

'Ego Cnuto' - a Winchester Document with Scandinavian Implications

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The above document, which is now among the muniments at Winchester, is dated to the first week after Easter 1019 and was promulgated by Cnut as King of England. It is registered as WCM 12093 and is accepted as genuine by Stenton (1955), Finsberg (1964) and *Danmarks Riges Breve* (1975).¹ My paper will consider the historical significance of the document and also some facts from this era, connected to some of the leading persons mentioned in it. The document results from a situation which must have caused Cnut some embarrassment, since it seems to expose a previous case of fraud, by which he had been deceived. Some land at Drayton (Hampshire) had to be given back to the monks of New Minster, Winchester after a local citizen had asked the King for it and wrongly convinced him that he had the right to dispose of it.

It is a Christian document, which begins with an initial monogram of the name of Christ which is six lines high (P with X). In the first line are the names of Christ, the Saviour and the Trinity. Not until line 5 is the King himself mentioned, in words of praise directed towards his English subjects rather than himself: he is *Ego Cnuto inclite ac speciosae gentis anglorum regnator basileus* 'I, Cnuto, royal ruler of the famous and excellent people of the English'. Despite his Viking origins, of which some details later, this document reinforces a traditional view about Cnut and his reign over England: that he was a pious Christian king. He enjoyed the full support of the English church, and his attitude to the monks of New Minster can be seen in his *libenti animo*, 'with a willing mind' in the King's mark at the end of the document.

The land in question is mentioned in line 8 and as the last item of its boundary list from lines 16 to 18, 'into draegtune' (see Appendix). The amplitude of land is given as five 'cassati', homesteads. - In a document from 1023 in *Danmarks Riges Breve* (No.415) Hannington is mentioned, a hamlet of seven cassati; here it is confirmed by King Cnut that one of his thegns, *Leofwine minister*, is to have hereditary possession of his hamlet. Here a value is mentioned, because the thegn had obtained the hamlet from King Æthelred for one pound of gold. So, the five cassati from WCM 12093 may be seen in comparison to this idea of value at the time. The last witness in WCM 12093 is likewise *Leofwine minister*; obviously, the same man who was a thegn in 1019 remained so in 1023.

In line 6 the monastery New Minster is mentioned as *coenobio quod novellum dicitur*, 'situated in the famous and populous city of Wintonia' (Winchester). Then it seems that the King himself inquires (*inquo*) and puts an end this day (*hodie*) to a curious deception (*mirifica decepter*). To the deception are linked two names in the genitive, *Iudoci* and *Grimbaldi*, obviously in the context of their having taken the land as booty (in war). Their names would be *Iudocus* and *Grimbaldus* in the nominative, and there is also a third person, the unnamed citizen, who wrongly convinced King

¹ After an inquiry to Winchester, I received a copy of WCM 12093 from Dr. Roger Custance, the Archivist of Winchester College, in December 1987.

Cnut that he had the right to dispose of the *Draegtun* land. The description of the anonymous fraudster as *adolescens animosus*, 'an audacious youth' (l.10), may suggest that some mercy was shown to him. Regarding Iudocus and Grimbaldus, however, there is no clue, nor are they found in the description of WCM 12093 as document No. 395 of *Danmarks Riges Breve*.

There is little doubt that the monks of New Minster must have played a large role in the drafting of the document. The Christian spirit of the document is also underlined by its concluding line, desiring glory and felicity to all true savants within the church. Some characteristics of King Cnut's religious side can be seen in the following descriptions. First a short but positive picture of how some religious persons met him: With gladness sang the monks of Ely, when Canute the Great rowed past them, says Renée Watkins in the Swedish version of *The Fires of Faith (Trons eldar)*.² In *Vikingerne* (1981, 180) Palle Lauring writes that Knud became a profound Christian and gave away his crown to Canterbury, where it became a votive crown on the great crucifix of the church. In *Vikingerne i England* (1981, 159) Peter Sawyer writes that Knud ruled as a Christian king, made a pilgrimage to Rome, was entirely supported by the English bishops, and was buried in Winchester when he died in 1035. In *The Birth of Britain* (1956, 111) Sir Winston S.Churchill writes on King Canute from *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, cited by Langebek (1773): 'When he entered monasteries, and was received with great honour, he proceeded humbly; keeping his eyes fixed with a wonderful reverence on the ground, and, shedding tears copiously – nay, I may say, in rivers – he devoutly sought the intervention of the Saints. But when it came to making his royal oblations, oh! how often did he fix his weeping eyes upon the earth!'³ To these descriptions of his humble reverence one should add that there exists a remarkable contemporary picture of him, probably giving a true comprehension of him, looking Nordic. The picture, dated to ca.1031 (Backhouse,1992, 334), shows him with his Queen, placing a golden cross in a church.⁴

