Queens, Concubines and the Myth of Marriage *More Danico*: Royal Marriage Practice in tenth and eleventh-century England.

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Eadwig the All Fair, king of the English (r. 955-957/9), was, according to the majority of eleventh and twelfth century authors who described him, 'a wanton youth, and one who misused his personal beauty in lascivious behaviour'.[1] Chroniclers and hagiographers alike linked this 'shameless conduct' with Eadwig's poor governance of the church and saw his loss of power in Mercia and Northumbria as apt divine punishment. Accounts of his vice centred on a beautiful kinswoman of his, Æthelgifu, and her daughter, Ælfgifu, who both 'enticed him to intimacy'.[2] According to the earliest *Life* of St Dunstan, matters came to a head in January 956 when Eadwig mysteriously abandoned his own coronation feast. Archbishop Oda demanded that the king be found and only Abbot Dunstan of Glastonbury dared to incur the royal wrath. He discovered Eadwig 'wallowing between the two of them in evil fashion, as if in a vile sty'.[3] Dunstan rebuked the women, hauled Eadwig to his feet and dragged the unwilling king back to his coronation banquet. Æthelgifu swore revenge and duly engineered Dunstan's exile.

In Eadmer's *Life* of St Oda, the archbishop subsequently sent soldiers to seize the woman with whom the king had most frequently 'cavorted in rude embraces', probably meaning Ælfgifu.[4] Oda then branded her on the face with a white hot iron and banished her to Ireland. When she recklessly tried to return to the kingdom she was captured at Gloucester where she was hamstrung 'so that she could travel no further in pursuit of her vagrant and whorish way of life'. Within days she was dead.

Such were the tales spun by hagiographers of Dunstan and Oda. In contrast, the *Liber Vitae* of the New Minster at Winchester referred to Ælfgifu as Eadwig's wife, and as a generous patron.[5] Charters tell a similar story.[6] It appears that Eadwig's choice of wife had enabled him to set up a new and powerful faction at court that challenged the previous dominance of Abbot Dunstan and of Eadwig's formidable grandmother, the dowager Queen Eadgifu.[7] Dunstan's exile was presumably a consequence of the ensuing conflict and when Dunstan was later revered as a saint the reputations of his political opponents inevitably suffered. For three years Ælfgifu was recognised as Eadwig's legitimate wife but in 958, according to the Worcester Manuscript of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (D), Oda did indeed separate Eadwig from Ælfgifu, forcing them to divorce because they were too closely related.[8] Eadwig had recently surrendered control of Mercia to his brother, Edgar, and

probably already Northumbria too. His power was crumbling and opponents of his wife's family clearly took full advantage of this.

The position of king's wife in tenth century England was, then, highly precarious. The first part of this paper examines just some of the contested royal marriages of this period. The second considers eleventh century practice, in particular Cnut's relationship with Ælfgifu of Northampton which has frequently been described as marriage in the Viking or Danish manner: marriage *more danico*. I will argue that the concept of marriage *more danico* is a myth constructed by the Norman chronicler William of Jumièges and that Cnut's behaviour was not markedly different from that of his Anglo-Saxon royal predecessors.

Wives or concubines?

Ruth Mazo Karras has argued that,

> although various rituals and property exchanges may have been typical in marriage formation, none of the traditions that Western medieval culture inherited – Hebrew, Roman, or "Germanic" - used them to distinguish formally between marriage and other forms of union. The concept of marriage itself was rarely defined. . . while definitions tightened up considerably during the Middle Ages, various categories of union still remained blurred, and the attribution of a union to one type or another was still often based on the status of the woman rather than on particular processes of formation.[9]

It was not until the mid-twelfth century that church courts were universally acknowledged as the arbiters of legal marriage, or indeed that the church developed a universal doctrine of what constituted a legally binding marriage.[10] Unfortunately many of our sources for the tenth century were written in the late eleventh or twelfth centuries and their authors inevitably attempted to make sense of their material in the light of contemporary distinctions and definitions.

In the tenth century many did consider an appropriate dower to be an essential part of legitimate marriage.[11] In England this was usually seen as remuneration from the husband to those who had reared his wife although the practice of the bride's family providing a dowry also sometimes occurred in the century before the Norman Conquest.[12] When there was no transfer of lands the relationship was, in practice, easier to dissolve, regardless of the nature of promises made earlier.

