

8-11-2015

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HOSTAGES IN OLD ENGLISH LITERATURE

by

MELISSA BIRD

Under the Direction of Edward J. Christie, PhD.

ABSTRACT

“Hostages in Old English Literature” examines the various roles that hostages have played in Anglo-Saxon texts, specifically focusing on the characterization of Æscferth in *The Battle of Maldon*. Historical context is considered in order to contextualize behavioral expectations that a 10th century Anglo-Saxon audience might have held. Since the poem was composed during the reign of Æthelred the Unready, an examination of hostages and incidents recorded in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* during his rule helps ground a socio-cultural approach. Furthermore, since Æscferth is among only a handful of named hostages in Old English literature, these other hostages have been analyzed and compared with him in order to further contextualize the hostage character. These hostages have been identified based on a broadened concept of the term “hostage” to include the social expectations of a medieval stranger. Through

a consideration of these other hostages, a continuum for changing hostage loyalty emerges and reflects the evolving warrior ethics at the end of the 10th century. Based on the presented evidence, this thesis concludes that Æscferth, as a hostage, best symbolizes *The Battle of Maldon*'s call for English unity at the end of the 10th century.

INDEX WORDS: Hostages, Old English literature, Anglo-Saxon England, Medieval strangers, Warrior ethic, *The Battle of Maldon*

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MELISSA BIRD

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2015

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Melissa Anne Bird
2015

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August 2015

DEDICATION

There are quite a few people who have helped me along this long road that I would like to dedicate this thesis to. First and foremost, to my parents who always inspired me to continue on when this project seemed most daunting. I would also like to extend this dedication to all of my colleagues at GSU who have helped keep me sane (especially Donna and Pallabi), and particularly my partner-in-medievalism, Dani Robinson, for the many pots of Turkish coffee and road trips to Michigan that it took to get to this point. Last, I would like to extend my dedication to Dan for consistently encouraging me to pursue my dream.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people who I would like to thank for their continued support in this project, but none more so than Dr. Christie. The endless help, recommendations, and guidance for the past few years have contributed greatly not only to the success of this thesis, but also my graduate student career. I also wish to thank Dr. Lightsey and Dr. Harris for their helpful suggestions throughout this process; your willingness to provide feedback to improve my work has been more valuable to me than you know.

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1 INTRODUCTION

After Byrhtnoth falls on the battle field in *The Battle of Maldon*, Godric forsakes his oath of loyalty, mounts Byrhtnoth's horse, and flees. In the confusion of the fight, other thanes mistakenly believe that Byrhtnoth is retreating and leave the battle as well. Those who remain have no doubts about their fates as their numbers dwindle and the Viking horde drives on. Nevertheless, the remaining Anglo-Saxon warriors stay and fight to the best of their ability until, as history tells us, the Vikings emerge victorious. When describing the men in turn, the poet leaves no question about their bravery and courage in the face of death as he frequently relies on such characteristic language as “*feaht eornoste*” (“fought earnestly”), “*heardlice feohtan*” (“fought hardly”), and “*cene hi weredon*” (“bravely defended themselves”) (lines 281, 261, and 283, respectively).

Amongst Byrhtnoth's loyal thanes, one character is singled out from the others by his station: *Æscferth*, a hostage from Northumbria. His brave acts are recorded as follows:

He ne wandode na	æt þam wigplegan,
ac he fysde forð	flan genehe;
hwilon he on bord sceat,	hwilon beorn tæsde,
æfre embe stunde	he sealde sume wunde,
þa hwile ðe he wæpna	wealdan moste (lines 265-272)

He did not turn aside from the war-game, but he hastened arrows forth in abundance; sometimes he hit a shield, and sometimes he wounded a man, ever and again he gave some wound, wielding his weapon while he was able ¹

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

While the lines that describe his actions are consistent with the descriptions of other warriors, he is singled out from the other named characters by being first identified as a “gysel” (“hostage”).

Æscferth’s status as hostage is the primary marker of his identity, and something that the poet uses to distinguish him from the rest of Byrhtnoth’s thanes (nearly every other remaining named warrior is simply introduced by his given name). The fact that the poet distinguishes Æscferth by his status as a hostages in addition to describing his ability to fight calls for a closer examination of this character and, by extension, an examination of the Anglo-Saxon hostage overall. As a hostage entrusted to Byrhtnoth, he fulfilled his expectations and surpassed them as he died on the battlefield still loyally in service to Byrhtnoth. His deeds even consist of eight whole lines of text, rivaled in length only by the account of Offa’s death; by occupying such a large portion of the named heroes’ section (there are forty-eight lines dedicated to recounting eight named warriors’ deaths and general descriptions of the battle’s severity), the poet places great importance on this character and his loyalty to Byrhtnoth. His actions evoke, in the reader’s mind, the same sense of loyalty and courage as the other warriors who were not strangers in this war band’s community – a loyalty not depicted in other hostages’ situations.

Æscferth fully adopts the identity of the community he was placed into where other hostages either retained their initial loyalties or forsake the conditions of their hostageships.² The fact that he remains on the battlefield to avenge Byrhtnoth suggests that he represents a changing sense of loyalty and identity. Æscferth symbolizes the very essence of the poem’s call for national unity and the fact that he is a hostage is crucial to fully understanding how he operates within the confines of the poem. For the purposes of this thesis, I will be using the term “nation” under what Adrian Hastings has identified as Bede’s third level of the concept of

² While this word was coined by Ryan Lavelle and isn’t technically an actual word, I use it to follow in his lead to refer to the legal status and duration of a hostage’s stay.

national unity for Anglo-Saxon England: “an existent unity” (37) as separate from an ecclesiastical or territorial unity. The island of Britain may be one unit, but within it existed separate kingdoms with separate languages. I will be operating under the pretext that England in the late 10th century was “now a single nation with a single language and a single church” (Hastings 38), and also includes the idea of the “nation-state,” which included all peoples under the crown to abide by one language, church and law (Hastings 39). Hastings further notes that explicit mentions of nationalistic pride in this sense are hard to find in Old English literature, but are most often found in the face of national threat (43). *The Battle of Maldon* then offers the best opportunity to view this concept of nationhood through the character of the Northumbrian hostage in service to Essex’s Earl, Byrhtnoth.

However little is known of Anglo-Saxon hostages, let alone what they can offer to complicate and complete an understanding of national identity. What is known is typically restricted to brief accounts in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* or representations as peace-weaving entities. Ryan Lavelle takes this information and initiates a discussion of hostages by categorizing a majority of named hostages into three possible roles: that of peacemaking, of legal surety, or of overlordship. Each of these roles represents some sort of political submission, many times as a way to guarantee peace or settle old feuds. Æscferth’s particular status as hostage falls under the category of overlordship because of Northumbria’s questionable fealty to Æthelred II and the high probability that he was given as a promise of loyalty to the crown.

An area long held under Danish rule and governed in fealty to the king by Anglo-Danish families, Northumbria continually wavered in unity with the rest of Anglo-Saxon England. During Æthelred’s reign, renewed attacks by the Vikings tested the ability of English armies to work together in order to protect the nation. An audience familiar with the historical context

surrounding the Battle of Maldon would have recognized the Northumbrian warrior's presence as signifying English unity in times of crisis. While it was at the very least a literary tradition that expected hostages to fight on behalf of their lords (Locherbie-Cameron "The Men Named in the Poem"), the extent to which a warrior, and even more so a hostage, was expected to fight *after* their lord has died remains debated (Hill *Warrior Ethic* and Harris "Oaths"). While we know much about Anglo-Saxon warrior ethics, the expectations for Anglo-Saxon hostages are harder to clarify.

This thesis adds to the current knowledge of Anglo-Saxon hostages and their expectations by expanding on what it means to be a hostage. A hostage was first and foremost "someone whose life was literally a guarantee of certain conditions" (Lavelle "Use and Abuse" 271), but the limit of a hostage's ability to uphold the conditions that led to his hostageship vary. Some hostages are released after a short period (e.g. Philippus), some leave when threatened with full indoctrination into their given community (e.g. Waldere), some uphold their duties by fighting for their adopted lord (e.g. Hengest), some fade into the unknown (e.g. hostages exchanged in A.D. 874), and some die while fulfilling their promise (e.g. Æscferth). In order to understand why hostages operate the way they do in their individual situations, the term hostage itself must be broadened to include their primary identification as a stranger operating within a new community. By expanding upon the concept of a hostage to include the expectations of strangers in medieval societies, a better understanding of Anglo-Saxon hostages unfolds. Medieval strangers, as described by F.R.P. Akehurst and Stephanie Cain Van D'Elden, are "those persons who have their own community and culture, and who come into a new environment. They are within the law, they tend not to be parasites, and they may be very beneficial in their new milieu" (vii). While a hostage may not have chosen to join a new community, like many strangers did,

he nevertheless satisfies the given criteria. A broader definition of the hostage, which includes the stranger's identity markers helps explain how hostages interact with their new communities and can clarify behavioral expectations for hostages, especially one who might have grown up within their new community like Æscferth. By accepting the identity of a stranger as a foundation for the hostage's status in a new or foreign community, Æscferth's death in service to Byrhtnoth can be seen as the ultimate fulfillment of a hostage's duties. More specifically, when we accept hostages as functioning within the same parameters of the stranger's social status, Æscferth then symbolizes the poem's very call to unity by upholding the oath he represents even after his hostage holder has died.

As the first chapter will detail, the England of 991 A.D. was a country preoccupied with maintaining loyal ties under the unsteady leadership of King Æthelred II, while simultaneously fending off renewed attacks by Danish invaders along the coast. The majority of such attacks occurred on the northern coast of England, close to or in the area of Northumbria. Hugh Magennis points out that there was a "concern with community evident in Old English poetic texts as fitting into a larger pattern of preoccupation with issues of identity and society in the late Anglo-Saxon period...stretching from the time of the aftermath of the battle of Brunanburh (937) to the decades of Danish rule in England" (5). This was a tumultuous time in English history as alliances were all but certain as the politics of governance were also uncertain (see Stafford "Kings, Kingships, and Kingdoms"). In fact, many of the laws created during Æthelred's reign, and immediately after, dealt with punishments for those who were not loyal to the crown – something that Magennis demonstrates was also a problem during previous generations (28). Æscferth, as a Northumbrian fighting as part of the Earl of Essex's retinue, fits directly into this dilemma by symbolizing the changing concept of what it meant to *be* English in the late 10th

century. While the kingdom as a whole was in upheaval, as we will see later in the thesis, *The Battle of Maldon* acts as a call for factions of the English to band together in order to keep the collective enemy at bay.

