

Sceaf, Japheth and the origins of the Anglo-Saxons

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The Anglo-Saxons' awareness of their cultural and racial affiliation with their continental cousins is well attested, as is their interest in the earliest migrations of their ancestors to the British Isles from the homelands of northern Europe. The founding figures who led the migrations from Europe across the North Sea had names which were preserved by oral tradition well into the Christian period, and the names of these founders of Anglo-Saxon dynasties entered the historical record when Christian missionaries introduced the technology of writing among the Anglo-Saxons.¹ The Anglo-Saxons knew where they had come from, and their rulers could trace their descent in Britain with some kind of historical accuracy, often preserving a more faithful record of evolving dynastic configurations in the century and a half after settlement than of true lines of descent.² In one of the earliest extant genealogies, Bede provides the barest account of the origins of the leaders of the first migration, with a brevity suggestive of early oral tradition: 'Erant autem filii Uictgisli, cuius pater Uitta, cuius pater Uecta, cuius pater Uoden, de cuius stirpe multarum prouinciarum regium genus originem duxit.'³ Such accounts of the origin of kings presumably served their uncomplicated ideological purpose well. The king, descended from the god, derived power and social prestige from his ancestors, as much as from his own military prowess. Obviously Bede did not believe Woden was a god, but a mythical hero of the same name could

¹ The seminal article on the subject is K. Sisam, 'Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies', *PBA* 39 (1953), 287–348.

² D. N. Dumville, 'Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists', *Early Medieval Kingship*, ed. P. H. Sawyer and I. N. Wood (Leeds, 1977), pp. 72–104, at 88–93, discusses the purpose of these genealogies, suggesting their reliability more as records of the political evolution of early Anglo-Saxon England rather than as true records of royal descent. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent* (Oxford, 1971), p. 44, acknowledges the scepticism about the earlier parts of the surviving genealogies of Anglo-Saxon kings, but comments: 'a written genealogy that relates each king to his predecessor is not the same as a simple king-list; nor does its absence from early documents exclude the inherent likelihood that kings were interested in their ancestry'.

³ *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), pp. 50–1 ('They were the sons of Wihtgisl, son of Witta, son of Wecta, son of Woden, from whose stock the royal families of many kingdoms claimed their descent').

easily be accommodated in a royal pedigree.⁴ With the passing of time and the consolidation of power, the rise of more complex political structures was accompanied by a desire for more elaborate genealogies, and it is no accident that the earliest of the longer pedigrees are the products of the eighth century. Offa's hereditary title could be traced back to the kings of the Angels and he had a pedigree to rival those of continental kings. Eighth-century genealogists may have been encouraged to elaborate the royal line of descent under the influence of continental or other Insular models, and Wallace-Hadrill has suggested that the circulation of scriptural codices with ornately decorated genealogies, especially that of Christ at the opening of the gospel of Matthew, might have provided some of the impetus.⁵ Such artistic representations certainly testify to the importance of genealogies to the Anglo-Saxon imagination. In the continuing extension of royal pedigrees, however, the Bible came to present a challenge to Anglo-Saxon genealogists, as the process of increasing the number of generations in a pedigree would eventually lead back to the early history of the world. The book of Genesis offered a detailed account of the descent of the Hebrew people, but provided no specific explanation of the origin of either the Anglo-Saxons or other Germanic peoples.

The Christian Anglo-Saxons knew that all the nations of the world descended from Noah, as the universal deluge had destroyed all those outside the ark (Gen. IX.18–19): 'Erant ergo filii Noe, qui egressi sunt de arca, Sem, Cham, et Jafeth . . . Tres isti filii sunt Noe, et ab his disseminatum est omne genus hominum super universam terram.'⁶ Noah's own ancestry, outlined in the *Liber generationis Adam*, provided the only line back to Adam for the whole human race (Gen. V.1). The new point of origin which Noah represents is articulated in the chapters following the account of the Flood (Gen. X–XI), where the descent of the nations of the world from the patriarch through his three sons is briefly outlined. In the works of the Fathers, this biblical passage found a fuller interpretation, with each of Noah's three sons conventionally assigned a continent of descendants.⁷ From Shem descended the inhabitants of Asia, from Ham those

⁴ For a full discussion of the transformation of Woden and the role of oral tradition in the genealogies, see Dumville, 'Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists', pp. 78–9 and 86–8 and R. North, *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature*, CSASE 22 (Cambridge, 1997), 111–32.

⁵ Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship*, p. 112, closely associates the movement towards the enlargement of the genealogies with Offa's reign, a fact rightly questioned by Dumville, 'Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists', p. 93, who also presents a full discussion of Irish, Welsh and other Germanic genealogies; see also A. Faulkes, 'Descent from the Gods', *MScand* 11 (1982 for 1978–79), 92–125, at 103, n. 42.

⁶ 'And the sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham and Japheth, . . . these three are the sons of Noah, and from these the whole human race was spread over the face of the earth.'

⁷ See H. Sauer, 'Die 72 Völker und Sprachen der Welt: Ein mittelalterlicher Topos in der englischen Literatur', *Anglia* 101 (1983), 29–48.

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of Africa, with Japheth the ancestor of all Europeans.⁸ Of particular concern to both scriptural and patristic authors was the line of descent from Shem, the ancestor of Abraham, and so the Jewish people, ultimately leading to Christ himself. In the Old English *Exodus* the genealogy recounted at the crossing of the Red Sea makes no direct reference to Adam – only descent from Noah is reckoned as significant. The poet emphasizes Noah’s historical familial links to Abraham, which are recalled during the entry of the people of Israel into the Red Sea (lines 353b-379):⁹

Him wæs an fæder,
leof leodfruma, landriht geþah,
frod on ferhðe, freomagum leof.
Cende cneowsibbe cenra manna
heahfædera sum, halige þeode,
Israela cyn, onriht Godes,
swa þæt orþancum ealde reccað,
þa þe mægburge mæst gefrunon,
frumcyn feora, fæderæðelo gehwæs.
Niwe flodas Noe oferlað,
þrymfæst þeoden, mid his þrim sunum,
þone deopestan drencfloda
þara ðe gewurde on woruldrice.
...
Swa þæt wise men wordum secgað
þæt from Noe nigoða wære
fæder Abrahames on folctale.

In *Exodus* genealogical considerations provide a key for the appreciation of the historical pattern of promise and fulfilment of God’s covenant with a chosen people of common stock, a nation which includes Moses, and from which Christ himself would ultimately emerge.¹⁰ Remembering and counting these generations is described as a task for the elders of the community, who define the collective identity of the people, here an identity with typological significance, by recounting their ancestry and the feats of the heroes from whom the

⁸ Bede opens the third book of his commentary on Genesis with a discussion of the division of the world between Noah’s three sons: *In Genesim*, ed. C. W. Jones, CCSL 118A (Turnhout, 1965), 142.

⁹ The edition cited is *Exodus*, ed. P. J. Lucas (London, 1977): ‘There was one father for them, a beloved head of the nation, he received the land-right, wise in spirit, loved by noble kinsmen. One of the patriarchs, he produced a line of brave men, a holy nation, the people of Israel, the righteous of God, just so the elders recount concerning origins, those who most studied the tribes, the distant origin of the nation, each noble pedigree. Noah, the glorious chieftain, sailed over the new floods with his three sons, the deepest of deluges which occurred in the world . . . So that wise men say in words that the father of Abraham was the ninth from Noah in the genealogy.’ ¹⁰ See Matt. I.1–2.

nation descends. Noah is clearly the apex of this genealogy – antediluvian ancestors are not mentioned. He and his three sons form the basis of the faithful remnant preserved by God, the *ece lafe* (3706). Noah is also the father of the first covenant, and therefore the first to receive a promise of mercy from God. Both ideas relate to the wider thematic concerns of *Exodus*, anticipating as they do both the faithful of the church and the new covenant in Christ, motifs which are drawn together in the context of a genealogy.

The inclusion of the reference to the Israelite genealogy in *Exodus* serves to demonstrate the ways in which this type of historical record could be understood and applied. At a moment of national crisis, and in anticipation of battle, the elders of the community define the identity of both the people and their ruler Moses in relation to their national past. The literal truth of the Hebrew genealogy for the early medieval reader harmonized with its symbolic truth: Noah, Abraham, Moses and Christ were connected not only in their roles as mediators between the human race and God, but this mystical link was complemented by a genetic one. A similar symbolic and genetic relationship could be seen in the cursed line of Ham, the ancestor of Nimrod, first king of Babylon. This dual genealogical and symbolic understanding lies behind Alfred's comments on Nimrod in his version of Boethius's *De consolazione Philosophiae*:

Ða cwæð he: Hwæt, ic wat þæt ðu geherdest oft reccan on ealdum leasum spellum þætte Iob Saturnes sunu sceolde bion se hehsta god . . . Ðyllica leasunga hi worhton, 7 meahthon eaðe seggan soðspell, gif him þa leasunga næren swetran, 7 þeah swiðe gelic ðisum. Hi meahthon seggan hwylc dysig Nefrod se gigant worhte; se Nefrod wæs Chuses sunu; Chus wæs Chames sunu, Cham Noes. Se Nefrod het wyrcean ænne tor on ðæm felda ðe Nensar hatte, 7 on ðære þiode ðe Deira hatte, swiðe neah þære byrig þe mon nu hæst Babilonia.¹¹

Alfred is familiar with classical pagan accounts of the world's early history, but in this instance it is the biblical version of events which is understood as providing a true account of the conflict between the giants and God.¹² He questions

¹¹ *King Alfred's Old English Version of Boethius' De consolazione Philosophiae*, ed. W. J. Sedgefield (Oxford, 1899), pp. 98–9: 'Then he said: I know that you have often heard in old fables, that Jove, the son of Saturn, should be the highest god above the other gods . . . Such fictions they invented, and might easily have related the true story, if the fictions had not been sweeter to them, and yet very similar to these. They might have related what foolish Nimrod the giant did. Nimrod was the son of Cush, Cush was the son of Ham, and Ham of Noah. Nimrod gave the order to erect a tower in the field which is called Shinar, and in the country which is called Deira, very close to the city which is now called Babylon.'

¹² A similar point of view is expressed by the Old English translator of Orosius's world history, *The Old English Orosius*, ed. J. Bately, EETS ss 6 (London, 1980), 25, lines 4–6: 'Be þæm Theulaleon wæs gecweden, swilce mon bispel sæde, þæt he wære moncynnes tydriend, swa swa Noe wæs' ('Concerning this Deucalion it was said, such a fable was told, that he was the progenitor of the human race, as Noah was'). This comment is not found in the translator's Latin

the preoccupation with erroneous classical histories in the treatment of the Titans' war with the gods when the true account is clearly found in the biblical story of Nimrod. In addition to asserting the veracity of scriptural history over the alternative account, Alfred demonstrates a particular concern to contextualize Nimrod's folly in relation to his genealogy, tracing his descent back to Noah through Ham. Nimrod's genealogy can be seen to function here in two important ways. Primarily, while the authority of biblical history is asserted over the rival pagan account, the possibility is recognized that extra-biblical tradition has preserved a version, however confused, of an episode in the early history of the world. Secondly, the genealogy functions to define post-diluvial events in terms of their genealogical propriety – any lapse of virtue in the post-diluvial world is ultimately to be identified with the maledict line of Ham, as Cain's progeny have been extinguished by the Flood.

Alfred's treatment of classical pagan legend and its distorted preservation of the memory of events of the ancient past is not entirely consistent, and other pagan stories are easily incorporated into his version of *Boethius*. In one instance he shows a preference for Germanic paganism over classical, musing over the fate of Weland's bones, rather than Fabricius's.¹³ This syncretic treatment of the pagan legend of the north and south and the biblical past, finds a counterpart in the links forged between the early patriarchs of Genesis and figures from northern paganism in the extensions of royal genealogies produced for the house of Wessex during his reign. Roberta Frank has suggested the inclusion of ancestors like Scyld, Sceaf, Beaw, Heremod and Hwala is in line with a contemporary cultural trend also witnessed among continental peoples. These 'Germanic' additions to the genealogy allow the house of Wessex to acquire 'not a little mythological depth and perhaps even some political legitimacy by claiming descent from the gods and rulers of the heartland of northern Europe'.¹⁴ But these heroes, in the context of the newly extended genealogies, also serve the purpose of bridging the gap between the 'northern heartland' and the immediate post-diluvial world. The genealogies represent not only an interest in Germanic pagan legend, but a desire to locate and legitimize both the mythical

source; see *Pauli Orosii Historiarum adversus Paganos Libri VII*, ed. C. Zangermeister, CSEL 5 (Vienna, 1882), 53–4. For a discussion of the problem of identifying the Latin text used by the Old English translator, see *Orosius*, ed. Bately, pp. lv–lxi. Some early Christian writers followed the Hellenizing Jewish theologian Philo in identifying Noah with Deucalion, the natural candidate from Greek mythology: see J. P. Lewis, *A Study of Noah* (Leiden, 1978), pp. 106–8. The identification was supported by Justin Martyr, *Apologia secunda pro Christianis* (PG 6, col. 455), but this view never won universal acceptance.

