



The story behind the fiction: the historical context presented in *Saxon Stories*, by Bernard Cornwell

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to present the historical context of the narrative space of the literary series *Saxon Stories* (2004-2020), by British author Bernard Cornwell. After briefly summarizing the plot of the first three novels in the series, we aim to explore the historical backdrop by discussing the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian peoples, as well as their interactions in the 9th century British lands. Notably, the cultural exchange between these groups is significant. Moreover, the relations between these two peoples led to cultural “hybridity”, which influenced the formation of English society and identity. This aspect is particularly relevant to the historical novels comprising *Saxon Stories*, as the protagonist and narrator, Uhtred, embodies this hybridity. Throughout the narrative, Uhtred experiences a sense of division between the two cultures: he is not able to state whether he considers himself an Anglo-Saxon or a Dane.

Resumo: O objetivo deste artigo é apresentar o contexto histórico do espaço narrativo da série literária *Saxon Stories* (2004-2020), do autor britânico Bernard Cornwell. Após apresentarmos um breve resumo do enredo dos três primeiros romances que compõem a série, pretendemos explorar o pano de fundo histórico discutindo a respeito dos povos anglo-saxão e escandinavo, bem como suas interações no espaço britânico do século IX. Notavelmente, a partilha cultural entre esses grupos é significativa. Além disso, as relações entre esses dois povos levaram a um “hibridismo” cultural, que influenciou a formação da sociedade e da identidade inglesa. Esse aspecto é particularmente relevante para os romances históricos que compõem *Saxon Stories*, pois o protagonista e narrador, Uhtred, incorpora esse hibridismo. No decorrer da narrativa, Uhtred experimenta o sentimento de estar dividido entre as duas culturas: ele não sabe dizer se se considera um Anglo-Saxão ou um Danês (Escandinavo).

Keywords: *Saxon Stories*, Historical Novel, Bernard Cornwell, Anglo-saxons, Scandinavians.

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1. *Saxon Stories*: the History inside the Fiction

Bernard Cornwell's *Saxon Stories* (2004-2020) is a novel series that, through the fictional writing, tells the history of England in the period of the Scandinavian invasions in the 9th century. The narrative mainly involves the clash of powers between the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian peoples, also leading to broadening reflections on the conflict between Christians and Pagans. By connecting fictional and real characters, *Saxon Stories* enables a historical reading and conveys contemporary memories regarding this important episode in the British past.

As a result of the television adaptation of the series by BBC, in 2015, this literary work is also known as *The Last Kingdom Series*. This series is composed by thirteen books: *The Last Kingdom* (2004), *The Pale Horseman* (2005), *The Lords of the North* (2006), *Sword Song* (2007), *The Burning Land* (2009), *Death of Kings* (2011), *The Pagan Lord* (2013), *The Empty Throne* (2014), *Warriors of the Storm* (2015), *The Flame Bearer* (2016), *War of the Wolf* (2018), *Sword of Kings* (2019) and *War Lord* (2020).

Nonetheless, we elected the first three novels of the series to discuss in this article: *The Last Kingdom* (2004), *The Pale Horseman* (2005) and *The Lords of the North* (2006). These first three volumes introduce the Alfredian context of the historical period, focusing mainly on the sense of belonging of the protagonist Uhtred as a result from his interactions with different peoples and cultures, specially with the Anglo-Saxons and the Scandinavians.

In *The Last Kingdom* (2004), the story of the protagonist Uhtred begins in 866, in the region of Northumbria, specifically in Bebbanburg (Bamburgh Castle), a fortress ruled by his biological father. This coincides with the arrival of the Danes in that area. Uhtred, a nine-year-old Anglo-Saxon boy, is captured by the Danish invaders after the battle that led to his biological father's death. From that moment, he finds himself embraced by a new family, immersing him in a new culture. Bebbanburg is now ruled by his uncle, Ælfric, who plots his death to avoid future demands from the true heir of those lands. This event incites the protagonist to a desire for revenge and to reclaim the lands that rightfully belong to him. This becomes Uhtred's main goal throughout the narrative of *Saxon Stories*.

Uhtred is raised by the Danish earl Ragnar, who considers him as his own son. As part of the group of Danes, the protagonist abandons his native religion, Christianity, to worship the gods of Norse religiosity. Uhtred learns how to fight, and as he grows up, he joins the Great Heathen Army, led by the Lothbrok brothers, to follow his foster father





Ragnar. Thus, Uhtred participates in invasions of East Anglia and Mercia and helping them to conquer most of Saxon England. The protagonist realizes at that moment that he was born to be a warrior in battle (ALLREADERS, 2012a)³.

The character begins to feel torn between the love he feels for the Danes and his sense of duty to his ancient Anglo-Saxon origins. These conflicts of identity are intensified when Uhtred's Danish adoptive father, Ragnar, is treacherously killed by Kjartan, a Dane from his group. Consequently, Uhtred and his Anglo-Saxon friend and companion, Brida, who had also been taken by the group of Danes, ask for help to Alfred, the king of Wessex.

Ragnar's son, also called Ragnar, returns from Ireland and reunites with Uhtred and Brida. Uhtred also reestablishes his connection with his old friend Beocca, who was previously a priest in Bebbanburg but became Alfred's servant in Wessex. The priest convinces Uhtred to swear an oath to serve King Alfred as a warrior. While Ragnar and Brida urge Uhtred to join them in living as Vikings, Uhtred resists the temptation and remains in Wessex. Consequently, Uhtred marries Mildrith, a devout Anglo-Saxon Christian, an action practically ordered by King Alfred, with the promise of new lands to the warrior.

Even though he served with loyalty, and despite his admiration for the intelligence, competence and cunning of the King of Wessex, Uhtred had many grievances against Alfred. These feelings are further intensified in the transition from the first to the second book, primarily due to the battle at Cynuit Hillfort. During this battle, Uhtred kills Ubba, a fearsome Scandinavian warrior renowned for his bravery, helping once again the Alfredian government.

In *The Pale Horseman* (2005), Uhtred is wronged when Odda the Younger declares to King Alfred to be the one responsible for Ubba's death. While attempting to prove his worth to Alfred and his advisors, Uhtred inadvertently violates one of Wessex's laws by drawing his sword in the presence of the king. Consequently, the protagonist experiences public humiliation, sanctioned by the king.

Uhtred decides to embark on a seafaring journey alongside his Saxon comrade Leofric, with the intention of engaging in acts of piracy. They arrive at the region of Cornwalum (Cornwall), where Uhtred meets Queen Iseult, towards whom he develops a profound passion. Additionally, he crosses paths with the renowned Bishop Asser, who

³ This paragraph was written based on the the Plot summary presented by the website "Allreaders.com". Available at: <http://allreaders.com/book-review-summary/the-last-kingdom-saxon-chronicles-1-39526> Accessed on: July 25th, 2022





becomes his enemy. Hired by the local king Peredur to drive some Danes out of Cornwall, Uhtred forms a treacherous alliance with Svein of the White Horse, attacking the small Breton kingdom and taking with him Iseult, who is much feared for being considered a queen of the shadows, whose greatest power would be to predict the future.

Uhtred brings Iseult to his lands in Wessex, where they forge a romantic connection. Consequently, Uhtred leaves his Saxon wife, Mildrith, who decides to serve God in a convent. King Alfred, upon learning from Asser of Uhtred's unauthorized invasion of Cornwall lands, summons Uhtred to Wintanceaster (Winchester) to face charges for their actions against Christians. In his defiance towards Alfred, Uhtred chooses not to humble himself, resulting in his sentence of a trial by combat against Steapa, the champion appointed by the king. This takes place in the context of the year 877, during which the Great Pagan Army, led by a Dane named Guthrum, poses a significant threat (ALLREADERS, 2012b).

