tortured many of his enemies. [...] For these reasons, his friends loved him and his enemies feared him”.¹⁵¹ While *Egil’s Saga* and the *Saga of Olaf Tryggvason* were written sometime during the 13th century and after the death of Harthacnut, the relevant note is the similarity in the violence in action as well as the aspect of ‘an eye for an eye’ being praised by Viking culture, which is what Harthacnut would have learned in Denmark. However, considering that this was not the case with Christianized Anglo-Saxon culture, one has to wonder exactly how Harthacnut was able to hold on to his power, as his actions depict a hot-headed young man, who may have been unready to be king. One possible reason for this is the support he received from Earl Godwine.

The relationship between Harthacnut and Godwine was not smooth from the beginning. Harthacnut had at first held a grudge against the Earl due to his involvement in the death of Alfred. However, William of Malmesbury states that “He [Harthacnut] also looked askance at Godwine, and compelled him to purge himself on oath. Godwine swore the oath, and added a present in order to win back his favour in full, an object very expensive and very beautiful.”¹⁵² It is surprising that the oath was enough to obtain forgiveness from Harthacnut, as his character indicates someone who would not easily let go of a grudge, as previously attested. While Godwine did swear an oath to Harthacnut and gave him a lavish gift, this may not have been enough for Harthacnut to allow him to remain unpunished, let alone to remain in a position of

¹⁵¹ Snorri Sturluson, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, in *The Viking Age: A Reader*, ed. Angus A. Somerville and R. Andrew McDonald (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 161-162.

¹⁵² William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, vol. I, 339.

power and influence. Rather, it is more likely that Harthacnut's mother convinced him to forgive Godwine without punishment. Emma had been witness to Anglo-Saxon politics through her marriages to Ethelred and Cnut, and she would have been aware of how valuable an ally Earl Godwine was to have. Ian Walker says that "Earl Godwine was to retain and develop his own unique position amidst occasionally very difficult circumstances until his death in 1053, and his success in doing so shows that Cnut was justified in placing his trust in him and was in turn repaid with loyalty."¹⁵³ He states specifically that "After 1023, Earl Godwine solidly maintained his allegiance to King Cnut and even his new family ties in Scandinavia failed to draw him from this. Even when his brothers-in-law, *Jarl* Ulf and Eilaf, rebelled against King Cnut in 1025 [...] Godwine remained loyal."¹⁵⁴

Considering all this, quite possibly Emma determined it be necessary for her son to have Godwine as an ally, as his reign was very young at the time and was potentially unstable. The blame for Alfred's death is given entirely to Harald Harefoot in the *Encomium*, rather than any laying with Godwine. The fact that there is no mention of Godwine in relation to Alfred points to the fact that Godwine was valuable. It may not have been viewed very well if one of Harthacnut's noblemen was involved in Alfred's death in such a manner, and could have harmed both Harthacnut and Godwine's reputation. Therefore, the *Encomiast* attempted to correct this by writing Godwine out altogether.

Godwine's support of Harthacnut did not extend to protecting Emma's best interest entirely, however, as he appeared to have been more concerned with protecting his own. After

¹⁵³ Walker, *Harold the Last Anglo-Saxon King*, 10.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

the death of Harthacnut, only a few years into his reign, Edward inherited the throne. William of Malmesbury describes a conversation between Edward and Earl Godwine shortly before Edward had been officially declared the king.¹⁵⁵ According to William of Malmesbury,

When Edward came to him [Godwine] and attempted to throw himself at his feet, he raised him; and when he told the story of Harthacnut's death, and begged for assistance in returning to Normandy, Godwine loaded him with copious promises [...] 'There is nothing in the way,' said Godwine, 'if you are willing to trust me. My authority carries very great weight in England, and on the side which I incline to, fortune smiles. If you have my support no one will dare oppose you, and conversely. Agree with me therefore for true friendship between us, undiminished honours for my sons, and my daughter's hand. As a result you will soon see yourself a king, who are now shipwrecked on the sea of life, exiled from the world of hope, and a suitor for the help of others.' In the need of the moment there was nothing Edward would not promise; loyalty was pledged on each side, and he confirmed on oath whatever was asked of him.¹⁵⁶

This excerpt depicts the relationship between Godwine and Edward as one of emotional manipulation: Edward, having been fearful of what his future would hold, went to Godwine for help. Godwine then reassured Edward and stated that he would be able to help him, as long as he helped his family gain power through enriching Godwine's sons and marrying his daughter, making her queen. It is likely that Edward chose to go to Godwine for support and advice rather than his own mother, as it appeared from many of the histories that Edward and Emma's relationship was not one of a close mother and son. Emma appears to have been far more focused on Harthacnut, and was only involved with her other children when it was convenient for her. This is something that Ian Walker presents as a possibility, by stating that "Queen Emma herself [...] decided to abandon Harthacnut and seek help from her sons by her previous marriage [...]"

¹⁵⁵ While it is difficult to prove exactly how much of the dialogue that William of Malmesbury describes did occur, through his writing of history William of Malmesbury has proven himself to be relatively unbiased (within context) and accurate with his details.

¹⁵⁶ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, vol. I, 351, 353.

This scenario seems more likely than her biographer's suggestion that Harold 'Harefoot' set a trap for his half-brothers, which is a clear attempt to deflect blame away from Emma for what subsequently occurred.¹⁵⁷ Here Walker refers to the death of Emma's son Alfred, which the *Encomium* describes as entirely the fault of Harald Harefoot. Walker's argument is likely close to what happened, and that once her son had been killed Emma realized that it could affect her negatively, thereby leading her to encourage the Encomiast to alter the events to portray Emma in a more sympathetic light, as a mother who was grieving over the loss of her son.

Clear favoritism can be seen in the *Encomium*, which also points to a rather weak relationship between Emma and Edward. Near the end of the work, it states that, after Harthacnut had become king of England, "being gripped by brotherly love, [Harthacnut] sent messengers to Eadward and asked him to come and hold the kingdom together with himself. Obeying his brother's command, he was conveyed to England, and the mother and both sons [...] enjoy the ready amenities of the kingdom."¹⁵⁸ Here, Harthacnut is clearly the one who is in control of the situation, which is especially highlighted by the use of the word "command", implying that Edward did not have much of a choice in this situation. He also had to share whatever power he was given with both his brother and his mother. The Encomiast depicts a happy family ruling together in harmony, stating that "here the bonds of motherly and brotherly love is of strength indestructible",¹⁵⁹ again enhancing Emma's role and power. While Edward is allowed power, he is implied to not have as much authority as his brother, as this situation was initiated by Harthacnut. Furthermore, this image of harmony with two brothers working together was

¹⁵⁷ Walker, *Harold the Last Anglo-Saxon King*, 13.

¹⁵⁸ *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, 53.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

beneficial for Emma, as it would have lessened the likelihood of continued civil war if her children did not fight over who was rightfully king. It could have presented an image of peace that would have helped Harthacnut gain support for his rule, to show that there would not be continued civil war in England. How enthusiastic Edward was about this arrangement is difficult to determine, but it is clear that, although the *Encomiast* would rather have the reader believe differently, Edward was a pawn used by his family to allow his brother more legitimacy, and co-rule with their mother.