We now turn to his Viking side, which may be described by another picture, which is not contemporary.⁵ It is a symbolic battle composition, which shows *Cnuto Rex Dacie* on horseback, with his sword attacking Edmund Ironside. On Cnut's shield are painted two Viking ships, and the whole appearance of Cnut might symbolize the means, by which he came to power in England - a Viking army and a fleet. After the death of King Svein in February 1014, the Danes had to withdraw from England, and it will then have been a heavy task for Cnut, only twenty years old, to return to England as soon as the following year. But a pact (Adam, II:52/50, 291) was concluded by Cnut and his half-brother Olof, the Swedish king. Supported by this,

² 'Merie sungen ðe muneches binnen Ely
 Ða Cnut ching reu ðer by.
 Roweþ cnites noer the iant
 And here we þus muneches sæng.'

(From the *Liber Eliensis* (Book II, ch. 85, ed. Blake ; trans. Fairweather, 182).

³ *Encomium Emmae Reginae* (ch. 21), ed. Alistair Campbell, 36-37.

⁴ This illustration is on fol. 6r of MS London, BL Stowe 944 (see James Campbell (1982), p. 208; Donovan, *Vikingarna* (1965), p. 143; Backhouse (1992), 103). For a detail of this picture of Cnut, see my handout.

⁵ See Donovan (1965), 144. A detail of this picture will also appear in my handout.

Cnut decided to conquer England. With the document of 1019 in mind, only four years had elapsed since Cnut's attack on England in 1015. Hostilities did not end until after the death of Edmund Ironside, and Cnut had only sent the main part of the fleet back to Denmark in 1018.

Sandwich in Kent was the first landing place both 1013 and 1015, but in 1013 there followed a fast sailing to the Humber and the River Trent. The fleet moored at Gainsborough with Cnut as its Commander-in-Chief, while King Svein operated in the south of England. Now, in 1015, with Cnut in sole command, the land operations started from Sandwich and made for Dorset, where Wareham was reached without any resistance. His forces were from Denmark, to some extent also from Sweden, and from Norway under *Yric dux*, Earl Eirik, his brother-in-law, the victor in the sea battles at Hjörungavag and Svold. London was still in the hands of King Æthelred, and when he became incapable through illness, Cnut's antagonist became Edmund Ironside, who managed to raise military forces in Wessex and to win a victory at Otford in Kent. At Ashington in Essex, Cnut won the victory, and the ensuing treaty agreed that Edmund was to hold Wessex and the Western Provinces, while Cnut was to have the rest of England. Earlier in the war, Uhtred, Earl of Northumbria was conquered by Cnut and subsequently murdered. *Yric dux*, Earl Eirik from Norway was made the new Earl of Northumbria. Edmund Ironside suddenly died in November 1016, and Cnut became King of England in 1017.

The few years preceding the drafting of the 1019 document had thus been a time of war and chaos in England. Terrible things had also hit the church. Already in 1012 Ælfeah, Archbishop of Canterbury, suffered martyrdom, but this was before Cnut had influence on the situation in England. War booty takers were probably abundant. The case of the land at *Draegtun* was finally solved, with the name mentioned in line 8 and later in the boundary list's *into draegtune*.

From an article on its modern name, Drayton, it appears that it is situated in Barton Stacey on the Test in Hampshire (Ekwall, 1932). Thus, *Draegtun* will have been in what is now the area of the junction between the Highways A34 (North/South) and A303 (East/West).

