

THE ANGLO-SAXON CHRONICLE, 755:
AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY
OF THE CYNEWULF AND CYNEHEARD EPISODE
FROM PLUMMER TO BREMMER¹

Abstract

For more than a century, Anglo-Saxonists of all generations have shown their concern with the so-called 'Story of Cynewulf and Cyneheard' writing numerous articles and editing now and again the entry for 755 in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. The interests shown range from merely historical studies of this and other sources to prove (or disprove) its historical accuracy to literary studies of the annal's style and its similitude to other contemporary Scandinavian accounts. The aim of this annotated bibliography is to offer, in chronological order of publication, a comprehensive analysis of the several studies and editions published from the nineteenth century (Plummer 1892-99) to the very first years of the twenty-first century (2005).

Keywords: Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, bibliography, Cynewulf, Cyneheard.

Resumen

Durante más de un siglo, anglosajonistas de todas las generaciones han mostrado su interés en la llamada 'historia de Cynewulf y Cyneheard' produciendo numerosos artículos y editando una y otra vez la entrada para el año 755 de la *Crónica Anglosajona*. Los intereses mostrados abarcan desde estudios meramente históricos de ésta y otras fuentes documentales para probar (o rebatir) su veracidad histórica, hasta enfoques más literarios acerca del estilo del anal y su similitud con otros relatos escandinavos contemporáneos. La finalidad de esta bibliografía comentada es ofrecer, en orden cronológico de publicación, un análisis general de estos estudios y ediciones publicados desde el siglo diecinueve (Plummer 1893-99) hasta los primeros años del siglo veintiuno (2005).

Palabras clave: Crónica Anglosajona, bibliografía, Cynewulf, Cyneheard.

1.1.- INTRODUCTION

The main topic of this annotated bibliography concerns the so-called 'Story of Cynewulf and Cyneheard.' My aim is to offer, in a chronological order of publication, a broad view of the different opinions established by generations

¹ I would like to thank Dr Alex R. Rumble for his helpful comments and Dr Jorge L. Bueno Alonso who encouraged me greatly in the process of revision of this bibliography.

of Anglo-Saxonists around this particular annal which, although it deals with facts that took place between the years 755 and 784 (757 and 786, to be exact),² was undoubtedly written down at the end of the ninth century (or beginning of the tenth) in the form we have today (see J. Bately 1991: xxii). The scope of this analysis ranges from Plummer's influential edition of *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel* (1892-9) up to the latest editions and articles in 2005. For the sake of practicality, I have decided to divide all the references into three clearly defined sections. The first offers most editions (that I am aware of) of the annal in its original language or translated into Present-Day English.³ The second section presents the bulk of the commentary dealing with the annal and its different critical trends (kinship vs. *comitatus*, oral tradition, saga connections, etc.). Finally, a considerably shorter section closes this bibliography in which I offer a number of references which, not being essential for the study of the entry, do treat it in some way relevant to its understanding. Thus, they range from editions of other medieval texts (such as the chronicles of Æthelweard and Gaimar) to more general studies on the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle which briefly refer to this story.⁴

² Check Ch. Plummer, ed. 1952: 44, 56. It is more widely discussed by J. Bately 1991: 32-5.

³ I have excluded here translations into other languages although I might hereby refer to the only version that I know of in one of my mother tongues: Jorge L. Bueno Alonso (forthcoming): *La épica de la Inglaterra anglosajona: Historia y textos del auge de Mercia al declive de la monarquía, 750-1016* (Vigo: University of Vigo Press).

⁴ I have also refrained from including in the main body of the bibliography the numerous works of mainly historical nature which cite the annal for 755 or at best retell its plot. Among those we might find H. M. Chadwick 1905: *Studies on Anglo-Saxon Institutions*. (Cambridge: CUP), p. 363; W. Hunt 1908: Cynewulf. In L. Stephen & S. Lee, *Dictionary of National Biography* (London: Smith Elder & Co.), vol. 5, p. 372; Ch. Oman 1910: *A History of England. Vol. I. England Before the Norman Conquest*. (London: Methuen), pp. 335-6 and 338-9; R. H. Hodgkin 1939: *A History of the Anglo-Saxons*. Second edition (London: OUP), vol. II, pp. 393-5; P. Hunter-Blair 1963: *Roman Britain and Early England* (Edinburgh: Nelson), pp. 251-2; F. Stenton 1971: *Anglo-Saxon England*. Third edition (Oxford: OUP), p. 208; D. Whitelock 1991: *The Beginnings of English Society*. Revised edition (London: Penguin), pp. 32 and 37-8; H. R. Loyn 1991: *Anglo-Saxon England and the Norman Conquest*. Second edition (Harlow: Longman), pp. 308-9; Heather Edwards 2004: Cynewulf

