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Images of ethnicity in later medieval Europe

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The Wages of Drinking

Drunkenness has been associated with the English for centuries.¹ In the twelfth century, the English were already famed for drinking alcohol – in particular beer – and for drinking too much. As Peter of Blois wrote to an Englishman called Thomas: ‘Your people are, above all other peoples, drinkers, gluttons, and profligate wasters of all temporal goods.’² In part, this reputation was shared with most northern European nations. The tendency to drink was sometimes explained using climate theory, the cold damp of the north inducing the need for the warmth coming from alcoholic beverages.³ Thus even David Hume, in his essay ‘Of National Characters’ (1748), pondered whether alcohol warmed the frozen blood in the cold north (whereas in the south the sun’s heat fired the passions, causing lust), even though he did not lend much weight to physiological theories of human difference.⁴ Nonetheless, of all the northern peoples, it was the English who took the cake with their drinking: ‘Why, he drinks you, with facility, your Dane dead drunk; he sweats not to overthrow your Almain; he gives your Hollander a vomit, ere the next pottle can be filled.’⁵

But the culture of drinking in England has been attributed far greater significance than mere jabbering tongues and vomiting. This chapter is about how a seemingly prosaic target of mockery such as excessive beer drinking could form a fundamental constituent of English identity, and be of strong significance in the narrative of war and conquest, as related by both the English and others.⁶

1 For the stereotype of the English drunkard in the Middle Ages, see Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 299-302; Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings*, 578-582; Clanchy, *England and its Rulers*, 248; Rickard, *Britain in Medieval French Literature 1100-1500*, 167-170; Langlois, ‘Les Anglais du Moyen Âge’, 302-303, 306, and sources below. For English stereotypes in the twelfth century in general, see also Southern, *Medieval Humanism*, 145-146; Short, ‘Tam Angli quam Franci’, 153-155.

2 *The Later Letters of Peter of Blois* no. 31, ed. Elizabeth Revell (Oxford 1993), 159-164, here at 159-160: ‘Tuus equidem populus pre cunctis gentibus potator et vorator est, omniumque bonorum temporalium temerarius profligator’; Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 301.

3 Tacitus, for example, wrote that the Germans consumed large quantities of alcohol; cf. *Germania* XXIII; Isaac, *Invention of Racism*, 433.

4 David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, T.H. Green and T.H. Grose (eds) (2 volumes; Aalen 1992) vol. 1, 256-258; Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore*, 584-587.

5 William Shakespeare, *Othello* Act 2 Scene 3.

6 English is here used as a general denominator of those people living on the island of Britain. References to Anglo-Saxons or Anglo-Normans are used when it is necessary to specifically differentiate between newcomers and older communities. In the twelfth century, the names Anglia and Britannia were both

This myth-symbol complex of drunkenness (accompanied by cowardice and perfidy) stretches back to Gildas' dark *The Ruin of Britain*, written in the first part of the sixth century, in which Britain's state of chaos and calamity following the wave of invasions of Picts and Saxons is attributed to the drunken stupor of the British priesthood. The underlying notion evoked by Gildas was that England was 'an island "nation" under God, just as in the manner of ancient Israel' which was being punished for its sins.⁷ Until at least the thirteenth century, this concept of chosenness – that the inhabitants of the geographical space of Britain constituted 'new Israelites' – in relation to the specific vice of drunkenness remained a powerful imagery which would be adopted by and which shaped the narrative of successive ethnic groups who conquered the island of Britain: Anglo-Saxons, Danes and Normans.

Drinking beer was related specifically to the geography of England and its cultural customs; beer was reviled as inferior to wine by Romance-speaking peoples. As such it was viewed as an exponent of an inferior culture. This will be discussed first in this chapter. Binge drinking was generally abhorred by all men of the Church, whether of English or foreign extract. However, it was associated especially with Anglo-Saxon culture and the custom of wassailing: a toasting ritual which encouraged communal intoxication.⁸ Moreover, in the twelfth century, some allusions were made to the vice of drinking as an hereditary English vice, caused by the original sin – pointing to a biologization of cultural practices within a religious context. Nonetheless, as will be discussed further, in Anglo-Norman circles drinking was also bemusedly ridiculed as a token of merriment.

Knights, students, kings and commoners could all enter in communal wassailing. However, in the historical narrative of Britain's history, drunkenness carried a dark meaning: that of the determinant of the fate of the island and its successive conquests, caused by the wrath of God. For this reason, knights were especially berated for their drunkenness, both by Anglo-Saxon, Anglo-Norman and French writers. In the final part of this chapter, the specific employment of the image of Anglo-Saxon drunkenness is discussed in references to the battle of Hastings and as justification for the papal interdict under Stephen Langton in the period 1207-1213. Not only did the image continue to serve as an explanatory commonplace in these key events in English history among the English themselves, but it was also alluded to in Notre Dame, Paris after the French conquest of La Rochelle in 1224.

Examining the employment of the imagery of drunkenness may shed some light on the highly complex discussion of ethnic images as agents functioning within the narrative of a collective

employed to designate either the island of England and Scotland, or even the whole of Great Britain, including Ireland. In the early thirteenth century, Henry of Avranches for example also claims that that the English descended from Brutus (i.e. the founder of the British). The distinction between Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman is also increasingly vague from the second part of the twelfth century onwards. See also chapter 8.

⁷ Smith, *Chosen Peoples*, 116.

⁸ See Mary Douglas, 'A Distinctive Anthropological Perspective', in Mary Douglas (ed.), *Constructive Drinking: Perspectives on Drink from Anthropology*, 3-15, for the competitive and inclusive function of drinking within societies.

history. Discussions of the formation of ethnic and national groups, both in the modern and medieval period, address the extent to which they were shaped by elites, who strengthened their power bases by appealing to cultural and social practices, beliefs and sentiments experienced by group members. In addition, the power of historical myths kept alive by group members, whether belonging to the elite or broader layers of the population, is considered a potent constituent for the continuous survival and evolution of ethnic and national identities. In discussions of the medieval period, the discussion is further complicated by the lack of source material produced by the illiterate, and the question to which extent class distinctions cut across any sense of a shared ethnic identity. (Beyond which an individual's identity constantly vacillates depending on a person's situation; individuals may juggle with 'atom units of identity' at all times.)⁹

Nonetheless, a number of points can be addressed here. In many sources, the collective ethnic custom of intoxication, the inhabitants' insatiable thirst and desire to seek oblivion, is evoked in moments of crisis in order to interpret the invasion and conquest of England by the Anglo-Saxons, Danes, and Normans respectively.¹⁰ For the elite at least, the cultural stereotype of drinking was evoked as a determinant of violence and conquest. From the sources, it is also evident that both laymen and clerics, knights, students and presumably peasants entertained themselves or participated ritually in communal wassailing. Drinking was a shared custom which as a ritual might have been recognized as a particular constituent of the inhabitants' island identity. Moreover, because drinking is a cultural custom, it could indeed easily be adopted, and indeed was so, by newcomers to the island, which facilitated the historical continuity of the narrative. Thus, the Britons were berated for their drunkenness in the sixth century; in the eighth century, the missionary Boniface brought to the attention of the Archbishop of Canterbury that the 'vice of drinking' was ubiquitous in his diocese among Anglo-Saxons.¹¹ Geoffrey of Monmouth relates that this custom was first introduced to England by Renwein, daughter of Saxon warrior leader Hengist, who was invited to stay in Britain by Vortigern. Conversely, according to the Winchester annals, possibly compiled by Richard of Devizes, drinking was introduced on the island by the Danes.¹² And thus, where the early sources of the twelfth century clearly relate English drinking to the Anglo-Saxon defeat at the hands of the Normans, in the course of the twelfth century it becomes less and less clear whether this drinking has not become an intrinsic part of the new Anglo-Norman identity (aided by the fact that the Normans were rather thirsty as well).¹³

The geographical space of the island of Britain was thus a stage for the survival of this myth-symbol complex. This leads to the question, falling beyond the scope of this chapter, whether there

9 Hoppenbrouwers, 'Dynamics of National Identity', 31.

10 For the role of cultural myths in moments of crisis, see also Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, 3-5.

11 Quoted by M.M. Glatt, 'The English Drink Problem Through the Ages', in *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine* 70 (1977), 202-206, here at 203.

12 For the authorship of the Winchester Annals, see John T. Appleby, 'Richard of Devizes and the Annals of Winchester', in *Historical Research* 36/93 (1963), 70-77.

13 Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 333.

was a general notion that the custom of drinking, and the fate of the English in battles was tied to royal authority, the king carrying responsibility for the moral state of the people. In the twelfth century, John of Salisbury famously articulated the organic concept of power in his *Policraticus*; the king was the head of the body politic; the courtiers its flanks, the common people (all those without an administrative position) its feet. In other words, if the sins of the chosen people determined the outcome of wars, did the body politic stumble and swagger when the people were intoxicated? The ultimate question is whether English drinking was acknowledged by broad layers of society as a participation in a common ritual of allegiance, linked to the historic destiny of the island.

Below, the significance of the image of drunkenness and the specific connotations of beer drinking will now first be examined. As will become clear, French clerics in particular associated beer drinking and drunkenness among the inhabitants of the island of Britain as an inferior cultural practice. Besides being a cultural custom, Peter of Celle, John of Salisbury and Stephen Langton also intimate that drunkenness was in fact hereditary trait attained after the original sin – attestations of the twelfth-century ‘material turn’ of cultural differences.

The battle between wine and beer

The inhabitants of England in the twelfth century were specifically known for their large consumption of alcohol, notably beer (but also wine and to a lesser extent mead and cider).¹⁴ Beer drinking was associated with large stretches of Northern Europe, from Scandinavia, the Germanic territories to Normandy and Brittany, yet it was English beer drinking and drunkenness which especially captured the imagination in a vast number of sources.¹⁵ This has to do partly with the geographical-cultural distinction between wine and beer drinking evinced by clerics and courtiers from the continent visiting twelfth-century England, following the Norman Conquest. However, the cultural significance of the contrast between wine and beer was in itself older, and not limited to the binary English-French; it also bore relevance, for example, to those living in the linguistic fracture area of the Meuse and Rhine (beer standing for Teuton, wine for Gallic). This becomes clear from the cultural battle between wine and beer in a number of ‘debate verses’.¹⁶ Beer and wine battle both directly against one another in debate verse on the two liquids, as well as in verse battles between the

14 Idem, 301-302.

15 See for example the dispute poem ‘Altercatio vini et cerevisiae’, where beer is drunk in Germany, Hungary, Hainault, Brabant, Flanders, Swabia and Saxony; cf. Alois Bömer, ‘Einer Vagantenliedersammlung des 14 Jahrhunderts in der Schlossbibliothek zu Herdringen’, in *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertums* 49 (1907), 199-202; Frederic J.E. Raby, *A History of Secular Latin Poetry in the Middle Ages* (Oxford 1934), 287. In the *Riote du Monde*, the Normans are famed for their drinking: ‘Et grant buveur, s’il est Norment’ (see chapter 5 note 67). For the image of the German beer drinker in modernity, see Manfred Koch-Hillebracht, *Das Deutschenbild: Gegenwart, Geschichte, Psychologie* (Munich 1977), 138-145.

