

# Waltheof: The Journey from Warrior to Saint

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The elevation to sainthood of Earl Waltheof of Northumbria, who was beheaded, ostensibly for rebellion against William the Conqueror, exemplifies the process by which non-elite and elite communities coalesced to construct a saintly cult in late eleventh- and twelfth-century England. Evidence suggests that his cult began as a popular one; the circumstances of Waltheof's death, his status as the last pre-Conquest English earl in power in 1075, and institutional and familial support for restoration of his reputation combined to nurture his cult. This journey to sainthood illustrates the importance of both the everyday devotion of the local populace and the active monastic promotion of the saint's life and cult post-mortem, both drawing upon contemporary religious and political sensibilities and hagiographical and heroic topoi with deep roots in the English past. Waltheof's journey to sanctity also serves as an example of lived religion, that nebulous confluence of individual perception and performance of faith, social and communal perceptions, performances, and systems of religion (including its material components), and the social and political structures that support and reinforce these perceptions, performances, and systems.<sup>1</sup> The sources show, initially, how the hagiographical exemplars and folk traditions of sainthood, such as Guthlac and other royal saints, provided role models for Waltheof, but also how his earliest recorded miracles highlight the willingness of the local community (well in advance of any official promotion of his cult) to transform Waltheof from a controversial political figure into an English saint.

Waltheof's progress from earl to traitor to popular saint is well-documented for this period and includes both sources written soon after his death and those written a generation later in the early twelfth century. His execution in 1076 drew immediate attention from *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (hereafter *ASC*), versions D and E, and *The Easter Table Chronicle*.<sup>2</sup> Although these are by nature laconic sources, they make clear the importance of

1 Robert Orsi, "Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion," in *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*, David Hall (ed.), Princeton NJ 2020, p. 7.

2 "Appendix: The Canterbury Annals in London BL Cotton Caligula A XV," in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, vol. 8, MS F, Peter S. Baker (ed.), Cambridge 2000, pp. 129–134; hereafter *Easter Table*; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, Vol. 6 MS D, G. P. Cubbin (ed.), Cambridge 1996, 1077, p. 88; hereafter *ASC D*; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, Vol. 7 MS E, Susan Irvine (ed.),

Waltheof's death to contemporaries and provide insight into the balance between opposition and accommodation to the first decade of Norman governance by English-speaking communities. The most detailed of the early twelfth-century sources are those associated with Crowland Abbey, the *Ecclesiastical History* of Orderic Vitalis (c. 1025) and the closely related text of Waltheof's *Passio*, found in MS BM Douai 852.<sup>3</sup> Orderic, a monk with "deep-rooted English sympathies," writing within fifty years of Waltheof's death, stayed at Crowland Abbey and had access to contemporary records and to people who knew Waltheof and his wife Judith directly.<sup>4</sup> The *Passio* is part of a collection of materials relevant to Waltheof bound together with other twelfth- and thirteenth-century hagiographical texts important to Crowland.<sup>5</sup> Among Francophone writers, Geffrei Gaimar, writing in the mid-twelfth century and drawing largely from oral tradition, portrays Waltheof as somewhat culpable but also unfairly singled out when more active participants received more lenient treatment.<sup>6</sup> While our earliest sources, the Old English chronicles, portrayed Waltheof as a wronged but not necessarily saintly figure, the earliest miracles of Waltheof, contained in the Douai manuscript, along with Orderic's stories of the reactions of Crowland monks to the nascent cult, suggest that a popular cult, a product of spontaneous devotion and lived religious practices, developed well before the composition of the *Passio*. Other twelfth-century Latin historical writers acknowledge Waltheof's cult as a given, even if not always enthusiastically.<sup>7</sup> Thus, within living memory of his death, Waltheof had gone from an

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Cambridge 2004, 1076, p. 91; hereafter *ASC E*. All translations from the Old English are by M. Wendy Hennequin unless otherwise noted.

- 3 Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, Vol. II, Books III and IV, Marjorie Chibnall (ed. and trans.), Oxford 1969, p. xv; hereafter Orderic. "Vita et Passio Waldevi Comitis", in *Vita Quorundam Anglo-Saxonum: Original Lives of Anglo-Saxons and Others who Lived before the Conquest*, [J.A.] Giles (ed.), London 1854; hereafter Giles. Other Latin writers (including William of Malmesbury, John of Worcester, Henry of Huntingdon, and the Warene or Hyde Chronicle) treat of Waltheof more briefly; their perspectives will be discussed later as relevant.
- 4 C. P. Lewis, "Waltheof, Earl of Northumbria (c. 1050–1076)", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford 2004; Chibnall in Orderic, pp. xiv–xxxix.
- 5 Timothy Bolton, "Guthlac, Waltheof, Crowland, and Douai, Bibliothèque municipale MS 852", in *Guthlac: Crowland's Saint*, Jane Roberts & Alan Thacker (eds.), Donington 2020, p. 412.
- 6 Geffrei Gaimar, *Estoire des Engleis / History of the English*, Ian Short (ed. and trans.), Oxford 2009, pp. ix, xxix; ll. 5724–5727, pp. 310–311; ll. 6137–6140, pp. 332–333; Paul Dalton, "The Date of Geoffrey Gaimar's 'Estoire Des Engleis,' the Connections of his Patrons, and the Politics of Stephen's Reign", *Chaucer Review* 2007:42:1, pp. 38–39, suggests the most likely date of composition is between 1141 and 1150, about a decade later than Short and others have proposed.
- 7 Lewis 2004; William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum, History of the English*

executed traitor to a martyr with a cult promoted by a well-established, respectable abbey.

Yet Waltheof seems an unlikely saint.<sup>8</sup> The contemporary historical sources, mainly chronicles and legal documents, provide clear (though annoyingly incomplete) evidence for Waltheof's family background and early life.<sup>9</sup> His father, Earl Siward of Bernicia, came from a Danish family, but Waltheof was descended on his mother's side from several English earls, and inherited the feud that killed his father and led to Waltheof taking vengeance on the sons of Carl many years later.<sup>10</sup> *The Domesday Book* shows that Waltheof owned extensive lands.<sup>11</sup> Saga evidence memorializes his prowess and places him, erroneously, at the Battle of Hastings.<sup>12</sup> The *ASC* version D lists "*Wælpeof eorl*" [Earl Waltheof] as one of William the Conqueror's hostages after his coronation in 1066, showing that he had inherited his father's status by then.<sup>13</sup> Waltheof later took part in the 1069 rebellion against William but in 1070, William made peace with Waltheof and gave him his niece Judith in marriage as a "peace dowry" (*nomine pacis dote*).<sup>14</sup>

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*Kings*, vol. 1, R.A.B. Mynors, R. M. Thompson, & M. Winterbottom (ed. and trans.), Oxford 1998, III.253, pp. 468–471; hereafter Malmesbury *GRA*. Brian J. Levy "Waltheof 'Earl' de Huntingdon et de Northampton: la naissance d'un héros anglo-normand", *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 1975:71–72, p. 193, notes that a decade after his *Gesta regum Anglorum*, William's *Gesta pontificum Anglorum* contains a more sympathetic view of Waltheof, one which portrays him as a betrayed martyr rather than a repentant sinner; see William of Malmesbury, *The Deeds of the Bishops of England (Gesta Pontificum Anglorum)*, David Preest (trans.), Woodbridge 2002, pp. 217–218.

8 Hugh M. Thomas, *The English and the Normans: Ethnic Hostility, Assimilation, and Identity, 1066–1220*, Oxford 2003, p. 49, described him as "the rather unsaintly earl Waltheof" and speculates that his veneration "served at least implicitly as a rebuke to the new regime."

9 Lewis 2004.

10 Lewis 2004; Richard Fletcher, *Bloodfeud: Murder and Revenge in Anglo-Saxon England*, Oxford 2003, pp. 131–138. For a different interpretation see Christopher J. Morris, *Marriage and Murder in Eleventh-Century Northumbria: A Study of De Obsessione Dunelmi*, Borthwick Paper 82, York 1992, pp. 3–5; *De Obsessio Dunelmi*, in Symeon of Durham, "Historiae Ecclesiae Dunhelmensis," in *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia*, Thomas Arnold (ed.), 1882, rpt. Cambridge 2012, vol. 1, secs. 7–8, pp. 219–20.

11 Lewis 2004; "Waltheof 2" in *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, <http://www.pase.ac.uk/2/9/2021>.

12 Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway*, Lee M. Hollander (trans.), Austin 1991, p. 658; Forrest S. Scott, "Earl Waltheof of Northumbria", *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 1952:30, pp. 164–65. Against this evidence are Waltheof's youth and William of Normandy's willingness to make peace with him, despite his hostility to those who fought against him at Hastings; David Bates, *William the Conqueror*, New Haven & London 2016, pp. 254, 276.

13 *ASC D* 1066, p. 81; Lewis 2004.