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* has survived in seven manuscripts, each of them identified by Plummer with a letter from A to G. A is considered to be the most important⁵ and the oldest, its earliest hand dating from the late ninth century or 'very early tenth.'⁶ For more than a hundred years, scholars have discussed the possible relationships between all the extant copies in an attempt to define their origins.⁷ It has always been accepted that it was during the last part of the ninth century, 'in the reign of King Alfred, when the *Chronicle* assumed its present form.'⁸ Dorothy Whitelock lists a group of possible sources which the first compiler might have 'had at his disposal'. Among them, she mentions 'some epitome of universal history which has not been identified,' Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, some 'northern annals,' genealogies and 'some sets of earlier West Saxon annals.' (Whitelock 1955: 115) However, when she comes to discuss in more detail the annal for AD 755, she refers to:

another type of source [...] in which the circumstantial account of the feud between Cynewulf and Cyneheard has plainly been added to an earlier written source, though the incident may have been handed down by oral narrative for some time before it was put in writing. (Whitelock 1955: 115).

(d. 786). *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: OUP) at [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6990>].

⁵ R. Fowler 1966: 3. (*Old English Prose and Verse*. London: Routledge).

⁶ D. Whitelock 1979: 109. (*English Historical Documents, c. 500-1042*. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode). Also N.R. Ker 1957: 57-58, (*Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press); where he describes it as an 'upright hand s. ix-x.' Also Bately (1991: 2); C. E. Wright 1939: 26. (*The Cultivation of Saga in Anglo-Saxon England*. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd); E. Trehearne 2004: 20. (*Old and Middle English: An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell).

⁷ See Bately (1991: 2); and Plummer (1892-9: xxxvii-cii).

⁸ Stenton (1971: 19). Also in Whitelock (1955: 114-115).

Certainly, many commentators have dealt with the possible sources of this 'precious bit of Old English prose narrative.'⁹ One of the main trends here seems to have been the association of this passage with the genre of the Old Norse sagas, especially after C. L. Wrenn's article 'A Saga of the Anglo-Saxons.'¹⁰ Nevertheless, in recent years, we find examples of voices which have successfully established a clear separation from that 'Scandinavian connection' and demonstrated that despite some structural similarities (paratactic constructions, sudden change into direct speech) there is not enough textual evidence to sustain a comprehensible bond.¹¹

Another theme often related to this entry is that regarding the dichotomy of kinship and *comitatus*. With a few exceptions,¹² scholars have commonly found this story as one of the best illustrations of the early Germanic heroic tradition in Anglo-Saxon literature. The determination to fight for one's lord (even when he is dead) against members of the same kin if necessary, is shown by most actors in this story and has placed this 'most familiar of all Old English heroic tales' (Shippey 1985: 221) at the same level of significance as the more celebrated epic poems, namely, *The Battle of Maldon* and *Beowulf*. Finally, more contemporary lines of thought seem to have also found its way through the scholarship devoted to the *Merantune* episode. Such is the case of the feminist reading offered by Nina Rulon-Miller (1997: 113-32), with particular attention to the female character whom Cynewulf decided to visit on that deadly night.

⁹ F. P. Magoun (1933: 374); also C. L. Wrenn (1940-1: 243).

¹⁰ Wrenn (1940); Fowler (1966: 4); Wright (1939).

¹¹ The main example of this 'disagreement' is represented by F. Heinemann, (1993: 57-89). Regarding the lack of evidence for the 'saga connection' see R. W. McTurk (1981: 81-127) who, despite an impressive effort is unable to come up with enough evidence to support his claim that 'C&C is ... comparable to an Icelandic saga.' (p. 81).