This arrangement that Emma desired between Harthacnut and Edward did not last, due to Harthacnut's death only a few years after he had become king. In 1042, Harthacnut had "attended the wedding of an Anglo-Danish aristocrat, Tofi the Proud, who had been his father's standard bearer."¹⁶⁰ According to the *Abingdon Manuscript (C)* of the *ASC*, "Harthacnut died as he stood at his drink, and he suddenly fell to the earth with an awful convulsion; and those who were close by took hold of him, and he spoke no words afterwards".¹⁶¹ O'Brien suggests that Harthacnut's death could have been due to "the onset of a stroke brought about by an excessive intake of alcohol",¹⁶² but his death is suspicious, as he died at a young age while he was still somewhat unpopular. Regardless, Harthacnut's unexpected death allowed for Edward to become king, which would result in the shrinking of power that Emma held.

Edward's apathetic feelings and lack of desire to rely on his mother is also apparent through the fact that, shortly after he was crowned king of England, he had Emma's lands and a good portion of her wealth taken from her. The *Abingdon Manuscript of the Anglo-Saxon*

¹⁶⁰ O'Brien, *Queen Emma and the Vikings*, 202.

¹⁶¹ *Abingdon Manuscript (C)*, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 162.

¹⁶² O'Brien, *Queen Emma and the Vikings*, 202.

Chronicle writes that in the year 1043, “Edward was consecrated as King in Winchester [...] And quickly afterwards the king brought into his hands all the lands which his mother owned, and took from her all she owned in gold and in silver and in untold things, because earlier she had kept it from him too firmly.”¹⁶³ Godwine’s support for Edward was likely necessary for him to do this.¹⁶⁴ It must have been a relief for Edward to no longer worry about his mother’s actions, as he may have never thought of her as a confidant for him, instead choosing to focus her attention on protecting Harthacnut.

In this chapter, I have attempted to answer two questions: First, why would Emma commission a highly biased work? Emma’s purpose for the *Encomium* was to calm tensions that were rising during Harthacnut’s rule while also attempting to convince the readers that she was the real power behind the throne, and daring them to challenge her statements in the text. The second question was; Did the *Encomium* succeed as a work of propaganda? Some stories from the *Encomium* found their way into a few other sources, but not many.¹⁶⁵ The *Worcester Manuscript (D)* from the *ASC* is one source that can be seen perpetuating a fictional story about Harald Harefoot’s birth promoted by the Encomiast as fact, would likely have been circulated throughout areas of learning, with updates occurring as frequently as needed.¹⁶⁶ This specific

¹⁶³ *Abingdon Manuscript (C)*, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 166.

¹⁶⁴ Walker, *Harold the Last Anglo-Saxon King*, 18.

¹⁶⁵ It was successful in being spread enough to feature in the *Worcester Manuscript (D)* and the *Abingdon Manuscript (C)* of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, as well as in *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*. However, not many other primary sources make note of this, further indicating the likelihood of this story about Harald’s birth being a rumor.

¹⁶⁶ Michael Swanton, introduction to *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. and trans. Michael Swanton (London: Orion Publishing Group, 1996), xx-xxi.

manuscript was written “in the middle of the eleventh century”.¹⁶⁷ The other source that was previously mentioned as also containing this story about Harald Harefoot was *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, a source that was written during the 12th century,¹⁶⁸ although there were only two complete chronicles that would have been circulated,¹⁶⁹ and may not necessarily have had the same level of fame compared to other histories as a result. It is relevant to note that they both originate in Worcester, indicating that the rumor about Harald Harefoot’s birth may not have spread further away. While the *ASC* source is dated to shortly after the death of Harald Harefoot, it is the only *ASC* manuscript that makes note of the story surrounding his birth. Combining this with *The Chronicle of John of Worcester* as the other source to describe this event, it seems unlikely that the *Encomiast’s* version of events made a strong impact on the histories written shortly after they occurred.

Considering whether or not it influenced Emma’s position of power and those of her sons, is difficult to determine. The *Encomium* was written only shortly before the death of Harthacnut in 1042,¹⁷⁰ and when Edward became king he chose to align himself with Godwine rather than his mother. The *Encomium* appears to have been preparing for an Anglo-Danish monarchy, which was never fulfilled. If Harthacnut had not died so soon after becoming king, it is entirely possible that things may have been different for Emma. Rather than being pushed to the sideline and having her son take some of her possessions and property from her immediately after he became king, she could have entered into a joint rule with her son by Cnut. However, the

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, xxv.

¹⁶⁸ Brett, “John of Worcester and his contemporaries,” 108.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁷⁰ Walker, *Harold the Last Anglo-Saxon King*, 17.

reality was Emma's son Edward becoming Edward the Confessor of England, and dying without any heirs, ending the direct family line for Emma, aside from her nephew William of Normandy, who would go on to become King of England himself.

Chapter 3: Empress Matilda

During the early to mid-12th century, England was in a state of chaos, commonly referred to as ‘the Anarchy’. Civil war had erupted after the death of King Henry I (1100-1135), one of the sons of William the Conqueror. He had held onto power for a long time, but due to the death of his son William Adelin in 1120,¹⁷¹ Henry I was left without a legitimate male heir to inherit the throne. The first attempt at a solution for this was his second marriage to Adeliza of Louvain in 1121.¹⁷² While Henry I did have many illegitimate children (one of whom, Robert, was Henry I’s “favorite bastard”,¹⁷³ and would go on to become the earl of Gloucester, and a staunch ally of his half-sister during the period of civil war in England), he was unable to have a son with Adeliza. Eventually he decided that his daughter Matilda, born in 1102 (through his first marriage to Matilda of Scotland), was his only ‘legitimate’ heir, and so he began preparing her to rule England,¹⁷⁴ after her return to Normandy from Germany due to the death of her first husband Henry V. He had his nobles swear to support her rule after his death, but when Henry I died in 1135, Matilda’s cousin Stephen of Blois had managed to seize the throne with support from many of the Anglo-Saxon nobles who were unhappy about the oath they had sworn.¹⁷⁵ This led

¹⁷¹ Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 37.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁷⁴ For the date of Matilda’s birth see Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 9. For Henry I’s marriage to Matilda of Scotland see Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 8.

¹⁷⁵ For the oath Henry I had his nobles swear to Matilda, see Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 51. For the date of Henry I’s death, see King, in William of Malmesbury’s *Historia Novella* p. 23, n. 68.

to many years of fighting for control, until eventually Stephen agreed to declare Matilda's son Henry as his heir in 1153, and after Stephen's death in 1154, Henry became king Henry II of England.¹⁷⁶

During the early period of the Anarchy, Stephen had many supporters who opposed Matilda, which was a constant obstacle for her. There are contemporary histories that viewed her as reckless and not suited to rule, some of which were based on her gender. However, while Matilda had inherited a fierce nature from her father that showed through her actions, she was knowledgeable of how to approach situations, which can be seen through her relationship with the church (as will be discussed below). She was not always successful in her endeavors however, as illustrated by the episcopal election in Durham in 1141.¹⁷⁷ What is interesting to note is the closeness in time to the Durham election, and to the writing of Robert of Torigni in the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* (*GND*). Robert was a monk at the Norman monastery of Le Bec until around 1149 when "he became prior there, and he held that office until 1154 when he was elected abbot of Mont-Saint-Michel."¹⁷⁸ According to Elisabeth van Houts, Robert of Torigni wrote his version of the *GND* shortly before 1140,¹⁷⁹ and his writing is one of the few examples in which Matilda's actions are justified and praised. In Robert's writing connections emerge between Matilda and Robert, through the relationship between her father and the abbey of Bec

¹⁷⁶ For the date that Stephen declared Matilda's son his heir, see Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 157. For the date of Stephen's death, see Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 158.

