

SKALDIC VERSE AND
ANGLO-SAXON HISTORY

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*The Dorothea Coke Memorial Lecture
in Northern Studies
delivered at University College London
17 March 1970*

PUBLISHED FOR THE COLLEGE
BY H. K. LEWIS & CO LTD LONDON

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PRINTED BY T. & A. CONSTABLE LTD EDINBURGH

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WHEN WE WISH TO DEFINE THE RELATIONSHIP TO history of any passage in an Icelandic saga, we must first consider what any verses quoted in the passage seem to mean from purely internal evidence (i.e. internal evidence of the verses themselves, not of the passage as a whole). This does not imply unlimited faith in the verses. It is, however, a method which reason imposes inexorably upon us, because no Icelandic saga is older than the twelfth century, but while the verses a saga quotes may be no older than itself, they may be much older, and indeed may be of the period of the events to which they seem to refer.

The language of poetry is conservative and hence difficult to date. Accordingly, the chief weapon in determining whether a verse is genuine (i.e. contemporary with the events to which it refers) must be an examination of its relationship to the prose in which it is embedded. A verse will be immediately suspect, which seems composed to add authority to the prose narrative. Such a verse is one we will consider below, which alleges that two Welsh earls named Hringr and Aðils were at the battle of Brunanburh in 937. On the other hand, verses which are misunderstood by the writer of the prose narrative will usually have a strong claim to be regarded as genuine, or at least older than the prose. Such are the verses about the English campaign of Ólafr helgi by Sigvatr Þórðarson and Óttarr svarti as they are applied in *Heimskringla*.

Historical inaccuracy is not itself a good reason for regarding a verse as a forgery. The poet may have been imperfectly informed about the events which he described. Instances will arise below. We must also be on our guard against starting to consider the verses with prejudices due to the prose. The prose may be wrong in its attribution of the verse to particular persons or events. Óttarr svarti claims that Knútr fought in Norwich. He seems not to have done so. It will be suggested below that the verse

is not a part of Óttarr's poem on Knútr, but belongs to another one (probably not by Óttarr), which dealt with Knútr's father, Sveinn.

The necessity of first considering the verses of a saga in isolation has long been well understood in Scandinavia. There is no evidence that it has been as yet grasped in England at all!¹ An instance may be given. The account of the career in England of Ólafr helgi in the *Heimskringla* is, of course, very confused. Yet in the *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, published at Oxford in 1883, G. Vigfússon and F. York Powell point out the clear story which emerges if the verse is taken alone.² Yet Sir Charles Oman, twenty-seven years later, in *England before the Norman Conquest* laments the obscurity of the story of Ólafr in England in *Heimskringla*, and continues to do so in successive editions till the eighth in 1937.³

In these circumstances, it seemed to me that a re-examination of the skaldic verse dealing with Anglo-Saxon history might be of interest. 'Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History' is not so large a subject as it perhaps sounds. There are five main points where Anglo-Saxon history can be illustrated from skaldic verse. Firstly, there is a group of poems preserved in *Egils saga*, at least most of which refer to the battle of Brunanburh in 937. Secondly, there is some skaldic evidence bearing upon the famous question, whether Ólafr Tryggvason is to be identified with the viking leader at Maldon. Thirdly, there is much skaldic verse bearing upon the part played by Ólafr helgi in the wars of Æthelred the Unready. Fourthly, there is also much skaldic verse bearing on the invasion of England by Knútr and his supporter Eiríkr Hlaðajarl. Fifthly, there is the skaldic poetry connected with the battle of Stamford Bridge. Since the poetry of Haraldr Harðráði and his skalds has received recent treatment in a Dorothea Coke Memorial Lecture,⁴ I will not give it further consideration, but will concentrate on the other four subjects mentioned above.

¹ The one exception to this is Professor D. Whitelock in the notes on translations of Norse poems in *English Historical Documents c. 500-1042* (1955), pp. 298 ff.

² Vol. II, 588.

³ p. 575, footnote 2.

⁴ G. Turville-Petre, *Haraldr the Hard-ruler and his Poets* (1968).