¹² See, for example, S. D. White (1989: 1-18).

1.2.- EDITIONS AND TRANSLATIONS

PLUMMER, Charles 1952[1892-9]: *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel. 2 vols. Vol. II.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp. 44-8.

Notes to Plummer's much praised edition of the annal (on pp. 46-50, vol. I). Some of his comments on this entry may seem somewhat general ('Arrangements of a Saxon house,' p. 45) but he offers good references to other sources like Æthelweard's *Chronicle* or Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and so it has commonly been accepted as the departure point for any research concerning this annal. His linguistic observations are also valuable as he gives a detailed description of some difficult grammatical structures and the different readings found in the various manuscripts.

BRIGHT, James W. ⁴1903: *An Anglo-Saxon Reader.* (London: Swan Sonnenschein), pp. 14-15, 202-3.

The author gives brief comments, mainly drawn from previous or contemporaneous scholars (Earle, Sweet ..., p. 202) to his edition of the annal from the Parker Chronicle. Nevertheless, it appears to be hardly useful from a modern point of view.

FLOWER, R. & H. Smith eds. 1941: *The Parker Chronicle and Laws (Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS 173).* Early English Text Society, Original Series 208 (London: OUP).

Although this is the only facsimile edition of this manuscript so far, it offers an excellent quality in its plates (see Fol. 10a and Fol. 10b for the annal AD 755). As the editors acknowledge in the preface, due to its wartime publication, the work unfortunately lacks an introduction with some remarks on the manuscript and its context. A new, perhaps digital, edition in full colour with such introductory notes would be desirable these days.

WHITELOCK, D. 1955: *English Historical Documents, c. 500-1042*. (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode), pp. 114-16, 162-3.

Considered one of the chief translations of the annal, this work offers valuable notes and comments on the whole Chronicle, particularly on its sources as well as pointing out some alternative readings. Though she dedicates one paragraph to the 755 entry and its possible sources (p. 115), it does not offer much new information. She also provides a short bibliography with some items mentioned here (p. 130). Both of these were utterly removed from the second edition published in 1979.

MITCHELL, B. & Fred. C. Robinson ⁷²⁰⁰⁷[1964]: *A guide to Old English*. (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 220-3.

In this book for elementary students of Old English, the authors offer an edition of the entry accompanied by some preliminary comments on the annal in which they identify the most general topics of study around it ('the heroic choice', 'oral tradition', 'spontaneous syntax', etc., p. 220). It is certainly useful for students of the language, although the notes avoid going into any kind of detailed discussion.

FOWLER, R. 1966: *Old English Prose and Verse*. (London: Routledge), pp. 4-6, 126-7.

Mainly introductory comments to Fowler's own edition of the Old English text. He makes fairly general remarks without going into deep discussion. However, he successfully pinpoints the most relevant thematic arguments discussed to that moment (oral origin of the story, heroic values, etc.), as he emphasizes the literary nature of the account. There are a few references to previous scholars as well as a brief bibliography on p. 126, both of them

lacking some key references. The text itself seems to follow the conventional patterns established both morphologically and in its division into paragraphs.

WHITELOCK, D. ed. 1970[1967]: *Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Reader in Prose and Verse. Fifteenth edition.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp. 1-3.

This is an influential edition of the annal in its original Old English version with a few introductory notes. After a reference to its oral tradition, Whitelock offers a rather negative view on the 'unsophisticated' style (p. 1) of the account which contrasts sharply with the importance that scholarship has conventionally given to this text. There is also some information on the manuscript tradition of the Chronicle.

GARMONSWAY, G. Norman ed. 1972: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.* (London: Dent)

A comparative translation of three different copies of the Chronicle: namely, the Parker and Laud versions as well as the text from the F manuscript (Cotton Domitian A.VIII) with certain references to other codices in the footnotes. Garmonsway's annotations are primarily focused on rather general issues such as the chronological dislocation of the annal, the definition of an Anglo-Saxon *burh* and certain minor differences between manuscripts. More discussion on deeper topics would have been desirable and more profitable for the reader's understanding of the story and its implications. Although the few names given refer to relevant figures (Stenton, Plummer, Magoun), they appear to be slightly out of date.