¹⁷⁷ Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 138.

¹⁷⁸ Van Houts, Introduction to *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni*, vol. I, lxxvii.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, lxxxiii-lxxxiv.

(where Robert was), his description of her donations to Bec, and (most importantly), the way he described her character. He revered her as a wise and devout woman, in stark contrast to how other contemporary sources vilified Matilda. Robert's writing has been labeled as propaganda,¹⁸⁰ but Robert's positive image of Matilda, combined with the closeness in date to the events of the Durham election, suggests a connection. In this chapter I will attempt to answer two questions. Firstly; what was the purpose of Robert of Torigni's depiction of Matilda as pious and devout? And secondly; how much of this account was due to Matilda herself?

Matilda's character is often disparaged in contemporary histories, and in order to gain a better understanding of Matilda, it is necessary to investigate the character of her father, Henry I of England (king of England and duke of Normandy from 1106 to 1135).¹⁸¹ Anglo-Norman historians describe both Matilda and Henry I as having prideful personalities, although in Matilda's case her character is emphasized mostly by writers who used it against her, and were biased in favor of Matilda's cousin, Stephen of Blois, as a candidate for the English throne. Orderic Vitalis, in describing Henry I, stated that he often had "enmity to those who broke faith, and scarcely ever pardoned any known of guilt without taking vengeance on their persons or depriving them of their honors and wealth."¹⁸² William of Malmesbury gives a thorough description of Henry I's character, describing him as

capable in administration and obstinate in defence, striving to avoid open hostilities as long as he honourably could; but once he had decided that a situation could no longer be supported, he became insupportable himself in the quest for revenge, armed with resolution like a shield to beat down the dangers in his path. His hatreds and his

¹⁸⁰ Elisabeth van Houts, "The Gesta Normannorum Ducum: a history without an end," 113.

¹⁸¹ Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 7.

¹⁸² Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, vol. VI, trans. Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 19.

friendships were maintained to any extreme, the one serving as outlets for his great fits of rage, the other for his kingly generosity.¹⁸³

Henry's brutality and anger is evident in one instance when, before he was king of England, he and his brother, Robert Curthose, were fighting off rebels in Rouen. After the fighting, Henry had grabbed Conan Pilatus (who used to be Henry's friend, but had now become a rebel against Robert Curthose and Henry) and threw him off of a tower to his death.¹⁸⁴ According to William of Malmesbury:

Henry [...] took him up to the summit of the keep at Rouen, and told him carefully to survey the wide prospect visible from the tower's top, with the assurance (it was a bitter jest) that all would soon be his; then caught him off his guard, and [...] threw him from the battlements down headlong into the Seine below. A traitor, he assured them, deserves no respite.¹⁸⁵

What is evident in this excerpt is Henry I's tendency to resort to cruel punishment if he believed it was deserved, pointing to his resilience and anger. Henry I's temper was apparently passed down to his daughter, as Matilda is described by contemporary sources in similar terms. Much of what the chroniclers wrote may be biased, but common aspects between the sources are more likely to be factual, such as her personality. While Robert of Torigni's description of Matilda is much more favorable (as will be discussed below), sources such as the *Gesta Stephani*, written entirely in favor of her rival Stephen of Blois, says that when Matilda was in power "she at once put on an extremely arrogant demeanour instead of the modest gait and bearing proper to the gentle sex, began to walk and speak and do all things more stiffly and more haughtily than she

¹⁸³ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, vol. I, 743.

¹⁸⁴ Judith Green, *Henry I: King of England and Duke of Normandy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 29-30.

¹⁸⁵ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, vol. I, 713, 715.

had been wont".¹⁸⁶ Matilda clearly believed in her right of position and authority, and if the negative language is disregarded, a character of stubbornness and determination emerges, qualities Matilda inherited from her father.

While Matilda's father was not attacked for his character, the traits that Matilda may have inherited from him were criticized. Marjorie Chibnall points this out in her book on Matilda, in which she states that "Conduct acceptable in a powerful king whose barons had reason to fear his anger was not acceptable in a 'Lady of the English' fighting an uphill battle to establish her authority."¹⁸⁷ She may have learned this from her father, during her early childhood and when she returned to England after the death of her first husband, the Holy Roman Emperor, in 1126.¹⁸⁸ Chibnall brought up the question of how much Henry I had prepared his daughter to rule when she had returned from Germany after the death of her first husband, Henry V (the Holy Roman Emperor), in 1125.¹⁸⁹ However, as Chibnall makes note of, Henry V had relied on her during their marriage, which can be seen when "Matilda acted as regent in Italy in 1118 and 1119, and a few years later acted on Henry's behalf in Lotharingia when rebellion called him to Saxony. Matilda would have been around the age of sixteen in 1118, as she had been eight years old when she first left England."¹⁹⁰ She was very young when she married Henry V, and according

¹⁸⁶ *Gesta Stephani*, trans. and ed. K. R. Potter (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 119.

¹⁸⁷ Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 63.

¹⁸⁸ William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella*, trans. K. R. Potter, ed. Edmund King (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 5.

¹⁸⁹ For the question Chibnall raised of Henry I's preparing of Matilda to rule, see Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 45. For the date of Henry V's death, see Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 40.

¹⁹⁰ Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 17.

to Robert of Torigni, Matilda was “crowned [...] by the archbishop of Cologne assisted by his bishops, especially the bishop of Trier, who reverently held her in his arms while she was consecrated.”¹⁹¹ She was personally involved in negotiating an alliance with her father; and her husband left the imperial regalia in her keeping when he died.¹⁹² Therefore, Matilda had experience wielding royal power from a young age.

Henry I certainly took steps to prepare Matilda once he had realized that she was the best candidate to be his heir after the death of her brother, William Adelin, in 1120.¹⁹³ The *Peterborough Manuscript (E)* of the *ASC* states that in the year 1126, “the king had his [William Adelin’s] brother Robert taken from the bishop Roger of Salisbury, and committed him to his son Robert earl of Gloucester, and had him led to Bristol and there put in the castle. That was all done through the advice of his daughter and through her uncle, David the king of Scots.”¹⁹⁴ Matilda did have some relevant experience in ruling, from her time in Germany and later in England. This speaks further to the way her character is depicted by contemporary historians as prideful, as she may have been confident in herself and her capability to hold power. Clearly her father trusted her with the kingdom after his death, as he worked very hard to ensure her succession, which can be seen through an oath of loyalty he required his nobles swear to Matilda.

While Henry I worked to ensure a smooth path to succession for Matilda, there were multiple issues that caused support to shift to Matilda’s rival Stephen of Blois for king. In 1128,

¹⁹¹ William of Jumièges, Robert of Torigni, and Orderic Vitalis, *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, vol. II, 219.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁹⁴ *Peterborough Manuscript (E)*, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 256.

