СУХИНО-ХОМЕНКО ДЕНИС ВЛАДИМИРОВИЧ

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Проблема принятия желаемого за действительное в историографии и споры о некоторых социальных явлениях в раннесредневековой Англии и Скандинавии

Статья посвящена разбору отдельных историографических тенденций, связанных с конструированием самодостаточных объяснительных моделей для описания внутренне не связанных между собой сведений в первоисточниках. В качестве иллюстрации в центре исследования стоят три примера изучения раннесредневековой социальной группы тэнов (*др. англ. / др. сканд.* þegn) в историографии XX в. Отмечается, что главная проблема подобных моделей заключается в неосознанном когнитивном искажении (*англ.* confirmation bias) при работе с оригинальными текстами: предвзятом прочтении, игнорировании противоречащих фактов, недостаточном внимании к происхождению памятников. Обращаясь напрямую к первоисточникам и минуя сложившуюся историографическую традицию, автор стремится показать, что некоторые из подобных далеко идущих выводов страдали от недостатка эмпирических доказательств уже на момент публикации. При активном вовлечении наработок современной историографии предлагаемая критика высказывается не с позиций «послезнания», а исходя из принципа *ad fontes*. В статье предпринята попытка исследования бытования такого рода самодостаточных моделей в последующей историографии с указанием на его возможные причины и последствия. Автор выражает надежду, что подобное частное исследование может найти более широкое применение в современной медиевистике.

Ключевые слова: барон; историография; Кнут Великий; рунические надписи; тэн.

СПИСОК СОКРАЩЕНИЙ / LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANS — Anglo-Norman Studies
Arch. SNSL — Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literatur
ASE — Anglo-Saxon England
EHR — The English Historical Review
Futhark — Futhark: International Journal of Runic Studies
RMN Newsletter — Retrospective Methods Network Newsletter
Saga-Book — Saga-Book of the Viking Society for Northern Research

ДЛЯ ЦИТИРОВАНИЯ / FOR CITATION

Sukhino-Khomenko D. V. Historiographical Wishful Thinking and Debates on Some Early Medieval Social Phenomena in the North Sea Region // Vox medii aevi. 2018. Vol. 2(3). P. 38–69. URL: *http://voxmediiaevi.com/2018-2-sukhino-khomenko*

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Historiographical Wishful Thinking and Debates on Some Early Medieval Social Phenomena in the North Sea Region

This article interrogates certain historiographical trends of constructing self-sufficient models of explanation for essentially unrelated data in the primary sources. For a case study the essay spotlights the protracted examination of the early medieval social group of *thegns* (OE/ON *þegn*). Attention is drawn to the influential articles by Svend Aakjær, Rachel R. Reid, and David Roffe. Aakjær's main thesis was that Viking-Age *thegns* and *drengs* (ON *drengr*) known from the Scandinavian runic inscriptions used to be members of royal retinue(s), just like they were strata of landed nobility in England. Rachel Reid drew an institutional parallel between the Anglo-Saxon king's *thegns* and medieval barons, and David Roffe augmented this later view by suggesting a continuity in 11th-century landholding patterns. The author hypothesises that the inherent flaw of such models lies in an unconscious confirmation bias when dealing with the source material. By addressing the primary sources directly, the author seeks to demonstrate that some of these views suffered from a lack of empirical data already at the inception. Though contextualising his polemics in modern historiography, in his criticism the author relies on the *ad fontes* method rather than the wisdom of hindsight. The article also aims to tackle the circulation of the self-sufficient models of this sort in subsequent historiography, as well as to identify plausible origins of prominence and consequences. The author hopes to relate this individual case study to a broader context of medieval research, thereby offering a feasible model of its application to further topics.

Key words: Baron; Historiography; King Cnut; Runic Inscriptions; Thegn.

Denis Sukhino-Khomenko

Historiographical Wishful Thinking and Debates on Some Early Medieval Social Phenomena in the North Sea Region[1]

Reflections of academic inductive reasoning in popular history: an introductory model

In the province of Västergötland, 13 kilometres east of Skara, one of Sweden's oldest towns, lies the small community of Varnhem. At present, it is best known for two historical sites: one is the imposing mid-13th-century abbey cathedral, and the other is the remnants of a much older stone church (pic. 1 and 2) on the hill next to the former cloister. This latter complex, colloquially called "Kata's Farm" (*Sw.* Kata Gård) after the site's Viking-Age owner, is believed to be one of the oldest, if not the oldest, Christian building in the whole of Sweden. From 2017 on, Kata's Farm is hosting a spectacular exhibition "Christian Vikings in Varnhem" (*Sw.* Kristna vikingar i Varnhem), the brochure of which explained, among other things, that

> Thegn is a title that is attested in England from the seventh century, referring to a warrior in the king's service or someone who enjoying the king's trust. <…> In Västergötland there are about thirty runic stones from the eleventh century carved in memory of the men who were called *thegn* and even *very good thegn*. These thegns from Västergötland were presumably local chieftains who placed themselves and their own subjects at the king's disposal. They swore loyalty to the king of the Danes and took part in military expeditions to the west[2].

1. It is my pleasure to thank Gwendolyne Knight (University of Stockholm) and Ruarigh Dale (University of Nottingham) for proofreading the manuscript of this article and offering their valuable advice.

2. *Vretemark M.* Catalogue for the exhibition Christian Vikings in Varnhem at Kata Gård in Varnhem, which opened on 7 May 2017. Lindesberg, 2018. P. 14.

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Pic. 1. Scale model of the earliest wooden church at Kata's Farm (scale 1:20). By Carl-Johan Gunnarson (scale 1:20). Västergötland Museum, Varnhem. Picture by the author.

Pic. 2. Scale model of the later stone church at Kata's Farm (scale 1:20). By Carl-Johan Gunnarson (scale 1:20). Västergötland Museum, Varnhem. Picture by the author.

The origin of the quote above goes back to the thought-provoking works of the Swedish archaeologist and lawyer Carl Löfving[3], whose main opinion in his doctoral thesis is that at the turn of the millennium, Götaland was experiencing cultural and political influence not from the *Svear* kingdom, with its supposed centre in Uppsala, but rather from Denmark, ruled at that time by the Jelling dynasty. In this explanation, extant runic inscriptions mentioning *thegns* (ON/OE *þegn*) as well as *drengs* (ON *drengr*) in Western Sweden attest to the Danish presence in this region. These inscriptions (46 and 73 respectively)[4] are surprisingly uniform in their contents and do not elucidate any relationships with a higher authority *per se*: they use the common commemorative formula, "X raised a stone in memory of Y, X's father/husband/other relation, a good *thegn/dreng,*" as, for instance, on the newly discovered Vg NOR1997;27 (pic. 3), found during restoration in the wall of the Hols church (*Sw.* Hols kyrka) in Vårgårda commune (Sweden):

> Ulfr and Assurr raised this stone in memory of Áslakr, a very good *þegn*, their father, very brave and valiant[5].

To prove that Scandinavian *thegns* were indeed in the service of the Danish king, who at the time was Cnut (r. 1016/18–1035), Löfving resorted to comparative methodology, presented in a nutshell in his earlier article:

> Because Cnut was king of both Denmark and England the term thegn of the Danish runic stones and of the English documents seem to denote the same dependent relationship. Since the runic inscriptions in Denmark and Västergötland have great similarities it is likely that they too denote a similar relationship. This means that a number of pirate chieftains in the area east of the Skagerrak had adopted Christianity and had accepted Cnut as their king[6].

In turn, the notion of a "dependent relationship," in which "thegns were often leading attendants to a king or prince or were directly in the service of such persons in authority," was derived mostly from second-hand anglophone historiography, in particu-

3. *Löfving C.* Hur långt sträckte sig danska kungars makt omkring år 1000? // in Situ: Västsvensk Arkeologisk Tidskrift. 1999. Vol. 2. S. 75–94. As might be expected, a popular brochure such as this does not provide references to any actual academic research. Nevertheless, the derivation of the statement from Löfving's thesis is not only natural but was kindly conformed to me by Dr Vretemark in person after the initial draft of this article had been submitted for peer-reviewing.

4. *Goetting L. Þegn* and *drengr* in the Viking Age // Scandinavian Studies. 2006. Vol. 78. №4. P. 382–383.