BATELY, Janet ed. 1986: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. A Collaborative Edition.* Vol. 3. MS A. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer).

A broad description of the manuscript is given in the introduction to this excellent edition of MS. A: Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS 173.

Despite the fact that there is no direct reference to the 755 annal, the information about scripts, hands, layout and the different items in the book, as well as the study of the relationships between the different surviving manuscripts, make it worthy of consultation.

MAGENNIS, H. & I. Herbison 1990: *Discovering Old English*. (Belfast: Ultonian Press), pp. 56-63.

Despite being a mere edition of the text (from MS. A) for students of Old English accompanied by some conventional and introductory comments, the editors are able to develop the theme of the heroic tradition to a certain extent after praising the narrative virtues of the 'first short story in English' (p. 56). It is interesting to note that they divide the annal into three main parts, though apparently without following any specific pattern, only to make it easier for non-advanced students of the language. A useful layout is used as each of these portions is accompanied by a glossary on the same page and a list of valuable textual notes facing the entry.

BRAVO, A., F. García & S. González eds. 1994[1992]: *Old English Anthology* (Oviedo: Servicio Publicaciones Universidad de Oviedo), pp. 291-3.

This edition of the Old English text is preceded by a short introduction mainly aimed at those interested in the *Chronicle* as a whole. It offers some information on the different editions of the whole text as well as on the number of surviving manuscripts and their stemma. In the back of the *Anthology* (pp. 456-7), the editors inserted another short note on this particular entry alluding rather broadly to its origin and offering only three bibliographical references and a few semantic and linguistic footnotes on the text itself (such as *Andred*, *Pryfetes Flodan* or the narrative switch into direct style). Some commentary on other problematic issues such as the heroic struggle between kin and king as well as further bibliographical details seem to be missing.

SWANTON, Michael transl. and ed. 2000[1996]: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* (London: Phoenix), pp. 46-50.

As the author states in the introduction (p. xxx), his edition follows the same pattern used by Earle and Plummer (see p. 3 above). This double page layout with the translation of A and E (and references to the rest of the surviving copies where necessary) offers a mere update of Garmonsway's work (see p. 5 above). However, Swanton presents one of the latest efforts to bring the most important source of Anglo-Saxon culture closer to both scholars and students of the period.

TREHARNE, Elaine ed. 2004: *Old and Middle English, c.890-c.1400: An Anthology*. Second edition (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 20-3.

A very useful edition and translation of some annals from the *Chronicle* with a short introduction in which the editor gives a rather general view of the whole work referring briefly to its possible origin, structure and educational aim. She also comments on the two extracts edited: The annals for 755, 'the story of Cynewulf and Cyneheard' and for 855-78, 'the death of Edmund' and 'Alfred's battles with the Vikings.' As she states in the introduction (p. xv), the 'explanatory annotation' preceding the bilingual rendering of these entries includes some 'bibliographical information for students:' some simple but accurate notes and a few bibliographical references, mainly on its latest editions.

MARSDEN, Richard ed. 2004: *The Cambridge Old English Reader*. (Cambridge: CUP), pp. 245-50.

An edition of the vernacular text found in MS. A, accompanied by a critical apparatus dealing with both semantic and linguistic issues relating to the annal. The text itself is preceded by an introductory discussion where the

editor refers to the main critical trends around this story. Within only four paragraphs, he is able to skilfully pinpoint the main issues on the possible origin of the story, its key linguistic features or the semantic struggles the reader may be left with due to the so-called paratactic style. He also lists some useful bibliographical references as further reading.

1.3.- COMMENTARY

MAGOUN, F. P. 1933: Cynewulf, Cyneheard and Osric. *Anglia* 57: 361-76.

The author offers a new division of the paragraphs of the text 'to facilitate reference within this paper and to emphasize [...] the well-balanced structure of the episode' (p. 363) as well as a list of all the '*dramatis personae*' (p. 365), which is supported by a discussion of his new arrangement. Nowadays, it may seem slightly out-of-date, although he is the first scholar to have openly admitted a possible connection with the Old Norse/Icelandic sagas (Plummer had just hinted at it very briefly – see p. 3 above) despite not pursuing the idea any further.