However, church authorities increasingly argued that it was merely the consent of the couple that was required to constitute a legal marriage between two people (assuming they were neither too closely related nor already married). Such conflicting opinions naturally blurred the distinction between wife and concubine. Moreover, it is not certain that most tenth-century writers felt it necessary to make a distinction. The Anglo-Saxon word *bedda*, meaning bedfellow, consort, or wife was used to refer to King Edgar's wife Ælfthryth in a document that she witnessed as *regina*.[13] Its literal meaning, like the Latin *concubina*, was one who shared a bed. This might be the context in which we should understand the reference to '*Ælfgifu concubina regis*' among the witnesses to one of King Edmund's charters.[14] None of Edmund's surviving charters refer to a consort or wife among the witnesses, although many were witnessed by his powerful mother, Eadgifu, who was clearly the dominant woman at court. Yet Ælfgifu was the name of Edmund's first wife, the mother of Kings Eadwig and Edgar. It seems most likely that Eadgifu's dominance as dowager queen meant that her daughter-in-law was seen as the king's bedfellow, rather than his queen, and that concubine here meant the same as wife. As St Augustine of Hippo had noted with concern in the fifth century, the terms occasionally appeared interchangeable in scripture and it seems likely that this continued to be the case in many Christian societies.[15] Centuries later canon lawyers such as Gratian described concubinage with '*maritalis affectio*' (marital affection) as an imperfect form of true marriage (assuming the partners remained together), and ecclesiastical courts found it almost impossible to distinguish between concubinage and clandestine marriage.[16]

However, in the royal family some distinction had to be made between legitimate and illegitimate unions. In 786 Kings Offa of Mercia and Ælfwold of Northumbria had accepted Pope Hadrian's decree that only men born of legitimate marriage could be 'the Lord's anointed and king of the whole kingdom . . . just as a bastard cannot attain to the priesthood'.[17] This ruling was not just a matter of laws of inheritance. It was also about spiritual purity and the spiritual authority of the king as God's anointed. As the iconography of kingship became more christological towards the close of the tenth century this was especially pertinent.[18] It was clear that the child of a prostitute could not inherit the throne. Nor could a child conceived while one of the parents was publicly acknowledged to be the spouse of a third party. But problems of definition occurred because many tenth-century kings practised serial monogamy in a manner which was very much at odds with strict Christian teaching on the indissolubility of marriage. These kings expected the children from unions contracted in the lifetime of a previous wife to be allowed to inherit. Consequently, a more helpful distinction than wife versus concubine is that between relationships that could produce a throneworthy son, an *æðeling*, and those which could not. The nature of the relationship in this case

was most likely to be determined by the social status of the woman in question rather than by any land transfer, marriage ceremony, or the existence of a previous wife who was still living.

Edward the Elder (r. 899-924)

For instance, Edward the Elder's partner Ecgwyna probably belonged to a noble family in the west country so their union was most likely arranged by Edward's father, King Alfred, to ensure the loyalty of Ecgwyna's powerful family.[19] She may have died young but it seems that her relationship was dissolved when Edward became king in 899.[20] Edward then married and had children by two more women. Yet Ecgwyna's son Æthelstan was still considered throneworthy (as his name suggested) and he eventually succeeded his father as king, first in Mercia and then Wessex also.[21] However, there were rumours that Æthelstan's mother was really a shepherd's daughter with whom King Edward had slept for a single night.[22] Such a low status mother and brief liaison would have made Æthelstan a bastard with no right to the throne. The story was probably first circulated by his political opponents although it developed into a more positive tale in which his mother dreamed that a light from her belly illumined the whole kingdom.[23] Concerns about the legitimacy of the king's birth had been rewritten to construct his mother as a Marian figure, a common trope in early medieval saints lives.

Even among the mothers of throneworthy offspring, not all wives were equal. Ecgwyna's successor, Ælfflaed, appears to have been anointed as queen during her husband's coronation.[24] This was perhaps specifically to ensure that her children were considered legitimate too, in spite of Edward's prior union with Ecgwyna. But the anointing also helped to make her status superior to Ecgwyna's, hence Ælfflaed's children witnessed charters above Ecgwyna's even though they were younger.[25] Edward very likely intended Ælfflaed's son to inherit the more prestigious kingdom of Wessex, reserving Mercia for Æthelstan. Despite her increased legitimacy as a royal wife, Ælfflaed too was eventually set aside when Edward needed to strengthen his position in Kent and chose to marry Eadgifu, daughter of ealdorman Sighelm of Kent. Edward's serial monogamy may have been essential to maintaining his own hold on power but it undermined Æthelstan's position as king and led to conflict which eventually cost Ælfflaed's younger son, Edwin, his life.[26]

How to set aside a royal wife

For an Anglo-Saxon king trying to evade the church's teaching on the indissolubility of

marriage, there were four possible means of disposing of an unwanted wife, several of which may have been used by Edward the Elder. The one approach not open to Edward was to claim that the match had never been consummated. This was obviously a useful excuse when a marriage had proved infertile. In the 670s Ecgfrith of Northumbria and his queen Æthelthryth had made this claim after twelve years of childless marriage so that she could become an abbess and he could remarry.[27] In 887 the Frankish king Charles the Fat and his queen Richardis negotiated a divorce on the same grounds.[28] It is possible that Edward the Confessor considered using this argument when he temporarily separated from his queen Edith in 1051, prompting the later legends of their chastity. The validity of such an excuse might be questioned because the importance of consummation as a component of legal marriage, like the transfer of lands, was an issue of debate throughout this period. Although Hincmar of Reims had proposed in around 860 that consummation be considered integral to legal marriage, later church reformers rejected this, focussing only on consent.[29] Nonetheless non-consummation remained a widely accepted excuse for annulling a marriage, and Thomas Aquinas eventually came up with a justification for this based on 1 Corinthians 7:3-4.[30]