The confrontation between Steapa and Uhtred is disrupted by an invading group of Norsemen, making it possible for Uhtred to escape. The surprise attack was orchestrated by Guthrum, who broke the peace agreement between Wessex and the Danes from East Anglia. Guthrum's army arrives in Wessex, seizing control of Wintanceaster and the surrounding territories, forcing Alfred and his family to seek refuge in the marshes outside Defnascir. Uhtred ensures Alfred's safety during this period and devises a plan for the remaining Saxons to retake Wintanceaster from Guthrum's Danish forces. The climax of this book is the historic Battle of Ethandun (Battle of Edington), a massive struggle that leads to the restoration of Saxon rule in Wessex, but to the death of the dear lover of Uhtred, Iseult. (ALLREADERS, 2012b)⁴.

In the third book, *The Lords of the North* (2006), Kjartan, the one responsible for the death of Ragnar and his family, now rules a stronghold in Dunholm (Durham), in Northumbria. A second Danish army under the leadership of Ivarr, son of Ivar the Boneless, gathers along the borders with Scotland. Uhtred comes across a group of Vikings, led by Sven, his childhood enemy, who is the son of Kjartan. Faced with this scenario, the protagonist pretends to be a "dead warrior" to humiliate Sven and his men and to free those who are enslaved by Sven's group (ALLREADERS, 2012c).

⁴ This paragraph and the previous one were written based on the *Plot* summary presented by the website "Allreaders.com". Available at: <http://allreaders.com/book-review-summary/the-pale-horseman-39540>
Accessed on: July 27th 2022





Guthred, one of the captives who has been set free, claimed to be the King of Northumbria, and Uhtred gradually develops a strong affection for him (ALLREADERS, 2012c). Therefore, the protagonist aids Guthred in his endeavor to establish his kingship to the north. Enchanted by the relics and the Christian “magic” (as he himself believed), Guthred chooses to be baptized. As a result, his small kingdom faces the coexistence of Anglo-Saxon and Danish peoples. In this context, Uhtred falls deeply in love with Gisela, Guthred's sister, who eventually becomes his wife.

Secretly, Guthred makes an agreement with Ælfric of Bebbanburg and Ivarr Ivarsson, which demands to get rid of Uhtred. Consequently, Uhtred is sold into slavery to a Danish pirate. During his period of enslavement, the protagonist meets an Irish Christian named Finan, who becomes his friend. When Hild, a nun who was saved from the Danes by Uhtred, in *The Pale Horseman* (2005), finds out the fate of the protagonist, she begs Alfred to save him. The king sends his champion Steapa along with a ship to liberate Uhtred from captivity. Once again, feeling indebted to Alfred, Uhtred agrees to reconcile with Guthred, aiming to defeat the growing threats of Ivarr and Kjartan (ALLREADERS, 2012c).

Uhtred and his foster brother, Ragnar Ragnarsson, discovers that Kjartan has held Thyra, their sister, for over ten years in captivity, during which she was raped and tortured by Kjartan, Sven, and their men. Ragnar kills Kjartan in a humiliating manner and assumes control of Dunholm fortress. After being rescued, Thyra falls in love with Father Beocca, leading to their eventual marriage (ALLREADERS, 2012c)⁵. The story ends with Ivarr's death by the hands of Uhtred.

The brief summary shows how Uhtred's trajectory is shaped by the transition between the Anglo-Saxon and the Scandinavian contexts. The story begins with the protagonist immersed in an Anglo-Saxon environment, followed by an event that leads to his involvement with a Danish group. However, he eventually returns to his Anglo-Saxon origins. Furthermore, the amalgamation of Anglo-Saxon and Danish characters is accentuated throughout the narrative. In the article “Uhtred’s memories in ‘Saxon Stories’, by Bernard Cornwell: rethinking the history of 9th century England” (2020) we analyzed how the memories of the protagonist Uhtred emerge from and are immersed into the British cultural memory of the past. We concluded that Uhtred expresses his identity by narrating his own story of life and showing how it is connected with the history

⁵ The plot of *The Lords of the North* (2006) described here is an adaptation of the Plot summary presented by the website “Allreaders.com”. Available at: <http://allreaders.com/book-review-summary/lords-of-the-north-39544>. Accessed on: July 27th 2022





of 9th century England, focusing on the memories he has shared with both Anglo-Saxons and the Scandinavians (SOARES, 2020).

In summary, in the first book, the historical context works as the background of the narrative by depicting the first Danish attacks on the Anglo-Saxons in the 9th century, leading up to Wessex becoming the last kingdom to resist. The second volume explores how Wessex almost went towards the oblivion of History. Finally, the third book describes the formation of the *Danelaw*, highlighting the peace agreements between King Alfred and Guthrum, a Dane who was baptized to be recognized as King of East Anglia. While Cornwell focuses on the history of Alfred and Wessex in these three *Saxon Stories* books, he also involves the history of other British regions, such as Northumbria, as well as regions that were not part of the Anglo-Saxon complex, such as Cornwall. In the next topics we present the historical context behind these fictional narratives, exploring specially the interaction between the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian peoples in the 9th century British lands, since the relations between these two peoples led to cultural “hybridity”, which influenced the formation of English society and identity, aspects that are represented in *Saxon Stories* by the memories and identity of the protagonist and narrator, Uhtred, who embodies this hybridity.

2. The Anglo-Saxons

Once known as *Britannia*, Great Britain was a part of the Roman Empire for approximately four centuries. Before the first Roman invasions, the British lands were inhabited by different Celtic groups scattered across the territory. The arrival of the Romans brought about a transformation in the Celtic way of life through the imposition of a new language, beliefs, and customs. Consequently, different peoples came into contact with one another, leading to the merging of new cultures.

Subsequently, several factors contributed to the decline of Roman rule and the withdrawal of Roman troops from Great Britain, creating an opportunity for various Germanic peoples from northern continental Europe to enter the region. While many Roman writers commonly referred to these groups as “Saxons”, Bede the Venerable recorded in his writings that these invaders originated from the three most powerful peoples of *Germania*: the Saxons, the Angles, and the Jutes (BLAIR, 1966). Each of these tribes settled in different regions within English territories: “[...] the Angles settled the north of England, the Saxons settled the south, and the Jutes settled in Kent, to the east.





Each of the three tribes spoke *Old English*, but of a different dialect” (DROUT, 2006: 61). The term “Anglo-Saxons” encompasses the fusion of these different Germanic peoples who shared similarities in their languages, customs and beliefs.

With the establishment of these Germanic peoples in British territory, the ancient Celtic inhabitants who survived the invasions, known as Britons, took refuge in the regions of Wales, in the west, and Cornwall, in the south. According to Jorge Luis Borges (2006), the Germanic peoples referred to the foreigners as “wealh”, which translates to “Welsh”. This new name was given to the former Britons and consequently applied to one of the British regions where these peoples sought refuge: Wales. In *The Pale Horseman*, the second volume of *Saxon Stories*, the protagonist and narrator, Uhtred, provides this exact explanation and further mentions Dyfed, one of the kingdoms of Wales:

Land. We hoisted the sail fully and sawthed past the two small, tubby boats, and so, for the first time, I came to the shore of Wales. The Britons had another name for it, but we simply called it Wales, which means “foreigners”, and much later I worked out that we must have made that landfall in Dyfed, which is the name of the churchman who converted the Britons of Wales to Christianity and had the westernmost kingdom of the Welsh named for him (CORNWELL, 2006a: 77).