It has long been held that *The Battle of Maldon* is a poem centered on this grander concept of English unity (see Frank “Heroic Literature”; Keynes “Historical Context”; Scragg, “Fact or Fiction”) especially in threatening times of invasion. If we are to accept this as true, then the character of Æscferth can even be seen as a symbolic epitome of the poem’s theme as he is literally uniting what it means to be Northumbrian *and* English within his identity. Magennis argues that the contemporary audience of late Anglo-Saxon poems perceived those of Scandinavian ancestry who were living in England as “marked by contradiction: the Anglo-Saxons, the relations with Danes and Norwegians mean conflict *and* settlement, paganism *and* conversion, disorder *and* law” (6). As a Northumbrian Anglo-Dane³, Æscferth reconciles these contradictions and helps redefine what it meant to be as an Anglo-Saxon with Scandinavian ancestry in that he fully accepts the identity of his new community as a member of, and not just a hostage in, Byrhtnoth’s retinue. While Byrhtnoth and his warriors ultimately failed in their attempt to keep the Vikings at bay, the audience is meant to appreciate and admire the warriors’ dedication to each other, “the oaths that bind a community” (Harris 86), and the concept of English unity.

Much of this appreciation stems from the dramatized form of the poem as the *Chronicle* details very little about the historical battle and does not name any warriors, let alone hostages, other than Byrhtnoth participating in the fray. However, the fragmentary poem *The Battle of*

³ While Æscferth is itself an Old English name, his father’s is not; such a change in naming convention suggests that Æscferth could represent a desire to demonstrate a trend toward becoming more Anglo-Saxon than Anglo-Danish or, at the very least, abandoning traditional names (see Lavelle *Æthelred II* and Woolf’s “The Personal names in *The Battle of Maldon*” respectively)

Maldon, affords a greater opportunity for elaboration and reflection on the events despite the fact that its historical validity is debated (see Scragg “Fact or Fiction”). Such fictionalized accounts help to illuminate our understanding of the qualities Anglo-Saxon warriors aspired to. In order to appreciate how Æscferth operates within the parameters of the Anglo-Saxon warrior code portrayed in the poem, it is necessary to examine the actual warrior ethics of late 10th century Anglo-Saxon England. An overall cultural understanding of how hostages were expected to behave during the time of their obligation, and Æscferth’s situation in particular, can then offer greater insight into how hostage expectations work within a particular warrior community. What seems to be, at first glance, a casual reference to one of the brave heroes who die at Maldon, Æscferth’s existence within the war band is loaded with meaning that the poem does not make clear until we consider him in light of other historical hostages. Even though the factual condition of Æscferth’s hostageship is difficult to trace, his existence within the verse account of the Battle of Maldon is enough to not only provide insight into the value and expectations of other hostages in the greater economy of such literature, but also assist in a greater understanding of the poem as a whole.

While *The Battle of Maldon* is indeed a fictionalized account, it nevertheless reveals factual expectations or modes of behavior as the characters continue to operate under the social contexts familiar to author, time period recalled, and intended audience. John Hill has shown how a fictionalized account “dramatizes subtle behaviour in a complex social world” (*Cultural World* 4) and how we can then use these accounts in order to come to a better understanding of the societies and cultures the texts represent. A large part of Anglo-Saxon society concerns the “heroic code.” Hill identifies this as a particular emphasis on “reciprocal loyalty between retainer and warlord...revenge obligation...and fame-assuring battle courage” yet notes that

these qualities typically remain “unpacked and literarily abstract” (*Warrior Ethic* 1) to a modern audience. It is critical to understand the expectations that characters in these heroic poems needed to espouse in order to fully appreciate just how Æscferth fits into the rest of the war band. Modern readers expect to see these characteristics in the quintessential “hero” of the poem, so it is interesting to note that the hostage in the war-party was also expected to embody these qualities. It will be necessary to follow Hill’s approach of using analogy as it “offers many points for observation and comparison...whereby an ‘unknown’ is compared with a ‘known’” (*Cultural World* 18). This strategy will afford the best opportunity to come to an understanding of a relatively ambiguous aspect of Old English literature.

However, my approach will differ from Hill’s in one key aspect. Whereas he utilizes a comparative ethnologic approach in order to create analogies between texts, cultures, and societies (Hill *Cultural World* 18), I focus on insular texts. I will rely on empirical evidence from texts written in Old English. This thesis will also extend Hill’s ambition to focus “on the social world depicted *in the poem*” (*Cultural World* 18) and attempt to locate the function of characters in the studied works within the social worlds from which they come. This is partly due to the fact that historical texts will also be analyzed in addition to literary ones. However, the extension to the “real world” will remain limited in that it will also reflect back on the poem itself. After all, it is the goal of this thesis to contextualize the function of hostages in Old English Literature and not just understand them in a historical manner.

To supplement this understanding, I will incorporate Hugh Magennis’ approach for reconciling the expectations that the literate audience would have held for such a character. While an exact definition of such an imagined audience is hard to describe definitively, Magennis’ attempt at recreating the audience is critical to our understanding of the poem because

it highlights how such a sense of community operated during the late Anglo-Saxon period. Of such a readership, Magennis generally concludes that:

Our textual community will understand Old English poetry in terms of an interpretative construct, the product of experience and outlook...we will not labour the authority of this community to the exclusion of other interpretative possibilities. In taking account, however, of ideas which this community might bring to the literature, we may use the possibility of such an audience/readership to historicize our criticism of the poetry, guiding us in our interpretations of Old English poems as artefacts of the Anglo-Saxon age (15).

When considered as an artifact of the period in which it is written, and vice versa, the analysis of *Æscferth*'s character as a combination of both Hill and Magennis's method becomes clear.

When we consider what *Æscferth* meant to the audience, we can begin to see how they, as a community seeking a theme of unity, would interpret *Æscferth* as part of his own warrior community. With the broadened definition of the hostage as someone who also fulfills the role of the stranger, *Æscferth* then fulfills a trend that other fictionalized hostages began by fully identifying with his adopted community.

This thesis considers the idea that dramatized hostage characters fall somewhere on an evolutionary path from interaction, to assimilation, and finally identification with their new communities. Since the majority of hostages recorded as being used for political advantage are documented in the more historically natured *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, named hostages located outside the *Chronicle* were compared in order to better conceptualize the development of hostage behavior. While it is tempting to restrict the analysis only to verse composed in the Second Viking Age, this scope was too limiting in that few examples were found. To accommodate for

this, earlier examples of verse were considered with the late 10th century Anglo-Saxon audience's reception in mind. With the widened parameters, other hostage figures were considered for analysis: Philippus from *The Old English Orosius*, Ecgferð from *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Waldere from *Waldere*, and Hengest from the "Finnsburg Episode" in *Beowulf*. An audience reading *The Battle of Maldon* would have also been familiar with such texts, and a common hostage-character formulae that emerges from them. All named hostages display some level of interaction with their adopted community, but it is only Æscferth who fully identifies with his. Other hostages participate with their community, and some begin to assimilate, but Æscferth stands out from the rest in his willingness to die for his promised lord.

Each of these literary hostages fit within this grander categorization and helps further our understanding of Anglo-Saxon hostages, as well. Both Waldere and Hengest abandon their stations in some manner, typically with disastrous results. While their position as hostages allow for both characters to be compared to Æscferth, it is this failure to fully uphold the tenets of their hostageship that separate them from him. Æscferth remains as a hostage even after the lord to whom he was promised has died and he could have fled the battle. His heroism not only speaks to a changing dynamic of the retainer-lord relationship, but also to a changing sense of duty as a hostage. Waldere interacts with the Huns, participates in their battles, and even throws a feast for Attila, but never fully accepts the Hunnish way of life. In fact, he only abandons the oath made when he became a hostage when threatened with becoming a full part of the Hunnish community through marriage. Hengest, on the other hand, does more than just interact with his new community. Tolkien suggested that Hengest may have been a stranger amongst the Danes

to begin with (see Tolkien *Finn and Hengest* 64-65), and can be regarded as a hostage through the acceptance of the broadened scope of hostage-as-stranger.

As Tolkien admits though, Hengest's role as a stranger in Hnæf's community is uncertain; but his function as a stranger in Finn's community is explicit. Hengest the stranger, I argue, could be Hengest the hostage functioning on two levels of the station. Unlike Waldere he has become such an important part of the Danish community that he leaves the bounds of interaction and enters those of assimilation. He fights on behalf of the Danes, offers to remain as foremost of the Danes who stay with Finn during the winter, and then exacts revenge for Hnæf. However, by doing so he then fails in his duty as a hostage to Finn. After completing his revenge duty, Hengest goes back to Denmark and his fate with the community is uncertain. Æscferth, then, finishes the continuum established by these other hostages in that he fully identifies with his new community. Not only does he willingly remain on the battlefield after the lord to whom he was given dies, but he himself dies in service to that lord. His unfailing loyalty marks him as the new form of hostage and warrior memorialized in *The Battle of Maldon*. An analysis of Æscferth contextualized in terms of historical significance, literary comparison, and contemporary reception helps us to come one step closer towards understanding the role of the hostage as a character in Old English literature.

2 THE ANGLO-SAXON HOSTAGE: A HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle provides historical evidence for the use of Anglo-Saxon hostages as early as 755 when a British hostage is spared during the battle between Cynewulf and Cyneheard. We are told very little about this hostage other than “ac heo symle feohtende wæron oþ hig ealle ofslagene wæron buton anum brytwyliscum gisle, se swyðe \ge/wundod wæs” (Irvine 38) (“but they were fighting continually until they all were killed except one British hostage, he was very wounded”). Even though this record of a hostage is exceptionally brief, he serves to provide one of the very first mentions of historical hostages in Old English and establishes a few criteria that further hostages also exhibit. From the partial line that he is mentioned in the author tells us that the hostage was a warrior, was British, was in service to Cynewulf, and survived the battle. These key pieces of information supply clues to the identity of the hostage and help to ground the political advantages the use of living people as oaths could be for either peacemaking, legal surety, or demonstrations of overlordship. While *Maldon*’s Æscferth is named and has his lineage provided (in so far as his father’s name and his place of origin), the conditions for his particular hostageship are similarly ambiguous.