¹³ *Boethius*, ed. Sedgefield, p. 46, lines 16–17; and compare his telling of the story of Orpheus, pp. 101–3.

¹⁴ See R. Frank, 'Germanic Legend in Old English Literature', *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. M. Godden and M. Lapidge (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 88–106, at 92–5.

heroes and their descendants in relation to the one truly authoritative version of the world's early history. Genesis provided no explicit account of the origins of the Anglo-Saxons, or of any Germanic tribe, and this silence presented a gap which an imaginative genealogist could fill. The key figure in this integrating strategy in Wessex is the elusive Scaef, who appears in the genealogies as the ark-born son of Noah. This singular Anglo-Saxon invention is found in regnal lists and genealogies tracing Anglo-Saxon royal descent back to Adam, making his earliest appearance in the genealogy of Æthelwulf, king of Wessex, in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* s.a. 855 (= 857). In this investigation of Scaef's role in bridging the gap between the mythical past of northern Europe and biblical history, I propose to review the evidence of the surviving genealogies which evoke this link.¹⁵ This evidence suggests that the incorporation of Scaef into the genealogies is a West Saxon innovation and draws on West Saxon tradition, and that his transformation into the ark-born son is the product of Alfred's reign. This will be followed by a discussion of the possible sources of the apocryphal idea that Noah had a fourth son, and a survey of reactions to the unorthodox notion that the West Saxons and their kings claimed exclusive descent from an otherwise unknown son of Noah.

Kenneth Sisam, in the first serious study of the Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies, noted the agreement of the genealogies of London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius B. v (s. xi¹), and the B, C and D versions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* against the genealogy of Æthelwulf in A (the *Parker Chronicle*, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 173, fols. 1–56, s. ix/x–xi²), Asser's genealogy of Alfred, and the genealogy outlined by Æthelweard in his Latin *Chronicon*.¹⁶ Sisam also demonstrated that it was the version in Tiberius B. v which was most often copied in Scandinavian texts, citing its agreement with the Prologue to the *Prose Edda*, with the implication that Scaef at least was unknown in Scandinavia before he was imported from England.¹⁷ The Scandinavian copies agree with

¹⁵ F. Magoun, 'King Aethelwulf's Biblical Ancestors', *MLR* 46 (1951), 249–50, at 249, commented that 'whereas much attention has properly enough been given to King Aethelwulf's post-Biblical ancestors, his Biblical forebears have been slighted', and also suggests that the genealogy in Luke III is the more likely source for the biblical section of the royal genealogies than Gen. IV–V. Sisam, 'Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies', p. 320, was not particularly interested in the biblical connection: 'The biblical names show the artificial character of this lengthened pedigree and the crudeness of the connexions that passed muster. Otherwise they need not detain us.'

¹⁶ Sisam, 'Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies', p. 290. The E-version, the *Peterborough Chronicle* (Bodleian, Laud Misc. 636 (s. xii¹–xii^{med})): see N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford, 1957), no. 346), does not contain the genealogy s.a. 855. As a replacement copy made long after the passing of West Saxon hegemony, the genealogy may have been considered superfluous in this context by the copyist; see *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, ed. C. Plummer (Oxford, 1892–9), p. 67.

¹⁷ See Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 193, who dates this manuscript to the first half of the eleventh century;

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Tiberius B. v against *Textus Roffensis*, a later manuscript containing two genealogies which include mention of an ark-born son.¹⁸ The collection of the material which forms the ‘common stock’, Plummer’s ‘æ’,¹⁹ of the *Chronicle* from its beginning at 60 BC down to a point in the early 890s, was the work of several scholars associated with the circle around Alfred.²⁰ It is in the *Chronicle* version circulated during this latter part of Alfred’s reign, about the year 892, that the ark-born son first appears, but Sceaf seems to have made his appearance in the royal genealogy a little earlier and without this apocryphal origin.

Despite the fact that it post-dates the 890s version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, it is generally agreed that the genealogy in the Latin *Chronicon* of Æthelweard, which traces the ancestry of the royal house of Wessex back to Sceaf, represents an earlier tradition than the one found in the Alfredian *Chronicle*.²¹ Æthelweard’s *Chronicon*, written in the last quarter of the tenth century, is mainly a translation of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and presents the pedigree of Æthelwulf under the year 855.²² Æthelweard shows a general concern in his *Chronicon* to record not simply the bare bones of history, but also to emphasize links with the past, particularly the links between the Anglo-Saxons

see also *An Eleventh-Century Anglo-Saxon Miscellany: British Library Cotton Tiberius B. V Part I, together with leaves from British Library Cotton Nero D. II*, ed. P. McGurk, D. N. Dumville, M. R. Godden and A. Knock, EEMF 21 (Copenhagen, 1983), 33, where McGurk suggests that the manuscript dates from ‘the second quarter of the eleventh century, perhaps nearer to 1050 than to 1025’. The list is, in part at least, a Christ Church, Canterbury compilation of the time of Archbishop Sigeric (990–4). This is not to say that Tiberius B. v was the direct source of the Scandinavian versions; see Sisam, ‘Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies’, p. 290. A. C. Murray, ‘Beowulf, the Danish Invasions, and Royal Genealogy’, *The Dating of Beowulf*, ed. C. Chase (Toronto, 1981), pp. 101–12, at 105–6, suggests that Scyld and Sceaf are firmly Danish in Anglo-Saxon minds, and believes a Danish source to lie behind Æthelwulf’s pedigree; but the evidence of the Danish copies of the genealogies, where ‘se Sceaf’ is mistakenly copied as ‘Seskef’, suggests that the name was unfamiliar; see Faulkes, ‘Descent from the Gods’, pp. 99–101.

¹⁸ See R. W. Chambers, *Beowulf: an Introduction to the Study of the Poem*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, 1959), p. 203; for further discussion of these lists and others, see D. N. Dumville, ‘The West Saxon Genealogical Regnal List: Manuscripts and Texts’, *Anglia* 104 (1986), 1–32; ‘Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists’, pp. 72–104; ‘The Anglian Collection of Royal Genealogies and Regnal Lists’, *ASE* 5 (1976), 23–50; R. I. Page, ‘Anglo-Saxon Episcopal Lists’, *Nottingham Med. Stud.* 9 (1965), 2–24.

¹⁹ See *Chronicles*, ed. Plummer, pp. lxiv, lxx, lxxxii, xci, xciv and cij; also see A. Meaney, ‘St Neots, Æthelweard and the Compilation of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*: a Survey’, *Studies in Earlier Old English Prose*, ed. P. E. Szarmach (Albany, NY, 1986), pp. 193–243, at 201; for an alternative theory of the development of the *Chronicle*, see J. Bately, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: Texts and Textual Relationships*, Reading Med. Stud., Monograph 3 (Reading, 1991).

²⁰ See S. Keynes, ‘A Tale of Two Kings: Alfred the Great and Æthelred the Unready’, *TRHS* 5th ser. 36 (1986), 195–217, at 196–7; Sisam, ‘Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies’, p. 298.

²¹ *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. A. Campbell (London, 1962), p. 32.

²² Sisam, ‘Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies’, p. 314; Æthelweard shares the chronological dislocation of the Old English *Chronicle*.

and their Germanic past, integrated into a wider historical perspective which includes biblical history. His opening address to his kinswoman Matilda outlines some of his concerns: ‘De notitia equidem communis prosapiae, generis quoque et migratione, ut ante breuiter per epistolam insinuauimus tibi, nunc cooperante deo ab ipsius principio mundi annalem sumentes ritum . . .’²³ After surveying the six ages of the world, from its creation down to the present, Æthelweard moves on to describe the migration to Britain of the Anglo-Saxons under the leadership of Hengest and Horsa, grandsons of Woden, whom the Danes and others mistakenly honour as a god.²⁴ Later he offers a version of the genealogy of West Saxon monarchs, providing a version which suggests he was using a source independent from, and pre-dating, the Alfredian *Chronicle*. Not only is *Scyld* described as the son of *Scef*, a tradition suggested elsewhere only in *Beowulf*, but Æthelweard contains no reference to an ark-born son of Noah by any name, and indeed terminates his genealogy with *Scef* himself.²⁵ Æthelweard provides a unique account of *Scef*’s mysterious origins, though it bears some similarity to the account of *Scyld*’s arrival at the beginning of *Beowulf*: ‘Ipse *Scef* cum uno dromone aduectus est in insula oceani que dicitur Scani, armis circumdatus, eratque ualde recens puer, et ab incolis illius terræ ignotus. Attamen ab eis suscipitur, et ut familiarem diligenti animo eum custodierunt, et post in regem eligunt; de cuius prosapia ordinem trahit Aðulf rex.’²⁶ Sisam suggests that Æthelweard’s failure to mention the biblical names cannot lead to the assumption that they were absent from his copy of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*: ‘He may have preferred family tradition to a written *Chronicle* for the part beyond Geat. Besides, he was a great patron of the revival of religion and learning that marked the second half of the tenth century, and scholarly friends like Ælfric would not encourage belief in the fabulous birth in the Ark of an ancestor of *Scef*.’²⁷ This may be so, but it is far from certain that at the time of

²³ *Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. Campbell, p. 1 (‘Just as we have previously informed you by letter about what is known of our common family and also about the migration of our nation, it is now desirable, with the help of God, employing the annalists from the beginning of the world . . .’). ²⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 7 and 9.

²⁵ See A. Meaney, ‘*Scyld* Seefing and the Dating of *Beowulf* – Again’, *Bull. of the John Rylands Univ. Lib. of Manchester* 71 (1989), 7–40, at 13; none of the Scandinavian sources indicates that *Scyld*/*Skjold* came over the sea as a child; whether the tradition was originally English or Danish, or a common one, is a matter for conjecture.

²⁶ *Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. Campbell, p. 32 (‘And this *Scef* arrived with one light ship in the island of the ocean which is called Skaney, with arms all around. He was a very young boy, and unknown to the people of that land, but he was received by them, and they guarded him with diligent attention as one who belonged to them, and elected him king. From his family King Æthelwulf derived his descent’).

²⁷ ‘Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies’, p. 320; as I will show, *Scef* himself is usually the ancestor supposed to have been born in the ark.

the composition of his *Chronicon* Æthelweard had come under the influence of Ælfric.²⁸ Furthermore, Æthelweard's *Chronicon* is the only version to open with a description of the ages of the world, and a link back to Adam through Noah would have fitted comfortably into his universal outlook. Descent from an apocryphal son of Noah cannot have been worse than descent from a false god: Ælfric certainly would have approved of neither.²⁹

Meaney has argued that the version of the *Chronicle* used by Æthelweard occupied a position midway between the earliest version evidenced – that used by the St Neots compiler – and the common archetype (Plummer's 'æ') of all the extant versions of the *Chronicle* in Old English for two reasons: it has the chronological dislocation which St Neots lacks, but has on the other hand various features which appear more original than the Old English versions.³⁰ One such feature is the length of Æthelweard's genealogy of his ancestor Æthelwulf, which is shorter than that in the Old English *Chronicle*, and 'as a rule, shorter genealogies are older than longer ones: once a prestigiously long set of ancestors has been claimed, none of them is likely to be discarded deliberately – only by accidental omission'.³¹ As Meaney has suggested, the inclusion of the names from Heremod to Bedwig in the generations between Scyld and Sceaf took place at a stage after Æthelweard's hypothetical exemplar (perhaps related to the St Neots *Chronicle*) and before Plummer's 'æ'. Æthelweard carefully numbers his ancestors, nineteen generations from Æthelwulf to Sceaf, and these must have been included in the genealogy s.a. 855 by the genealogist of Æthelweard's pre-'æ' *Chronicle*. The ultimate extension back through the ark-born son to Adam can only be the work of genealogists of Alfred's reign.³²

Despite a degree of confusion, there is general agreement among the surviving versions of the Old English *Chronicle* genealogy of Æthelwulf in naming this ark-born son as Sceaf. The C-text, from Abingdon (London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius B. i, s. xi^{med}–xi²)³³ includes the genealogy of Æthelwulf s.a. 856, which concludes:

Geatt Tætwaing,
Tætwa Beawing,
Beaw Scældwaing,
Scældwa Heremodung,
Heremod Itermung,

²⁸ See Meaney, 'Scyld Scefig', p. 18n; *Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. Campbell, p.xiii.