Already in the seventeenth century, scholars saw that the historical foundation of the battle of *Vínheiðr*, described in *Egils saga*, must be the battle of Brunanburh, and since then hazardous use has often been made of the saga by those anxious to solve the problem of the site of the battle. It may now be well to translate the verses which are supposed to refer to the battle, and to consider what they have to tell us without regard to the prose with which they are connected.¹

E.s. 16. Ólafr put the one lord to flight and slew the other. The fighting was sharp, and I have heard that the king was hardy in battle. Goðrekr trod many a wavering path upon the field. The foe of the English brought half the realm of Álfgeirr under his control.

E.s. 17. The slayer of the earl, who feared nothing, advanced quickly in the great battle. The bold Þórólfr fell. The earth is fruitful over my glorious brother near the Vína. That is a bitter grief, but we must hide our pain.

E.s. 18. I covered the earth with heaps of slain before the banner-poles in the west. Sharp was the fight when I attacked Aðils with the Blue Serpent. Young Ólafr had battle against the English. Hringr was steadfast in battle. The ravens did not go hungry.

E.s. 19. The warrior let the jingling noose hang on my arm. I raised the armlet on my sword. The warrior had the more praise.

E.s. 20. My eyebrows sank down with sorrow, but now I have found one who smoothed the unsmooth places on my forehead. The king has raised my eyebrows up from my eyes, he cares not for his gold.²

E.s. 21. Now has the warrior king, the ruler of the land, the noble descendant of kings, laid three lords low. Æthelstan did more: everything has submitted to the king of famous race; I declare it now, O generous listener.³

E.s. 22. Now the lofty haunt of the deer lies in the power of Æthelstan.

¹ In this paper each of the translations of skaldic verses has pre-fixed to it the number of the verse in *Egils saga*, ed. Sigurður Nordal (Íslenzk fornrit II, 1933; abbreviated E.s.); or in *Heimskringla*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (Íslenzk fornrit XXVI–XXVIII, 1941–51; abbreviated Hkr., Ó.s.T., Ó.s.h., according to the saga); *Knytlínga saga*, ed. C. af Petersens and E. Olson in *Sögur Danakonunga* (1919–25; abbreviated Ktl.). All the verses will, of course, also be found in *Den norsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (1912–15), and *Den norsk-islandske Skaldediktningen*, reviderad av Ernst A. Kock (1946–9).

² i.e. he gives it away freely.

³ E.s. 21 is said to be from a *drápa* on Æthelstan, of which 22 is the refrain.

Now we must ask ourselves what a twelfth-century interpreter receiving these verses with a tradition that they were by Egill, would make of them. He would conclude that Æthelstan had been generous to Egill after a battle. He would assume, therefore, that Egill was fighting for the English. It would also emerge that Álfgeirr and Goðrekr were on the English side, while Hringr and Aðils were on the side opposed to Egill. It would also appear that the invaders were led by one Ólafr. There would, however, be some deceptive things. The only occasion upon which Æthelstan had to face serious invasion was in 937, and there can be little doubt that the Norse poems mostly refer to the events of that year. Ólafr was the name of the leader of the invaders, and Æthelstan defeated his forces. So far there is agreement of the Norse and English sources. But the English sources show clearly that Ólafr was a king of the Irish Scandinavians, who departed to Dublin after his defeat. The author of *Egils saga* had no information about his background. He knew that in the circumstances of his own time the likeliest nation to invade England were the Scots. He accordingly made Ólafr into a king of the Scots. Of all the verses, no. 17 was the most deceptive. It recorded the death of the poet's brother near the Vína.¹ Now Vína is the Old Norse form of the name of the Dvina. There is not the slightest reason to think that an English river bore such a name. The verse is a plain statement that Egill's brother was killed in Russia. It was perhaps composed as an answer to someone who asked what had happened to Þórólfr. The prose of the saga, indeed, records that Eiríkr blóðøx was accompanied by Þórólfr on a visit to Russia, where they fought a great battle by the Vína. If traditions of any value are under the prose, it may be that Þórólfr fell in this battle, but in any event, Egill's poem on his death was taken at a later date as belonging to his Brunanburh series of verses, and it was then assumed that Vína was the name of an English river. Unfortunately, the verse opened the way to further errors. Þórólfr was called in it 'earl-slayer'. This is no more than a kenning for 'warrior', but evidently the writer of *Egils saga* took it literally, and wondered who the earl could be. Verse 21 said that Æthelstan