During the Anglo-Saxon period, before the establishment of the Scandinavians, the British island was divided into several kingdoms and basically grouped into three main ethnic populations. The Anglo-Saxons inhabited the southern and central parts, which is now territory of England. The Scots and the Britons resided in the north and west coast of Great Britain, occupying the outlying lands along the coast.

Michael Swanton (1997) explains that there were “districts” rather than kingdoms, during the Anglo-Saxon period. In the northern region of the British territory, the “Scots” and other ancient Scottish or Breton peoples inhabited areas such as *Lothian*, *Galloway*, *Dal Riada* (which is now part of Scotland), and *Strathclyde* (which today encompasses parts of northern England and southern Scotland). In *The Last Kingdom*, there is a reference to *Dalriada* and *Pictland*, where the protagonist mentions the desolate nature of the land: “Why not go north?” I asked him. / ‘To *Dalriada* and Pictland’ he laughed. ‘There’s nothing up there, Uhtred, except bare rocks, bare fields and bare arses. That land there is no better than at home [...]’ (CORNWELL, 2005: 74). In the third book, *The Lords of the North*, *Strathclyde* is mentioned, cast by Cornwell as *Strath Clota*, which, according to Uhtred, is inhabited by savage people who raided Cumbreland:





I had been taught as a child that there were many tribes in Scotland, but the two tribes closest to Northumbria were the Scots themselves, of whom Aed was now king, and the savages of Strath Clota who lived on the western shore and never came near Bebbanburg. They raided Cumbreland instead [...] (CORNWELL, 2007: 49).

The territories and small kingdoms inhabited by Breton peoples were *Cornwall* (now part of England), *Gwent*, *Dyfed*, *Powys* and *Gwynedd* (those four formed the territory that is now Wales). The three major English kingdoms were Northumbria, Mercia and Wessex. *Bernicia* and *Deira* were the small kingdoms that formed Northumbria. In *The Last Kingdom*, Bebbanburg was identified as the former kingdom of Bernicia: “We were kings here once,’ he told me, ‘and our land was called Bernicia.” (CORNWELL, 2005: 13). Additionally, *Cumbria*, a small Northumbrian territory, known as Cumbreland in the Saxon Stories. The narrative, in the context of the Scandinavian invasions, explains that:

[...] Cumbreland was the part of Northumbria that lay across the hills and next to the Irish Sea, and it was raided by Scots from Strath Clota, by Norsemen from Ireland and by Britons from north Wales. Some Danes had settled in Cumbreland, but not enough to keep the wild raids from ravaging the place (CORNWELL, 2007: 24-25).

It is complex to define the territorial division of Anglo-Saxon England. The traditional history usually applies the term “Heptarchy”⁶ to the Anglo-Saxon period, alluding to seven kingdoms that would later unite to form England: Sussex, Wessex, Essex, Kent, Mercia, East Anglia, and Northumbria. However, as noted by the Brazilian researcher Isabela Dias de Albuquerque (2017b), this conception is problematic: firstly, England was not solely comprised of seven kingdoms, as there were indeed other smaller kingdoms, and secondly, not all of these kingdoms were exclusively inhabited by the specific peoples they are associated with.

In the 7th century, there was another period of Roman presence in Great Britain, occurring a century after the formation of small kingdoms in English territory by the Anglo-Saxon peoples. During this time, Christian monks not only from Rome but also from the neighboring island of Ireland worked to christianize the inhabitants of the British island. João Bittencourt de Oliveira (2010) summarizes how this process of Christian conversion unfolded:

[...] the conversion of the Saxons in England from Germanic paganism to Christianity was accomplished around the 7th century under the influence of

⁶ A conception created by the cleric Henrique de Huntington (1088-1154) in the twelfth century.





the already converted Jutes of Kent (a county situated in the southeast of England, near London). However, this process of Christianization was not uniform among all the peoples who inhabited the region at that time. The West Saxons, for example, were more resistant to the adoption of Christianity. In fact, Christianity, during this period, was more accepted among the nobles. Free citizens and serfs continued to practice pagan rituals even after their nominal conversion to Christianity. These lower and marginalized classes (known by the Latin expression *plebeium vulgus* or *cives*) of the political process remained a problem for Christian authorities until 836, when the *Translatio S. Liborii* warns of their obstinacy towards pagan rites and superstitions (*ritus et superstitio*) (OLIVEIRA, 2010: 111, our translation)⁷.

It within this context of Anglo-Saxon England that English Literature finds its origins. Borges (2006) explains that English literature began to develop from the end of the 7th century or the beginning of the 8th century. In its early stages, English Literature was an oral tradition since the inhabitants of the English territory did not practice writing. Ronald Carter and John McRae (1997: p. 3) state that “in English, the first signs of oral literature tend to have three kinds of subject matter – religion, war, and the trials of daily life – all of which continue the themes of great deal of writing”. With the advent of Christianity in England and the subsequent introduction of writing, many oral works were eventually recorded in written form. An example of this is the epic poem *Beowulf*, considered to be the earliest surviving literary work in England and estimated to have been composed between 500 and 700 AD. Despite being written in English territory and originally in the Anglo-Saxon language (*Old English*), *Beowulf* recounts events that took place in Scandinavia, particularly in the regions inhabited by the Geats, Swedes, Frisians and Danes, which correspond to present-day Sweden and Denmark (OLIVEIRA, 2010). This illustrates the connection between the Anglo-Saxon peoples and their ancient origins.

The Last Kingdom, the first book of *Saxon Stories*, begins with the arrival of the Danes in Northumbria in the 9th century. In this period, the Norsemen came with the intention of not only raiding but also conquering and colonizing British territory, and, according to Cornwell's fictional account, only four major Anglo-Saxon kingdoms prevailed: Northumbria, East Anglia, Mercia, and Wessex. Disputes over land, as well as

⁷ “[...] a conversão dos Saxões na Inglaterra do paganismo germânico ao Cristianismo foi consumada por volta do século VII sob a influência dos já convertidos Jutos de Kent (condado situado no sudeste da Inglaterra, próximo de Londres). Esse processo de cristianização, entretanto, não foi uniforme entre todos os povos que então habitavam a região. Os Saxões do oeste, por exemplo, foram mais resistentes à adoção do Cristianismo. Na verdade, o Cristianismo nessa fase foi mais bem aceito entre os nobres. Os cidadãos livres e a classe servil continuaram praticando os rituais pagãos mesmo depois de sua conversão nominal ao Cristianismo. Essas classes inferiores e marginalizadas (conhecidas pela expressão latina *plebeium vulgus* ou *cives*) do processo político continuaram sendo um problema para as autoridades cristãs até 836, quando o *Translatio S. Liborii* adverte sobre sua obstinação quanto aos ritos e superstições pagãs (*ritus et superstitio*)” (OLIVEIRA, 2010: 111).





other political and cultural disagreements, brought different peoples into contact, sharing cultural differences and similarities.

3. The Scandinavians

Currently, the Scandinavians are the inhabitants of the region located in the far north of Europe, which comprises Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland. However, this term is also used to also refer to the ancient Germanic peoples who inhabited the region where Denmark, Norway and Sweden are located nowadays. Another designation used for these peoples is *Norsemen* (as it appears in Cornwell's work). It is also important to mention the term *Viking*, which primarily was used to refer to Scandinavians who practiced piracy, seafare, invasions, and looting. Nowadays, due to a series of cultural appropriations that have been juxtaposed, the term has become popular, equating *Vikings* and Scandinavians.