16 For the genre of the debate verse see Hans Walther, *Das Streitgedicht in der Lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters* (Hildesheim 1984); Ludwig Selbach, *Das Streitgedicht in der altprovenzalischen Lyrik und sein Verhältniss zu ähnlichen Dichtungen anderer Literaturen* (Marburg 1886). See further Raby, *Secular Latin Poetry*, 282-289; Betty Nye Hedberg, ‘The Bucolics and the Medieval Poetical Debate’, in *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 75 (1944), 47-67.

English and the French. Whereas in the former, the tone is relatively mild, in the latter, it is distinctly abusive.

In the battle between wine and beer, grapes definitely have the upper hand; beer was often reviled as bitter and full of dregs. For example, in the poem ‘Altercation of Wine and Beer’, in a manuscript belonging to the Benedictine monastery St. Jacques of Liège on the Romance-Germanic linguistic border, wine comes up trumps.¹⁷ Similarly, in an exchange of poems between Peter of Blois, a Paris student who ended up in King Henry II’s service, and Robert of Beaufeu (died in or before 1219), a secular canon of Salisbury and an acquaintance of Gerald of Wales, the two cross swords over wine and beer.¹⁸ In one of his letters, Peter of Blois had complained about the drink at Henry II’s Angevin court, and although Peter does not mention France or England, it is highly likely that he is referring to the two countries in his opening verses:

Happy is the place where the sweet vine delights
 That blessed house where the rich vine, through the gift
 Of Bacchus, lavishly bestows its guests with wine.
 But unhappy the house where oats are turned into beer,
 In large measures, by the bottle;
 The smoke-dried corn is truly poisonous.¹⁹

Peter of Blois continues to describe how, when drinking this noxious potion, the feet begin to stagger and the mind falls in turmoil, which leads to debauchery. When the drinker finally passes water, the beer is without dregs; these must have fermented into kidney stones.²⁰ In reply, Robert of Beaufeu writes in defence of beer, noting the joys of a simple meal accompanied by beer, and the less reputable role of wine in the stories of Ham’s laughter at Noah’s drunkenness and Lot’s daughters, who slept with their father after they had intoxicated him.²¹ Beer, contrary to wine,

17 ‘Altercatio vini et cerevisiae’, ed. Bömer, ‘Einer Vagantenliedersammlung des 14 Jahrhunderts’, 199-202; Raby, *Secular Latin Poetry*, 287 note 1.

18 Peter of Blois’ poem and Robert of Beaufeu’s reply are printed in E. Brauholtz, ‘Streitgedichte Peters von Blois und Roberts von Beaufeu über den Wert des Weines und Bieres’, in *Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie* 1927 (47) 30-38; and André Wilmart, ‘Une suite au poème de Robert de Beaufeu pour l’éloge de la cervoise’, in *Revue Bénédictine* 50 (1938), 136-140, here at 136-137.

19 Ed. Brauholtz, ‘Streitgedichte’, 32: ‘Felix ille locus quem vitis amenat amena, / Illa beata domus qui Bachi munere plena / Vina dat hospitibus de vitis divite vena; / Sed domus infelix ubi cervisiatur avena, / Mensurata nimis, modo mensuranda lagena / Infumata seges, non vina, immo venena.’

20 See also an epigram attributed to Hildebert of Tours, beginning with line ‘Nullus amicorum posset meliora monere’, which states the belief that the dregs of beer remain in a person’s entrails; and Henry of Avranches, ‘Nescio quid Stygiae monstrum conforme paludi’. Both are quoted by Brauholtz, ‘Streitgedichte’, 35. See also Rigg, *History of Anglo-Latin Literature*, 181.

21 In the debate poem ‘Goliae Dialogus inter Aquam et Vinum’, Water makes the same reproach to Wine in verses 91-94; see Wright, *The Latin Poems commonly attributed to Walter Mapes*, 87 ff.

'imposes sober reins on illicit desires', quenching fires.²² In another verse, also attributed to Robert of Beaufeu by André Wilmart but of otherwise unknown authorship, Peter of Blois' reproach is again addressed directly:

Why is the place happy where the sweet vine delights,
Which hurls its javelin sharper than the Siren with her sweet voice?
It gives grapes; Venus is in wine, and the shackle of Venus.
But happy is the house where the oats abound,
For whom measure is a comrade, affable and glorious place.²³

Peter of Blois, for his part, retorts that Christ chose to turn water into wine – not beer.²⁴

These are friendly exchanges, defending the felicity of landscapes and their produce. But there is an underlying meaning to these exchanges, carrying social and moral significance in relation to geography and ethnicity. Indeed, one of the reasons that beer drinking could become a constituent of identity is that ale was regarded as culturally inferior to wine; furthermore, this inferiority concurred with the broader imagery of northern barbarity and a lack of cultural refinement. Images of beer drinking were implicitly associated with a degree of backwardness, coarseness, lack of restraint, just as consuming large amounts of French fries and hamburgers today may be associated with gluttony and cultural unsophistication. Wine, on the other hand, replenished the finer classes. At court, it was customary to drink wine during meals, a more expensive commodity in England as it had to be imported mostly from France.²⁵ Furthermore, wine had a religious connotation – wine was said to transform into Jesus' blood during the celebration of mass, and the grape and the vine are symbols

22 Robert of Beaufeu, 'Eloquio dulci vernans et voce serena', in ed. Wilmart, 'Une suite au poème de Robert de Beaufeu', I vs. 15, 139: 'Motibus illicitis imponens sobria frena'.

23 Idem, II vs. 1-5, 140: 'Unde locus felix quem vitis amenat amena, / Que magis amentat quam dulci voce Sirena? / Vina dat: in vino Venus est, Venerisque cathena. / Sed domus felix ubi prenimiat avena, / Cui mensura comes est, comis et inclita scena.'

24 Peter of Blois, 'Scribo, sed invitatus: invitatus enim grave vitis', in ed. Braunholtz, 'Streitgedichte', vs. 9-10, 33: 'In vinum convertit aquas prece matris aquarum / conditor, at nunquam cervisiavit eas.'

25 Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings*, 579. For a shortage of wine in England, see for example John of Salisbury's letter to Peter of Celle, who remarks that 'wine is certainly more ready to hand with you than *caelia* which we commonly call *cervisia*', in *The Letters of John of Salisbury. Vol. 1: The Early Letters (1153-1161)* no. 33, eds W.J. Millor, H.E. Butler, vol. 1, 55-58. In the same letter, the sender himself notes that wine was more available on the continent than in England, 'but your experience knows that "man does not live by bread alone," and that their assiduity in drinking has made the English famous among the foreign nations.' Peter of Celle had written a treatise, 'De panibus', on bread in the Bible. In an elaborate interplay between the symbolic/allegorical and literal meaning of wine and beer, John of Salisbury requests that Peter now give him 'a good quantity of wine, or at least a dole, provided always it be enough to satisfy an Englishman and a toper'. John, who himself states that he enjoys both beer and wine, nevertheless prefers wine 'beyond all other intoxicants, that it may be ready to gladden my heart when fortified with bread', presumably referring to the body and blood of Christ.

for fruitfulness in the Old Testament.²⁶ Beer, on the other hand, did little more than transform into excess urine.²⁷

References to beer's inferior reputation are, as a result, manifold. In Carolingian times, Alcuin sniffed that the Frisians did not have olive oil or wine, and that bitter beer sloshed in English stomachs.²⁸ In the twelfth century, Reginald of Canterbury, who was originally from Faye-la Vineuse in central France, made a complaint about the vile taste of beer. In a poem dedicated to Lambert, abbot of St Bertin, he squawks: 'Here you shall be able to enjoy the taste of the English muse; but do not be surprised that France's is better. One thing produces our muse, another yours: the vine instructs the French, the Englishman is taught by barley. Heavy Ceres burdens our senses with dregs, the vines of Liber sweeten your teaching.'²⁹ This complaint against beer is made despite the fact that Reginald of Canterbury felt some kind of allegiance with the English (he spoke of 'our English people').³⁰

The fact that the vine did not flourish in the colder regions of northern Europe, thus offered a geographical context for remarks about social and cultural inferiority. In this literary play, it is evident that the cultural drinking customs bore relevance to a geographical space as being less or more desirable. As cultural symbols, wine and beer were deployed as a means to express pride in place and status. Generally speaking, in these exchanges, beer was deemed inferior and distasteful.

The sin of binge drinking

However, it was not simply the bitter, uncultivated taste of English beer which the poets reviled. Although Robert of Beaufeu tries to defend beer as more sobering than wine, it was notably their binge drinking for which the English were castigated.³¹ This may have to do partly with the much larger quantities of beer which were consumed by the English, as the alcohol percentage of beer was, as it is today, much lower than that of wine (although wine was also diluted with water). Chrétien de Troyes himself acknowledges this in *Yvain ou Le Chevalier au Lion*, where he describes how after dinner men, brash from too much drink, brag about going forth to kill Sultan Nureddin – without

26 Raymond van Uytven, *De zinnelijke middeleeuwen* (Leuven 1998), 24.

27 See for example Walter Daniel's imagery in the *Centum Sententiae* of the English drinker sitting, holding the siphon with one hand to his mouth to drink, and his other hand 'his own pipe to eject urine' ('Sedet aliquis et manu una ciffum ad os tenet ut bibat, altera vero fistulam naturalem ut urinam eiciat.') Printed in C.H. Talbot (ed.), 'The Centum Sententiae of Walter Daniel', in *Sacris Erudiri* 11 (1960), 326.

28 Quoted by Van Uytven, *De zinnelijke middeleeuwen*, 25. No source reference.

29 Ed. Felix Liebermann, 'Raginald von Canterbury', in *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere Geschichte* 13 (1888), 519-556, here at 531: 'Hinc Anglae poteris Musae gustare saporem; / sed non mireris, quia Francia fert potioem. / Altera res nostram Musam parit, altera vostram: / Vitis Francigenam docet, / anglica discit avenam; / crassa Ceres nobis sensum cum faece laborat, / Pampineus vobis Liber documenta saporat.' See Rigg, *A History of Anglo-Latin Literature*, 11.

30 Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 72, for references.