WRIGHT, C. E. 1939: *The Cultivation of Saga in Anglo-Saxon England*. (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd), pp. 26-7, 78-80.

Though much cited by later commentators, Wright only dedicates two short fragments of his work to the annal. There he accepts its oral origin and its saga-like theme, structure and style, which prompts him to state that 'the short introductory passage formed probably no part of the story in its originally saga-form' (p. 80). Unfortunately he is unable to give evidence to support this. He also renders a 'fairly literal translation' (pp. 78-80).

WRENN, C. L. 1940-1: A Saga of the Anglo-Saxons. *History* 25: 208-15.

'There is one famous passage in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* which [...] does bear a quite remarkable resemblance to an Old Icelandic saga in its stylistic

features' (p. 210). The author gives an extensive definition of 'saga' and applies its various features to the Chronicle annal after rendering his own translation. Although some of his arguments are plausible ('allusiveness', 'colloquial language', 'conciseness', p. 22), he describes the story's origin with a disappointing 'very speculative explanation'(p. 213). Despite being frequently referred to when discussing the saga-like origin of the annal, it appears to have lost most of its significance after Heinemann's article (see item 21).

MOORMAN, C. 1954: The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for 755. *Notes And Queries* 199: 94-8.

Moorman's aim is to find the 'connection' used by the chronicler to give 'his entry [...] some sort of structural and thematic unity' (p. 94). The British hostage plays that central role as he is identified by this commentator both as the swain and the ealdorman's godson. Extremely critical about Magoun's article (see p. 7 above), his proposal is tremendously doubtful and exceptionally implausible for he relies entirely on mere assumptions.

TOWERS, T. H. 1963: Thematic unity in the story of Cynewulf and Cyneheard. *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 62: 310-316.

In order to establish the thematic unity of the annal, the author examines and finally rejects the earlier proposals by Magoun and Moorman (see pp. 7 and 8 above). In his opinion 'the political concept in this chronicle is much more sophisticated than the *comitatus*, and it comprehends the *comitatus*' (p. 315). Thus, that 'political interest' (p. 316) would give the story its 'thematic harmony' (p. 312). His argument is plausible in that a political background seems obvious behind the main action of the entry. However, he fails to consider appropriately the thematic relevance of some other elements, such as the heroic values in the dialogues prior to each fight or the theme of revenge.

BATTAGLIA, F. J. 1966: Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for 755: the missing evidence for a traditional reading. *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 81: 173-8.

The author describes the annal as ‘a coherent narrative of internecine strife between branches of Cerdic’s family tree.’ (p. 178) Therefore, in his view the ‘missing evidence’ of the title comes to be the blood ties between Sigebryht, Cynewulf and Cyneheard. However, his innovative reading depends to a great extent on later renderings of the story, mainly that of Geoffrey Gaimar, a twelfth-century chronicler (p. 176). He focuses his discussion, perhaps too much, in trying to justify the behaviour of the ‘kinsmen’ (p. 176) inside the *burh* with Cyneheard as not betraying the *comitatus* spirit.

WATERHOUSE, R. 1969: The Theme and Structure of 755 Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. *Philologische Mitteilungen* 70: 630-40.

After establishing a new set of divisions and subdivisions of the text, Waterhouse offers a rather unclear study of the annal’s structure based on a number of parallelisms and contrasts within her numerous sections and around the ‘ideal of *comitatus*-loyalty to one’s lord’ (p. 640). Consciously ignoring ‘the historical accuracy ... of the events recounted’ (p. 631), she probably goes further than the annalist in searching for a net of connections and interconnections within the account’s otherwise uncomplicated structure.

WILSON, J. H. 1977: Cynewulf and Cyneheard: The Falls of Princes. *Papers On Language And Literature* 13, 3: 312-17.

‘In this paper, (Wilson is) concerned with the [...] interpretation of the entry and its dramatic quality’ (p. 312). He studies the dramatic implications of the ‘tragic catastrophe’ of the falls of the three royal characters (i.e., Sigebryht, Cynewulf and Cyneheard) in order to obtain a ‘fuller understanding of the episode and a fuller appreciation of the accomplishment of the chronicler.’ (p.