The period of migration of the Scandinavian peoples is usually called the Viking Age, which lasted from the late 8th century and early 9th century to the 11th century (ALBUQUERQUE, 2017b). Johnni Langer (2017) explains that the Viking Age is traditionally divided into two periods. The First Viking Age, which began with hostile incursions and surprise attacks (raids) in the late 8th century, followed by the establishment of settlements in regions such as Scotland, Britain, and France. The Second Viking Age was characterized by the emergence of permanent dynasties, the intensified process of Christianization, and the process of urbanization in Europe affected by Scandinavian merchants. During this later period, “a Scandinavian ceased to be a Viking when he became a Christian” (LANGER, 2017: 212, our translation)⁸.

Historically renowned for their excellence in naval engineering, the Vikings were not only great explorers but also colonizers, establishing settlements in distant lands, such as Greenland and Iceland. Furthermore, “the Vikings were possessed of superior technology and military organization” (DROUT, 2006: 76). Thus, the warfare had a significant role in Viking Age Scandinavian culture, as it served as a means to establish political, economic, and social connections through combat (MOITA, 2017).

Regarding the reasons that led these peoples to explore different territories, Albuquerque (2017b) explains that it was primarily due to the commercial expansion in

⁸ “[...] um escandinavo deixava de ser um viking quando se tornava um cristão” (*apud* LANGER, 2017, p. 212).





Northern Europe, which began in the late 7th century. In 862, when “King Charles of West Francia began systematically investing in the defenses of his kingdom, the Vikings shifted their focus to the occupation of England” (ALBUQUERQUE, 2017b: 133, our translation)⁹.

During the First Viking Age, the Scandinavians had not yet been converted to Christianity, although the regions of origin already had a Christian presence with the intention of converting them. The Christianization of the Scandinavian peoples started in the 8th century with the arrival of missionaries in Denmark, but it was not fully consolidated until the 12th century (OLIVEIRA, 2010). The Scandinavian peoples had beliefs similar to those of the ancient Anglo-Saxons, who worshiped several gods. As the Scandinavians did not have a specific term to describe their beliefs, these are often called by the historians as “Norse Paganism”. “According to Boyer, there were religious practices and not a single religion” (LANGER, 2015: 357, our translation)¹⁰. Therefore, it is incorrect to consider “Norse paganism” as a uniform belief. Beliefs, rituals, and preferences for certain gods could vary across different regions of ancient Scandinavia. Academic research on Medieval Scandinavia has indicated that the Norse religiosities during the Viking Age were not centralized at a theological or organizational level, as the Scandinavians did not have temples, dogmas, specialized priests, or standardized prayers (LANGER, 2015). Furthermore:

The Norse people maintained relationships of personal and utilitarian nature with the god or gods they had decided to revere, a kind of contract. Aside from the great solstice celebrations, the Vikings were not particularly religious, nor did they manage a set of abstract conceptions regarding the divine. [...] When they needed it, they invoked a particular god in the form of a petition (*badja*) and not a prayer: “if I offer you this or that, you will give or grant me something else in return” (LANGER, 2015: 358, our translation)¹¹.

The first invaders of the British Isles were the Danes. In *The Last Kingdom*, the protagonist Uhtred explains that the Scandinavian invaders “were called Vikings when they were raiders, but Danes or pagans when they were traders” (CORNWELL, 2005: 12). Michael Drout (2006) elucidates that the term “Danes” was commonly used by local

⁹ “[...] o rei Carlos da França Ocidental começou sistematicamente a investir nas defesas do seu reino, os vikings direcionaram sua atenção na ocupação da Inglaterra” (ALBUQUERQUE, 2017b, p. 133)

¹⁰ “[...] segundo Boyer, ocorriam práticas religiosas e não uma única religião” (LANGER, 2015: 357).

¹¹ “O nórdico mantinha relações de tipo pessoal e utilitário com o deus ou deuses que havia decidido reverenciar, uma espécie de contrato. Fora das grandes celebrações dos solstícios, o Viking não era particularmente religioso, tampouco manejava um conjunto de concepções de tipo abstrato com respeito ao divino. [...] Quando necessitava, ele invocava o seu deus particular sob a forma de petição (*badja*) e não de reza: “se eu te oferecer isso ou aquilo, tu me darás ou me concederás outra coisa em troca” (LANGER, 2015: 358).





populations to encompass all Scandinavians, irrespective of whether they originated from Denmark, Norway, or other regions of Scandinavia.

The Scandinavian presence in the British Isles and other regions was considered not friendly from the point of view of the local populations due to their practice of piracy. Christian documentation from that time, such as the 9th century *Annales Bertiniani* (Annals of Saint Bertin) and the 10th century *Annales Vedastini* (Annals of Saint Vaast), conveys the negative impact and fear associated with the activities of the Scandinavians in the areas they raided (ALBUQUERQUE, 2017b).

4. The English territory between Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians

Cornwell's fictional narrative promotes the memory of the “creation” of England as it depicts events from the period of Alfred's reign (871-899). As Isabela Albuquerque (2017b) suggests, during this period, a political endeavor emerged aiming to unite the smaller kingdoms and consolidate the vision of constructing an “England”.

Firstly, it is important to mention that both the Anglo-Saxons and the Scandinavians belong to the Germanic root, which indicates a certain kinship between them. Jorge Luis Borges (2006) outlines some considerations about the Germanic peoples and the influences they imparted on the English language:

“Germanic” is, then, the name of a group of tribes with different governance structures that spoke related dialects and later gave rise to modern languages such as Danish, German, English, etc. These tribes had common mythologies, from which only the Scandinavian one was saved, in the most distant point of Europe: Iceland. We know from this mythology recorded in the *Eddas* some correspondences: for example, the Scandinavian god *Odin* was the German god *Wotan* and the English god *Woden*. The names of the gods were associated with the days of the week, which were translated from Latin into Old English: “Monday”, *lunes*, the day of the Moon; *martes*, the day of Mars, is “Tuesday”, the day of the German god of war and glory; *miércoles*, the day of Mercury, was assimilated to Woden in “Wednesday”; the day of Jupiter, *jueves*, gave “Thursday”, the day of Thor, with the Scandinavian name; the day of Venus is “Friday”, the German *Frija*, *Frig* in England, goddess of beauty; “Saturday” is the day of Saturn; the Lord's Day – something you see in the Italian, “*domenica*” -, was like the day of the Sun: “Sunday” (BORGES, 2006: 3-4, our translation)¹².

¹² “Germanos” é, então, o nome de uma série de tribos com diversos governos, que falavam dialetos afins e depois deram origem às atuais línguas dinamarquesa, alemã, inglesa, etc. Tinham mitologias comuns, das quais se salvou somente a escandinava, no ponto mais distante da Europa: a Islândia. Conhecemos por essa mitologia salva nas *Eddas* algumas correspondências: por exemplo, o Odin escandinavo era o Wotan alemão e o Woden inglês. Os nomes dos deuses ficaram nos dias da semana, que foram traduzidos do latim para o inglês antigo: “Monday”, *lunes* [segunda-feira], dia da Lua, “moon”; *martes* [terça-feira], dia de Marte, é “Tuesday”, dia do deus germano da guerra e da glória; *miércoles* [quarta-feira], dia de Mercúrio, assimilou-se a Woden em “Wednesday”; o dia de Júpiter, *jueves* [quinta-feira], deu “Thursday”, dia de Tor,





The first distinguishing aspect between them is the nearly five hundred years of history, starting from the moment when the forming groups of the “Anglo-Saxons” (the Anglians, the Jutes, the Saxons and others) left their respective regions to migrate to the territories of *Britannia*, thus forming a new culture. However, what really sets them apart (the Anglo-Saxons and the Scandinavians), as a consequence of this period of migrations, is the conjecture that they were Christianized. Religion practically transformed them into opposing groups within the historical context we are discussing in this article. Nonetheless, as highlighted by Borges (2006), there are remnants of their affinity that persist to this day, particularly through the English language itself, as expressed by the names of the days of the week.