From the document have hitherto been presented some parts of the texts of in all 28 lines of text and names from a rectangular space of about 33x26 cm; twenty lines of text, seven lines for the witnesses and the concluding line, *desiring glory and felicity*. - The King's name in line 5 was already given, and his name can also be read in line 20. For his mark, as for the marks of the witnesses, there is a cross, and then: *Ego CNUTO rex anglorum hoc documentum libenti animo concessi atque roboravi*, 'I, Cnuto, king of the English, have granted and confirmed this document with a willing mind'. After the King are the two archbishops. Lyfing has confirmed the attestation by the testimonies; Wulfstan has agreed. Their full names are: *Ego Lyfing dorobernensis ecclesiae archiepiscopus*; *Ego Wulfstan eboracensis archiepiscopus*. In 1013 Lyfing had succeeded archbishop Ælfeah, who in 1012 suffered martyrdom. The place-names for the archiepiscopal sees can partly be explained via Latin *Duruvernum Cantiacorum* for Canterbury (from Celtic *dur-whern* 'rapid stream', Gauffin, 1966, 29) and Latin *Eboracum* for York (from Celtic *eburos* 'yewtree', Gauffin, 1966, 121). The Queen's witness is recorded in the sentence: *Ego ælfgifu eiusdem regis conlateranea adiuvi*. 'I, Ælfgifu, the same king's consort, have supported'. King Cnut and Queen

Emma married on 2nd July, 1017. She had previously been married to King Æthelred, who died on 23rd April, 1016. Then follows the witness of five bishops, each recorded in a different verbal form: '(has) recommended, confirmed, conformed, written and acquiesced'. The remaining witnesses are six earls (*duces*), five abbots and twelve thegns (*ministri*). The identities of the six earls will be discussed; five of them were members of Cnut's Anglo-Scandinavian entourage, but the last, Regnold, was a Swedish career diplomat, Rögnvaldr Úlfsson, jarl of Västergötland. The names of the six earls in the charter are: *Ego thurkil dux. Ego yric dux. Ego godwine dux. Ego elaf dux. Ego leofwine dux. Ego regnold dux.*

Because of the support given to him by his half-brother Olof, Cnut decided to conquer England, as mentioned. This 'family pact' from 1014/1015 is reported to us from the 1070's (Adam, 1978, 291). So it will be relevant to this paper to give a short description of their shared genealogy. In my view, and according to Adam of Bremen (Adam, 1978, 270), the mother of both Olof and Cnut was Sigrid Storrada. But according to Thietmar, the mother of King Svein's sons was a daughter of Mieszco (*dux*) of Poland (Thietmar, 1974, 397). This daughter is obviously the same person as the Gunnhild named by Snorre (*Hkr.* I, 34). An acceptable solution of the question in this context might be arrived at from five sources:

1. Thietmar is perhaps the only one of these sources where the right name, *Miseconus* (Mieszco) is given to king Svein's Polish father-in-law. However, Sigrid Storrada's Danish son cannot have had Gunnhild as his mother. If my thought is accepted, Queen Gunnhild had one son with king Svein; this was Cnut's half-brother on his father's side, Harald, King of Denmark 1014-1018.

2. Adam of Bremen, in scholion 24 (Adam, 1978, 270) mentions a pact between King Eric (*Hericus rex Sueonum*) and 'Boleslaw' (an error for Mieszco), one of whose daughters was to be wedded to King Eric. This will have been Sigrid. The role of Skoglar-Toste is of course a problem in this context, but he might have been a bridesman, who made the necessary diplomatic arrangements, and was probably regarded as if he were her father. These comments by Adam (Adam, 1978, 270) postulate Sigrid Storrada as a sister of Boleslav Chrobry (992-1025), who was the son of Mieszco.

3. Saxo mentions king Svein's wedding to the widow of King Eric of Sweden. In this context Saxo also gives the name of Syritha (Sigrid) as the mother of two sons, Olof with King Eric and Cnut with King Svein (L. Weibull, 1948, 310-11).

4. The *Gesta Cnutonis* mentions that after the death of King Svein, Harald and Cnut went to Slavia and brought their mother from there (L. Weibull, 1948, 311). A conclusion of the statements here should be, that they brought Harald's mother and Cnut's mother's sister (i.e. Gunnhild) from Slavia.