The Battle of Maldon is the only place that mentions Æscferth so all we can know for certain about him and any conditions for his term as a hostage come from the poem. While the poem does not tell us much, the historical precedence set by other hostages can help recreate why he would have been present in Byrhtnoth’s retinue. Hostages are primarily recorded as being used for some guarantee of peace in all three of these roles – similar to the fosterage of young nobles or marriage contracts – but occupied a distinct social position separate from other individuals used to strengthen social ties (Lavelle “Use and Abuse” 272). While they could be used for peace-weaving, hostages more often symbolized the submission of one party to another

and also involved exchanges of oaths, which “were of the utmost importance to Anglo-Saxons” (Harris 88). The hostages physically represented a guarantee of the verbal oath and, as Stephen Harris explains, “Without the binding force of a spoken oath or promise, the Anglo-Saxon social fabric would unravel” (88). The importance of the oath was reflected in the station of the people who became hostages as most were members of the nobility and were not necessarily *captured* as they were *given* (Lavelle “Use and Abuse” 272). Exchanges were made between parties of equal social standing and the recipient was expected to take care of the hostage in his control. While the hostages might have been reluctant about assuming their role, they were nevertheless expected to uphold the terms of the agreement they symbolized and behave accordingly while in the hostage holder’s service.

The majority of recorded hostage exchanges come from the ninth through eleventh centuries, the Second Viking Age, and stem from tenuous relationships between the Anglo-Saxons and their Scandinavian invaders. These hostages were both given as conditions for peace and as displays of the giver’s submission. For example, in 874, hostages were given to the Vikings by a Mercian thane as a promise to help the Vikings should they come back and need additional forces:

þy ilcan geare hie sealdon anum unwisum cyninges þegne Miercna rice to
haldanne, he him aþas swor gislas salde, þæt he him gearo wære swa hwelce dæge
swa hie hit habban wolden he gearo wære mid him selfum on allum þam þe him
læstan woldon to þæs heres þearfe (Bately *Chronicle* 49)

and in the same year they gave a king’s unwise thane power to hold Mercia, and he swore them [the Vikings] oaths and gave them hostages, that he would be ready any day that they would have and that he himself would be ready with all that would accompany him for the needs of the army

The inclusion of the foolish Mercian thane's service in the bargain illustrates the point that hostage exchanges not only involved people of high importance, but also that they functioned as obvious power plays. The thane here is clearly at the mercy of the Vikings and agrees to whatever terms necessary to achieve peace. However while hostage giving was a very serious and binding act, the peace created through their exchange was not permanent as evidenced by the frequency with which these exchanges took place.

Only two years after the thane of Mercia surrendered Anglo-Saxon hostages, the Vikings gave their own hostages to King Alfred as part of a condition for peace-making: "him þær foregislas saldon, swa fela swa he habban wolde micle aþas sworon þa godne friþ heoldon" (Bately *Chronicle* 50). Since, "they [the Vikings] granted him [King Alfred] choice hostages, as many as he would have, and they swore many oaths then they held good peace," there is the notion that there was reciprocity to be had whenever the purpose of the exchange involved peace-weaving. This would serve to soften the blow felt by the subordinated side in an effort to ease "hard feelings" and maintain the "godne friþ," "good peace." In fact during the following years and leading up to the Battle of Maldon, from 876 to 991, *The Chronicle* states that hostages were exchanged six times (876, 877, 885, 886, 892, and 893).

In addition to reciprocity, it is important to note that the hostages Alfred received were "foregislas," "choice hostages" of a high status. Since the author uses a compounded form of the word and not the root word, "gisl" or "gysel," itself, we can assume that they were choice hostages *because* of their status. However, we are not always given such information; this includes *Maldon's* hostage. While this could be because the poem does not recount his actual exchange, Locherbie-Cameron gives alternative insight into this situation by stating that the poem is concerned with the portraying the warriors' exceptional heroism. She claims that the

poet may have “expected his audience to be familiar with his references, either because of the warriors’ reputations or because, if the poem was originally substantially longer than the extant fragment, he had himself already provided the necessary information” (238). She asserts that the poet was purposefully ambiguous in his tone when referring to the individual warriors in order to demonstrate that their sense of heroism transcended their status (238) and that it is their *naming* that is critical as it adds a sense of factuality to the drama.

Historical hostages were only used for overlordship twice, in 878 and 914, and both times were given by the Vikings to the English. When hostages were given directly to King Alfred in 878, he again was given prime choice: “salde se here him foregislas micle aþas þæt hie of his rice uuoldon” (Bately *Chronicle* 51) (“they gave him choice hostages and many oaths that they would leave his kingdom”). Similarly, *The Chronicle* records that hostages given to Hereford and Gloucester in 914 were also accepted on the condition that the Vikings leave Edward’s kingdom: “hie him sealdon gislas þæt hie of Eadweardes cyninges anwalde afaran woldon” (Bately *Chronicle* 65) (“they gave him hostages that they would depart from King Edward’s jurisdiction”). In contrast to choice hostages given for peace-keeping purposes, there does not seem to be any sense of reciprocity with hostages given for overlordship; instead a sense of threat can be felt as the Vikings were made to swear oaths that they would never again come into the land. Throughout these exchanges, there exists a pervading sense ill would befall the hostages should the oaths be broken since there was no need to maintain a good faith at this point in negotiations. These guarantees of hostages and oaths to leave England’s shores are the last times the *Chronicle* mentions hostage exchanges between the Anglo-Saxons and the Vikings, until after the Battle of Maldon and the enactment of the Danegeld.

This is not to say that there are no hostage exchanges recorded during the intermittent period though. Instead, the use of hostages as a way to guarantee political power or submission shifts to one of maintaining insular peace and unity. The three records of hostages that occur between 914 and 994 all occur within the confines of Anglo-Saxon England: twice unnamed hostages are given in the *Ordinance of the Dunsæte*, and then Æscferth appears. The two times hostages are mentioned in the *Ordinance of the Dunsæte* they are cited as being “bestowed upon Dunsæte at [the] West Saxon king’s discretion” (Lavelle 276). I consider this as an issue of concern for insular England because while the areas concerned in this *Ordinance* are located on the border of Wales, they were under the rule of the Wessex. As John Earle translates: “formerly the Wentsæ belonged to the Dunsæte, but that district more strictly belongs to Wessex, for they have to send thither tribute hostages and hostages” (Earle 161). Regardless, this act of hostage giving can be seen as one more of legal surety than overlordship because the rest of the ordinance describes other conditions that were also fulfilled (e.g. deciding what to do with the cattle in the ambiguous territory).

When Æscferth’s hostageship is finally mentioned, he is not found in an annal or legal ordinance. He only exists within the fictionalized and dramatized battle poem. Because of this, we must now turn from the consideration of historically recorded hostages to examine the time period surrounding his hostageship in order to understand the need for his status as a hostage. Æscferth’s purpose in the poem is complicated not only by the potential reason why he was in Essex in the first place, but also by the complicated history that Northumbria had with the rest of England. Both of these conditions help recreate hostage expectations that the intended audience might have held.

Located in and above the Danelaw, Northumbria was continuously a particular source of contention as “the Danish settlers did establish political and administrative structures which were formulated according to their own social and customary regulations” (Crawford 62). The region largely maintained Scandinavian traditions, something that helps to explain why Northumbria’s allegiance to was so shaky during the Second Viking Age. While not much recorded history of the Northumbrian aristocratic houses survives (and most that does only in the form of diplomas), we do know that many bore Danish or Scandinavian names, including Æscferth’s own father, Ecglaf (Locherbie-Cameron 239). Furthermore, Richard Fletcher explains how the facts that there were few landed estates owned by English royalty in Northumbria, that divisions of land were not conducted as they had been in the rest of the country, that only one mint was operative in contrast to the seventy operating south of the Humber river, and that there were no royally funded monastic houses in Northumbria (33) also contributed to the distance from the rest of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. The audience would have come to the poem featuring a hostage from this area expecting Æscferth to participate in his ancestral tendency to avoid associating with the broader sense of English nationalism. However, by the time of King Æthelred II’s reign, the area had indeed declared fealty to the crown. Nevertheless, this area continued to be hesitant in allowing itself to come completely under the fold of English unity and Alfred’s lineage of the “ambitious Wessex dynasty” (Crawford 63) would continue to strive to bring the area back under their control – an act for which the use of hostages was exceptionally useful.

In fact, *The Chronicle* shows that as early as 894 the Northumbrians, and East Anglians, were betraying pledges made with hostages

Ond þys geare, þæt wæs ymb twelf monað þæs þe hie on þæm eastrice geweorc
geworht hæfdon, Norþhymbre Eastengle hæfdon Ælf(f)rede cyninge aþas geseald

Eastengle foegisla .vi. þeh, ofer þa treowa, swa oft swa þa opre hergas mid ealla
herige ut foron, þonne foron hie, opþe mid opþe on heora healfe an.

(Bately *Chronicle* 55)

And in this year, that was twelve months from the time that they had made that work [a fortification] in the East Kingdom, the Northumbrians and East Anglians gave oaths to King Alfred and the East Anglians gave six choice hostages, and yet, despite that covenant, as often as others went out [and] made war with all devastation, then they went out either with them or on their own behalf

Here, six anonymous political hostages were given and yet the terms of the agreement were abandoned just a year after the covenant was made. This is just one, detailed and explicit, example of bonds being forsaken and hostages failing in their purpose. Northumbria had also acted as the aggressor against Alfred and both parties were thus required to swear solemn oaths. Despite the fact that the hostages are identified as East Anglians, the fact that the Northumbrians made the same oaths as them suggests that they were expected to behave in similar ways.

Nearly one hundred years later, Northumbria was still largely Danish. Its loyalty was not always guaranteed since much of Northumbria still maintained close ties with their Scandinavian culture, as evidenced by place and familial names. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* shows how York was a Viking Kingdom until Æthelstan was able to annex it in 926 following the death of its king, Sihtric, his sister's husband, a mere seventy years before Maldon took place: "Sihtric acwæl Æþelstan cyning feng to Norðhymbra rice. Ealle þa cyngas þe on þyssum ignland wæron he gewylde" (Cubbin 41) ("Sihtric died and King Æthelstan took the kingdom of Northumbria. Then all the kings on this island were under his power"). This change in leadership still did not guarantee complete control over the region. In fact, the *Chronicle* goes on to list various altercations in the area, as attempt to fully control the kingdom. In fact, in 941 The Northumbrians broke their promise and adopted Olaf as their King, only to once again claim

loyalty to England a mere two years later. This was to be a theme for the greater part of the middle 10th century.