²⁹ See Ælfric's comments on the northern gods in his homily *De falsis diis*, which present his barely concealed contempt for the errors in the Danes' accounts of the gods: *Homilies of Ælfric: a Supplementary Collection*, ed. J. C. Pope, 2 vols., EETS os 259–60 (London, 1968) II, 682–8.

³⁰ Meaney, 'St Neots, Æthelweard', pp. 201–3. ³¹ *Ibid.* p. 13.

³² Meaney, 'Scyld Scefig', p. 18; Meaney disputes the dates of some common archetypes, but this does not affect the present argument. ³³ Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 192.

Itermon Haðraing,
Haþra Hwalaing,
Hwala Bedwiging,
Bedwig Sceafig.

Id est filius Noe, se wæs geboren on þære earce Noes, Lamech, Matusalem, Enoh, Jared, Malalehel, Camon, Enos, Seth, Adam primus homo et pater noster id est Christus.³⁴

The B-text (London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius A. vi, s. x²), another Abingdon version, agrees with C.³⁵ The D-text (London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius B. iv, s. xi^{med}-xi²)³⁶ agrees with B and C in naming the ark-born son as Scaef, though with minor differences in the spelling of his name and other names found in this part of the genealogy:

Geat Tætwaing,
Tætwa Beawing,
Beaw Scealdwaing,
Scealdhwa Heremoding,
Heremod Itermoning,
Itermon Haðraing,

Haþra [. . .],
Hwala Beowing,
Beowi Sceafig,

id est filius Noe, se wæs geboren on þære arce Nones.³⁷

However, the A-text, which represents the earliest manuscript of the *Chronicle*, and so also the earliest extant reference to the ark-born son, suggests another name for him:³⁸

Geat Tætwaing,
Tætwa Beawing,
Beaw Sceldwaing,

³⁴ *The C-Text of the Old English Chronicles*, ed. H. A. Rositzke (Bochum-Lagandree, 1942), p. 29 ('Geat son of Tætwa, Tætwa son of Beaw, Beaw son of Scealdwa, Scealdwa son of Heremod, Heremod son of Itermon, Itermon son of Haþra, Haþra son of Hwala, Hwala son of Bedwig, Bedwig son of Scaef. He is the son of Noah, who was born in Noah's ark, Lamech, Methuselah, Enoch, Jared, Cainan, Enos, Seth, Adam the first man and our father, that is Christ').

³⁵ Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 188, art. 1. Chambers, *Beowulf: an Introduction*, p. 202: ' . . . Geata Tætwaing, Tætwa Beawing, Beaw Scealdweaing, Scyldwa Heremoding, Heremod Itermoning, Itermon Haðraing, Haðra Hwalaing, Hwala Bedwiging, Bedwig Sceafig, id est filius Noe, se wæs geboren on þære earce Noes.' ³⁶ Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 192.

³⁷ Chambers, *Beowulf: An Introduction*, p. 202.

³⁸ For a full discussion of the palaeography and date of this manuscript, see M. B. Parkes, 'The Palaeography of the Parker Manuscript of the Chronicle', *ASE* 5 (1976), 149–71, and D. N. Dumville, *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar* (Woodbridge, 1987), ch. 3; and his 'English Square Minuscule Script: the Background and Earliest Phases', *ASE* 16 (1987), 147–79, at 148.

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Sceldwea Heremoding,
Heremod Itermoning,
Itermon Hraþraing,

se wæs geboren in þære earce; Noe, Lamach, Matusalem, Enoh, Iaered, Maleel, Camon, Enos, Sed, Adam. primus homo et pater noster est Christus, Amen.³⁹

The implication here seems to be that Hraþra was Noah's son born in the ark, with the names of Hwala, Bedwig/ Beow and Sceaf, and the comment 'id est filius Noe' missing in this version. This is not the only version naming Hraþra as the apocryphal son: the badly damaged, and very closely related, London, British Library, Cotton Otho B. xi (Winchester, x^{med}-xi¹) version agrees.⁴⁰ Sisam suggested that this was the result of one scribe carelessly copying the mistakes of another which nobody had bothered to correct.⁴¹ It would seem that the Parker scribe has missed at least a whole line of text in his copying, and that the manuscripts with the longer genealogy naming Sceaf as the ark-born son represent the older tradition.

The genealogies found in the versions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* have close relatives which survive separately as royal genealogies.⁴² The West Saxon genealogy, which comes at the end of a series of royal genealogies in Tiberius B. v, traces the royal pedigree back to Adam through Noah.⁴³ This West Saxon genealogy works its way back to Christ, the 'father of all':

Haec sunt genealogiae regum Occidentalium Saxonum

...

Eat Beawing,
Beaw Scealdwaging,
Scealwa Heremoding,
Heremod Itermanning,
Iterman Haðraing,
Haðra Bedwiging,
Bedwig Sceafing.

Se Scef wæs Noes sunu, 7 he wæs innan þære earce geboren. Noe wæs Lameches sunu, Lamech Maþusalemys, Maþusalem wæs Enoches, Enoch, Lared, Malalehel, Caino, Enos, et Adam, primus homo, et pater omnium qui est Christus.⁴⁴

³⁹ *Chronicles*, ed. Plummer, pp. 66–7.

⁴⁰ Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 179; see also Sisam, 'Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies', p. 298.

⁴¹ Sisam, 'Royal Genealogies', pp. 315–16.

⁴² Dumville, 'Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists', pp. 83 and 86, has discussed both the similarities and differences in the character of genealogies and regnal lists: the former describe royal succession in terms of a pedigree, while the latter simply narrate transitions of power across political generations without necessarily relating these generations in patrilineal succession.

⁴³ Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 193.

⁴⁴ T. Wright and J. O. Halliwell, *Reliquiae Antiquae – Scraps from Ancient Manuscripts*, 2 vols. (London, 1841–3) I, 172–3.

According to Ker,⁴⁵ this text of the royal genealogy is nearly identical to those found in the *Textus Roffensis*. This statement should be treated with caution in relation to the ark-born son of Noah. The *Textus Roffensis* contains genealogies of both the West Saxon and Anglian royal houses, and it is this Anglian genealogy which uniquely offers the possibility that the character of Scaef the ark-born son has an independent textual life outside Wessex. There is, however, a curious difference between the two concerning the ark-born son: in the Anglian genealogy ‘Scyf’ is the son of Shem, while in the West Saxon ‘Scaef’ is son of Noah. The Anglian list begins:

Ðis ys Angel Cynnes Cyne Cynn þe her gemearcod is. Adam wæs se æresta man. 7 he gestrinde Seð. 7 Seð gestrinde Enos. 7 Enos gestrinde Kainan. 7 Kainan gestrinde Malaleel. 7 Maleel gestrinde Iared. 7 Iared gestrinde Enoch. Æfter Enoch wæs Matusalam. þa wæs Lamech. þa wæs Noe. þa wæs Sem. þa wæs Scyf. se wæs in ðam arken geboran. Ða wæs Bedwig. ða wæs Hwala. ða wæs Haþra. ða wæs Iterman. ða wæs Heremod. ða wæs Scealdra. ða wæs Beaw. ða wæs Teþwa. ða wæs Geata. ðene ða hæþena wurþedon for god.⁴⁶

The West Saxon genealogy in the *Textus Roffensis*, found in the manuscript immediately following the Anglian list, concludes:

Eata Teþwafing.
Teþwa Beawing.
Beaw Scealdwaging.
Scealwa Heremoding.
Heremod Hermanning.
Herman Haþraing.
Haðra Hwalaing.
Hwala Bedwining.
Beadwig Scaefing.
Se Scef wæs Noes sunu, 7 he wæs innan ðære earce geboren.

Noe wæs Lameches sunu. Lamech Maþusalemys. Maþusalem wæs Enoches. Enoch Iared. Malalehel. Caino. Enos. Et Adam primus homo. Et pater omnium qui est Christus.⁴⁷

According to Dumville this manuscript was written at Rochester in the first half of the twelfth century, probably soon after 1122,⁴⁸ and Page has suggested, on

⁴⁵ Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 193a.

⁴⁶ *Textus Roffensis*, ed. T. Hearne (Oxford, 1720), pp. 59–60 (‘This is the descent of the Anglian nation which is described here. Adam was the first man, and he fathered Seth, and Seth fathered Enos, and Enos fathered Mahaleel, and Mahaleel fathered Jared, and Jared fathered Enoch. After Enoch was Methuselah, then was Lamech, then was Noah, then was Shem, then was Scaef, who was born in the ark. Then was Bedwig, then was Hwala, then was Haþra, then was Itermon, then was Heremod, then was Scealdwa, then was Beaw, then was Tetwa, then was Geat, whom the heathen honoured as a god’).⁴⁷ *Textus Roffensis*, ed. Hearne, pp. 61–2.

⁴⁸ Dumville, ‘The Anglian Collection’, p. 28; Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 443, art. 7.

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the basis of evidence from accompanying episcopal lists, that the two manuscripts, *Textus Roffensis* and Tiberius B. v, may derive from a common exemplar.⁴⁹ The Anglian regnal list in Tiberius B. v (not the genealogy) reaches back only as far as Frealaf, suggesting that the ark-born son and the patriarchal extension to the genealogies were added later. The Tiberius B. v list would appear to have been compiled in the time of Sigeric, archbishop of Canterbury (990–4), though the manuscript is half a century later. This provides the earliest *terminus ad quem* for a common exemplar of the Anglian material.⁵⁰ It would seem likely then, that Scyf, the ark-born son of Shem, does not represent a separate Anglian tradition, but a mutated borrowing from the West Saxon royal genealogies.

Another text which must be included in an investigation of the Anglo-Saxons' line of descent from Noah is Asser's *Life of King Alfred*. At the beginning of his biography Asser traces Anglo-Saxon royal descent back to Adam, but in a way which presents problems in the search for the origins of an ark-born son. Where the Old English *Chronicle* had provided a pedigree of Alfred's father Æthelwulf which included the ark-born son, the *Life* traces the ancestry of Alfred back to Adam by a slightly altered route. Accepting Sisam's conclusion that the genealogy of Æthelwulf was added to the *Chronicle* in the version circulated around 892,⁵¹ the *Life*, a document contemporary with or post-dating this genealogical invention, not only omits ark-birth as a characteristic of this fourth son, but renames him as 'Seth', son of Noah:

Ælfred rex, filius Æthelwulfi regis; . . . qui fuit Geata, quem Getam iamdudum pagani pro deo venerabantur . . . Qui Geata fuit Tætuaa; qui fuit Beauu; qui fuit Sceldwea; qui fuit Heremod; qui fuit Itermod; qui fuit Hathra; qui fuit Hwala; qui fuit Beduwig; qui fuit Seth; qui fuit Noe; qui fuit Lamech; qui fuit Mathusalem; qui fuit Enoch; <qui fuit Jared;> qui fuit Malaleel; qui fuit Cainan; qui fuit Enos; qui fuit Seth; qui fuit Adam.⁵²

Sisam accounts for this variation Seth for Sceaf as a scribal error, which may well be the case. He claims that making Seth a son of Noah is 'unlikely' to have been Asser's own work, but argues that it represents scribal confusion involving Japheth: 'a careless scribe may have substituted *Seth* for *Sceaf*'.⁵³ Sisam only

⁴⁹ Page, 'Episcopal Lists', pp. 81–2. ⁵⁰ Dumville, 'The Anglian Collection', pp. 24–5.

⁵¹ See Sisam, 'Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies', p. 321.

⁵² *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, ed. W. H. Stevenson (Oxford, 1904), pp. 2–4; S. Keynes and M. Lapidge, *Alfred the Great: Asser's 'Life of King Alfred' and other Contemporary Sources* (Harmondsworth, 1983), p. 68 ('King Alfred was the son of king Æthelwulf, . . . the son of Geat (whom the pagans worshipped for a long time as a god) . . . Geat was the son of Tætwa, the son of Beaw, the son of Sceldwa, the son of Heremod, the son of Itermon, the son of Hathra, the son of Hwala, the son of Bedwig, the son of Seth, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, [the son of Jared], the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan, the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam').

