Leading Ladies:
A Study of Queenship and Identity through Conquest

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The study of medieval women is often viewed with a qualitative purpose. Scholars seek to define the medieval woman as either empowered or oppressed, and within the medieval timeframe, as either more or less so than their predecessors. The year 1066 is seen as a turning point by many for the female narrative; it was the year of the Norman Conquest, which brought with it new schools of thought and manners of life. Rather than attempting to qualify the lives of women as either good or back, the question of medieval women can be approached by asking how they were able to navigate their lives and the changing world around them. This is best examined through the lives of queens because they are the most visible from an historical standpoint. Conquest mentality from the point of view of the conquered forced queens to become more active in the shaping of their identities for political survival and success. Through the lens of conquest, which reveals and sharpens this pattern, Queens Emma, Edith, and Mathilda II were all able to shape their own identities, but because of the uncertainty of conquest, their identities were also shaped for them by others.

England’s conquest history begins with the formation of the English identity; without it, conquest would have been a matter of land alone rather than also a conquest of people and ideas. Before the late ninth century, England was split into several kingdoms, which warred with one another as often as they fought alongside each other. The formation of the English identity began with Alfred the Great (871-899) who attempted to unite the many kingdoms under one rule. This English identity united the people of Wessex, Mercia, Northumbria, and other regions under one king and one identity through shared religion, language, and military necessities. Alfred’s successors continued to encourage a nationalist sensibility of Englishness after his death.¹

The English people and their national identity were most effectively threatened by the Danish Conquest of the late tenth and early eleventh centuries and the Norman Conquest of 1066.

The Danish Conquest was finally successful during the reign of King Æthelred, who was supplanted by the Danish king, Cnut. Queen Emma (985-1052), Æthelred’s second wife, became Cnut’s second wife after Æthelred’s death in 1016, and continued to be queen until Cnut’s death in 1035. As part of her marriage to Cnut, it was agreed that the succession should continue through her children with Cnut, rather than her children with Æthelred or Cnut’s children with his first wife. This caused dispute over the succession for nearly a decade, with Emma supporting her son by Cnut, Harthacnut, over Harold, Cnut’s son by his first wife, and over Edward, Emma’s son by Æthelred. The succession was eventually resolved in 1042 when Harthacnut died and Edward assumed the throne, returning the dynasty to its English origins.

Edward’s success can be attributed in part to the help of the powerful Godwin family who held the most land of any noble family. Earl Godwin’s interference in the political trajectory of the nation made him and his family vital to Edward’s reign. Edward married the Earl’s daughter, Edith (1025-1075), perhaps as a sign of good will and gratitude toward them. Edward’s reign was fraught with internal discord regarding the Godwin family, as Edith’s family famously fell out of favor with the king over a matter of investiture, the appointment of clergy officials. The Godwins and Edward resumed peaceful relations during his later reign, and eventually Edward named Edith’s brother, Harold, as his successor, after his marriage to Edith proved childless.

However, Edward allegedly also promised the succession to William, Duke of Normandy, later William the Conqueror or, simply, William I. It was on this promise that William based his claim on the throne and justified his invasion of England in 1066. He conquered the English people at the battle of Hastings, where Harold was killed, and William I spent most of his reign attempting to unite the Norman settlers and the conquered English under
his rule. He introduced a Norman identity to the kingship and queenship of England. He did not fail in this endeavor, but he also did not fully succeed; many of the English still resented him up through his death in 1087 when he was succeeded by his son, William Rufus who was similarly unsuccessful in uniting the English and the Normans.

In 1100, William I’s youngest son, Henry, assumed the throne. He married Matilda II of Scotland, (1080-1118), who represented the older, English dynasty through her relation to Edmund Ironside, who ruled England for a brief period after Æthelred’s death and before Cnut’s reign. This marriage effectively combined Norman and English royal identities, and did much to pacify the native English population. In a way, their union can be seen as an end to the conquest and to the major national identity shifts that occurred as a result of conquest. At the very least, it serves as a resolution of the conquest narrative, bringing about a national identity that would remain relatively intact for centuries to come.

Primary source material from the early middle ages is rare, and sources regarding Anglo-Saxon women, even more so. The absence of such documents has been argued to be the cause of anything from their destruction over time, to a deliberate exclusion of women from the texts due to a variety of gendered issues. However, while the surviving texts cannot paint a full picture of the female, Anglo-Saxon experience, much can still be gained from sources that both include women and those that do not. In some cases, their absence speaks much more to their status in society than their inclusion, although that is not always the case. There are several types of available documents regarding this subject that will be discussed in this paper, including biographies, hagiographies, personal letters, histories, and annals. Some of these sources were written contemporaneously with the events they discuss, while others were written after the fact. Perspective is important to consider, whether it is simply a retrospective point of view or that of

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2 William I’s wife, Matilda I, remained remarkably Norman throughout her life, so her national and queenly identity cannot be examined through conquest in the same ways in which Emma’s, Edith’s, and Matilda II’s can be seen.
an entirely different national identity. With this in mind, these sources can be categorized into two groups: those that were directly influenced by the queens to shape their identities, and those that shaped, reflected upon or discussed that identity without input or direction from the queens.

The three queens discussed in this paper, Edith, Matilda II, and Emma, each commissioned works to be written about themselves or their families. These sources take on biographical style with hagiographical elements. Hagiography is a style of writing used to chronicle the lives of saints; it typically includes miraculous deeds and an emphasis on faith and saintly traits. Edith commissioned the *Vita Ædwardi Regis*, Matilda II, the *Life of St Margaret*, and Emma, the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*. These sources allow for in depth understanding of the lives of these women, and, even more so, their objectives.

The *Vita Ædwardi Regis* was likely commissioned by Edith, to whom the anonymous author refers as his muse, after Edward the Confessor’s death in 1066, but before the Norman invasion. The narrative of the work is split into two parts: Book I, which deals with the exploits of the Godwin family (Edith’s father and brothers); and Book II, which is a recounting of the many deeds and miracles of Edward, written in the hagiographical style. For both books, the story is of Edward’s reign and ends with his death. Both books stress the spiritual nature of Edward and his wife, but the first book puts more emphasis on Edith and her family, as well as her relationship to her husband as Queen, while the second book focuses solely on the King’s mighty deeds. The purpose of the *Vita* was twofold, at least: to elevate and commemorate Edward the Confessor after his death, and to shape Edith’s reputation as a widow. It is this second purpose that allows the source to speak to the changing personal identity of the queen and how she was able to guild perception of her public identity and adapt to her changing circumstances. This

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source is used as evidence for Edith’s personal identity-narrative, but it is also revealing of
gendered culture and national English identity.

Matilda II of Scotland did not, to the knowledge of modern historians, commission any
biographical work on the subject of her own person; rather, she commissioned Turgot, Bishop of
St. Andrews, to write a hagiography of her mother, St Margaret of Scotland. The text of the work
itself reveals very little about Matilda II’s life after her childhood, however it can serve as a
source for exploration of female traits Matilda II considered to be important. By examining
Margaret’s womanly virtues, Matilda II’s own priorities can, in turn, be seen. Additionally, the
sheer existence of the source shows Matilda II’s reverence for her mother, which in turn implies
the emphasis of her maternal identity, which will be explored later in this discussion.