¹ *Egils saga*, ch. 37.

slew three lords. From this the author of the saga concluded that Ólafr died in the battle, and that two nobles supporting him also died, one being killed by Þórólfr, who was accordingly called 'earl-slayer'. I would suggest that, to give these two backgrounds, the saga-writer fabricated verse 18, about Hringr and Aðils, and claimed in his prose that they were Welsh. Although it does not occur in the Old English poem on Brunanburh, a tradition that there were Welshmen (of Cumbria or Wales) opposing Æthelstan in 937 was widely known. But even if there were, their leaders were certainly not called Hringr and Aðils, names which are applied practically only to heroes of the legendary period. The verse in which they are named is, therefore, to be regarded as suspicious in the extreme. It is not necessary to take verse 21, in which Æthelstan is said to have felled three lords, as referring to Brunanburh at all. It could easily refer to some earlier occasion (such as the invasion of Scotland in 934¹) or a later one (such as the suppression of various Welsh kings after Brunanburh).

To summarize, I would suggest that verse 18 on Hringr and Aðils took shape at the same time as the prose narrative. Verse 17 on Þórólfr's death I would regard as the work of Egill, but if this is not the case, it is older than the prose narrative, and the source of various misunderstandings in the latter. It may be added that verse 16, about Álfgeirr and Goðrekr, seems genuine.

II

The question whether Ólafr Tryggvason was the Anlaf who led the invaders at Maldon in 991 is an old one, and a review of all the evidence bearing upon it would occupy more time than is available. Nevertheless, to make this paper a fairly complete review of the events of Anglo-Saxon history upon which skaldic poetry throws some light, or may at least do so, it may be pointed out that verses attributed to Ólafr's court poet, Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, are extant in which a description of Ólafr's viking youth is given.

¹ Verse 22 would suit 934 better than 937, in which year there is no reason to think Æthelstan invaded Scotland.

Some of these verses may now be translated:

Hkr., Ó.s.T. 129. The king, the son of Tryggvi, finally left the much wounded bodies of the Saxons before the shy, misshapen steed of the giantess (i.e. the wolf). The king who had many friends gave to the black steed of the witch (i.e. the wolf again) the brown blood of many Frisians to drink.

Hkr., Ó.s.T. 130. The mighty king changed the Dutchmen's bodies indeed (i.e. slew them). The warrior gave the raven the flesh of the Flemings.

Hkr., Ó.s.T. 131. The powerful king sought strife against the English when young. The warrior brought death to the Northumbrians. The feeder of wolves, the lover of battle, wasted the Scots widely with his sword. He who is free with gold fought in Man.

Hkr., Ó.s.T. 132. The Bowman (i.e. Ólafr) slew the men of the islands and the Irish. The warrior longed for glory. The king fought the Welsh and cut down the Cumbrians.

This fits well with the *Old English Chronicle*, if Anlaf and Ólafr are the same. Vikings are said to have ravaged widely in England after the battle of Maldon, and to have sacked Bamborough in 993. The Norse verses depict a raiding expedition in the Low Countries, followed by English adventures, and then raids in Scotland and round the Irish Sea. Into these adventures the battle of Maldon would easily fit.

III

A great deal of skaldic verse is quoted in the various accounts in the sagas of the deeds of Ólafr helgi in England. An attempt must now be made to test its coherence, when considered without the accompanying prose. The youth of Ólafr was described by his poet and friend Sigvatr Þórðarson in a series of verses known as *Vikingavísur*. These verses have the immense advantage of being numbered, or at least the battles they describe are numbered. The verses which are devoted to Ólafr's English adventures may be thus translated:

Hkr., Ó.s.h. 12. Indeed it was the sixth battle, when Ólafr attacked the *bryggjur* of London. The bold prince offered war to the English. The foreign swords bit, and there the vikings guarded the dike. Some of the host had their encampment in flat Southwark.