⁵³ Sisam, 'Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies', p. 316.

touches on the problem, and does not endeavour to explain how such confusion could have arisen.⁵⁴ Lapidge and Keynes discuss Asser's genealogy in more detail, noting that while it is based on the genealogy of Æthelwulf in the *Chronicle* s.a. 855, 'Asser seems to have used a version that was significantly different from the versions in the manuscripts of the *Chronicle* that have survived, or to have made his own modifications to the version in front of him in the light of other information.'⁵⁵ However, the statement that 'Asser's "Seth", son of Noah, corresponds to the Sem of Luke III. 36–8 (cf. Gen. V. 32)' needs qualifying, as it is more likely that the Anglo-Saxons, and the Welsh, would have named Japheth, the progenitor of the Europeans, as their ancestor.⁵⁶ The confusion over the identity of Scaef may well be that of the Welsh Asser, perplexed by the inclusion in early biblical history of a figure who most likely derives from Anglo-Saxon legend. Whether this confusion was present in Asser's original, or represents the alteration or error of a later scribe is impossible to say.

Despite the confusion surrounding the identity of the ark-born son, the evidence of the majority of surviving genealogies suggests that he was originally identified as Scaef. The surviving written records also suggest, as Meaney has argued,⁵⁷ that Scaef was recast as Noah's ark-born son in Wessex towards the end of the ninth century, at a time when the royal house of Wessex was emerging as the unifying authority for those areas of England not under Viking control.⁵⁸ J. M. Wallace-Hadrill has noted the probable motivation for the growth of genealogies up until the 890s: the budding Anglo-Saxon royal houses needed to vindicate their status with an impressive ancestry as much after, as before, their conversion.⁵⁹ Germanic ancestors could no longer be identified as

⁵⁴ The discussion of this same problematic passage by M. Hunter, 'Germanic and Roman Antiquity and the Sense of the Past in Anglo-Saxon England', *ASE* 3 (1974), 29–50, at 45, seems less satisfactory: 'Asser, in the first chapter of his *Life of King Alfred*, inserted after the name "Geat" in Alfred's pedigree a passage from Sedulius describing the slave Geta, who appears in Terence, apparently assuming that he and the Germanic god were identical. The context of both was biblical: the compilers of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* thought it only proper to relate Woden and his companions to Noah, Enoch, Seth (who could be identified with the Germanic Scaef) and Adam.' Nor does the discussion of T. D. Hill, 'The Myth of the Ark-Born Son of Noah and the West Saxon Royal Genealogical Tables', *Harvard Theol. Rev.* 80 (1987), 379–83, at 380, satisfactorily explain the change: 'The error might have resulted from a conflation of the biblical "Sem" and the name "Scef" which is found in most of the other lists.' The more likely product of such a conflation, rather than confusion or a deliberate substitution, surely would be either 'Scem' or 'Sef'.

⁵⁵ See Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, p. 229; see also Sisam, 'Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies', pp. 301–2; Dumville, 'The Anglian Collection', pp. 34 and 37.

⁵⁶ Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, p. 229. ⁵⁷ Meaney, 'Scyld Scefing', p. 18.

⁵⁸ Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, pp. 37–41.

⁵⁹ Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship*, pp. 44–5; C. R. Davis, 'Cultural Assimilation in the Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies', *ASE* 21 (1992), 23–36, at 23.

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gods, so they settled on men of the same name. But this was a gradual process, and the ultimate extension during Alfred's reign of his own ancestry beyond these heroes, back through a righteous and redemptive figure such as Noah to Adam and ultimately Christ, the 'father' of all, took place long after the conversion.⁶⁰ Clearly the majority of names imported into the most remote sections of the genealogies were borrowed from Germanic mythology so as to enhance the status of the kings who claimed descent from them. Both Scyld and Scaef may have had mythological or folk origins, as their names suggest, and at least the simple meanings of these names probably would have been apparent to any Anglo-Saxon.⁶¹ No evidence survives of a folk tradition associating the harvest with a hero named 'Sheaf' among the Anglo-Saxons, though there is evidence of various customs focused on the harvested sheaf, including one which associated it with a shield.⁶² *Widsith* records the name 'Scaefa' for a king of the Lombards, suggesting there may have been poetry associated with the name which could have made a link with Noah more (or less) obvious to an Anglo-Saxon who read this name in the genealogies.⁶³ The Lombards themselves seem to have been unaware that they had been ruled by a king called *Scaefa*, though Paul the Deacon records that they believed themselves to have originated in Scandinavia.⁶⁴ But where did the genealogists of the house of Wessex find the tradition of an ark-born son of Noah, and why did they identify him with Scaef?

Such an invention clearly contradicts explicit biblical authority – the book of Genesis is unequivocal on the number of sons Noah had before and after the Flood, and leaves little room for those who would imagine the birth of another during the Flood. It might be supposed that the Anglo-Saxon invention of a fourth son born in the ark would rest on some Christian tradition, however unorthodox. Thomas Hill has suggested that the ark-born son has his origin in the apocryphal fourth son of Noah found in the *Apocalypse* of pseudo-Methodius, a work found in Latin and Greek versions.⁶⁵ Hill notes that the Anglo-Saxons knew the pseudo-Methodian *Apocalypse*, as it is cited by name in some late Old English and Latin notes in the *Old English Hexateuch*, and argues that this fourth son, named Jonitus in Latin 'was created to fill some special role

⁶⁰ See Davis, 'Cultural Assimilation', pp. 28 and 31.

⁶¹ See Meaney, 'Scyld Scefing', p. 15, on folk origins of names of Scaef and Scyld.

⁶² See Chambers, *Beowulf: an Introduction*, pp. 79–84 and 301–4; and H. M. Chadwick, *The Origin of the English Nation* (Cambridge, 1907), p. 278.

⁶³ *The Exeter Book*, ed. G. P. Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie, ASPR 3 (New York, 1936), p.150, line 32b: *Scaefa Longbeardum*; see also Meaney, 'Scyld Scefing', p. 16.

⁶⁴ *Pauli Historia Langobardorum*, ed. L. Bethmann and P. Waitz, MGH SS rer. Lang. 1 (Hanover, 1878), 53–4; also see Meaney, 'Scyld Scefing', p.16.

⁶⁵ See Hill, 'Ark-Born Son', p. 380; Hill does suggest that the identification of *Hraþra* as the ark-born son is a scribal error in the Parker *Chronicle*.

for which the biblical sons of Noe were not eligible.⁶⁶ This figure of Jonitus is described as a son of Noah who was sent by his father to the east. He therefore was not implicated in the building of the tower of Babel and he received esoteric wisdom directly from God. Hill quotes from the Latin translation of pseudo-Methodius describing Jonitus's journey to the east:

CCCmo vero tempore de trium milium annorum dedit Noe donationes filio suo Ionito et demisit eum in terram Eoam et post obitum Noe DC et XC anno in eosdem trium milium annorum ascenderunt filii Noe de terra Eoam et aedificaverunt sibi turrem in terra Sennahar, et illuc divise sunt linguae et disperse sunt super faciem totius terrae. Ionitus autem, filius Noe, introivit in Eoam usque ad mare, qui vocatur hiliu chora, id est regio solis, in quo solis ortum fit et habitavit ibidem. Ionitus accipit a Deo donum sapientiae, qui non solum hoc tantum, sed et omnem astronomiae articulum factusque inventor. Ad huc descendens Nebroth, qui fuit gigans, et eruditus ab eo accipit ab illo consilium, in quibus regnare coepissent. Hi[c] autem Nebroth ex filiis discendebat hiroum; qui fuit filius Sem et ipse primus regnavit super terram.⁶⁷

Hill argues that the significance of the inclusion of this fourth son of Noah in the genealogy rests on the ideological implications of his friendship with Nimrod: 'an Anglo-Saxon genealogist could have seen in a passage of this sort an authoritative extra-scriptural text which implied that the first king derived his authority from a son of Noe whom the Bible does not mention.' However, this argument for Jonitus as the source of the ark-born son, resting on the significance of the royal connection in the mind of an Anglo-Saxon genealogist, is far from convincing.⁶⁸ Such a notional link assumes close knowledge of the

⁶⁶ Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 142; Hill, 'Ark-Born Son', pp. 381–2; the text of the Old English notes is in *The Old English Version of the Heptateuch, Ælfric's Treatise on the Old and New Testament and his Preface to Genesis*, ed. S. J. Crawford, EETS os 160 (London, 1922), 418–22.

⁶⁷ Hill, 'Ark-Born Son', p. 382: 'In the 2300th year from Adam [the 300th year of the third millennium] Noe gave gifts to his son Jonitus and sent him into the land of Eoam, and after the death of Noe in the 690th year of the same third millennium of years, the sons of Noe ascended from the land of Eoam and built for themselves a tower in the land of Sennahar; and there were the languages divided, and they were scattered over the face of the earth. Jonitus, however, the son of Noe, entered into Eoam as far as the sea, which is called hiliu chora, that is the region of the sun, in which the sun rises, and he lived there. Jonitus received from God the gift of wisdom, [he] also [received] not only this, but also every division of astronomy and became its inventor. Descending to that one, Nebroth, who was a giant and taught by him, received counsel from him among whom they [Nebroth and Jonitus?] began to reign. This one [Nebroth] descended from the sons of heroes; he was a son of Sem and the first to reign on the earth.'

⁶⁸ Hill, 'Ark-Born Son', p. 383, does not force the argument: 'At any rate, an Anglo-Saxon antiquarian would not have had to invent the concept that Noe had a fourth son; the conception was current. And such an antiquarian, perhaps influenced by the story that Scēf or Scyld was brought to his people as an infant in a boat, hypothesized that the first ancestor of their kings was indeed born(e) on a boat – the ark of Noe.'

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text, a fact not at all verified, or verifiable, for the late ninth century. Such a knowledge would have been necessary if the inclusion of this son of Noah in the genealogy was to convey its meaning not only to the genealogist who introduced the ark-born son, but to his readers. Any significance the ark-born son might have had would need to be more immediately accessible to contemporary readers if his inclusion in the genealogies was worth the effort of contradicting the patristic belief that Anglo-Saxons, West Saxon kings included, descended from the biblically verifiable Japheth, a blessed son of Noah. A more serious difficulty is encountered when the passage in question is re-examined. Immediately before describing Jonitus's journey eastwards, pseudo-Methodius makes quite clear the timing of his birth in relation to the Flood: 'Iam in trium milium annorum, postquam exivit Noe de arca, aedificaverunt filii Noe novam possessionem in exteriora terra et appellaverunt nomen regionis illius Thamnon secundum nuncupationem numeri qui exierunt de arca, id est VIII. C. autem anno de terciam chiliadam natus est Noe filius secundum ipsius similitudinem et vocavit nomen eius Ionitum.'⁶⁹ Not only would an Anglo-Saxon genealogist have had to identify Jonitus with Sceaf, he would have knowingly contradicted this alternative apocryphal authority which clearly states he was not born on the ark. The prospect of ark-birth is further precluded by the careful enumeration of those who left the ark. Furthermore, it is unlikely that an association with Nimrod would be considered prestigious among the Anglo-Saxons. It is improbable that Alfred, or any other Anglo-Saxon, would have wanted to associate his kingship too closely with such a questionable character as the archetypal necromancer and idolator, a king described by Alfred himself as 'foolish'.⁷⁰

The valuable contribution of Hill's argument that Noah's fourth son, Jonitus, influenced the appearance of the ark-born son of Noah in Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies, is that 'the conception was current'.⁷¹ Stephen Gero has discussed the background to the legend of Noah's fourth son in Rabbinic literature, where his character was already problematic.⁷² The idea that Noah had more offspring than the three sons described in Genesis is found in the *Book of Adam*, where

⁶⁹ *Sibyllinische Texte und Forschungen – Pseudo-Methodius, Adso und die Tiburtinische Sibylle*, ed. E. Sackur (Halle, 1898), p. 63 ('Now in the third millennium, after Noah went out from the ark, the sons of Noah built new estates in the outer world and called that region Thamnon, according to the reckoning of the number of those who came out from the ark, that is eight. In the hundredth year of the third millennium a son was born to Noah, exactly like him, and his name was Jonitus').