For a king who had children there were three further possibilities. The most brazen approach was simply to separate from a woman as if she had been a concubine, perhaps playing on the contemporary lack of clarity about what actually constituted a binding marriage. Edward may well have done this to Ecgwyna. The match had most likely been made without any transfer of lands since it was made in Edward's father's lifetime. Early medieval kings commonly tried to avoid setting up the potentially rival power base for their sons that a full marriage would entail.[31] Without a land transfer Edward's marriage would have been relatively easy to dissolve, yet the fact of Æthelstan's succession indicates that to most contemporaries there was some legitimacy to the union, most likely as a consequence of Ecgwyna's noble family. In such cases secular society simply rejected clerical demands for indissoluble marriage.

A second means of setting a wife aside was to 'discover', or develop a guilty conscience about, an impediment to legal marriage, such as the wife having taken orders as a nun, having previously been married to someone still living, or being related within forbidden degrees of kinship. Again such a process should have disinherited any offspring since it meant that the marriage had never been valid, but this fact was commonly ignored. Identifying whether or not a woman had been a nun could be every bit as debatable as whether she was a concubine, as Princess Edith of Scotland discovered in 1100 when she had to give evidence before a council of nobles and leading ecclesiastics to prove that despite her upbringing in a nunnery she was still eligible to marry Henry I

of England.[32] It is just possible that various stories accusing King Edgar of raping nuns were a consequence of rumours that this excuse had been used to justify his separation from the mothers of his children Edward and/or Edith. Again it could have been a pretext considered by Edward the Confessor as a means of divorcing his queen Edith since she had been educated at Wilton.

However, by far the most common impediment forwarded by early medieval nobles in search of divorce was that of kinship, an easy option since many flouted the incest regulations to an extraordinary degree, none more so than Alfred the Great's elder brother Æthelbald who married his own step mother, Judith.[33] Æthelbald's reckless disregard for church teaching on a matter which St Paul himself had railed against is a salutary reminder that the church was not as powerful as chroniclers often implied. Despite the outrage Bishop Asser expressed at this 'great disgrace', the couple were still married when Æthelbald died in 860.[34] Kings who married their relatives found it quite easy to dispose of their wives later if need be and Edward the Elder perhaps took this stance with Ælfflaed who was possibly his second cousin.[35] The danger with this approach was, as Eadwig later found, that it could cut both ways. Political rivals could weaken a king by claiming that his politically valuable marriage was invalid or that his parents had not been legally married.[36] But if Edward the Elder did use the excuse of prohibited degrees of kinship to part from Ælfflaed, he did not allow it to affect the throneworthiness of her sons.

There was a fourth possible option which did not disinherit children: Edward might have claimed that Ælfflaed wanted to retire from marriage to a nunnery. It looks as if she did eventually become a nun at Wilton.[37] When the early church first allowed marriages to be dissolved for those who felt called to the religious life, neither partner was permitted to remarry. However, from the late seventh century a tradition evolved in England, accepted in *Theodore's Penitential*, that permitted men to remarry after their wives had entered nunneries.[38] Eadwig's younger brother Edgar most likely used this means to separate from Wulfthryth who also became a nun at Wilton, despite the lack of support for such ideology outside England.[39] That said, we do not actually know that Edward or Edgar gave any religious or legal justification for setting aside their wives.

Edgar the Peaceable (r. 957/9-975)

Edgar's marital history is notoriously unclear and is interspersed with various accusations of raping or seducing nuns.[40] Æthelflæd the White (*Candida*) and Wulfthryth, the mothers of his first two children, had probably both grown up in nunneries but not taken vows so that their families

considered them eligible to marry, even if some churchmen did not.[41] Goscelin de St Bertin, in his hagiography of Wulfthryth's daughter Edith, described Wulfthryth's marriage with Edgar as a passionate love match.[42] But since Edgar had earlier tried to seduce Wulfthryth's kinswoman, Wulfhild, the girls must have belonged to a family whose loyalty Edgar was trying to acquire. This would suggest that some formal land transfer was part of the arrangement in this political union. Even after her separation from the king, Wulfthryth was a political force to be reckoned with as a powerful abbess and ally of the reforming bishop Æthelwold of Winchester.[43]