5. Snorri writes (*Hkr.* I, 34), that earl Sigvalde forced King Svein to make peace with Mieszco on condition that two marriages took place: King Svein was to marry Gunnhild, daughter of Mieszco, and Mieszco was to marry Tyra, sister of King Svein (I have substituted the name of Mieszco here for that of Boleslaw/Burislav, with whom this episode is wrongly connected by both Adam and Snorri).

Sigvalde himself was married to Astrid, the daughter of Mieszco, and Olav Tryggvason had been married to Geira, a sister of Astrid. There are thus four names to

consider: Astrid, Geira, Gunnhild and Sigrid (Gunnhild and Sigrid should probably be interpreted as two different people).

After considering the family of King Cnut, I shall now turn to the historical issues that arise in connection with the six earls named in our document. Five of them were members of king Cnut's Anglo-Scandinavian entourage, but the last, *Regnold dux*, must certainly have been on a diplomatic mission to England. In the sagas he is called Rögnvaldr jarl Úlfsson. In Swedish he is 'västgöta-jarlen Ragnvald'. However, it has also been maintained, that he had traits of an earl of the Swedish kingdom (Tunberg, 1940, 106). The prominent positions occupied by his sons Ulf and Eilif Ragnvaldsson may strengthen the idea that their father had enjoyed a similar status.

Ragnvald jarl had helped to negotiate peace between Sweden and Norway. In order to confirm the peace, a marriage was arranged between Astríör, daughter of King Olof of Sweden, and king Óláfr Haraldsson (later St. Oláfr). Earl Ragnvald was probably in England to report to king Cnut on this marriage. After years of hostilities between Sweden and Norway, the year 1019 became a year of peace. The marriage of Astríör had taken place at Borg about Candlemas, with Earl Ragnvald as her bridesman (*Hkr.* II, 91, 118 and II, 92, 118-19). After the marriage he went back to Götaland. However, his presence in England at Easter 1019 suggests that he might have sailed directly from Norway to England. More travelling was to follow for him in 1019, because in the summer, Ingigerör, Astríör's sister, went to marry King Jaroslav of Russia (*Hkr.* II, 93, 119-120), with Ragnvald jarl as her bridesman. Before this, he is said to have been in Öster-Götland, so he was in Sweden, notwithstanding Olof Skotkonung's anger against him. He accompanied Ingigerör to Russia, became Earl of Aldeigjuborg (Staraya Ladoga) according to her wishes, and stayed there until his death about 1030, after which his son, Earl Eilif, became his successor (*Fgrsk.*, 1985, 227). His other son was Earl Ulf, and both sons had helped to negotiate the peace between Sweden and Norway. In the war of ca. 1025-1026, Ulf and Eilif Ragnvaldsson were the commanders of the Swedish fleet which fought against king Cnut at Helgeå (Moberg, 1989, 12). The knowledge about the peace negotiations by Ragnvald jarl and his sons originates from *Sigvat the Skald* (Moberg, 1985, 10-11).⁶

I have discussed Earl Ragnvald first, but in the document he is mentioned last. The first of the six earls in the document is Earl Thurkil, 'Torkil the Tall'. He was already a leader against England in 1009-1012. He gained what was then the highest ever Danegeld of 48,000 pounds, and then agreed to serve King Æthelred with forty-five ships, which were stationed on the River Thames (Sawyer, 1981, 158). Torkil was a brother of earl Sigvalde of Jomsborg fame. Heming was another brother of Torkil and was also one of the leaders in 1009. The third leader then was the Danish Earl Eilif, one of the six earls of 1019. *Elaf dux* (Earl Eilif or Eglaf) lived until the 1030's, as he was in England when king Canute died in 1035, according to a Welsh chronicle. Thurkil dux probably lived until 1024. We have a contemporary document about the Danegeld, in the form of the Yttergårde rune-stone in Uppland. It tells us that 'Ulfr took three gelds in England: first was Tosti's geld, then Thurkil's geld, then Knútr's

⁶ On Ragnvald jarl's presence in England in 1019, see also Matts Dreijer (1983), 229 and note 16.

geld'. The Tosti referred to here is Skoglar-Toste (*Hkr.* I, 91, 283 and Jansson, 1956, 38).