⁷⁰ See *Boethius*, ed. Sedgefield, p. 99; other descriptions of Nimrod are even less flattering; see, for example, Bede, *In Genesim* (ed. Jones, pp. 144–6). ⁷¹ Hill, 'Ark-Born Son', p. 383

⁷² S. Gero, 'The Legend of the Fourth Son of Noah', *Harvard Theol. Rev.* 73 (1980), 321–30, at 321; Gero's interest is in the problems which the legend of the fourth son posed for orthodox Judaism, principally his suspect association with the necromancer Nimrod.

after the Flood Noah marries another wife who bears him six children.⁷³ But it was the *Book of the Cave of Treasures*, a sixth-century Syriac work based on a fourth-century account of biblical history, which introduced to Christian audiences Yonton (Jonitus), teacher of wisdom and astronomy to Nimrod. The *Apocalypse* of pseudo-Methodius is a Latin version based on a later Greek recension of this text.⁷⁴ The account of the fourth son found in the *Book of the Cave of Treasures* differs slightly from the Greek and Latin versions:

And in the days of Nimrod, the mighty man (or Giant), a fire appeared which ascended from the earth, and Nimrod went down, and looked at it, and he established priests to minister there, and to cast incense into it. From that day the Persians began to worship fire, [and they do so] to this day . . . And Nimrod went to Yokdora of Nodh, and when he arrived at the Lake (or Sea) of Atlas, he found there Yonton, the son of Noah. [A marginal note in BL MS Add. 25875 adds, 'Noah begot this Yonton after the flood and he honoured him in many things, and sent him to the east to dwell there.'] And Nimrod went down and bathed in the Lake, and came to Yonton and did homage to him. And Yonton said, 'Thou art a king; doest thou homage to me?' And Nimrod said unto him, 'It is because of thee that I have come down here'; and he remained with him for three years. And Yonton taught Nimrod wisdom, and the art of revelation (divining?), and he said unto him, 'Come not back again to me.'⁷⁵

The Syriac original was conceived by its author as a book of genealogical history, designed to explain clearly descent from the Old Testament patriarchs, and is also entitled 'The Book of the Order of the Succession of Generations'.⁷⁶ Only in the much altered Greek version does it take on a predominantly apocalyptic character. The marginal note mentioned in Budge's translation (the only one available in English) specifying the fourth son's post-diluvial birth superficially seems to agree with the text of the pseudo-Methodian *Apocalypse*. However, Budge's text is unrepresentative: it is made from a single Syriac manuscript, British Library, Add. 25875, which was copied only in 1709.⁷⁷ Carl Bezold's German translation and edition helps to place this marginal note in its correct context.⁷⁸ BL, Add. 25875, collated as 'A', is only one of eight manuscripts used by Bezold for his edition, and he observes that of the eight, only 'A' contains this marginal note.⁷⁹ The timing of Yonton's birth after the Flood is clearly stated in the Latin pseudo-Methodian *Apocalypse*, and in its Greek source, a version often only very loosely based on the Syriac. It is probable that the Syriac original did not specify that Noah's fourth son was

⁷³ Gero, 'Legend of the Fourth Son', p. 322.

⁷⁴ See *Sibyllinische Texte*, ed. Sackur, pp. 10–18 and 25.

⁷⁵ E. A. W. Budge, *The Book of the Cave of Treasures* (London, 1927), pp. 142–3.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 15 and 43. ⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p. xii. ⁷⁸ C. Bezold, *Die Schatzhöhle* (Leipzig, 1883, 1888).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 1888, pp. v–vi; 1883, p. 78, n. 115.

born after the Flood, and that the marginal note in BL, Add. 25875 represents the influence of the Greek textual tradition, found in pseudo-Methodius, on the Syriac. One of the problems encountered in establishing the *Apocalypse* of pseudo-Methodius as the source for the ark-born son of Noah in the genealogies is the fairly late appearance of this text in an Anglo-Saxon manuscript.⁸⁰ Twelfth-century marginal notes do not demonstrate, or even suggest, close knowledge of the text among ninth-century royal genealogists. However, it is possible that the notion that Noah had a fourth son could have come to Anglo-Saxon England much earlier, and not through the Latin *Apocalypse*, but from knowledge of the original Syriac *Book of the Cave of Treasures*. This is not to suggest that a copy of this work itself ever came to England in the period, or that any Anglo-Saxon ever read this work in the original language. However, knowledge of some of the details found only in this work is indicated by biblical commentaries associated with the Canterbury School, and suggests that Archbishop Theodore himself was acquainted with it.⁸¹ It is possible, if not probable, that Theodore knew Syriac, and he certainly knew Syriac biblical traditions, and he would have brought these with him to England in the seventh century.⁸² One such tradition, which he may have introduced into Anglo-Saxon England, was that Noah had a fourth son, an idea originally encountered in a text which was concerned with genealogies and racial origins, and one which did not specify when this fourth son had been born or what had become of his descendants. Such a notion may have gained currency in Anglo-Saxon England, and evolved divorced from its original setting in the *Book of the*

⁸⁰ See Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 142; *Heptateuch*, ed. Crawford, p. 418.

⁸¹ B. Bischoff and M. Lapidge, *Biblical Commentaries from the Canterbury School of Theodore and Hadrian*, CSASE 10 (Cambridge, 1994), 236–7. Two details which appear in the Canterbury commentaries suggest the acquaintance. The first, a comment on the fall discusses the conversation of Adam and Eve with the Lord in ‘the afternoon air’ (Gen. III.8). The Commentator cites an authority whom he calls John Chrysostom: ‘Ad auram post meridiem [III.8]: .i. incipiente septima hora, quia Iohannes Crisostomus dicit Adam factum tertia hora et sexta peccasse et quasi ad horam nonam eiectum de paradiso . . .’ (‘At the afternoon air [III.8]: that is at the beginning of the seventh hour, since John Chrysostom says that Adam was created at the third hour, sinned at the sixth hour and was cast out of paradise at the ninth hour . . .’, Pent. I. 44, pp. 310–11). This statement is in fact not found in any of the works of John Chrysostom, and the rigid scheme found in the commentary seems to be paralleled, and exactly, only in the *Book of the Cave of Treasures*. Lapidge describes the resemblance as ‘striking’ and notes that without a precise parallel in Greek the possibility of the influence of the Syriac work ‘cannot easily be argued away.’ The second comment which suggests the link to the *Book of the Cave of Treasures* is its precise parallel to the statement in Ev. II. 3 (p. 396), that after seeing their guiding star the Magi set off two years before Christ’s birth, in order to arrive in Bethlehem at the time of the Nativity.

⁸² Bischoff and Lapidge, *Biblical Commentaries*, p. 237. This is not to suggest that he brought Syriac books with him to England, or indeed that he had even read them himself: he may have been familiar only with ideas.

Cave of Treasures, until the reincarnation of the fourth son as Scaef, the ark-born son of Noah.⁸³

A degree of artistic licence would necessarily have been employed for an ark-born son to be included under the name of Scaef in the genealogies, a licence not at odds with the purpose of the genealogies themselves. They were not documents designed for asserting either theological truth or scientific history. As Dumville has noted, 'ideology is an essential aspect of the genealogist's trade: to discover the nature of his ideology is to acquire both useful historical evidence and a vital weapon in the historical criticism of pedigrees and king lists'.⁸⁴ To examine what possible meaning descent from the ark-born son/Scaef character could have conveyed, it will be helpful to consider aspects of the meaning of both sides of this double personality as son of Noah and royal ancestor. Hill's discussion of the cultural role of genealogies emphasizes the separateness they establish for kings:

the West-Saxon royal genealogy claimed that their kings were born outside the normal biblical genealogical order, from 'Scef' or some other figure born on the ark. There are anomalies and difficulties in these lists, but the essential content of the etiological myth which they summarize so succinctly is clear. The West Saxon kings are indeed descendants from Noah like the rest of mankind; but unlike the rest of us they are not descendants from Shem, Iafeth, or Ham, but from a fourth son of Noe, whose name (whatever it may be) is not recorded in the Bible.⁸⁵

This idea is complemented in Hill's view by the idea that at least after the conversion 'it was necessary to integrate the traditional Germanic genealogies into the larger perspective which biblical history suggested'.⁸⁶ But such views are surely exaggerated. By the 890s the Anglo-Saxons, and their kings, had been Christian for quite some time; generations of Christian kings had been untroubled by their pagan ancestry, and even its elaboration. The earlier extension which took the genealogies back to a figure such as Geat scarcely reveal an impulse to include the perspective of biblical history.⁸⁷ The shift back to the biblical patriarchs through the ark-born son is not a cultural development associated with the conversion, but rather with the ideological programme of the reign of Alfred, when the biblical names first appear in the genealogies. Furthermore, a restricted view of the genealogies as defining descent of aloof kings 'set apart from the families of the people' by a distinct pedigree ignores the wider func-

⁸³ See R. Mellinkoff, 'Cain's Monstrous Progeny in *Beowulf*: part I, Noachic Tradition', *ASE* 8 (1979), 143–62, at 158–9, who notes: 'Uncanonical materials may have been preserved as whole tracts or in portions, as individual stories or items. Moreover, materials were transmitted orally as well as in writing.'

⁸⁴ Dumville, 'Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists', p. 72.

⁸⁵ Hill, 'Ark-Born Son', p. 380.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* p. 381.

⁸⁷ Sisam, 'Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies', pp. 309–1 and 321.

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tion of genealogies as demonstrating a pure and legitimate line of descent of a royal house from ancestors shared with the rest of the nation. Davis has pointed out that what made a king's descent from common ancestors more important than that of his tribal subjects was 'the direct and demonstrable descent from divinity'.⁸⁸ The relationship of the king to his people was evocatively expressed in his title, the etymology of which cannot have been lost on any of his Anglo-Saxon subjects: he was *cyn-ing*.⁸⁹ A figure such as the ark-born son would have been particularly important to his royal descendants, but also to the whole nation to which the king belonged and which he governed. The concept of an ark-born son, in preference to a more conventional, and biblically acceptable, explanation of descent from Japheth, was deliberately chosen not to separate the king from his people, but because of the significance of shared communal descent from this figure; nevertheless, status is retained by the royal family who can trace this line of descent. Indeed, the genealogies' inclusion of heroes associated with other Germanic peoples invites the interpretation that these too shared this descent.⁹⁰

Few certainties emerge in the search for the origins of the ark-born son of Noah, known to us only from brief references in Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies. These pedigrees certainly served the purpose of legitimizing the power of the kings whose ancestry they claimed to trace. But as the more fabulous characters in the more extended versions of the genealogies are encountered, the nature of this claim to legitimacy has certainly moved well beyond its earlier function in the oral culture of a Germanic tribe.⁹¹ The introduction of literacy, and with it the possibility of transmitting accurate records, to Anglo-Saxon society with the advent of Christianity had made possible the consolidation of the royal genealogies and their great enlargement across several generations. The question which remains difficult to answer is why the genealogists chose to introduce the apocryphal figure of the ark-born son to establish their kings' descent from Noah. Royal genealogists in other early medieval societies, such as Wales and France, felt no need for such an invention when they desired to make a connection to early biblical history – the universally accepted convention was that European peoples were descended from Japheth, one of Noah's blessed sons, and ancestral ties to him were easily invented.⁹²

There was clearly a potential for an imaginative link between the character of Sceaf, as described in the *Chronicon* of Æthelweard, who according to tradition

⁸⁸ Davis, 'Cultural Assimilation', pp. 28 and 31.

⁸⁹ J. Bosworth, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, ed. T. N. Toller (Oxford, 1898), pp. 185–6.

⁹⁰ Faulkes, 'Descent from the Gods', p. 94, notes the ease with which Anglo-Saxon pedigrees became attached to different Scandinavian royal houses.

⁹¹ See Dumville, 'Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists', pp. 76, 79, 83 and 86.

⁹² See Faulkes, 'Descent from the Gods', p. 103, n. 42.

mysteriously arrived in ‘Scani’ from across the waters, and the story of Noah’s Flood. Other traditions, now beyond reach, may have made such a link more or less obvious.⁹³ *Beowulf*, the only other Anglo-Saxon text with a similar story, offers a different version of events, and describes Scyld’s arrival from across the waters in Scedeland.⁹⁴ Meaney, following Chambers, suggests one possible reason for the transformation of Scaef into a son of Noah in the *Chronicle* genealogies: ‘Scaef himself stands effectively where he did in Æthelweard’s copy of the *Chronicle* at the head of the genealogy, but with his provenance strangely changed: “Bedwig Scaefing, id est filius Noe, se was geboren in þære earce Noes” – a statement which surely proves that the motif of the hero coming over the sea as a child must here belong to Scaef, or what would have been the point of his transmogrification?’⁹⁵ Meaney has sought to establish that *Beowulf* represents a distorted version of events; but this is probable, not certain. A part of her argument itself rests on the genealogical link between the maritime Scaef and his diluvial double. The underlying assumption of the argument advanced by Meaney and others is the potency of the myth centring on the character of Scaef himself as providing the link to Noah in Anglo-Saxon perception.⁹⁶ But such speculations should be treated with caution. The ark-born son’s varying name, and even parentage, suggests that Scaef’s legendary identity may not have been immediately obvious, even in Anglo-Saxon England, at any great remove from the West Saxon genealogists who connected his watery origins to Noah. It seems Scaef himself was not so important to subsequent copyists as the unique link to Noah provided by the ark-born fourth son, whatever his name. I would suggest that in the minds of the royal genealogists, while the mythological Scaef must originally have held some significance in their grafting of the Germanic past onto the biblical story of Noah, it was his function in providing the privileged descent through an ark-born son which continued to be of paramount

⁹³ A degree of caution is necessary when tracing the flow of ideas between two cultures, especially two as closely related as Anglo-Saxon and early Scandinavian. The assumption that traditions concerning Scaef are Danish in origin should be regarded as simply that: an assumption.