It wasn't until Æthelred's father Edgar inherited the throne that the kingdom of Northumbria retained some consistency under English rule: "Her forðferde Eadwig cing, Eadgar his broþor feng to rice, ægðer ge on Wessexum ge on Myrcum ge on Norðhymbrum" (Conner 3) ("Here King Eadwig died, and his brother Edgar took the kingdom both in Wessex and in Mercia and in Northumbria"). Even though the *Chronicle* only states this limited information for this year, it signifies a peaceful assent to the throne that also united a divided kingdom. Ryan Lavelle notes that it was not necessarily unusual to have a divided kingdom ruled in a parallel fashion by the two brothers, as it had precedent, rather than trying to continue to force the notion of a united England (*Aethelred* 27) as had been envisioned by Alfred (*Aethelred* 15). However, since Eadwig died of natural causes (unlike Edgar's first successor), the transfer of power was able to bring the country back together under the rule of one man – including Northumbria. This union of rule was not limited to purely geographic limitations though as Edgar was also coronated twice: once as the King of England, and a second time as a King ordained by God. Edgar was a relatively well-liked and respected king who began his reign with a series of monastic reforms and quickly gained the favor of the Church. When he was crowned again in 973, he "had become part of the ecclesiastical order in a coronation ceremony that made him God's representative on earth" (Lavelle *Ælred* 29). This unquestionable legitimization of the king's power and authority created a precedent for ruling still practiced today and helped to contribute to the budding sense of nationalism (Hastings 39) hailed in *The Battle of Maldon*.

In addition to beginning the long tradition of ruling through lineal and religious privilege, Edgar's reign was also characterized by relative peace as the Northumbrians did not attempt to

break their truces again; until Edgar died and his appointed Northumbrian ealdorman, Oslac, was banished for unknown reasons (Swanton 120). When he died and his young son Edward took the throne, the kingdom was thrown into near immediate upheaval. The *Chronicle* relates that many ealdormen broke laws (both the king's and God's), there was famine, and “fela unrihte yfelra unlaga” (Cubbin 47), “many evils and many injustices.” While Edward's reign was short, the fact that it was characterized by such turmoil highlights how his ascension to the throne had little to do with his actual ability to rule, and was more concerned with political motives. The kingdom that had been united under Edgar's crowning was torn apart upon his death and there were multiple claims to the throne. Ealdormen chose sides between declaring legitimacy behind both Edward and Æthelred's claim (Lavelle *Æthelred* 36 and Williams 8). The additional woes of famine and disease only further served to add tension to the already weak political environment that existed when Æthelred finally did come to the throne (after his brother was murdered) and attempt to bring all of the provinces back under his rule.

Almost as soon as Æthelred did take the throne, further trouble rose in the kingdom not only in terms of attacking Vikings, but also with Northumbria's loyalty. This was partly due to the fact that his brother was murdered only a few years into his rule. Because he was murdered at Corfe, Æthelred's mother's home, it was difficult for all ealdormen to pledge full fealty and come to the aid of the kingdom against the invading Norse. The 980s were particularly characterized by frequent raiding and trouble from Northumbria is suggested in the *Chronicle's* accounts. As Æthelred wanted to bring Northumbria back under English rule, the fact that he took a Northumbrian bride could have been an attempt at solidifying Northumbrian loyalty, and the entrustment of Æscferth to Byrhtnoth after this marriage takes place further serves to affirm this. Yet where the marriage would have been characteristic of a peace-weaving action,

Æscferth's hostageship can be interpreted as part of a demonstration of subordination and fealty to the crown.

Since there are other warriors with Scandinavian names in the war band, it is curious that Æscferth has an Anglicanized name instead of one that follows in the tradition of his ancestors. Lavelle argues that this could possibly show the attempt to make him more Anglo-Saxon than Anglo-Dane and that his name might even have been changed upon his fosterage (*Æthelred II* 17). This idea would further suggest that his position in Byrhtnoth's household was indeed one of proving loyalty and submission, and not of peace-weaving or legal surety. His presence might be representative of the Northumbrian desire to show their loyalty to Æthelred. It also lends itself to reading the character of Æscferth as critical to the overall understanding of the poem as one of English unity.

Regardless, Æscferth's hostageship is the last one mentioned that was conditional as an agreement of submission within Anglo-Saxon England. Starting from 994 and continuing through to the Conquest, all other hostages were given by the English to the Danish: a Viking army in 994, three times to Swein by three different areas in 1013, twice to Cnut in 1016 (the second was a massive promise of three hundred hostages), to Swein Godwinsson in 1046, and as a tool for peacemaking between English earl and King Edward in 1051 (Lavelle 277). The fact that Æscferth is the only named internal hostage and the last recorded as a tool for subjugation singles him out as an anomaly worthy of closer inspection.

These patterns of the use of hostages throughout 8th – 10th century Anglo-Saxon England demonstrate how people were exchanged as living symbols of promises made. Whether they were used between two peoples of the same national identity or between warring parties, a sense of responsibility could always be felt by both the hostage and the recipient. Where the recipient

was supposed to ensure the hostage's safety and guarantee comfort, the hostage was supposed to adopt the ways of his/her new setting. While this sometimes backfired, political hostages were extremely useful tools for maintaining order, loyalty, and power from one entity to another.

3 OTHER HOSTAGES IN OLD ENGLISH LITERATURE

The majority of hostages found in the corpus of Old English literature, just like those in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, were unnamed. In fact, of the one-hundred forty times that the word “gisl” or its variants are used in the Old English Corpus,⁴ only four are accompanied by a name – Iudas, Philippus, Ecgferð, and Æscferth.⁵ While Iudas was named as a hostage, he was not considered for this section because of his religious context. By belonging to a religiously inclined text, he necessitates a further layer of understanding and criticism that is not within the scope of this project. He cannot be considered simply as a literary recording of a hostage character because of the immediate implications that arise around him. The remaining named hostages who are specifically referred to as “gislas,” Philippus and Ecgferð, exist within their manuscripts, *The Old English Orosius* and *The Old English Version of Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English Peoples* respectively, as historical records. The accounts of these hostages could be considered as further instances of historically named hostages discussed in the previous chapter, but do not because of the fact that they are specifically named and given identities other than simply that of a hostage.

Even though *Orosius* does not take place in Anglo-Saxon England, the Anglo-Saxons sought a connection to the larger concept of history that it recounts. Copied and translated Latin texts often reflected Anglo-Saxon beliefs and help establish a basis of expectations that later literary hostages also exhibit. While we are told very little about both Philippus’ and Ecgferð’s time spent as hostages, the information is still critical and helps us draw conclusions about the nature of hostage characters extant in works outside of *The Chronicle*. Much like the hostage

⁴ While the root form “gisl” is actually recorded one-hundred ninety-two times, fifty-two instances had to be ignored as they belonged to place names, people’s names, or were included as part of an Anglo-Saxon gloss.

⁵ It is tempting to include Matthew from *Andreas* with this categorization, but since he was captured and not given to the Mermedonians he is not technically a hostage.

spared during the fight between Cynewulf and Cyneheard, even a few details are enough to form a basis for understanding hostages in Old English literature. Many of the details that accompany the conditions and treatment of Philippus and Ecgferð are echoed throughout later cases, as we will see in regards to Waldere, Hengest, and Æscferth.

All we are told about Philippus' time spent as a hostage is as follows:

Philippus, þa he cniht wæs, wæs Thebanum to gisle geseald, Paminunde, þæm
stro'n' gan cyninge þæm gelæredestan philosophe, from his agnum breþer
Alexandre, þe Læcedemonia rice þa hæfde, mid him gelæred wearð on þam þrim
gearum þa he ðær wæs (Bately *Orosius* 61)

Philip, when he was a knight, was given as a hostage to the Tebans, Paminunde, that strong king and learned philosopher, by his own brother Alexander, who held the kingdom of Læcedemonia, with him he became learned and he was there for three years.

As expected, Philippus was a valuable hostage indeed since he was the brother of Alexander; even though he was but a knight when he was given, he was a member of the nobility who would later go on to be king. These years formed a critical part of his life while he was young so much so that it needed to be recorded and reaffirms the fact that hostages were important. This trend is continued throughout Old English literature and helps to connect the condition that a hostage be of a high status back to an established tradition. We are also told that the length of his hostageship was very short. Only three years passed while he was a hostage and we are not told anything about those years other than that “gelæred wearð.” Because of this detail, Philippus also experienced the expectation that hostages be afforded some level of comfort or freedom. This trend is developed further in the cases of Waldere, Hengest, and Æscferth, but again the

foundation for the habit stems back to a Classical tradition that serves to ground the identity of the Anglo-Saxon people.

Ecgferð also helps to establish Anglo-Saxon hostage expectations in an old tradition, but one that was closer, temporally and geographically, to the contextual audience than Philippus'. In his third book, Bede tells us of a war between King Oswy and the Mercians that occurred in 664 A.D. King Oswy had already given up money and offerings of peace so that the Mercian King Penda would return home. However, when King Penda refused, battle resumed. King Oswy, however, could only do so with a small host and faith in Christ. Bede explains that part of the reason that the retinue was so small was "Forðon Ecgferð his oðer sunu in þa tid in Mercna lande mid Cynwisse þa cwene wæs to **gisle** geseald" (Miller 236) ("because Ecgferð, his other son, was given as a hostage and was in the Mercian's land at that time with Cynwisse, the queen"). Even with one of his sons given to the enemy as a hostage and only a small army at his side, King Oswy won the battle, brought Christianity to the Mercians, and restored peace to the area. Though it is not explicitly stated, we can assume that Ecgferð was returned to his father, since the need for him to be a hostage was presumably then rendered moot, and Ecgferð would later go on to take the throne after the death of Oswy.