The *Encomium Emmae Reginae* is the only one of these three sources that is named for
the woman by whom it was commissioned. It is structured similarly to the *Vita* in that the author
is unknown, usually referred to as “the Encomiast,” and that it is largely biographical with
hagiographical elements. It could be argued that the *Vita* was partially modeled after the
*Encomium*, although it is more likely that they were both modeled after the same, earlier
biographical sources. The *Encomium* follows Cnut, Emma’s second husband, and his conquest of
England in the early eleventh century. Emma’s significance is emphasized in the later half as first
Cnut’s queen and then as the mother of Harthacnut, Cnut’s heir. Similarly to the purpose of the
*Vita*, the *Encomium* was meant to reinforce Emma’s reputation, as well as legitimizing
Harthacnut’s claim to the throne. The source served as an *apologia*, justifying Emma’s actions
during the dispute over the succession that followed Cnut’s death, and thus shaping her identity as
the king’s mother and, retroactively, as queen.5

In addition to these three works, the surviving personal letters of Matilda II can be used
in a similar way. It is not improbable that the queens had a hand in the themes of the biographical

5 “*Apologia*,” meaning a work in defense of one’s actions, is the term used by historians to describe the
*Encomium*. This term is used by Stafford to describe the *Encomium* in “Emma: The Powers of the Queen in
the Eleventh Century.”
and hagiographical sources discussed above, but these letters are inherently different because they were penned, or at least dictated, by the queen herself. The letters provide insight into Matilda II’s personal identity as well as the public identity she wished to convey, as royal letters were rarely truly private. The two letters discussed in this paper are both from Matilda II, one written to Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, and the other to Pope Paschal II. These two letters can be used as evidence of Matilda II’s involvement in both religious affairs and political affairs, both of which were important parts of her queenly identity, as will be discussed further.

Sources used in this paper that shape queenly identity without queenly input in regard to Edith, Matilda II, and Emma are, for the most part, histories. William of Malmesbury’s *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, William of Poitiers’ *Gesta Guillelmi*, Eadmer’s *Historia Novorum in Anglia*, and the *Anglo Saxon Chronicle* all focus on events occurring in an historical timeline. While they were not all written retrospectively, they were all written by those who were not writing at the behest of their queens, meaning that the queens themselves had little to no influence on the text and so they can be used to discern what the public view might have been at various times from various other identities, with the exception of William of Malmesbury whose unique case will be discussed below.

The *Gesta Regum Anglorum* dates back to the beginnings of English history, beginning with the arrival of the Angles and Saxons in Britain in 449 to 1125, ending with Henry I’s reign.

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Its author, William of Malmesbury, was an historian of the 12th century who relied heavily on the works of Bede (c.727-735) who wrote the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum.* The text includes a narrative of the Danish conquest, which can be used to discuss the events occurring during Emma’s life with an external perspective, as opposed to the deeply personal *Encomium,* and the Norman conquest, which can do the same for Edith. In regard to Matilda II, however, this source serves a similar purpose to those that shaped queenly identity. Matilda II knew William of Malmesbury personally and likely encouraged, if not commissioned, the writing of the *Gesta Regum.* Therefore, the sections in which Matilda II is referenced may be treated similarly to the *Encomium* and the *Vita,* while other sections can be considered as less personal for William of Malmesbury as the author and therefore written by an outsider.

William of Poitiers, a Norman priest, wrote the *Gesta Guillelmi* just after 1066, so, while the source was written post-conquest, its author lived at the time of the events. The *Gesta Guillelmi* follows the deeds of William the Conqueror, and so provides a Norman point of view to the Conquest. This allows for an examination of Norman perspective on not only the events, but also the people involved, which includes Edith, the widow of Edward the Confessor and sister to Harold Godwin, with whom William the Conqueror fought for the throne. By using the *Gesta Guillelmi* as an example of Norman sentiments, Edith’s image as seen by the Normans is revealed.

Eadmer wrote during the same period as William of Malmesbury. He was born just before the Norman Conquest and wrote up until the end of the eleventh century. His work focuses largely on Anselm, the archbishop of Canterbury, who became involved in Matilda II’s marriage to Henry I. He also discusses queens Emma and Edith in part and their husbands, however his main bias is in reference to Matilda and her marriage, as Anselm was a great influence on him.

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both as a person and as a writer.\textsuperscript{10} This source can be used similarly to the \textit{Gesta Regum} and while there are still questions of bias for Matilda, it was not overtly claimed by the author as it was by Malmesbury.

The \textit{Anglo-Saxon Chronicle} is a series of annals, of which there are several versions, presenting the events of English history. The \textit{Chronicle} originated during the reign of Alfred the Great (849-899) and continued well into the 12\textsuperscript{th} century. While the \textit{Chronicle} itself provides much in the way of the Norman Conquest, the entry that will be examined most closely in this discussion is the \textit{Chronicle D 1067} entry, which is significant in that it includes several women by name, something that is unique to the entry.\textsuperscript{11} The author of \textit{D} presents a northern, English viewpoint on the aftermath of 1066, and its emphasis on women indicates their importance as national symbols.\textsuperscript{12} This source can be seen as similar to the \textit{Gesta Guillelmi} in terms of point of view. However, instead of an outsider-Norman viewpoint, it represents the internal-northern English viewpoint. The source’s point of view allows it to be used to examine the way the English saw their own identity in relation to aristocratic women; this did not include Edith, which in and of itself is indicative of the English opinion of her identity. Although it reveals Edith’s identity in a different way, it falls in accordance with the rest of the primary sources used, all of which shape contemporary perceptions of queenly identity and can be used to discuss the broader themes of royalty, gender, and Englishness.

Scholarly debate on women during conquest vastly outnumbers the sources on which it relies. The origins of Anglo-Saxon women’s history dates back to the early nineteenth century with Sharon Turner’s \textit{History of the Anglo-Saxons}. His work only briefly mentions women, but it

\textsuperscript{10} Eadmer, \textit{History of Recent Events in England, Historia Novorum in Anglia}.

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Chronicle D} refers to one of several versions of the \textit{Anglo Saxon Chronicle}; After the reign of Alfred the Great, many different religious establishments continued the tradition of the \textit{Chronicle}, accounting for the several versions. For more information on the \textit{Chronicle} and the entry in question, see footnote 7.

spawned an outpouring of scholarship regarding women over the next century.\textsuperscript{13} The most prominent debate in Anglo-Saxon women’s history focuses on the Norman Conquest of 1066 as a turning point in the treatment of women. This debate took hold during the late nineteenth century and continues to be a contentious subject. Some historians argued that before 1066 women enjoyed more freedoms and rights, while others argued that after Norman arrival the treatment of women was positively affected. While the debate no longer attempts to qualify one as better or worse, arguments regarding 1066 as a turning point are still very much alive in scholarship.