Henry I held a council at Westminster to discuss his successor, and “all agreed to the king's wish that his daughter, the widow of Henry, emperor of the Romans, should receive the English kingdom under Christ's protection with her lawful husband, if she had one, and that all were to swear an oath so that this plan should be firmly implemented.”¹⁹⁵ However, this oath was not enough to guarantee that the crown would pass to Matilda. Instead, her cousin Stephen of Blois seized the throne, which he was able to do for three reasons. First, that he rushed to England immediately after the death of Henry I in 1135, and Matilda did not.¹⁹⁶ Chibnall asserts that this was due to the need for Matilda to secure control of her lands in Normandy.¹⁹⁷ The second reason is that, despite the oath that Henry I's nobles had sworn to support Matilda's ascension to the English throne, many of them were not comfortable with her ruling, and disapproved of the oath they had sworn to. According to the *Gesta Stephani*, Stephen's supporters went back on their word by claiming that, with “loud commanding utterance that nobody could resist he [Henry I] rather compelled than directed the leading men of the whole kingdom to swear to accept her [Matilda] as his heir. And though he knew in advance that they swore unwillingly and that the oath would not be kept [...] he wished to make peace in his own time”.¹⁹⁸ The text goes on further to state that Henry I, “in his death agony, with very many standing by and listening to his truthful

¹⁹⁵ John of Worcester, *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, vol. III of *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, trans. and ed. P. McGurk (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 177, 179.

¹⁹⁶ For the date of Henry I's death and Stephen rushing to England after, see King, in William of Malmesbury's *Historia Novella* p. 23, n. 68. For Matilda not going to England immediately after her father's death, see William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella*, trans. K. R. Potter, ed. Edmund King (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 27.

¹⁹⁷ Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 67.

¹⁹⁸ *Gesta Stephani*, 11.

confession of his errors, he very plainly showed repentance for the forcible imposition of the oath on his barons.”¹⁹⁹ A footnote to the translated text however, states that “According to Gervase (i. 94) when the archbishop was hesitating to crown Stephen [...] [Hugh Bigod, steward to the king, afterwards Earl of Norfolk] came forward to swear that King Henry in his presence had relieved those who took the oath of the obligation to keep it.”²⁰⁰ The language used by the author of the *Gesta Stephani* would have the reader assume that multiple people were witnesses who could attest to Henry I relieving those who swore the oath on his deathbed. However, if it is true that his steward had claimed to hear this, it brings forward the question of why there were not other people who came forward as witnesses to this statement from Henry I. It is possible that this did actually occur, but the statement should not be taken as fact if it was provided by the *Gesta Stephani*, a heavily biased source. The third reason is due to fighting in Normandy between the borders of Geoffrey of Anjou’s (Matilda’s new husband) land along with the other neighboring regions. C. Warren Hollister says that conflict had arisen between Henry I and his son-in-law, Geoffrey of Anjou, due to Matilda’s dowry which consisted of specific frontier castles in Normandy.²⁰¹ The conflict worsened to the point that “after the king’s [Henry I] death, the Angevins compounded their mistakes and invaded Normandy [...] Henry’s *fideles* were constrained to take up arms against Geoffrey and Maud [Matilda] [...]. Not until 1138 was the border situation resolved.”²⁰² Geoffrey had attempted to increase his authority and power in

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 13.

²⁰⁰ R. H. C. Davis, in *Gesta Stephani* p. 12, n. 1.

²⁰¹ Hollister, *Henry I*, 467.

²⁰² Ibid., 483.

Normandy through his wife's dowry, which would have worried other Norman magnates. Henry I likely did not intend Geoffrey to rule England and Normandy, as Hollister explains; "there are good reasons to doubt that he [Henry I] intended Geoffrey as his successor. [...] In the years following the marriage Henry did nothing whatever to prepare Geoffrey for the throne. Geoffrey acquired no lands in England or Normandy [...] He received no oaths from the Anglo-Norman barons".²⁰³ Nevertheless, it was a fear that would explain why Geoffrey and Matilda had to struggle to control their lands in Normandy, and why support for Stephen was more attractive than for Matilda.

Matilda's supporters, viewed Stephen's taking the throne as an act of perjury. According to William of Malmesbury,²⁰⁴ who wrote in his *Historia Novella*

The king himself [Stephen] had also acted contrary to law [...] He was indeed encouraged by the answers of many ecclesiastics whom he had consulted on the matter, who said that there was no way he could pass this present life without disgrace, or win blessedness in the life to come, if he neglected to keep the oath to his father's daughter. In addition to this, he took note of the terms of the papal letter, which bade him obey the oath he had taken in his father's presence.²⁰⁵

This was an argument that was used by those who were in favor of her rule. However, it was not enough to convince Stephen's supporters to change their mind, as can be seen in the *Gesta Stephani*. Matilda was likely aware of the pushback against her, and Robert of Torigni's writing

²⁰³ Ibid., 324.

²⁰⁴ William of Malmesbury is an excellent historian, however with regards to his *Historia Novella* his legitimacy as a historian is brought into question due to the work being commissioned by Robert of Gloucester, Matilda's half-brother and one of her strongest supporters (*Historia Novella*, 3).

²⁰⁵ William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella*, 43.

may have been intended to help Matilda's reputation, as he was responsible for some of the few sources that depict Matilda in a largely positive way.²⁰⁶

Upon inspection of Robert's writing and career, it becomes clear that he had strong connections with Matilda's family, and appeared to have a close relationship with her. This can be seen with Robert's election as abbot of Mont Saint Michel in 1153, which was assented to by Matilda's son "duke Henry [Henry II of England] [...] and it was most willingly confirmed by Hugh, archbishop of Rouen, a man of the greatest religion and energy, who was then present, along with the empress [Matilda], the duke's mother."²⁰⁷ This event took place after the tumultuous years in the English civil war between Stephen and Matilda, establishing that Robert and Matilda had known each other for many years. They may have met through the friendship shared between Abbot Boso (abbot of Le Bec while Robert was a prior there) and Henry I, as attested by Robert in his writings in the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* (GND):

Although the king [Henry I] bestowed gifts on the monastery [...] it was absolutely clear that the king revered this abbot more than his predecessors, for during his abbacy the king devoutly gave the monastery of Le Bec sometimes hundreds of silver pounds, very often a hundred silver marks, whereas before he had given the abbey scarcely more than a quarter of such sums. He expressed not only in words but also in deeds his opinion that the abbot excelled all the other dignitaries of his realm in holiness and counsel concerning both spiritual and secular affairs. Especially during the two years before the abbot's death, when the holy man was ceaselessly weakened by severe illness, the king never passed through the neighbourhood without turning from his route to pay him a

²⁰⁶ One other source that was favorable to Matilda is the *Draco Normannicus* written by Stephen of Rouen. However there is not a full translation of the text that has been completed. The text itself is in the style of an epic poem and "historicises the conflict between Henry II [Matilda's son] and Louis VII" see Elizabeth Kuhl, "Time and Identity in Stephen of Rouen's *Draco Normannicus*," *Journal of Medieval History* 40, no. 4 (2014): 421. Regardless, the content of the text is not relevant for this study.

²⁰⁷ Robert of Torigni, *The chronicles of Robert de Monte*, 74-75, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015025000715;view=2up;seq=6>.

visit, and he always granted the abbot with joy what he sought for the needs of his own or for another monastery.²⁰⁸

This is relevant especially considering that Abbot Boso had encouraged Robert of Torigni's writing.²⁰⁹ Chibnall points out that "Matilda's presence there [at Bec] may have been connected with her father's attempts to groom her as his heir and prepare her for taking over the business of government if he should die before her eldest child [...] came of age."²¹⁰ The connection between Matilda and Robert is strong, which leads to questioning of Robert's depiction of Matilda in his writing, as will be discussed below.