Here again we have an example of an extremely valuable hostage who would one day go on to take the throne. Ecgferð further reinforces the idea that hostages needed to be members of the nobility, but the information given in this excerpt tells us less than any of the other literary hostages in terms of conditions during his stay, any freedoms or privileges he might have experienced, how long he remained in Mercia with Cynwisse, etc. Yet, this lack of information also demonstrates a pattern extant in all instances of recorded hostages. Whether the description of a hostage exchange exists in *The Chronicle* or one of the literary works able to dramatize the

hostage's story, there always exists a certain sense of ambiguity. *Maldon* does not state the reason for Æscferth's hostageship; *Oroisius* neglects to tell us why Philippus' status as a hostage ended; Bede never states why Ecferð was given to Cynewisse; and countless hostages remain anonymous in *The Chronicle*. In order to supplement such information, these literary characters must, on some level, interact with and incorporate their historical contexts. Lavelle's categorization system once again helps the reader recognize some of the missing information in an effort to complete an understanding of the situations in which these hostages operated. Because of Northumbrian politics, it is conceivable that Æscferth symbolizes Northumbria's submission to King Æthelred II. Based on context, a reader can assume that Alexander also gave Philippus as a symbol of submission to the Thebans. Ecgferð might have been in Mercia long before this final battle between Oswy and Penda as part of a potential peacemaking agreement. While such information might be helpful for a modern audience to better comprehend how these hostages functioned, this pervading sense of ambiguity suggests that it was not necessary for the intended audience to know the exact details of or reasons for one's hostaship. Instead, what matters most of all was that these characters *were* hostages.

Accepting the broadened definition of a hostage to include the social expectations of the medieval stranger helps to better contextualize these characters, even with their ambiguities, for both a modern and intended audience. When we accept that the hostage also has his "own community and culture" and then "come[s] into a new environment" (Akehurst and Van D'Elden vii), a pattern emerges that shows how hostages fit somewhere on a continuum of integration with their new communities. Both Philippus and Ecgferð fall on this continuum, but in very limited ways. Since the authors give such little detail about their terms as hostages, we can see that they only interact with their communities in so far as they live in them for a period of time.

Philippus takes the first steps beyond this stage of cohabitating by receiving an education while he is there. It is entirely possible that Ecferð also interacted with his new community on a more intimate level, but the text does not allow us an opportunity to imagine what that might have looked like.

There are, however, two hostages in the corpus who are described with a similar sense of detail that echoes what we can learn from *Æscferth*: *Waldere* and *Hengest*. When considered with *Æscferth*, these three versions of the stranger-as-hostage all highlight changing markers of warrior loyalty (which will be detailed in the following chapter) that evolves from interaction, to assimilation, to identification with their new community. These literary hostages, while likely founded on factual people, much like Philippus and Ecferð, help bridge the gap from pure recollection to dramatization. However, these three hostages do not evolve along a temporal path. Instead I have disregarded temporal continuity in favor of readership reception, since composition dates for nearly all Anglo-Saxon texts are hotly debated. A late 10th century readership could have had access to all of these texts and, I believe, would have recognized the same changing bounds of loyalty to oaths analyzed here especially since they are all chiefly described as being hostage warriors.

The fragments that contain the Old English version of *Waldere*'s story are exceptionally short and in no way contain the entire story *Walter of Aquitaine*. The fragments collectively called *Waldere* only detail two brief scenes where he has already liberated himself from the terms of his hostageship and escaped with Hiltgunt. While the scenes extant in the fragmentary excerpts do not concern themselves with the actual hostage period of *Waldere*'s life, his status as hostage is necessary for understanding the fragments that we do have. *Waldere* exists in other formats, the most notable of these being *Waltharius*. Alexandra Hennessey Olsen goes to great

lengths to compare the formulae and themes of these two poems. In doing so, she shows how they are most certainly related and how a reading of either *Waldere* or *Waltharius* requires a consideration of “a ‘mixed’ traditions (both Germanic and Latin)” (Olsen 266). The character of Waldere portrayed in light of both these traditions acts as a convenient bridge from the consideration of Classical hostages, like Philippus, and Germanic hostages, like Hengest. While a potential readership would have been able to recognize the characteristics of Classical hostages when encountering Old English ones, since they formed the foundation of Anglo-Saxon hostage expectations, Waldere better reconciles the two traditions in that he conforms to the more distant role of the Classical hostage of only interacting with the Hunnish community.

Since *Waltharius* and *Waldere* can be considered together, the additional information provided in *Waltharius* helps to better ground Waldere’s status as a hostage. In his edition of *Waldere*, Frederick Norman gives an excellent summary of Waldere’s story. In short, *Waltharius* details a war fought between the Huns, led by Attila, and the Franks, Burgundians, and Aquitanians. When the Huns emerge victorious, each of the Western nations is required to give a hostage: Hagano (from the Franks’s king Gibicho), Hiltgunt (the only daughter of the Burgundians’ king Heriricus), and Waldere (the only son of the Aquitanians’ king Alphere and the Hiltgunt’s betrothed). Interestingly, when Gibicho dies and his son refuses to pay further tribute, Hagano flees suggesting that he was no longer protected in his status as a hostage once the giver was dead. Waldere and Hiltgunt, however, remained at Attila’s camp. Enjoying his privileged status as a hostage from particularly high ranking, Waldere gained the trust of many of the Huns and became a leader of part of Attila’s army. After Hagano fled, Attila feared that the remaining hostages might follow suit and decided that Waldere would marry a Hun in order to guarantee that he remain. Under threat of marriage, Waldere and Hiltgunt both decide to flee

while the Huns were drunk following a celebratory feast thrown by Waldere. The Huns were afraid to pursue Waldere and Hiltgunt because of his status as an exceptional warrior, even though they were promised riches to do so. Because of this, Waldere and Hiltgunt escaped, married when they returned home, and Waldere ruled his kingdom for thirty years.

Like *Æscferth*, the dramatized version of Waldere presented in the fragment has a likely foundation in a historical king. He bridges not only Classical and Germanic traditions, but also historical and literary hostages. As fictionalized characters, Waldere and *Æscferth* exhibit realistic expectations for behavior as warriors and espouse qualities an audience would admire. Waldere's ability to achieve a high position in Attila's retinue provides a basis for the fact that these warrior hostages were able to beneficially contribute to their new communities through their skill at arms. In fact, in the first fragment, Hiltgunt's speech of encouragement to Waldere, she speaks to his "ellen" ("strength, courage") and recounts some of his deeds:

Nalles ic ðe, wine min,	wordum cide	
ðy ic ðe gesawe	æt ðam swerd [p]legan	
ðurh edwitscype	aeniges monnes	
wig forbugan	oððe on weal fleon	
lice beorgan	ðeah þe laðra fela	
ðinne byrnhomon	billum heowun	(lines 12-17)

Not at all would I, my friend, chide you with words that I saw you at sword-play through cowardice avoid any man's battle or flee to the wall to save your body while many foes at your coat of mail still hewed with falchions.

Here Hiltgunt claims that she would never criticize or tell anyone that Waldere could be a coward, simply because she could not. She then goes on to celebrate his strength more by stating "Ac ðu symle furðor feohtan sohtest" (line 18) ("But, you always sought the fight further").

Waldere, much like Æscferth, never gives up the fight while he is still capable of pursuing the enemy. In his eight lines, we similarly see that Æscferth “He ne wandode na æt þam wigplegan” (line 268) (“he never did weaken at the war game”). Both of these poems, though, are categorized as heroic poems and the reader could expect to see displays of exceptional bravery and fighting prowess as part of the style. The fact that Waldere had just escaped his hostageship and that Æscferth only exists *as* a hostage though still reinforces the idea that it was a necessary characteristic for the hostage character to be able to contribute to his host’s community. The warrior culture espoused by these Germanic cultures then expects that the best way a hostage could benefit his new community would be through the ability to fight well.

Waldere additionally helps continue the tradition that hostages were valuable members of the nobility as the Latin poet explicitly tells us in that he is the only son of Aquitaine’s King Alphere. While historical documents suggest that hostages were usually people of high rank, the reinforcement of this tradition in dramatized verse emphasizes that this is something critical to understanding the station of a hostage. As previously stated, Waldere bridges the expectation established by Classical hostages that they be important people by later assuming his throne, in the same way as Philippus and Ecgferð. The hostage character in this poem is critical in that he helps reinforce the fact that Anglo-Saxons sought out similarities between their own culture and that of the continent. Even if not explicitly stated, Waldere helps add credence to the assumption that dramatized hostages be nobles just like those choice hostages recorded in *The Chronicle*.

While neither Æscferth nor Hengest are explicitly identified as nobility like these other three were, the fact that they share the same sense of freedom as Waldere helps to further demonstrate this as part of their identity. We know that Waldere enjoyed great freedom with Attila since he was allowed to train and lead Huns in campaigns. He also had the ability to hold

feasts for Attila, and Hiltgunt even gathers their treasure into chests for their escape; they do not need to steal from their caregivers, but maintain control over what is presumably already theirs. Hengest, too, shares in this tradition in that he becomes Hnæf's chief thane, but is denied this privilege when he acts as a hostage to Finn. When we then consider Æscferth, his actions within the poem suggest he too shared a sense of freedom. The most obvious of these is the fact that he was allowed to fight and participate in the battle. He was not commanded by Byrhtnoth to stay behind; Byrhtnoth trusted Æscferth to stay on the field and fight for his cause. This might be because he had been relegated to Byrhtnoth's care at a young age (as suggested by Lavelle in *Æthelred II*), but the fact that he does not flee the battle along with others, or even like Waldere, further shows a freedom to stay and the choice to continue to uphold the oath he represents. Another notion within the poem that alludes to freedoms enjoyed by Æscferth during his hostageship is, again, his skill with the bow. He surely would have had to be trained in combat, especially with a weapon that necessitates skill like the bow. While the weapon is not prestigious enough to be named, like Waldere's sword Mimming, Æscferth's skill with his weapon is nevertheless inextricably tied to the idea that he would have had the freedom to learn, practice, and perfect this style of combat.

Waldere and Æscferth share many similarities as named literary hostages, but their exceptional skill on the battlefield, aristocratic station, and suggested freedom are where their similarities end. Waldere and Æscferth depart as literary hostages in one key aspect – the limit to which they interact with their new communities. Waldere interacts with the Hunnish community in so far as he fights, hosts, and celebrates with the Huns. However, when threatened with the prospect of Hunnish marriage and, thus continuing the path toward identification with the community, Waldere forsakes the terms made when he was given as a hostage and he flees

like Hagano. But where Hagano abandons his hostageship because the king who gave him died, therefore potentially completing his role as hostage, Waldere only does so because of threat of marriage to someone other than his fellow hostage Hiltgunt. He does not wait for one of the parties involved in the hostage exchange to die, but takes it upon himself to leave before he adopts any more the Hunnish communities' expectations. His role of the stranger as a hostage is limited along the continuum to only interaction with his given community because of this.