5. *Gustavson H.* Verksamheten vid Runeverket, Stockholm // Nytt om runer: Meldingsblad om runeforskning. 1997. №12. S. 27–28. The conventional transliteration of the actual inscription goes as follows: *Ulfr ok Ôzurr reistu stein þenna eptir Áslak, harða góðan þegn, fôður sinn, harða frýnan.* All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

6. *Löfving C.* Who Ruled the Region East of the Skagerrak in the Eleventh Century? // Social Approaches to Viking Studies. Glasgow, 1991. P. 154. Cf. the opinion of Judith Jesch who argued against comparing the relevant rune stones in Denmark and Västergötland (*Jesch J.* Skaldic and Runic Vocabulary and the Viking Age: a Research Project // The Twelfth Viking Congress: Developments Around the Baltic and the North Sea in the Viking Ages. Stockholm, 1994. P. 301).

Pic. 3. Rune stone Vg NOR1997;27. Hols kyrka, Västergötland, Sweden. Picture by the author.

lar (though not exclusively) from the often-quoted 1927 article "Old Danish Thegns and Drengs" by the Danish historian and archivist Svend Aakjær (1894–1963)[7]. Surprisingly, when comparing the Scandinavian material to the English, Aakjær preferred to rely primarily upon the hitherto existing British scholarly writings and dictionaries, which very often bypassed the Scandinavian *thegns* altogether[8]. To be fair, this line of argument was rather prominent in academic works at the time of Löfving's research. For example, both Peter (1928–2018) and Birgit Sawyer (1945–2016) assumed the status of a Scandinavian *thegn* to be identical with that of his Anglo-Saxon counterpart due to the joint Anglo-Scandinavian rulership of Cnut, too. Danish archaeologist Klavs Randsborg (1944–2016) refrains from mentioning Cnut by name but offers a similar argumentative framework[9]. But given this arguably questionable handling of the primary source material and a very mechanistic "crossover" comparative approach, even if it is prominent in the scholarship, this whole interpretation of Västergötland's runic *thegns* and their socio-political position may be vulnerable to criticism.

7. *Aakjær S.* Old Danish Thegns and Drengs // Acta Philologica Scandinavica. 1927. Vol. 2. P. 1–30.

8. Aakjær indeed included references to original sources, but in the manner of his time, he often abbreviated them so much (for example, "P. 6. Edward I., B. R. Rot. 7" at page 23) that checking them today may challenge even an experienced scholar. It is apparent however that it was the interpretations and selection which Aakjær discovered in the available British historiography that guided much of his own assessment.

9. *Sawyer P.* The Making of Sweden. Alingsås, 1988. P. 34; *Sawyer B.* The Viking-Age Rune-Stones. Oxford; New York, 2000. P. 103; *Randsborg K.* The Viking Age in Denmark: The Formation of a State. London, 1980. P. 31.

Instructiveness of the *thegns* in the wider context of the *ad fontes* discourse

When it comes to the study of the *thegns*, this is but one example of a firm judgment being passed based on marked distortions of the sources which is then reproduced in the popular discourse. As far as Scandinavian scholarship is concerned, I have argued elsewhere that a large chunk of the discussion has been dedicated not to the interpretation of the primary sources but to a retelling thereof by Svend Aakjær. However, in this particular respect, anglophone historiography has itself not been flawless either. Despite the significant advancement in modern source criticism, up until now most scholars have tended to reproduce the description of a "stereotypical" Anglo-Saxon *thegn*, first laid out by 19th-century consti-

tutional historians. The problem here is that it is predominantly a reciting of schemes by Archbishop Wulfstan of York (d. 1023), a man well-known for his ideologically-informed concern regarding social order[10]. Bearing in mind the numerous recurrent appearances of *thegns* in the Old English and Old Norse sources, including at several pivotal historical moments[11], I believe they could be described as an *elite* in modern sociological terms[12], which justifies all the more the interest in this social group.

In conducting such a survey, one will encounter certain oft-repeated opinions in historiography which now and then approach the status of a "received wisdom"; these are "sanctioned" sometimes by the authority of the scholars expressing them, and at other times by their frequent recurrence in print. In fact, this observation may be instructive regarding a much more widespread experience in historiography; namely, the recycling of certain notions to such an extent that they become separate epiphenomena and start living lives of their own. That is by no means to claim that they result from professional negligence. As explained by American scholar Thomas Kuhn (1922–1996), the original ideas that may spawn such epiphenomena are often initially expressed within the dominant episteme of the time and are therefore completely legitimate at their inception. In his essay on evolutionary epistemology, philosopher Karl Popper (1902–1994) observed that the development of scholarly/scientific knowledge is built around the principle of the "natural selection" of educated guesses, not dissimilar to the one behind the biological processes. Rivalling explanations compete for academic acknowledgment by means of solving the most problems, with tentative theories constantly being subject to error elimination[13]. In short, the trial-and-error method stipulates for the best-founded, most empirically sound, and most theoretically coherent hypotheses to remain in circulation. The current essay addresses some less well-grounded but nevertheless active ideas that deserve revision and, I dare say, possible removal from academic circulation.

10. *Sukhino-Khomenko D.* Outlines of a Methodological Reassessment: Thegns in the Social Order of Anglo-Saxon England and Viking-Age Scandinavia // RMN Newsletter. 2018. Vol. 14, *forthcoming*.

11. As in 1013, when "Ealdorman Æthelmær <…> and with him the western thegns <…> all submitted to Swein [Forkbeard]" (The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (60 B.C. — A.D. 1042) // English Historical Documents c. 500–1042. London; New York, 1979. P. 246), or in 1035, when Magnus Olafson was acknowledged King of Norway "with consent of all thegns, both rich and not, as well as all the crowd" (*Гуревич А. Я.* Избранные труды. Норвежское общество. М., 2009. С. 312; note though that this statement comes from the 13th-century Fagrskinna and not a contemporary record).

12. For the sake of brevity, the current article adopts the definition of an elite provided by Laurent Feller: "…all those who enjoy a high social position … [which means] the possession of wealth, power and knowledge as well as recognition by others" (*Feller L.* Introduction: Crises et Renouvellements des Élites au Haut Moyen Âge: Mutations ou Ajustements des Structures? // Les élites au haut moyen âge. Crises et renouvellements. Turnhout, 2006. P. 8).

13. *Popper K.* Evolutionary Epistemology // Evolutionary Theory: Paths into the Future. Chichester; New York, 1984. P. 239–241.

In line with the theme of the present issue — *Ad fontes* — this article aims to explore three particular cases by consulting the primary sources on which these ideas are based. It is anticipated that despite its narrow and specific scope, such an endeavour will touch on a wider problem and could be generalised and made relevant to many of our colleagues, therefore serving a methodological case study.

Were *thegns* and *drengs* royal retainers?

This was the question that titled the 1945 article by the Danish historian and runologist Karl Martin Nielsen (1907–1987)[14], written in direct opposition to an essay from Aakjær, and the answer arrived at by Nielsen over eleven pages was negative. Ever since then, save some rare exceptions[15], relevant Scandinavian scholarship of the Viking Age seems to have been split into "team vassalage" and "team local leadership". The former sees the *thegns* aligned, one way or another, with the growing power of kings and contextualises this explanation in a wider framework of the state-formation processes[16]; the latter counters them by pointing out the lack of empirical evidence in the literary sources for such an assumption, as well as the forced nature of the arguments[17]. Whichever stance in this debate one adopts, the point of departure is inevitably the same influential article by Svend Aakjær. His selection and treatment of the Old English sources, however, has for the most part escaped scholars' attention[18]. Meanwhile, as already mentioned, as the relevant runic material could not provide enough information to support his conclusion, Aakjær was forced to make use of the contemporary Anglo-Saxon texts. As he himself put it,

> The meaning of *þegn* appears, however, far more clearly and that of *drengr* also to some extent, when we turn to other languages which have older sources of a more comprehensive character, such as the Old High German, but more especially Old English[19].

14. *Nielsen K. M.* Var Thegnerne og Drengene Kongelige Hirdmænd? // Aarbøger for nordisk oldkyndighed og historie. 1945. S. 111–121.