Early proponents of the superiority of Pre-Conquest treatment of women were Florence Buckstaff, who argued that women’s property laws before 1066 were as inclusive of women, if not more, than Post-Conquest regulations, and Doris Stenton, whose work, \textit{The English Woman in History}, discusses the evolution of English Women and does not focus solely on Anglo-Saxon women.\textsuperscript{14} These two works strongly influenced the debate. Stenton brought the topic into prominence, inspiring such works as \textit{Women in Anglo-Saxon England and the Impact of 1066} by Christine Fell, Cecily Clark, and Elizabeth Williams.\textsuperscript{15} Buckstaff pointed the debate toward considering women’s lives from a legal standpoint, rather than focusing on their lives inside the home. Advocates for the oppositional argument cited the increased number of women present in Domesday, a record of land holdings that began during the reign of William I after his defeat of the English in 1066. This argument relies on evidence that has no equal in Pre-Conquest England, and so does not necessarily indicate an increase in women’s landholding, but rather an increase in documentation of such holdings. Another argument, as made by Thomas Wright, was that the church fought for the rights of women after the links between England and the Papacy were

\textsuperscript{15} Fell, \textit{Women in Anglo-Saxon England and the Impact of 1066}. 
allegedly strengthened. However, Wright faced criticism for failing to back up his claim with substantial evidence.16

More recently, Pauline Stafford tackled the debate in “Women and the Norman Conquest,” criticizing the trajectory of the scholarship.17 Stafford points out that the study of Anglo-Saxon women often attempts to address the question of the treatment of women and on evaluating the quality of their lives, but due to the minimal evidence to examine in this particular area, such evaluations are not only difficult to argue, but unwise to attempt. Stafford’s article directly asks for a more thorough investigation and criticism of the sweeping statements made in the past. The essence of her argument is that to apply an importance to 1066 as a turning point for women, either for better or worse, is to ignore a great deal of historical evidence. She suggests that generalizations do not aid in historical debate and that a closer investigation into women’s lives is necessary in order to move past the assumption that 1066 marks either the beginning or end of an era of prosperity for women.18

It was Stafford’s article that catapulted the scholarly community into discussions of more specific aspects of 1066 and questions of female identity. Stafford wrote on gender identity in “The Meaning of Hair in the Anglo-Norman World: Masculinity, Reform, and National Identity.”19 Cecily Clark, who co-authored Women in Anglo-Saxon England and the Impact of 1066, also wrote on female identity and national identity through the lens of women’s names before and after 1066, although she wrote on this subject before Stafford’s call for more specific scholarship.20

18 Stafford, "Women and the Norman Conquest."
The study of queens, while it certainly predates Stafford, serves, in a sense, as an answer to “Women and the Norman Conquest.” The study of one group of women has the potential for specificity that studies regarding the entirety of Anglo-Saxon women do not. Stafford, herself, has written on queens as a way of exploring more individualized questions of female identity in her book, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, and in the article “Emma: The Powers of the Queen in the Eleventh Century.” Through these works, Stafford is able to address personal identity, queenly identity, and gender identity. Lois Hunneycutt, in her biographical work *Matilda of Scotland: A Study in Medieval Queenship*, is able to perform a similar analysis of Matilda II. Investigation of female identity through queens is also present in the introductions and explorations of the primary sources discussed earlier. Frank Barlow’s discussion of the *Vita Ædwardi* in the introduction calls attention to Queen Edith’s public image and the shaping of that image through the work.

This paper will attempt to continue analysis of Anglo-Saxon women through queens Emma, Edith and Matilda II. Issues of national identity, gender identity, and personal identity are all linked in that they all affect one another in a correlative manner, which is something difficult to see or prove in the relatively undocumented lives of the ordinary women of Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman England. By looking at royal women, whose lives are recorded with slightly more documentation, if not accuracy, this paper will examine the personal and public identities of queens effected by conquest, the shaping of their identities, and how those identities relate to larger questions of gender and nation.

The female identity for Anglo-Saxon women is difficult to pinpoint. It is certainly debatable, as is the concept that this all encompassing identity applies to all Anglo-Saxon women.

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23 Barlow, "Introduction."
All women experience change differently, as do all people, but it is impossible to treat them as individuals except in the case of those women who were well documented and prominent in society. These were, for the most part, queens. The identities of these women can be categorized as three different types of identity: their national identities, their identities that were tied to male identities, and their queenly identities.

A queen’s national identity was of utmost importance, as it dictated status and power in marriage. Conquest calls into question these national identities and in the cases of Emma, Edith, and Matilda II, it forced them to shape their national identities in order to survive and maintain power. It was this national identity and the queens’ ability to change their national identities which allowed them to not only survive conquest, but profit from it.

A queen’s national identity served a purpose for her husband, and her identity, once married, became that of her husband. Emma, Edith, and Matilda II all retained a certain amount of their national identities, but their identities as daughters, wives, and mothers allowed them to adopt the identities of men who were most important or most powerful in their lives. This is seen in the way queens were addressed in writing; as Stafford points out, queens were almost always referred to in terms of their relationship with the king, for example regis mater (“king’s mother”), and conlaterana regis (“she who was at the king’s side.”) In many of the primary sources the queens, and other women as well, are referred to in relation to their fathers, husbands, brothers, or sons. In this way, the queens’ identities were tied to men. For some this limited their power to shape their identities, but for others, it allowed them options and opportunity to change how conquest compelled them to.

The main platforms of queenly identity are seen throughout medieval queenship, conquest or no, but they are revealed and sharpened through conquest as the queens affected by change were forced to ascribe to the queenly identity in a more active way. The expectations of

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24 Stafford, Queen Emma and Queen Edith, 55-7.
queenship were threefold: a queen was religious and supportive of religious institutions; she was 
a peaceweaver. This term refers to her personal and political power as an agent of peace and 
serenity as well as an influence on the king toward peace; and she was tasked with ensuring the 
continuation of the dynasty. Each of the queens examined the following section exhibit these 
traits differently, but through the necessity of conquest, their struggles and their methods to 
maintain these queenly traits are revealed.

The role of national identity for queens became more significant during times of conflict 
and, in particular, conquest. Queens Emma, Edith, and Matilda II were all influenced by national 
identity and all experienced a distinct shift during their lives. Emma, who was born with Norman 
identity, developed an Anglo-Saxon identity as well as links to Danish identity; Edith was a 
symbol of Anglo-Saxon identity up until the aftermath of the Norman conquest, during which she 
was neither truly Norman nor Anglo-Saxon; and Matilda II, a Scottish princess, represented an 
Anglo-Saxon identity through her lineage and grew to represent the unification of Anglo-Saxon 
with Norman national identities. These changes, while not impossible during times of peace, 
became a cultural necessity for women and specifically queens.