31 There are many sources containing remarks about English drunkenness. See below; cf. also William of Malmesbury's remark in the *Gesta Pontificum* 281, that in abbot Wulfstan's hall everybody drank 'according to the custom of the English'.

leaving the table –, as ‘there are more words in a pitcherful of wine than in a hogshead of beer’.³² The same is intimated by Walter Daniel, a Cistercian monk at the abbey of Rievaulx in North Yorkshire, who in the 1150s or 60s wrote in the *Centum Sententiae* that the English ‘indeed do not drink wine, but a drink made with oats or barley, or sugared with apples. This they drink so often and immoderately that they consider their intake as little. But it is not for that reason less a vice than if they become drunk on cheaper liquor.’³³ The image of English drunkenness may also have to do with their famed toasting rite. This, as Robert Bartlett says, ‘was a competitive and provocative ritual, designed to make your drinking companion drink more and more’.³⁴ One person raised his cup with a ‘wassail’, upon which the drinking companion replied with a ‘drink hale’, drinking companions thus engaged socially in an antiphon of toasting.³⁵

In general, religious men denounced drunkenness morally as loss of control, lack of restraint, and as an agent of sexual desire. Drinking was a token of intemperance, lack of self-discipline, and hedonism. In this regard, for the moralists – whom these clerical poets and monks were – both wine and beer were equally baneful as stupefaction of the mind was abhorred. ‘The men of your land are accustomed to savour unto drunkenness rather than to sobriety,’ begins the Benedictine monk Peter of Celle, in an epistle to G., an unidentified priest at Hastings.³⁶ He then enters into an elaborate diatribe against drinking, in which he lays much emphasis on loss of reason: ‘Drunkenness is a base vice, and one of the baser among the other vices. For where is the sense of the drunkard? Where is the respect in a drunk? Where the dignity? He is forgetful of the past, unmindful of the future, and ignorant of the present. Discretion is confounded, reason is blunted, sense is bound up, the mind itself numbed.’³⁷ Peter also refers to the sexual desire which alcohol arouses. The drunk is ‘a plaything of demons’, drinking is the ‘prostitute of vices’.³⁸ Drinking is a perversion of nature, to be avoided as the ‘bite of the snake’, for the drunk is condemned to damnation. A similar moral outpouring can be found in John of Hauville’s *Archweeper*, in the chapter on drinking too much. Again, it is associated with the English, although here there is access to wine supplies: ‘Waving the goblet about, shouting unrestrainedly, they cry out “Wassail!” and again “Wassail!” Wine, not thirst,

32 Chrétien de Troyes, *Yvainou Le Chevalier au Lion* vs. 590-591, ed. Karl D. Uitti and Philippe Walter (1994), 353: ‘Plus a paroles au plain pot / De vin qu’an un mui de cervoise’.

33 Ed. C.H. Talbot, ‘The Centum Sententiae of Walter Daniel’, in *Sacris Erudiri* 11 (1960) 326-327: ‘Non enim isti vinum bibunt, sed potum avene vel ordeï sive pomorum sucro confectum. Quem tanto sepius et insolentius bibunt, quanto pro parvo comparant quod insument. Nec iccirco minus peccatum quod uiliori liquore ebriantur.’ Cf. Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 304-305.

34 Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings*, 578.

35 Gerald of Wales tells the tale of how Henry II was entertained by a Cistercian abbot and induced to follow a deviant ritual, in which a toast of ‘Pril’ was followed by a ‘Wril’; Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings*, 578; Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 301-302.

36 *The Letters of Peter of Celle*, ed. and transl. by Julian Haseldine (Oxford 2001), ‘To G., a priest of Hastings’, no. 62, 296-297: ‘Solent homines terre tue potius sapere ad ebrietatem quam ad sobrietatem.’

37 Idem: ‘Vitium ignobile, et inter cetera vitio ignobilius, ebrietas. Ubi enim sensus ebrii? Ubi reverentia in ebrii? Ubi dignitas? Immemor est preteriti, futuri ignarus, presentis nescius. Discretio confunditur, ratio hebetatur, sensus ligantur, mens ipso sepelitur.’

38 Idem, 298-299: ‘Lusus demonum est homo ebrius. (...) prostibulum vitiorum’.

is what they strive to banish; they are far more eager to exhaust the supply of wine than to ease the pressure of thirst.’³⁹ John of Hauville goes on to give a very graphic description of how excessive – unnatural – drinking leads to sickness: ‘But now there is drinking without limit, until the bellyful taken in overflows, and retraces its original journey. The gift of nausea restores the wine again to the cups. Streaked with yellow bile it comes forth from the belly into the bowl, restoring to Bacchus those gifts which the dark abyss within obliges the drinker to reject – but you are quick, o Bacchus, to turn the tide again. Thus does nausea punish ill-considered indulgence, for Nature’s pleasures are temperate and she rejects excess.’⁴⁰

Heredity of drinking

For twelfth-century clerics emphasizing and appraising rational thought, excessive drinking was, officially, highly reprehensible.⁴¹ Drinking degraded a human being to the animal kingdom; and the English, with their tails behind, were already being compared to dogs. So common was the stereotype of the English drunkard that some moralists even took the remarkable step to claim it a hereditary character trait. In a letter to the otherwise unknown Baldwin of Valle Darii, who possibly lived at Christ Church, Canterbury, John of Salisbury refers directly to the literary debate poetry between beer and wine and exclaims:

You once knew, however, that a sane man seems delirious to the insane, that drunks see a lamp double, that it is common for drunks to think men animals and to forget themselves and their family. You and your like are not to blame for such behaviour, however, since nature and heredity make you drunk so that you cannot even be sober when you have had nothing.⁴²

Because of this excessive drinking, the English thought ‘our France a land of sheep and the French mutton-heads’, whereas ‘for you to think us French drunk is as if the bandy-legged should ridicule

39 John of Hauville, *Architrenius* x 310-314, ed. and transl. Winthrop Wetherbee, 48-51: ‘Vagante cifo, distincto guttere “wesseil” / Ingeminant “wesseil”; labor est plus perdere vini / Quam sitis. Exhaurire merum studiosius ardent / Quam exhaurire sitis.’

40 Idem, 319-326: ‘Non modus est calicis, nisi sarcina sumpta redundet / Et primum repetatur iter, data nausea reddit / Altera vina cifis: luteo corrupta veneno, / A venis in vasa venit, sua munera Bacho / Indignata refert, reditumque urgente palude, / Bache, retro properas, verseque recurritis unde. / Sic male libratos castigat nausea sumptus / Et fugat excessus nature parca voluptas.’ Moral denunciation can also be found in vernacular sources. Drinking is for example personified in the character of Yvrece, who fathered Versez in England (possibly the same as Guerso; the *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch* links the name to wassailing): ‘Anglois, qui de boire à guerso, / A granz henaz plains de godale.’ In a text by Guillaume Guiart the author states that the English drink a lot but are ready to flee in battle.

41 Murray, *Reason and Society*, 126.

42 *The Letters of John of Salisbury. Volume 2: The Later Letters (1163-1180)*, ed. and transl. Millor and Brooke, no. 270: ‘Sed ut olim scire conueueras, sanus insanis videtur furiosus, et ebrii lucernae duplicari, et frequens est ut homines bestias putent et ut sui non meminerint aut suorum. Quod tamen tibi tuique similibus imputari non debet, quibus tam natura quam mos patrius ebriositatme ingerit ut etiam ieiuni sobrii esse non possint.’

the straight-legged, or the Ethiopian the white man'.⁴³ The English were, in other words, off their heads, drinking was a 'hereditary' ethnic vice, and drunkenness led to a blurring of the distinction between humanness and animal-like behaviour, between rational thought and animal-like urges. In John of Salisbury's view, English ridicule of the French was on the same baneful level as a black-skinned African laughing at a white man. However, besides its explicit 'biological' rhetoric, this passage is again a remarkable example of the complex fluidity of ethnic boundaries in this period – John of Salisbury was an Anglo-Saxon by birth, yet residing in France for substantial periods of time, he speaks of 'us French' and 'our France', despite the 'hereditary nature' of English drunkenness.

In this period, some writers also intimate that the vice of drunkenness was a consequence of the Fall of mankind, a morally depraved behaviour 'inherited' by the children of Adam. This discussion is reminiscent of the early development, from the twelfth century, to discuss vices in terms of biological heredity.⁴⁴ Peter of Celle was certainly willing to condemn English drinking as a sign as visible as Hebrew circumcision.⁴⁵ In an often quoted letter from Peter of Celle to Nicholas of St Albans, written circa 1180, Peter refers to English levity and their dreamy minds, caused by the island's watery surroundings and the subsequent moisture on the brain.⁴⁶ However, at the end of the letter, there is a passage which has so far seemingly remained unnoticed and which bears upon the question of original sin.⁴⁷ The letter's focus is a dispute about the feast of the Immaculate Conception – whether Mary's own conception had been immaculate, something which Peter denied. With reference to Samson's riddle of the lion carcass and the bees (Judges 14:12-19), Peter of Celle then introduces the following conundrum:

Let the French take from the English question that which they may ruminate, and let the English take from the French draught that which they had sought. For just as Dagon is the drink of England, so Baal is the food of France. Evil drink, evil food, evil drunkenness, evil belching: each one of these merits hell for its cultivators.⁴⁸

43 Idem: 'Franciam nostrum ueruecum patriam credas et Francos esse uerueces. (...) Nos Francos ebriosos putas, ac si loripes rectum derideat, Aethiops album.'

44 See chapter 3.

45 See his letter to John of Salisbury, *The Letters of Peter of Celle*, no. 173, ed. Haseldine, 666-669: 'Regarding your people and their customs, it is well enough known to me that they are accustomed to fill up their wineskins, nay their bellies, even indeed to fill them to overflowing, both with wine and with mead without censure and, as the Hebrews circumcise their flesh as a sign that they are the seed of Abraham, without the disgrace of dishonour.' See also for example letter no. 172, ed. Haseldine, 664-665, also to John of Salisbury.

46 *The Letters of Peter of Celle*, 'To Nicholas of St Albans', no. 158, ed. Haseldine, 578-581.

47 Idem, Appendix 13, 'Peter of Celle and Nicholas of St Albans', ed. Haseldine, 727-729.

48 *The Letters of Peter of Celle*, no. 158, ed. Haseldine, 598-599: 'Habeant', inquires, 'Galli de Anglica questione quod rument et Angli de Gallicano haustu quod petissent.' Sicut enim potus est Dagon Anglie sic Baal est cibus Gallie. Malus potus, malus cibus, mala inebriatio, mala ructatio: singulum horum suis cultoribus patrat gehennam.'

Dagon was the god of grain (making beer) and agriculture among the Philistines; Baal the god of fertility. Both Dagon and Baal were ‘idols’ of the enemies of the Israelites. Peter of Celle subsequently makes an intricate allusion to the consummation of these idols by the French and English – while both peoples considered themselves as new Israelites. Although the passage’s meaning is not entirely clear, it would seem to intimate that English drinking, and French eating, are a result of the inheritance of the original sin. The leftovers of the fruit of the tree of knowledge were divided among the French and English, the sap here intimating beer:

But let us steal through discipline and melt down through abstinence that which is superfluous in food and drink, just like the idol of our father Adam which was fashioned from the tree of knowledge of good and evil; when he and Eve were fed full of it they left the remains of it to their children, which the English and French divided between themselves by lot so that the English were made drunk by the more liquid part and the French choked by the more solid.⁴⁹

By eating from the superfluous remains – the sap of a forbidden fruit – the English were thus re-enacting a moment of the Fall.