14 *ASC D*, 1068 and 1071, p. 84; and *ASC E* 1069 and 1070, p. 88; Lewis 2004; Ann Williams,

With this marriage, William confirmed Waltheof in his lands and in his office as earl of Huntingdon, while Waltheof gave Judith a title and contributed his own extensive lands.<sup>15</sup> Of the marriage itself, we know only that it consolidated many landholdings in England and produced two daughters, who survived him.<sup>16</sup> King William strategically used such marriages, with their unification of lands and production of heirs, to neutralize the threat of indigenous nobility whose family ties and power bases were rooted in pre-Conquest traditions.<sup>17</sup> Waltheof was living a life very much in the world.

Even so, he and his secular peers had their eyes on eternity throughout their lives and had numerous role models for Christian behavior. Waltheof would have received religious instruction from an early age. In addition to the catechism, Orderic reports that Waltheof knew the Psalms by heart; even if a hagiographical interpolation, this suggests a common attainment among the warrior aristocracy.<sup>18</sup> As a warrior Waltheof would also have had role models among early English saints. Guthlac is an obvious example, since Waltheof was a “good friend and brother of [Guthlac’s monastery and resting place] at Crowland” (*fidus frater et adiutor ... Crulandensi*) and a benefactor of the monastery.<sup>19</sup>

Guthlac (born c. 674) was a noble warrior turned hermit whose cult was popular before 1066.<sup>20</sup> Our earliest literary source, a Latin life written by Felix within a generation of the saint’s death, emphasizes his military prowess and his elite connections.<sup>21</sup> For those who did not know Latin, several eleventh-century manuscripts contain Old English material on Guthlac, most notably the poems *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B* and an Old English tran-

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*The English and the Norman Conquest*, Woodbridge 1995, pp. 33–35; *The Warenne (Hyde) Chronicle*, Elizabeth M. C. Van Houts & Rosalind Love (eds.), Oxford 2013, pp. 24–5; Thomas 2003, p. 130; “De Comitissa,” in Giles, p. 18.

15 *Passio Waldevi*, in Giles, pp. 1–30, on pp. 1–11. The legal language for these transactions is inserted marginally in the manuscript (Douai, BM MS 852, f. 61r).

16 Both daughters married Norman nobles; Maud married twice, first to Simon de Liz, who succeeded to the earldom of Huntingdon, and later to King David of Scotland. Her second son from her first marriage was named Waltheof after his grandfather and also became a saint (Lewis 2004; Scott 1952, pp. 208–09; *De Comitissa* in Giles, pp. 19–20).

17 Thomas 2003, pp. 115–30.

18 Lewis 2004; M. J. Toswell, “Awended on Engliscum Gereorde’: Translation and the Old English Metrical Psalter”, *Translation and Literature* 1996;5.2: p. 168, notes that the psalms were among the texts most often quoted, glossed, or translated in Old English.

19 Orderic IV.ii.269, pp. 324–325.

20 Tom Licence, “The Cult of St Guthlac after the Norman Conquest”, in Roberts & Thacker 2020, pp. 385–386, 394.

21 Bertram Colgrave in Felix, *Felix’s Life of Saint Guthlac*, Bertram Colgrave (ed. and trans.), Cambridge 1956, pp. 2, 15–19.

slation of the Latin life.<sup>22</sup> Crowland's monks promoted Guthlac's cult into the twelfth century, when Orderic inserted an abbreviated version of Felix's *Life* in his *Ecclesiastical History*.<sup>23</sup> The Crowland manuscript of Waltheof's *Passio* and other material relevant to his cult also includes Guthlac's vita.<sup>24</sup> The earl donated a manor to Crowland because the monks there served St. Guthlac.<sup>25</sup> Gaimar reports that the monks of Crowland dedicated Waltheof's body to Guthlac,<sup>26</sup> presumably due to Waltheof's own devotion to the saint. Orderic recounts a vision in which Guthlac and Bartholomew confirmed Waltheof's sanctity, as well as suggesting posthumous acquisition of royalty: "Headless no more ... That was earl heretofore ... Now is king forever more" (*Acephalus non est ... Comes his fuit ... Ac modo rex est*).<sup>27</sup>

Guthlac was a warrior saint with a distinguished military career, one whom Waltheof and men of his rank could emulate while living in the world. *Guthlac A* places his life in the context of "Monge sindon geond middan-geard / hadas under heofonum þa þe in haligra / rim arisað" [There are many upon middle-earth, people under heaven, who rise in the holy reckoning],<sup>28</sup> suggesting that holiness is not limited to one class of people. Although in *Guthlac A*, the saint rejects worldly honors and evil,<sup>29</sup> the poet demonstrates his military success, and only later says that

*he mongum weard  
bysen on brytene sippan biorg gestab  
eadig oretta and-wiges heard  
gyrede hine georne mid gæstlicum wæpnum*<sup>30</sup>

22 Colgrave in Felix 1956, pp. 19–20.

23 Orderic, IV.ii.268–279, pp. 322–339. This postdated the revised Old English version of Guthlac's life; see Licence 2020, p. 385.

24 Timothy A. Bolton, "Guthlac, Waltheof, Crowland and Douai, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 852," in Roberts & Thacker 2020, pp. 408–425.

25 Orderic, IV.ii.285, pp. 344–345; Scott 1952 discusses this (pp. 163, 195, 197) but he is dubious that the gift to Crowland was ever made; Scott's information comes mainly from Orderic, IV.ii.285, pp. 344–345. Chibnall in Orderic, p. 344n2, repeats his arguments.

26 Gaimar 2009, ll. 5721–5740, pp. 310–311.

27 Orderic, IV.ii.289, pp. 348–349; Susan Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults*, Cambridge 1988, p. 249, states, "The Anglo-Saxons did not, to my knowledge, create a single martyred aristocrat; nor did they seek the sanctification of 'opposition to the king'" for the period before 1066, thus raising the question of whether Waltheof was made royal in this vision to better fit traditional representations or whether intimations of royalty were already present in his story.

28 *Saint Guthlac. A. The Exeter Book I & II*, Israel Gollancz (ed.), 1895, ln. 30–32a. Early English Text Society O.S. 104 & 194, Rochester, NY 2000. Hereafter *Guthlac A*.

29 *Guthlac A*, ln. 96b–97a.

30 *Guthlac A*, ln. 174–177.

[He became an example to many in Britain, after the blessed champion, hardy in war, ascended the barrow. He girded himself eagerly with spiritual weapons.]

Guthlac has transformed himself from a worldly soldier to a *miles Christi*, a soldier of Christ. *Guthlac A* describes the saint as one of the “*Cempan gecorene Christe leofe .../... fæstan lufiað, / beorgað; him bealo-niþ and gebedu secað;*” [The chosen champions, beloved to Christ ... [who] love fasting, guard themselves from deadly hate, and seek prayer].<sup>31</sup> A warrior like Waltheof could aspire to Guthlac’s worldly and spiritual example, as both a successful warrior and a soldier of God.

As a warrior, Guthlac was generous in victory, returning a third of his booty back to the conquered.<sup>32</sup> While Waltheof was not quite as generous, he imitated Guthlac’s secular liberality in his generosity to the Church. Orderic plays up his gifts to Crowland when they were rebuilding their church.<sup>33</sup> Not surprisingly, given his family’s Northumbrian ties, Waltheof supported northern English religious houses. For example, charters link him to the admission of a relative, Morkar, into Tynemouth monastery and the refoundation of Jarrow.<sup>34</sup> He also confirmed gifts made by earlier generations of his family to the Peterborough monastery in East Anglia.<sup>35</sup> Waltheof had close ties with Thorney Abbey, also in East Anglia, where he is listed in the abbey’s *Liber Vitae*, with his wife and his father Siward.<sup>36</sup> Waltheof settled peaceably with Thorney over lands granted by Thurkill

31 *Guthlac A*, ln. 797, 808–809.

32 Felix 1956, XVII, pp. 80–81.

33 Orderic, IV.ii.285, pp. 344–45; Chibnall in Orderic, 344 n2 agrees with Scott 1952, pp. 163, 195, and 197 and Lewis 2004 that there is “no corroboration of this alleged gift” and suggests that Waltheof may in fact “have made a grant of stone from the quarries to Crowland.”

34 *Monasticon Anglicanum: A History of the Abbies and Other Monasteries, Hospitals, Frieries, and Cathedral and Collegiate Churches with the Dependencies in England and Wales*, vol. I, William Dugdale (ed.), New Edition. 1817–1830, pp. 233–39. The church at Tynemouth later came under control of St. Albans, where Judith and Waltheof are listed among those for whom the monks prayed (Scott 1952, pp. 198ff and Dugdale 1817–30, vol II, p. 220). Williams 1995, p. 66n97, gives solid reasons for doubting the charter’s authenticity, but it provides evidence of the on-going importance of Waltheof’s name and reputation for those wanting to establish legitimate claims to these lands.

35 H. Pierquin, *Recueil général des chartes anglo-saxonnes: Les saxons en Angleterre, 604–1061*, Paris 1912, pt 6, no. 74, p. 838, <https://archive.org/details/recueilgeneraloopier/page/838> (3/9 2022).