While Waldere fails in his duty to remain a hostage, interestingly there are no immediate negative consequences seen in the poem. Even though Attila dispatches his men to find him, he is not found until he enters the territory of the Franks and the new king desires to take advantage of his situation. While conflict ensues and Waldere battles and kills several men, he does not do so against the people to whom he had been given (he does however fight a former fellow hostage). In this manner he does not explicitly break his bond of hostageship, he simply abandons it. Regardless, this can still be categorized as a failed hostageship, along with Hengest's second hostage station, because he does not definitively fulfill the terms he represents.

Hengest's situation differs markedly from Waldere's though. Hengest poses a challenge in that he can be seen as a hostage in two scenarios: first, in the most basic sense as a stranger in Hnæf's community; and second, as a hostage representing submission to and peace with Finn. Following in Tolkien's tradition, I believe that Hengest is a stranger amongst the Danes and can be considered as a hostage for this thesis in light of the broadened definition. Like Waldere, he is allowed great freedom while a stranger in their midst and rises to become Hnæf's chief thane and even assumes leadership after Hnæf dies. Once this happens though, Hengest and Finn then swear oaths to each other in a reciprocal relationship that echoes those depicted in *The Chronicle* used for peacemaking. The fighting ceases and many of the Danes go home. Hengest, however

remains behind with a few other retainers as living symbols of the peace oaths they swore. He gives *himself* as a hostage, something unique to this episode. In the end though, Hengest fails to uphold the truce he promised to Finn, but in so doing upholds his presumed duty to the Danes in an act that propels him from pure interaction with his new community into the realm of assimilation.

Hengest then takes on a second stage in the continuum that stranger-hostages fulfill. Tolkien goes to great length to show how both the fragment and the episode show how Hengest *may* have been a stranger amongst the Danes (65-66). He relies on evidence made available outside of the text in order to “define Hengest’s position or origin more closely” (Tolkien 66). He shows how Hengest’s name plays a critical role in establishing his identity outside of the text, a practice that also accomplishes the same end for Æscferth. Their names serve to identify who they were independent from the context of the poems in which they appear and help to identify them as strangers in the communities they appear with. Hengest follows in the same traditions established by other hostages and bears all the markers of being a hostage among the Danes and the Finns. He integrates so well with the Danish community that he even goes so far as to explicitly break the oath of peace he swore with Finn in order to exact revenge for his sworn lord. Where Waldere’s abandonment of his hostage oath does not result in disastrous consequences though, Hengest’s results in a Frisian slaughter.

In fact, “The Finnsburg Episode” shows how two peace pledges were forsaken with tragic consequences. First, the Frisians forsake the oath of kinship formed when Hildeburh was married to Finn. While under the care and protection of their “in-laws,” the Danes are set upon

and slaughtered by their very hosts.⁶ While Hildeburh herself does not forsake the terms of her hostageship, her adoptive kin do. Then, after the fighting has ended, the Danes forsake oaths made *in* the action of the poem. Since Hengest's self-pledged hostage status is the only one of its kind, it can be seen as one of the most solemn. And yet, as the poem tells us, this peace does not last as hatred is nursed throughout the winter that the Danes spend in the company of the Frisians. When given the opportunity they, like Waldere, forsake the terms of the agreement. However instead of simply abandoning the post, Hengest instead violates the terms and fights against those with whom he had made peace. In this action, Hengest demonstrates the development of a hostage character's sense of duty to his oath by betraying a promise made with himself as the symbol of that oath in order to fulfill his original pledge to Hnæf.

Again, here we have a singularity in the Old English corpus. When hostageships failed in other peaceweaving capacities (like those detailed in *The Chronicle*), it happened in a more abstract sense. There are no other examples of hostages fighting *against* the people to whom they are sworn. Ryan Lavelle details hostages who were abused by those to whose care they were entrusted (see "The Use and Abuse of Hostages"), but this reversal of the abuse of the hostage holder is a singularity. If we are to take Hengest as a hostage, then the betrayal of the Finns by the Danes is made all the more treacherous and his loyalty to the Danes all the more admirable. Not only were oaths betrayed very soon after they were made, but they were betrayed by someone who was the very living representation of that oath. Hengest then shows a unique situation where the hostage character establishes a precedent not followed by other hostages as he is both a failure and a success in his ability to uphold the expectations of a hostage.

⁶ Who exactly attacks them, as Liuzza demonstrates in a footnote on page 86 in his edition of *Beowulf*, is unclear. For the purposes of this paper, I have chosen to accept the path of least resistance and assume that the Jutes were acting on behalf of the Finns.

Hengest takes the precept established in *Waldere*'s character of identifying with his community and complicates it by assimilating with the Danes. He does so to such an extent that he conforms to their expectations of revenge duty and abandons a peace-pledge in order to avenge Hnæf. While this next step in the evolutionary chain of the loyal hostage is a critical one, we do not see what becomes of Hengest once the Danes return home with Hildeburh. For all we know, he could have returned to his original community after having satisfied any pre-established criteria for his stay with the Danes. For this reason, his ability to integrate with that particular new community must be limited to one of assimilation. There is only one hostage character who completes the path to ultimate loyalty by identifying with his community to the point of suicidal loyalty, Æscferth.

4 ÆSCFERTH'S ROLE AS HOSTAGE IN *THE BATTLE OF MALDON*

As we have learned in the previous chapters, Æscferth fits within a larger categorization of hostage characters by acting as a living promise of subordination. The poem's description of him, while limited, allows us to then use precedents established by other Old English hostages and apply them to Æscferth in order to see how he operates on a continuum of hostage loyalty to his new community. Æscferth is a hostage who symbolizes Northumbria's political loyalty to Æthelred II, as entrusted to Byrhtnoth of Essex. Like other dramatized hostage characters, Æscferth was allowed a certain level of freedom, as evidenced by his skill with a bow in the poem. This freedom allowed him an opportunity to interact and assimilate with his community, but his choice to uphold an oath made *for* him by remaining loyal to his given community demonstrates the fact that he fully identified with the other warriors on the battlefield who upheld oaths they presumably made for themselves. All of this information shows how Æscferth represents the very call to the recognition of a larger sense of English unity that the poem itself symbolizes.

By bringing the information presented in the rest of this thesis together, this final chapter argues how when just one hostage character operates within the same parameters of the stranger, Æscferth can illuminate an understanding of *The Battle of Maldon* by symbolizing the very purpose of the poem in his single character. Hostages have been largely overlooked, but they nevertheless play critical roles in understanding their literature. Whereas historical records of hostages leave almost no information about the hostage himself, fictionalized accounts of hostageships do. Some of these even place great importance on the hostage character (e.g., Waldere) and the work might not exist without that character, but the same cannot be said of Æscferth. He is singled out because of his legal status as a hostage, but is simultaneously

included as a part of the retinue. Unlike other hostage characters who operate within the confines of the promises they symbolize, Æscferth alone dies as a member of his given community.

The fact that he acts as a member of the war band asks us to consider his actions in light of the other named warriors, hostage expectations, and 10th century Anglo-Saxon warrior ethics. While it is then tempting to analyze him as just another member of the retinue, the poet's deliberate act of distinguishing him through his naming order asks us to consider him as both separate from and a part of the warrior community. The poet singles out Æscferth by first identifying him by his station, and not his name, for this calls hostage expectations to mind. He then progresses with Æscferth's identity by listing Æscferth's homeland and father's name. In so doing, the poet then invokes the political history of Northumbria's relationship with the rest of England, Æscferth's Scandinavian ancestry, and the possible need for his term as a hostage. Interestingly though the poet does not just limit Æscferth's identity to that of a hostage, but is sure to give the audience his name; an effort that places him on equal standing with the other warriors the poet describes.

What, then, was the expected behavior of the other warriors? Hill explores just what these ideals would have looked like in his book *The Anglo-Saxon Warrior Ethic*. He notes that nearly every heroic poem exhibits a "play between traditional codes and expectations and the particular intentions, motivations or hopes of agents in given situations" and that warrior societies' poetry "reflect this play whenever that poetry seriously dramatizes social scenes meant to be taken as realistic, even historical" (112). Certainly, *The Battle of Maldon* falls directly in this category. The traditional codes Hill mentions here typically take the form of loyalty to one's retainer and one's king, and courage in the face of great adversity (111); but, these traditional

maxims were challenged and complicated in later Anglo-Saxon poetry especially in terms of what it meant to be loyal and who you were supposed to be loyal to. Hill demonstrates that warriors often held a sense of freedom in deciding just how far their loyalty to a leader would actually go (*Warrior Ethic* 112). However, there was a distinction between different types of loyalty as loyalty to kinship was something seen as unwavering (as evidenced by bloodfeuds and familial vengeance in many of the sagas and older heroic poems), but evolving notions of nationalism and duty as a retainer during later Anglo-Saxon England extended this notion to include political leaders as well. Hill notes that many poems (e.g. *Beowulf*) show how warriors were often able to choose to whom and for how long they were loyal in their service (112); to a degree, this sense of freedom also extends to hostages. If they desired, they could leave a lord after terms of their oath were fulfilled and it is ambiguous at best whether they were beholden to such bonds after death.

Æscferth, then, is in a unique position. It was not he who made such oaths of fealty and loyalty; the oaths were made for him. Harris questions the extent to which the members of the war band were expected to remain loyal after their lord was no longer living (95) and I wish to extend this notion to question what would have been expected of a hostage when his holder had died. Presumably, when Byrhtnoth died then the terms of Æscferth's status as a hostage could also have ended. However since Æscferth so fully identified as a member of the "folc," his decision to remain with the rest of the war band who made the choice to remember their oaths pushes Æscferth's actions to the very limelight, justifying the poet's placement of him as first among the named warriors. As a hostage, he physically represented the very promise that the others have sworn. While the others have words to tie them in their loyalty, Æscferth only has action. Words and deeds become united in his character just as he unites the kingdom of

Northumbria to the English cause against the invading Northmen. He perfectly demonstrates the warrior ethos by acting on an oath made for him, for which he is given to uphold. He does not question his sense of duty to both the man and the idea for which he was given and, in so doing, represents heroic poetry's reoccurring values of loyalty and courage.

