

Anglo-Scandinavian Identity in the Danelaw



Figure 1

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When exploring sources on Scandinavian place names, it is important to take note that these sources, while giving vital information on Norse influence, also neglect to inform us of the amount of Anglo-Saxon place names. This is explained with Barbara Crawford's map of Scandinavian place names within England and Ireland, where Anglo-Saxon place names are only mentioned in correspondence to the Scandinavian takeover.¹⁵ As a result of this, it is important to look at regions, such as Amounderness, to gain a full insight into just how much Anglo-Saxon areas within the Danelaw were changed after its occupation in 878. As stated, the Amounderness Region, as a case study, gives historians an insight into the changes that occurred over the period of the Scandinavian occupation of the Danelaw. Not only does only show the linguistic renaming of areas, but the assimilation of two languages as a whole. There is no evidence that any place names in the Amounderness region were taken directly from Scandinavia.¹⁶ This shows Norse initiative, not to conquer and create a replica of their previously inhabited land, but to create a new living space and assimilate with locals. However, it would appear that despite the archaeological and place name evidence for the Amounderness region, the earliest substantial record of place names for the North-West come from *Domesday Book* (1086) which would have been some 180 years after the settlements were created.¹⁷ This causes difficulties when exploring how far the place name evidence is part of an Anglo-Scandinavian hybrid. Sawyer contests the argument that the Viking invaders came to England to assimilate, and takes note on the fact that the vast change in place-names actually shows that a marginal amount of natives survived, or if they did, were 'reduced to very inferior status'.¹⁸ This argument portrays the idea that settlers intended to populate the land and depose or isolate the natives. This theory is overshadowed by the archaeological evidence which portrays co-operation between the native Anglo-Saxons and the Scandinavian settlers.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.60

¹⁶ Nicholas J. Higham and Martin J. Ryan, *Place-Names, Language and the Anglo-Saxon Landscape*, p.134

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.135

¹⁸ P. H. Sawyer, *Kings and Vikings*, (Routledge LTD, 1982) p.99

shoulders of women appears to have been eased greatly by the similarities between the Scandinavian and English language.²⁹ It is explained that communication relied heavily on individuals who knew both languages.³⁰ The intermarriage and assimilation of cultures and languages would have dramatically increased the bilingual population and communicational conductors. This research portrays women as the cultural transmitters between the two societies, and emphasises their role in Anglo-Scandinavian assimilation. This further generation of Anglo-Scandinavians is referred to during Edgar's reign in 970.³¹ While their identity is debated as a whole, Van Houts notes that a neither the English nor the Danes at the time would have been able to consider themselves as 'purely genetically ethnic'.³²

The Scandinavian desire to integrate into Anglo-Saxon society can be seen from their first large scale invasion of the British Isles with the *micel here*, known as the great Danish Army. The army not only began to settle in England, but after Northumbria had been conquered it is explained in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* that 'Healfdene shared out the land of the Northumbrians, and they proceeded to plough and to support themselves'.³³ This explains how after only being in England for a short period of time, the invaders began to support themselves. This proposes that their invasion of England was so they could settle and inhabit the English landscape. This would explain the use of '-by', for Scandinavian settlements within the Danelaw.³⁴ It is possible to draw the assumption that the Vikings invaded England for trading and settlement purposes. The settlers can be seen adopting practices of the indigenous elite, such as culture and forms of lordship.³⁵ This submission to native culture displays the Scandinavians need to assimilate with Anglo-Saxon culture in order to maintain control or order in the land. However, in this case, reverse mimicry is displayed. The English

29 Sawyer, *Kings and Vikings*, p.101

30 *Ibid*, p.101

31 Van Houts, *A Social History of England; 900-1200*, p.216

32 *Ibid*, p.217

33 Dorothy Whitelock, David C. Douglas and Susie I. Tucker, *The Anglo Saxon Chronicles*, (London; Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1961) p.48

34 Wendy Davies, *From the Vikings to the Normans*, p.59

35 James Graham-Campbell, Richard Hall, Judith Jesch and David N. Parsons, *Vikings and the Danelaw*, (Oxford; Oxbow Books, 2001) p.17

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The study into the emergence of an ethnogenic Anglo-Scandinavian identity requires the exploration of both Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian histories. The *Anglo Saxon Chronicle* is extremely useful in deciphering the contemporary perceptions of the indigenous population. The chronicle can be used to explore the key events in Anglo-Saxon society, such as the settling of the Scandinavians and the Christianisation of the leaders, but is very limited when exploring the day-to-day interactions. It is because of these limitations that historians must look at the impact on items. This Anglo-Scandinavian emergence is shown through the impact on cultural items such as brooches.

Jane Kershaw describes the emergence of an Anglo-Scandinavian archaeological presence in *The Distribution of the "Winchester" Style in Late Saxon England: Metalwork Finds from the Danelaw*. She explains the appearance of an ethnogenic culture as a result of Anglo-Scandinavian communication and integration. This impact is portrayed through the mixture of native and foreign styles, typically containing both Norse and Anglo-Saxon distinctions. This change is also observed by Dawn Hadley in *The Vikings in England: Settlement, Society and Culture*. This secondary source charts the change in both societies to form a new Anglo-Scandinavian society. The whole book contains relevant information on the importance of culture, religion and economy in the ethnogenic creation of the hybrid. Hadley's perspective on the Scandinavian impact of Anglo-Saxon society gives historians information on the linguistic changes, as well as political accommodations between the two cultures.

The shift of culture in England is explored extensively by Elizabeth Van Houts in her book, *A Social History of England; 900-1200*. The book explores the culture of both societies and the amalgamation of the two cultures to form a singular Anglo-Scandinavian hybrid within the Danelaw. This book is an invaluable source when looking at Anglo-Scandinavian identity. The source allows historians to look at both societal structures and offers an analysis into the

coming to a conclusion on how the Norse religion was dominated by Christianity. This book, however, was not the only one to help this paper draw conclusions on the main topics. *Vikings and the Danelaw*, edited by James Graham-Campbell, among others, schools us in the importance of religion during this period as well as making us aware that the process of assimilation occurred in stages. The book draws on a number of archaeological findings which explore the depth of integration between the two cultures in the Danelaw. Naturally, this analysis is extremely important when attempting to understand the ethnogenic emergence that took place in the Danelaw.

The trade and economic impact of the settlers in Anglo-Saxon England is described by Julian Richards in *Viking Age England*. The book, although focusing on the Vikings in England, explains the trade between the two societies and the constant interaction that occurred as a result of the Danelaw's geographical location. The book also exclusively describes the use of grave goods and hoards in England and the results of Anglo-Scandinavian interaction. This amalgamation of the two societies is further explained in *Archaeology, Economy and Society; England from the Fifth to the Fifteenth Century* by David Hinton. The study looks at the change in economy, and mentions the Danelaw and the shift in economic structure. This can be seen, and is described as, a result of Anglo-Scandinavian communication. The cultural and economic diversity of the Scandinavians can be seen in *Ibn Fadlan's account of Scandinavian Merchants on the Volga in 922*. The source describes interaction of an Arab trader with the Vikings, and his shock at some of their daily regimes. The contemporary source also explains the economic diversity of the Scandinavians and their ability to trade beyond borders and countries. This is seen through archaeological evidence at Cuerdale and the place-names in Amounderness.

All of these sources are crucially important when exploring the creation of an Anglo-Scandinavian identity within the Danelaw. They allow readers to analyse archaeological information and primary sources which explain how the Scandinavians impacted England and assimilated into Anglo-Saxon society through cultural, economic and religious means.