317) He focuses mainly on the moral implications of 'their attempts to elevate themselves in the defiance of authority and established order' (p. 314), which eventually leads them to a fatal end. He offers a rather reduced view of the whole entry as he willingly ignores other current interpretations ('*comitatus*', 'blood relationships', 'political overtones', p. 317).

MCTURK, R. W. 1981: "Cynewulf and Cyneheard" and the Icelandic Family Sagas. *Leeds Studies In English* 12: 81-127.

The author attempts 'an investigation of the claim made so often that C&C is in one way or another comparable to an Icelandic saga' (p. 81). Although, in this highly elaborate article he carries out a dense formal and stylistic study of the annal in the light of previous literary theories regarding the Icelandic sagas, he obtains not entirely successful results as he is unable to establish an effective connection between this entry and the Icelandic tradition: 'while the evidence for the formal characteristics [...] in C&C is not overwhelming, it is perhaps rather more impressive than the evidence for oral style [...]. Over half of the twenty laws [...] seem to be closely followed.' (p. 113).

SHIPPEY, T. A. 1985: Boar and Badger: An Old English Heroic Antithesis? *Leeds Studies In English* 16: 220-39.

The author studies here three pieces of the Old English heroic tradition (*The Story of Cynewulf and Cyneheard*, *Waldhere* and *The Battle of Maldon*) in order to ascertain the response of an heroic 'champion' when under pressure, as he responds either with the 'fury and impetus' of a boar or with the 'doggedness' and 'cost-effective defence' of a badger (p. 225). Besides examining Cynewulf's behaviour at the doorway (as a boar), he affirms the fictional nature of the king's reaction to the sight of the usurper judging by the contextual difficulties of the moment (it happened at night). His proposal as regards this entry resides mainly in a sensible interpretation of the text and the possible annalist's aims concerning the character of the king.

WHITE, S. D. 1989: Kinship and Lordship in Early Medieval England: The Story of Sigebert, Cynewulf and Cyneheard. *Viator* 20: 1-18.

The author offers a reappraisal of the 'codes' ruling the loyalties of warriors in terms of kinship and lordship. Departing from the traditional interpretation of the story ('the decline of kinship and family', p. 18), he sets out to offer a deeper study of this type of political relationship in the context of early medieval societies. His conclusions ('it seems impossible to locate the definitive appearance of a society founded primarily on contract', p. 18) seem not entirely convincing, as he rests his argument on the fact that 'this author's written text is not a definitive, impartial, or complete statement of law or custom' (p. 7). The number of references given in the footnotes is certainly noteworthy.

HEINEMANN, F. J. 1993: "Cynewulf and Cyneheard" and *Landnámabók*: Another Narrative Tradition. *Leeds Studies In English* 24: 57-89.

With the aim of 'dispos(ing) of the notion that "Cynewulf and Cyneheard" resembles a saga' (p. 58) the author establishes clearly the three main differences (intertextuality, treatment of subject matter and narrative voices, pp. 58-64) between this form of composition and a chronicle. Next, he uses 'three types of entries narrating extended conflict in *Landnámabók*' (p. 65), an Old Icelandic narrative chronicle, to test his claim 'that sagas tell us more about the past than can any summary of their plot' (p. 65). In the end, after establishing a clear link between this annal and those entries in *Landnámabók*, he concludes that this 'is not a saga but a rather tantalising summary of a complicated story that we are no longer able to reconstruct completely' (p. 82). He successfully challenges all previous scholars who found this entry's source in the Icelandic saga tradition as he is able to establish a strong differentiation between the two.

JOHANSEN, J. G. 1993: Language, Structure and Theme in the “Cynewulf and Cyneheard” Episode. *English Language Notes* 31, 1: 3-8.

In this commentator’s opinion, the purpose of the ‘structural subdivisions’ established by the annalist ‘is to focus our attention on the courage and prowess of Cynewulf and his men, and [...] to glorify those ideals and the individuals who live up to them’ (p. 7). His discussion does not seem to add anything really innovative to the current study of the annal and some of his assumptions appear to be questionable (‘Cynewulf’s armies were large and splendid’, p. 3; ‘[Osric’s band] penetrated ... into the very chamber where Cynewulf himself had been trapped earlier’, p. 4). Besides, the references given in the footnotes also lack some significant names.