The changes in Emma’s national identity narrative can be seen in her marriages to 
Æthelred and Cnut. After her first marriage, Emma changed her name to the more Anglo-Saxon 
Ælfgifu. This served as a symbolic change that identified her with Anglo-Saxon ideals. When 
Cnut successful conquered England, he married Emma in order to link himself to that same 
Anglo-Saxon identity. The significance of Emma’s nationality is seen in Cnut’s propaganda; She 
is seen next to Cnut on the frontispiece of the Liber Vitae, and she is labeled as Ælfgifu, giving 
prominence to her Anglo-Saxon name. While she was, by no means, originally Anglo-Saxon, in

25 Peaceweaver is a term that dates back to the early Middle Ages. Concepts of peaceweaving appear in 
early Anglo-Saxon works, such as Beowulf: Beowulf: A New Verse Translation. Translated by Seamus 
26 Liber Vitae of Newminster and Hyde, 1031, MS Stowe 944, British Library, London, in Encomium 
the eyes of Cnut, and arguably the eyes of the greater Anglo-Saxon public, it was the Anglo-
Saxon identity she had gleaned from her marriage to Æthelred that made her valuable.

Edith’s national identity, on the other hand, was of little importance until her later life. When England fell to the Normans, it appears that she was quick to establish her identity as vital to the conquering Normans. She might have chosen to become a symbol of Englishness and part of rebellion, but she did not. Instead, she followed a path of survival in the newly forming Anglo-Norman kingdom. The sources do not depict Edith as taking on a Norman identity, but rather as relinquishing her strong ties to an Anglo-Saxon identity. To the English, Edith symbolized their national grief rather than rebellion, and to the Normans she symbolized national submission, or at least compliance. This is echoed in the tale of William’s conquest of Edith’s lands. Instead of taking them by force, he asked for only loyalty. According to the tale, she offered him the keys voluntarily as tribute. This shows an “active Edith,” as Stafford calls her, in the shaping of her post 1066 fate in regard to national identity.

Edith’s lack of Anglo-Saxon identity after the conquest can be seen further through a comparison with her mother, Gytha, who presents a very different picture of female identity. Gytha stayed attached to the English identity, despite being originally Danish. Edith and her mother were of similar status and position by the time of the Norman Conquest; both were widows, and both dealt with questions of identity and survival. Edith, who was able to survive the conquest, had no children, while Gytha’s children fought the Normans and each other. It may have been possible for Gytha to align herself with Edith, forcing the Normans to treat her well after the Conquest, but her public image was not so expertly doctored as Edith’s. Instead, Gytha’s post-Conquest image appears as the sorrowing mother of the dead Harold, begging for his burial.

27 Stafford, Queen Emma and Queen Edith, 276-7.
28 Stafford, Queen Emma and Queen Edith, 14
29 Stafford, Queen Emma and Queen Edith, 14.
rights. In this case, her alignment appears to have been with Harold, who, hated as he was by the Normans, would not have gained her any friendships among the new rulers. Perhaps if Gytha had abandoned her dead son and, instead, aligned herself with Tostig or Edith she would have survived the conquest more effectively.

Gytha’s English identity is reiterated in the text of Anglo-Saxon Chronicle D 1067. The author writes, “In this year Gytha, mother of Harold, went out to the Isle of Flatholme and the wives of many good men accompanied her; she remained there for some time, and went thence over the sea to St Omer.” For the purposes of discussing Gytha and Edith in relation to identity, this passage’s significance lies in Stafford’s analysis of the author; Stafford claims that the author was likely a Northern English monk with strong Angelcynn identity. Stafford’s analysis reveals that while he may have loved England, he disapproved of the aristocracy, both English and Norman. Of the author’s character, Stafford says he was, “a nostalgic, fatalistic if also bitter and angry clerical Northern English patriot.” By including Gytha and not Edith, the author shows that in his eyes, Gytha represented something of the old English identity—that which was present before 1066. His exclusion of Edith suggests that she represented a failure to maintain and promote English ideals and identity. It is arguably Edith’s absence from the passage that reveals the most about national identity shifts and, specifically, her personal national identity and loyalty.

Like Emma, Matilda II’s national identity was important in conjunction with her marriage and, also like Emma, her ascribed national identity was not necessarily the one that she identified as in her childhood. While it is possible that Matilda II identified with both of her parents’ national identities equally, it is her mother’s ties to the Anglo-Saxon royal line that proved to be the most significant in her later life. From birth, it seems, Matilda II was slated to be

31 The Anglo Saxon Chronicle, MS D, 1067.
of multiple nationalities; her godfather was Robert Curthose, William I’s eldest son, granting her a connection to Norman identity as well.\footnote{Lois L. Huneycutt, Matilda of Scotland: A Study in Medieval Queenship (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2003), 10.}

Matilda II’s marriage to Henry I is of great significance in relation to national identity. Because Henry had inherited a kingdom split by differences of national culture, he required a unifying force to bring the people of England under one identity; Matilda II was that unifying force. Their marriage serves to symbolize the end of the conquest narrative in that the English began to identify as a single national unit again, although this identity was hardly the same as the English identity that Alfred the Great cultivated.

Matilda II was not unpopular with the English. However, some of the Norman courtiers began calling the King and Queen “Goderic and Godiva,” a reference to Matilda II’s Anglo-Saxon heritage in the form of insult.\footnote{Huneycutt, Matilda of Scotland: A Study in Medieval Queenship, 73.} In an attempt to Normanize herself, Matilda II, who was born Edith (significant in that it links her with Queen Edith and her Anglo-Saxon past), changed her name to Matilda, perhaps as a tribute to her predecessor, Matilda I, William I’s wife, or even her godmother, Matilda of Flanders. It has been suggested that Robert Curthose, Matilda II’s godfather, gave her the name at her birth to honor his mother, but she did not begin to use it until her marriage to Henry.\footnote{Huneycutt, Matilda of Scotland: A Study in Medieval Queenship, 26.} Regardless, the name change signifies a shaping of her national identity, perhaps to fit the larger national identity to which she was attempting to belong.

As discussed earlier, the national identities of queens were directly linked to their husbands and, more broadly, to the men to whom they were related: fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons. Each of the queens in question had strong ties to their male relatives that gave them context within the political sphere as well as a national context. Before a queen’s marriage, she ascribed to the identity of her father, then once married to her husband, and after the death of her...
husband she was attached to the identities of her children. This is another factor of identity that is sharpened through the lens of conquest and conflict.

Emma’s identity in reference to men was largely related to national identity. As mentioned above, her marriages to Æthelred and Cnut were both politically charged for the purposes of gaining alliances or credibility through national identity. The image of Emma on the front of the Liber Vitae, Stafford argues, can be seen in two lights: first, as an image of her subordination to the new king, and second as an image of her significance as his queen.37 It is the second of these analyses that would suggest a more aggressive shaping of her public image. She is referred to as regina in the image, rather than conlaterana regis, as she had always been when married to Æthelred. She is also seen in the foreground of the image next to Cnut, which might indicate that she is, if not of equal importance, then at least great importance to the new king.