Embracing drinking customs

Throughout the twelfth century, the stereotype of the drunken Englishman thus served as a symbol of moral depravity. As such, it was an image which could be decried, both by the clerics in general and by those with different ethnic backgrounds in particular, as a token of reprehensive behaviour. Certainly after the Norman Conquest, an Anglo-Saxon custom such as drinking could be employed by some to speak ill of the inhabitants of the island of Britain. In the *Dialogue of the Exchequer*, Richard Fitz Nigel speaks of the ‘natural drunkenness of its inhabitants’, relating it clearly to crime

49 Idem, 600-601: ‘Furemur autem per disciplinam et conflamus per abstinentiam quod superfluum est in cibo et potu, tanquam ydolum patris nostri Ade quod de ligno scientie boni et mali confictum est; unde ipse et Eva saturati, dimiserunt reliquias parvulis suis, quas sorte missa diviserunt inter se Angli et Galli ut illi humidioribus resolverentur, isti solidioribus suffocarentur.’ A similar distribution of vices is made by Richard of Devizes in his description of behaviour of French and English knights on the Third Crusade. The English, says Richard, with proper ceremony ‘drained their cups to the sound of clarions and the clangour of trumpets’. The French on the other hand ate until they were sick. Together, they consumed huge amounts, so much so that the merchants of the region ‘were astonished at these extraordinary ways and could scarcely believe what they saw to be true, that one host of people, and that a small one, should consume three times as much bread and a hundred times as much wine as would sustain several or even countless hosts of pagans.’ Richard of Devizes, *Chronicle*, ed. Appleby, 72-73. See also Walter Map’s anecdote that French King Louis VII joked that the French ‘only’ had wine and bread; *De nugis curialium* v 5, ed. James, Brooke and Mynors, 451.

rates.⁵⁰ At the same time, however, excessive drinking was also associated with merriment and embraced as a sign of plenty, as Hugh Thomas has pointed out.⁵¹

Drunkenness seems to have served as a broader cultural agency uniting those who, as inhabitants of the island, participated in communal customs. English carousing is sometimes condemned with a light-hearted jocosity. Indeed, communal drinking could be a bonding experience, enacted in the elaborate drinking ritual of wassailing. Although the moralists generally, regardless of their ethnicity, were bent on condemning drunkenness, yet clerics could also revel in drinking. Drunkenness could be joked about, and there seems to be a certain pride in drinking large quantities especially in Latin writings about English drinking habits (by the ‘Anglo-Saxons’ John of Salisbury, Richard of Devizes, Nigel Longchamp). In a thirteenth-century English verse collection, the arguments of the English drinker are mocked. However, it is a moral condemnation with a touch of the satirical:

When they go to drain their cups, they excuse their deeds,
Saying truly that they must wet their tongue.
They say, when they drink: ‘Without moisture or rain,
The fruits of the earth perish, through lack of water.’⁵²

In Henry d’Andeli’s *Bataille des vins* (circa 1225), an English priest is set the task to sample all the wines of the world. Each he tastes with great indiscriminate satisfaction, except for beer. This he subsequently excommunicates.⁵³ The English argue that drink brings merriment, a good night’s sleep, and that drinking demands brave strength. Satirical jokes are made about the drunkenness of the English clergy studying abroad in Paris, as for example mentioned by Jacques de Vitry in his *History of the West* or in sayings such as ‘French learning, English thirst, Breton stupidity, and Norman boasting all increase with increasing years’.⁵⁴ In Nigel Longchamp’s satirical *Mirror of Fools*, when the ass Burnel arrives in Paris to study the liberal arts, he can find only three faults with the English schools in Paris:

50 Richard Fitz Nigel, *Dialogus de Scaccario*, ed. and transl. Johnson, Carter, Greenway, 87: ‘innatam indigenis crapulam’.

51 Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 302. The notion that drunkenness was related to England’s wealth, is perhaps echoed in William of Normandy’s early thirteenth-century *Besant*, who states that Pride had married his three daughters in England: Envy, Luxury, and Drunkenness. Cf. Langlois, ‘Les Anglais du Moyen Âge’, 308 note 1.

52 In André Wilmart, ‘Quelques poemes moraux d’un manuscrit Burney’, 180: ‘Excusant quod agunt, dum sumere pocula vadunt, / Dicentes vere quia debet lingua madere. / Dicunt, quando bibunt: “Sine rore vel imbre peribunt / Fructus terrarum, quia deficit usus aquarum.’

53 Cf. Rickard, *Britain in Medieval French Literature 1100-1500*, 169.

54 In B. Hauréau, *Notices et extraits de quelques manuscrits latins de la Bibliothèque nationale* (6 volumes, Paris 1890-1893), vol. 6, 124: ‘Francis scire, sitis Anglis, nescire Britannis, / Fastus Normannis crescit, crescentibus annis.’ See Langlois, ‘Les Anglais du Moyen Âge’, 306.

Many a course in lordly state
 Adorns their tables, wine abundant flows;
 All this attracts, only three faults he knows;
 But for these three all else would he commend;
 They are 'Wassail', 'Drink Health!' and 'Lady friend'.⁵⁵

Nigel also remarks that whereas the French usually multiplied threats, the English usually multiplied cups of alcohol.⁵⁶ The overall image drawn by Nigel Longchamp in his passage on English students in Paris, coincides heavily with the ideal characterization of the courtier, who is merry and generous. Although ale drinking was certainly identified as a reprehensible 'native' Anglo-Saxon custom (and ale drinking related to stupidity), in these texts it is thus sliding into a happier connotation.⁵⁷

From these remarks, the question arises how 'English' these drinkers were. Most students in Paris were certainly not of strictly Anglo-Saxon descent; on the contrary, most would have been from mixed Norman-Anglo-Saxon parentage (besides which the corporate English nation in Paris included students from the German Empire and the Scandinavian regions).⁵⁸ The question also arises whether these jokes rubbed off the sharper edges and thus eased the way for the descendants of the Norman invaders to adopt an English identity.⁵⁹ Indeed, identification is a process in a state of constant flux; contrasting self-images with that of the other can be alternated with individual identification with cultural customs or behavioural traits of the 'other'. When members of various cultures meet, boundaries can be sharpened or softened. Instead of approaching the ethnic group as a stable, static entity, ethnic identity must thus be viewed as a fluctuant, constantly adapting and reacting, re-evaluating old symbols, or sharpening existing boundaries.

In the course of the twelfth century the boundaries between Norman and Anglo-Saxon were becoming increasingly fogged on many levels; certainly by the end of Henry II's reign, the boundaries between the descendants of the Norman invaders and the free native Anglo-Saxons seem to have broken down.⁶⁰ The process of the Normans' cultural identification with English customs

55 Nigel Longchamp, *Speculum Stultorum*, ed. Mozley and Raymo, 64-65. The translation is from Nigel Longchamp, *A Mirror of Fools: The Book of Burnel the Ass*, transl. J.H. Mozley (Notre Dame, Ind., 1963), 50. For an overview of these stereotypes of the English in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, see Charles-Victor Langlois, 'Les Anglais du Moyen Âge', 298-315.

56 Nigel Longchamp, *Speculum Stultorum*, 66; Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 318.

57 See Clanchy, *England and its Rulers*, 248 and Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 301 for the dispute between Evesham abbey and the bishop of Worcester, which appeal to the papal court in 1206, and the pope's remark toward the bishops showing off of his knowledge of ecclesiastical law, that 'you and your masters must have drunk a lot of English beer when you learned that'; cf *Chronicon Abbatiae de Evesham* (RS 29), 189.

58 Kibre, *The Nations in the Medieval Universities*; Boyce, *The English-German Nation*.

59 See Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 298.

60 For this much debated topic, see especially Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, chapters 4, 5 and 6; Short, 'Tam Angli quam Franci'; John B. Gillingham, "'Slaves of the Normans'?: Gerald de Barri and Regnal Solidarity in Early Thirteenth-Century England', in Pauline Stafford, Janet L. Nelson, Jane Martindale (eds), *Law, Laity and Solidarities: Essays in Honour of Susan Reynolds* (Manchester 2001)

was probably lubricated by the fact that the Normans themselves were known for consuming large quantities of alcohol.⁶¹ Notably, as Rickard remarks, it were often the Normans themselves who emphasized English drunkenness in their sources.⁶² William of Malmesbury, writing in the 1120s, already remarks that the Normans had adopted the lavish English dining style, where guests are intoxicated with wine.⁶³ After the conquest of England the Normans took over their custom of ‘eating till they were sick and drinking till they spewed’.⁶⁴ The vice was shifting from the conquered ethnic group to the conquerors. Even more so, they were embracing the English beer drinking rituals. There is an anecdote, told by Gerald of Wales, about how Henry II, on an incognito visit to a Cistercian abbey, is enticed to speed up the drinking by the abbot, who reassures him that the English toasting ritual consisted of a terse ‘pril’ and ‘wril’ instead of the double syllabic ‘wesheil’, ‘drincheil’.⁶⁵ By toasting, Henry was participating in an Anglo-Saxon custom, apparently without understanding the purport of the exercise. When the abbot later visits the royal court, Henry welcomes him with a ‘pril’, embarrassing the thirsty abbot in front of the courtiers. The anecdote demonstrates how an ‘outsider’, King Henry, could actively participate and enjoy local English customs while at the same time distancing himself. Henry exploits his foreign background and momentary loss of social standing in order to play dumb and drink excessive amounts, although fully aware of the proper rite of English wassailing. By putting the abbot to shame at court, Henry is acknowledging his full awareness of English customs; the abbot is actually reminded of the right manner of wassailing by the ‘foreign’ king.⁶⁶ Such anecdotes demonstrate how the variety of ethnic customs might be entertained and gradually adopted and adapted by both parties.

Drunken English knights

Specifically relevant to the myth-symbol complex of English drunkenness and the historical destiny of Britain, is the fact that English drinking was associated particularly with the somewhat weak reputation of the English knighthood. English knights were, for example in the *Roman de Waldef*,

160-171. John Gillingham argues that assimilation occurred as early as the 1120s-40s. The end of hostility is sometimes also viewed to have occurred upon Henry I’s marriage to Queen Edith-Mathilda, a relative of Edward the Confessor; cf. Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 56.

61 Short, ‘Tam Angli quam Franci’, 153; Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 52 note 37. Thomas remarks that the ale-wine divide may have become more important later in the twelfth century. Nevertheless, as I argue, in the second half of the twelfth century, it is difficult to make a clear distinction between Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman drinking habits.

62 Rickard, *Britain in Medieval Literature*, 167.

63 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum* III 255, ed. and transl. Mynors, Thomson and Winterbottom, vol. 1, 472-473.

64 Idem, III 245, ed. and transl. Mynors, Thomson and Winterbottom, vol. 1, 458-459: ‘in cibus urgentes crapulam, in potibus irritantes vomitam’. See *Gesta pontificum* 139-140, 281-282 for more references.

65 Gerald of Wales, *Speculum Ecclesiae* III 13, ed. Brewer, vol. 4, 213-215; cf. Bartlett, *England under Norman and Angevin Kings*, 578; Edward Coleman, ‘Nasty Habits – Satire and the Medieval Monk’, in *History Today*, 43/6 (1993), 36-42.