KLEINSCHMIDT, Harald 1996: The Old English annal for 757 and West Saxon dynastic strife. *Journal of Medieval History* 22, 3: 209-24.

‘This article seeks to place the unusual entry for 757 in the *Parker Chronicle* into the context of eighth- and ninth-century controversies about hereditary succession in the Kingdom of Wessex’ (p. 209). As he explains, the author offers a deep historical study on the ‘dynastic legitimacy’ of the descendants of Ine as a means to justify the alleged attitude of the ninth-century annalist against the three royal characters of the entry. Thus, he arrives at the dubious conclusion that they ‘appear as villains and could be blamed for misgovernment and misbehaviour from the point of view of an insider critic because they belonged to a branch of the West Saxon *stirps regia* which ... had lost its struggle over rules for succession ... in 802’(p.224). The impressive bibliography offered is certainly remarkable as it concerns a wide range of topics such as the succession to the other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms (p. 216), Sutton Hoo (p. 211), or *Beowulf* (p. 217).

BREMMER, Rolf H. Jr. 1997: The Germanic Context of “Cynewulf and Cyneheard” revisited. *Neophilologus*, 81, 3: 445-65.

‘What I propose here is a macro-contextualization that leads us away from the intermediate context of the annal’ (p. 447). This ‘macro-contextualization’ is based on three main points of discussion (uncle-nephew relation, *wif*’s role and the offer of *feorh and feoh*) which he seeks to explain by using a good number of examples from other literary traditions (such as those from Iceland, Frisia or Lombardy). The first of his topics (an uncle-nephew relation between Cynewulf and Cyneheard) seems dubious, as Bremmer fails to comment on the same relationship between Cynewulf and Sigebyrht twenty-nine years before. Similarly, his explanation of the role of the female character (‘who falls prey – being raped – to the machinations of men thrusting for power’, p. 456) is, as the author admits, based on ‘speculation’ (p. 455).

SCRAGG, D. G. 1997: *Wifcyþþe and the Morality of the Cynewulf and Cyneheard Episode in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. In Roberts, J. & J. L. Nelson with M. Godden eds., *Alfred the Wise: Studies in honour of Janet Bately on occasion of her sixty-fifth birthday*. (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer), pp. 179-85.

Scragg offers an interesting study around the meaning of the unique word *wifcyþþe*. He concludes that ‘the message of the piece is ... arguably not a broadly moral one about heroic values but a specifically Christian one’ (p. 184), and states that *wifcyþþe* offers ‘an opprobrious moral comment (which) may thus be regarded as changing the import of the annal’ (p. 185). However, as he rests his Christian reading mainly on the figure of Osric’s godson, miraculously the sole survivor from the last fight, he seems unable to fit the female character into his innovative interpretation.

RULON-MILLER, Nina 1997: “Cynewulf and Cyneheard”: a Woman Screams. *Philological Quarterly* 76: 113-32.

‘My concern in this essay is the woman Cynewulf was visiting at Merton’ (p. 113). From this starting point, the author applies a feminist reading to the

annal in order to 'clean' it from the traditional 'androcentric' interpretations which have placed 'the woman at Merton at best as a trivial event and at worst as "the cause of it all."' (p. 124) Her alternative analysis of the story seems to lack textual supporting evidence from the short piece as she claims, for instance, 'the interpretation of Sigebert's *unrybtum dædum* as "sexual misbehaviour"' (p. 121).

HILL, John M. 2000: Violence, Law and Kingship in the Annals of West Saxon Feud. In Hill, J. M., *The Anglo-Saxon Warrior Ethic*. (Gainesville: University of Florida Press), pp. 74-92.

Departing from an unlikely theory where the annalist of 755 would have made up this story from 'some kind of outline of the incident' (p. 74) and in response to Alfred's political interests, Hill goes on to discuss the plot and all of its turns quoting the opinions of some relevant scholars and focusing all the time on 'the question of rightful, [...], legal deposition or expulsion of kingship' (p. 74) in Wessex. The main argument to support his innovative theory has to do with the 'number of common features' (p.74) that this annal shares with those narrating the story of Æthelwold, Alfred's nephew (901 and 905). It is also remarkable the number of times he refers to other heroic narratives, especially *Beowulf*, in order to establish some kind of generic heroic behaviour.