15. E.g. *Strid J. P.* Runic Swedish thegns and drengs // Runor och runinskrifter. Stockholm, 1986. P. 301–316.

16. E.g. *Randsborg K.* Op. cit. P. 31–44; *Lund N., Hørby K.* Samfundet i vikinglid og middelalder 800–1500. København, 1980. S. 62; *Löfving C.* Op. cit.; *Sawyer B.* Op. cit. P. 103–107; et al.

17. E.g. *Christensen A. E.* Vikingetidens Danmark paa Oldhistorisk Baggrund. København, 1969. S. 218–222 (cf. his own support for Aakjær's thesis in an earlier treatment of the subject: idem. Kongemakt og aristokrati. København, 1945. S. 32–37); *Lindow J.* Comitatus, Individual and Honor: Studies in North Germanic Institutional Vocabulary. Berkley; London, 1976. P. 106–112; *Syrett M.* Drengs and Thegns Again // Saga-Book. 1998. Vol. 25. P. 243–271; *Jesch J.* Runes and Words: Runic Lexicography in Context // Futhark. 2013. Vol. 4. P. 88–95; et al.

18. The only explicit instance to the contrary that I have been able to discover is by Martin Syrett (Op. cit. P. 46), who identified pointed out Aakjær's over-reliance on 12th- and 13th-century sources when elucidating the social standing of the pre-Norman English dreng.

19. *Aakjær S.* Op. cit. P. 15.

A careful and prudent investigation into Aakjær's source work reveals that the whole academic controversy surrounding it has been perhaps based upon quicksand from its inception.

A capsule version of Aakjær's main contention is that the Danish *thegns* and *drengs* used to be "royal servants, members of the king's attendant nobility and of his hird or bodyguard," (p. 28) correlating to the strata of landed nobility in England. It would indeed prove hard to deny some Anglo-Saxon *thegns* an elevated social position, but juxtaposing them exclusively to the *drengs* does not seem to follow from even the very post-Conquest sources brought out by Aakjær. In these 12th- and 13th-century data, *dreng* can be paired with a whole array of lexemes for socio-economic status (*swein, freman, kniht, miles, smalemann*[*us*]) and not solely with *thegn*. To confirm that *drengs* actually "constituted a sort of inferior nobility during the period prior to the Conquest, ranking between *þegnas* and *ceorlas*" (p. 20) and "belonged to a lower order of thegns, the minor thegns, with smaller estates than the thegns proper" (p. 25), the author constructs a lengthy chain of interdependent arguments, which when simplified could be itemised as follows:

1. Johannes Steenstrup (1844–1935) maintained that the indigenous Old English name for the class of people called *drengs* used to be "yeoman".
2. The "hunting and forest law" of King Cnut stipulated that "4 men are to be elected to supervise felling and hunting, and that they should be chosen from among the *mediocres homines, quos Angli læs-þegnas nuncupant, Dani vero yoong men vocant*" (p. 24)[20].
3. Therefore, *drengs* were indeed a lower stratum of the *thegns* (*læs-þegn* = yeoman = *dreng*).

Besides the issue of the single testimony to the existence of the *læs-þegn* in but this one source, the major problem is that the "hunting and forest law" of King Cnut, known as the *Constitutiones de Foresta* ["Forest Regulations"; hereafter *Constitutiones*][21], has

20. "…men of lesser importance, whom the English call *læssþegenes* [lit. "smaller/minor thegn"] and the Danes, *yongermen*" (*Harris S.* Tam Anglis quam Danis: "Old Norse" Terminology in the Constitutiones de foresta // ANS. 2014. Vol. 37. P. 135).

21. *Liebermann F.* Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen. Halle, 1903. Bd. 1. S. 620–626 (henceforth Die Gesetze).

absolutely nothing to do with the monarch in question "and may, therefore, reasonably be called a 'forgery'"[22]. The *Constitutiones* were written no earlier than 1123/4 by an anonymous Anglo-Norman clerk whose mother tongue was probably not English, and they reported the norms of their time while most likely possessing no actual legislative force themselves. In fact, though we know virtually nothing about their author, by exploiting the potential of the inner source criticism, Sara Harris has been able to convincingly reconstruct the author's probable ideological motive for composing this text: to offer means of ethnic reconciliation between the Normans and the English by alluding to an earlier precedent[23]. Whatever the native language of the nameless writer might have been, they clearly did not know Old Norse from Old English, as they identified three evidently English words — *yongerman*, *ealderman*, and *halsefang* — as Norse. In short, the *Constitutiones* are not only a highly unreliable source, but do not confer any knowledge about pre-Conquest society whatsoever[24].

Taking the part of "devil's advocate", one could point out that the actual contemporaneousness of the *Constitutiones* with the reign of Cnut did not play a crucial role in Aakjær's argumentation; nevertheless, at the close of his article, he himself emphasised the importance of the chronological concurrence of Danish Viking-Age runic inscriptions and Anglo-Saxon evidence[25]. Aakjær's proponent could also indicate that the Danish historian made an honest mistake *bona fide*, not possessing up-to-date knowledge about the provenance and peculiarities of the *Constitutiones*. Nonetheless, both had been laid out by Felix Liebermann (1851–1925) more than 30 years prior to Aakjær's publication[26], but for whatever reason, Aakjær seems never to have learnt about this fact. At the very least, in his last work, printed only three weeks before his death, Aakjær still mentioned *Constitutiones* as a respectable source (though not by name)[27].

To return to Nielsen's question, in all probability neither *thegns* nor *drengs*, commemorated in runic inscriptions, had to be royal retainers in the sense proposed by Aakjær. Better yet is to say

22. *Wormald P.* The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century. Oxford, 2001. P. 407.

23. *Harris S.* Op. cit. P. 132, 146.

24. Ibid. P. 135.

25. *Aakjær S.* Op. cit. P. 30.

26. *Liebermann F.* Über Pseudo-Cnuts Constitutiones de foresta. Halle, 1894.

27. *Aakjær S.* Torperne og de danske drenge // Politiken (København). 1962. December 24th. P. 8–9.

that such a probability in certain circumstances is not theoretically precluded, but by themselves these nouns "are neither technical terms of rank nor general terms of approbation"[28], and even if men thus called could become chieftain's retainers, this does by no means follow from Aakjær's argumentation. As agreed by most modern scholars, the Old Norse lexeme *drengr* was a generic term to denote a daring young man. Since it used to be common practice for such characters to partake in military expeditions, including those led by royalty, members of king-led troops could be styled *drengir/drengjar*, though this must have been more of an epithet that an actual title or *terminus technicus* ["technical term"][29]. As for the *thegns*, I argue elsewhere that in light of the chronology of the earliest Old English and continental sources mentioning them, and bearing in mind the word's etymology, recently revisited by linguist Guus Kroonen, this Germanic lexeme at its core ought to have meant "retainer"[30], but linguistics alone does not confirm this reading for the Danish and Swedish runic texts.

All things considered, due to the flaw inherent in the decisive element of Aakjær's argument, when investigating the Nordic *thegns* these days, one is forced to return to the pre-1927 state of research, when, as noted by Aksel E. Christensen, the Old Norse word *þegn* used to be treated just like any other entry in the dictionary[31].

Furthermore, enquiring into Aakjær's source work sheds light upon a somewhat enigmatic yet persistent apposition of the *thegns* and *drengs* in historiography. These two words belong to a wide range of Old Norse prose and poetic terms denoting human males, each with its own connotation: *bóndi* ([independent] farmer, husbandman), *sveinn* (boy, lad, [young] man), *karl* ([mature] man, husband), *rekkr* ([valiant] man = warrior), etc. The three former lexemes appear in commemorative runic inscriptions alongside the *thegns* and *drengs*, the three latter are also found in place names[32]. The laudatory epithets (*nýtr*, *fyrstr*, *snjallr*, *jafn*, etc.) are a commonplace in the runic formulae and 14% of all commemorated are

28. *Jesch J.* Skaldic Verse and Viking Semantics // Viking revaluations: Viking Society Centenary Symposium, 14–15 May 1992. London, 1993. P. 164.

29. *Syrett M.* Op. cit. P. 248; *Strid J. P.* Op. cit. P. 308; *Jesch J.* Skaldic Verse and Viking Semantics. P. 165.