36 *The Thorney Liber Vitae: London, British Library, Additional MS 40,000, fold. 1–127*, Lynda Rollason (ed.), Edition, Facsimile and Study, Woodbridge 2015, p. 102 (transcription with notes); pp. 116–117 (description of folio 10r by Cecily Clark and Neil Ker); color plate 13 (facsimile of folio 10r).

the Dane to the monastery but later given to Waltheof by King William. The monks were satisfied with the outcome as they described Waltheof as “a saintly man and a lover of all justice.”<sup>37</sup>

Waltheof’s journey to sainthood did not begin as Guthlac’s did, with a spiritual conversion or even with his emulation of the saint’s more worldly aspects. Events leading to Waltheof’s sainthood began with a failed revolt. Both the D and E versions of the *ASC* implicate Waltheof in the 1075 rebellion engineered by Earls Ralph of Suffolk and Norfolk and Roger of Hereford, which led to their exile and imprisonment respectively. The *ASC* says that Waltheof attended the wedding of William FitzOsbern’s daughter (Earl Roger’s sister’s Emma) to Earl Ralph.<sup>38</sup> There, Earls Ralph and Roger plotted to depose William.<sup>39</sup> Both versions of the *ASC* agree that these two originated the plot, and that many people were present, including bishops and abbots. *ASC* D also notes that Ralph and Roger recruited Bretons and requested a naval force from Denmark.<sup>40</sup> After quelling the rebellion, William punished the Bretons at midwinter, an event so important that it is recorded in verse: “*sume hi wurdon geblende, 7 sume wreccen of lande, 7 sume getawod to scande. Þus wurdon þæs kyninges swican genyðerade*” [some of them were blinded, and some driven from the land, and some shamed. Thus the king’s traitors were brought low].<sup>41</sup>

The Old English sources present Waltheof’s part in the uprising as negligible. While both the D and E versions of the *ASC* record Earls Ralph and Roger’s specific actions, the *Chronicle* says only that Waltheof attended the wedding and says nothing of his participation in the military campaigns against the king. In contrast, during the 1069 rebellion, Waltheof appears prominently, his name occurring immediately after Edgar the Atheling.<sup>42</sup> Nor do Bishop Lanfranc’s surviving letters mention Waltheof, though they mention the other conspirators.<sup>43</sup> Finally, according to the *ASC* version D, Waltheof himself informed William of the conspiracy and offered compensation: “*7 Walþeof eorl ferde ofer sæ, 7 wreide hine sylfne, 7 bæd*

37 Scott 1952, pp. 187–188; Lewis 2004; Facsimile of *The Red Book of Thorney* (Cambridge MS Add. 3021, f. 385r – v), [https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-03021/343\\_2021-11-07](https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-03021/343_2021-11-07).

38 *ASC* D 1076, pp. 86–87; *ASC* E 1075, pp. 90–91.

39 *ASC* D 1075, p. 87.

40 *ASC* D 1076, p. 87; *ASC* E 1075, p. 91.

41 *ASC* D, 1076, pp. 87–88. Thomas 2003, pp. 59–60, notes that the revolt of 1075 was not an English rebellion against Norman rule, even though Waltheof’s involvement gave it something of that flavor. Williams 1995, p. 60, suggests that all three earls may have resented holding earldoms smaller than would have been the case before 1066.

42 *ASC* D, 1068, p. 84.

43 Williams 1995, p. 65.

*forgyfenysse, 7 bead gærsuman*” [And Earl Waltheof went over the sea, and accused himself, and asked forgiveness, and offered treasures].<sup>44</sup> Whatever Waltheof’s initial role, in this account he chose loyalty over rebellion. This required a journey to Normandy and gifts for the king, so the step must have been taken with deliberation. The *ASC* version D also tells us that “*se kyng let libhtlice of oð þæt he com to Englalande 7 hine let syððan tacan*” [the king regarded it lightly until he came to England and afterwards allowed him to be taken].<sup>45</sup> Then, as both *ASC* D and E tell us abruptly,<sup>46</sup> “*7 her wæs Walþeof eorl beheafðod on Wincestre on Sancte Petronella mæssedæg, 7 his lic wearð gelæd to Crulande, 7 he þær is bebyrged*” [and in this year (1076) Waltheof Earl was beheaded in Winchester on Saint Petronella’s mass-day, and his body was led to Crowland, and he is buried there].<sup>47</sup>

Neither version of the *ASC* gives details of Waltheof’s death, nor does the death seem a martyrdom in these sources. The only facts about Waltheof’s death about which all the sources agree originate in the *ASC*. First, both versions of the *ASC* agree on death by beheading, later dramatized by hagiographers. Secondly, the *ASC* version D and the contemporary *Easter Table Chronicle* agree on 31 May 1076 as the date of death.<sup>48</sup> The *ASC* does not connect Waltheof’s beheading to King William or the conspiracy except by implication. It is not meted out with the other punishments to the rebels at the midwinter court, and the *Chronicle* does not record another judicial event. The *Easter Table Chronicle*’s account is even more mysterious about Waltheof’s death: “*On þison gære man sloh wælþeof ii K iun*” [In this year, a person slew Waltheof, 31 May].<sup>49</sup> The implication is that Waltheof’s death was violent and unexpected: he was *slain* by an unknown assailant,<sup>50</sup> suggesting a murder important enough to be recorded in a very terse chronicle and possibly reflecting a disjunction between the legal status of Saxons and Normans in the early years of William’s reign.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, the *Easter Table Chronicle* was produced at Christ Church Cathedral Priory, seat of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Lanfranc, who served as regent during the

44 *ASC* D, 1076, p. 87; *ASC* E 1075, p. 91, reports only that the plan became known to the king (*hit wearð sona gecydd þam cyngre*) but not how he discovered it.

45 *ASC* D, 1076, p. 87.

46 *ASC* D, 1077, p. 88; *ASC* E, 1076, p. 91.

47 *ASC* D, 1077, p. 88.

48 *Easter Table*, p. 131.

49 *Easter Table*, p. 131.

50 Joseph Bosworth & T. Northcote Toller’s *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, Oxford 1983, p. 666, notes that this construction is often used in Old English to convey the passive voice. Therefore the passage could alternately be translated: “In this year, Waltheof was slain 31 May.”

51 Thomas 2003, pp. 49–50.



rebellion and must have known the details of Waltheof's condemnation and execution had they been completely official.<sup>52</sup>

Half a century after Waltheof's death, Orderic exonerates him of complicity in the rebellion and attributes his execution to the machinations of Norman nobles, using the rebellion as an excuse to gain his lands.<sup>53</sup> The Francophone writer, Geffrei Gaimar, writing sixty years after Waltheof's death, is unique in describing Waltheof as equally culpable with Earl Roger and executed as the immediate result of the uprising:

*Ço fust si feit. Treis anz après  
Raül le conte de Wäers  
fust dechascé—il se forfist.  
Li reis Willame Wallief prist.  
Li quens Wallief e quens Roger  
le rei voleient exiller;  
puis en perdit Wallief la test  
pur cel surdit.*

[Three years later [in 1075] Ralf de Waers, earl [of Norfolk], was found guilty of acting beyond the law and driven out of his lands. Waltheof [earl of Northumbria] and Roger earl [of Hereford] sought to overthrow William, and the king took Waltheof prisoner. He was then executed [in 1076] for his part in the uprising.]<sup>54</sup>

If Gaimar is correct, then Waltheof was the only conspirator to die for his participation in the plot (and indeed may be the only person William ever executed.)<sup>55</sup> Gaimar and the *ASC* agree that the Bretons were mutilated and exiled, and Orderic colorfully describes Earl Roger's life imprisonment.<sup>56</sup> There must have been a particular and strong reason for Waltheof to be singled out, not only executed but punished months after the others.<sup>57</sup> But possibly Waltheof was not put to death because of his role, whatever

52 Bates 2016, pp. 377–383.

53 Orderic, IV.ii.266, pp. 320–321.

54 Gaimar 2009, ll. 5721–5740, pp. 310–311.

55 Williams 1995, p. 59.

56 Orderic, IV, ii.264, pp. 318–319. Orderic notes not only his punishment but his scolding of any kindness shown him in prison by William, including the burning of fine garments sent to him in celebration of Easter.

57 Bates 2016, p. 387, suggests that Waltheof was executed on William's orders, not for any one act but for a pattern of untrustworthiness: "While arguably excessive in relation to Waltheof's faults in 1075–6, the sentence can be viewed as logical in relation to the history of the English kingdom since 1066"; Thomas 2003, p. 50, ascribes Waltheof's execution to differences in law for English and Normans.

it was, in the conspiracy. The *Easter Table Chronicle's* vague attribution of Waltheof's death and the *ASC's* use of the passive voice may indicate that Waltheof died mysteriously, a possibility which later contributes to his status as folk-hero and folk-saint.