The *GND* is the text that houses Robert's writings, in which the relevant depiction of Matilda can be found. It originated with Dudo of St Quentin's *De moribus et actis primorum Normannorum ducum*, which William of Jumièges edited and turned into the beginning of the *GND*.²¹¹ After William of Jumièges's death, the work was revised multiple times, with the two most famous versions being from Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni.²¹² It is Robert's writing that is of concern at this moment, as his addition to the *GND* was the closest in time to the events of the civil war in England between Matilda and Stephen, and it is his depiction of Matilda that warrants a closer inspection. In Elisabeth van Houts' translation of the *GND* she estimates that the date of Robert's writing was prior to 1140 as,

²⁰⁸ William of Jumièges, Robert of Torigni, and Orderic Vitalis, *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, vol. II, 255.

²⁰⁹ Van Houts, introduction to *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, vol. I, lxxxiii-lxxxiv.

²¹⁰ Marjorie Chibnall, "The Empress Matilda and Bec-Hellouin," *Anglo-Norman Studies: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 10* (1987): 39.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, xx.

²¹² *Ibid.*, xxi.

“The last dateable passage of Robert’s redaction of the *GND* concerns the two popes Innocent II (1130-43) and Peter Leonis as Anacletus II (1130-8). [...] He must have written this chapter between the death of Anacletus, in January 1138, and 27 July 1139 [...] Such dating is consistent with the fact that in the final chapter of viii. 42, Robert refers to events dateable to 1137 or 1138, of which the election of Conrad III as king of the Germans in March 1138 is perhaps the latest.”²¹³

Van Houts also points out that “It is however interesting to see how Robert used his version of the *GND* as propaganda material supporting Matilda as legitimate heiress against Stephen of Blois.”²¹⁴ This can be seen in almost every section involving Matilda, one instance being where Robert writes, “he [Henry I] wanted her to succeed him in the kingdom of England after his death according to hereditary right”.²¹⁵ The use of the words “hereditary right” are important to note, as they clearly indicate Matilda as the legitimate heir to her father. The *Gesta Stephani* contrasts this however, by describing a letter Matilda had sent in which she complains of being “denied her father’s will and deprived of the kingdom promised to her on oath”.²¹⁶ As Davis points out in his edition of the *Gesta Stephani*, “The author is careful not to say that she had been disinherited [...] but that she had not received what Henry had willed and the barons had promised to her on oath.”²¹⁷ The statement from the *Gesta Stephani* is strategic, and makes note of the oath to Matilda while also describing her father’s intention for Matilda to rule in a way that allows for justification of Stephen becoming king later on in the text. The difference between these two excerpts is in how much Matilda was entitled from the death of her father.

²¹³ Ibid., lxxix.

²¹⁴ Van Houts, “The *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*: a history without an end,” 113.

²¹⁵ William of Jumièges, Robert of Torigni, and Orderic Vitalis, *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, vol. II, 241.

²¹⁶ *Gesta Stephani*, 53.

²¹⁷ R. H. C. Davis, in *Gesta Stephani* p. 53, n. 5.

When looking at the statement from Robert, it is clear through the language in his writing that Robert is already attempting to convince the reader that Matilda was the rightful ruler of England, and that her children should naturally inherit the throne from her line.

In the introduction to her translation of the *GND*, van Houts discusses how Robert had pulled from William of Poitiers's [a historian contemporary to William the Conqueror] writing on William the Conqueror and Lanfranc [Archbishop of Canterbury during the reign of William the Conqueror] to describe the relationship between Abbot Boso and Henry I, as "the two accounts are virtually identical."²¹⁸ According to van Houts, Robert does this again with Matilda, when discussing how her donations to the abbey of Bec were "more or less the same as William of Poitier's story of William the Conqueror's gifts to Saint-Étienne at Caen."²¹⁹ This points to a depiction of both Matilda and her father that would relate to positive aspects of William the Conqueror's acts, as Robert modeled his descriptions of them on other sources. Later on in the text he states:

"It would be a lengthy task to examine all his [Henry I] deeds of devotion or the height of the wisdom and prowess he showed in governing public affairs. The church and the poor bear testimony to the former, whereas the English court and his distant provinces with his magnates are unfailing witnesses of the latter. Well aware of the generous liberality of the king himself and his daughter Empress Matilda to us [the abbey of Bec], we have striven incessantly and repeatedly, to the limit of our powers, to recommend them in our prayers. Nevertheless so as not to seem ungrateful, we have included for the information of posterity some deeds of the king which we remember, while omitting many which we do not know of, as examples for the present and future generations to follow, if they do not disdain to do so."²²⁰

²¹⁸ Van Houts, introduction to *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, lxxxviii.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ William of Jumièges, Robert of Torigni, and Orderic Vitalis, *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, vol. II, 257.

This statement describing the inclusion of Henry I's deeds gives the impression that Robert is representing the abbey of Bec, through the constant use of the word 'we', and on behalf of the monks at Bec Robert is praising Henry I and Matilda. The last part of the statement further implies that Robert (or all of the monks at Bec as he would have the reader believe), in order to show his gratitude to both Henry I and Matilda for their care of the abbey of Bec, is describing all of the positive acts that Henry I is responsible for. Even if there was not an explicit request from Henry I or Matilda for Robert to do this, the excerpt above implies the presence of a transaction, or at least the message that for their continued support and patronage of the abbey of Bec, Robert would return the favor.

After the death of Henry I is described in the *GND*, Robert uses language to distinguish Matilda as the true heir to the throne. Robert wrote that Stephen of Blois, Henry I's nephew, "was made king of the English after the death of his uncle King Henry, for when that king died in Normandy his daughter, the Empress Matilda, whom he had long before appointed heir to his realm, was staying in Anjou with her husband Count Geoffrey and her sons."²²¹ It is important to make note of the fact that Robert described Matilda as Henry I's "long before appointed heir",²²² whereas Stephen is described as being simply made king. When describing Matilda's marriage to her second husband Geoffrey of Anjou, Robert states that "she bore him three sons, Henry [born in March 1133, and would later become Henry II of England], Geoffrey Martel [born in 1134] and William [born 22 July 1136], the legitimate heirs to the kingdom of England, not only

²²¹ Ibid., 263, 265.

²²² Ibid., 265.

through King Henry, their grandfather, but also through Queen Matilda II, their grandmother. Both were closely related in blood to the old kings of England”.²²³ Later on in the text, when describing Matilda’s actions after the death of her father, Robert says, “At that time Matilda, the king’s heiress, as we have already told, was in the county of Anjou. She took over her father’s fortresses at Domfront, Argentan, and Exmes, along with three others, Colmont, Gorrion and Ambrières”.²²⁴ Once again, Robert’s language sends the message of Matilda being the rightful heir to the throne, rather than Stephen.

Robert describes donations from Matilda to the abbey of Le Bec with high praise:

The same Empress Matilda sufficiently demonstrated her wisdom and religious devotion to the present and future generations when she was lying ill in Rouen. [...] She gave them with so devout a hand that she did not even hesitate to dispose of the silk mattress on which she had slept during her illness, but sold it and ordered the money she received to be given to lepers. [...] She bestowed on Le Bec several gifts, which were precious on account of their material as well as their make. Byzantium itself would have reckoned them most dear. They are most valuable till the end of time, an example of the diligence and affection of the empress for this monastery.²²⁵

Robert is clearly presenting an image of a generous woman, but he emphasizes that she was especially generous to the abbey that he was from [the abbey at Le Bec]. From this, the question arises of whether or not this donation served purposes other than charity. Van Houts does state that this donation did actually occur,²²⁶ noting her source for the list of Matilda’s donations, but

²²³ For the date of birth of Henry II, see Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 60. For the date of birth of Geoffrey Martel, see Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 61. For the date of birth of Matilda’s son William, see Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 67. For the quote by Robert on Matilda’s children, see William of Jumièges, Robert of Torigni, and Orderic Vitalis, *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum* vol. II, 241, 243.