30. This thesis shall be elaborated on in a forthcoming article co-authored by Kroonen and myself. An earlier draft thereof has been presented by me at the workshop *Perspectives on the Middle Ages* at the University of Århus on May 4th, 2018.

31. *Christensen A. E.* Vikingetidens Danmark… S. 220.

32. *Brink S.* Social Order in the Early Scandinavian Landscape // Settlement and Landscape: Proceedings of a conference in Århus, Denmark, May 4–7 1998. Moesgård, 1999. P. 423–439.

described that way, with the "good man" (*góðr*, *algóðr*, *bestr*, *mjǫk góðr*, etc.) type appearing at least 263 times[33]. Briefly put, nothing in the available evidence presupposes a juxtaposition of the Scandinavian lexemes *thegns* and *drengs*, and what set them aside was Aakjær's article, in which he noted their occurrences in the English texts, though their connexion is entirely artificial and follows from an arbitrary treatment of cursorily assessed primary sources[34]. Judith Jesch is perhaps the only scholar who recently objected to comparing the runic *thegns* and *drengs*. In doing so, she followed the Danish archaeologist Søren Sindbæk's analysis of communication and social networks in Viking-Age Scandinavia, which empirically testified to the absence of any correlation between the *thegns* and *dregns*[35]. The historiographic and source re-examination above substantiates that apparently there was none from the beginning.

All in all, upon revision, it would seem that if not all of Aakjær's ideas then at least his line of argument should be removed from academic circulation as failing a critical re-examination of the exploited methodology and source work.

33. *Sawyer B.* Op. cit. P. 99–102, 107–111, 174–183.

34. Moreover, the only two extant occurrences of the loanword dreng in Old English before 1066 are from "The Battle of Maldon" (*Syrett M.* Op. cit. P. 246) and a private northern writ from the 1050s (*Harmer F. E.* Anglo-Saxon Writs. Stamford, 1989. P. 419–424, 532).

35. *Jesch J.* Runic Inscriptions and the Vocabulary of Land, Lordship, and Social Power in the Late Viking Age. P. 41–42; eadem Runes and Words. P. 89.

From the Anglo-Saxon "king's *thegns*" to the Anglo-Norman "barons": continuity or a historiographical fiction?[36]

The protracted "caesura *vs.* continuity" debate regarding the effect of the Norman Conquest on Anglo-Saxon social institutions goes as far back as the academic controversies between the historians Edward Augustus Freeman (1823–1892, "team continuity") and John Horace Round (1854–1928, "team caesura"). In great awe and not daring to foolhardily engage in the said dispute, I would like to draw the attention to but one particular case.

As noted by Hugh Thomas on a similar topic, "the problem of identifying discrete individuals among the multitudes of Godwins, Wulfrics, and Edwards"[37] impedes the calculation of exact figures, but modern assessments of the *Domesday Book* estimate the pres-

36. The following section is an elaboration of my presentation at the International Student, Postgraduate, and Young Researchers' Forum "Lomonosov" in Moscow in April 2017. See the abstract in: *Сухино-Хоменко Д.* От англо-саксонских «королевских тэнов» к англо-нормандским «баронам»: преемственность или историографический конструкт? [Digital resource] // Материалы Международного молодежного научного форума «Ломоносов–2017». URL: https://lomonosov-msu.ru/file/uploaded/4000/report/request_159419/56420/uid32322_report.pdf?1492219048 (accessed May 8th, 2018).

37. *Thomas H. M.* The Significance and Fate of the Native English Landholders of 1086 // EHR. 2003. Vol. 118. №476. P. 306.

ence of roughly four to five thousand secular Anglo-Saxon landlords other than the king, his family, or earls on the eve of the Norman Conquest[38]. Within the twenty years between the Conquest (1066) and the *Domesday* inquest (1086), this number dropped catastrophically: of the *c.* 900 king's immediate tenants only 13 (*sic!*) were of English origin, and of them only four were major lords. The lower strata did not suffer as severely, but in the great scheme of things their significance was almost negligible[39]. Colloquially, this social group of pre-Conquest lords is often collectively referred to as *thegns*. Its heterogeneity has been observed on multiple occasions[40], but despite this, historiography has seen at least two attempts to empirically isolate the top tier of the English pre-Conquest lay landholding elite.

38. *Fleming R.* Kings and Lords in the Conquest of England. Cambridge, 1991. P. 112; *Roffe D. R.* Domesday: The Inquest and the Book. Oxford; New York, 2000. P. 25; et al.

39. *Baxter S.* Lordship and Labour // A Social History of England, 900–1200. New York, 2011. P. 104.

40. E.g. *Barlow F.* The Feudal Kingdom of England, 1042–1216. London; New York, 1999. P. 5.

...Baro vel thainus[41]: in search of the late Anglo-Saxon top-tier aristocracy

41. "...baron or thegn".

One belongs to the field of the so-called "Constitutional history". In 1920, medievalist Rachel Reid (1876–1952) published a lengthy article[42] in which she upheld two crucial ideas:

42. *Reid R. R.* Barony and Thanage // EHR. 1920. Vol. 35. №138. P. 161–199.

1. The medieval Anglo-Norman and later medieval English baron "was a ducal officer, albeit an hereditary one; and his barony was more than a fief, it was an administrative unit" (p. 168). This type of tenure, known as *per baronia* ["in barony"], was characterised by certain privileges, in the 13th century called *la haute justice* ["high justice": rights to execute thieves and hold judicial trials by combat] but antedating this name in essence by two hundred years. In England, similar privileges were expressed in the mnemonic formula "*sake* and *soke*, *toll* and *team*, and *infangtheof*": general police jurisdiction, rights to do trade and to try red-handed criminals on one's own land[43].
2. Before the Norman Conquest, the aforementioned privileges were granted to king's *thegns*; therefore, the latter were fundamentally identical with the medieval barons. This last

43. *Ibid.* P. 174–175.

contention was supplemented by examining the lexis of the post-Conquest legal compilations.

Though Dr Reid's theses have not always been reiterated in subsequent major works on the English medieval aristocracy, the strength of her arguments was reinforced by David Roffe's analysis of the tenurial patterns in the *Domesday Book*[44]. Briefly, his main postulate is that Anglo-Norman baronies were the product of merging wholesale the preceding smaller *boclands* ("a precarious tenure in this respect [*i.e.* military service. — *D. S.-Kh.*], but otherwise it was hereditary and its lord had free disposal of it")[45] of the pre-Norman king's *thegns* into larger units. In turn, *bocland* as a type of land holding was synonymous with the legal formula "*sake* and *soke*" and "clearly expressed the concept of full rights — *terra* and *soca* — as opposed to the limited dues conferred by the latter"[46]. In Roffe's view, whoever in 1066 owned a *bocland* simultaneously enjoyed the full rights of "*sake* and *soke*" over their land, which automatically made them a king's *thegn*, whether verbally described as such or not (in the actual *Domesday* text this relation could be indicated by the formula 'X *tenuit*' ["X held"])[47]. Rounding his argument up and recycling Reid's, Roffe concluded that "there can be no doubt that conceptually there is a direct relationship between pre- and post-Conquest usage" of the expression "king's *thegn*" and "baron"[48].

Despite voices of moderate support[49], in his review of Roffe's first monograph, Stephen Baxter challenged the author's rigid methodology of equating *bocland* to the rights of "*sake* and *soke*" by pointing out a forced and arbitrary reading of the primary sources. Baxter reminds us that not only did *bocland* not have to be the only means of acquiring the rights of "*sake* and *soke*," but that there is no empirical evidence that it "convey[ed] peculiar rights of lordship at all". Furthermore, *soke* could have pertained to the manors, held by ealdormen, sheriffs, and earls by virtue of office and not a charter (hence a *bocland*). Finally, Baxter questioned whether the *Domesday* text actually leaves room to unequivocally translate

44. *Roffe D. R.* From Thegnage to Barony: Sake and Soke, Title, and Tenants-in-Chief // ANS. 1989. Vol. 12. P. 157–176; *Idem*. Domesday: The Inquest and the Book. P. 17–48.

45. *Roffe D. R.* From Thegnage to Barony. P. 167. More about the concept of *bocland* can be found in: *Baxter S., Blair J.* Land Tenure and Royal Patronage in the Early English Kingdom: A model and a Case of Study // ANS. 2006. Vol. 28. P. 19–46.