Hkr., Ó.s.h. 13. Yet again Ólafr gave battle in the country of Úlfkell—it was the seventh time as I relate. All the English stood on Hringmaraheiðr, when the heir of Haraldr (i.e. Ólafr) caused strife—there was loss of life in battle.

Hkr., Ó.s.h. 16. I know that the warrior, foe of the Wends, fought his eighth fight at the fortress. The king advanced in his might. The port-reeves could not deny their dwelling, the city of Canterbury, to Ólafr. He gave much sorrow to the noble inhabitants (?).

Hkr., Ó.s.h. 17. The young king held not back, and gave the English bloody hair. Again in Nýjamóða the brown blood flowed onto the swords. Now I have counted nine battles, O warrior from the east. The Danish army fell, when the spear attack on Ólafr was fiercest.

Sigvatr places the ninth battle at Nýjamóða and as this place is not identified, little is to be learned from the verse. No doubt the poet had to elevate some very slight skirmishes to make up his hero's tale of battles. The sixth, seventh and eighth battles are, however, reasonably identified by the light of a passage in the *Old English Chronicle* (MSS. C, D and E), which can now be summarized. In August 1009, the immense army of raiders known as 'Þorkell's host' landed at Sandwich, and harried on all sides till mid-November. They then returned to Kent, and made many attacks on the city of London, but had no success. They resumed more general ravaging after Christmas, but concentrated in Kent in the spring of 1010, and repaired their ships, planning an invasion of East Anglia. The famous East Anglian commander, Úlfkell, concentrated forces at Ipswich, but the raiders sought them out and destroyed them. Florence of Worcester places this battle at Ringmere, and he is often well informed on Scandinavian affairs. It is accordingly reasonable to identify the battle of Ipswich with Hringmaraheiðr. This battle was followed by a year of unchecked ravaging, but in 1011 peace was bought from the raiders. Nevertheless, they attacked and captured Canterbury in September of the same year. Now, it is at least a remarkable coincidence that Sigvatr's sixth, seventh and eighth battles should be placed at points where the *Old English Chronicle* mentions fighting in the course of one campaign of the same viking army ('Þorkell's host'), and that the order of the three clashes (London, Ringmere, Canterbury) agrees with the order of Sigvatr's numbered series of battles. Various scholars have been led by this agreement of English and

Scandinavian sources so different in kind to conclude that Ólafr must have taken part in Þorkell's campaign on the viking side, for Sigvatr's verses on the fighting at London and Canterbury make it plain that Ólafr fought at these places against the English. Yet this conclusion raises difficulties. Sigvatr is certainly right in not claiming a great success for Ólafr at London, for the city never fell in the invasions of the time of Æthelred the Unready and Edmund Ironside. Similarly, Sigvatr is right in claiming that Canterbury fell. But the verse on the battle of Ringmere is totally inconclusive. This battle was a great viking success, but Sigvatr hardly does more than record fighting in East Anglia. Furthermore, had Sigvatr known anything of the course of the campaign, he could have mentioned more places (e.g. Oxford) where Ólafr must have fought, if he was with Þorkell. The explanation probably is that Sigvatr had very imperfect information about Ólafr's adventures in England. It is never suggested that the poet had been there himself. He was, according to the traditions used in *Heimskringla*, an Icelander, who came to Norway and became a trusted member of Ólafr's court. If this be well founded, it is obvious that Sigvatr's information about the wars in England would have to be derived from the king himself, or from warriors who had fought with him in England. These sources might have become clouded by time, for we do not know when the *Vikingavísur* were composed.

A further series of verses on Ólafr, attributed to Óttarr svarti, is extensively quoted in the sagas. Three of the verses clearly deal with the same events as those of Sigvatr on Ólafr's sixth, seventh and eighth battles. These verses may be translated as follows:

Hkr., Ó.s.h. 10. Again, O warrior bold in fight, thou didst break the *bryggjur* of London. Thou hast had the fortune to conquer land. Shields, from which war-service is pressingly asked, advanced, and old swords broke. Then was the height of the battle.