The same was not true for Æthelflæd the White who has left barely any record of her existence. Her complete absence from her son Edward's early hagiography does suggest that many did not consider theirs a legitimate union. Nicholas of Worcester claimed that she was the daughter of a certain ealdorman Ordmaer of the East Angles but no other record of such an ealdorman exists.[44] Very likely Nicholas, or his source, had taken the name from a rather tangled passage in Byrhtferth's *Vita Sancti Oswaldi* that conflates the mothers of Edward and Æthelred and identifies the princes' maternal grandfather as 'ormeri'. This must be a mistake for Ælfthryth's father Ordgar rather than a reference to Æthelflæd's father, who remains unknown.[45]

It looks as if the relationships with Æthelflæd and Wulfthryth occurred in very quick succession since some later writers believed they were concurrent.[46] It is quite possible that the child of one liaison was not born until after the second union had begun. Edgar's third relationship, however, was very different. This was his marriage to Ælfthryth, widow of his foster-brother Æthelwold, ealdorman of East Anglia. Ælfthryth became one of the most influential queens of the tenth century and she very probably shared in her husband's re-coronation at Bath in 973.[47] Like the anointing ceremony for Edward's wife Ælfflæd, this served to emphasise the queen's legitimacy in spite of Edgar's previous relationships. Even before 973 Ælfthryth's son Edmund was given precedence over his elder brother Edward.[48]

However, when Edgar died in 975 Edmund was already dead and Ælfthryth's younger son, Æthelred, was probably less than ten years old. Despite the informality of her relationship with the king, Æthelflæd the White's son Edward was allowed to inherit. The magnates who made this choice may have resented the influence of the queen or they may simply have felt that the son who would reach maturity soonest was the wisest choice.[49] Either way, political pragmatism had again triumphed over concerns about legitimate royal marriage. Edward's reign was not a success and within three years he had been murdered at the Gap of Corfe. At this point Æthelred did become

king and eventually acquired the epithet Unræd. Queen Ælfthryth resumed her powerful position at court. Indeed she dominated his household to such an extent that Æthelred's first wife witnessed no charters and even her name is uncertain. William of Malmesbury called her a woman 'whom fame in darkness hides', assumed she was of 'low birth' and implied that she was a concubine.[50] Yet John of Worcester believed her name was Ælfgifu and both he and Ailred of Rievaulx claimed that her father was an ealdorman, Ailred providing the more plausible identification of Thored of Northumbria[51] This Ælfgifu's son, Edmund Ironside, was certainly recognised as king on Æthelred's death and indeed always witnessed charters ahead of the offspring of his father's second marriage. The situation looks to have been very much the same as at Edmund's court where the king's mother Eadgifu had so completely overshadowed his wife, an earlier Ælfgifu, that the latter was called '*concubina regis*'. Noticeably it was only after his own indomitable mother's death that Æthelred Unræd married a woman whom he anointed as his queen, Emma of Normandy.[52]

Marriage *more Danico*

It is in the light of these contested marriages and inheritance by the sons of 'concubines' that I want to raise the question of Danish marriage, or marriage *more Danico*. Edward Freeman, in his history of the Norman Conquest, referred to King Cnut's partner Ælfgifu of Northampton as his 'concubine or Danish wife'.[53] Historians have since regularly applied the term to her and to a number of other women, often qualifying it as 'common law wife'. These women include Emma of Normandy's mother Gunnor, William the Conqueror's mother Herleva, Malcolm III of Scotland's wife Ingibjorg Finnsdottir, and Harold Godwinson's mistress, Edith Swanneck.[54] Recently Timothy Bolton has suggested that Ælfgifu's union with Cnut may have been 'a form of alliance-building relationship specific to Scandinavia, which has been equated to concubinage, but for which we have no satisfactory modern term. This could subsequently be dissolved when needed without the loss of the woman's status or the alliances involved'.[55] I would argue that it is not necessary to look to Scandinavian practice to understand Ælfgifu's relationship which was actually very much in the tradition of previous Anglo-Saxon royal unions, including those of Ecgwyna, Ælfflæd, Æthelflæd the White and Wulfthryth.

The little evidence we have for pre-Christian Danish marriage suggests that it was much the same as that among other Germanic peoples: a relationship between people of similar social status which required a bride price (*mundr*) paid by the groom's family at the wedding feast, in return for which the bride's family gave the couple her share of her inheritance (*dos*) at this time. Divorce

looks to have been relatively uncommon but could be initiated by either party.[56] After conversion to Christianity practice appears very similar to that in England. Across Scandinavia kings and other men did set their wives aside as men in other countries did, most often on the grounds of close kinship. What was unusual was that even in the eleventh and twelfth centuries Norwegian kings commonly had extra-marital relationships with a large number of aristocratic women and that the children of these liaisons were permitted to inherit the throne.[57] The practice across Scandinavia of permitting the children of concubines to inherit was a source of criticism from clerics elsewhere in Europe in the eleventh century.[58] Noticeably contemporaries in Scandinavia and abroad all simply called these women concubines, not wives *more Danico*. As Bolton himself observes, Cnut's relationship with Ælfgifu was clearly different from the experience of peripatetic Norwegian kings who were offered a multitude of relationships with aristocratic girls whose parents hoped they would produce a potential heir to the throne.[59]