66 A clear example of how identity and alterity can interpenetrate and mingle. Leerssen, ‘Identity/Alterity/Hybridity’, 341; Hoppenbrouwers, ‘Dynamics of National Identity’, 34.

valiant, prudent, and strong, but for their excessive drinking.⁶⁷ Thus, the English knights in *Partonopeus of Blois*, in the company of the king of England, are ‘strong, free, light, tough, courageous and wise, hard in battle and most handsome, but they drink too much beforehand’.⁶⁸

By this period, the knighthood was certainly not viewed as ‘native Anglo-Saxon’ or Norman, but as ‘English’, in the sense of men of mixed Norman/Anglo-Saxon parentage. King Richard the Lionheart’s decision to allow tournaments in England was, as William of Newburgh wrote, inspired by a desire to be on a par with French knights, who were insulting them as inexperienced fighters.⁶⁹ In the early thirteenth century, a debate poem by an outsider, Henry of Avranches, lays a marked emphasis on the English knights’ dismal performance on the battle field. This debate verse is a typical example of how at the cosmopolitan twelfth-century courts, men of various ethnic backgrounds could mould and sharpen ethnic processes of identification, which at the same time remained fluctuant.

Henry of Avranches, whose father was probably a Norman, was born in the German empire; by 1214, however, he was writing for King John.⁷⁰ The attack on the English is part of a debate poem (the initial lines by the Englishman presumably lost), in which an unidentified German called Conrad fiercely attacks English knights. Henry’s verse is one of the few verse examples in which Germans are actually praised:

When the tailed English, who were born for drinking cups,
Are filled up, it is with the seed of Brutus.⁷¹
Then they throw themselves into the fray, boasting they are a glorious people,
Bringing death to all, belching with bursting bellies,

67 Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 387. Cf. *Le Petit Plet* vs. 1263-1265, B.S. Merrilees (ed.) (Oxford 1970).

68 *Partonopeus of Blois* vs. 7359-7369: ‘Fors et delivers et legiers / hardis et coragos et pros / en bataille durs et estols / et beaus sor tote / mais trop boivent nen sai avant.’ Another foreigner who speaks lowly of the English when fighting is William the Breton in the *Philippide* XI vs. 560, ed. Delaborde vol. 2, 341, which was written under the patronage of Philip August. According to William, the English were drawn to the cups and gifts of wine, rather than to the hard duties of war.

69 William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, ed. Howlett, 422-423. Cf. Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 80.

70 Josiah Cox Russell, ‘Master Henry of Avranches as an International Poet’, in *Speculum* 3/1 (1928), 34-63, here at 34-35; Rigg, ‘History of Anglo-Latin Literature’, 179-192. Henry also entered into a bitter verse debate with Michael of Cornwall in 1254-1255, delivered before high Church officials such as the dean of St Pauls in London, the clergy of Cambridge, the abbot of Westminster. In Michael’s attack, he accuses Henry of calling him a Cornish goat, of being conceited (yet knowing nothing of grammar), of knowing more about whores than metres. Of Normandy and England, Michael writes that it gives Henry nothing sweet, who has to rely on English food, drink and money; England, conversely, is fertile, pleasant, sociable, contrary to miserable Normandy. This, of course, was written after the loss of Normandy. Cf. Alfons Hilka, ‘Eine mittellateinische Dichterfehde: “Versus Michaelis Cornubiensis contra Henricum Abrincensem”’, in Alois Bömer and Joachim Kirchner (eds), *Mittelalterliche Handschriften: Paläographische, Kunsthistorische, Literarische und Bibliotheksgeschichtliche Untersuchungen: Festgabe zum 60. Geburtstag von Hermann Degering* (Hildesheim and New York 1974), 123-154, here at 147-148, vs. 974-978; cf. Rigg, *History of Anglo-Latin Literature*, 193-197.

71 I.e. the descendants of the eponymous Trojan founder Brutus.

For they are unwarlike weavers and fullers.⁷²

Earlier, the image of the unwarlike wool processors had been tacked onto Flemish migrants coming to England by Anglo-Norman Jordan Fantosme (d. 1185); the context then was the participation of Flemish knights in the revolt of 1173-1174, who purportedly came to England greedy for wool and plunder instead of contributing as proper knights.⁷³ Now, apparently it was an English characteristic. The Germans, on the other hand, were not a royal but an imperial people, subject only to Rome; they are strong, triumphant, impetuous, with their golden hair and tall bodies. (Afterwards, the Englishman defends himself by referring to his own generosity, in contrast to the German who is reviled throughout the world like a dog.) According to Henry, the miserable British – Henry of Avranches seems to use English and British synonymously – could take a leaf out of their book:

But you, o miserable British, slow to battle,
 Whose belly is your God, and abyss of food;
 Full of the dregs of beer and without wisdom,
 You honour Bacchus when darkness falls;
 Then Venus appears, applying her lewd potion (...) ⁷⁴
 Some always vex you as enemies:
 The clergy is harsh in opposing the knighthood;
 The people generally hold religious men in hatred;
 With the bonds loosened, the people, the tribute trampled on,
 Are robbed of the best by pope or king with frequent bulls. ⁷⁵

Beer drinking is clearly the fault of the knighthood; the divide is along socio-cultural, not ethnic lines. The clergy opposes the knighthood, which is weak on the battlefield; the people are heavily burdened by taxation. It is wrong to suppose that Henry of Avranches is only targeting the knighthood, however. His thoughts, as will become clear below, echo those of William of Malmesbury a century earlier on the conquest of England in 1066, who claims that English

72 Printed in Josiah Cox Russell and John Paul Heironimus (eds), *The Shorter Latin Poems of Master Henry of Avranches Relating to England* (Cambridge Mass. 1935), no. 93 vs. 5-9, 29: 'Angli caudati, qui sunt ad pocula nati, / cum sunt imbuti, tunc sunt de semine Bruti; / prelia tunc tractant, quod sunt gens inclita iactant, / dant omnes leto, ructantes ventre repleto, / cum sint imbelles textores vel paripelles.'

73 Jordan Fantosme, *Chronicle* 99-109, ed. Johnston (Oxford 1981), 70-80; cf. Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, 114; Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 325-326.

74 Eating, drinking and sexual lewdness are mentioned in the same breath by for example Gerald of Wales; see Coleman, 'Nasty Habits'.

75 Russell and Heironimus (eds), *The Shorter Latin Poems of Master Henry*, no. 93 vs. 15-19 and , 29: 'Sed vos, O miseri Britones, ad prelia seri, / est venter quorum deus atque vorago ciborum, / vos fece cervisie pleni vacuique sophie / precolitis Bacum suberit cum tempus opacum; / tunc Venus obscena subit apponendo vene<na>. (...) Vestrum vos aliqui semper vexant ut iniqui; / militie clerus est adversando severus; / plebs habet exosos generaliter religiosos, / federe dissuto plebs conculcata tributo / crebris et bullis privat quam papa medullis.'

commoners were exploited financially, but were 'ingrained' with a preference for alcohol over money.

From these sources, a picture emerges that the cultural practice of beer drinking was commonly associated with Anglo-Norman knights, but also with students, abbots, Anglo-Saxon 'native criminals' and the such. In French rhetoric, the Anglo-Norman elite would eventually pay the price for their adoption of this custom. Indeed, the image of excessive drinking is evoked especially in the context of French-Anglo-Norman political relations and conquests on the battle field. Here, several strands come together: the inferiority of a territory producing beer and its unsuccessful knighthood. Here also enters a third party in the myth symbol complex: God. His power to support just wars, aid in conquests, and to wreak revenge for sinful behaviour is a recurrent paradigm in medieval (biblical) thought. In the case of the English it takes on a specific meaning in relation to the notion of Anglo-Saxon chosenness. As already stated in the opening paragraphs, the stereotype of drunkenness is particularly relevant as drinking, the 'innate custom of the English', played an intricate part in the discourse on the fate of the English in conquest and politics. Besides pointing to acculturation, the image of drunkenness thus functioned as a causal catalyser of God's wrath, supposedly determining the fate of the nation. It was related to the success or failure of the ruling dynasties in warfare and in securing possession of territory. This strong motif will be discussed further below. First however, it must be noted that also in Anglo-Norman-French relations, the latter (who viewed themselves as the most Christian people) employed the image of an inferior beer culture to accentuate their own success on the battlefield.

Images of Anglo-French relations

Already with the invasion of the Normans, Norman animosity towards the French was introduced on the island, Norman writers such as William of Jumièges and William of Poitiers speaking of French envy or arrogance. The Norman poet André de Coutances, author of the *Roman de Franceis* (sometime in the last decades of the twelfth century) displays an intense anti-French sentiment, remarking upon their stinginess, arrogance, cowardice, and mendacity (whereas the verse begins with a certain king Arflet of Northumberland wishing all drinkers good health).⁷⁶ Furthermore, although the Normans in England had no qualms about being denominated as (culturally) French in English sources, Norman-French warfare over territory on the continent continued to shapen them as hostile groups. This dynastic warfare could easily be viewed in ethnic terms (William of Newburgh remarking that each people supported its king).⁷⁷ As early as the beginning of the twelfth century, these wars were already seen in terms of France versus England (although at the same time also in terms of Normandy, Anjou and Poitou); this probably also encouraged Norman-English assimilation.

⁷⁶ Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 318 for more references.

⁷⁷ Idem, 38-39, 317-319; William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum* III 14 ed. Hamilton, vol. 1, 247-248.

‘Warfare’, as Hugh Thomas put it, ‘against the French helped to solidify a network of loyalty in which support for king, realm, and people became interlocked and thus mutually reinforcing.’⁷⁸ Indeed, as Charles Tilly wrote, nations make war and war makes nations.

Henry II’s claims to the Vexin in the 1150s were thus brought into relation with English drinking in a debate verse by Pierre Riga, supporter of King Louis VII.⁷⁹ The poem, which was written sometime between 1157 and 1161, has been entered into manuscript Arsenal 1136 (part of a collection belonging to archbishop Samson of Reims) following another debate verse, in this case between popes Alexander and Victor.⁸⁰ In Pierre Riga’s poem, two advocates argue over the cause of respectively King Louis VII and Henry II; at the end, ‘judges’ speak their verdict on the case presented before them. The background to the poem is the bid of both monarchies to settle the tug-of-war over the much-disputed border territory of the Vexin. As a result, the two dynasties had entered into a marriage alliance, King Louis of France marrying off his six-month old daughter Marguerite to Young King Henry in 1157, who was aged three at the time. The dowry consisted of Gisors and Neaufle. But after just three years, Henry II pressed the marriage through, although Marguerite was still a mere toddler, in order to seize these strongholds.

Riga’s attack on Henry, centring on treachery, contains a variety of familiar motifs on the English.⁸¹ Henry treacherously uses money instead of weapons to achieve his goal,⁸² attuning to the English’ reputation as perfidious and rich.⁸³ Again, there is also an allusion to drinking:

It becomes the English hand to use design, not weapons,
That the cup is to the mouth, not the steel in the sword.

