'Origin Legends and Objects', in *Origin Legends in Early Medieval Western Europe*, ed. Lindy Brady and Patrick Wadden (Brill, Reading Medieval Sources series, 2022), pp. 305-337

Katherine Cross

Origin legends, by definition, relate to the material and social worlds. They cannot be defined as a literary genre, though they accrued narrative conventions and repeated *topoi* during the Early Middle Ages. Instead, these narratives appear within a variety of historical genres, while a broader range of texts, including vernacular poetry and genealogies, seems to refer to them.[1] Nor can the category of origin legends be drawn according to their content, since this tends merely to reinforce modern preconceptions, whether that means separating history from fantasy or 'Germanic' tradition from classical ethnographic references.[2] The uniting factor seems to be the social and narrative role played by these stories. Either within the overarching narrative of a text, or within society more broadly, origin legends explain how a contemporary group, political order, or institution came into being. They both claim a reflection of material historical realities and play a role in cohering and expressing an ethnic or national (or regional, institutional, or political) identity in the world outside the text.

As a result, investigation into origin legends has always incorporated materials beyond the literary text, in attempts to corroborate (or refute) those historical statements or to find further evidence of the identities in question. The key cross-medium exchanges debated have been the relationships of oral traditions to the written text (as discussed by Shami Ghosh in this volume). Yet the transmission, circulation and employment of narratives in society also incorporated material culture, art and architecture, topography and place, and ritual performance. If we want to understand how origin legends operated in society, and how they related to people's identities, we must engage with these multiple and intersecting channels of communication. In this chapter, I consider how early medievalists from a range of disciplinary backgrounds have combined texts and material culture in their study of origin legends, before looking at two case studies in detail. In particular, this chapter focuses on portable objects, since they have been used to demonstrate both personal identity and migrations in varied ways.

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[1] Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550-800)* (Princeton, 1988); Joaquín Martínez Pizarro, "Ethnic and National History ca. 500-1000", in *Historiography in the Middle Ages*, ed. Deborah M. Deliyannis (Leiden, 2003), pp. 43-87 (esp. pp. 43, 47, 81).

[2] Pizarro, "Ethnic and National History", pp. 44-7; Susan Reynolds, "Medieval *Origines Gentium* and the Community of the Realm", *History* 68 (1983), 375-90.

The following discussion addresses the role of origin legends in early medieval England in the Anglo-Saxon and Viking periods. Accounts of the so-called *adventus Saxonum* recorded in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* (731) and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (earliest existing version c. 891/2), have been discussed extensively as origin legends for the English-speaking peoples, and further contributions in this volume demonstrate the continued appropriateness of the label.[3] However, we may also consider the lack of comparable origin legends from Viking-Age England, despite a possibly similar process of migration, conquest and settlement by ethnically distinct groups.[4] Judith Jesch's chapter in this volume reveals the richness of origin legends composed in and about the Viking Age in other regions of northern Europe. I suggest that we need to broaden the scope of what we consider to be origin legends, and to search for their equivalents, if we are to understand how they arise (or when they do not). To find them, we may need to look beyond texts.

I. Approaches to origin legends and objects

Narratives we now classify as origin legends have always formed part of the study of early medieval material culture. As scholarly approaches to these narratives have changed, so have their roles within discussions of archaeological and art-historical evidence. Broadly speaking, there has been a move outwards from imagining material culture as part of the historical *content* of origin legends, to interpreting it as making similar *claims* and playing a similar role as those legends, to considering objects as *media* involved in storytelling processes in distinct and complementary ways to texts. We can see these three approaches as progressively distancing material culture from origin myths' internal narrative worlds, but they are all current perspectives, and indeed there is considerable overlap between them. While the following discussion focuses on material from Britain, the methodological developments have taken place in a much broader context that encompasses research into early medieval Europe more generally.

The majority of studies considering origin legends in relation to material culture have aimed at assessing the historicity of those narratives. From the mid-nineteenth century, archaeologists and antiquarians used origin legends as a means of identifying excavated artefacts from the early medieval period. In England, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* and the

[3] Barbara Yorke, "Anglo-Saxon origin legends", in *Myth, Rulership, Church and Charters: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Brooks*, ed. Julia Barrow and Andrew Wareham (Aldershot, 2008), pp. 15-29; Nicholas Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Haven, 1989).
[4] Katherine Cross, *Heirs of the Vikings: History and Identity in Normandy and England, c. 950-c. 1015* (York, 2018), pp. 80-3.

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, along with the *Historia Brittonum* (mid-ninth century), supplied a chronology of migration and conquest by Germanic tribes from the continent in the fifth and sixth centuries AD, which seemed to provide an explanation for the artefacts being unearthed by the barrow-diggers. Antiquarians viewed excavated grave-goods as the cultural footprints of distinct peoples found in these historical texts. For the English antiquarian Thomas Wright, for instance, the regional distribution of different brooch types found in furnished burials constituted the primary material for identifying Anglian, Saxon, and Jutish peoples in the archaeological record while, for J. M. Kemble, comparison of cremation urns from England and in Hanover seemed to supply evidence for migration from Saxony as described by Bede.[5] The approach to the material relied upon the idea that tribal groups used distinct *types* of objects and decorated them with their own forms of ornament; the geographical and chronological distinctions between these types and styles then revealed the movements of peoples.