William of Malmesbury’s depiction of Emma paints both of her marriages negatively. Of Æthelred, William of Malmesbury says that he was “so offensive even to his own wife that he would hardly deign to let her sleep with him, but brought the royal majesty into disrepute by tumbling with concubines.”38 This description suggests that Æthelred was unpopular, at least from a retrospective point of view. He was not the only king to employ mistresses, but he is one of marginally few in the Gesta Regum who is rebuked or even acknowledged for it. Her marriage to Cnut, alternatively, is not depicted as unpleasant, but rather as an act of a traitor: “you would not know which incurred the greater disgrace, the man who gave her away or the woman who agreed to share the bed of one who had harassed her husband and exiled her sons.”39 Here, William of Malmesbury reproaches her betrayal of her sons and dead husband. In this sense, her ties to the men of her first marriage are seen as important in terms of her identity and by marrying

the new king, she is, in a sense, giving up those links and, with them, her identity that was formed around them.

When, after the death of Cnut, Emma’s identity became increasingly linked to that of her sons, she was mater regis rather than regina. Through the Encomium, Emma was able to shape that relationship to suit her needs. The frontispiece of the Encomium shows her with her sons, rather than with either of her husbands. This might be indicative of her changing role from regina to mater regis. With her significance being that of the king’s mother, Emma might have sought to stress this importance in order to remain relevant and powerful. Additionally, she appears larger than her sons and is the focal point of the image, which Stafford suggests might reveal an attempt to reinforce her symbolic power.

The text of the Encomium also speaks to this concept. The work was purposed to focus on Emma and on justifying her role and actions in the succession. Her bias in favor of Harthacnut, her son by Cnut, rather than Edward, her son by Æthelred, caused her to be treated harshly once Edward became king. He stripped her of all her lands. Had the Encomium been written once Edward was king, it might have taken on a different theme, but instead it was very much an attempt to legitimize Danish rule, as would be continued by Harthacnut. Perhaps Emma knew that her political safety was reliant on not only favor from Harthacnut, but that of all her sons, because, as Stafford points out, she places her platform on the idea that “through working for the claims of one son she worked for them all.” The final sentiments of the Encomium certainly presents an image of family togetherness: “the mother and both sons, having no disagreement between them, enjoy the ready amenities of the kingdom. Here there is loyalty among sharers of rule, here the bond of motherly and brotherly love is of strength.

43 Stafford, Queen Emma and Queen Edith, 39-40.
44 Stafford, Queen Emma and Queen Edith, 38.
In this way, Emma was able to shape, through the Encomiast, her significance as *mater regis* and continue to extend her influence as such.

Malmesbury treats Emma with a fair amount of disdain for her actions in regard to the unequal treatment of her sons, saying of Emma, “‘long had she mocked her offspring’s years of need’. She never contributed anything out of her own resources, passing down her hatred of the father to the child; for she had loved Cnut more while he was alive and dwelt more on his praises after his death.’” This passage is likely in reference to the *Encomium*, which certainly praised Cnut, while ignoring Æthelred. William of Malmesbury portrays Emma as a negligent mother to Edward, who proved to be much more important in dynastic terms than any of her other sons. This shows Emma’s failure to predict the course of events in terms of the transition of power, but does not detract from the evidence showing her to be an active queen in the shaping of her identity. While she may have chosen the wrong son to support, she was able to effectively align herself with Harthacnut, regardless of the unfavorable turn of events. This goes to show the extent of queens’ powers to shape their identities, but also that the successfulness of a queen’s shaping did not necessarily pertain to the outcome, but more to whether she was able to achieve the image she desired. In Emma’s case, her intention was to connect her identity to Harthacnut; she was successful in this endeavor, as shown by her decline, which was congruent with Harthacnut’s death.

Edith’s identity was also strongly connected to male influence. In her youth, she was tied to Earl Godwin, her father, whose prominence and significance in the succession granted him the name “King Maker.” Her marriage, therefore, was likely due to Edward’s desire to gain Godwin’s support. The death of Earl Godwin might be assumed to have had a substantial effect on Edith’s identity, as one of the men she tied herself to was no longer part of society. Instead, she was linked to her brothers, Harold (who would later become king) and Tostig, who took over

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45 *Encomium Emmæ Reginae*, 53.
their father’s powers. With the continued mutual support between herself and her family, Edith
was able to maintain herself as powerful on two fronts. Harold and, in particular, Tostig proved to
be just as troublesome as they were helpful, however. Edith was linked to both their successes
and failures. Tostig, whose dealings in the north turned disastrous, creating a wedge between
Harold and Tostig. Edith likely saw this separation as problematic for her own purposes, as she
was well aware that she was nearing the end of her time as the King’s wife and approaching
widowhood, at which point she would lose her second, male-dictated identity. Another woman in
her position might have looked to her children for identity; a king’s mother was an acceptable
title and the natural progression for a queen. However, Edith was without children and with her
husband’s death looming on the horizon and her father’s death having sent her family into
internal dispute, she was forced to consider a new identity—that which belonged to a woman who
was tied to no living man.

It was, perhaps, this desperation that inspired Edith to commission the *Vita Ædwardi*. The
work overtly extols the virtues and deeds of her husband, Edward, as a just ruler and a saint, but it
also serves to honor Edith in many ways, displaying her as an ideal queen and excusing any
supposed failures. Frank Barlow, translator and scholar of the *Vita Ædwardi*, discusses the
intricacies and implications of Edith’s involvement in the creation of the work, saying that, due to
the complimentary nature of the work, it was either written by someone who sought her favor or,
as is more likely, she requested its creation.47 Assuming that this is the case, the *Vita Ædwardi*
supplies evidence that Edith very much so had the power to shape her identity even after her
husband’s death. By linking herself to the ideals of her dead husband, rather than either of her
living brothers, Edith put herself in a unique situation; her identity was pliable and she was able
to continue to shape it in order to best fit the circumstances of the Norman Conquest, as she was
the sole dictator of her identity’s trajectory.

Edith’s image during and after 1066 takes on the grieving widow persona in art as well. In the Bayeux Tapestry, Edith is one of the few women pictured; she is seen as the sorrowing widow at Edward’s deathbed, stressing her relationship and loyalty to the king rather than to her family. Stafford suggests that this image might have been under her control, and thus she was able to dictate her surviving image. As Stafford points out, “Edward’s widow was the identity increasingly important to her after 1066.” By presenting herself as the king’s widow rather than returning to an identity linked to her family, she aligned herself with the dead king who had not been in opposition with William, unlike Harold.

Matilda II’s identity, on the other hand, does not rely solely on men in the same ways in which Emma’s and Edith’s did. While her marriage to Henry was certainly significant, the identity shifts she experienced do not appear to be linked to him. Instead, her identity was linked to her mother, whose significance lay in that she was a descendent of Anglo-Saxon royalty. It could be argued that because this connection was to Edmund Ironside, a man, that it does, in fact, signify a male-dictated identity, but the significance of her mother, as made even more prominent by the Life of St. Margaret, cannot be ignored. The fact that Matilda II commissioned a whole work to be written about her mother puts emphasis on the importance of their relationship on both a personal and political level. While a source such as the Life of St. Margaret can reveal personal details about Margaret, its value in the context of this study lies in its sheer existence, suggesting that not only was Margaret important, but that Matilda II wanted to portray her as such. In this way, Matilda II shaped her own identity as well as her mother’s.