The only medieval references to an institution called marriage *more Danico* occur in William of Jumièges' *Deeds of the dukes of Normandy*, which was written in the third quarter of the eleventh century. This work was essentially an updated version of Dudo of St Quentin's *History of the Normans*, with an additional celebration of William the Conqueror. According to William of Jumièges, when the Viking chieftain Rollo besieged the city of Bayeux, in the early tenth century, his prisoners included 'a most noble girl named Popa, and not long afterwards he bound her to himself according to the Danish custom (*more danico*)'.[60] Rollo was not at this time a Christian, so it made perfect sense for William to explain here that the ceremony was carried out according to the pre-Christian custom of Rollo's people. However, William tells us, Popa was later repudiated because Rollo was baptised and swore fealty to the Frankish king Charles III after which he 'took the daughter of this great king as his consort according to Christian custom (*Christiano more*)'.[61] But when the Frankish princess, Gisla, died childless, Rollo again took up with Popa, mother of his by then adult son, William Longsword.

History repeated itself for William Longsword who had a son Richard by, 'the noble maiden Sprota, to whom he was bound according to the Danish custom'.[62] This reference to Danish custom is more problematic since William Longsword is assumed to have been a Christian before his marriage to Sprota. William of Jumièges actually fails to mention directly that William Longsword also married Leyarda of Vermandois but he was clearly aware of it since he relates that Louis IV of France called Sprota's child the 'son of a whore (*meretricis filium*) who had seduced another woman's husband', and demanded that Richard give up his pretensions to rule Normandy because

he was illegitimate.[63]

By contrast, William of Jumièges' sources made no mention of marriage *more Danico*. Dudo of St Quentin simply said that Rollo took Popa in marriage.[64] Dudo did not imply that the marriage to Gisla was any more legitimate or claim that Popa was reinstated on Gisla's death. I would suggest that William of Jumièges was disconcerted by the fact that William Longsword had inherited Normandy given that Longsword's mother looked like a concubine or mistress by his eleventh-century standards. Bastards inheriting Normandy was something of a sensitive subject at the time and in his work William of Jumièges carefully avoided making any reference to the current duke's illegitimacy either. What William of Jumièges did not know was that actually the Frankish princess Gisla was a literary invention by Dudo, so that Popa had not been repudiated and there was no need for concern about William Longsword's legitimacy.[65]

Sprota's position was rather different. Dudo claimed that she was a legitimate wife, saying Longsword's nobles had compelled him to join with her 'for the sake of preserving the succession by hereditary right'.[66] Dudo, however, was writing for Sprota's immediate heirs and he tactfully made no mention of Leyarda. We do not know whether Sprota was a legitimate wife who was subsequently repudiated or indeed a mistress acquired during William's marriage to Leyarda and perhaps subsequently married to him, but in either case her son Richard was obviously vulnerable to Louis IV's accusations. William of Jumièges was presumably aware that Frankish chronicles called Sprota 'a Breton concubine'.[67] His reference to her marriage *more Danico* seems to have been an attempt to reconcile his conflicting sources and to make Richard appear more legitimate than Frankish authorities believed.

Interestingly William of Jumièges himself made no such claim of Danish marriage for Richard I's Danish born partner Gunnor (unlike some more recent historians).[68] Dudo, who was writing for Gunnor and her family, had tactfully implied that her relationship with Richard began after the death of his wife Emma. Dudo nonetheless admitted that it was initially what he called a 'forbidden union' (*prohibitae copulationis*) which was only later legitimised by marriage.[69] Robert of Torigni, writing much later in the mid-twelfth century plausibly implied that Gunnor was actually Richard's mistress during his marriage to Emma and explained that his subsequent marriage to Gunnor was a means of legitimising her children.[70] William of Jumièges, by contrast, said only that after Emma's death, Richard married 'according to Christian custom, a very beautiful maiden' (*speciosissimam virginem*).[71] He made no reference at all to a prior forbidden relationship. Here he had quite clearly

been economical with the truth. I would argue that his invention of the term marriage *more Danico* was part of this same sanitisation of Norman history.