Waltheof was undeniably important in his time, both as a descendant of a pre-Conquest ruling family and as a well-endowed earl, with holdings particularly in the midlands,<sup>58</sup> close to his final resting place at Crowland. The *ASC*, which seldom notes the deaths of earls, records not only his death but his participation in politics and war and his burial. Moreover, the *ASC* includes Waltheof's death among events of national and international importance: the death of the Danish King Svein, the succession of his son, and the appointment of an abbot of Westminster.<sup>59</sup> *The Easter Table Chronicle* is even more selective, focusing on events surrounding Christ Church, where it was produced. Between 1066 and 1076, for instance, the *Easter Table Chronicle* records only the death of King Edward the Confessor; the coming of William; the burning of Christ Church; two entries about Lanfranc, archbishop of Canterbury; and the death of Waltheof.<sup>60</sup> Waltheof's death is the first entry in several years, and one of the few non-local entries; Waltheof was as significant to Christ Church as its abbot-archbishop and two English kings.

Waltheof's importance endured for several centuries and spread beyond England. Snorri Sturluson in the thirteenth-century *Heimskringla* depicts Waltheof not only in his political and martial capacities but as a saint. The *Heimskringla's* "Saga of Harald Sigurtharson" records Waltheof's defeat and escape from the Norse invasion of 1066 and puts Waltheof at the Battle of Hastings where he defeats a troop of Normans by burning the forest down around them.<sup>61</sup> Sturluson conflates the aftermath of Hastings, the aftermath of the northern rebellion of 1069, and the wedding conspiracy of 1075; paints William as an oath-breaking villain; and concludes with Waltheof's sainthood:

He [William] sent word to Earl Waltheow [Waltheof] about coming to terms with him, and gave him assurance of safe-conduct ... The earl journeyed with but a few men, and when he came to the heath north of Castlebridge, he encountered two stewards of the king with

58 Lewis 2004.

59 *ASC D* 1077, p. 88; *ASC E* 1076, p. 91.

60 *Easter Table*, p. 131.

61 Sturluson 1991, ch. 85 and 96, pp. 650, 658–59; Lewis 2004.

a troop of followers. They took him prisoner and set him in chains, and later he was put to death. The English consider him a saint.<sup>62</sup>

Clearly, Waltheof's story became integrated into Norwegian literary culture and royal history. Snorri quotes from two evidently famous poems about Waltheof as part of the story,<sup>63</sup> and Waltheof also appears in the *Fagrskinna* and *Hemnings þattr*.<sup>64</sup> By Sturluson's time, Waltheof is a warrior-saint with an international reputation.

Waltheof's sanctification happened within living memory of his death. In the 1120s, Orderic places Waltheof's *passio* immediately before the *vita* of St. Guthlac in his *Ecclesiastical History* and then picks up with Waltheof's miracles, as if Waltheof's sanctity is established fact, rather than needing proof.<sup>65</sup> Gaimar, writing slightly later, also reports Waltheof's saintly reputation:

moignes furent ki l'emporterent,  
a saint Gulac le presenterent,  
en Crulande l'enspelirent;  
le cors de lui tresbien cherirent.  
Puis est sovent el liu veüz  
ke Deus en fait mainte vertuz.

[Some monks carried it [the body] off and, dedicating it to St Guthlac, reburied it at Crowland [in Lincolnshire], where it became the object of the monks' veneration. Subsequently God has been seen to perform many miracles in this place on numerous occasions.]<sup>66</sup>

Thus, within fifty years, Waltheof rose from criminal to saint in the cultural imagination, both among the educated Latin-literate churchmen and among educated Francophones. But how did this elevation to sainthood happen and why?

Waltheof's elevation did not happen immediately, nor by royal or episcopal sponsorship, but grew through folk tradition, popular worship, lived religious practices such as pilgrimage and prayer at a tomb, and Crowland Abbey's active promotion. We see the folk tradition begin in contemporary records, which emphasize Waltheof's worldly positions as earl and warrior. Yet we find some hints of Waltheof's sanctity in the *ASC* version D's brief account

62 Sturluson 1991, p. 659.

63 Sturluson 1991, pp. 650, 659.

64 Scott 1952, pp. 167–169.

65 Orderic, IV.ii.268, pp. 322–323 and IV.ii.288, pp. 348–349.

66 Gaimar 2009, ll. 5728–40, pp. 310–311.

of Waltheof informing on the conspiracy, quoted earlier. Firstly, Waltheof clearly acknowledges his fault (*wreide hine sylfne*), and offers compensation (*bead gærsuman*) according to Anglo-Saxon custom.<sup>67</sup> More importantly, Waltheof asks forgiveness (*bæd forgyfenysse*).<sup>68</sup> Waltheof is atoning for his crime, whatever it was, by both by pre-Conquest English legal custom and the Christian method of confession. Seeking forgiveness takes Waltheof's confession from a judicial action meant to avoid a feud and prove his loyalty, and renders it a pious gesture, setting the stage for his later sainthood.

Some evidence suggests that Waltheof's cult arose through the lived religious practices of common people, without official support and possibly in opposition to it. The original disposal of Waltheof's body in a ditch, an archetypal form of deviant burial, suggests an official interest in keeping his burial place secret and emphasizing his unworthiness for Christian burial and familial mourning, let alone veneration.<sup>69</sup> His later reburial at Crowland Abbey, a mark of respect for a high-status corpse,<sup>70</sup> was not necessarily a step to sainthood, merely a concession either to his widow Judith (who petitioned for the body) or to his rank and generosity during his lifetime.<sup>71</sup> Soon, local people began to pray at his tomb, and this formation of a spontaneous popular cult initiated Waltheof's transition to sainthood. A short collection of a dozen miracles, included in the manuscript of Waltheof's *Passio*, documents this stage in the process. These are written in an early twelfth-century hand but are incomplete; the last miracle ends before the supplicant appeals to Waltheof, and a note in red tells us that the rest is missing.<sup>72</sup> Most supplicants were local and sought healing from such afflictions as deafness, blindness, and lameness. Though no year is given, the

67 *ASC D*, 1076, p. 87.

68 The verb here, *biddan*, can mean both "to ask" and "to order." Waltheof may not only be asking for forgiveness, but demanding it, though politely.

69 Giles, p. 14; Orderic, IV.ii.267, pp. 322–323; Andrew Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, Oxford & New York 2009, p. 44.

70 D. M. Hadley, "Burying the Socially and Physically Distinctive in Later Anglo-Saxon England," in *Burial in Later Anglo-Saxon England, c.650–1100 AD*, Jo Buckberry & Annia Cherryson (eds.), Oxford 2010; Tim Pestell, *Landscapes of Monastic Foundation: The Establishment of Religious Houses in East Anglia, c. 650–1200*, Anglo-Saxon Studies 5, Woodbridge & Rochester 2004, p. 141. For the importance of honorable reburial, consider the example of Harold Godwinson; see Nicole Marafioti, *The King's Body: Burial and Succession in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, Toronto 2014, pp. 147–148, 154.

71 Giles, p.14; Orderic, IV.ii.267, pp. 322–3; Licence 2020, pp. 387–388.

72 Giles, p. 30 (Douai BM MS 852, ff. 67r–70v.). On dating of the manuscript, see Timothy Bolton, "Was the Family of Earl Waltheof a Lost Line of the Ancestors of the Danish Royal Family?" *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 2007:51, p. 48. For dating of the miracles see Eamon Duffy, *Royal Books and Holy Bones: Essays in Medieval Christianity*, London 2018, pp. 264–65.

miracles seem to take place in a short time, if one is to judge by phrases such as *Nec multo post* (not long after) and *Proxima debinc die* (on the very next day) between May 18 and June 22, St. Alban's day.<sup>73</sup> The supplications in these miracles show the local populace were treating Waltheof as a saint shortly after 1100. We know that some intermediary, if inaccurate, revisions of Waltheof's story must have taken place to integrate him into traditions of folk heroes and folk saints at the same time. As we will discuss shortly, Waltheof's history shared elements with earlier royal English martyrs, so it is probable that some folk versions of the story either emphasized or embellished these elements. Furthermore, when Orderic was writing in the 1120s,<sup>74</sup> a story was already circulating of a Norman monk who scoffed at those who came to Waltheof for miracles, suggesting that his popular veneration was already well-established. Finally, and most importantly, Orderic indicates that the local people knew of Waltheof's holiness before the miracles that began around 1112 during Geoffrey's abbacy (1109–1124). Orderic reports that when the miracles begin,

*quorum auditis rumoribus Angli ualde letati sunt et Anglicæ plebes ad tumulum sui compatriotæ quem a Deo iam glorificari signis multiplicibus audiunt.*

the news of them gladdened the hearts of the English and the populace came flocking in great numbers to the tomb of their compatriot, *knowing from many signs that he was already favored by God.* [our emphasis]<sup>75</sup>

The many signs (*signis multiplicibus*) show that Waltheof's sanctity was already (*iam*) accepted by the English, and in an example of popular, lived religion, began praying at his tomb before any official sanction. Except perhaps the unfinished miracles, we have no surviving primary documentation of the earlier cult, possibly because of the Crowland fire in 1091, but clearly, Orderic's miracles post-1112 had antecedents.