The queenly virtues, faith, peaceweaving, and motherhood, are each present in the writings focused on queens Emma, Edith, and Matilda II. From works commissioned by the queens themselves and works written without their influence, each queen’s particular way of conforming to expectations of queenship. None of these three queens approached any of the

49 Stafford, Queen Emma and Queen Edith, 277.
duties of queenship in the same way, and they each struggled differently. However, through their influence, they were able to shape the portrayal of their queenly identity.

Emma’s religious importance, while referenced in the *Encomium* and other primary sources, does not take on quite so significant an image as in the frontispiece of the *Liber Vitae*. In it, an angel places a veil upon her head, mirroring the angel crowning Cnut; Emma reaches toward the cross, although Cnut grasps it in his hand; and she is pictured below an image of the Virgin Mary.\(^50\) Stafford points out that this final connection is significant in that she is to the right of the cross—and perhaps, symbolically, the right hand of Christ.\(^51\) Using this analysis, Emma can be seen as a symbol of religion and those traits that were found most important by Christianity. It is impossible to determine how much influence Emma had over this particular image, but at the very least it could be argued that it was important to Cnut that she be viewed religiously.

In written sources, Emma’s faith is not given as much significance as in imagery. It is ignored by Malmesbury in favor of discussions about her father and husband. Eadmer, on the other hand, does discuss her faith and involvement with the church. For her benefaction of Canterbury and other churches, he praises her and shows her to be the very picture of faith, as well as a powerful figure not only in terms of religious matters, but those of state as well.\(^52\)

As a peacemaker, Emma’s role was much more prominently discussed in the sources. Both of her marriages were acts of peacemaking, in a sense; Malmesbury quotes Æthelred as having said of his wife’s father, “He will protect me too without disdain; for kindness shown to my wife and children will give me assurance of my own safety.”\(^53\) In this instance, Emma is an inactive player. Her existence alone as wife of Æthelred was a promise of peace and allegiance.

\(^{50}\) *Liber Vitae of Newminster and Hyde*. 1031
\(^{52}\) Eadmer, *History of Recent Events in England, Historia Novorum in Anglia*, 112-3
between her husband and father. The same can be said of her marriage to Cnut in that it promoted peace between the English and the invading Danish forces.

Emma’s more active peacemaking was in conjunction with her sons. Whether she was truly a force of peace or not is debatable, but it is clear that through the *Encomium* she hoped to present herself as peacemaking force around the succession after Cnut’s death. The language, as discussed above, painted her sons as harmonious and unified with their mother. It is far more likely that they were unified against Harold Harefoot, Cnut’s son by his first wife, who was king from 1035-1040, rather than unified by a familial bond perpetuated by their mother. Harthacnut and Edward may have worked together during Harold Harefoot’s reign, but it appears, as Malmesbury presented the situation, as if Emma abandoned Edward in favor of Harthacnut. Whatever image of peacemaker and familial unity Emma endeavored to portray in the *Encomium* was successful only until Edward’s ascension to the throne when he was able to strip her of lands and power.

Emma’s role in ensuring the continuation of the dynasty was inherently linked to her peacemaking. With her first marriage to Æthelred, it might be argued that by marrying Cnut and transferring the inheritance to her sons by him she was abandoning this duty. However, this act might also be seen as her attempt to maintain some semblance of dynasty, for if she had not agreed to this, Cnut might have simply left the kingdom to his sons by a previous wife. She should, therefore, not be seen as powerless to affect change in the succession, but rather as a queen doing the best she could to fulfill her queenly duties without losing control of the royal see. Later, after Cnut’s death, her allegiance to Harthacnut might be seen as being in line with the promises she had made as queen to Cnut, however nationalists and patriots might have seen her support of her younger son as a betrayal of her prior marriage to Æthelred. Malmesbury certainly fell into the second group, labeling her marriage to Cnut in the first place as traitorous.  

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However, Emma’s own portrayal of herself as mother painted a picture of a loyal and dutiful *mater regis*, as discussed earlier. This image extended only as far as the *Encomium* was viewed as valid; so, once Edward became king, Emma’s claims about herself as mother, were somewhat discredited.

Similarly to Emma, Edith faced a great deal of political turmoil during the second half of her life and, more significantly, after the death of her husband. This prompted her to commission the *Vita Ædwardi*, through which she was able to promote an image of herself that both explained her actions during Edward’s reign and aligned her with the dead king and his wishes. In the *Vita Ædwardi* Edith is portrayed as being equally religious to her husband. She gave alms to women, who were “the weaker sex, less skilled in building, more deeply felt the pinch of poverty, and was less able by its own efforts to drive it away.”55 Whether this quote reveals something about the general perception of women or about Edith’s own perception is unclear, but it certainly provides a platform from which to show her charitable nature. Her religiosity, too, is discussed in the *Vita Ædwardi* in conjunction with Edward’s; the royal pair sought to undertake the building of religious houses. In a contest between them, they each supported a project for the benefit of the church. Edith’s motivation is described as an emulation of her husband’s faith: “She instantly imitated the king’s love with her own, and demonstrated her own heart’s devotion for the holy church in the place of her up-bringing.”56 This statement ties her to the project in a personal way, as it was meant to thank those who had educated her in her youth, but it also reiterates her connection to the king and, even more so, the connection of her religious actions to his.

As one of the main duties of a queen, peaceweaving was, arguably, Edit’s primary function as queen. As discussed earlier, her marriage, in and of itself, was an act of peaceweaving. Her role as wife and as kin to Godwin allowed her to act as peaceweaver between them during times of instability, although there is no concrete evidence that she was able to do so,

55 *The Life of King Edward, Who Rests at Westminster*, 47.
since she was sent away at that time. Edith’s peaceweaving is praised, however, in the poetry of the *Vita Æwardi*:

> O happy earl, in bairns and forebears blessed,  
> Siring four guarantors of England’s peace.  
> First, Edith, gem-like on the kingdom’s breast,  
> All virtues’ friend, fit daughter for the earl,  
> Her sire, and also for her spouse, the king;  
> By her advice peace wraps the kingdom round  
> And keeps mankind from breaking pacts of peace.\(^\text{57}\)

This discussion of Edith’s peaceweaving ability shows her as both the king’s private councilor, advising him in important peace related matters, and as, primarily, Earl Godwin’s daughter. This particular section of the *Vita Æwardi* is framed as praise for Earl Godwin, numbering Edith among his triumphs. In this manner, Edith ties herself to both men and peaceweaving at the same time, perhaps purposefully linking concepts of peaceweaving with the individuals discussed in the passage.

Edith as peacemaker is a conceptual image created in the *Vita Æwardi* that promotes Edith as a symbol of Englishness and as a moral compass for the country. Even though she was half Danish by birth, Edith became a national symbol of femininity and nation. Her emotions were reflected by the court and public, and she was sympathetic to national feelings: “And when she wept inconsolably, the whole palace went into mourning. For when misfortunes had attacked them in the past, she had always stood as a defense, and had both repelled all the hostile forces with her powerful counsels and also cheered the king and his retinue.”\(^\text{58}\) In this sense, her role as peacemaker worked on an internal level; she made sure the people were taken care of, and they, in turn, sympathized with her own troubles.