Cnut (r. 1016-1035) and Ælfgifu of Northampton

So what should we make of Ælfgifu of Northampton's relationship with Cnut? Ælfgifu was an English woman whose father had been murdered and her brothers blinded in a palace coup. But theirs remained a powerful family and Cnut most likely married Ælfgifu in about 1013, on his father Swein's instructions, to assist the Danish attempt to conquer England.[72] In such circumstances there might have been no transfer of land ownership but it does appear to have been part of an alliance negotiated between families so land very likely was exchanged. Ælfgifu seems to have been a kinswoman of Morcar and Siferth who were the 'foremost thegns' in the Five Boroughs which were among those places that had submitted to Swein in 1013.[73] Ælfgifu's union with Cnut was probably part of this submission and may thus have been one of the reasons that Siferth and Morcar were 'dishonourably' murdered in Eadric Streona's chamber two years later.[74] Ælfgifu bore Cnut two sons, Swein and Harald (Harefoot), named after his father and grandfather, which would suggest that Cnut considered them worthy to inherit his possessions and status. Thus far their relationship looked like a conventional marriage and it seems reasonable to assume that contemporaries saw it as such.

However, shortly after Cnut became king in 1017 he married King Æthelred Unræd's widow, the duke of Normandy's sister, Emma. Ælfgifu disappears from the sources at this point, but re-emerges as an important political figure in the late 1020s when she acted as regent for her son Swein in Norway. On Cnut's death in 1035 she ensured that her younger son Harald became king of England, much to Emma's chagrin. No source mentions Ælfgifu being repudiated and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* enigmatically called her simply 'the other Ælfgifu' or 'the Northampton Ælfgifu'.[75]

At first sight it might look like bigamy, and some historians have suggested as much.[76] But there is no hint that Cnut cohabited with Ælfgifu after his marriage to Emma. Her situation, I would suggest, was not vastly different from that of Edgar's wife Wulfthryth, although Wulfthryth exercised her significant post-marital political power from the less controversial space of a nunnery. At the time of his marriage to Ælfgifu, Cnut could not have guessed that just four years later his own father and Æthelred Unræd would be dead, and that marriage to Emma would be politically

essential. Many of his Anglo-Saxon predecessors had brazenly flouted church teaching on what constituted an eligible wife and many had equally set wives aside for political rather than legal reasons. In this royal tradition of allowing pragmatism to triumph over church teaching Cnut took his predecessor's wife as his queen and probably soon afterwards sent Ælfgifu of Northampton with their son Swein to Denmark.[77]

When Emma challenged Harald Harefoot's right to the English throne she did not try to claim that Cnut's union with her predecessor was some kind of secular or common law marriage unblessed by the church. Rather she asserted that some considered Harald to be Cnut's child by a concubine (*concubina*) whereas he was actually a servant's child and Ælfgifu had tricked Cnut into thinking the boy was his.[78] The fact that Emma felt the need to invent a servant mother for Harald suggests an awareness that the boundaries between marriage and concubinage were sufficiently blurred that a noblewoman would be assumed to be a wife rather than a concubine. More crucially, Emma asserted that she had refused to marry Cnut until he had sworn an oath that her sons would have precedence over the sons 'of any wife (*coniugis*) other than herself . . . For she had information that the king had had sons by some other woman (*alia quadam*)'. The references to Ælfgifu as a concubine and Harald as a servant's child were standard political slurs, but the account of this oath indicates that Emma well knew that Cnut's marriage with Ælfgifu of Northampton had produced throneworthy sons. I would suggest that, like Ecgwyna or Ælfgifu of York (Æthelred Unræd's wife), Ælfgifu of Northampton acquired a reputation as a concubine only because she was replaced by a wife of greater political value.

Ingibjorg Finnsdottir, Edith Swanneck and Herleva of Falaise

The same was true in Scotland of Ingibjorg Finnsdottir, wife of Malcolm III. As with Ælfgifu of York, our evidence for her identity is late and by no means certain, but Malcolm clearly had a wife in about the 1050s since he had a son, Duncan (named after his father) who later became a hostage at William the Conqueror's court and was briefly king of Scotland in 1094.[79] Yet according to Symeon of Durham Malcolm had designated the eldest child of his second marriage, Edward, as his heir.[80] This is presumably why William of Malmesbury believed that Duncan was a bastard and why later writers have felt the need to imagine Ingibjorg as a wife *more danico*.[81] But the Scottish throne rarely passed according to primogeniture. Malcolm's decision to favour Edward was probably motivated by a combination of Duncan's decision to remain at the Norman court even after William Rufus had released him, and the fact that young Edward's descent from Æthelred

Unræd meant that he might one day lay claim to the English throne.[82] In privileging the children of a later marriage Malcolm was doing exactly the same as his wife's ancestors Edward the Elder and Edgar had done in the previous century and as Emma had hoped Cnut would do.