The monks, too, treated Waltheof as a saint without episcopal approval. Waltheof's body was given a high-status burial at Crowland's chapter house soon after his death, under the Saxon Abbot Ulfketel. In 1092, the monks translated the body to the church proper under Abbot Ingulf, a Norman appointee. While this promotion was not particularly saintly, the monks were prepared to wash bones, a common practice with saints' bones. While

73 Giles, pp. 23–30.

74 Chibnall, in Orderic, p. xv.

75 Orderic, IV.ii.288, pp. 348–349.

Waltheof's translation to the church may have been calculated to promote his cult, washing the bones indicates that the monks thought that Waltheof was a saint *already* even though Orderic suggests that no miracles occurred until 1112.<sup>76</sup> The precautions seem justified: when the monks exhumed the body, Orderic reports it was miraculously incorrupt, thus confirming Waltheof's sanctity.<sup>77</sup> Within thirty years, common people and monks were already venerating Waltheof as part of their everyday religious practices, and the strength of this practice prompted Crowland's monks to record Waltheof's miracles and commission his (hagiographical) life from Orderic, thus marking the beginning of a more established cult.

Popular cults were not uncommon, but not always Church approved. Two letters (c. 1102) from Archbishop Anselm of Canterbury show a similar cult and its official suppression. Around 1100, Anselm wrote to Archdeacon Stephan and then to the nuns of Romsey to forbid veneration of an unidentified "dead man" and to expel the dead man's son from the tomb, where he had been living.<sup>78</sup> These letters show how cults grew through spontaneous local veneration, and how those lacking institutional support were quickly suppressed. Romsey was not an isolated case. The Council of London (Westminster) in 1102 specifically forbade treating dead bodies as

76 Orderic, IV.ii.285–288, pp. 344–349; Lewis 2004. Note that Orderic's testimony can be regarded as the last possible date at which miracles began, as earlier miracles may well have been undocumented, perhaps even unnoticed, by the monastic elites who kept track of such things.

77 Orderic, IV.ii.286–286, pp. 346–347. For the translation as a promotion of Waltheof's sanctity, see Duffy 2018, p. 266; for incorruption as a sign of sanctity, see Licence 2020, p. 392.

78 Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, "Letter 236: To Stephen, Archdeacon of Winchester," and "Letter 237: To Abbess Athelits and the Nuns of Romsey," *The Letters of St. Anselm of Canterbury*, vol. 2, Walter Frölich (ed. and trans.), Kalamazoo 1993, pp. 212–214, <https://archive.org/details/lettersofsaintanoo02anse/page/212/mode/2up> (1/7 2021). [Note on copyright page: "This translation is based on the text in volume four of the critical edition of F.S. Schmitt, *osb*, *Anselmi Opera Omnia* six volumes (Edinburgh 1946–1963; rpt. Stuttgart 1968)."] Some modern scholars, including Lewis 2004 and Williams 1995, p. 64, have identified the dead man with Waltheof. While intriguing, the evidence does not support the hypothesis. Frölich, in Anselm 1993, p. 214, notes the inconsistency with Waltheof's burial at Crowland but does not note the problematic nature of this son, who is otherwise unmentioned in the sources. See Emma Mason, "Invoking Earl Waltheof" in *The English and their Legacy 900–1200: Essays in Honour of Ann Williams*, David Roffe (ed.), Woodbridge 2012, pp. 185–186. This misunderstanding arose with the seventeenth-century scholar Joannes Picardus, who is quoted in the *Patrologia Latina* edition of Anselm's letters; details in Richard Sharpe, "Romsey Abbey: Benedictine nuns of St Mary and St Ethelfleda," 2016, in "Charters of William II and Henry I Project," <https://actswilliam2henry1.files.wordpress.com/2016/10/h1-romsey-2016-1.pdf> (30/7 2022) p. 3.

saintly relics unless authorized by the bishop (canon 27).<sup>79</sup> The need to ban spontaneous veneration of unofficial saints suggests that such behavior was widespread and problematic. After 1102, the official propagation and even the unofficial existence of Waltheof's cult at Crowland depended on the good will of Robert Bloet, bishop of Lincoln (1093–1123), a member of a distinguished Norman family, chancellor for William Rufus, and someone often present at William's court.<sup>80</sup> Orderic's account marks an official promotion of Waltheof's cult in 1112, and no opposition from the see of Lincoln survives. This suggests royal and ecclesiastical acquiescence, if not approval, for the cult.

From the 1120s Waltheof's official hagiography codifies the folk and popular veneration and completes Waltheof's transition to sanctity. Most hagiographical material about Waltheof's life derives from Orderic, so we will concentrate on his version. Orderic elaborates on the scanty historical information about Waltheof in the contemporary chronicles and imbues it with Christian meaning to reconstruct Waltheof as a saint. For instance, Orderic says the conspirators "*multis eum modis temptantes talia promunt*" [tempted him with such reasoning as this ...].<sup>81</sup> Waltheof no longer attends a wedding; Roger and Ralph seek him out and *tempt* him, a particularly Christian ordeal. Orderic has Waltheof rebuff his tempters in a speech conflating English heroic and Christian values. After asserting the heroic values of loyalty to one's lord [*"integra fides"*] and fidelity to one's oath, Waltheof refers to "*apostatam et proditorem*" [the apostate and the traitor], thus equating betraying one's religion to betraying one's lord.<sup>82</sup> Orderic's Waltheof also says that betraying William would make him a "*proditor sacrilegus*" [sacrilegious traitor] – unholy as well as disloyal.<sup>83</sup> The political uprising becomes, here, a test of Waltheof's Christian faith and his integrity as a loyal thane, thus conflating the tropes of hagiography and heroic literature.

Orderic constructs Waltheof as a saint during his passion. Orderic glosses over the trial but tells us that the judgment was postponed for a year because the judges could not reach a verdict,<sup>84</sup> just as Paul's judgment is deferred in *Acts* 24. In the interim, Waltheof uses his imprisonment to pursue sanctity instead of proving his innocence or seeking revenge. He continually con-

79 *Councils and Synods with Other Documents Relating to the English Church*, vol. 1: A.D. 871–1204, Part II: 1066–1204, D. Whitelock, M. Brett & C.N.L. Brooke (eds.), Oxford 1981, p. 678.

80 Frank Barlow, *William Rufus*, Yale English Monarchs Series, 1983, rpt. New Haven & London 2000, pp. 179, 192.

81 Orderic, IV.ii.260–61, pp. 312–314.

82 Orderic, IV.ii.262, pp. 314–315, translated "apostates and traitors."

83 Orderic, IV.ii.262, pp. 314–315.

84 Orderic, IV.ii.266, pp.320–321.

fesses to unnamed sins and does penance; monk-like, he chants the psalms daily; and experiences the gift of tears.<sup>85</sup> To reinforce the point, Orderic makes it clear: Waltheof is “*Deuotus Dei cultor*” [a devoted Christian], who fulfills all the expected practices of lived religion: obedient to the clergy, generous to both the Church and poor, virtuous, good to his people, and well loved<sup>86</sup>—all the aspects of the perfect English ruler, Christian, and man.

Orderic converts Waltheof’s beheading, a probable political execution, into a martyrdom by representing Waltheof as a saint. Just before his execution, Waltheof distributes his costly clothing to local clergy and poor (*clericis et pauperibus*), a work of Christian charity and *imitatio Christi*. Orderic then shows Waltheof engaging in penitential behavior – prayer, holy tears, and lamentations – and when pressed, he begs for time, not out of a fear of death, but to pray for the executioners as well as himself, again emulating Christ. If this behavior is not proof enough of Waltheof’s holiness, Orderic renders the execution miraculous. When the executioners behead Waltheof prematurely, the severed head finishes the prayer: “*Porro caput postquam præsectum fuit cunctis qui aderant audientibus clara et articulata uoce dixit, ‘Sed libera nos a malo amen’*” [Then the severed head was heard by all present to say in a clear voice, “But deliver us from evil. Amen.”].<sup>87</sup> Waltheof not only behaves piously before death; he displays the powers of a saint immediately upon his death. If the reader still doubts that Waltheof is a saint, Orderic stresses his purity: when his body is translated, two weeks later, from its ignominious burial in a ditch to Crowland, Abbot Ulfketel finds the body fresh and incorrupt.<sup>88</sup> In other words, Orderic shows that Waltheof lived as an English warrior and earl, but he clearly *died* as a saint.

The transition from noble warrior to saint, both in the popular imagination and in official Church practice, was hardly surprising in the cultural context. Waltheof lived in a culture that acknowledged worldly and successful warriors, politicians, husbands, and fathers, as capable of living a good Christian life and also as potential martyrs and saints. While only a few in society chose a monastic existence and even fewer were recognized as saints, the lives of saints modeled good Christian behavior for a much wider audience. In pre-Conquest English culture, saints were as much warriors as those who fought invasions.