The third duty of the queen, which was to ensure the continuation of the dynasty, Edith was unable to fulfill in the traditional way. It was not unique to Edward and Edith’s marriage that they were childless; of interest, however, is that they both remained married to one another and


\[ 58 \] *The Life of King Edward, Who Rests at Westminster*, 54.
that their childlessness is excused in the literature as a choice, rather than fate. Their marriage was notably chaste, a fact that became part of Edward’s saintly persona. This may have been true due to his deep faith or perhaps, as suggested by William of Malmesbury, because his hatred for Godwin and his power over him extended to Godwin’s daughter as well.\textsuperscript{59} The deduction that this fact is true, however, is doubtful. Aside from the unlikely nature of a husband and wife remaining chaste throughout their marriage, the necessity of an heir in a fragile dynasty, such as it was after the Danish conquest, would have been tantamount. Additionally, there is substantial evidence that Edith’s removal from court in 1051 may have been due to Edward’s wish to divorce her.\textsuperscript{60} If the king had reason to believe that his wife was barren, that would have been sufficient reason to divorce her. The episode did not end in divorce, probably because of the extensive power and influence of Godwin and his family, but the doubt in Edith’s fertility was laid.

The assertion that Edward and Edith remained chaste, therefore, is of great interest concerning Edith’s alteration of her identity within the \textit{Vita Ædwardi}. There are many reasons why Edith would want to encourage this story, regardless of its validity, as Barlow discusses.\textsuperscript{61} She may have faced criticism during her husband’s life for not producing a child, but if she were able to spread the idea that their childlessness was not due to her own infertility, or even a possible impotence of her husband, then she would be able to retain a respectable image for them both.

This supposed infertility would have proved very troublesome for Edith if it became the common assumption. With both the story of their chaste marriage and a sprinkling of themes of fertility throughout the \textit{Vita Ædwardi}, Edith used it as a platform for personal propaganda. Maternal language is used in the poetry of the \textit{Vita Ædwardi}, not necessarily in reference to Edith, but closely related enough that it could be used to imply the concept that while Edith was

\textsuperscript{60} Stafford, \textit{Queen Emma and Queen Edith}, 264.  
\textsuperscript{61} Barlow, "Introduction," lxxviii.
mother to no living child, she was, in a way, mother to England. Additionally, in one episode, Edward cures a barren woman of her infertility. This links Edward with virility, so dispelling any story that he was unable to sire children. So, too, might the story have been used to show that if Edward could cure one woman’s infertility, he could certainly have cured his wife’s if, indeed, she was so afflicted. Since they were childless, however, this might imply that she was not infertile (as he could have cured her of it) and instead reinforces the tale of their chaste marriage.

Thus, Edith’s role as queen differed from her predecessor. She performed her duties as queen in advising Edward, as was expected of a queen, but she appears in the Vita Ædwardi to assume a familial role with Edward, rather than a marital one. A throne was always prepared for her next to the king, as was customary, but she preferred to sit at his feet like a daughter rather than a wife. She often appears at Edward’s feet, perhaps denoting a submissive nature to her relationship with the king. Near the end of Edward’s life, she is seen warming his feet in her lap, once again placing her at his feet. Edward, himself, refers to Edith as being like a daughter to him in his final words:

‘May God be gracious to this my wife for the zealous solicitude of her service. For she has served me devotedly, and has always stood close by my side like a beloved daughter. And so from the forgiving God may she obtain the reward of eternal happiness.’ And stretching forth his hand to his governor, her brother, Harold, he said, ‘I commend this woman and all the kingdom to your protection. Serve and honour her with faithful obedience as your lady and sister, which she is, and do not despoil her, as long as she lives, of any due honour got from me.’

This passage is significant in three different ways: it gives evidence of her wifely role as being that of a daughter, as well as that of being a servant to the king; it links Edith with being a symbol of the kingdom, for he puts her before the kingdom when he grants it to Harold; and he orders Harold to continue to support her and treat her with the respect she is due. This, as it can be argued, might signify Edith’s role as queen and mother in that while she did not produce an heir

63 The Life of King Edward, Who Rests at Westminster, 42.
64 The Life of King Edward, Who Rests at Westminster, 76.
65 The Life of King Edward, Who Rests at Westminster, 79.
on her own, he role as a daughter-figure to Edward enabled her to pass along the dynasty to her brother, Harold. This would allow her to fulfill her duty as queen without ever giving birth. Of course, this argument is troublesome in that she is later seen to side with William the Conqueror, which might imply that either the Vita Æduardi did not portray her true allegiance, or that she changed that allegiance after 1066.

Mathilda II differs from her predecessors in that she did not survive her husband, so she did not ever need to navigate a succession. However, circumstances of conquest still affected her life and cultivated an active queenship within the narrative. Mathilda II’s religious life, which grew to great importance during her time as queen, began early on. Her childhood was spent at court with her parents, which The Life of St Margaret details as happy.66 The Life of St Margaret also discusses Margaret’s persistent teaching of her children in the area of faith and God.67 Matilda II’s later youth was spent at the religious house in Wilton, where she furthered her religious education.68 Edith had also spent time there while she was in exile and had rebuilt it as its patron. In this way, the two queens are linked. It is possible that Matilda II was influenced early on by the memory of Edith that almost certainly remained at Wilton.69

It was at Wilton that Matilda II supposedly began to wear the veil, a choice that might have stemmed from a variety of reasoning: an attempt to repell suitors, a desire to emulate her deeply religious mother, or possibly her own religious endeavor to become a nun. Regardless of the reason, Matilda II’s father reacted adversely to this choice, famously throwing her veil on the ground and stomping on it.70 This act can be perceived as a show of the value King Malcolm placed on his daughter and the future marriage that she might have rather than any enmity toward the church. Despite Malcolm and Margaret’s copious amount of children, many of which were

66 Turgot, The Life of St Margaret, 33-5.
67 Turgot, The Life of St Margaret, 34.
69 Huneycutt, Matilda of Scotland: A Study in Medieval Queenship, 18-9.
70 Eadmer, History of Recent Events in England, Historia Novorum in Anglia, 126-8
male, Matilda II was still of great importance to her parents as was her marriageability. Additionally, Eadmer quotes Edith herself as saying that she wore the veil in fear of her Aunt’s wrath, “That hood I did indeed wear in her presence, chafing at it and fearful; but, as soon as I was able to escape out of her sight, I tore it off and threw it on the ground and trampled on it.”

This passage suggests both that Matilda II’s wearing of the veil was not for religious purposes, and that even at an early age, she was willful and active in her own life.

Matilda II’s ardent faith, as described by William of Malmesbury, was “a woman of exceptional holiness,” served to elevate her in the eyes of the English when she became their queen, but it was also an impediment to her marriage. The fact that she had worn the veil, even thought she was not a nun, proved to be quite the obstacle to her marrying the English king. On her behest, archbishop Anselm called an ecclesiastical council meeting to decide the matter. Eventually the marriage was permitted, although the rumor continued to be hotly debated long after the fact. For the most part, the verdict was greeted with celebration, although some of the Norman nobility saw her Anglo-Saxon ties negatively.