Caie lists several poems, such *The Battle of Brunanburh* and *The Battle of Maldon*, as best representative of celebrating these same ideals, but notes that there are important distinctions between their purposes. He explains that heroes in these poems "are individuals who stand out as perfect examples of the code to which they adhere" (80) and that they are often encouraged to "gain eternal glory by valiantly fighting" (85). W.P. Ker has also stated that the societies these poems portray often held fighting as the central activity (12). The ability to fight, and more importantly to fight well, until the end of one's life is a common theme that can also be seen in both the poetry and prose of Old English literature, but its existence in Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry is the important as these poems held the hallmarks for behavior (Caie and Pope both make a case for this). While *The Battle of Brunanburh* better serves to nod back at a collective sense of solidarity in the face of invasion because of its historical conclusion, *The Battle of Maldon* offers a unique opportunity for reflection while the action was fresh in the intended audience's mind. In fact, Edward B. Irving highlights that the recent nature of *Maldon's* action sets it apart from other heroic poems (458). He argues that the fact that *Maldon* does not deal with time-honored, archaic heroes shows how it was necessary to look for heroes among the audience's own age: "A real historical event is being raised to a higher level of significance; the actions thus become increasingly symbolic; the ordinary identifiable men of Essex approach and enter the world of heroes, the world of legend" (460). The heart of this act of symbolization lies within the epic form of the poem, its elevated style, and its direct addresses

from the speakers within it (Magennis 198). In order to demonstrate the shift from historical representation to dramatic symbolization, the poet splits the poem's style into two distinct sections (Irving 458) that serve different functions as the focus of the poem's action changes from a description of the battle to warrior ethos.

The first, more realistic style is used to describe the battle during Byrhtnoth's leadership (Irving 458-59). The poet relies on simplistic language to convey the main action of the poem before leading into a more epic style. For the purposes of this study, we will take epic to refer to a highly stylized form of poetry relying more heavily on kennings and compound words – both hallmarks of the second style of the poem. The tendency to rely on “epic diction” increases in frequency as the poem leaves the confines of relating events in order to reflect on the deeds and speeches of the characters (Irving 459-60). Irving takes the poem's stylistic pattern in an interesting direction though when he suggests that “there is an ultimate point where they [words and deeds] become almost indistinguishable” (460). While the speeches in *Maldon* and the characters who speak them have been critically analyzed before (especially Byrhtnoth's dying speech and Bryhtwold's speech at the very end of the poem), we must place equal importance on those warriors who silently take part in the battle-play since the poet describes their deeds in the same contemplative manner used for the speeches. In order to do so, the poet singles out certain characters through naming them so that they can stand out from the surrounding action.

The poet's purposeful distinguishing of the warriors' behavior from the battle then calls particular attention to how *Æscferth* further symbolizes the poem's ability to combine words and deeds seamlessly. As Harris has shown, the poem focuses on the war band's commitment to upholding oral oaths to each other, and Irving has explained how this is shown stylistically in the poem through words and deeds becoming synonymous. As a hostage, *Æscferth* actually does

reconcile any difference between an oath and the action that fulfills the oath. He is a corporeal representation of a sworn oath; his very identity becomes entwined with the need to uphold a vow through action. Where the other retainers recall their loyalty to each other by remembering the oaths they swore in the mead hall (lines 212-215), Æscferth has no need to since his very existence in the retinue resulted from an oath made for the cause of unity. His choice to uphold the oath made for him signifies his acceptance of a new identity as a member of the group.

This acceptance is then the final step in the continuum of community assimilation established by earlier examples of hostages. This full identification with the group is an individual choice that the hostage must make on his own because many times he is included as one of community by the other members. In the case of Waldere, Attila accepted him as a Hun as evidenced by his ability to lead raids and the fact that Attila wanted Waldere to marry into the community. Throughout *Maldon*, there is a sense of communal identity that exists in the speeches given. As Harris points out, the war band acts as a singular unit; evidenced by the fact that Byrhtnoth uses the plural form in order to answer the Viking emissary's call: "Byrhtnoth allows his *folc* to answer ('Hwæt þis folc segeð,' line 45b), rather than answer himself...The difference is subtle but instructive. Byrhtnoth's people speak in one voice and adopt Byrhtnoth's decision" (96). Æscferth is included as a member of this "folc," and later chooses to behave as a full member of the community when the time calls for it. His identification as a member of the "folc" symbolizes the very unity between English kingdoms that his hostageship was meant to guarantee and that the poem calls for. Instead of fleeing, this "outsider" from a politically tenuous Anglo-Dane territory upholds the heroic ideal to *choose* to stay with the rest of the retainers from Essex who are still loyal to avenging Byrhtnoth, attempting to protect the

extended concept of unified England, and upholding the oaths they swore when they became members of the war band.

This serves to further uphold the claim that *Æscferth*'s character acts as a singular representation of the poem's theme within the poem itself. Scholars have debated the purpose of the poem throughout its critical history, but we can generally conclude that it serves to highlight a sense of "English" unity (see Frank "Heroic Literature"; Keynes "Historical Context"; Scragg, "Fact or Fiction"; Caie "Shorter Heroic Verse"). Graham D. Caie shows how later heroic Old English verse "reflect a growing sense of nationality" (80) especially in terms nostalgically creating a collectively envisioned and imagined past. Caie argues that part of this nostalgic past rested in a national identification of a united Germanic history so as to remind intended audiences of a sense of continuity with their ancestors (80). George Clark also makes a case for this when analyzing heroic codes in the time period surrounding the action at Maldon: "The laws of the following age strongly suggest that the heroic ideal survived in *Æthelred*'s reign, and indeed both the laws of Canute and *The Battle of Maldon* express a common desire to rehabilitate or reassert a heroic ideal which is seen as having fallen into a regrettable decline" (60). In order to achieve this, it was necessary to celebrate ideals that were linked with this Germanic past and were present in the aristocratic class. These ideals were then promulgated in celebratory works that audiences were meant to identify with and then replicate in their own actions regardless of whether or not they belonged to the aristocratic or lower classes, and similarly as a propaganda tool to help cultivate a sense of national pride and unity in the face of invasion. What is unique with *Maldon*, and by extension *Æscferth*, is that the action of the poem was quite recent to when a contemporary audience would have received it. *Maldon* perhaps then best encapsulates this

shift toward English nationalism through unity against an invading force, but it is by no means the only Old English poem that does so.

The fact that *Maldon* exists outside of its *Chronicle* entry adds to this sense as its purpose does not fall within the expectations of a historical record. *The Battle of Brunanburh*'s inclusion as part of the *Chronicle*'s entry for 937 acts as a historical record for that year and a poetic chance for dramatization. However, because of its place within the *Chronicle*, its purpose is more geared toward being a historic and not dramatic record. While both poems are generally accepted as having been written relatively recently after their actual battles, the fact that *Maldon* exists outside of the *Chronicle* entry for that year allows it a greater chance for dramatized reflection than *Brunanburh*. The chance to dramatize a poem allows the poet to elaborate on characters and action much more than the *Chronicle* can. A quick comparison of the two battle poems goes to prove this as *Brunanburh*'s seventy-three lines pales in comparison to the fragmented *Maldon*'s three hundred twenty-five. This distinction matters in terms of discussing the function of the characters within each of these poems. While they both act as a way to celebrate English exceptionalism, *Maldon*'s ability to go beyond the confines of a historical record allow for the poet to take the actions, words, and warriors into the realm of symbolism and afford them the opportunity to relate to the audience on a more intimate level. Characters like Æscferth help to bring the concept of loyalty to the reader in an effort to inspire a similar sense of national pride and, therefore, unity. However, this could not have been shown to as great an extent if Byrhtnoth had not died. His death acts as the crux for the remaining warriors to choose to remain loyal to each other; the sense of communal duty as well as duty to the lord signifies a shift from revenge duty to a need to band together, for each other, which cannot be seen elsewhere in the corpus.

While revenge duty is quite a common theme of heroic poetry, duty to each other in the name of a dead lord is not. Hill identifies *Cynewulf and Cyneheard* as the first poem that replaces the notion that warriors could choose their own lords to follow in light of familial ties (Hill *Warrior Ethic* 113); this ability to choose then comes to a suicidal climax in *Maldon* and, more specifically, in the character of Æscferth. In *Cynewulf and Cyneheard*, the retainers' choice to remain with Cynewulf even though Cyneheard promises them many rich gifts truly helps to portray the changing maxim of freedom to abandon an oath and, thus, leave a lord's service upon his death. The warriors here remain loyal with their lords and most die in service to their lord. As Rosemary Woolf states, "to a thegn, death is preferable to ignobly entering the service of the murder of his lord" (70), a notion that is curiously contrasted in "The Finnsburg Fragment" but explained by Woolf who claims that it was done out of self-preservation during the winter (71). However, the oaths that Hengest swears suggest a political agreement to Finn that Woolf ignores. Here, the importance of a hostage's duties are again brought to the forefront as Hengest's revenge duty to the community in which he assimilates are more important than the agreement signified by his hostage status in Finn's hall. The duty to fight, or die, with one's lord as demonstrated in *Cynewulf and Cyneheard* and complicated by "The Finnsburg Fragment" evolves radically to include the sense of suicidal devotion to unity with each other that Æscferth and his comrades exhibit approximately one hundred and fifty years later. There is one key distinction between *Maldon*'s warriors and *Cynewulf and Cyneheard*'s though; once Cyneheard dies the action stops, if only temporarily, in order to negotiate terms for peace and gather more thanes to the fray. While the battle falls to an unmentioned background in *Maldon*, we are not told explicitly that the action stops when Ælfwine, Offa, Leofsunu, and Dunnere make their speeches like it does in *Cynewulf and Cyneheard*.

While the warriors in *Cynewulf and Cyneheard* also choose to remain loyal to each other and their lord after *Cyneheard* dies, their actions serve to represent a more immediate sense of loyalty than those in *Maldon*. Many of the warriors enact revenge because of kinship ties, something thrown into sharp relief when the author specifically notes that the hostage was spared. *Maldon* alone shows the suicidal loyalty of a warrior community through the fact that its hostage character dies with the rest of the retinue. Rosemary Woolf and John Hill even note that there were no other markers of such suicidal loyalty in Old English poetry (see “Ideal” 71 and *Warrior Ethic* 112 respectively). *The Battle of Maldon* is the sole exception to this pattern. Because of this thematic anomaly, Æscferth’s actions must be considered as representative of something that an audience was expected to identify with as a relatively recent cultural phenomenon. Since *Maldon* was composed so close to the date of the actual battle, we can see in it expectations of a current era and not simply a nod back to the way things used to be (R. Woolf makes a case for this on page 81 in “Ideal”), although it certainly can be argued that it is steeped in archaic tradition (such as Clark suggests on pages 68-69 in “Heroic Poem”). These warriors follow in their lord’s example as fulfillment of their oaths and as a demonstration that they truly were *one* unit.