⁹⁴ S. Newton, *The Origins of Beowulf and the Pre-Viking Kingdom of East Anglia* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 74–5, discusses the significance of the use of this apparently more ancient Old English form in *Beowulf*.

⁹⁵ Meaney, ‘Scyld Scefing’, p. 19. This view is supported by Davis, ‘Cultural Assimilation’, p. 30: ‘In the pedigree of Alfred’s father Æthelwulf, recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (*sub anno* 855) . . . Scaef is rationalized as a fourth son of Noah born in the Ark, perhaps as an attempt to reconcile native and biblical accounts of a divinely directed ship bearing ancestors.’ J. M. Kemble, *Ueber die Stammtafel der Westsachsen* (Munich, 1836), pp. 8, 10–11 and 15, long ago offered a retrospective interpretation of traditions associated with Scaef in the works of post-Conquest writers and German folk traditions; see also K. Müllenhoff, *Beowulf – Untersuchungen über das angelsächsische Epos und die älteste Geschichte der germanischen Seevoelker* (Berlin, 1889), pp. 5–11.

⁹⁶ See Hill, ‘Ark-Born Son’, p. 383; Chambers, *Beowulf: an Introduction*, p. 80.

importance.

The fusion of the heroic Germanic past with the world of the biblical patriarchs which the invention of Sceaf as the fourth son of Noah suggests is certainly an ideological innovation appropriate to the reign of Alfred. Alfred's personal interest in the biblical past is well documented, and the impact it had on his regal imagination was arguably his most profound inspiration.⁹⁷ Of course, earlier Anglo-Saxons had both a reverence for scripture and an acute awareness of their connections to the continental Germans.⁹⁸ But this would not have been an awareness, particularly in the earlier period of evangelization, which would have embraced too many recently de-deified pagan gods as shared ancestors.⁹⁹ By the ninth century, however, royal genealogists did not hesitate to borrow the names of by now thoroughly human Germanic heroes to enhance their masters' pedigrees. Roberta Frank has suggested there was even a positive trend in this direction at the time, and Alfred himself clearly shared an interest in the 'Germanic' past of the English.¹⁰⁰ Whatever the original inspiration behind the incarnation of Sceaf as Noah's ark-born son, this genealogical creation suggests that at least the West Saxon genealogists desired to create for their kings – and implicitly for the Anglo-Saxons and all those who shared their common origin – a unique relationship with Noah, the second father of the human race. The implicit extension of this sense of uniqueness to include their Germanic cousins, who like the Anglo-Saxons themselves are not accounted for by the 'true' version of early world history found in Genesis, claimed for the West Saxons a privileged place among the northern peoples. Their genealogies make the prior claim to exclusive descent, with their own traditions preserving a memory of racial origins concerning which biblical history is silent, and other northern peoples are ignorant.

In the decades after the invention of Sceaf as Noah's fourth son, born in the ark, the idea that the Anglo-Saxons could trace their descent to this apocryphal figure undoubtedly received broad circulation in England. Wherever a text of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* was found, in the authoritative Alfredian version, belief in the historical veracity of Noah's fourth son, and the nation's privileged

⁹⁷ Keynes, 'A Tale of Two Kings', pp. 209–10; Asser frequently comments on the king's reverence for scripture, particularly the psalms: see *Life of King Alfred*, ed. Stevenson, chs. 24, 76, 88, 99 and 103.

⁹⁸ See D. Whitelock, *English Historical Documents, vol. 1: c.500–1042*, 2nd ed. (London, 1979), no. 174.

⁹⁹ Bede's apparent scepticism on royal descent from Woden may not have been widespread: see *Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 50; see also Hunter, 'Germanic and Roman Antiquity', p. 31. Also compare Guthlac's reflection on the valiant deeds and ignominious ends of famous Germanic kings, *Felix's Life of Guthlac*, ed. B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1956), pp. 80–2. ¹⁰⁰ See Frank, 'Germanic Legend', pp. 94–5.

descent from him, might also be found. It is not likely that all Anglo-Saxon scholars, particularly in the new intellectual climate fostered by the Benedictine revival, would have found such a belief acceptable. Ælfric was one such scholar, and his concern for rooting out apocryphal error is well documented.¹⁰¹ Noah and the Flood, a man and an event of pivotal significance in the history of the world, are frequently mentioned in the works of Ælfric. And in the many texts in which he discusses the Flood, Ælfric consistently takes care to include and emphasize one particular detail among all others – the number of people saved in the ark. This concern, emphasized in some of his earliest works, is found even in his briefest references to the Flood. Ælfric's First Series homily *De initio creaturae*, which provides an overview of the major events of salvation history, offers a detailed treatment of Noah and the Flood. The sermon moves directly from the fall of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from the Garden on to a description of the Flood. In the account of the deluge provided by Ælfric, Noah's role as progenitor is implied in the wording of God's command to him to gather his family into the ark with the animals and birds:

þa wearð þa hrædlice micel mennisc geweaxen. and wæron swiðe manega on yfel awende. and gegremodon god mid myslicum leahtrum. and swiðost mid forligere; þa wearð god to ðam swiðe gegremod þurh manna mandæda þæt he cwæð þæt him ofþuhte þæt he æfre mancyn gesceop; Ða wæs hwæpere an man rihtwis ætforan gode. se wæs noe gehaten; þa cwæð god to him; Ic wille fordon eal mancyn mid wætere. for heora synnum. Ac ic wille gehealden þe ænne and þin wif. and þine þry suna. sem. and cham. and iafeð. and heora þreo wif. for ðon þe ðu eart rihtwis. and me gecweme . . . Ic gegaderige into ðe of deorcynne and of fugelcynne simle gemacan. þæt hi eft to fostre beon; Ic wille sendan flod ofer ealne middanearð.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ See P. Clemoes, 'Ælfric', *Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature*, ed. E. G. Stanley (London, 1966), pp. 176–209, at 184.

¹⁰² *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies. The First Series. Text*, ed. P. Clemoes, EETS ss 17 (London, 1997), 184–5, lines 177–89; abbreviations have been expanded silently ("Then was the human race quickly and greatly increased, and very many were turned to evil, and provoked God with various iniquities, and mostly with fornication. Then God was so greatly provoked because of the evil deeds of humanity that he said that he regretted that he had ever created the human race. Then, however, one man was righteous before God; he was called Noah. Then God said to him, "I will destroy the whole human race with water, for their sins, but I will protect you alone, and your wife, and your three sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and their three wives, because you are righteous and acceptable to me . . . And I will gather for you all kinds of beasts and birds and mates for each, so that later they will be able to breed. And I will send a flood over all the earth"). On the sources of the passage, see M. Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, EETS ss 18 (Oxford, 2000), 13; M. Förster, 'Über die Quellen von Ælfric's exegetischen Homiliae Catholicae', *Anglia* 16 (1894), 1–61, at 56–7, could find no direct source; for the sermon's context in the catechetical tradition, see V. Day, 'The Influence of the Catechetical *narratio* on Old English and some other Medieval Literature', *ASE* 3 (1974), 51–61, at 56–9.

The careful enumeration of the members of Noah's family who will be passengers in the ark is Ælfric's own summary, conflating God's less numerically precise command found in Gen. VI.18 and the description of the entry into the ark found in Gen. VII.13. His version of God's command makes clear at the outset the number of people who went into the ark, and in a biblical account crowded with mystically significant numerical details, the numbering of the four men and four women is one of the few retained by Ælfric.¹⁰³ A more cursory treatment of the Flood is found in Ælfric's homily for *Dominica XXI post Pentecosten*, which expands Gregory the Great's exposition of the parable of the wedding of the king's son.¹⁰⁴ As a part of the development of the spiritual meaning of the text, Ælfric outlines some significant details, including the number of those saved in the ark: 'On þære þriddan fleringe wunede noe mid his wife and his þry suna mid heora þrim wifum.'¹⁰⁵ He goes on to explain the spiritual significance of the three floors of the ark – but does not provide any explanation of the significance of the detail concerning Noah and his family. In fact, this careful enumeration is one of the few details not found in this section of Gregory's homily outlining the allegory of the ark, but has been inserted here by Ælfric. Ælfric's second series homily *Dominica II post Aepiphania Domini* is based on Bede's homily for the same occasion, and develops the allegory of the jars at Cana as representative of the six ages of the world. Noah's role in salvation history is presented in clear terms, stressing the patriarch's key role in the universal regeneration after the Flood,¹⁰⁶ which marks the turning point between the world's first age and the second: 'on ðære oðre ylde þissere woulde wearð eal middaneard mid flodes yðum adylegod for synna micelnysse. buton ðam rihtwisan Noe anum. and his seofon hiwon. þe on ðam arce belocene wæron to anes geares fyrste. and hi siððan eal mancyn gestryndon'.¹⁰⁷ Ælfric, however, has altered Bede's original here: 'Secunda aetate saeculi inchoante deletus est aquis diluuii mundus ob peccatorum magnitudinem,

¹⁰³ This assertion is carried over into Wulfstan's Homily 6, based largely on Ælfric's *De initio creaturae*. *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, ed. D. Bethurum (Oxford, 1957), p. 46, lines 56–69.

¹⁰⁴ Matt. XXII.1–14; *First Series*, ed. Clemons, pp. 476–85.

¹⁰⁵ *First Series*, ed. Clemons, p. 484, lines 264–6 ('On the third floor dwelt Noah with his wife and his three sons with their three wives'). For a discussion of the source of this passage, see Godden, *Introduction*, pp. 297–8, and J. E. Cross, 'Bundles for Burning – A Theme in Two of Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies* – With Other Sources', *Anglia* 81 (1963), 335–46, at 343–4; see also C. Smetana, 'Ælfric and the Early Medieval Homiliary', *Traditio* 15 (1959), 163–204, at 194; and Förster, 'Die Quellen', no. 51, for earlier discussion of the sources; Gregory's *Hom. xxxviii* is in *Homiliae in Euangelia*, ed. R. Étaix, CCSL 141 (Turnhout, 1999), 359–78.

¹⁰⁶ *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies. The Second Series. Text*, ed. M. R. Godden, EETS ss 5 (London, 1979), 32, lines 84–5.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* p. 33, lines 111–29 ('In the second age of this world all the earth was destroyed for the greatness of sins, except the righteous Noah alone and his seven relatives, who were locked in the ark for the duration of a year, and afterwards they propagated the whole human race'). See Godden, *Introduction*, p. 375.

sed solus Noe est propter iustitiam cum domo sua liberatus in archa.¹⁰⁸ Ælfric adds the numerical detail in his version, so placing a greater emphasis on Noah's progenitorial role, and drawing further attention to his concern for the number of people saved in the ark. Whatever Ælfric's motivation, Noah and his seven relatives are more clearly and firmly locked in Ælfric's ark than in Bede's.¹⁰⁹

This concern for the number of those in the ark becomes an emphatic insistence in his treatise dedicated solely to discussion of the six ages of the world, where Ælfric again focuses on the cosmic significance of the Flood. This text, his own composition from a variety of sources, presents a summary of the details which Ælfric considered most important in the Flood story (lines 15–45):

Deos is seo forme yld. þissere worulde.
fram Adame. oð Noe. to þam cwæð ure drihten
ðe ic sceowode. ætforan me rihtwisne. on þissere mægðe.
gemaca nu forþig ænne mycelne arc eall gerefedne.
ic wylle adrencan and adydan eall þis mennisc mid wætere.
buton þe 7 þinum þrim sunum. 7 eowrum sinnhiwum;
Ge eahta sceolon wunian on þam arce . . .
7 of eallum nytenum ic gegaderie into eow.
þæt ge magon to fostre æfter þam flode . . . 7
. þæt eall þeos woruld ne wurðe adylegod;
Noe þa geworhte þone wunderlican arc
(. . .) him oninnan. ær þam þe þæt flod come
mid his þrim sunum; Sem. Cham 7 Iafeth
7 eac mid his gebeddan. 7 his bearna wifum.
. . .
þæt flod ða weox under þam fleotendan arce.
7 adrencte endemes ælc þing cucas
buton þam eahta mannum þe on ðam arce wæron.
7 buton þam orfcynne þe binnan wæs.
of þam com syþþan eall þæt nu cucu is;
Noes sunan ða syðþan gestryndon twa 7 hundseofontig sunana.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ *Opera homiletica. Opera rhythmica*, ed. D. Hurst, CCSL 122 (Turnhout, 1955), 95–104; *Bede the Venerable: Homilies on the Gospels: Book One: Advent to Lent*, trans. L. T. Martin and D. Hurst (Kalamazoo, MI, 1991), p. 140: 'As the second age of the world began, the world was destroyed by the waters of the flood because of the great number of sinners, and only Noah, together with his household, was delivered in the ark on account of his righteousness.'