CONDE SILVESTRE, J. Camilo 2004: The limits of History and Fiction in the 755 entry of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. In Rodriguez, A. & F. Alonso eds., *Voices of the Past: Studies in Old and Middle English Language and Literature*. (A Coruña: Netbiblo), pp. 165-172.

"Cynewulf and Cyneheard" may be considered as a benchmark to explore the fading limits between factual and fictional narratives both theoretically, from the perspective afforded by contemporary literary theory, and genetically, by tracing the process back to the internal development of medieval chronicles.'

(p. 167) This quotation summarises what the author intends to accomplish in this article: a systematic application of contemporary literary theory to the entry in order to define the limits between reality and fiction. It represents an innovative attempt to tackle such a complicated issue in this particular entry obtaining interesting results: However, his conclusions seem to rest upon theoretical assumptions ('the limits of history and fiction were blurred when texts of factual intention ... started to make use of narrativity,' p. 170) rather than upon textual evidence.

1.4.- OTHER USEFUL REFERENCES

BELL, Alexander ed. 1960: *Geffrei Gaimar, L'Estoire des Engleis*. Anglo-Norman Text Society, Vols. XIV-XVI (Oxford: B. Blackwell), pp. 57-61.

This is the only edition of the twelfth-century compilation of previous material by Geffrei Gaimar who produced a chronicle in verse for his Norman audience. His account of the Cynewulf and Cyneheard episode (ll. 1804-1916) has been sometimes quoted as it varies considerably from that in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (for instance, here Cynewulf and Cyneheard are presented as uncle and nephew). In the critical apparatus, the editor gives different readings found in the other extant manuscripts of Gaimar.

CAMPBELL, A. ed. and transl. 1962: *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*. (London: Nelson), pp. xxiii, 22-5.

Campbell's notes in the introduction warn the reader of the misreadings and misinterpretations made by Æthelweard when he translated this annal into Latin. His layout, with the Latin text facing the Modern English one, is considerably helpful. It has been widely cited by those scholars who argue about the identity of the *wifcyþþe on Merantune*, as a result of the unfortunate translation made by Æthelweard.

BATELY, Janet 1978: The compilation of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* 60 BC to AD 890: Vocabulary as Evidence. *Proceedings Of The British Academy* 64, 93-129.

This is a study of the vocabulary in the '890 chronicle' (p. 96), as the author calls it. On pp. 106-7 we find the only mention of the annal for 755. Here she deals with its origins and nature with exceptional brevity, giving no more than one single reference (Wrenn, p. 8 above). More interested about the 'number of differences of usage between this account and other pre-885 annals' (pp. 106-7), she does not offer any new relevant information for the study of the entry.

O'KEEFE O'BRIEN, K. 1991: Heroic Values and Christian Ethics. In Godden, M. and Lapidge, M., eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*. (Cambridge: CUP), pp. 107-25.

In her commentary on the 'unusually detailed representation of conflicts implicit in the heroic ethos,' (p. 110) the author highlights 'the focal point of the story ... on social order,' (p. 111) and the fact that it 'focuses on the tensions created by the conflicting demands of kin and group, of king and usurper and of loyalty and self-interest' (p. 111). This often-cited article places the entry into the wider context of the heroic tradition as it emphasizes the common features of its main Anglo-Saxon examples: namely, *Beowulf*, *The Battle of Maldon* and the annal for 755.

BREMMER, Rolf H. Jr. 2005: Old English Heroic Literature. In Johnson, D., & Treharne, E., eds, *Readings in Medieval Texts. Interpreting Old and Middle English Literature*. (Oxford: OUP), pp. 75-90.

Within this general overview of the main examples of heroic texts in Old English literature, the author refers to this entry (pp. 86-7) by recounting its plot and commenting rather briefly on the main heroic features of the story:

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'loyalty and revenge' (p. 87). This is undoubtedly a good place to start for students interested in the heroic tradition surrounding early Anglo-Saxon England, but it appears somewhat broad from a scholastic point of view.

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