²²⁴ William of Jumièges, Robert of Torigni, and Orderic Vitalis, *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, vol. II, 275.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 245.

²²⁶ Van Houts, in *GND* p. 245 n. 4.

this is still relevant to make note of due to how it gives the reader a good impression of Matilda, which was Robert's goal.

Robert describes an anecdote that, according to van Houts, is only seen with Robert's writing, pointing to his own creation of the story.²²⁷ In it, he describes a time when Matilda was very ill [before the death of Henry I], and that she had asked her father if she could be buried at the abbey of Le Bec. At first he refused, but Matilda's response was that

she would never be happy again unless her wish in this matter could be fulfilled. O woman of admirable virtue and prudent counsel, who spurned worldly pomp for the burial of her body! For she knew that it is better for the souls of the deceased to be buried at a place where prayers are very frequently and devoutly offered to God. Convinced by the devotion of an empress and the prudence of a daughter, the father, who himself used to surpass others by his virtue and devotion, yielded and granted her wish and request to be buried at Le Bec. But by the will of God, as we have said above, she recovered and her health was completely restored.²²⁸

This anecdote is important, in considering how Robert portrays Matilda. He describes her as devout and wise, more so than her father. Considering that this was likely fictional and invented by Robert (as established previously), and that his work is clearly biased in favor of Matilda compared to Stephen, this story is suspect. While it may have been merely Robert's way of showing gratitude on behalf of the monks of Bec for Matilda's patronage, this anecdote along with his insistence of Matilda being the true heir to the English throne lead to the conclusion that this story was intended as propaganda. Van Houts has made this claim in the past, but one question that is raised is, why would Robert focus on describing Matilda's religious nature in

²²⁷ Van Houts, in *GND* p. 247 n. 2

²²⁸ William of Jumièges, Robert of Torigni, and Orderic Vitalis, *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, vol. II, 247.

such passionate terms? One possible answer could be the rise of veneration for the Virgin Mary. During the 12th century, a movement that is referred to by historians as the ‘Cult of the Virgin’ was emerging, in large part due to the writings of St. Bernard of Clairvaux.²²⁹ Anselm of Bec’s prayers to the Virgin were also influential for Marian devotion,²³⁰ which is relevant as he was from the same abbey in Normandy that Robert lived at. Robert would have been aware of the growing movement and Anselm’s prayers. Therefore it is very likely that he described Matilda as a wise and devout woman in order to create a connection between her and the Virgin Mary. However, it is necessary to study Matilda’s dealings with the church, as Matilda is not the only royal figure who had been described positively as religious in contemporary histories. With regards to the empress it is incredibly important to be aware of the context of this writing.

Two episcopal elections occurred in 1141 in London and Durham that Matilda was involved in, but it was the Durham election that had ended poorly for Matilda. The candidate for the office of bishop for the London election was one that Matilda had nominated herself, Robert de Sigillo, a monk at the abbey in Reading as well as “the master of her father’s writing office.”²³¹ This election went smoothly, as Robert de Sigillo was well liked, and was approved by the archbishop of Canterbury and bishop Henry of Winchester. While there were no issues with this election, it is important to be aware of, as it highlights that Matilda’s influence in the election did not weigh as much as the influence of the prominent men in the church, especially when

²²⁹ Sim R Innes, “Is Eagal Liom Lá Na Hagra: Devotion to the Virgin in the Later Medieval Gàidhealtachd,” in *The Cult of Saints and the Virgin Mary in Medieval Scotland*, ed. Boardman Steve and Williamson Eila (Boydell and Brewer, 2010), 138.

²³⁰ Adrienne Williams Boyarin, *Miracles of the Virgin in Medieval England: Law and Jewishness in Marian Legends* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2010), 1.

²³¹ Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 137.

compared to the Durham election in the same year.²³² This election did not go as smoothly as the one in London, and nearly damaged her reputation. Matilda's uncle, King David of Scotland, had wanted to insert his chancellor, William Cumin, into the see of Durham after the death of the previous bishop of Durham.²³³ Relying on conclusions made by the historian A. L. Poole about David I of Scotland, Edmund King states that:

it suited David's policy to abide by the oath he had taken to support his niece the empress in 1127 [...] Poole merely says that 'it provided a motive for invasions across the border, the ostensible object of which was support of the empress's cause, the real object to secure Northumberland' [...] Had the empress made good on her own claim to the English throne, I have no doubt whatever that David I would have insisted on being given control of Northumberland.²³⁴

If David's goal was to assert more control over England it is not difficult to understand why he chose a candidate to recommend that would not be focused on the care of Durham itself.

According to the Durham chronicler, William Cumin was an incredibly corrupt and evil man, who worked for his own selfish gain. He was described as working to bring in support for himself by,

doing everything within his means [...] to ensure that the power he had presumed to take on himself should remain in his hands. He [...] obtained what he wanted from them [the barons] almost before he asked for it, for they were prevented from resisting both by fear of him and by his cunning in outmanoeuvring them. He also corrupted one of the archdeacons with the poison of his malice so that he won his assent. All this was done [...] in the darkness, in the shadow of death.²³⁵

²³² Ibid., 138.

²³³ Symeon of Durham, *Libellus de Exordio atque Procursu istius hoc est Dunhelmensis Ecclesie*, trans. and ed. David Rollason (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000, Reprint, 2006), 283.

²³⁴ Edmund King, *The Anarchy of King Stephen's Reign* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 244-245.

²³⁵ Ibid., 285.

However, Henry of Winchester (the bishop of Winchester and Stephen's brother), finding the situation irregular and improper, "prohibited William's partisans with justified reproaches from accepting William as bishop except by canonical election. He also placed William under an interdict as regards all communion with the church if he accepted the bishopric without being canonically promoted to it."²³⁶ Although Henry of Winchester was not the Archbishop of Canterbury, the head of the church in England, he was appointed a papal legate in 1139,²³⁷ and became one of the most powerful men in the English church. Therefore, he had the authority to prevent William Cumin's election. Although, according to the Durham chronicler, regardless of Henry of Winchester's hesitation regarding William Cumin, he attested that "William was to accept the staff and ring from the empress [Matilda], and these would have been given to him had there not been an uprising by the Londoners and the empress and her followers left London on that very day."²³⁸ This last statement (that Matilda would give the staff and ring to William Cumin herself, which would have been her attempt to make him the bishop of Durham) is likely an exaggeration from a biased source, but as Marjorie Chibnall pointed out in her article on Matilda and her dealings with the church,

we do not know whether she would have gone to the length of investing Cumin or what symbol she would have used. She may have uttered threats; but if in a fit of anger she spoke rashly, perhaps telling her cousin the legate that if he wouldn't invest Cumin she would do so herself, this is not a reliable guide to her views on reform. [...] She was undoubtedly guilty with her uncle David of trying to intrude Cumin into the bishopric. Yet it is on this one episode, and in part on the word of a hostile chronicler, that her reputation as an old-fashioned opponent of church reform largely rests.²³⁹

²³⁶ Ibid., 287.

²³⁷ Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 79-80.