Most of the historiography regarding the relations between the Anglo-Saxons and the Scandinavians in the British Isles relies largely on research drawn from various manuscripts written during that time period, such as *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, a compilation of annals originally written in Old English that outlines the trajectory of the Anglo-Saxon people, and *The Life of King Alfred*, originally written in Latin and credited to Asser, a Welsh monk. These medieval narratives are recognized as historical and archaeological documentation that aids in reconstructing the history of the period they depict. Although the use of these texts as historical sources is subject to discussion, as they contain elements of fiction, their notable intention to record real events should be acknowledged. It is also important to consider that most of the written sources from that time were produced by Christian scribes or authors and therefore presented a specific perspective on the Scandinavian “other”, often omitting many aspects of their culture.

Asser, who is believed to be the author of *The Life of King Alfred*, is a historical character who appears in *Saxon Stories*, particularly in the second book, *The Pale Horseman*. When Uhtred first meets him in the Cornwall region (which, during that time, was inhabited by the native Britons/Celts), he notices that Asser is very proactive and anticipates a possible interest on the part of King Alfred to meet this British monk:

I was impressed that a British monk at the end of the land of Britain knew so much of what happened in Wessex, and I reckoned Alfred would have been pleased to hear Asser's nonsense, though of course Alfred had sent many messengers to the British (CORNWELL, 2006: 57).

com o nome escandinavo; o dia de Vênus é “Friday”, a Frija alemã, Frig na Inglaterra, deusa da beleza; “Saturday” é o dia de Saturno; o domingo, dia do senhor – coisa que se vê no italiano, “domenica” -, ficou como o dia do Sol: “Sunday” (BORGES, 2006: 3-4).





Although Asser does not please Uhtred at all, as he states “[...] though I did not know it, I had just met a man who would haunt my life like a louse” (CORNWELL, 2006: 51), the passage is interesting because it signifies a memory related to one of the scribes who played a role in preserving the Anglo-Saxon records that have survived to the present day (at least symbolically, considering that some scholars claim that the authorship of *The Life of King Alfred* is uncertain).

In the 9th century, the Anglo-Saxons were almost completely Christianized. During this time, their rulers openly embraced the Christian faith, as can be seen in historical documents, such as *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and *The Life of King Alfred*. However, it is possible that remnants of pre-Christian beliefs still persisted among certain segments of the Anglo-Saxon population. Additionally, as Albuquerque (2017b) describes, the annals of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* provide instances of pre-Christian memory, not in a religious sense, but in order to revitalize the collective identity of the various peoples inhabiting the English territories:

In the ASC [*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*], we find a series of references to the pre-Christian past, despite the fact that the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were already Christianized by the time the text was compiled. However, the presence of cultural elements prior to Christianity does not diminish the belief of these peoples, but shows us that they were inserted in a cultural tradition that referred to the period before the migrations to the island and that this tradition was part of their identity construction as a group.

It is precisely during Alfred's period, when the ASCs were beginning to be compiled, that [...] the pagan past and the biblical past meet, linking the first patriarchs of the book of Genesis to figures from the pre-Christian period and building the logic of the new royal genealogies (ALBUQUERQUE, 2017b: 65, our translation)¹³.

In addition, there exist other minor literary fragments that shed light on the early English literature. Ronald Carter and John McRae briefly discuss these fragments in their book *The Routledge History of Literature in English: Britain & Ireland* (1997). One notable example is *Caedmon's Hymn*, recognized as the earliest known fragment of English literature dating back to approximately 670. When tracing specific aspects of this text, Carter and McRae emphasize that:

¹³ “Nas ASC encontramos uma série de referências ao passado pré- cristão, muito embora no momento em que o texto passou a ser compilado, já fossem os reinos anglo-saxões cristianizados. Todavia, a presença de elementos culturais anteriores ao cristianismo não relativiza a crença desses povos, mas nos mostra que eles estavam inseridos numa tradição cultural que remetia ao período anterior às migrações para a ilha e que esta tradição fazia parte de sua construção identitária enquanto grupo. É justamente durante o período de Alfred, momento em que as ASC começavam a ser compiladas, que [...] o passado pagão e o passado bíblico se encontram, ligando os primeiros patriarcas do livro dos Gênesis a figuras do período pré- cristão e construindo a lógica das novas genealogias régias” (ALBUQUERQUE, 2017b: 65).





Christian monks and nuns were, in effect, the guardians of culture, as they were virtually the only people who could read and write before the fourteenth century. It is interesting therefore that most of the native English culture they are not preserved in Latin, the language of the church, but in Old English, the language of the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes (CARTER & McRAE, 1997: 7).

The authors suggest that the church, by acting in this way in British territory, seemed to demonstrate an awareness of the linguistic and, consequently, identity importance that they would be preserving, in order to contribute to the centuries that would follow. João Bittencourt Oliveira (2010) explains that the earliest written settlements in England began in the 7th century, when the Benedictine monasteries were consolidated, mainly in the Northumbria region, becoming centers of erudition. However, the majority of written material during this period was in Latin, the official language of the Church, since native languages were deemed unsuitable for sacred scripture and theological subjects. The beginning of prose in the vernacular language and probably the preservation of old English poetry were possible due to the reign of Alfred the Great (849-899):

After decisively defeating the Danes in 876, Alfred rebuilt his kingdom, reestablished fair law, and sought to restore England's leadership in scholarship in the 7th and 8th centuries. It is also probably to Alfred that the publication of the most important prose work in Saxon English, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, a collection of chronicles or annals covering the history of England since the year 1 until 1154 (OLIVEIRA, 2010: 112, our translation)¹⁴

From this perspective, King Alfred the Great was a milestone in the construction of English identity. According to Albuquerque (2017b), Alfred is believed to be the first to use the term “English” to refer to the people of his territory in the context of a political community. Beginning in the 9th century and followed by his successors, Alfred's project extended beyond the political sphere and encompassed the spiritual realm. By choosing the term “Anglo” instead of “Saxon”, Alfred consciously embraced a pre-existing notion of the supposed uniqueness of the English identity. This choice was legitimized by Bede, who used the Latin term *gens anglorum* coined by Augustine of Canterbury, the founder of the Catholic Church in England. Considering that Alfred's project sought to coin the necessary elements to build an English identity, not only the term *gens Anglorum* was used as a foundation, but also the term *Angelcynn*, from the Old English, found in the

¹⁴ “Após derrotar os Daneses de maneira decisiva em 876, Alfredo reconstruiu seu reino, restabeleceu uma lei justa, e procurou resgatar a liderança da Inglaterra na erudição que tinha nos séculos VII e VIII. É também provavelmente a Alfredo que se deve o início da publicação da mais importante obra em prosa em inglês saxônico, a *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (“Crônica Anglo-Saxônica”), uma coleção de crônicas ou anais que cobrem a história de Inglaterra desde o ano 1 até 1154” (OLIVEIRA, 2010: 112).





manuscripts of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. The term *Anglo*, in this way, served to differentiate the Germanic peoples from their Celtic neighbors and establish a unified Church under the authority of Rome (ALBUQUERQUE, 2017b).