78 Idem, 319.

79 Printed in B. Hauréau, ‘Un poème inédit de Pierre Riga’ in *Bibliothèque de l’École des Chartres* 44 (1883), 5-11; Raby, *Secular Latin Poetry*, vol. 2, 37; Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 318; Stotz, *Beobachtungen zu lateinischen Streitgedichten*, 7; Walther, ‘Streitgedicht’, 182.

80 Manitius, *Geschichte der lateinischen Literatur*, vol. 3, 959-960.

81 See chapter 6.

82 English’ treachery and perfidy were common stereotypes; cf. Weiler, ‘Ethnographische Typisierungen’, 112-113; Cerwinka, ‘Völkercharakteristiken’, 76; Stanzel, *Europäer*, 86-88. See for example Otto of St. Blasien on the perfidy of the English during the Third Crusade. If only Frederick Barbarossa had remained alive; with Italy’s power, France’s liveliness and experience in warfare, and especially Germany’s bravery, they would have vanquished. Cf. Otto of St Blasien, *Chronica* xxxvi, ed. Schmale, 107. In the sixteenth century, John Major remarked that the English and Scots could not possibly be crafty as Aristotle had said they lacked intelligence. His argument is based on climate theory. However, the stereotype of perfidy would remain current even until the Napoleonic Wars. According to Blaicher, ‘Zur Entstehung und Verbreitung’, 560-561, in the fourteenth century the stereotype was employed against the common population who had turned against or let down the monarchy. In the *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, ed. N. Denholm Young (1957), 63, the author says that the English people excel other peoples in three things: ‘in superbia, in dolo et in periurio’. It seems particularly popular during the Hundred Years War. See also Randall, ‘Medieval Slander’, 31-32, in relation the image of the English hatching eggs.

83 Hauréau, ‘Un poème inédit de Pierre Riga’: ‘Argento custodes allicit, urit / Interius mentes frigida marca foris, / Et fauces hominum transfigens muneris hamo, / Oppida venatur taliter ille duo; / Sed clam, sed furtim, sed nocte, sed arte, sed auro, / Non vi, non animi laude, nec ensis ope.’ Instances of the English described as treacherous in Norman sources are Dudo, *De moribus* 158-160; Benoît, *Chronique* I 189, 197. See Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 244-245, for further examples and discussion.

They prefer gluttony to helmets, drink to lances,
 Cups of wine to sharp points of iron.
 You Englishman, England, are committing a crime,
 Abetted by your allies; your king, France, is unawares.⁸⁴

The debate is concluded by the ‘judges’, who claim that the Englishman is ‘full of chinks’ (not to be trusted), whereas ‘pure faith grows in your mouth, Gaul’. Pierre Riga finally makes a pun on the tailed Englishman, another of those images of the English often mentioned in relation to their drinking: ‘Never was the English cause just, or rather, never the English tail to be trusted’.⁸⁵

A later example can be found in the repositories of a power base of the French monarchy, the School of Notre Dame. In 1224, La Rochelle, an important harbour for wine export to England and a strong Poitevin town, was captured by King Louis VIII of France; King Henry III of England subsequently had to yield all of Aquitaine north of the Dordogne to the French. On this occasion a *conductus* was composed at Notre Dame. A *conductus* is a non-liturgical vocal composition sung polyphonically; these types of composition were processional pieces.⁸⁶ A *conductus* could be written to lament death or for religious or political events; its purpose could be to intensify political power.⁸⁷ In this composition for three voices, ‘De rupta Rupecula grata fluunt pocula’, the Parisian versifier claims that nothing is more befitting than that Paris is turned into Parnassus, that God has willed its troops that Phoebus enjoys Bacchus, the god of wine, and that the city has nothing to fear. It ends stating that France is the victorious land of wine, England of beer, where the vine does not belong. Again, here the image is one of inferiority of the English geographical space; here, however, God has abetted the French dynasty in its drive for direct power over the French domains.

Where inferior cultural customs were recalled by northern French clerics in order to emphasize how God favoured their territorial expansion, in the English sources the overriding focus lies on the punishment of English sins as a chosen people. The imagery of drunkenness thus performed an effective role in the rhetoric used recording two highly important events in Anglo-Norman and French history in this period: first in William of Malmesbury’s (and later Wace’s) description of the Battle of Hastings; and secondly, at the end of the papal interdict, the speech upon the return of

84 Idem: ‘Ut tractet telas, non tela, manum decet Angli; / ut sit in ore calix, non sit in ense chalybs. / Plus gula quam galea, latices quam lancea, vini / Pocula quam ferri spicula cuique placent. / His fretus sociis tuus Anglicus, Anglia, crimen / Perficit, ignaro, Gallia, rege tuo.’

85 Idem: ‘Nunquam recta fuit, nunquam meruit sibi causa / Anglica, vel potius Anglica cauda fidem.’

86 Robert Falck, *The Notre Dame Conductus: A Study of the Repertory* (Henryville 1981).

87 Printed in M. Léopold Deslisle, ‘Discours’, in *Annuaire-Bulletin de la Société de l’histoire de France* 22 (1885), 82-139, here at 112-113. The last lines: ‘Terra Bacchi Francia Anglie cervisia / Moysis est Anglia. Lyei letitia / Quid de rupe vinosa Francie superatur.’ For the *conductus*, see F. Alberto Gallo, *Music of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge 1985), vol. 2, 18-21. It has been recorded by Anne-Marie Deschamps’ Ensemble; a recording is accessible at <http://dev.concertzender.nl/swfplayer.php?mode=rod&provider=cz&program=duif&date=20090212&hour=23&pid=38752> at 26.50 minutes.

Archbishop of Canterbury Stephen Langton to England in 1213. In each of these events, English drunkenness figures as constitutive element. Here, power and politics bore direct relation to this collective ethnic vice, for which divine punishment was meted out. In the same vein, it provided a motif for the string of conquests of the island.

Drunkenness and the migration myth

Before turning to drunkenness and divine retribution in the twelfth century, the myth-symbol complex tradition of divine retribution and drunkenness in sources related to the geography of Britain must be established. Divine retribution as a cause of events on earth, whether successes or failures, natural disasters or outcome of battles, was ingrained in medieval thought. It is, then, a small step to interpret the fate of peoples as the outcome of God's will, punishing them for their collective behaviour and sins, such as debauchery, gluttony or pride. The Old Testament was replete with examples of such a notion. In the early middle ages, the tradition of interpreting the fate of ethnic groups as part of God's plan, was continued in for example Salvian's *De gubernatione Dei* (*The Government of God*), written in the middle of the fifth century in the monastery of St Victor of Marseilles.⁸⁸ The first to do so in British historiography, was Gildas.⁸⁹

Gildas wrote his *De excidio Britonum* (*The Ruin of the British*) in the first half of the sixth century as a jeremiad of the evils of his time, especially among Britain's rulers and in the church.⁹⁰ The objective was to invite the British to repent and thus regain God's favour. Gildas was also the first to represent the British as God's chosen people (as were the Franks, in their view).⁹¹ Through this special covenant, the island's inhabitants were the receivers of divine assistance, God for example intervening to aid Britain after it was abandoned by Rome.⁹² The Old Testament imagery is laid on thick in Gildas' complaint. St Alban achieves martyrdom by sacrificing himself under Roman persecution, leading a thousand men as new Israelites through the muddy waters of the Thames, which parts before them. As Robert Hanning writes in *The Vision of History*: 'Alban's exercise of national-ecclesiastical leadership at a dark moment is a free gift of God to save Britain,

88 Salvian of Marseille, *De gubernatione Dei* IV 67-68, *Patrologia Latina* 53; Meyvaert, 'Voicing National Antipathy', 746-747.

89 Hanning, *Vision of History*, 46-8.

90 It is usually dated around 540, although Karen George proposes a date somewhere between 510 and 530; cf. Karen George, *Gildas's De Excidio Britonum and the early British Church* (Woodbridge 2009), 4; John Morris, 'Historical Introduction' in Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain and other documents*, ed. and transl. Michael Winterbottom (Guildford 2002), 1.

91 By all means, the inhabitants of England were not the only people to identify themselves as entered into a special relationship with God. In *Chosen Peoples*, chapters 4 and 5, Anthony Smith distinguishes a number of 'peoples of the covenant' in late medieval and modern times – Gregorian Armenians, Amharic Ethiopians, Afrikaners and Zionist Jews – and 'missionary peoples' – Greek Orthodox, Russians, Franks, inhabitants of England and Scots.. His distinction is based on the definition that missionary peoples, in contrast to people of the covenant, 'seek to expand into and transform the world', aiming to submit the profane world to the deity. However, as Smith remarks himself, the distinction is one of degree only. Smith, *Chosen Peoples*, 95.

92 Hanning, *Vision of History*, 54.

and the climatic event of Alban's career is itself visualized in terms of the "baptism" of the British church, the mark of divine initiation which assures the final victory of the Britons over their persecutors.'⁹³ On the other hand, God was equally inclined to punish the Britons if they persevered in sin. In a wave of corrective punishments – the invasion of the Picts, a plague and finally the coming of the Saxons – God thus wreaked his revenge.⁹⁴

According to Gildas, the weakness of the Britons was partly due to a lack of masculinity, as well as treachery and cowardice – 'like women they stretched out their hands for the fetters. In fact, it became a mocking proverb far and wide that the British are cowardly in war and faithless in peace.'⁹⁵ Yet it was their drunkenness, both of the clergy and laymen, which incited God's wrath and opened the gateway to the advent of the Saxons:

Things pleasing and displeasing to God weighed the same in the balance – unless indeed things displeasing were regarded with more favour. In fact, the old saying of the prophet denouncing his people could have been aptly applied to our country: "Lawless sons, you have abandoned God, and provoked to anger the holy one of Israel." (...) Everything they did went against their salvation, just as though the true doctor of us all granted the world no medicine. And this was truly not merely of worldly men: the flock of the Lord and his shepherds, who should have been an example to the whole people, lay about, most of them, in drunken stupor, as though sodden in wine.⁹⁶

This powerful rhetoric, in which drunkenness went hand in hand with envy and dissension, laid the framework for subsequent interpretations of both past and future events on the island. As a token of divine retribution, the migration myth (the coming of the Saxons) was retold by Bede, Alcuin – who was the most explicit about the English as new Israelites in *Versus de patribus regibus et sanctis Eboricensis Ecclesiae* – and, in the eleventh century, Wulfstan.⁹⁷ Indeed, just as the cultural traditions of the island's inhabitants could be passed down from one ethnic group to another, so the myth could retain its power for the Anglo-Saxons – in Gildas' text God's punishment had befallen

93 Idem, 53.

94 Idem, 56. Hanning points out that Gildas is also following the model of the last three books of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*. Cf. Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, 41-42.

95 Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae* VI, *The Ruin of Britain and other works*, ed. and transl. by Michael Winterbottom, 18, 91: 'manusque vinciendae muliebriter protenduntur, ita ut in proverbium et derisum longe lateque efferretur quod Britanni nec in bello fortes sint nec in pace fideles'.