46. Ibid. P. 167.

47. *Roffe D. R.* Domesday: The Inquest and the Book. P. 34. The latter assertion has led Roffe to drafting a chart of the "king's thegns", known from this formula alone: Ibid. P. 38–39. Later on, the table was extended and presented at the author's personal website: URL http://www.roffe.co.uk/thegns.htm (accessed May 8th, 2018).

48. Ibid. From Thegnage to Barony. P. 159.

49. *Reynolds S.* Bookland, Folkland and Fiefs // ANS. 1992. Vol. 14. P. 219–220.

the 'X *tenuit*' formula as anything but a mere identification of a pre-Conquest landholder. Substantiating his critique, in 2006 in co-authorship with John Blair, Baxter undertook a case study of the Bampton hundred (Oxon), and used this example as a demonstration of the tangled nature of royal patronage and land tenure patterns in late Anglo-Saxon England[50].

As in case with Aakjær's thesis, it would seem that few scholars meticulously scrutinized the handling of sources by the author when quoting Reid's article. Similarly, in the light of re-examination her methodology casts a doubt on the validity of at least some part of the maintained premise.

No pre-Conquest Old English text explicitly restricts the privileges of "*sake* and *soke*, *toll* and *team*, and *infangtheof*" to the king's *thegn*. Unintentionally foreshadowing Aakjær's later approach, Reid projected the information from the more telling sources onto a more obscure and distant past. One of them, the Franco-Latin *Leis Willelme* (["The Laws of William I"], before 1150?)[51], certainly translates the Old English *cynges þegn* as *baro/barun*, and the *Leges Henrici Primi* (["The Laws of Henry I"], before 1118)[52] allow variation between *baro* and *thainus*, on another occasion expressly endowing a baron with "*sake* and *soke*" (fig. 1). Reid concluded that Norman clerks "identified the king's thane with the baron" because both enjoyed "their justiciary rights"[53].

Three problems arise with this classification, two of which were certainly apparent already by 1920.

Firstly, both *Leis Willelme* and *Leges Henrici Primi* postdate the Norman Conquest by at least fifty years, and their main source of inspiration by almost a century. To polemicise: the fact that the Anglo-Norman scribes and lawyers sometimes equated the contemporary barons to the pre-Norman king's *thegns* does not itself attest their identity; it merely suggests that the authors might have seen them as peers. The second problem is the nature of the texts brought forward by Reid in defence of her thesis. By the beginning of the 20th century their provenance, stemmata, and relation to the

50. *Baxter S., Blair J.* Op. cit.

51. *Wormald P.* Op. cit. P. 408.

52. Leges Henrici Primi. Oxford, 1972. P. 34–37 (henceforth Leges Henrici Primi). Note my mistake in the published abstract of the 2017 presentation: in spite of the modern name given by William Lambarde in his *Archaionomia* (1568), Leges Henrici Primi were not a piece of official legislation.

53. *Reid R. R.* Barony and Thanage. P. 173.

Figure 1. Concurrence of OE *þegn* and AN *baron* in legal texts

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Anglo-Norman translation</th><th>Old English original</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">*Leis Willelme*[54] (before 1150?)</td><td rowspan="3">*II Cnut 71,1*[55] (before 1023)

7 syððan cingces þegnas, þe him nyhste syndan: IIII hors, II gesadelode 7 II unsadelode, 7 II swurd 7 IIII spera 7 swa feala scylda 7 helm 7 byrnan 7 L mances goldes.[56]</td></tr>
<tr><td>Latin</td><td>Old French</td></tr>
<tr><td>20,1 Releuium baronis: IIII equi, ex quibus duo sellati erunt et frenati, et cum eis lorice due, scuta II, galee II, lancee II, gladii II. Reliquorum duorum equorum alter erit palefridus, alter chaçur cum frenis et chamis.</td><td>20,1 De relief a barun: IIII chevals, les II enfrenez e enseelez, e II haubercs e II haumes e II escuz e II espees e II lances. E les autres II chevals: un chaceur e un palefrei a freins e a chevestres.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">*Leges Henrici Primi* (before 1118)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">9,11 Soca uero placitorum alia proprie pertinet ad fiscum regium et singulariter, alia participatione, alia pertinet uicecomitibus et 5 ministris regiis in firma sua, alia pertinet baronibus socam et sacam habentibus[57].</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">87,5 Ouerseunessa regis est, ut diximus, xx mance, episcopi et comitis X mance, baronis uel thaini v mance in Westsexa, que capud regni est et legum, ad quam recurrendum est in omni dissidentia contingentium[58].</td></tr>
</table>

original Anglo-Saxon legislation had been for the most part established, but modern scholarship broadly questions the veracity and trustworthiness of such texts. Concluding his analysis of the *Leis Willelme*, Patrick Wormald pronounced them to be "an intellectual exercise"[59]. As for the *Leges Henrici Primi*, historians have shown a great deal of interest and high regard for both the text and its author[60], but though we are able say a lot more about this author and their methods, background, intentions and so forth, it is at present far from clear as to how accurately they represent the real Anglo-Norman law in action[61]. To be fair, at the moment Dr Reid finished her study, such reserved opinions had not yet taken hold.

54. Die Gesetze, S. 506.

55. Ibid. S. 358.

56. "And next is [the *heriot* ("war-gear") — *D. S.-Kh.*; see below] of the king's *thegn* who stands next to him: four horses — two saddled, two not saddled, — two swords, four spears and as many shields, and a helmet and a coat of mail, and 50 *mancuses* of gold". *Mancus* is a somewhat tricky "term which probably originated in Italy around the 770s to refer to Arabic gold dinars and which was current in England a decade later," but "[i]n many documents, when there is no hint of what was meant by *mancus*, *solidus* or *libra*, it is simply impossible to tell exactly what was intended" (*Naismith R.* Money and Power in Anglo-Saxon England: The Southern English Kingdoms 757–865. New York, 2012. P. 266, 272).

57. "In the case of the soke of pleas, some of these profits belong peculiarly and exclusively to the royal treasury, some are shared by it with others, some belong to the sheriffs and royal officials in their farm, and some belong to the lords who have soke and sake" (Leges Henrici Primi. P. 109).

58. "The penalty for *ouerseunesse* in respect of the king is, as we have stated, twenty mancuses, for a bishop and an earl ten mancuses, for a baron or thegn five mancuses; this is the case in Wessex, which is the capital of the kingdom and of its laws, and to which recourse is to be had in the case of every occasion of disagreement" (Ibid. P. 267).

59. *Wormald P.* Op. cit. P. 409.

60. E.g. L. J. Downer's extensive introduction in: Leges Henrici Primi. P. 1–78.

61. *Wormald P.* Op. cit. P. 413.

Felix Liebermann regarded *Leis Willelme* as an authoritative source in 1901[62], and Frank Stenton used both on multiple occasions in his 1932 book[63]. Therefore, the present argument highlights the slightly too swift modern acceptance of Reid's logic more so than it challenges her arguments' validity in 1920.

But the third and least amendable problem is the instability of the Anglo-Norman legal lexis. Comparing the *Leis Willelme* and *Leges Henrici Primi* to the contemporary texts demonstrates a whole set of potential synonyms for rendering the Old English *cynges þegn*. Thus, in the 353 *acta* of William the Conqueror (r. 1066–1087), *baro* is apparently interchangeable with *minister* ["servant"] and *fidelis* ["loyal one"] (115, 95, and 166 occurrences respectively) rather with the vernacular *þegn* or various transliterations thereof (*tainnus*, *taunus*, *thennus*), which occur on only 38 occasions (another synonym, *optimas* ["best man"], is by far the least preferred one, occurring merely 27 times)[64]. Moreover, the *taini regis* in the *Domesday Book* are anything but landed feudal nobility: they appear as the king's petty *ministeriales* alongside the sergeants:

> If 'king's thegn' always meant a great man rather than a thegn of the king then the Domesday scribe misunderstood it[65].

These discrepancies (fig. 2) were well known to Dr Reid, yet she preferred to see a superficial trend towards unification[66]. Nevertheless, when put together these examples demonstrate that there was hardly any, and that each author worked in his/her own manner[67].