Orderic at least seems to consciously make choices that fit Waltheof in Guthlac’s mold. Guthlac’s Latin life depicts him as both worldly warrior and

85 Orderic, IV.ii.266, pp. 320–321.

86 Orderic, IV.ii.266, pp. 320–321.

87 Orderic, IV.ii.266–267, pp. 320–323.

88 Orderic, IV.ii.267, pp. 322–323.



heavenly hermit, a fit role model for both monks and for secular noblemen.<sup>89</sup> Felix describes Guthlac as a traditional warlord of his day with kingly and noble ancestry.<sup>90</sup> Waltheof, too, came from an illustrious family, including several earls of Northumbria on his mother's side and the semi-mythological descent of his Scandinavian father Siward.<sup>91</sup> Guthlac's early education included "the noble learning of the ancients in his father's hall" (*nobilibus antiquorum disciplinis aulis in paternis inbuebatur*) and a basic Christian education beginning with baptism.<sup>92</sup> Waltheof probably had a similar education. Historian Frank Barlow describes Edward the Confessor's exposure to Old English and Scandinavian heroic stories, and Waltheof, raised only a generation or two later, must have been educated similarly.<sup>93</sup> These heroic stories inspired Guthlac to take up arms, as did Waltheof.<sup>94</sup>

Orderic depicted Waltheof, like Guthlac, reciting the psalms,<sup>95</sup> probably in Old English.<sup>96</sup> And Waltheof, like Guthlac, remains a soldier during his penitent religious life. Even after he has become a hermit, Felix calls Guthlac a warrior (*comes* in Latin)<sup>97</sup> and continues to draw parallels between the worldly life of a nobleman and Guthlac's spiritual life. Guthlac's retreat becomes "a home inherited from his father" (*paternae hereditatis*

89 Licence 2020, p. 390

90 Felix 1956, pp. 74–75.

91 For Waltheof's lineage (and the associated feud), a good introduction is Fletcher 2003, especially, the genealogical tables, pp. 39 and 76. For Waltheof's paternal heritage, the same manuscript that includes his *passio* also includes a genealogy, tracing his father Siward back to a famous Norwegian bear, and another work relating Siward's own encounters with a dragon. See Douai BM MS 852, ff. 58r–60v; Giles, pp. 5–10.

92 Felix 1956, XI, pp. 78–79 (translated by Colgrave).

93 Frank Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*, New Haven 1997, p. 13.

94 Felix 1956, XVI, pp. 80–81.

95 Toswell, M. J. "Awended on Englisum Gereorde: Translation and the Old English Metrical Psalter," *Translation and Literature* 1996:5.2, p.168, notes that the psalms were among the texts most often quoted, glossed, or translated in Old English.

96 Giles, pp. 13–14. Waltheof's knowledge of the psalms has caused much discussion among scholars. Some see it as an indication that he may have been destined for a religious career (e.g. Chibnall in Orderic, p. 320 n1) but the historicity of the death scene found in the *Passio* and in Orderic's *History* is questionable. The fact that neither the anonymous hagiographer nor the historian Orderic speculate on when or how he learned the psalms suggests that this may well have been a common element of religious education for someone of his social class. This is borne out by several examples of non-clerical study of the psalms; see Julia Crick, "Learning and Training" in *A Social History of England, 900–1200*, Julia Crick & Elisabeth van Houts (eds.), Cambridge, UK 2011, pp. 352–372, especially 362–363.

97 Colgrave in Felix 1956, p. 189, renders the Latin *comes* as *ge-sið* rather translating into modern English or using *ge-fera*, as is found in the Old English prose translation of Guthlac's story. All three words mean literally companion but should be understood as warrior or thane in this cultural context.

*habitaculum*),<sup>98</sup> where he miraculously heals two other *comites* and hosts King Æthelbald of Mercia.<sup>99</sup> But despite these worldly ties, in Felix and *Guthlac A and B*, Guthlac transforms into a *miles Christi*: “girding himself with spiritual arms against the wiles of the foul foe, he took the shield of faith, the breastplate of hope, the helmet of chastity, the bow of patience, the arrows of psalmody, making himself strong for the fight” (*praecinctus spiritalibus armis adversus teterrimi hostis insidias scutum fidei, loricae spei, galeam castitatis, arcum patientiae, sagittas psalmodiae, sese in aciem firmans arripuit*).<sup>100</sup> Guthlac may be a spiritual warrior, but he is a warrior still. And Guthlac’s “bow of patience, [and] the arrows of psalmody” may have directly influenced Orderic’s depiction of Waltheof’s penitential practices. Waltheof, at least according to Orderic, emulates Guthlac’s example by giving up his military career and turning to prayer and fasting.

While Guthlac’s life had some obvious parallels to Waltheof’s, other royal or noble saints followed similar patterns. These saints may have served as role models for Waltheof’s life but certainly became templates for his legend once his cult (both popular and clerical) began to flourish. Waltheof exhibited conventional piety during his life, hardly signs of someone destined for martyrdom and sanctity. Nevertheless, the example of these royal saints may well have reassured him, and the people who later venerated him, that worldly office and a warrior lifestyle were compatible with sanctity and Christian piety. Saints Oswald, Edwin, Edmund, Kenelm, Edward the Martyr, Æthelberht, and Æthelred, for example, were all kings or kings’ sons and died violently, several because of treachery.<sup>101</sup> These royal saints therefore not only may have inspired Waltheof during his lifetime but served as exemplars to those who later promoted his cult.

Oswald’s life, for instance, strongly resonates with Waltheof’s history. Oswald came to power after his brother was murdered on a peace-making mission.<sup>102</sup> Waltheof’s great-grandfather Uhtred and his entourage similarly had been assassinated when they came to submit to Cnut.<sup>103</sup> Like Waltheof, Oswald was a benefactor of churches, completing the church at York begun

98 Felix 1956, XXVI, pp. 90–91.

99 Felix 1956, XLII and XLV, pp. 130–133 and 138–141; for Æthelbald, XL, pp. 124–127.

100 Felix 1956, ch. XXVII, pp. 90–91.

101 Catherine Cubitt, “Sites and Sanctity: Revisiting the Cult of Murdered and Martyred Anglo-Saxon Royal Saints,” *Early Medieval Europe* 2000:9:1, pp. 63–77. We follow Cubitt’s examples of royal saints here (though we had identified similarities between several of them and Waltheof earlier), and are indebted to her article.

102 Bede, *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Bertram Colgrave & R. A. B. Mynors (eds.), Oxford 1969, III.i, pp. 214–5.

103 Fletcher 2003, pp. 1–4.

by King Edwin.<sup>104</sup> Bede tells us Oswald “gained ... greater earthly realms than any of his ancestors had possessed.”<sup>105</sup> That is, Oswald’s military career and martial success is a divine gift and *proof* of his sanctity, not a contradiction to it. Waltheof’s military prowess might similarly have been seen as a mark of God’s favor.

Waltheof, and those who rewrote his story as hagiography, could have found validation in English warrior culture and English rulership of other saints as well. Another Northumbrian, St. Edwin, came to power when his predecessor died in battle, and immediately began a program of military activity which ended in his own death in battle in 633.<sup>106</sup> Another saintly king, Edward the Martyr, was murdered in 978.<sup>107</sup> Edward hardly seems a glorious role model: the *ASC* excuses his brief and difficult reign, plagued by civil wars and famine, by his youth at the death of his father, but Waltheof similarly endured the death of his own father and William’s harrying of the north during his youth.<sup>108</sup> Like Edward, the Kentish princes, Æthelberht and Æthelred died by treachery; indeed, an interpolation in the *ASC* version A under the year 640 states that Thunor martyred them.<sup>109</sup> While the princes’ historicity is shadowy, their *passio*, written in the tenth century, puts them at the center of palace intrigues that eventually led to their deaths.<sup>110</sup>

Waltheof’s hagiographical connection to these royal saints is clear. Like Edwin and Oswald, Waltheof was a soldier; like Edward the Martyr, his own father died when he was young,<sup>111</sup> and he also lived through turbulent times. Like the Kentish princes and Edward, he was betrayed. And like all of these figures, Waltheof’s death was seen as murder – recall that the *Easter Table Chronicle* reports that he was slain – and later, as the hagiographical sources prove, as martyrdom. Historian Catherine Cubitt argues that these royal cults began through popular veneration, a manifestation of their lived religious practices, though all eventually received official recognition, and as historian David Rollason noted, were often used and reshaped for elite purposes.<sup>112</sup> Surely, several of these stories were circulating orally and

104 Bede 1969, II.xx, pp. 204–5.

105 Bede 1969, III.vi, pp. 230–231.

106 *ASC E* 617 and 633, pp. 23–4.

107 *ASC D* 975–78, pp. 46–7; *ASC E* 975–78, pp. 59–60. These chronicles also include poems about Edward’s ascension and death.

108 *ASC D* 975, pp. 46–47; Williams 1995, pp. 42–44.