Even though Wessex, where Alfred reigned, was traditionally a region of Saxons, the term *Anglo* was chosen to coin the identity unification of that people. Albuquerque (2017b) explains that the term *Saxons* was widely used between the 5th and 6th centuries to refer to the inhabitants of the territory. However, in the centuries that followed, *Saxon* “became linked to the continental origins of these Germanic peoples” (2017b: 138, our translation)¹⁵, reflecting their migratory past. In this sense, *Anglo* acquired a Christian religious connotation, while *Saxon* was connected to the pagan past.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle encompasses several manuscripts that were seemingly written simultaneously but in different regions, resulting in variations among them. To provide some references to this study, we have selected the translation by Michael Swanton, particularly the 1997 edition. Swanton's purpose as the translator is to unify the manuscripts by supplementing each other and creating a comprehensive version of the chronicle. This edition is valuable as it includes additional explanations within the excerpts.

According to this *Chronicle*, the first violent attack by the *Vikings* on the English lands occurred in the spring of the year 793. A group of Norsemen arrived in the northwest of England, attacking a monastery. They not only looted its riches but also killed many monks and captured others as slaves. The *Chronicle* manuscripts record that in 793, “terrible portents came about over the land of Northumbria, and miserably frightened the people: [...] immense flashes of lightning, and fiery dragons were seen flying in the air” (SWANTON, 1997: 55). In a footnote, Swanton suggests that these poetically described “portents” could possibly refer to long-tailed comets and adverse weather conditions in the region, indicating that the Anglo-Saxons received signs of what was to come: following these signs, a severe famine ensued, and the main catastrophe unfolded with the onslaught of heathens who “miserably devastated God's church in Lindisfarne island by looting and slaughter” (SWANTON, 1997: 57).

Subsequent to this event, further attacks occurred not only in the British Isles but also in other European regions. Most groups of Norse explorers of this period belonged to an elite group: “People persecuted in their homelands or those who sought wealth,

¹⁵ “saxão passou a estar ligado às origens continentais desses povos germânicos” (ALBUQUERQUE, 2017b: 138)





glory, and fame through adventurous exploits, this migrating elite was distinguished by a select group of travelers” (ALBUQUERQUE, 2017b: 142, our translation)¹⁶. After 793, this migrating elite:

[...] carried out several more or less disorganized but devastating attacks on monasteries on islands and on the English and Scottish coasts, particularly in Northumbria. Then, still as recorded in the *Chronicles*, in 865 a skillfully organized army landed in East Anglia, led by Ivar Ragnarsson (or Ivar the Boneless "Boneless") and his brother Halfdan, sons of Ragnar Lothbrok (Loðbrók), and over the course of the next fifteen years, they took possession of practically every eastern part of England (OLIVEIRA, 2016: 33, our translation)¹⁷.

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As Albuquerque emphasizes, the manuscripts of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* indicate elementary differences between the attacks that took place in the first half of the ninth century and those of the second half. The former “refer only to the presence of one *army (here)*, which leaves the occupied region as soon as “peace is made”, certainly after payment for that purpose” (ALBUQUERQUE, 2017b: 118, our translation)¹⁸. Therefore, invaders would be concerned only with the acquisition of valuable goods, either through violent attacks or through peace agreements/treaties. The records that report the second attacks “allude to a *large army (micel here)*, which suggests that the Scandinavians actually came in a greater number than in previous years” (ALBUQUERQUE, 2017b: 118, our translation)¹⁹, probably aiming territorial occupation.

The so-called “Great Heathen Army” landed in England in 865. In the following years, which lasted until 875, the army conquered several territories, such as the kingdoms of East Anglia and Mercia. According to Leandro Vilar de Oliveira (2017a: 325, our translation)²⁰, the reasons that led to the arrival of this great army are uncertain, “it is not even known who had the idea to undertake a daring campaign to conquer territories in England”. However, the memories that emerge from this context permeate not only the

¹⁶ “Pessoas perseguidas em suas regiões de origem ou que buscavam riqueza, glória e fama através de aventuras, essa elite que se deslocava era marcada por um grupo seletivo de viajantes” (ALBUQUERQUE, 2017b: 142).

¹⁷ “[...] realizaram diversos outros mais ou menos desorganizados, porém, desastrosos ataques a mosteiros em ilhas e nas costas inglesa e escocesa, principalmente na Northumbria. Então, ainda conforme os registros das *Crônicas*, em 865 um exército habilmente organizado desembarcou na Ânglia Oriental, liderado por Ivar Ragnarsson (ou Ivar the Boneless “Sem-Ossos”) e seu irmão Halfdan filhos de Ragnar Lothbrok (Loðbrók), e no decorrer dos quinze anos seguintes se apossaram de praticamente toda parte oriental da Inglaterra” (OLIVEIRA, 2016: 33).

¹⁸ “[...] referem-se apenas à presença de um *exército (here)*, que deixa a região ocupada tão logo “a paz é feita”, certamente após o pagamento para tal finalidade” (ALBUQUERQUE, 2017b: 118)

¹⁹ “aludem a um *grande exército (micel here)*, o que nos sugere que os escandinavos viessem, de fato, em maior número que nos anos anteriores” (ALBUQUERQUE, 2017b: 118).

²⁰ “inclusive se desconhece de quem teria sido a ideia para empreender ousada campanha para conquistar territórios na Inglaterra” (OLIVEIRA, 2017a: 325).





English context but, in particular, Scandinavian societies, as we can see in the following explanation:

[...] some accounts from that time point out that the reason for the attack of the Norsemen was due to the intention to avenge the death of Ragnar Lothbrok. The three alleged sons of the legendary hero, namely Ivar the Boneless, Halfdan and Ubba, are said to have encouraged Danish and Norwegian chiefs to form a coalition. According to the *Saga of Ragnar Lothbrok*, the hero, Ragnar, was executed in a snake pit by King Aella of Northumbria and because of that his three sons would have led a powerful army to avenge their father's death and conquer England (OLIVEIRA, 2017a: 324-325, our translation)²¹.

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Ragnar Lothbrok is one of the “Viking” names immortalized in Scandinavian memory, mainly through their medieval literature. Scholars affirm that this popular legendary king of the Norse world “did not exist outside the representations found in mythical narratives” (MIRANDA, 2017: 583, our translation)²², suggesting that this “mythological character is the result of an amalgamation of several historical figures or a product of the Scandinavian imagination of the Viking Age and, especially, of later times” (MIRANDA, 2017: 583, our translation)²³, given that:

The narratives surrounding Ragnar Lodbrok have greatly contributed to the romanticized image we have of the Vikings, given that the character has a life guided by adventurous seafaring, plundering Christian kingdoms and engaging in violent combat and death, ideals also attributed to his sons. But his figure also contributes to building an example of how Scandinavians in the Middle Ages imagined their heroic past (MIRANDA, 2017: 583, our translation)²⁴.