On the whole Reid's argument about the institutional continuity between an Anglo-Saxon king's *thegn* and a medieval English baron cannot be seen as conclusive — not on the strength of the proposition itself, but on the basis of some underlying methodological and conceptual flaws in dealing with the primary sources. Leaving aside the modern advancement in the scholarship of the *Leis Willelme* and *Leges Henrici Primi*, Reid's argument inherently suffered from the unquestioning acceptance of the continuity of the legal and social arrangements between the pre-Conquest state

62. *Liebermann F.* Über die Leis Willelme // Arch. SNSL. 1901. №106. P. 113–138.

63. *Stenton F. M.* The First Century of English Feudalism, 1066–1166. Oxford, 1932. P. 17, 21–22, 29, 30, 41, 46, 59, 76, 86, 162, 216, 218, 237.

64. See the full lists in: *Regesta Regum Anglorum*: The Acta of William I (1066–1087). New York, 1998. P. 1012, 1021, 1028, 1037. To be fair to Reid, as indicated by David Bates, in the early 1900s, a few volumes of relevant Norman charters were published by French scholars, but they never not formed a systematic corpus. Nevertheless, Reid did mention charters' formulae in her argumentation. The latest inquiry into the functioning of the Anglo-Norman scribal community that I am familiar with can be found in: *Timofeeva O.* Cum saca et soca, et tol et theam: The Status of English Terminology in Latin acta of William the Conqueror // Sonderausdrück aus Mittalalterliches Jahrbuch. 2017. Bd. 52. №2. S. 195–215. See also other works by the same author

65. *Reynolds S.* Op. cit. P. 220.

66. *Reid R. R.* Barony and Thanage. P. 169–170.

67. Cf. the modern views on the legal translation techniques in this period: *O'Brien B. R.* Translating Technical Terms in Law-Codes from Alfred to the Angevins // Conceptualizing Multilingualism in England, c. 800 — c. 1250. Turnhout, 2011. P. 57–76.

and Anglo-Norman England, as well as from turning a blind eye to the otherwise obstinate sources. As summed up by John Hudson,

> Later evidence suggests that possession of sake and soke might derive from status rather than royal grant, but this is not clear in the Anglo-Saxon period. One possibility is association with the status of king's thegn, but it is in fact very hard to show that all king's thegns had sake and soke; that king's thegns who had sake and soke did so as a result of being king's thegns; and that only king's thegns, not some other thegns, had sake and soke. More likely is that a significant number of king's thegns were important men and prominent landholders, and that such men often had rights of sake and soke[68].

68. *Hudson J.* The Oxford History of the Laws of England. Croydon, 2012. Vol. 2: 871–1216. P. 60.

Figure 2. Variance of Anglo-Norman legal lexis

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Norman 12th-century renditions</th><th>Old English original
II Cnut 71,1
(before 1023)</th></tr>
<tr><td>Leis Willelme
(before 1150?)</td><td>Lat. baro, OF barun</td><td rowspan="5">cingces þegn</td></tr>
<tr><td>Quadripartitus
(before 1108?)</td><td rowspan="2">thainus regis</td></tr>
<tr><td>Leges Henrici Primi
(before 1118)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Consiliatio Cnuti
(early 1100s)</td><td>vir regis</td></tr>
<tr><td>Insituta Cnuti
(before1123/24?)</td><td>liber homo qui consuetudines suas habet</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="2">Norman 11th-century renditions</th><th>Meaning/equivalent</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">The Domesday Book
(1086)</td><td>taini regis</td><td>ministeriales/sergeants</td></tr>
<tr><td>tainus uel miles regis</td><td>military dependant (?)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Acta of William I
(1066–1087)</td><td>t(h)aini mei, barones mei, fidelis sui, optimates mei, ministri, etc.</td><td>(ealle) mine þegnes</td></tr>
</table>

…Licet nobilis esset, inter proceres tunc numerari non potuit[69]

In a popular 2001 book, *The English Elite in 1066: Gone but not Forgotten*, British archaeologist Donald Henson dedicated 26 pages (p. 67–93) to meticulously cataloguing the "major thanes" on the eve of the Norman Conquest. In stating his motivation, he explained that

> There is evidence that thanes with over £40 of land could be seen as constituting an upper class within the nobility. In terms of their wealth and in numbers, they would roughly equate with later medieval barons[70].

A professional historian, Henson did indicate the source that led him to this statement, Peter Clarke's monograph *The English Nobility under Edward the Confessor* (1994)[71], but a scrupulous bibliographical investigation reveals far deeper roots.

The origin of the notion of the solid property criterion as definitive in determining top-tier Anglo-Saxon nobility can be traced to the late 12th-century *Liber Eliensis* ["The Book of Ely"] — the history of the abbey on the Isle of Ely (Cambs) founded by St Æthelthryth in 672. The exact date of the composition is wanting, but given that Book 3 does not record any events after 1169, this year serves as the *terminus post quem* ["limit after which"] for the final draft.

Chapter 7 of Book 2 reports how King Edgar (r. 957/959–975) granted the abbey a certain estate of forty *hides*[72] in Hatfield (Herts) to support the brethren with timber- and firewood. However, after the king's death, sons of the powerful Ealdorman of East Anglia, Æthelstan *Half-King* (in office 932–956), led by his heir and successor, Æthelwine (in office *c.* 962–992), claimed the land, insisting on the forceful expropriation of their father's property by the deceased king, and that the said property was exchanged by Æthelstan for his *patrimonium* in Devonshire[73]. Another story is preserved in Chapter 97 of Book 2[74]. In it we are told about one Guthmund, a brother of abbot Wulfric, who abused his relationship in the 1050s to lease a few estates in secret from the monks.

69. "…although noble, [he] could not be counted among the leading men then."

70. *Henson D.* The English Elite in 1066: Gone but not forgotten. Hockwold-cum-Wilton, 2011. P. 68.

71. *Clarke P.A.* The English Nobility under Edward the Confessor. Oxford, 1994.

72. "Whatever 'hide' may have meant during the prehistory of the Anglo-Saxons, by the time of its entry into the written sources it would seem to have been a cadastral unit <…>, a term of taxation, or tribute" (*Abels R.* Op. cit. P. 101).

73. Liber Eliensis: edited for the Royal Historical Society. London, 1962. P. 80 (henceforth Liber Eliensis).

74. Note my mistake in the number of the chapter in the published abstract of the 2017 presentation.

Guthmund needed the land in order to marry the "daughter of a very powerful man," for despite his nobility he did not command lordship over forty hides of land and could not be counted among the "leading men" (*proceres*), so the girl rejected him[75].

I cannot pinpoint the indisputably first modern scholar who used this evidence in actual historical research, but it was perhaps William Stubbs (1825–1903) who aggregated and popularised it. Under his pen, all his predecessors' (Sharon Turner (1768–1847), John Mitchell Kemble (1807–1857), Benjamin Thorp (1782–1870) et al.) single findings were seemingly harmonised in a single framework[76]: in the Anglo-Saxon social hierarchy, the position of an *earl*, also called *procer* in Latin, was eight times higher than the status of a *thegn*, since *thegnhood* was acquired by virtue of possessing five *hides* but *earldom* required forty; furthermore, an *earl*'s *wergild* ["man-price"][77] was eight times greater than that of a *thegn*, and the same ratio held true for their respective *heriots*[78]. When editing the text of *Liber Eliensis* in 1962, Ernest Blake copied this interpretation of Guthmund's standing[79], whence it was used by Peter Clarke in his own study — a partial theoretical combination of Stubbs' model with that of Reid and Roffe's[80] — for determining the lower limit of the nobility in the days of Edward the Confessor (r. 1042–1066). Since *Domesday* surveyors employed multiple methods of assessing land property, Clarke modified the 40-*hide* criterion and instead used the equation "1 hide = £1"[81] as his guiding principle. As surmised above, Donald Henson's statement indeed had deep roots.

The one-to-eight ratio in Stubbs' scheme was derived from two main sources: the aforementioned law of King Cnut (*II Cnut 71*)[82] and a text known as *Norðleoda laga* ["The Laws of the Northern People (presumably the Northumbrians)"], edited by Archbishop Wulfstan of York[83]. Figure 3 lays out the scale according to which the lay elite had to pay their *heriots*.