109 *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, vol. 3: MS A, Janet Bately (ed.), Cambridge 1983, 640, pp. 28–29. Hereafter *ASC A*.

110 Cubitt 2000, pp. 74–75.

111 Scott 1952, pp. 155–156.

112 Cubitt 2000, p.65; D. W. Rollason, “Relic Cults as an Instrument of Royal Policy, c. 900–1050” *Anglo-Saxon England* 1986:15, pp. 91–103.

through official Church channels. Waltheof probably knew of their stories, particularly as several were kings in Northumbria or Mercia, his ancestral home and the site of his own holdings respectively. Certainly, his hagiographers knew of them, and Waltheof's parallels to this already-established tradition of noble warrior-sainthood, and its path to official canonization, facilitated his popular veneration.

The most striking parallels between Waltheof and these royal saints come at the end of their lives and during their cults' formation. They often died in battle and were decapitated or dismembered, as a cause of death or post-mortem. Oswald was decapitated in battle and his hand later removed.<sup>113</sup> Oswald's body remained incorrupt, like Waltheof; both saints' heads had become reattached by the time of translation.<sup>114</sup> Even those saints who avoided battle died violently, often through betrayal. In this respect, Kenelm provides a striking parallel to Waltheof. As Cubitt sums up his *passio*, "His death is the result of conspiracy and betrayal. It is carried out by a social inferior. His corpse is disposed of in a shameful fashion and not given a proper burial."<sup>115</sup> As Cubitt notes elsewhere, it was a female relative who betrayed Kenelm (a motif echoed in later sources that blame Waltheof's wife for his betrayal).<sup>116</sup> Vengeance miracles also abound in these cults: Kenelm's betrayer's eyes spontaneously fall out, and the nobleman who mocked St. Edmund "becomes insane and perishes horribly."<sup>117</sup> Similarly, the Norman monk who scoffed at Waltheof's veneration was rewarded by an untimely death.<sup>118</sup> After Waltheof's death, the creation of his cult followed Cubitt's pattern for the royal cults: murder or assassination, translation of the body, widespread lay veneration locally, recorded miracles, official hagiography, and Church approval.<sup>119</sup> Cubitt argues that these saints' popular cults predated

113 Cubitt 2000, p. 65.

114 Cubitt 2000, p. 73; Cubitt, p. 66, puts Waltheof's reattached head in the context of these early saints and later ones such as St. Thomas of Lancaster.

115 Cubitt 2000, p. 72.

116 See Orderic, IV.ii.265, pp. 320–21, where Judith appears as Waltheof's accuser (*per delationem Iudith uxoris suae accusatus est*). The *Passio* in Giles, pp. 11–12, does not implicate Judith at all, but focuses on Waltheof's voluntary confession and surrender to William; elsewhere in Crowland material she is excoriated for her betrayal of the saint and compared to the wife of Job (see "Epitaphium metricum ejusdem comitis, ab eodem Willelmem editum," in Giles, p. 4 and "Epitahium ejusdem Metricum," in Giles, p. 17; these two poetic memorials use identical language to condemn her). Thomas 2003, p. 150, attributed Judith's portrayal as Waltheof's betrayer as a later family tradition.

117 Cubitt 2000, pp. 69, 64.

118 *Passio* in Giles, p. 15; Orderic, IV.ii.288, pp. 348–349.

119 Summarized by Cubitt 2000, pp. 57–58. The two notable exceptions are the lack of worship at sites in the landscape (other than his tomb) and adoration centered on holy wells (Cubitt 2000, p. 57).

their sanctioned veneration and cites Waltheof as proof that this pattern continued after the Norman Conquest.<sup>120</sup> In contrast, historian Susan Ridyard sees many royal cults as “deliberate creations” for political purposes.<sup>121</sup> In most cases, however, as with Waltheof, there was undoubtedly popular veneration and institutional promotion that reinforced and strengthened each other.

Official hagiography marks the transition between a spontaneous religious cult and its institutionalization. In Waltheof’s case, Crowland’s active promotion of the cult through these hagiographical works indicates that social and political motives for his sainthood dovetailed with popular veneration. As possessor of Waltheof’s body and beneficiary of his and Judith’s largesse, Crowland would benefit from Waltheof’s sanctity. A saint’s body encourages pilgrims and donations and enhances the abbey’s reputation;<sup>122</sup> a traitor’s body does not. Orderic’s account, quoted earlier, reports an influx of pilgrims under Abbot Geoffrey when another round of miracles began in 1112.<sup>123</sup> Crowland Abbey harnessed Waltheof’s existing cult for the abbey’s own ends. Crowland Abbey produced or commissioned many hagiographical works. Orderic’s accounts of Waltheof’s *passio* and Guthlac’s *vita* promote both cults at Crowland and link Guthlac’s sanctity to Waltheof. Orderic tells us that, in honor of Waltheof and his miracles, “*Vitali Angligenæ uersibus heroicis epitaphium eius edere iusserunt*” [They asked the Englishman Vitalis

120 Cubitt 2000, p. 66.

121 Ridyard 1988, p. 236.

122 The multiplication of saints in many locations is perhaps a measure of their value to religious institutions. In the “Secgan” (an itinerary of resting places of the saints in England), Thorney Abbey is credited with the relics of nine saints. For editions of the Latin and Old English versions of the Secgan, see *Die Heiligen Englands: Angelsächsisch und lateinisch*, Felix Liebermann (ed.), Hanover 1889, pp. 15–16, at <https://archive.org> (7/11 2021). Thorney’s own account of its relics is even more extensive, beginning with a dozen foreign saints and adding in several English saints. The abbey did not claim to possess complete bodies of all of these saints (in a couple of cases only oil associated with the shrines of the saints). See Rollason 2015, p. 113 (edition of text), p. 278 (Lynda Rollason, “The Thorney Relic List”), and Plate 16 (BL Additional MS 40,000, fol. 11v). The monks of St. Albans, as well as their primary patron St. Alban, promoted St. Amphibalus, a wholly fictitious saint who owed his existence to a misreading of “amphibalus” (a rare word in Latin, derived from the Greek word for a cloak or overcoat) as a proper name; John Frankis, “From Saint’s Life to Saga: The Fatal Walk of Alfred Ætheling, Saint Amphibalus and the Viking Bróðir” *Saga-Book* 1999: 25:2, pp. 121–137, at [http://www.heathengods.com/library/viking\\_society/1999\\_XXV\\_2.pdf](http://www.heathengods.com/library/viking_society/1999_XXV_2.pdf) (7/11 2021), pp. 128–129, notes that “Unfortunately the plea of honest misunderstanding can hardly be extended to the whole cult of St Amphibalus as developed in St Albans in the late twelfth century, which shows a remarkable doggedness, and some ingenuity and imagination, in constructing and authenticating the cult of a fictitious saint.”

123 Orderic, IV.ii.289, pp. 348–49.

to compose his epitaph in heroic verse].<sup>124</sup> Such a poem could be easily disseminated and recited as a medieval form of advertisement for Waltheof's tomb, thus promoting his cult through lay society.

Promoting Waltheof's cult also would ingratiate the abbey to Waltheof's family, a still living, wealthy, and politically powerful line related to two royal houses. Crowland had good reason to seek and expect generosity from Waltheof's relatives. Waltheof, Judith, and their descendants gave liberally to monastic foundations such as Sawtry, Elstow, and St. Albans, as well as Waltheof's reputed gift to Crowland.<sup>125</sup> By focusing on Waltheof's sanctity instead of his criminality, Crowland could hope to keep the family's good will and receive some of its bounty.

Other political factors may have led the monastery to encourage devotion to Waltheof. Ethnic tensions between the Norman newcomers and the remaining Saxons also fed into his veneration. Waltheof was the last pre-Conquest English earl, whose death was irregular and unjust. Waltheof's Englishness and his unfair execution (or murder) gave the English a rallying point, a hero. Furthermore, those promoting his cult, including the abbey, carefully associated Waltheof with the very English, very grass-roots Saint Guthlac, thus reinforcing the Englishness of the new saint. And finally, the hagiographical documents emphasize nationalistic miracles, including a vengeance miracle on a *Norman* monk, unsurprising when ethnic differences loomed large in the kingdom.<sup>126</sup> Counterintuitively, Waltheof's very Englishness may have made him an acceptable saint for the twelfth-century Norman rulers, who could use veneration of English saints to promote Norman assimilation.<sup>127</sup> Waltheof's cult could thus be read either as the triumph of an English saint over the worldly power of the Normans or as evidence of continuity of English traditions as Norman rulers assimilated to their new homeland.

Waltheof's surviving relatives, including his wife Countess Judith and his oldest daughter Queen Maud of Scotland, also had both motive and means to nurture Waltheof's cult. A saint in the family was a traditional

124 Orderic, IV.ii.289–90, pp. 350–351. Despite the fact that it is presented in Latin verse, some of the diction and phrases hint at Old English verse. Like “Caedmon's Hymn,” this epitaph may have been composed in Old English and then later translated to Latin or vice versa, or Orderic may have composed it in both languages.