There were some former Joms-Vikings in the forces of Earl Thurkil in 1009 (cf. Stenberger (1967), 79 and Lauring (1981), 155). As Thurkil and Eilif were leaders in 1009 and witnesses in 1019, it is also worth describing some relations of the Joms-Vikings. Heming was one of the leaders in 1009, and as the 'Hemingr jarl' of *Flatayarbók* he was also on the attacking side at Fyrisvold and obviously survived. The father of Thurkil and his brothers was Strút-Haraldr jarl, the third last king of Scania (Ohlmarks). At his death he was succeeded as king by his brother Toke, Torgils Spragalæg's father Toke Gormsson, who according to a memorial of Fyrisvold on a runic stone at Hällestad in Scania 'did not flee at Upsalum' (Nielsen, 1983, 203). The specific dates of the battles at Hjorungavag and Fyrisvold are uncertain, as is the question of which is the older. Fyrisvold may have been fought in almost any year in the 980's, while for Hjorungavag 985-987 are feasible years (the 1000-years' jubilee was held in 1986). I believe that the battle of Fyrisvold was the older one. A hint to dating might be the ten years, given by and to King Eric in his alleged agreement with Odin in the 980's. The marriage of Sigrid Storrada to King Svein is also a factor to be taken into consideration, with 995 as the year of King Cnut's birth.

Before ending this study of the Viking era, with King Cnuto's document of 1019 as its starting point, I must return to the remaining three earls, viz. *Yric dux*, *Godwine dux* and *Leofwine dux*. Eirik jarl (*yric dux*), who was perhaps the most successful of the earls, with fame gained from the battles of Hjorungavag (ca. 986) and Svold (1000), was married to Gyda, daughter of King Svein (*Fgrsk*, 1985, 164), and was hence a brother-in-law of King Cnut. In England he was made Earl of Northumbria, and here he lived until a tragic operation on his tongue's uvula (*úfr*) caused him to bleed to death, supposedly in 1023 (*Hkr.* II, 25, 26; *Knyfl.*, 1982, 120). For the battle of Svold he managed to ally the longships of Scania with his own forces and those of King Svein and Olof Skotkonungr, who probably guaranteed him control of bases on the River Gotha (Holmström, 2003, 238).

Godwine dux, a West-Saxon earl or *ealdorman*, had married Gyda (1020), the daughter of Torgils Spragalæg (Rud, 1988, 100). Torgils Spragalæg was the last king of Danish Scania (Ohlmarks), and it may be true that he lost his life at Svold (Holmström, 2003, 240). The old royal family of Scania was obviously of high rank in the days of King Cnut. Ulf jarl, the brother of Gyda, was married to Cnut's sister Estrid. Ulf became an earl both in England and in Denmark until his downfall at Roskilde ca. 1026 (Bröndsted, 1960, 89; Rud, 1988, 100). Earl Godwine lived until 1053.

Finally, *Leofwine dux*, an *ealdorman* of the Hwicce (approximately equivalent to Gloucestershire), is known as a witness to documents under King Æthelred in the 990's. Leofric, his son, was earl of Mercia from about 1023.

Summary:

The six earls of the document promulgated by King Cnuto in the week after Easter in 1019 were chosen as follows: Two were Anglo-Saxons, one of them with a wife whose relations came from Danish Scania. Two were Danes, one of them from

Danish Scania. One was a Norwegian, married to a daughter of king Svein. One was a Swede, married to a sister of Olav Tryggvason, and he was Ragnvald jarl (*regnold dux*), who ended his life as a commander near Ladoga and had previously held the rank of earl of the Swedish kingdom (*riksjarl*).

Appendix:

Boundary list of WCM 12093 from lines 16 to 18 (with w for 'wynn'; 7 = et):

Ærest of humeran east berriddel hæma mearce to tudan byrig . of tudan byrig nyþen into micel defer . 7 swa andlang micel defer to leafwinne mearce . of leafwynne mearce to þam hæþenan beorge . 7 of tham hæþenan beorge eft into draegtune.

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