75. Liber Eliensis. P. 167.

76. *Stubbs W.* The Constitutional History in its Origin and Development. Oxford, 1874. Vol. 1. P. 174–175. Though concise in his retelling, Stubbs obviously conflates the stories of Æthelwine and Guthmund, claiming that the latter lived during the reign of King Edgar.

77. "The compensation to be paid to the victim's kin for emendable homicide was his wergeld. The laws specify wergelds according to the status of the man slain. We do not have case evidence to show whether these exact amounts were paid, or whether there was some variation" (*Hudson J.* Op. cit. P. 179).

78. A *heriot* was "a death-due that appears to have originated in the return of the arms with which the lord had outfitted his man. Although the character of the heriot was evolving throughout the period, becoming increasingly associated with problems of tenurial succession, the nobility often continued to pay this impost in kind, with weapons, byrnies, and horses, up until the Conquest" (*Abels R.* Op. cit. P. 137–138).

79. Liber Eliensis. P. 424.

80. *Clarke P. A.* Op. cit. P. 31–34, 153.

81. *Abels R.* Op. cit. P. 106.

82. Die Gesetze. S. 356–358.

83. Ibid. S. 458–460.

Figure 3. *Heriots* in II Cnut 71

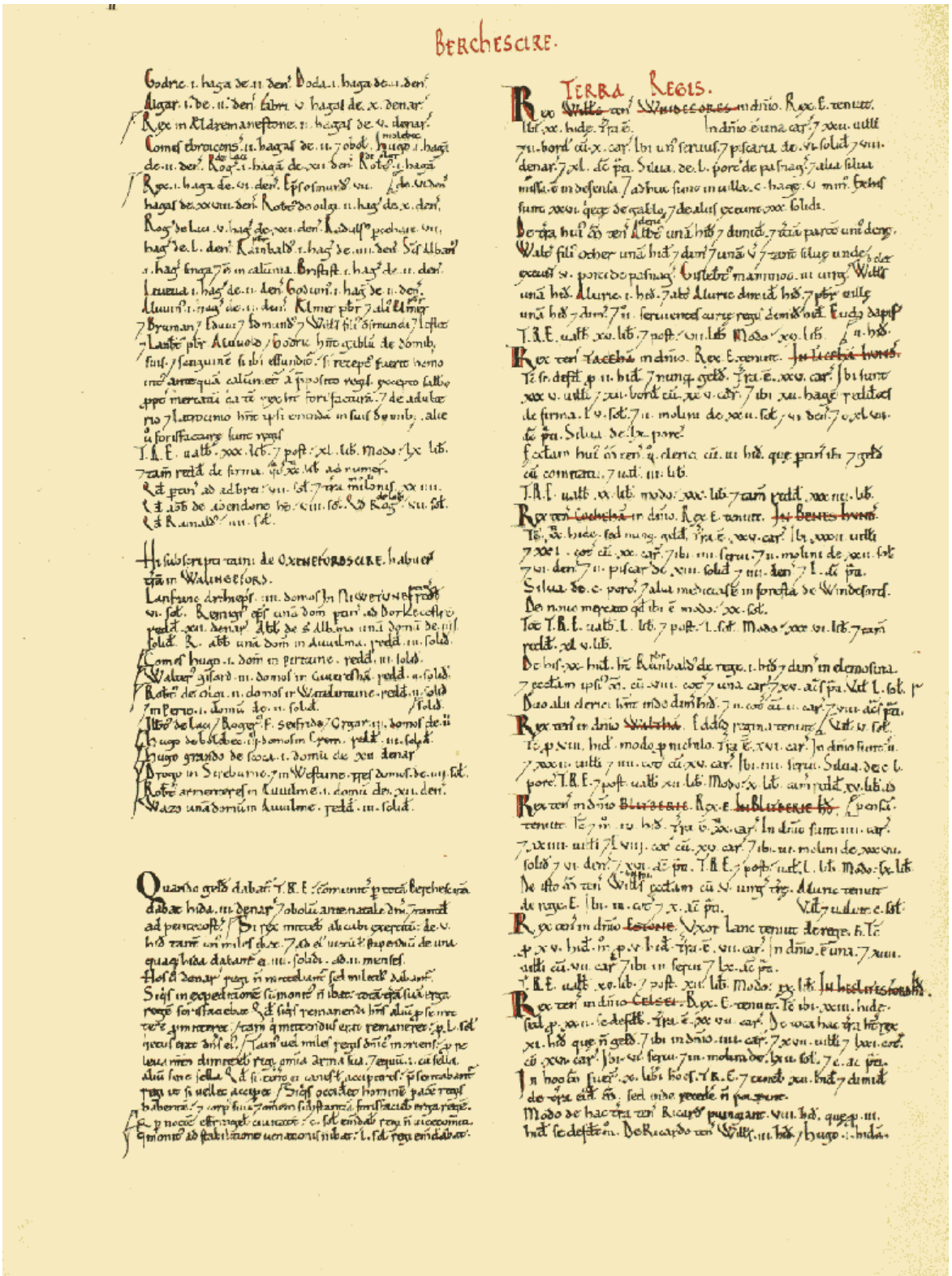
Category	*Heriot*
earl	8 horses (4 saddled, 4 unsaddled); 4 helmets; 4 coats of mail; 8 spears; 8 shields; 4 swords; 200 *mancuses* of gold
king's *thegn* who stands next to him	4 horses (2 saddled, 2 unsaddled); 1 helmet; 1 coat of mail; 4 spears; 4 shields; 2 swords; 50 *mancuses* of gold
other/median *thegn*	1 horse with trappings; his weapons[84] or: *healsfang*[85] in Wessex, 2 pounds in Mercia, 2 pounds in East Anglia
king's *thegn* "among the Danes" who has the right of soke	4 pounds
king's *thegn* who has a closer relationship with the king	2 horses (1 saddled, 1 unsaddled); 1 sword; 2 spears; 2 shields; 50 *mancuses* of gold
king's *thegn* who is of a lower position	2 pounds

84. Items not given.

85. "The *healsfang* was 120s. of a 1,200s. wergeld, and belonged only to the closest kin, children, brothers, and uncles" (*Hudson J.* Op. cit. P. 179).

The first inconsistency with the historiographical scheme is that there are no two categories whose *heriots* would exactly relate as one to eight. The second inconsistency stems from the *Norðleoda laga*: leaving aside the provenance and reliability of this source, an *earl*'s *wergild* is said to be 15,000 *þrymsas* (a type of monetary unit derived from the Merovingian tremissis) and the *thegn*'s 2,000 *þrymsa*, which gives a slightly lower ratio of 1:7,5, and of the three manuscripts only one speaks of an *earl*, the other two replacing it with *æðeling*. As for the five *hides* as the proviso for a commoner to ascend to *thegnhood*, this notion hinges on the writings of Archbishop Wulfstan (*Norðleoda laga* and *Geþyncðu* ["Ranks"], both elements of the so-called "Promotion laws" or "Compilation on the status") and some ambiguous passages in the *Domesday Book*. Concerning the former, I argue elsewhere[86] that despite the seemingly welcoming and clear reading, Wulfstan's word cannot be taken for

86. *Sukhino-Khomenko D.* Op. cit., *forthcoming*.



Pic. 4. Folio of Domesday Book, i, 56b. Berkshire custumal concerning the five-*hide* quota for military service (bottom left corner). Courtesy of Professor J. J. N. Palmer and George Slater. URL: http://opendomesday.org/book/berkshire/02 (accessed May 14th, 2018).

the testimony of the actual mechanism of social mobility in late Anglo-Saxon England: his literary legacy is highly ideologically loaded, and "many of the practices it describes are unsupported by contemporary evidence"[87], and we are left with a unique testimony. Regarding the *Domesday* information, the source explicitly states military service for one man from five *hides* in 1066 only for Berkshire[88], but the connexion of this particular custumal to the *thegns* is hampered by the vagueness of the used original Latin term *miles* [lit. "warrior"]. Despite the frequent universalisation of this rule in historiography, Richard Abels convincingly warns us not to read too much into it, given the precarious nature of the evidence. In particular, he refuses to see the *Norðleoda laga* and *Geþyncðu* as confirming the omnipresence of the Berkshire five-*hide* rule and its applicability to the *thegns* alone[89]. As noted by Abels, should a grid of five-*hid*e units have indeed covered the hidated part of the kingdom, it did not have to serve military purposes: taxation of all things could just as well have been its *raison d'être*[90]. Even if the five-*hide* rule existed in some parts of England, it is unclear what it could possibly have to do with an *earl*'s *heriot* that merely manifested the material acknowledgment of the king's lordship.