96 Idem, XXI, *The Ruin of Britain and other works*, ed. and transl. by Michael Winterbottom, 25, 96: 'omnia quae displicuerunt deo et quae placuerunt aequali saltem lance pendebantur, si non gratiora fuissent displicentia; ita ut merito patriae illud propheticum, quod veterno illi populo denuntiatur est, potuerit aptari, "filii", inquit, "sine lege, dereliquistis deum, et ad iracundiam provocastis sanctum Israel." (...) Sicque agebant cuncta quae saluti contraria fuerint, ac si nihil mundo medicinae a vero omnium medico largiretur. Et non solum haec saeculares viri, sed et ipse grex domini eiusque pastores, qui exemplo esse omni plebi debuerint, ebrietate quam plurimi quasi vino madidi torpebant.'

97 Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, 26; Patrick Wormald, 'Engla Lond: the Making of an Allegiance' in *Journal of Historical Sociology* 7/1 (1994) 1-24.

the Britons – because the Anglo-Saxons applied Gildas’ model to the inhabitants of the island and not to a specific people. The island was a ‘promised land’; the Anglo-Saxons were now the new Israelites, who had been chosen by God to replace the sin-stained Britons.⁹⁸ Thus Bede, in 731, in his account of Anglo-Saxon Britain in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, could begin his account with a representation of England as a land of milk and honey, and repeat how the British vices of internal quarrels, violence and drunkenness led to their downfall at the hands of the then still pagan Anglo-Saxons, for ‘the fire kindled by the hands of the heathen executed the just vengeance of god on the nation for its crimes. It was not unlike that fire once kindled by the Chaldeans which consumed the walls and all the buildings of Jerusalem’.⁹⁹

The myth gained further dissemination as Bede’s history was translated into Old English sometime during the reign of King Alfred in the tenth century. The migration myth could therefore serve as a moral warning; threats came as a sign that the chosen status of the Anglo-Saxons was being called into doubt by God. Again, in the ninth century, Alcuin repeated the migration myth of the Anglo-Saxons, in response to Viking raids: ‘He who reads Holy Scripture and studies ancient history and considers the way the world develops will find that kings have lost kingdoms and peoples their lands for sins of this kind, and when powerful men have wrongly seized the property of others, they have rightly lost their own.’¹⁰⁰ And again, when in the eleventh century, invading Scandinavians made incursions, Wulfstan repeated Gildas’ position that ‘also through the foul wantonness of the people and through gluttony and manifold sins they destroyed their country and themselves they perished’.¹⁰¹ Sin was omnipresent in every corner of the country, and the Scandinavians were acting as agents of God’s will.¹⁰²

Anglo-Saxon drunkenness and the Battle of Hastings

Prior to the Norman Conquest, therefore, the sins of the inhabitants of the island of Britain – drinking, gluttony – were already called upon as a reason for their ill-fated destiny. After the Norman Conquest in 1066, again the same vices are evoked, in this case by both the conquerors and the conquered.

It is perhaps not unsurprising to expect the victors to morally condemn the subjugated Anglo-Saxons, and Harold in particular. The *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*, for example, calls the English a wicked people. Other accusations are those of dishonesty, treachery, and perfidy.¹⁰³ To an extent,

98 Wormald, ‘Engla Lond’, 14-15. For Anglo-Saxon identity in relation to the indigenous Britons before the tenth century, see Debby Banham, ‘Anglo-Saxon attitudes: in search of the origins of English racism’, in *European Review of History – Revue européenne d’Histoire* 1/2 (1994), 143-156.

99 Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica* I 15, ed. and transl. Colgrave and Mynors, 52-53: ‘accensus minibus paganorum ignis iustas de sceleribus populi Dei ultiones expetiit, non illius inpar qui quondam a Chaldaeis succensus Hierosolymorum moenia, immo aedificia cuncta consumsit’.

100 Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, 25.

101 Idem, 11.

102 Idem, 14-15.

103 Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 244.

such imagery was commonplace; subjugation was often described in more general terms as a result of weakness, lack of courage, and effeminacy, related to a lack of masculinity in the affairs of war. The long-flowing hair of the Anglo-Saxon nobility, as a token of luxury and effeminacy, was thus also linked to the conquest of England by the Normans in 1066 by among others the ‘Anglo-Normans’ Orderic Vitalis, William of Malmesbury and the Anglo-Saxon Eadmer.¹⁰⁴ But it was especially drunkenness which was once more evoked as the cause of England’s conquest by the Normans.

The strength of the myth-symbol complex of chosenness, subjugation and drunkenness is particularly evident in light of the fact that monks of both Anglo-Saxon and Norman ethnicity were ready to scourge the sins of the Anglo-Saxons as a factor for their subjugation shortly after the conquest. The D version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, for example, states that God gave victory to the French because of the sins of the English.¹⁰⁵ Morality was, according to William of Malmesbury, in a deplorable state on the eve of the Norman Conquest.¹⁰⁶ Just as the fifth-century British king Vortigern had been given to debauchery, prostitutes and laziness on the eve of the Anglo-Saxon migration, so Anglo-Saxon boozing had caused their loss on the battlefield:

So the leaders on both sides, in high spirits, drew up their lines of battle, each in the traditional manner. The English – so I have heard – spent a sleepless night in song and wassail, and in the morning moved without delay against the enemy. (...) The Normans on the other hand spent the whole night confessing their sins, and in the morning made their communion.¹⁰⁷

The message here is clear: whereas the Normans purged themselves from their sins before entering into battle, the Anglo-Saxons wallowed in their customary vice. (At the end of the twelfth century, Wace elaborated on this by stating that ‘the English were very happy and there was much laughter and merriment. They ate and drank all night long and that night they never went to bed. You could see them moving about a great deal, dancing, jumping up and down, and singing.’)¹⁰⁸ As William of

104 Fenton, *Gender, Nation and Conquest*, 119-120; Platelle, ‘Le Problème du Scandale’, 1071-1096; Stafford, ‘Meanings of Hair’, 153-171; Bartlett, ‘Symbolic Meanings of Hair’, 43-60.

105 Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 252.

106 Wormald also notes that William of Malmesbury and Orderic Vitalis wrote that ‘it was the sins of the English which had brought their drastic punishment upon them, and the Normans who had been its instrument’; cf. Wormald, ‘Engla Lond’, 17.

107 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum* II 241-242, ed. and transl. Mynors, Thomson and Winterbottom, vol. 1, 452-455: ‘Ita utrimque animosi duces disponunt aties, patrio quisque ritu. Angli, ut accepimus, totam noctem insomnem cantibus potibusque ducentes, mane incunctanter in hostem procedunt. (...) Contra Normanni, nocte tota confessioni peccatorum uacantes, mane Dominico corpori communicarunt.’ Cf. Fritz Kemmler, ‘Facts and Fictions – The Norman Conquest’, in Barbara Korte and Ralf Schneider (eds), *War and the Cultural Construction of Identities in Britain* (Amsterdam 2002), 39-60, here at 42.

108 According to Glyn S. Burgess and Elisabeth M.C. van Houts, *The History of the Norman People: Wace’s Roman de Rou* (Woodbridge 2004), 173 note 258, Wace goes on to use a number of words to

Malmesbury continues, the Anglo-Saxons shouted a number of wassails, keeping the cup coming, in accordance with their custom. This wassailing was accompanied by a whole array of vices. The clergy could barely mumble the words of the sacraments; monks ridiculed their rule with luxurious clothing and dining; the noblemen spent their mornings in bed with their wives instead of attending mass, and oppressed the poor. Many noblemen got their maids pregnant (presumably in the afternoons and evenings) and then sold them off to the brothel. The common people were being exploited for money (as Henry of Avranches writes), although it was ‘ingrained in that nation to dote on wassail rather than wealth’.¹⁰⁹ In short, England had turned into a Gomorra, and its inhabitants were in a constant state of drunkenness.¹¹⁰ ‘Drinking in company was a universal practice, and in this passion they made no distinction between night and day. In small, mean houses they wasted their entire substance, unlike the French and the Normans, who in proud great buildings live a life of moderate expense.’¹¹¹ Because of their drunkenness, they were sapped of masculine virility. The result was their lack of proficiency on the battlefield, which William explains in terms of their temperament. In their drunkenness, ‘there was more rashness and headlong fury than military skill in their conflict with William [the Conqueror], so that in one battle – and a very easy one – they abandoned themselves and their country to servitude. For hot blood has no staying power; whatever it starts with a rush fails or is suppressed.’¹¹²

The very same argument of drunkenness, though this time captured in prophetic terms, is also employed by Henry of Huntingdon in his *History of the English*, which ends in 1154. Discussing the so-called prophecy of Dunstan, Henry relates that ‘a certain man of God, too, proclaimed to them that because of the enormity of their crimes – for they were not only at all times bent on slaughter and treachery, but also continually given over to drunkenness and the neglect of the Lord’s house – an unforeseen lordship would come over them from France.’¹¹³ Had not Edward the Confessor, shortly before his death, suffered a prophetic nightmare, known as the ‘green tree prophecy’, in

describe the English toasts, such as *weisseil*, *laticome*, *drincheheil*, *drinc*, *hindrewart*; these, according to Wolege, were used to convey the babbling of foreigners by Wace.

109 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum* III 245, ed. and transl. Mynors, Thomson and Winterbottom, vol. 1, 458-459: ‘magis ingenitum sit illi genti commesationibus quam opibus inhiare’.

110 Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 253.

111 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum* III 245, ed. and transl. Mynors, Thomson and Winterbottom, vol. 1, 458-459: ‘Potabatur in commune ab omnibus, in hoc studio noctes perinde ut dies perpetuantibus. Paruis et abiectis domibus totos absumebant sumptus, Francis et Normannis absimiles, qui amplis et superbis edifiitiis modicas expensas agunt.’

112 Idem: ‘Magis temeritate et furore precipitin quam scientia military Willelmo congress, uno prelio et ipso perfacili seruituti se patriamque pessumdederint. Nichil enim leuius, sed quicquid cum impetus inchoat, cito desinit vel compescitur.’