¹⁰⁹ The sources are discussed by Förster, 'Die Quellen', no. 79, and Smetana, 'Early Medieval Homiliary', p. 196.

¹¹⁰ H. C. L. Tristram, *Sex aetates mundi: Die Weltzeitalter bei den Iren und den Angelsachsen* (Heidelberg, 1985), pp. 195–6, lines 15–45 ('This is the first age of this world, from Adam until Noah, to whom our Lord said, I have beheld you righteous before me among this generation. Therefore, make a great ark now, completely fixed, and I will drown and destroy the entire human race with water, except you and your three sons, and your companions. You eight will dwell in the ark . . . and I will gather every kind of beast for you, so that you can prosper after the flood . . . and so that

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Ælfric is concerned here to emphasize, and re-emphasize, not only the salvation of the eight in the ark, but also carefully to define Noah's relationship to the seventy-two nations descended from his three sons. Ælfric takes particular care here to stress only certain aspects of the Genesis account. The sinfulness of the antediluvian world, associated with Adam, is contrasted with Noah's piety (lines 17–19). Only certain numbers are mentioned: the salvation of eight (and only eight) people in the ark is mentioned three times (lines 20–1, 27–8, 38); the origin of the seventy-two nations in Noah's three sons (lines 40–1). The only number without genealogical significance preserved from the Genesis account is the forty days of rain, mentioned only once.

Ælfric's concern, on each occasion when he mentions the Flood to stress that only eight people were saved in the ark, is paralleled by a similar concern to articulate in certain terms how the nations of the world descended from these eight. These facts from biblical history are straightforwardly set out in Ælfric's Old English version of Alcuin's *Interrogationes Sigeuulfi in Genesis*.¹¹¹

INT: Hu wæs þes middan eard todæled æfter þam flode?

RESP: Se yldesta noes sunu sem gestrynde mid his sunum seofon 7 twentig suna. 7 hi gebogodan þone east dæl middaneardes þe is gehate asia. Se oðer noes sunu cham gestrynde mid his sunum þrirtig suna. 7 hy gebogodan þone suðdæl þe is gehaten. affrica. Se þridda noes sunu iafeth gestrynde mid his sunum fiftyne suna. 7 þa gebogodan norðdæl. þe is gehaten europa. þas ealle togædere syndon twa 7 hund seofontig þeoda. 7 swa fela leorning cnihta sende crist to bodigenne þone soðan geleafan ealne middaneard;

Ælfric has modified his source in a couple of ways. Alcuin's question CXLI had simply listed the three sons of Noah, while Ælfric suggests a ranking by age.¹¹² A second minor detail which Ælfric has added, and which seems a logical expansion of Alcuin's list of continents, is the direction of the dispersal, which leaves

this world might not be completely annihilated. Noah then made the wondrous ark (. . .) before the flood came he [went] inside it with his three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, and also with his wife, and his sons' wives . . . The flood then rose under the floating ark, and drowned entirely all living things except the eight people who were in the ark and the beasts which were inside. And from those descended all which is now living. Noah's sons later fathered seventy-two sons').

¹¹¹ G. E. Maclean, 'Ælfric's Version of the Interrogationes Sigeuulfi in Genesis', *Anglia* 6 (1883), 425–73, and *Anglia* 7 (1884) 1–59, at 38–40 ('Question: How was the earth divided after the flood? Answer: Shem, Noah's eldest son, fathered twenty-seven sons, and they inhabited the eastern part of the earth which is called Asia. Noah's second son, Ham, fathered thirty sons, and they inhabited the southern part which is called Africa. Japheth, Noah's third son, fathered fifteen sons, and they inhabited the northern part, which is called Europe. Altogether this makes seventy-two nations, and Christ sent out the same number to preach the true faith to all the world').

¹¹² *Ibid.* p. 39: 'De Japhet nati sunt filii quindecim. de Cham triginta. de Sem viginti septem.' ('From Japheth were born fifteen sons, from Ham thirty, from Shem twenty-seven.') See Alcuin, *Interrogationes et responsiones in Genesis*, CXLI (PL 100, col. 532).

Japheth's descendants occupying the *norðdal* ('northern part'). This interest in specifying the northern descendants of Noah is found in another of Ælfric's works. His *Letter to Sigeward* is a text concerned with outlining the details of salvation history.¹¹³ The epistle suggests the desire on Ælfric's part to articulate the details of Noah's historical role from the point of view both of biblical history and ethnography, including details of humanity's slide into sin after the fall of Adam and Eve, leading to the Flood: 'and Caines ofspring, þe him of com, siððan eall wearð adrenced on þam deopan flode, þe on Noes dagum adyde eall mancinn buton þam eahta mannum, ðe binnan þam arce wæron, and of þam yfelan teame ne com nan ðing siþþan . . . Noe and his wif and heora þri suna, Sem, Cham and Iafeth mid heora þrim wifum.'¹¹⁴ Ælfric has discussed these issues elsewhere,¹¹⁵ but the details which he considers it necessary to include here in his quick summary are not accidental: eight survived the Flood in the ark to continue the human race. Noah, his wife, and their three sons and their wives survived, and every living creature outside the ark was destroyed. Not only does Ælfric mention that there were only eight people in the ark, but he also describes who they were. Here, these are the only numbers mentioned. Ælfric turns to the meaning of these events soon after, once again taking particular care to mention that eight were saved in the ark, while all others perished. He also explains how the seventy-two nations, the whole of the post-diluvial population of the world, descend from them: 'Noe, þe on ðam arce wæs on ðam miclum flode, þe ealle woruld adrencete buton þam eahta mannum, ys gereht requies, þæt is 'rest' on Englisc; . . . Nu segð us seo boc be Noes ofspringe, þæt his suna gestrindon twa and hundseofontig suna.'¹¹⁶ Theological considerations, similar to those found elsewhere, necessitate the articulation of the pure Hebrew line which leads to Abraham, and eventually to Christ.¹¹⁷ When discussing the descent of nations other than the Hebrews, based on a commonplace patristic elaboration of the

¹¹³ See Day, 'The Influence of the Catechetical *narratio*', pp. 56–9.

¹¹⁴ *Heptateuch*, ed. Crawford, p. 22, lines 145–61 ('and Cain's offspring, who were descended from him, were all destroyed later in the deep flood, which in Noah's day destroyed the whole human race except the eight people who were in the ark, and from that evil line nothing else came afterwards . . . Noah and his wife and their three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, with their three wives').

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 22, lines 163–4, 'we oft habbað ymbe þis awriten' ('we have often written about this').

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 24, lines 195–214 ('Noah, who was in the ark during the great Flood, which drowned all the world except those eight people, is interpreted *requies*, that is 'rest' in English; . . . Now the book tells us concerning his offspring, that his sons fathered seventy-two sons').

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 25, lines 239–42: 'Of Noes yldstan sunu, þe wæs Sem gehaten, com þæt Ebreisce folc, þe on God gelifde' ('From Noah's eldest son, who was called Shem, descended Hebrew people, who believed in God'). This concern with the pure line of descent preserved from idolatry also receives special mention in his *Sex aetates mundi*, lines 58–9: 'buton Israhela folce. þe on God gelyfde . . . se þe com of Sem Noes yldstan suna' ('except the Hebrew people, who believed in God . . . who descended from Shem, Noah's eldest son').

genealogies of Genesis X, Ælfric also offers an aside presenting a unique, and apparently superfluous, detail in the context of the orthodox tradition which he is transmitting: ‘Of Cham, Noes suna, com þæt Chananeisce folc, and of Iaphet, þam ginstan, þe wæs gebletsod þurh Noe, com þæt norðerne mennisc be þære Norðsæ, for þan þe ðri dælas sind gedælede þurh hig, Asia on eastrice þam yldstan suna, Affrica on suððæle þæs Chames cynne, and Europa on norðdæle Iapheþes ofspringe.’¹¹⁸ The affirmation that Japheth was blessed follows appropriately after the mention of Ham and his cursed Canaanite descendants. And the almost tautological description of Japheth, the proto-European, as the ancestor of the ‘northern’ people by the ‘north-sea’, the continental Germanic peoples from whom the Anglo-Saxons descended, is a logical inference. But the insistent repetition of this detail here in Ælfric’s composition brings together what emerge as two pervasive concerns: eight people survived the universal deluge in the ark, and one of them, Japheth, was the ancestor of all the peoples of northern Europe, including those by the northern sea.¹¹⁹

It is probable that the Old English version of the *Interrogationes* was made by Ælfric as a companion work for his translation of Genesis, explaining the mystical interpretation of particular passages, and clarifying potentially confusing points.¹²⁰ In his translation of Genesis,¹²¹ Ælfric completely omitted the extended genealogical section (Gen. X–XI). He may have believed it was unnecessarily confusing, as these two chapters provide a complex account of the origin of the nations, which without glossing would fail to account for the origins of the Anglo-Saxons and other Europeans.¹²² The account of racial

¹¹⁸ *Heptateuch*, ed. Crawford, p. 27, lines 274–84 (‘From Ham, Noah’s son, came the Canaanite nation, and from Japheth, the youngest, who was blessed by Noah, came the northern people beside the north sea, because the three parts are divided in them, Asia in the eastern kingdom for the eldest son, Africa in the southern part to the family of Ham, and Europe in the northern part for Japheth’s offspring’).

¹¹⁹ This geographic statement may also allude to other beliefs about the descent of the peoples of the north, especially the Vikings; see Abbo’s *Passio S. Eadmundi, Three Lives of English Saints*, ed. M. Winterbottom (Toronto, 1972), p. 72.

¹²⁰ P. Clemoes, ‘The Chronology of Ælfric’s Works’, *The Anglo-Saxons: Studies in Some Aspects of their Literature and Culture, presented to Bruce Dickins*, ed. P. Clemoes (London, 1959), pp. 212–47, at 244–5. ¹²¹ *Heptateuch*, ed. Crawford, pp. 81–143.

¹²² See J. Raith, ‘Ælfric’s Share in the Old English Pentateuch’, *RES* 203 (1952), 305–14, at 309–10, who disagreed with K. Jost, ‘Unechte Ælfric-Texte’, *Anglia* 51 (1927), 177–219, on the matter of the authorship of the translation of Genesis IV–V, X–XI; *Homilies of Ælfric*, ed. Pope I, 36 n. 1, agrees that ‘it is probably wise to question the authenticity of both the extant versions of Genesis iv, v, x and xi’; Clemoes believed that Ælfric’s translation resumes not at Gen VI.1 but rather at V.32, giving Noah’s age and the names of his three sons; see P. Clemoes, ‘The Composition of the Old English Text’, *The Old English Illustrated Hexateuch, British Museum Cotton Claudius B. iv*, ed. C. Dodwell and P. Clemoes, EEMF 18 (Copenhagen, 1974), 44–5. On Ælfric’s treatment of catalogues in his translation, see also R. Marsden, ‘Ælfric as Translator: the Old English Prose Genesis’, *Anglia* 109 (1991), 319–58, at 342.

origins found in the Old English *Interrogationes*, which perhaps should be understood as Ælfric's replacement for the genealogies of Gen. X–XI, was composed earlier than that found in the *Letter to Sigeward*. This later work, written in the period 1005–6, presents emphases not found in Ælfric's earlier, more compact account written somewhere between 992–1002. Indeed, his treatise *On the Six Ages of the World*, with its emphatic treatment of the unique salvation of Noah and his family in the ark, is from the same late period.¹²³ In the light of this evidence, it is possible to detect an insistence on orthodoxy in Ælfric's discussion of the question of descent from Noah and his three sons, which becomes more urgent in his later writings. In this detailed scheme there is no room for doubt: the peoples by the northern sea, including Ælfric and his Anglo-Saxon audience, descended from Noah's son Japheth. This is a clear contradiction of the account offered in the royal genealogies. It has been noted that royal genealogies are not texts concerned with the statement of orthodox theological truth: they are concerned more with political ideology. But for other writers, including Ælfric, theological concerns were primary, and it is not likely he would have approved of such a notion as an apocryphal son of Noah. But it is just as unlikely that he would have chosen to do more than emphasize the orthodox position. An overt contradiction should not be expected from a Winchester-educated West Saxon such as Ælfric, a subject of beleaguered West Saxon kings who believed in their unique line of descent, writing at a time of renewed Viking attack, and when the ideology expressed by Noachic descent through the apocryphal son may still have held some potency.