Finally, let us briefly review the evidence of the *Liber Eliensis*. Before anything else, here we are again in the hands of an Anglo-Norman historian: even if we concede the veracity of the reported facts that preceded the record by 120–180 years, scholars still have to rely on the anonymous author's interpretations thereof. Upon a closer examination, besides the figure of forty *hides*, the two relevant stories share virtually nothing in common. Nothing indicates that the 40-*hide patrimonium* conferred the title (or rank?) of an ealdorman upon Æthelstan *Half-King*. The origins of his ancestry lay indeed in Wessex, but the family's resources were presumably much greater than what his sons claimed had been expropriated by King Edgar[91]. As for Guthmund, though we know his personal assets exceeded £40 by just a meagre fraction in 1066[92], the *Liber Eliensis* does not really render it as a statement "that marriage to

87. The Political Writings of Archbishop Wulfstan of York. Manchester, 2015. P. 67.

88. Greater Domesday Book, folio 56 verso (DB, i. 56b) (pic. 4). "Si rex mittebat alicubi exercitum de quinque hidis tantum unus miles ibat, et ad eius uictum uel stipendium de unaquaque hida dabantur et .iiii. solidi ad duos menses. Hos uero denarios regi non mittebantur, sed militibus dabantur. Si quis in expeditionem summonitus non ibat, totam terram suam erga regem forisfaciebat" (*Abels P.* Op. cit. P. 260).

89. *Abels R.* Op. cit. P. 110.

90. Ibid. P. 108.

91. *Hart C.* Athelstan "Half King" and his family // ASE. 1973. Vol. 2. P. 126.

92. Liber Eliensis. P. 424.

the daughter of a *procere* [sic] was only allowed to one of the same class"[93]. All an impartial reader learns is that a prominent family turned down a marital offer for property and/or wealth reasons, if this really was their motivation in the first place. That *proceres* at any time formed an actual well-defined and endogamous "class" is a somewhat far-fetched interpretation, especially since it demands a positivistic assumption that terms *ealdorman* and *procer* from the Anglo-Norman *Liber Eliensis*, *earl* from the Laws of Cnut (modelled after West Saxon legislation) and *earl* from the *Norðleoda laga* (modelled after local Northumbrian customs?) all described one and the same social group.

To recap, I must regretfully raise an objection to Henson's assertion about the existence of "evidence that thanes with over £40 of land could be seen as constituting an upper class within the nobility". If there is any, it is hardly the *Liber Eliensis*, *Domesday Book*, *Norðleoda laga*, or *Geþyncðu*.

93. *Clarke P.A.* Op. cit. P. 34.

Looking for a black cat in a dark room

Coincidently or not, none of the three studied cases was conducted by a specialist in the field the respective case belonged to: Aakjær's primary area of expertise belonged to the high and late Middle Ages[94], as did Rachel Reid's, and as for William Stubbs, of his monumental *Constitutional History* he devoted only one sixth to the Anglo-Saxon period. The coincidence, I grant, may be superficial. But the more likely essentially common trait may be cautiously called *confirmation bias*[95]. In some instances it is even potentially feasible to discern its underlying mechanisms at work.

In all honesty I cannot claim to know what motivated Svend Aakjær to write his influential article. My educated speculation would be his general familiarity with the anglophone medieval historiography, since in 1921 he had graduated with his degree in English, German, and Danish studies. Understanding the firm foothold

94. *Bjørn C.* Svend Aakjær i Dansk Biografisk Leksikon. 3. udg. Gyldendal 1979–1984. [Digital resource] URL: *http://denstoredanske.dk/index.php?sideId=299723* (accessed May 10th, 2018).

95. Without delving too deeply into the field of psychology and the discussions surrounding the term, for my purposes I shall adopt the definition by Scott Plous: a confirmation bias is "a preference for information that is consistent with a hypothesis rather than information which opposes it" (*Plous S.* The Psychology of Judgment and Decision Making. New York, 1993. P. 233). I would like to state my awareness that throughout writing this essay I was probably subject to it as well.

his ideas got in the subsequent Scandinavian scholarship seems an easier task. As indicated by Henrik Janson, the preoccupation with the beginnings of the early medieval states in the North has been a traditional concern for a great many Scandinavian scholar for nearly two hundred years and can be traced back to Hegelian contraposition of the "historical" and "non-historical" peoples. In Hegel's philosophy of history, the latter only began with the emergence of the state, hence everything prior to it is considered "pre-history" not worth examining. Later surge of national Romanticism would alter this view and Friedrich Schlegel, for instance, would praise the "Germanic" abhorrence of a strong government, but the notion of state as a hall-mark of historicity would not entirely leave the historiographical scene in Germany and Scandinavia[96]. Aakjær's opinion on the societal role of the *thegns*, informed by his philological approach, fit in well in various historical narratives set along these lines. Characteristically, numerous discourses did not make *thegns* the object of their study *per se* but exploited them beside many a methodological element in the overview of the early medieval Scandinavian formation. Martin Syrett aptly epitomised this trend as follows:

> That historical approaches have tended to link the thegns and drengs of the runic inscriptions with the growth of a royally sanctioned aristocracy derives largely from the necessity of positing some royal officers somewhere to account for the development of the Danish state in the tenth and eleventh centuries. As Peter Sawyer put it, "kings must have had agents … not only to lead local defences but also to gather royal resources"[97].

The force of Aakjær's interpretation has been simply too strong for the "state-formation addicts," as Eric Christiansen uncomplimentarily branded the adherents of this school of thought[98], to subject it to a critical source-study test: theory prevailed, the cart was put before the horse. While not sharing Christiansen's stigmatising disapproval, and confirming the validity of the episteme these authors worked within, I nevertheless take issue with them in light of re-examination of their source treatment.

96. *Janson H.* Till frågan om Svearikets Vagga. Gällstad, 1999. S. 21, 76–91.

97. *Syrett M.* Op. cit. P. 268.

98. *Christiansen E.* The Norsemen in the Viking Age. Oxford, 2002. P. 335.

What drove Rachel Reid and David Roffe in their research is beyond my current knowledge though, naturally, the "caesura *vs.* continuity" controversy immediately springs to mind. My only suspicion concerns a methodological side effect of "whiggish historiography" with its occasional tendency to simplify "a complex story and ben[d] its inner linkages by leaving out all those facts that got in the way <…>"[99]. This impression is further reinforced by Dr Reid's obvious aim to flesh out the full history of the tenure *per baronia*, the last date in her sketch being 1819[100]. However, I do acknowledge the speculative nature of my argument. Whatever the actual case, the paradigmatic pattern found in both Reid and Roffe's similarly named articles, as well as Stubbs' scheme, is perhaps best described by a phrase coined by Leonid Alaev in an unrelated discussion:

> It is hard to fight the ineradicable thirst for order, uniformity, and regularity[101].

As announced in the beginning of this article, I do hope that the offered case study is instructive of a more general historiographical trend with its occasional "spillover effect" on popular history writing. I would probably hesitate to join Stephen Baxter's somewhat judgemental characterisation of this trend as the employment of "a long and precarious chain of mutually dependent arguments which cannot hold the weight placed upon it"[102] in historical research, yet I recall that it is ever hard to look for a black cat in a dark room, especially if there is no cat at all.

99. *Bentley M.* Introduction: Approaches to Modernity: Western Historiography Since the Enlightenment // Companion to Historiography. London; New York, 1997. P. 423.

100. *Reid R. R.* Barony and Thanage. P. 164.

101. *Алаев Л. Б.* Сельская община: «Роман, вставленный в историю». М., 2016. С. 8.

102. *Baxter S.* Review of Domesday: the Inquest and the Book [review no. 216] // Reviews in History. 2001. September [Digital Resource] URL: http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/216 (accessed May 8th, 2018).

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