125 Orderic, IV.ii.285, pp. 344–345; K. J. Stringer, *Earl David of Huntingdon, 1152–1219*, Edinburgh 1985, p. 142; *Saint Albans Benefactors Book*, BL Cotton Nero XV.D. f. 93v [https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton\\_ms\\_nero\\_d\\_vii\\_fsoorr](https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_nero_d_vii_fsoorr) (5/8 2022).

126 Orderic, IV.ii.288, pp. 348–349; Thomas 2003, pp. 46–48 and 283–287. Williams 1995, p. 146, points out that it was a French abbot who chastised the mocking monk.

127 Thomas 2003, pp. 283–287.

pre-Conquest way of establishing a family's reputation and legitimacy. *Ælfric's Lives of Saints* and Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* include many saints from or related to English royal lines. Moreover, re-writing Waltheof's execution as martyrdom removes the stain of treason from the family. Countess Judith sought to remove this taint immediately; Orderic tells us that Judith, upon hearing of her husband's death, petitioned for his body and had it reburied honorably in Crowland.<sup>128</sup> The *Passio* tells us that Judith also donated a costly altar-cloth for his burial.<sup>129</sup> Waltheof's daughter Maud apparently convinced her Norman husband of Waltheof's innocence since they named their second son after him. This grandson, Waltheof of Melrose, also became a saint – a holy man and abbot, rather than a penitent martyr – and family and monastic interests would combine to nurture Waltheof's cult, even more so, perhaps, after Maud's second husband became king of Scotland. Another Waltheof, a distant cousin, eventually became abbot of Crowland, yet another incentive to promote his cult.<sup>130</sup> The work of the family to remove or mitigate treason from the lineage must have been successful: although Orderic tells us that traitors forfeit all their goods under both Norman and English law,<sup>131</sup> Judith, her daughters, and their heirs inherited Waltheof's lands, holdings, and title.<sup>132</sup>

The most important reason, perhaps, for Waltheof's veneration among lay people was his compatibility with the folk traditions of English heroes and royal saints. Waltheof's appeal as a folk hero is undeniable. His inclusion in the *ASC* and the *Easter Table Chronicle* indicates his importance during his lifetime, and he was apparently popular, as William the Conqueror preferred to make peace with him rather than exile or remove him after the 1069 rebellion. William's apparent respect for Waltheof would also contribute to his popularity, and as the last English earl, his ethnicity would appeal to the English. Waltheof was also a military hero, in the 1069 rebellion if

128 Orderic, IV.ii.267, pp. 322–323, tells us that Judith petitioned William for the body two weeks later, a time frame that the *Passio* repeats (Giles, p. 14). The delay in the petition may reflect the time it took for the news to reach Judith, and then for her to consult with the abbot of Crowland, who is ultimately credited with the actual physical relocation of Waltheof's body. Orderic is the earliest source to record that Judith sought permission to bury Waltheof honorably. Gaimar 2009, ll 5724–5734, pp. 310–311, credits only the monks of Crowland with the removal of Waltheof's corpse, "After some considerable time."

129 Giles, p. 14.

130 Williams 1995, p. 132.

131 Orderic, IV.ii.262 and 264, pp. 314–15 and 318–19.

132 Scott 1952, pp. 208–209; Williams 1995, p. 183; "De Comitissa" in Giles, pp. 19–20; "Judith 3," in *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, <http://www.pase.ac.uk> (6/11 2021), lists Judith as tenant-in-chief in 1086 of estates (including those held as subtenant) valued at well over £600.

not at the Battles of Stamford and Hastings, and, as the Old English poetic corpus clearly shows, the eleventh-century English audience loved warrior stories – so much so that saints such as Guthlac and Andrew and even Christ himself are represented martially.<sup>133</sup> We have less evidence of Waltheof's growth as a folk-hero than as folk-saint, but his heroic reputation was so established and widespread that skalds wrote poetry about him and Norse and Icelandic sources report his integrity and heroism centuries after his death.<sup>134</sup> Thanks to Gaimar, even twelfth-century Anglo-Normans knew him as a wronged (if not completely innocent) figure in the rebellions of the previous century.

Waltheof's life and death also fit into two established patterns of sainthood: the *miles christi* and the royal, murdered saint. Waltheof, as a warrior who later renounces his military position to engage in a holy life, emulates the *miles christi* known to both Waltheof and his contemporaries. Guthlac is the obvious example here, but Waltheof and his contemporaries would also have known Martin of Tours and George, warrior-saints included in *The Old English Martyrology* and Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*.<sup>135</sup> We cannot know whether Waltheof modeled himself on the *miles christi*, but as we have seen, the hagiographers represented Waltheof as devout and penitent while in prison to fit the trope.

Waltheof's unmerited violent death lent itself to the folk motif of the royal, murdered saint. The injustice of his death, implied in the contemporary chronicles and emphasized by Orderic and Gaimar, also fits the pattern of royal saints,<sup>136</sup> as do Waltheof's martial prowess and personal holiness. This holiness may have been created later, but Waltheof and Judith's generosity to the Church and monastic foundations gave material proof of Waltheof's piety and offered a basis for extending it. Given these circumstances, promoting Waltheof as a saint must have been easy, even if unnecessary, since people already accepted Waltheof as holy and were visiting his tomb.

133 See *Andreas (Andreas and the Fates of the Apostles)*, Kenneth R. Brooks (ed.), Oxford 1998, pp. 1–55), *Guthlac A and Guthlac B (The Exeter Book)*, vol. 1 and 2, Israel Gollancz (ed.), 1895, EETS 104 and 194, London 2000, pp. 104–89), and “The Dream of the Rood.” in *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, vol. II, *The Vercelli Book*, George Philip Krapp (ed.), New York 1932, pp. 61–65. Even St. Helen is constructed as a warrior: Cynewulf calls her “gūðcwen” [battle-queen] (*Cynewulf's Elene*, P.O.E. Gradon (ed.), revised ed., Exeter 1996, ln. 254).

134 Scott 1952, pp. 164–70; Williams 1995, p. 37.

135 *The Old English Martyrology: Edition, Translation and Commentary*, Christine Rauer (ed.), Cambridge 2013, pp. 214–215 and 84–85; Ælfric, *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, Walter W. Skeat (ed.), Early English Text Society, 2 vols., Oxford 1996, pp. II.218–314 and I.306–319.

136 Orderic, IV.ii.265–267, pp. 320–323; Gaimar 2009, pp. 332–333.



Because Waltheof's death and life fell into familiar folk templates, the English people were willing, even eager, to accept him as a saint.

Waltheof's evolution from political figure to saint illuminates the everyday practice of religion in Anglo-Norman England in several ways. It shows us how lay people practiced piety through material means, such as generosity to monastic foundations and costly burials, and also how they practiced religion in their private lives, such as Waltheof's recitation of psalms and tearful prayers. It shows us that aristocratic laity viewed royal and noble saints such as Guthlac, Edmund, and Oswald as examples for their own lives and behavior. It shows us the belief in proximal and cumulative holiness: holiness can be gained through proximity to a saint, and the internment of multiple saints in one place increases the place's holiness exponentially. It shows us how saints were popularly created, first through spontaneous devotion and folk traditions, and then through oral reputation and the medieval public relations machine of hagiography, histories, and even poetry and sagas.

### Summary

The elevation to sainthood of the English earl, Waltheof, who was beheaded, ostensibly for rebellion against William the Conqueror, exemplifies the process by which non-elite and elite communities coalesced to construct a saintly cult in late eleventh- and twelfth-century England. This paper traces the development of Waltheof's cult from the time of his execution and burial through the mid-twelfth century and seeks to place his path to sainthood within the context of the use of hagiographical material as exemplars for the lives of the laity.

We have drawn heavily on the *Passio Waldevi*, a hagiographical account of Waltheof's life and martyrdom, written at Crowland Abbey in the early twelfth century, along with other materials, most notably early miracles of Waltheof, contained in the same manuscript (Douai BM MS 852). This account, though written to promote the official cult of Waltheof, nevertheless gives hints of earlier, spontaneous veneration of Waltheof. As a point of comparison, we look at earlier hagiographical materials, most notably English and Latin accounts of the life of St. Guthlac and several saints that figure prominently in Bede. To put Waltheof's death and cult in historical context we consider historical materials in Old English (*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and *Easter Table Chronicle*), Latin (Orderic Vitalis and William of Malmesbury, among others), and Norman French (Geoffrei de Gaimar), and we briefly consider the Norse evidence (Snorri Sturluson) for Waltheof's wider reputation. While most of our evidence is textual, we have also considered archaeological evidence, particularly as it relates

to burials, both saintly and deviant. We argue that this evidence, taken together, indicates that Waltheof's cult draws on long-standing practices and attitudes towards sanctity and the Christian life in the centuries before the Norman Conquest of England.

*Keywords:* Waltheof, Earl of Northumbria; Guthlac, Saint; saints' cults, hagiography, Crowland Abbey