Of the other eleventh-century women termed wives *more danico* by modern historians, the most elusive is Edith Swanneck, 'the woman whom the king [Harold] had loved before he became ruler of the English'.[83] It is beyond the scope of this paper to disentangle the many romantic notions and academic theories that have been built on the Waltham Chronicler's brief mention of Harold's lover, although I hope to present the evidence on Edith in the detail it deserves at a later time. Given the range of ages to be found among Harold's bastard children, it seems plausible to accept that he had a number of mistresses and that Edith was simply the one known to the canons at Waltham because she lived near their abbey. Even Freeman did not call this a marriage *more danico*, although he depicted Edith's loss in 1066 as emblematic of the tragedy that had befallen England and suggested that Harold's liaison with her was 'perhaps not wholly condemned by the standard of his own age'.[84]

The case of William the Conqueror's mother, Herleva, is similar. As Eleanor Searle argued, the story that Herleva was the daughter of a tanner or someone who prepared corpses for burial should be seen as nothing more than insults of the same kind as those levelled at the mothers of Æthelstan and Harald Harefoot.[85] Herleva was the daughter of duke Robert's chamberlain and thus belonged to a respectable family, albeit not a noble one like Ælfgifu of York or Ecgwyna. If Herleva's status had been akin to that of Popa or Sprota William of Jumièges would surely have recorded her existence. Contemporaries were in little doubt that William was a bastard.[86] But Norman dukes were not bound by the same quasi-priestly ideals as English kings. A generation later Henry I of England emphasised this difference between kings and less exalted lords when he chose to support Eustace de Pacy, bastard son of William de Breteuil, in his claims to inherit his father's Norman lordship, yet did not consider any of his own bastard sons fit to succeed himself as king when his only legitimate son died.[87] This concern for legitimate kings could have undermined William the Bastard's own claim to be king of England, but the stigma of his birth was outweighed by the overwhelming divine support he was deemed to have revealed by his victory at Hastings.

Conclusion

It was a century and a half ago that Edward Freeman first applied the concept of marriage *more*

danico to Ælfgifu of Northampton's relationship with Cnut but in the last thirty years or so the term has increasingly been applied to other royal relationships and discussed as a form of secular marriage that reveals Viking influence in Normandy and Britain. I have argued that marriage *more danico* was William Jumièges' invention, adopted to make his history more edifying and to reconcile conflicting sources. Furthermore it is illogical to apply the term to eleventh-century relationships, which were actually strikingly similar to those of the previous century. Throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries relationships which the king and an eligible noblewoman entered into as marriage could produce throneworthy children even if political necessity meant that the marriage was later abandoned. Therefore, the most apt description for these supplanted women remains that which Sir Frank Stenton applied to Ælfgifu of Northampton: a 'temporary wife'.[88]

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1 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum. The History of the English Kings*, ed. and trans. by R.A.B. Mynors, R.M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998-99), I, 237.

2 *Memorials of Saint Dunstan Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. by W. Stubbs, Rolls Series, 63 (London, 1874), p. 32.

3 *Memorials of Dunstan*, p. 33.

4 Eadmer of Canterbury, *Lives and Miracles of Saints Oda, Dunstan and Oswald*, ed. and trans. by A. J. Turner and B. J. Muir (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), pp. 26-9.

5 *The Liber Vitae of the New Minster and Hyde Abbey*, ed. by S. Keynes (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1996), p. 94.

6 F. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 366.

7 P. Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers: the King's Wife in the early Middle Ages* (London: Batsford Academic and International, 1983), p. 16

8 'because they were related'. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, A Collaborative Edition, MS D*, ed. by G. Cubbin (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996), s.a. 958.

9 R. Mazo Karras, *Unmarriages. Women, Men and Sexual Unions in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), p. 24.

10 C. Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 126-41.

11 *English Historical Documents c. 500-1042*, ed. by D. Whitelock, 2nd edn. (London: Eyre Methuen, 1979), no. 50.

12 P. Stafford, 'Women and the Norman Conquest', *TRHS* 6th series, 4 (1994), 221-249 (239).

13 *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, ed. and trans. by A. J. Robertson (Cambridge, 1939), p. 95

14 *Charters of Rochester*, ed. A. Campbell (London: British Academy, 1973), p. 34. It is of course possible that this Ælfgifu was a different woman from either of the king's known wives, yet the fact that these wives did not witness any surviving charters and the coincidence of name make it more likely that she was Edgar's mother.

15 James Brundage, 'Concubinage and Marriage in Medieval Canon Law', in *Journal of Medieval History* l (1957), 1-17, (2).

16 Brundage, 'Concubinage and Marriage', pp. 1-17.

17 *Historical Documents*, no. 191.

18 Robert Deshman, '*Christus rex et magi reges*: Kingship and Christology in Ottonian and Anglo-Saxon Art', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 10 (1976), pp. 367-405.

19 B. Yorke, 'Æthelwold and the Politics of the Tenth Century', in *Bishop Æthelwold. His Career and Influence*, ed. by Yorke (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1988), 65-88 (66); B. Yorke, 'Edward as Ætheling', in *Edward the Elder 899-924*, ed. by N. J. Higham and D. H. Hill (London,: Routledge, 2001), 25-39 (33-4).