Hkr., Ó.s.h. 14. O prince, I have heard that thine army piled up a heavy heap of slain far from their ships. Hringmaraheiðr was red with blood. The natives, the band of English, soon bent to the ground before thee in battle, and many (perished) in flight.

Hkr., Ó.s.h. 15. O king, thou madest a great attack upon the royal race.

Gracious prince, thou didst take broad Canterbury in the morning. Fire and smoke played mightily round the houses. King's son, thou didst win victory: I have heard that thou didst take men's lives.

It will be seen that Óttarr adds very little to what Sigvatr says about the three battles. He tells us less than Sigvatr about the siege of London, for his remark that his hero has had the good fortune to conquer land is extremely indefinite. On the other hand, he makes it more definite than Sigvatr does that the English were defeated at Hringmaraheiðr. Both poets are clear and correct in saying that Canterbury was captured. It is also to be noticed that Óttarr has no verses on any of the events between Sigvatr's sixth and seventh or between his seventh and eighth battles. Óttarr's stanzas are accordingly to be regarded as variants on those of Sigvatr rather than as entirely original compositions.

Little doubt remains that Ólafr, according to contemporary skalds, fought with Þorkell in England in the campaign of 1009-11. Difficulty and confusion have arisen because of a further verse, said in the prose narrative also to be by Óttarr and to refer to Ólafr. This may be translated as follows:

Hkr., Ó.s.h. 11. O prince, thou didst bring Æthelred into the land, and didst bestow a kingdom upon him. In this, the mighty friend of warriors relied upon thee. The fighting was hard, when thou camest with the relative of Edmund to his country—the native chief had ruled the land before.

Now, this verse clearly refers to an ally of Æthelred's, who accompanied him on his return to England in 1014. Beyond that there are various ways of regarding it. Ólafr is not named in it, and therefore it may have been addressed to some other warrior, who accompanied Æthelred on his return in 1014. While this is possible, it is unlikely. Skaldic verse was addressed chiefly to kings and highly distinguished nobles, who were in a position to repay it. Often it was addressed to nobles with a family tradition of patronage of poetry. It is unlikely that there was on Æthelred's side a Scandinavian warrior of this type and calibre, who is unknown to us today. Again, the verse may be a later fabrication, added to Óttarr's sequence on Ólafr. It is, however, difficult to see why such a fabrication should have been made, and how a later poet would come to think that Ólafr was a friend of

Æthelred's, for soon after his death the belief was general in Scandinavia and Europe that he had fought in England against the English. We are, therefore, led to regard the verse as contemporary, and as referring to Ólafr. It was so interpreted by the compiler of the Oldest Saga of St Ólafr, to judge by the extant recension of this known as the Legendary Saga. In this saga, Ólafr is Þorkell's companion, but nevertheless helps Æthelred to return from exile. Snorri's *Ólafs saga helga* (both in *Heimskringla* and in the separate version) does not face the discrepancy of the verses, and makes Ólafr Æthelred's ally from the beginning. This, however, makes it impossible to identify Ólafr's English battles as described and numbered by Sigvatr at all. Accordingly, it is better to return to the pre-Snorri versions of the *Ólafs saga*, and to assume that Ólafr, like his friend Þorkell, changed sides and became a supporter of Æthelred before going on his expeditions in France and Spain. We need not think that this would deter him from raiding in England on his way home to Norway, and this he seems to have done according to two lost verses of the *Vikingavísur*, the sense of which is given in the prose of the sagas.

IV

The next events of Anglo-Saxon history to receive mention in early skaldic verse are connected with Knútr's conquest of England. A number of verses of *Knútsdrápa*, a poem in praise of Knútr attributed to Óttarr svarti, the same poet who praised Ólafr helgi, deal with this period of Knútr's life, and may be translated as follows:

Ktl. 8. O warrior, thou madest war in green Lindsey. There the vikings wasted widely the country they had chosen. In thy fury, foe of the Swedes, thou didst cause the English people to know sorrow in broad Helmingborg, west of the Ouse.