The narratives surrounding the legendary figure Ragnar suggest that his supposed sons, Ivar (Hingwar), Halfdan, and Ubba, were the ones responsible for leading the Great Heathen Army in English territory. It is highly probable that they were real historical characters, as their names are mentioned not only in Icelandic sagas but also in certain Anglo-Saxon historical documents. However, the lack of archaeological evidence beyond

²¹ “[...] alguns relatos da época apontam que o motivo do ataque dos nórdicos deveu-se ao intuito de vingar a morte de RagnarLothbrok. Três supostos filhos do herói, Ivar Sem Ossos, Halfdan e Ubba, teriam incentivado chefes dinamarqueses e noruegueses a formar uma coalizão. Segundo a *Saga de Ragnar Lothbrok*, o herói foi executado num poço de cobras pelo rei Aella da Nortúmbria e com isso seus três filhos teriam liderado um poderoso exército para vingar a morte do pai e conquistar a Inglaterra” (OLIVEIRA, 2017a: 324-325).

²² “não existiu fora das representações encontradas nas narrativas míticas” (MIRANDA, 2017: 583)

²³ “personagem mitológico ser o resultado de um amálgama entre vários personagens históricos, ou produto do imaginário escandinavo da Era Viking, e, principalmente, de épocas posteriores” (MIRANDA, 2017: 583).

²⁴ As narrativas em torno de Ragnar Lodbrok contribuíram muito para a imagem romântica que possuímos dos vikings, haja vista que o personagem possui uma vida pautada pela aventura nos mares, pelo saque aos reinos cristãos e pela violência em combate e em morte, ideais também atribuídos aos seus filhos. Mas a sua figura também contribui para construir um exemplo de como os escandinavos na Idade Média imaginaram o seu passado heroico” (MIRANDA, 2017: 583).





medieval literary documentation leaves uncertainties regarding the actual brotherhood of these three individuals and their blood relationship with Ragnar Lothbrok.

In Cornwell's narrative, the identity of Ivar, Halfdan, and Ubba as “Lothbrok Brothers” is maintained. However, the name of their father Ragnar is never mentioned. On the other hand, we have another character Ragnar, a fictional Danish warrior who is sworn to Ivar. Was it the intention of the narrative to present an example of a “Ragnar” character, who could potentially merge with other “Ragnars” that were part of the legendary Lothbrok? Let's leave this question open.

The establishment of the Great Heathen Army in English territory encouraged and intensified the frequency of Viking raids in the British Isles. However, realizing that these actions also resulted in the loss of their own men, the Norsemen discovered an “easier way to amass treasures”:

When a Viking band besieged a city or landed nearby, they often merely demonstrated their combat prowess, and that was usually enough to make their enemies inclined to avoid confrontation. Opponents believed that, in the face of Viking power, they would be massacred, which is why they looked for other means to get rid of the marauders' presence. In this way, the English kingdoms of the ninth century started paying the Vikings to leave. The first record of this was in 865 AD. C, as mentioned in *the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* (OLIVEIRA, 2017c: 169, our translation)²⁵.

This practice, known as *Danegeld* in medieval English annals, derived its name from the literal meaning of “Danish gold”. It brought a certain level of “comfort” to the local communities, but even the Norse invaders “departed soon after receiving the amounts, there was no prolonged period of peace as another location would soon become the target of threats” (OLIVEIRA, 2017c: 169, our translation)²⁶, leading to the granting of more and more riches. These actions facilitated the establishment of Norse peoples in the Anglo-Saxon lands and the constitution of a true Danish province in these territories (OLIVEIRA, 2017c).

The Scandinavian invasions of English territory and their numerous conflicts with the Anglo-Saxon inhabitants draw the predominant backdrop in *Saxon Stories*. The series begins by presenting a historical plot that unfolds from a specific moment, namely when

²⁵ “Quando um bando viking sitiava uma cidade ou desembarcava em suas proximidades, muitas vezes apenas demonstrava seu poder de combate e isso, normalmente, era suficiente para deixar seus inimigos propensos a evitar o enfrentamento. Os oponentes imaginavam que, diante do poderio viking, seriam massacrados, razão pela qual buscavam outros meios para se livrar da presença dos saqueadores. Dessa forma, os reinos ingleses do século IX começaram a pagar os vikings para que fossem embora. O primeiro registro disso foi em 865 d. C, conforme consta nas *Crônicas Anglo-saxônicas*” (OLIVEIRA, 2017c: 169).

²⁶ “partissem logo após receber as quantias, não havia muito tempo de paz, pois logo em seguida outro local se tornava alvo das ameaças” (OLIVEIRA, 2017c: 169).





the Danish army captured York and gained control of Northumbria in 869. Shortly after the fall of Northumbria in 870, King Edmund of East Anglia was killed. According to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* manuscript MS. F – *The Cantebury Bilingual Cantebury*, King Edmund was murdered by the pagans Ingware (Ivar) and Ubba²⁷.

In 871, the Danish army arrives in Wessex. In the following year, King Athelred and his brother Alfred organizes the defense against the Danish attacks, and “after months of fighting against the Scandinavians, the King of Wessex dies, leaving his brother as his successor” (ALBUQUERQUE, 2017b: 118, our translation)²⁸. In 873, the Mercian king, Burgred, exiled himself to Rome. The last kingdom to resist was Wessex. In fact, this episode is focused by the first volume of our object of study, whose name already indicates: *The Last Kingdom*.

After the first attacks and conquests, the Great Heathen Army was divided in 875. One part, commanded by Halfdan, went to Northumbria with the objective of maintaining the previous conquests, while the other part remained in the south, under the command of Guthrum (ALBUQUERQUE, 2013). Subsequently, Guthrum decided to launch attacks on Wessex, which proved successful and led to the exile of King Alfred. This exile gave Alfred the opportunity to prepare and gather forces to reclaim his kingdom.

According to Albuquerque (2017b), Alfred's greatest military victory against the Norsemen was undoubtedly the Battle of Edington (878) (Ethandun, as referred to by Cornwell, who aimed to maintain the toponymy of the period in his narrative). In this battle, the Anglo-Saxons managed to secure hostages from the Scandinavian side and an agreement was reached. Although King Alfred was unable to completely defeat and expel the Danes, he achieved a temporary peace by signing an agreement with King Guthrum known as the *Treaty of Wedmore*, which assigned “the delimitation of the boundaries of an area that would be restricted to Danish leaders, leaving Wessex, at least for the time being, outside of the Scandinavian focus” (ALBUQUERQUE, 2017b: 120, our translation)²⁹. Furthermore, this agreement also stipulated Guthrum's baptism and his integration into the Anglo-Saxon leadership system (ALBUQUERQUE, 2017b). As a result, the English territory was divided into two kingdoms: *Wessex* - the kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons - and *Danelaw* - territory ruled by the Scandinavians.

²⁷ Michael Swanton brings this observation in a footnote. In : SWANTON, Michael. (Trans.) **The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle** . London: JM Dent, 1997. p. 70.

²⁸ “após meses de lutas contra os escandinavos, o rei de Wessex morre, deixando seu irmão como sucessor” (ALBUQUERQUE, 2017b: 118).

²⁹ “a delimitação das fronteiras de uma área que seria restrita a lideranças danesas, deixando Wessex, pelo menos por ora, fora do foco dos escandinavos” (ALBUQUERQUE, 2017b: 120).





The Danelaw did not establish a unified political entity and lacked a capital, with power in the region being “distributed among the warlords who settled in the so-called Five Boroughs, namely Lincoln, Stamford, Leicester, Nottingham, and Derby” (OLIVEIRA, 2017d: 171, our translation)³⁰. York was another influential center in the region, which was predominantly under Norwegian rule. The Danelaw remained until the 11th century, experiencing a decline following the death of Canute the Great died in 1035. Canute was king of Denmark, Norway, and part of Sweden (OLIVEIRA, 2017d).