²³⁸ King, *The Anarchy of King Stephen's Reign*, 287.

²³⁹ Chibnall, "The Empress Matilda and Church Reform," 116, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3678969>.

Matilda was rather astute with regards to dealing with the church overall. One example of this can be seen with Bordesley Abbey. It was originally founded by Count Waleran of Meulan, who,

was rewarded by Stephen with extensive gifts [...] he used part of his booty to found a new Cistercian abbey at Bordesley, and his endowment was confirmed by Stephen. [...] Bordesley presented her [Matilda] with a problem; she could not suppress a thriving new Cistercian house even had she wished to do so without alienating the church, but she could not recognise the foundation as it stood without conceding the legitimacy of Waleran's title to royal demesne received from Stephen. She therefore took over the abbey and, in effect, refounded it herself.²⁴⁰

This was a clever way to assert her dominance over Stephen without harming Bordesley Abbey. Matilda was aware of how to toe the line with the church and the papacy, as Chibnall points out, stating that Matilda “recognized the increasingly effective power of the papacy and realised that, though the popes would tolerate much in the interests of peace, to press any dispute beyond the point that they would tolerate was sheer folly.”²⁴¹ However, the Durham election placed Matilda in a difficult position. William Cumin was backed by her uncle, David of Scotland, who had been a valuable ally for her claim to the throne, and had supported her for many years. She could not afford to lose his support, and so she supported his candidate. It is also relevant to note that the previous bishop of Durham was Geoffrey Rufus, appointed by Henry I, who was also Henry I’s personal chancellor.²⁴² Knowledge of this could have given Matilda confidence that she would be able to influence the Durham election. Even so, while Matilda may have known of the potential consequences if William Cumin’s reputation was as bad as the Durham chronicler had attested to (as discussed previously), the repercussions were still harsh for her. Henry of

²⁴⁰ Chibnall, “The Empress Matilda and Church Reform,” 110.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 120.

²⁴² Hollister, *Henry I*, 464.

Winchester had switched sides and supported Matilda, as Stephen had passed over Henry's nomination for a new bishop of Salisbury. "Henry of Blois [Henry of Winchester] could obviously not tolerate that; nor indeed could he turn a blind eye to simony or to the fact that the chapter of Salisbury had refused to accept Philip a bishop."²⁴³ This was especially upsetting for Henry of Winchester, as he had used his connections to aid his brother in gaining support for his claim to the throne, in return for "the liberty of the Church; he made Stephen promise it, not as a bribe which might be forgotten, but as the price which any king ought to pay for the friendly cooperation of the Church, and he saw to it that the general promise was made specific."²⁴⁴ After the decisive Battle of Lincoln in 1141,²⁴⁵ when Matilda gained the upper hand against Stephen and held him in her custody, she convinced Henry to support her rule. As he had felt that Stephen did not have the best interests of the church at heart, it was not difficult for Henry to switch sides. However, his support for Matilda did not last long, due to both the events of the Durham election in 1141, as well as Matilda's refusal to allow Stephen's son Eustace to inherit estates and lands from his father (specifically in Mortain and Boulogne), which Henry had petitioned for on behalf of his nephew.²⁴⁶ In her book on Matilda, Catherine Hanley discusses Matilda's reasoning for this: "it is understandable that she did not want to make Eustace into [...] the son of a dispossessed man who thought he should be king, and who had the resources to mount a

²⁴³ Davis, *King Stephen: 1135-1154*, 44.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁴⁵ Jim Bradbury, *Stephen and Matilda: The Civil War of 1139-53* (UK: Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd, 1996), 99.

²⁴⁶ Hanley, *Matilda: Empress, Queen, Warrior*, 153.

challenge to the throne.”²⁴⁷ Nevertheless, both of these events were enough to convince Henry of Winchester to revoke his support of Matilda, and he switched his support to Stephen’s cause again.

Considering all this, it is relevant to note again that Robert of Torigni’s biased account of Matilda in the *GND* was written shortly before the Durham election (based on Elisabeth van Houts’ dating of the written contribution from Robert), which suggests a connection. This connection is made stronger through consideration of Matilda’s patronage of the abbey at Bec, which was the abbey that Robert spent many years at, as well as their friendly relationship. It is clear that Robert favored Matilda and portrayed her in the best light. With regards to Matilda’s intentions towards Robert’s writing in the *GND*, her involvement is not as obvious. During the time of Robert’s writing, Matilda was fighting Stephen and attempting to gain control. She worked to establish herself politically, and knew how best to deal with certain situations involving the church. The first time she was able to directly involve herself in an episcopal election was the London election, which was somewhat successful. However, the Durham election (shortly after the London election) ended badly, due to Matilda not wanting to lose her uncle as an ally. Robert may not have been able to predict this, and he does not address the event in the *GND*. However, it is suspected that Robert was originally planning on adding more material to his writing in the *GND*, as van Houts points out that there are a few blank columns in the original manuscript.²⁴⁸ While he did not continue the work, he later asked the Prior Gervase of Saint-Céneri “to write a continuation of the *GND* in the form of a history of Geoffrey of

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Van Houts, introduction to *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, vol. I, xc.

Anjou as duke of Normandy”,²⁴⁹ but this was not fulfilled. Van Houts does state that this points to Robert’s belief that “the legitimate line of succession after King Henry I was the line of his daughter and son-in-law, and not the line of his nephew Stephen.”²⁵⁰ His chronicles (*The Chronicles of Robert de Monte*) do not discuss the Durham election either, despite that his writing there describes events that occur after the election in 1141. He must have known what occurred, and may even have heard it from Matilda herself. This is very likely, considering that there are anecdotes in the *GND* that Robert would have been told by Matilda, such as that she was held in the arms of Archbishop Bruno of Trier during her coronation from her marriage to Henry V when she was a young girl.²⁵¹ Regardless, he does not mention it, and focuses instead on his praise of her. It is not known if Matilda strictly commissioned Robert to depict her in a certain way. However, considering the connections between the two, this was likely Robert’s way of showing his gratitude to Matilda for her patronage and support. Matilda certainly would not have discouraged Robert, as she needed every advantage possible to best Stephen. All of this suggests at least a small level of involvement on Matilda’s part, potentially more.

It is quite possible that the image of a pious and devout woman that Robert painted of Matilda could have bolstered her reputation, and her involvement in church elections might have received less pushback as a result. Creating this image of Matilda could also have helped with winning over Henry of Winchester to her side, as he greatly cared about church matters in England and had resented being pushed aside like he had been with his brother. However, after

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, lxxxviii.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 25.

the Durham election in 1141, as Chibnall points out, “Thereafter she [Matilda] was never in a position to claim a direct voice in any episcopal election.”²⁵² The image of a devout and wise woman qualified to play a role in matters of the church, crumbled after 1141. Supporters of Stephen would still have criticized Matilda if things had gone differently, but if it was not for the events of the Durham election, she may well have been able to hold onto her power for longer, or prevent Stephen from regaining the throne later on.