113 Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum* VI 1, ed. and transl. Greenway, 338-339: ‘Predixit etiam eis quidam vir Dei, quod ex scelerum suorum inmanitate, non solum quia semper cedi et prodicioni studebant, verum etiam quia semper ebrietati et negligentie domus Domini dediti errant, eis insperatum a Francia aduenturum dominium.’ See also Huntingdon, page 75, for similar remarks about God’s wrath regarding the Britons, who lived in prosperity, ‘casting off Christ’s easy yoke and subjecting their necks to drunkenness, enmity, dispute, strife, envy, and other similar acts of wickedness.’ God subsequently sent the Scots and Picts; cf. Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 75-77; 243.

which God, because of the sins of the clergy, would deliver the country into the hands of the devil?¹¹⁴ Once more, the theme is that of moral decay leading to conquest.¹¹⁵

In this rhetoric, the conquest of England was thus attributed to the immoral behaviour of its inhabitants, and not so much to the superior qualities of its victors. As a result, as John Freedman has pointed out, the Anglo-Saxons, ‘found wanting in military emergency’ were identified with serfdom.¹¹⁶ In this sense, the conquest of Britain is set in a different rhetoric from the English conquest of Ireland or Wales. As an early form of imperialism, these conquests too were justified by the use of stereotypes, as discussed extensively by among others Rees Davies, John Gillingham, and recently James Muldoon.¹¹⁷ However, the Irish and Welsh were depicted as inferior, barbarous peoples desperately lacking culture and religion, whose political and cultural domination by the superior Anglo-Normans was thus morally justified. The conquest of England, on the other hand, was an internal moral affair between the inhabitants of the blessed isle, and God. This could, in a reversal of fate, equally result in God’s intervention on behalf of the English, as is the case in accounts of the civil revolt against Henry II in 1173-1174. Here, the rebels were aided by the king of France and Flemish knights. (Notably, the role of the Normans in the rebellion was, as Hugh Thomas remarks, ignored.) Rebels, represented as foreign invaders, were quashed by God’s hand, as in Jordan Fantosme’s chronicle:

Soon you might hear shouting very loud
 Between Flemings from Flanders and French and Pohier:
 ‘We have not come to this country to dwell
 But to destroy king Henry the old warrior
 And to have his wool, which we desire.’
 Lords, that is the truth: the most were weavers
 They did not know how to bear arms like knights.
 But for this they had come, to have gain and war
 For there is no place on earth more hospitable than St. Edmunds.
 Now listen, lord barons, to God’s great vengeance

114 Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 56.

115 Idem, 252-253. A further notion circulating was the idea that a wretched sin could stain generations, God’s vengeance being wreaked upon the descendants who were the hereditary bearers of the mark of sin. Eadmer thus relates the English’ defeat at Hastings at the hands of God as a result of divine anger at the murder of Edward the Martyr in 978. Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 245.

116 Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant*, 110. Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 102, 250; Van Caeneghem, *Birth of English Common Law* 55, 96.

117 Davies, *Domination and Conquest*, 20-3; Gillingham, *The English in the Twelfth Century*, especially chapters 1 and 3, and ‘Images of Ireland, 1170-1600’; 16-22; and further references in chapter 8 note 53.

Which he poured down on Flemings and the people of France.¹¹⁸

The bond between God and the island inhabitants would continue to be tested in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Of the battle of Sandwich, Ralph of Coggeshall writes that ‘God smote the heads of his enemies who were coming to scatter the English people’.¹¹⁹ In the poem on the Second Battle of Lincoln in 1217, a fourfold madness leads God first to punish England’s pride; afterwards however, England, whose tears for John’s death brought forth strength, ‘drew victorious swords by the divine will’.¹²⁰ Research on the political poems written during the Hundred Years War will undoubtedly uncover countless further examples of such rhetoric.

The fate of the people

Besides determining the outcome on the battle field, the bond between God and the English people could further be tried and tested in direct relation to the mother church, the papacy and the ruling dynasty. The rhetoric was applied precisely so in one of the pivotal episodes of this period, following the rift in relations between the mother church and the papacy during King John’s reign between 1207 and 1213. Here, the ‘innate’ sins of the English people are held directly responsible for the papal interdict imposed on England in 1208.

The fissure leading to the interdict followed a dispute over the election of Cardinal Stephen Langton as archbishop of Canterbury, an appointment which King John refused to accept, partly on the grounds that Langton’s loyalty lay with the Capetian monarchy.¹²¹ In 1208, an interdict was pronounced by pope Innocent III, denying the King’s subjects access to the sacraments. The

118 Jordan Fantosme, *Chronicle* 99-109, ed. Johnston (Oxford 1981), 72-73: ‘Tost I purriëz oïr e bien en halt crier / Entre Flamens de Flandres e Franceis e Puier: / “Nus n’eimes pas en cest païs venuz pur sujorner, / Me spur lu rei destruire, Henri, le vielz guerrier, / E pur aver sa leine, dunt avum desirier.” / Seignurs, ço est la verité: li plus furent telier, / ne sevent porter armes a lei de chevalier, / Mes pur ço furent venuz, pur aver guain e guerre, / Kar n’ad meillur viandier de Saint Edmund en terre’; cf. Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, 114; Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 325-326. Similar remarks were made by Gervase of Canterbury: ‘Flemish wolves envying English abundance had left their natural endeavour, namely the business of weaving, and boasted of seizing England.’ The rapid transference of this image from the Flemish to the English, again points to the mercurial nature of some of the ethnic images in this period. Gervase of Canterbury, *Historical Works of Gervase of Canterbury*, ed. Stubbs, vol. 1, 246: ‘Flandrenses lupi Anglicanae copiae ab olim invidentes, naturali negotio textoria scilicet arte dimissa, Anglia se jam cepisse jactitabant’; transl. Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 326; Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, 114-116, who mentions Gerald of Wales more positive appraisal of the Flemish as a ‘brave and robust people, but very hostile to the Welsh and in a perpetual state of conflict with them. They are highly skilled in the wool trade, ready to work hard and to face danger by land or sea in the pursuit of gain, and, as time and opportunity offer, prompt to turn their hand to the sword or the ploughshare’; cf. *Itinerarium Kambriae* I 11, ed. Dimock, vol. 6, 83: ‘Gens fortis et robusta, continuoque belli conflictu gens Kambrensis inimicissima; gens, inquam, lanificiis, gens mercimoniis usitatissima; quocumque labore sive periculo terra marique lucrum quaerere gens pervalida; vicissim loco et tempore nunc ad aratrum, nunc ad arma, gens promptissima.’; transl. Thorpe, *The Journey Through Wales*, 141-142.

119 Ralph of Coggeshall, *Radulphi de Coggeshall Chronicon Anglicanum*, ed. Stevenson, 185; quote from Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 339-340.

120 Wright, *Political Songs*, 19-27; Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 340.

121 Ralph V. Turner, *King John* (London and New York 1994), 157-174.

following year John was excommunicated, while Stephen Langton lived in exile on the Continent. Finally, the conflict was resolved in July 1213; England became a vassal state of the pope. Langton immediately crossed the Channel and travelled to St Paul's in London, where he delivered a sermon to the barons justifying the papal policy on August 25, 1213.¹²² The political significance of this sermon was huge, for it served as a justification of the church interdict. As such, it directly struck at the relations between the monarchy, the church and people of England.¹²³

Although the sermon is conserved in relatively simple Latin, it must be noted that whether it was actually delivered in Latin or in the vernacular is a matter of debate. In the case of Langton, evidence seems to point to the practice that sermons to the laity were preached in the vernacular but written down, probably during or afterwards, in Latin.¹²⁴ We know that it was delivered in front of a large crowd. In it, Langton directly argues that the interdict had been caused by the vices of gluttony and drunkenness:

The English are burdened with the weight of numerous sins, but they are especially weighed down by two which sink them into the basest of things: gluttony and drunkenness. These two vices reign strongest in England, and it is the nature of the English to drink to wassail.¹²⁵

As a people, the English were incited to reform. However, Langton indicates that English drinking is passed down from father to son, as had Peter of Celle and John of Salisbury. Adam's gluttony banished him from Paradise, yet his children continued to wallow in vice:

These two, gluttony and drunkenness, rule in us English; but in order that these are abandoned, we set forth an example how to flee from them. You have heard that certain diseases are passed by heredity to the progeny and derivate from father to son, as in the case of gout. If however the father would suffer from one such illness and would know to die from that, would not his son fear that very disease and in every way take precautions not to be struck by this hereditary disease? I am wrong when I think that he would not take precautions. Our father, Adam of

122 George Lacombe, 'An Unpublished Document on the Great Interdict (1207-1213), in *Catholic Historical Review* 15 (1929/1930) 408-420, here at 409; Baldwin, *Masters, Princes, and Merchants*, vol. 1, 27. The manuscripts containing sermons preached to a lay audience sometimes contain the rubric *ad populum*, as is the case in the sermon preached by Langton in August 1213. See Phyllis Barzillay Roberts, *Studies in the Sermons of Stephen Langton* (Toronto 1968), 47.

123 Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 305.

124 Roberts, *Sermons of Stephen Langton*, 52.

125 *Selected Sermons of Stephen Langton*, Phyllis B. Roberts (ed.), Sermon II 7: 'Sarcinas innumeras peccatorum gerunt Anglicani, sed duabus proprie specialiter deprimuntur quibus descendunt ad infima: hee sunt ingluvies et ebrietas. Hec duo vicia maxime regnant in Anglia, et est Anglorum proprietas bibere ad verseil.'

course, was banished from Paradise because of his gluttony, but the sons do not fear what brought the father to fall ill.¹²⁶

Because the English continue to indulge in these vices, they ‘subject themselves to their Lord’s judgment and judge themselves worthy of the punishment of traitors. Drunkenness is the rope by which we are bound; gluttony is the vice for which we are reputed to be traitors.’¹²⁷

Stephen Langton had been trained as a theologian in Paris in the circle of Peter the Chanter, as had Gerald of Wales and Raoul of Ardent. Both these men had also remarked upon the ‘heredity’ of ethnic vice; it is tempting to surmise that this had been the subject of particular discussions within this circle of theologians in Paris. Although the controversy between the monarchy and the papacy centred on the issue who was empowered to elect the archbishop of Canterbury, Langton in his address to the barons thus embeds an ethnic cultural custom in his exemplification of the moral state of affairs. It is the shared custom of the laity, the communal wassailing – often ridiculed in Latin poetry and vernacular prose, but more importantly often performed in taverns and at dining tables – which thus decided the fate of the English people, the monarchy, and the English Church, according to Langton. Taking into account the considerable effects the interdict would have had on the community – being denied access to the sacraments – and the direct relationship drawn between its sins and these events, Langton’s address would surely have evoked a deep sense of community, and responsibility, among those present.

Although power flowed from God, and the people were supposed to be guided and protected by their divinely appointed prince, within the triad God-king-people the sinful behaviour of an ethnic group, as a chosen people, might thus be viewed as determining the outcome of events, incurring God’s wrath. In this sense ethnic character might be a strong determinant for interpreting the fate of a community, as it explained pivotal events in a people’s history. In this chapter, we have seen that such ethnic sins might even be explained as character traits inherited from the Fall. However, these images were dictated by Church men; for Anglo-Saxon serfs or merchants, communal wassailing might have been a cultural custom simply to enjoy.

126 Ibid: ‘Hec duo, gula et ebrietas, in nobis Anglicis principantur; set ut illa recedant de cetero exemplum proponemus ipsa fugiendi. Audistis quod quedam infirmitates iure hereditario transfunduntur in posteros et a patribus in filios deriuantur, ut est pedum egritudo. Si autem pater alicuius tali morbo laboraret et eodem cogente moreretur, none filius eius morbum illum formidaret et modis omnibus precaueret ne in hereditarium caderet egritudinem? Fallor si non sibi precaueret. Pater noster, scilicet Adam, per gulam eiectus est de paradise, set morbum quo pater cecidit filii non formidant.

127 Ibid: ‘Et ita domini sui se subicientes iudicio, dignos se iudicant supplicio traditorum. Ebrietas est vinculum quo ligamur, ingluvies est vicium pro quo pro proditoribus reputamur.’