A reaction against the notion of Anglo-Saxon descent from an ark-born son can also be detected in a textually corrupt note in British Library, Cotton Tiberius A. iii, fols. 43–4, a mid-eleventh-century Canterbury compilation of monastic texts, prognostics, prayers and notes.¹²⁴ The note is uncompromising in its tone, suggestive of controversy in relation to the number of people saved in the ark, and the total number of Noah's offspring:

Noe se heah fæder hæfde þry sunu þa wæron þus hatene. sem. cham. iaphet. 7 of þam þrim sunum wearð onwæcnad. 7 awridad eall manna cynn wearð on besenced 7 þæt næfre to lafe ne wearð ma þonne him eahtum. ac hit eall se gifra flod forswalh. 7 forgrinde. 7 he eac þa gyt nolde urne drihten for his myldheortnesse þæte ðes middangeard nære ortydre manna cynnes. ac ascyrede to lafe þæt þæt we eft of awocon þurh þæs halgan heahfæderes gearnunga noes 7 his goddra dæda mycelnesse. 7 of him þrim eft

¹²³ Clemons, 'Chronology', p. 245.

¹²⁴ Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 186, art. 8a. The passage is noted by Hill, 'Myth of the Ark-Born Son', p. 383: 'The insistence of the author of the fragmentary compilation of biblical lore preserved in British Library MS Cotton Tiberius A.iii, fols. 43–44, that no one survived the flood except Noe and his sons and their wives, . . . reflects a possible counter-reaction against the myth of the ark-born son of Noe.'

Sceaf, Japheth and the origins of the Anglo-Saxons

wearð awridad twa 7 hund seofontig þeoda ealdorlicra mægða. 7 swa fela is eac manna gereorda 7 heora gespæc todæled. þonne awoc ærest of iafede noes suna .xv. mægða ealdorlicere 7 micel. þonne onwocon. of chame. xxx. theoda mycelra 7 eac þæt cynn wæs geseald fram urum drihtne þam oðrum cynnum twam on heaftnead. 7 on þeowdom. 7 þæt wæs for þon swa gedon þæt he getælde his fæder noe þær he on his sceape locode 7 his to bismere hloh. ðonne onwoc fram þam ðriddan suna seme 7 se wes heora geongost wæs þeh hwæðere on wisdome yldost seofon 7 twentig þeoda 7 þanon wæs awæcnod þæt æþeluste cynn 7 þæt betste. þæt wæs forþon þe he his fæder noe na getælde 7 untweogendlice of þysum þrim mannum noes sunum þæt eall þes middangeard wearð eft onwæcnod þeh hwe drihten on þreo streonde 7 swa sibbe cneordnesse to dælde. 7 þæt he todælde for þære tælnysse þe hy heora fæder tældon noe þæt he on ðreo to wearp þa cneordnysse. þæt wæs wælic. 7 oncyrlisc cynn. 7 on gesyðcund cynnd. for þyssum gyltengum þe we nu gehyrdon wæron þa gesyblingas þus to dælde.¹²⁵

The assertion that Shem was the youngest of the sons seems to be based on the ordering of the genealogies in Genesis X, where the sons are listed in the order Japheth, Ham, Shem. But this is no firm basis for a ranking of ages: in all other places in the story of Noah the order is Shem, Ham, Japheth (Gen. VI.7, VII.13 and IX.18). But it is not the relative ages of Noah's sons which is of primary interest to the author of the note. His insistence that 'þær næfre to lafe ne wearð ma þonne him eahtum' does more than indicate a wish to dispel confusion in the minds of others over how many sons Noah had. Such insistence suggests that Ælfric's careful pattern of enumeration is more than coincidental.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ A. Napier, 'Altenglische Kleinigkeiten', *Anglia* 11 (1889), 1–10, at 2–3, lines 36–65 ('Noah had three sons who were called thus: Shem, Ham and Japheth. And from these sons sprang forth and were born the whole human race. [All] were drowned and there survived no more than the eight, but the greedy flood swallowed and destroyed them all. And still, he also, our Lord, did not wish for his compassion that this world be empty of humanity, but separated a remnant, those from whom we later descended, according to the merits of the holy patriarch Noah and the greatness of his good deeds. And from the three afterwards sprang forth the seventy-two principal (or 'authentic') nations, and into so many also are the languages and speech of humanity divided. Then arose first from Noah's son Japheth fifteen nations, excellent and great; then arose from Ham thirty great nations, and those people were also separated by our Lord from the other two peoples by compulsion and in slavery, and that was done because he insulted his father Noah when he looked at his genitals, and laughed in mockery. Then arose from the third son Shem, and although he was the youngest of them, he was eldest in wisdom, twenty-seven nations, and from them arose the noblest nation and the best. That was because he never shamed his father Noah. And without a doubt it is from these three men, Noah's sons, that this whole earth was populated, even though the Lord divided them into three and so divided the kin into races. And he so divided [Ham's race?] because of the insult with which they shamed their father Noah, so that he cast the generation into three; that was a servile and very churlish race, and exiled. For these sins we have now heard were the siblings so divided').

¹²⁶ The simple orthodox position is outlined in a number of much shorter notes in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, such as the one in British Library, Cotton Caligula A. xv, 139v, a manuscript of the second half of the eleventh century, probably a short time after 1073 (see Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 139A). See Napier, 'Altenglische Kleinigkeiten', p. 7, lines 31–4: 'Noe hæfde .iii. suna þus

Whatever the original ideological motivation of the royal genealogists, it is apparent that later scribes and authors found the idea of an ark-born son of Noah too much of an unorthodox invention to be tolerated. The rejection of, and perhaps confusion caused by, such a curious creation manifests itself in a variety of ways. The cautious treatment given the ark-born son by William of Malmesbury reveals a degree of scepticism concerning the ark-birth of Noah's fourth son, as well as the declining vitality of the myth. William does not represent a separate authority on the royal genealogies,¹²⁷ and his confused double inclusion of the character of Scaef shows that he is dealing with a genealogical tradition which has lost its social context and ideological relevance. The story of the arrival of Scaef, son of Sceldwa, is based on the *Chronicon* of Æthelweard, but this is merged with a longer pedigree derived from either Asser or a corrupted version of the longer West Saxon royal genealogy: 'Scaef fuit filius Heremodii; Heremodius Stermonii; Stermonius Hadrae; Hadra Gwala; Gwala Bedwigii; Bedwegius Strefii (hic, ut dicitur, fuit filius Noe in archa natus).'¹²⁸ The name Scaef has been transformed into 'Streph', making him his own great-great-great-great-grandfather. William's laconically sceptical reference to the ark-birth of 'Streph' (*ut dicitur*) reflects not only his doubt about the story, but also the changing needs of royal ideology. This change saw the ark-born son, under any of his names, disappear from royal genealogies in the later Middle Ages.¹²⁹ The scepticism expressed by William may already lie behind alterations to the text of the Anglian genealogy found in the *Textus Roffensis*, re-fashioning the ark-born son as the son of Shem. This difference may represent a scribal error, but could just as easily be understood as an attempt by the scribe to

wæron hatene. Sem. cham. Iafeð. of þam þreom awocan 7 forð coman .lxxii. þeoda. fram Iafeðe .xv. 7 fram chame .xxx. 7 fram Seme .xxvii.' ('Noah had three sons who were called Shem, Ham and Japheth. From these three are descended seventy-two nations; from Japheth fifteen, and from Ham thirty, and from Shem twenty-seven'). See also the note in Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 133, art. 2, which outlines the genealogy and ages of patriarchs, and two notes in *Heptateuch*, ed. Crawford, pp. 420–1, nos. 17 and 18; and *The Prose Dialogues of 'Solomon and Saturn' and 'Adrian and Ritheus'*, ed. J. E. Cross and T. D. Hill (Toronto, 1982), pp. 27–8 (nos. 13 and 17).¹²⁷ Sisam, 'Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies', pp. 318–20.

¹²⁸ See *William of Malmesbury: Gesta Regum Anglorum: the History of the English Kings*, ed. R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1998–9) I, 176–7 and II, 88–9 ('Scaef was the son of Heremod; Heremod of Stermon; Stermon of Hathra; Hathra of Gwala; Gwala of Bedwig; Bedwig of Streph who was, they say, a son of Noah, born in the ark'). On William's sources and style, see A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c. 550 to c. 1307* (London, 1974), pp. 169–74.

¹²⁹ There are other reasons for the decline in the popularity of Scaef, the ark-born son; Brutus came to dominate the myths of British origin as politics, ideology and literary taste developed across the centuries. For an account of the character's later development, see Kemble, *Stammtafel*, pp. 8 and 11–12. On William's sources, see Sisam, 'Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies', pp. 318–20.

present a less unorthodox origin for Sceaf. As an ark-born son of Shem, Sceaf presents fewer problems of harmony with the biblical text: Shem was traditionally accorded twenty-seven sons, not all of whom are named in Genesis.¹³⁰ The now lost manuscript of Asser's *Life of King Alfred* diverged from the *Chronicle* genealogies, in presenting Seth, whose birth is not discussed, as the fourth son of Noah.¹³¹ This scribal 'confusion' may also have its roots more in scribal scruples than carelessness. A scribe unfamiliar with the idea of Sceaf as the ark-born son of Noah, or one who considered the idea as unacceptably unorthodox, could well have substituted the name Seth, leaving an apocryphal fourth son, but not one born in the ark.

There can be no doubt that in the Anglo-Saxon Christian imagination, the descent of all people living in the post-diluvial world from Noah was an historical fact. The text of the Bible makes this quite clear. Nor can there be any doubt that Ælfric was familiar with the idea that the kings of Wessex claimed descent from Noah's ark-born son, just as there can be no doubt that he rejected the notion. The difference in approach to Noachic descent of the late-tenth-century West Saxon Ælfric and the late-ninth-century West Saxon royal genealogists owes much to the differing intellectual, and to a degree political, climate of their times. The manner in which the extended genealogy of Æthelwulf claims legitimacy reflects the interest in Alfred's circle, and probably the king's personal interest, in harmonizing legendary accounts of ancient history with the biblical record. This took place against the background of a revived interest in the early history of northern Europe. The fact that at times during his reign Alfred experienced only a tenuous grasp on power can only have enhanced his interest in laying claim to an ancestry extending back through Noah to Christ, and one which privileged the West Saxons among all northern peoples. Until they were connected to the history of Noah the royal genealogies were ideological documents creating prestige for contemporary kings by tracing lines of descent which disappeared into the mists of mythical time. Making the connection to Noah transformed the genealogies, historicizing the past of the peoples of northern Europe as well as presenting an ideological foundation for West Saxon kings by de-mythologizing and incorporating mythical ancestors into a family tree. A century later, when the ideology of kingship and the role of kings had been transformed, and in the renewed intellectual climate of the Benedictine revival, a writer like Ælfric could be equally interested in the question of descent from Noah, but from a perspective which gave a higher priority to theological

¹³⁰ See Gen. X, and, in particular, comments on X.32; cf. Bede, *De temporum ratione*, ed. C. W. Jones, CCSL 123B (Turnhout, 1977), 468–9, and Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, ed. B. Dombart and A. Kalb, CCSL 48 (Turnhout, 1955), 501–4.

¹³¹ Wanley dated the manuscript c. 1000; see Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, pp. 224–5.

orthodoxy and biblical authority. Ælfric's interest in the question of the descent of the peoples of the north suggests a tension between his concern for theological orthodoxy at the turn of the millennium and the ideology of kingship evoked by the artistry of the late ninth-century West Saxon genealogists. The orthodox opinion expressed by Ælfric, that Noah did only have three sons, and that from these descended all the nations of the world, was of course the view which prevailed. The radical departure from the letter of the biblical text which the ark-born son represents could not survive too long outside the cultural circumstances which generated him.¹³²

¹³² I would like to thank Malcolm Godden for reading and commenting on earlier versions of this article.