Ktl. 9. Young leader, thou madest the English fall dead very near to the Tees. The deep dike flowed over the bodies of the Northumbrians. O inciter to war, thou didst awaken the raven; more to the south, thou didst lead the onset at Sherston, O brave son of Sveinn.

Ktl. 10. Warrior, I believe that thou didst slay Frisians there, breaking

inhabited Brentford with its settlements. The descendants of great Edmund¹ got deadly wounds. The Danish force pierced the troops with spears as thou didst press the pursuit.

Ktl. 11. Mighty Scylding, shield-protected, thou wroughtest the work of war at Ashingdon, the blood-bird got brown (i.e. blood-soaked) carrion. Thou didst win, O prince, fame enough with the great sword to the north of Danaskógar—to the warriors it seemed a slaughter.

Ktl. 12. O cheerful giver of great gifts, thou didst stain corslets red in Norwich—breath will leave thee before thy courage fails.

It became clear above that Sigvatr and Óttarr were vague and ill-informed about the campaign of Ólafr helgi in England. The vagueness of Óttarr concerning Knútr's campaign was much greater. The *Old English Chronicle* provides no evidence that Knútr fought in Lindsey. He was there when Sveinn died, 3 February, 1014, and agreed with the inhabitants that they should all live by plunder. When Æthelred re-appeared, Knútr promptly fled to Denmark. Neither does there seem a place in the story for the battle of Helmingborg. The title 'foe of the Swedes', given to Knútr, indicates that the verse was composed a good deal later (after the battle of the Holy River, 1025 or 1027), and hence cannot be greatly trusted for its facts. Again, the fighting in Northumbria mentioned in the next verse would seem to be assumed by the poet because Knútr did receive the surrender of the Northumbrians. This, however, happened without bloodshed. Sherston, however, is undoubtedly an historical battle, fought in 1016, and the description of its site as 'more to the south' (than Northumbria) reflects the vagueness of the information the poet was able to get about Knútr's campaign. Later, in 1016, there was a battle at Brentford, but whereas the skaldic verse is reticent about Sherston, it claims Brentford as a Danish victory, although it was in fact a severe defeat. As part of the general vagueness, the people of Brentford are called Frisians. It is surprising that the verse does not enlarge more on the great Danish victory of Ashingdon. The fifth verse translated above (Ktl. 12) is perhaps wrongly connected by the prose with Knútr's campaign. It refers rather to Sveinn, who sacked Norwich in 1004. A further verse refers to fighting by

¹ I assume hypallage; literally 'the great descendants of Edmund'.

the Thames, but it is entirely vague, and does not name Knútr, so I exclude it from my translation.

Verses which are of considerable interest are those dealing with the English wars, said to be from the *Eiríksdrápa* of Þórðr Kolbeinsson. These may be translated as follows:

Hkr., Ó.s.h. 27. Again a song of praise is raised, for I have heard that the famous princes, the lords of the country, sent word to the helmeted hero, the earl, that he, Eiríkr, should come as in duty bound to a friendly meeting with them. I understand what the king¹ had in mind.

Ktl. 13. I have heard that the splendid marriage connections of the lords² were advantageous in the expedition of men to war. Many ships unequal in length entered the river. The noble warrior steered his ships so near to the land that he saw the English plains.

Ktl. 14. Knútr the Scylding, the sailor, came in with his long-ships to the shallows by the sandy shore. On that day, when both wished to set sail, the meeting of the helmeted earl and the prince was opportune.

Hkr., Ó.s.h. 28 (Ktl. 18). The chief gave battle west of London. The famous sailor fought for land. Úlfkell received grim blows where the blue swords shook above the Norse warriors' (? thing-men's) heads. I have made a poem.

Ktl. 19. The active warrior, who often gave the raven swollen flesh, left the marks of the sword-edge on men's limbs. The bold Eiríkr often made the forces of the English grow less, causing their deaths. The army made Hringmaraheiðr red.