20 This would explain the later rumours that she was a concubine. William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, p. 207.

21 Æðele meant noble and was the prefix for many names in the royal family. Æthelstan was the name of King Æthelwulf's eldest son (Alfred's eldest brother).

22 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, p. 225.

23 In the twelfth century it was recorded that Æthelstan's accession to the throne was challenged by 'a certain Alfred' on the grounds that his mother was a concubine. William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, p. 207. The shepherdess story is also retold by William of Malmesbury who makes it clear that he does not believe it. The miracle it includes was clearly meant to indicate that Æthelstan's reign was God's will and that this overrode any concerns about the king's illegitimacy consequent on Edward's subsequent marriages. William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, pp. 225-7.

24 J. L. Nelson, *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe* (London: Hambledon, 1986), p. 367.

25 *Charters of New Minster, Winchester*, ed. by S. Miller (Oxford: British Academy, 2001), pp. 27, 31.

26 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, p. 227. As Stenton argues, it is likely that Edwin's death by drowning was an accident rather than at Æthelstan's behest, but the reason he was in that ship was political upheaval, Stenton, pp. 355-6.

27 *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. by. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 390-92,

28 Regino of Prum, *Chronicon*, s.a. 887 in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores*, I (Hannover: Anton Hierseman, 1963), p. 597.

29 J. Brundage, *Law, Sex and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 136, 188-9.

30 C. N. L. Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 132-3.

31 Stafford, *Queens, Concubines*, p. 70.

32 Eadmer of Canterbury, *History of Recent Events in England*, trans. by G. Bosanquet (London: Cresset Press 1964), p. 127

33 *Alfred the Great. Asser's* Life of King Alfred *and other contemporary sources*, ed. by S. Keynes and M. Lapidge (London: Penguin, 1983), p. 73.

34 Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred*, p. 73.

35 Yorke, 'Æthelwold and the Politics', p. 70.

36 In 1139 King Stephen's representative at the Second Lateran Council argued that the Empress Matilda had no right to the English throne because her parents, Henry I and Edith of Scotland, had not been legally married. *The Correspondence of Thomas Becket Archbishop of Canterbury 1162-1170*, ed. by A. Duggan, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), II, 1365.

37 Pauline Stafford, 'The king's wife in Wessex 800-1066,' in *Past and Present* 91 (1981), 3-21 (13).

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39 Barbara Yorke, 'The Legitimacy of St Edith', *Haskins Society Journal*, 11 (2003), 97-113 (104).

40 *Memorials of Dunstan*, p. 111; Eadmer of Canterbury, *Lives and Miracles of Saints Oda, Dunstan and Oswald*, ed. and tr. by A. J. Turner and B. J. Muir (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), pp. 44-5, 134-5.

41 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, I, 261.

42 A. Wilmart, 'la Légende de Ste Édith en prose et vers par le moine Goscelin', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 56 (1938), 5-101, 265-307, (41).

43 Yorke, 'Legitimacy', p. 113; Susan Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 142. This continued influence may have provoked her successor as queen, Ælfthryth, to expel Wulfthryth's kinswoman, Wulfhild, from Barking Abbey. Pauline Stafford, 'Queens, Nunneries and Reforming Churchmen. Gender, Status and Reform in Tenth and Eleventh-Century England', *Past and Present*, 163 (1999), 3-38 (26).

44 *Memorials of Dunstan,* p. 423.

45 Byrhtferth of Ramsey, *The Lives of St Oswald and St Ecgwine*, ed. and trans. by M. Lapidge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009), pp. 84-5.

46 Eadmer, *Lives*, pp. 136-7.

47 Nelson, *Politics and Ritual*, p. 370. But see also Lapidge's comments in Byrhtferth, *Lives*, pp. 110-11.

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62 *Gesta Normannorum*, I, 78-9.

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64 Dudo of St Quentin, *History of the Normans*, ed. and trans. by E. Christiansen (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998), p. 39

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68 Allen Brown, *Normans*, p. 17.

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71 *Gesta Normannorum*, I, 128-9.

72 Bolton, 'Ælfgifu', p. 252.

73 *Charters of Burton Abbey*, ed. P. H. Sawyer (Oxford: British Academy, 1979), p. xliii; *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles,* s.a. 1013, 1015. Siferth and Morcar were called the foremost thegns of the Seven Boroughs which Stenton suggested included the Five Boroughs.

74 *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles,* MSS E s.a. 1015.

75 *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles,* MSS C and D s.a. 1035.

76 F. Barlow, *The Godwins. The Rise and Fall of a Noble Dynasty* (Harlow: Longman, 2002), p. 39.

77 Bolton, 'Ælfgifu', p. 260.

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83 *The Waltham Chronicle*, ed. by L. Watkiss and M. Chibnall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 54-5.

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85 Eleanor Searle, 'Possible History', *Speculum*, 61 (1986), 779-786 (784).

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