One of the most significant consequences of these cultural and political clashes is the fact that since the Scandinavians were a common foreign enemy to the other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, the cultural and political clashes between them will represent the final unifying factor of English identity (ALBUQUERQUE, 2017b). In this perspective, the author of *Saxon Stories*, Bernard Cornwell (2016: 347, our translation)³¹, argues that “the story of the creation of England is actually a narrative of how the Saxons reclaim their lost kingdoms, starting in the south and moving inexorably north”.

Furthermore, as stated by Albuquerque (2017b: 181, our translation)³² and confirmed in her thesis, there were processes of identity hybridity in the regions where Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians interacted, suggesting that “different identity models were adopted, and that distinct social practices made up each of them”. This condition also significantly influenced the formation of England, particularly in terms of cultural aspects.

Albuquerque (2017a) summarizes that documents written in Latin and Old English contain the terms *Angelcyn* (English), *Angulsaxonum* (Anglo-Saxon), *paganus* (pagan) and *Dane*, which were used to differentiate political conflicts, especially in this context of Scandinavian settlements. However, other archaeological evidence suggests that the relationship between Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians extended beyond mere political issues and land disputes. These peoples intermingled mainly in the northern and northeastern regions of England. Based on this idea, Albuquerque introduces the notion of the “Anglo-Scandinavian”. The researcher further argues that analyzing linguistic relations between Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians offers insights into the coexistence between these two groups (ALBUQUERQUE, 2017a).

³⁰ “distribuído entre os chefes-guerreiros que se assentaram nas chamadas Cinco Aldeias, sendo elas Lincoln, Stamford, Leicester, Nottingham e Derby” (OLIVEIRA, 2017d: 171).

³¹ “a história da criação da Inglaterra é na verdade uma narrativa de como os saxões reivindicam seus reinos perdidos, começando no sul e seguindo inexoravelmente para o norte” (CORNWELL, 2016: 347).

³² “modelos diversos de identidade foram adotados e que práticas sociais distintas compunham cada uma delas” (ALBUQUERQUE, 2017b, p. 181)





Martini and Soares (2016; 2018) conducted a bibliographic research on studies focusing on the influences of *Old Norse*, a language spoken by the ancient Scandinavians, on the English language. Their research presents different theories regarding the linguistic consequences arising from the contacts between the Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians in English territory. In summary, the traditional theory posits a three-stage evolution: *Old English*, the language spoken by the Anglo-Saxons, underwent some influences from *Old Norse*, the language spoken by the Scandinavians, and evolved into *Middle English*, which eventually developed into *Modern English*, the language spoken today. However, Joseph Embley Emonds and Jan Terje Faarlund (2014 *apud* MARTINI, SOARES, 2016; 2018) published a work in which they defended the view that *Middle English* directly descended from *Old Norse*, with only some influences from *Old English*, and not the contrary. Additionally, Martini and Soares (2016; 2018) mention other scholars who propose a theory of “creolization”, asserting that *Old Norse* and *Old English* mixed together, forming a new language that further evolved into *Middle English*.

In *Saxon Stories*, there are constant descriptions of the relationship between these two peoples, which prompt us to reflect on the possible implications for the constitution of local identities and, more importantly, for the English identity as a whole. These relationships and their impacts are observed throughout the narrative, encompassing several aspects: political agreements, religion, geography, cuisine, customs, and, significantly, language. We include an excerpt from the third volume, *The Lords of the North*, where Uhtred elaborates on the linguistic consequences he witnesses resulting from the interaction between these peoples in northern England:

[...] They could more or less speak to each other because I had noticed that in Northumbria the Danish and the Saxon tongues were becoming muddled. The two languages were similar anyway, and most Danes could be understood by Saxons if they shouted loud enough, but now the two tongues grew ever more alike. Instead of talking about their 'swordcraft' the Saxon earlings in Guthred's household troops boasted of their 'skill' with a sword, though they had none, and they ate 'eggs' instead of eating 'eyren'. The Danes, meanwhile, called a horse 'a horse' instead of 'a hros' and sometimes it was hard to know whether a man was a Dane or a Saxon. Often they were both, the son of a Danish father and Saxon mother, though never the other way around (CORNWELL, 2007: 79-80).

Regardless of which theory of the evolution of the English language is true, or closer to the truth, the influence of Scandinavians on the English language and culture is indisputable. The account narrated by Uhtred reinforces this idea by not delving into any particular theory but demonstrating that these contacts occurred and their impact continues to resonate in our language to this day.





The author Cornwell (2016) himself, in a short essay discussing the story of the creation of England³³, reinforces that the impact of the “Vikings” on the English language is one of the most significant legacies resulting from the Scandinavian “colonization” of England. The author's perspective is interesting as he argues that the importance of the “fearsome Vikings”, often regarded as “invaders”, is highlighted when we recognize them as “colonizers” in the English territory.

Albuquerque (2017a), as well as Martini and Soares (2016), mention other impacts, such as the adoption of Anglo-Saxon proper names by Scandinavians (and vice versa). According to Albuquerque, incorporating “a new name or a new language is a way to redefine connections with the local community” (2017a: p. 39, our translation)³⁴. Furthermore, another linguistic consequence that is evident in English geography pertains to “toponyms” - place names. An example that can be cited is the city of York. Prior to the Norse settlement, the city was known as *Eoforwic*. After the attacks by the Great Army on Northumbria, which led to the conquest of the region, Eoforwic became Jorvik/Yorvik (OLIVEIRA, 2017b). This fact is mentioned in *Saxon Stories* during a conversation between the Danish Ragnar and the young Uhtred: “[...] but you saw what happened at Yorvik.’ That was how the Danes pronounced Eoferwic. For some reason they found that name difficult, so they said Yorvik instead” (CORNWELL, 2005: 55).

Perhaps the moment that best represents the hybridism between Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians is depicted in the third book, *The Lords of the North*, when Guthred's small reign is solidified. It showcases a scenario where Christians and pagans, Anglo-Saxons and Danes, are ruled by the same king: a Dane who converts to Christianity. According to Cornwell (2007), in the *Historical Note* of this book, there was indeed a king named Guthred (also mentioned in some sources as Guthfrid), who took the throne as a replacement for an Anglo-Saxon puppet king. Moreover, we can perceive that the character Uhtred himself serves as a clear representation that unifies these two cultures.

Building upon these foundations and initial historical events discussed in this article, Cornwell's novels unfold by considering the protagonist's life and his fictional involvement in the history of England's formation, primarily through his relentless efforts to drive out the Scandinavian invaders. *Saxon Stories* externalize numerous circumstances that reflect the interplay between Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian cultures,

³³ We had access to this essay only in Portuguese language, which is available at the end of the ninth book of *Saxon Stories*, Brazilian edition: CORNWELL, Bernard. *A criação da Inglaterra. O pano de fundo da história de Uhtred*. In: CORNWELL, Bernard. **Guerreiros da Tempestade**. Crônicas Saxônicas. Livro 9. Trad. Alves Calado. 2. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2016. p. 341-34

³⁴ “um novo nome ou um novo idioma é uma forma de reconfigurar os laços com a comunidade local” (ALBUQUERQUE, 2017a, p. 39).





or Christian and Pagan cultures, which maintained contact for an extended period until they blended into different aspects of English culture, particularly language, politics, and geography.

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