On the whole, however, her marriage became Matilda II’s first act as a peacemaker, bringing together two feuding nationalities. Their marriage united the new, Norman dynasty with the old, Anglo-Saxon one. It has been suggested that Matilda II and Henry might have been a love match, but considering the political implications, it is much more likely that it was a marriage of convenience. This idea is present in the Gesta Regum. William of Malmesbury writes of the marriage, “To love of her his mind had long since been turned, and a rich dowry was in his eyes of no account, if he could but secure the affections of one whom he had long desired; she was in fact, although of exalted rank as a great-great-niece of King Edward through his

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74 Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland: A Study in Medieval Queenship*, 27.
brother Edmund, mistress of only a modest fortune, being and orphan without either parent."

This passage indicates that it was more important for the marriage to be seen as one of love than one of fortune. Perhaps this says more about Henry I than it does Matilda II, but if she was involved in the shaping of her character in the *Gesta Regum*, as it is suggested in its opening, then it would not be impossible that she preferred to be seen as an object of affection rather than a political tool. Of course, her relation to the Anglo-Saxon dynasty is also included, for it would certainly have been an important piece of her identity as well as the identity created by her marriage, but it is secondary to Henry I’s love for his bride. The inclusion of her heritage, however, is evidential of a mutually beneficial, political marriage in that Matilda II would become queen and that Henry would be able to pacify dissent from those who opposed Norman rule.

The successful nature of the union of Henry I and Matilda II was predicted by Edward in the *Vita Æwardi*. Whether this was added later or was part of the original text is uncertain, but the significance remains. Edward, on his deathbed, says:

‘When a green tree, if cut down in the middle of its trunk, and the part cut off carried the space of three furlongs from the stock, shall be joined again to its trunk, by itself and without the hand of man or any sort of stake, and begin once more to push leaves and bear fruit from the old love of its uniting sap, then first can a remission of these great ills be hoped for.’

Edwards words, although not quite understood at the utterance, provide a framework for Matilda II’s marriage to Henry. Providing that the tree is a symbol of the Anglo-Saxon dynasty as carried on by Matilda II, her return to England was predicted to bring unity and peace, which, in a way, it did.

Matilda II’s actions as peacemaker were not limited to her act of marriage. She was quite the intermediary, especially when concerning her husband. The debate regarding lay
investiture\textsuperscript{77} was prevalent, with Henry on the side of investiture and the continental church, against it. The lay investiture conflict caused quite the upheaval in England, which Matilda II felt most strongly, as it caused her to be separated from Anselm, who had conducted the investigation into the validity of her marriage and who had become quite a close confidant to her. Matilda II wrote often to Anselm, who had left England because of disagreements in regard to lay investiture. In one letter, Matilda II praises Anselm, likening her affection for him to that for her own father, and imploring him to continue to pray for her, her husband, and their children. She praises him, and hints that he might be able to return to England soon.\textsuperscript{78} It is unclear how this is made possible, but her influential capabilities are implied. Another letter, in which Matilda II begs Pope Paschal II for advice, she praises Anselm again and asks for his return.\textsuperscript{79} Her role as a peacemaker in the second letter is very clear. She writes, “I, indeed, taught by your most sound and gracious advice, will, as far as woman’s strength may suffice, and with the help of worthy men, which I shall procure, endeavour, with my whole power, that my humility may, as far as possible, fulfill what your highness advises.”\textsuperscript{80} Here, Matilda II may be veiling the extent of her power of influence with humility, but still it is apparent that she believes that whatever the Pope recommends, she will be able to implement.

Matilda II’s power as an intermediary may have declined after 1105. Eadmer relates an instance in which she was asked to intercede with the King, but promptly burst into tears, claiming that she was afraid to.\textsuperscript{81} Lois Huneycutt suggests that this indicates that she might have interceded too often in the investiture conflict and had thus lost some of her power or that Henry was too busy preparing for crusade to consider anything else at the time. Huneycutt also considers that Henry may have been less indulgent on account of him tiring of her as a wife; power to

\textsuperscript{77} Lay investiture refers to the appointing of bishops by laymen rather than churchmen and was one of the main religious debates of the high middle ages.

\textsuperscript{78} “Matilda of Scotland, Queen of Henry I, to Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, C. 1103,” 22-3.

\textsuperscript{79} “Matilda of Scotland, Queen of Henry I, to Pope Paschal II, C. 1103,” 23-4.

\textsuperscript{80} “Matilda of Scotland, Queen of Henry I, to Pope Paschal II, C. 1103, 24.

\textsuperscript{81} Eadmer, \textit{History of Recent Events in England, Historia Novorum in Anglia}, 185.
advice him may have, thus, been split between Matilda II and the king’s mistresses. Regardless, this decline was short lived and Matilda II continued to serve as a peaceweaving intermediary for the duration of her life.

Henry I’s reign faced many difficulties and threats, including that of Robert Curthose, who made an unsuccessful claim to the English throne. Henry, his youngest brother, was to achieve what Robert could not, but Robert remained a relative threat. This, Matilda II was able to thwart, as suggested by Huneycutt, by pretending threat of a miscarriage. The dual loyalties of Robert, as a claimant to the throne but also as her godfather, made Matilda II’s position ideal for negating him as a threat. Additionally, William of Malmesbury cites her as the bringer of peace between the brothers in another incident in which Henry I allegedly promised Robert Curthose money, but then refused to pay it. Robert Curthose forgave Henry I “simply because he understood that the queen wished it from her silent pleading.” This passage shows her as peacemaker within the royal family, solving internal conflict as well as large scale, national issues as a source of peace.

Matilda II’s third queenly duty was to continue on the royal line. She had two children: Matilda, who would later go on to become Empress Matilda, and William. According to William of Malmesbury, she was satisfied with one child of each sex. With the birth of her son, she had completely fulfilled the prophecy of Edward the Confessor, although William did not live to become king. Instead, the peace that Matilda II had sought to create through her children was threatened later when her daughter fought for her own son’s right to rule. At the time of Matilda’s death, however, she had presented herself as a loyal and peaceful queen, dedicated to fulfilling her queenly role.

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82 Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland: A Study in Medieval Queenship*, 83-5.
83 Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland: A Study in Medieval Queenship*, 74.
These three queens provide a framework for the changing identity during Conquest. Emma represented multiple identities and survivalist tactics in order to maintain her power and the ability to shape both her country’s identity as well as her own; Edith symbolized Englishness as reclaimed by Edward and the shifting toward a Norman identity at the end of her narrative; and Matilda II’s marriage to Henry I signified an end to the conquest narrative, uniting two cultural identities. The ways in which queens’ identities were shaped by other and the ways in which they shaped their own identities reveal not only which traits were most important to them, but how they were able to present them to the public. The shaping of these identities became the most important power of the queen during conquest because it allowed them a say in how they were seen in terms of nationality, their links to men, and in their queenly actions. These identities became not only a channel for queenly power during conquest, but also a channel for queenly survival.
Primary Sources


Secondary Sources