²⁵² Ibid., 139.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Summary of the Study:

This thesis has examined how bias and propaganda affected contemporary histories written about two key Norman figures: Emma of Normandy and Empress Matilda. Regarding Emma, it establishes that Emma romanticized the Viking heritage of Cnut in order to present her son Harthacnut as the ideal candidate for the English throne. Emma and the *Encomiast* did this through the descriptions of the secular aspects of Viking culture such as their ship architecture and the origins of Harthacnut's name. They gave the references to paganism to Harald Harefoot, Harthacnut's political rival, in order to associate Harald with the pagan aspects of Viking culture. Harald's birth and relation to Cnut were also called into question by Emma and the *Encomiast*, as they seemingly fabricated the story about Harald being born illegitimate, in order to slander him and establish that he never had a true claim to the throne of England. Emma's reputation may also have been shaky at this period, due to the circumstances surrounding the death of her son Alfred. According to the *Encomium*, his death was due entirely to Harald Harefoot, and is described in explicit detail in order to convince the reader to be disgusted, and direct their anger over Alfred's death towards Harald. However, the letter that was written to convince Alfred to go to England and aid his mother was a forgery on Harald's part, according to the *Encomiast*. As previously discussed, the letter may have actually been written by Emma, but when Alfred died, Emma felt the need to claim the letter was forged by Harald in order to stave off criticism of her involvement in his death. Whether or not she did actually write the letter, the readers of the *Encomium* needed to be convinced that it was Harald's fault entirely. Harthacnut was the rightful king of England, according to Emma, and although there were falsehoods within the text that

would have been obvious to contemporary readers, by including these Emma was essentially challenging her subjects to contradict her. This implies that Emma held a significant level of power while Harthacnut was king, if she was able to openly perpetuate rumors and falsehoods. The *Encomium* was also intended to calm tensions that had risen during Harthacnut's reign, as he was not a popular ruler, and viewed by the English as hot-headed.

However, by studying the sources that were written after Emma and looking for evidence of the *Encomium*'s influence, it becomes clear that the propaganda was unsuccessful. Any influence it may have had during the reign of Harthacnut was gone after his death, as Edward became king and did not allow his mother as much power as she had previously. This was due, in large part, to Edward's decision to trust Earl Godwine rather than his mother. Emma and Edward did not have a close relationship, as he was sent off with his younger brother Alfred to Normandy as a child, and was only given power in England as an adult to ease worries about Harthacnut becoming king. Godwine emotionally manipulated Edward into giving him more power, with his support for Edward in return. Therefore, Emma no longer held any influence over the king, and lost a significant amount of the power that she had held previously. The only two sources that make note of stories which had originated with the *Encomium*, such as the circumstances of Harald's birth, are the *Worcester Chronicle (D)* of the *ASC* and *the Chronicle of John of Worcester*. The location of Worcester may hold some significance regarding Emma, but it is beyond the scope of this study. Regardless, the fact that the story of Harald's birth was found in so few later histories indicates that the *Encomium* was not the most successful work of propaganda in the long-term.

Through the study of Matilda's dealings with religious institutions, it is evident that she was well-versed in political relationships with the church. She was able to successfully tackle a situation involving Stephen's previous endowment of Bordesley Abbey without causing harm to it, by refounding the abbey herself. While this is just one example, it does point to a clever and astute nature, and displays that Matilda generally knew the best option she could take regarding church matters. However, because of the struggle for control that she was involved in against Stephen of Blois, Matilda was unable to assert her dominance over the church entirely when she was in power, and needed every advantage at her disposal. Stephen's supporters worked to negatively affect her, and slander her reputation as seen in the *Gesta Stephani*. While that text is a more obvious example of propaganda for Stephen, other contemporary histories portrayed Matilda in somewhat unflattering terms. However, this is important to note, as her father (Henry I of England) was often described similarly to Matilda, but was viewed more positively than she was. Both Henry I and Matilda were stubborn and fierce, but in Henry I's case, his character allowed him to be a strong and effective ruler. Matilda went to Germany to become empress at a young age and spent many years there, gaining experience and confidence. This, combined with a character that she likely inherited from her father, made her a strong and stubborn woman. She attempted to assert her dominance, just as her father had, but this was viewed by her critics as behavior that should not be present in a woman. These double standards that Matilda encountered must have been frustrating for her, and although her father was able to rule successfully until his death, Matilda was only queen for a short period of time, until Stephen regained the throne in England, and it became necessary for Matilda to fight for her son to become king, rather than becoming queen herself.

Therefore, Robert of Torigni's depiction of Matilda in the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* is suspect, as compared to his contemporaries who described Matilda in more negative terms; he portrayed her as a devout and faithful woman who loved the church. While one possible reason for this may have been the growing popularity of Marian devotion (especially at Bec, due to the prayers to the Virgin that were written by Anselm), the intention of his depiction of Matilda was more likely to bolster her reputation as the rightful ruler of England. The connections between Matilda and Robert were strong, and imply the presence of a transaction or at least an understanding, that Matilda's favor towards Robert's abbey (the abbey of Bec), would be repaid through Robert's propaganda for Matilda. However, by connecting this with the Durham election in 1141, it becomes clear that Robert's propaganda was unsuccessful, and Matilda was not able to use the image of her that he had created to her advantage. This is largely due to her decision to support the candidate backed by her uncle, King David of Scotland, who was one of her most important allies. His candidate, William Cumin, was unpopular, and if the sources are accurate, William Cumin was unfit for the position of bishop of Durham. However, it may also have been less effective due to the fact that Robert was in Normandy, at the abbey of Bec, and the election occurred in Durham, England. Robert could not have predicted that this event would occur, and it is likely that he was hoping to build up Matilda's image in the literature that could have been spread all over both Normandy and England. Unfortunately for Matilda, Robert's writing was not effective enough to protect her from the disastrous events of the Durham election.

While Emma and Matilda dealt with differing circumstances, both women were in somewhat unstable positions of power during a period of their lives, and would have cared about their image. Therefore, both women attempted to enhance their position through propaganda.

Emma and Matilda also worked to further the position of their sons, Harthacnut and Henry II, while struggling to maintain control against political rivals for the English throne. Therefore, propaganda through written literature would potentially have benefitted them both. Although I conducted this study from English translations as I am unable to read the original text, and I only studied specific events in Matilda's career related to her efforts to establish control over the church in England (due to the length of this paper I was unable to study other instances of Matilda asserting her dominance during her career), my findings of this study are supported by the evidence that I have presented.

Interpretation of Findings:

Through analyzing primary sources that were written after the *Encomium*, it appears that Emma's propaganda from the text did not make a lasting impression on many sources. Emma's intention of spreading propaganda may have been more successful if it hadn't been for the unexpected death of Harthacnut. This allowed her son Edward, with whom she did not have a strong relationship--and therefore had less opportunities to assert control--to inherit the throne.

The lack of successful propaganda is something that can be seen with Robert of Torigni's writing of Matilda as well. Robert's depiction of Matilda as a devout and faithful woman could have worked to bolster her reputation as a monarch who was qualified to actively involve herself in or to assert some amount of control over church affairs in England, in order to enhance her claim to the English throne. However, this was stopped in its tracks by the events of the Durham election in 1141, in which Matilda's decision to back her uncle's unpopular candidate cost her the support of the papal legate in England, and prevented her from being actively involved in

church affairs in England afterwards. Her unsuccessful efforts to control ecclesiastical matters harmed rather than helped her pursuit of power.

Research into public image and propaganda is an area of study that is approached by historians often. However, sometimes historians lack consideration of propaganda existing within certain texts, taking them as fact instead, or missing them due to further information needed to provide context. In the modern era, we see propaganda everywhere, and is often successful. Therefore, by studying figures in medieval history who were actively involved in propaganda centuries prior, we may discover a greater understanding of propaganda today, and what exactly is successful.

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