Regardless of how loyal the remaining warriors’ actions to stay on the battlefield were, it cannot be forgotten that it was not an immediate reaction to do so. Instead, some of the warriors flee the battle as their first course of action:

Hi bugon þa fram beaduwe	þa þær beon noldon:
þær wurdon Oddan bearn	ærest on feame,
Godric fram guþe,	and þone godan forlet
þe him mænigne oft	mear gesealde

he gehleop þone eoh þe ahte | his hlaford,
 on þam gerædum, þe hit riht ne wæs,
and hi broðru mid him begen ær[n]don,
 God[w]ine *and* Godwig, guþe ne gymdon,
 ac wendon fram þam wige *and* þone wudu sohton,
and manna ma þonne hit ænig mæð wære
 gyf hi þa geearnunga ealla gemundon
 þe he him to duguþe gedon hæfde (lines 185-97)

Then, they who did not want to be there fled from the battle: there were the Odda's sons were the first in flight, Godric fled from the battle and then he allowed the brave man who had often made him a gift of many a horse to suffer, he leapt onto the trappings of the war-horse that his lord had owned, that was not right, and both of his brothers ran with him, Godwine and Godwig did not care for battle, but turned from the warrior and then sought the woods, and more men than in any measure than was fitting, if they had all called to mind the favors that he had done for their benefit.

These warriors' actions are the first described after Byrhtnoth dies (Ælfnoth and Wulfmær being included with their lord's death) and convey a sense of desperation felt among the remaining war band. The poet does not pass judgement on these men; he does not call them cowards but instead lets their actions speak for their nature. The poet tells us that taking Byrhtnoth's horse "riht ne wæs" ("was not right"), but does elaborate on their actions. The poet nods to the traditional sense of freedom warriors held in determining whether to stay after their lord dies or to flee. Those who are courageous stay since they are not simply "heroic automata to whom the idea of flight cannot even occur. They are aware of it and of the crushing burden of individual choice now confronting them" (Irving 464). These contemporary heroes are presented with the traditional sense of freedom, but remember that their loyalty to each other, and to Byrhtnoth, is more important.

From this scenario, we can understand Irving's claim that the notion of courage here was defined as "not fleeing" (464). Since they are not simply heroic tropes incapable of considering other options, the poet includes a speech from some of the "unearge men" ("unfearful men") who encourage those who remain to remember the oaths that they had sworn together instead of immediately launching into a description their suicidal loyalty and courage. It seems here that the defining characteristic between those who flee and those who stay is the ability to remember all that their lord had done for them, something that is also reflected in their willingness to uphold their oaths to one another in a display of community (Harris 85-86). The notion of loyalty in this manner is not something inherent, but something to be recalled. It was necessary for the warriors to remember the promises they made to each other and their lord in this disastrous moment.

While Æscferth represents only one of the several named warriors and contributes to the ideal of loyalty, the characters' oaths to each other are not enough to create a code of behavior to adhere to. Just as the poem exemplifies behavior for a potential audience to admire, the warriors themselves need a standard to hold themselves to. The poet accounts for this and provides an exemplar through the nature of Byrhtnoth. Irving suggests that Byrhtnoth embodies the heroic style in both deeds and action and acts as a model for which the other characters follow (460). This can be seen in multiple ways, especially in Æscferth's actions. The most obvious example of this is the fact that Byrhtnoth dies while fighting, in fact he even *laughs* while expiring upon the battlefield. Since he is the ideal to which the others must look up to, the cowardice of those who flee the battle is felt in even sharper relief. They leave before Byrhtnoth is cold upon the field with Godric even taking the lord's own horse in his haste to escape to the safety of the trees. While the poet himself does not pass immediate judgment on these characters, because they still

retained the choice of whether to stay, the audience still reads the underlying principle that fleeing does not best represent a warrior's behavior. As Magennis states, "This personal dimension of treachery stands out as particularly heinous" (198). The poet leaves this fact for the audience to interpret through what happens immediately after the warriors flee.

Instead of describing the battle play, the poet instead turns to the characters in order to hear their decision on remaining. Offa recalls the hall scene where oaths were made to stay loyal to each other and the men band together to face their fate. This personal nature is emphasized by Magennis as critical to the poem's central purpose as it portrays the changing sense of community in later Anglo-Saxon England: "The figure of Byrhtnoth dominates the poem, and yet *Maldon* does not present the battle as the exploit of one great man. Rather, it is shown to be the enterprise of a community in the face of external threat...the poem still stresses the communal nature of the struggle against the Danes" (199). The decision of the warriors to continue to fight together and for each other foreshadows the broader sense of comradery throughout England that the poem evokes through its depiction of their loyalty to each other. Æscferth, then, plays the most critical role in his choice to accept an identification with the war band by choosing to uphold the oath that he represents.

Through his actions, Æscferth sets himself apart as a representative of the changing need for national identity as a response to a threat that endangered the collective English nations. He is not only unique in his ability to fulfill the continuum for hostage expectations of interacting with their new communities, but also in this ability to physically reconcile a personal identity as a Northumbrian and a broader identity as English. He further upholds the duty of a warrior to remain loyal to his lord, and follows in the behavior of the other warriors by remaining loyal to their created sense of community after that lord has died. Even though the expectation of

revenge loyalty for the lord was an accepted and established one, the warriors in *Maldon* are the first to include a sense of duty to each other in that expectation. The recollection of the oaths they swore to each other serves as a reminder that they are all one community, a community that extends to the hostage, and stranger, Æscferth. It is then his choice to accept this inclusion that shows how he has taken the opportunity to interact with his community to its fullest extent. By reciprocating the identity as a member of the war band, and not just a hostage entrusted to Byrhtnoth, Æscferth best represents the importance that hostage characters held in their new communities. He dies not as a Northumbrian hostage, but as an English warrior united with the other members of the retinue who are dedicated to each other.

5 CONCLUSION

Hostages in Old English literature, while underrepresented in current studies, are critical to furthering our understanding of political relationships in Anglo-Saxon England. While each hostage that was given represented a specific agreement made between two political powers, we are often not given much specific information about the hostages themselves: who they were, how long they remained in their hostageship, whether their status as a hostage resulted in a successful peace between the two parties, what happened after they were given, etc. We can draw general conclusions about the majority of most historical hostages from the *Chronicle*'s entries detailing the relationship between parties that had exchanged them, but *The Battle of Maldon*'s Æscferth affords us one of the most detailed accounts of a hostage's role. First among the named warriors in *The Battle of Maldon*, skilled with a bow, and hailing from Northumbria, Æscferth's choice to uphold the oath that he represents by remaining on the battlefield after some of Byrhtnoth's thanes flee perfectly encapsulates the poem's message of English unity. His suicidally brave actions represent a very blatant message to the poem's readership – if a hostage remains on the battlefield to avenge his lord, then all warriors should, too.

Later Anglo-Saxon England saw changes in the nature of the war-bond, and the emerging sense of duty to the nation challenged previously held freedoms that warriors once could have taken advantage of. The budding sense of nationalism that arose as a response to renewed attacks from the Vikings during Æthelred's rule widened the scope of duty from one's immediate surroundings to a call for national unity. The fact that there are members from various stations and sections of Britain fighting as equals in the war band, and who remain loyal to each other after their lord dies, forcefully portrays the need for national unity in the face of the attackers. Whereas it would have once been acceptable for a warrior to choose the limits of his

loyalty, especially after the lord dies, *Maldon* demonstrates that the need for unity outweighed individualized freedoms. As a result, revenge duty is shown to be extended from familial associations (as called for in *Cynewulf and Cyneheard*) to include those of the nation-state. The warriors who died upholding this changing maxim in *The Battle of Maldon* all serve to represent the message that the bonds created through a chosen community were sacred, Æscferth's most of all.

Through my consideration of Æscferth's role in *The Battle of Maldon* and the extension of the concept of a hostage to include the social expectations of a medieval stranger, we can see how emerging concepts of nation-hood, changing concepts of warrior loyalty, and cultural expectations all converge within the character of one hostage from Northumbria. He stands apart from other warrior hostages in that he not only successfully upholds the terms of his hostageship, but also fully identifies with his adopted community to the point of dying as a part of Byrhtnoth's retinue. Despite the fact that he was initially a stranger from a community with its own sets of traditions, Æscferth fully identifies with his fellow warriors to the point where he dies alongside them rather than accept that his hostageship has been fulfilled and return home. Other hostages that were fictionalized through poetry, such as Waldere and Hengest, were only able to interact with their new communities to a certain point. Waldere abandoned his duty as a hostage when threatened with becoming part of his community. Hengest, while loyal to the Danish community to the point of assimilation, fails in his duty as a hostage to Finn. He purposefully remains separate from the Frisians, but, as we are unable to know what happens after the Danes leave with Hildeburh, the extent to which he integrated with the Danish community cannot be known beyond his assimilation with the group identity. Where these two other hostages begin to belong to their new communities, Æscferth fully identifies with his. His

hostageship does not end with betrayal, ambiguous terms, or with a return to pre-hostage conditions (i.e. going back on the promise symbolized by the exchange of hostages). Instead, his ends successfully; he carries out his duties as a hostage to the fullest extent one could.

Æscferth's role in *The Battle of Maldon* allows for a unique opportunity to see a fictionalized hostage in detail. We can begin to understand what the late 10th century audience would have seen in his actions and how they contribute to the sense of unity in the poem. Æscferth's ability to fully integrate and identify with his new community helps us to contextualize just how important this character might have been for that imagined audience. However it is not his duty as a hostage to stay and fight that separates him from other loyal hostages like Hengest, but it is his choice to die in service to his position that holds him as a standard for comparison of hostage behavior.

While this thesis has only begun to expand and clarify the roles that Anglo-Saxon hostages play in Old English literature, the acceptance of a broadened definition helps start a discussion about the importance of these characters. By incorporating the role of the stranger as one who integrates into a new community with the expected behavior of an Anglo-Saxon hostage, Æscferth demonstrates how choices can determine the success of a hostage exchange. He represents the changing maxim of a warrior's duty to a lord as inclusive of a shared sense of duty to the war band community better than any of the other hostages in *The Battle of Maldon* because of his choice to uphold and fulfill an oath made on his part. His acceptance of death for the sake of fulfilling a hostage duty based on the guarantee of Northumbrian loyalty to Æthelred's England demonstrates in eight lines what the poem does in three hundred twenty-five. In so doing, Æscferth can be viewed as the epitome of a hostage and can be held as a standard for judging other hostage behavior in Old English Literature.

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