The Eiríkr to whom these verses refer is beyond doubt Eiríkr, earl of Hlaðir, who is well known as a supporter of Knútr in England. At the time of Sveinn's death, Eiríkr was ruling Norway in the Danish interest. He first appears in English affairs early in 1016, when he was appointed earl of Northumbria by Knútr immediately after the murder of Uhtred. The Norse verses tell with great probability how two princes summoned Eiríkr to join them. The two princes are, no doubt, Knútr and his brother Haraldr, who were probably ruling Denmark jointly. Eiríkr's voyage and the meeting of his fleet with that of Knútr is next described, and we are reminded of the marriage connection of

¹ Perhaps *gramr* means 'the warrior' and refers to Eiríkr.

² Eiríkr had married a sister of Knútr.

Eiríkr and the Danish royal house. In 1016, as was mentioned above, Eiríkr was appointed earl of Northumbria. One might have expected him to be henceforth fully occupied with the affairs of that troubled province. Yet, although Eiríkr is not mentioned in the *Old English Chronicle* again, apart from the record of the confirmation of his earldom in 1017, it is alleged in the *Encomium Emmae Reginae* (II, 7) that he was with Knútr's forces just before, if not during, the siege of London in 1016. Accordingly, there may be some foundation for the statement in the fourth of the verses translated above, that the hero fought a battle west of London. It is, however, extremely improbable that Úlfkell, the East Anglian leader, took part in such an engagement. When, in the next verse, Þórðr goes on to say that Eiríkr defeated the English at Hringmaraheiðr, it becomes plain that he was totally lacking in knowledge of Eiríkr's campaigns in England, and has picked the names London, Úlfkell, and Hringmaraheiðr out of the verses of Sigvatr and Óttarr on the English battles of Ólafr helgi.

Apart from the verses discussed above, there are few allusions in skaldic verse to the conquest of England by Knútr. Sigvatr composed a poem in praise of Knútr, and one verse is:

Hkr., Ó.s.h. 27. And soon Knútr overcame or drove away the sons of Æthelred, yes, every one of them.

Hallvarðr Háreksblei is also said to have composed a poem on Knútr. One verse quoted as being from it describes the arrival of Knútr in England, where he enters an unknown river or district called Fljót.

Ktl. 4. Thou Knútr, bold in strife, didst speed thy well-armoured ships *tíl Fljóta*. The famous warrior came from the sea. Thou, warrior, didst bind thy fleet to the heritage of the English, and didst manure the battle-field.

A good many other verses said to belong to this poem survive, but they do not provide any additional information. It is more than once remarked in them that Knútr now rules England.

Something has now been said on the four subjects upon which I proposed to speak. After Knútr's time, skaldic verse loses contact with Anglo-Saxon history, apart from the Stamford Bridge poetry at the very end. The stirring events of the Confessor's reign

inspired no skaldic poetry, and the house of Godwin attracted no skald to its service. We may, however, in conclusion step over the Anglo-Saxon time boundary to observe that one descendant of a noble Anglo-Saxon house had in his service a skald. Earl Waltheof of Northumbria, a son of Earl Siward himself, was praised in a skaldic sequence by Þorkell Skallason. Two verses of this survive. The first may be translated as follows:

Hkr., H.s.h. 161. The warrior burned a hundred followers of the king in the hot fire. For men that was an evening of scorching. It is known that it was easy for men to lie under the talons of the wolf. The ash-grey wolf got food from the corpses of Frenchmen.

This verse is interesting as providing an extreme example of the misunderstanding of the subject of skaldic verse. The verse would seem to allude to the burning of York by the Norman garrison and their destruction by Waltheof in 1069. In the *Saga of Haraldr Harðráði* (the *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla* versions) it is attached to an apocryphal story, in which Waltheof is alleged to have been present at the battle of Hastings, and to have afterwards burned a wood and destroyed some soldiers.

The second verse is much to our purpose, for with it we can bid a fitting good-bye to the Anglo-Saxon period. It obviously refers to the execution of Waltheof in 1075:

Hkr., H.s.h. 162. William, who reddened steel, and cut through the icy sea from the south, has indeed betrayed the doughty Waltheof under a truce. Truly the slaying of men will be long in ceasing in England, [but] no more glorious lord than was my gallant chief shall die.