As the discipline of early medieval archaeology found its feet, scholars rapidly appreciated that archaeological findings could challenge the narratives they were using as guides. E. T. Leeds, identifying 'early Saxon' artefact types in the Upper Thames valley, reconstructed a different route of migration for the early West Saxons from that found in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.[6] Moreover, with the multiplication of artefactual and archaeological evidence, it became clear that Bede's account of Anglian, Saxon, and Jutish migration required revision. Mid-twentieth-century archaeologists such as J. N. L. Myres argued for a more complex map of migrant Germanic ethnicities in fifth- and sixth-century lowland Britain, and identified the survival of a native British population through the appearance of 'Romano-British' artistic elements on some artefacts.[7] The first century of academic study into early medieval material culture led to a more nuanced approach to origin legends in historical texts, which were shown to be unreliable accounts of the post-Roman centuries.

Origin legends were thus treated as comparable to other kinds of historical sources. They were assessed for reliability and for the authenticity of the traditions they recorded. The considerable length of time that had passed between the events they described and their

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[5] Thomas Wright, *The Celt, The Roman, and the Saxon* (London, 1852), p. 410; J.M. Kemble, "On Mortuary Urns Found at Stade-on-the-Elbe and Other Parts of North Germany, Now in the Museum of the Historical Society of Hanover", *Archaeologia* 36 (1856) 270-83, repr. in idem, *Horae Ferales, or Studies in the Archaeology of the Northern Nations* (London, 1863), pp. 221-32; Sam Lucy, *The Anglo-Saxon Way of Death: Burial Rites in Early England* (Stroud, 2000), p. 11.

[6] E. T. Leeds, *The Archaeology of the Anglo-Saxon Settlements* (Oxford, 1913), pp. 50-3.

[7] J. N. L. Myres, "Three Styles of Decoration on Anglo-Saxon Pottery", *Antiquity* 17 (1937), 424-37; J. N. L. Myres, *Anglo-Saxon Pottery and the Settlement of England* (Oxford, 1969); Lucy, *Anglo-Saxon Way of Death*, pp. 164-73.

recording in writing suggested a high degree of distortion, of course. But historical critique in the 1970s and 1980s indicated that the issue was more significant than distortion: the accounts of the *adventus Saxonum* are better understood as a different kind of narrative, as origin legends akin to those told about other early medieval peoples.[8] However, a number of important archaeological studies have continued to use these sources primarily as (admittedly unreliable) historical records of migration and ethnic groupings, providing a chronological frame.[9] Compare the treatment of Viking-Age migration to England. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* again supplies a framework for investigation, but in this instance the historical text is near contemporary and compiled from an outsider perspective. Material culture—the presence of women's oval brooches, the incidence of furnished burial and the cremation rite—is similarly used to map the migration and impact of Scandinavian settlers, fleshing out the sparse details of the *Chronicle*.[10] Yet it is not at all clear that the annals recording the arrivals of Hengest and Horsa, Cerdic and Cynric, Stuf and Wihtgar, and so on, can be used as historical sources akin to the annals recorded by contemporaries in the ninth.

Research into the material culture of the post-Roman centuries has now begun to employ origin legends, not for the historical information they contain, but as a distinct form of narrative. In particular, scholars have been influenced by the 'ethnogenesis' theory of the Vienna school and associated discussions of the literary and linguistic evidence for origin legends.[11] Proponents of the 'ethnogenesis' theory identified an oral narrative 'core of tradition' preserved by a small elite group, and possibly reflecting their historic past experiences, which was then adopted much more widely to form the basis of an ethnic identity.[12] Archaeologists have similarly proposed that material culture could reflect past migrations and lifestyle traditions of elites, which their followers came to adopt as their

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[8] Yorke, "Anglo-Saxon origin legends"; Patrick Sims-Williams, "The Settlement of England in Bede and the *Chronicle*", *Anglo-Saxon England* 12 (1983), 1-41.

[9] E.g. John Hines, *The Scandinavian Character of Anglian England in the pre-Viking Period* (British Archaeological Reports British series) 124 (Oxford, 1984); Toby F. Martin, *The Cruciform Brooch and Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2014).

[10] Jane Kershaw, *Viking Identities: Scandinavian jewellery in England* (Oxford, 2013); Guy Halsall, "The Viking Presence in England? The Burial Evidence Reconsidered", in *Cultures in Contact: Scandinavian Settlement in England in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries*, ed. Dawn Hadley and Julian Richards (Turnhout, 2000), pp. 259-75 for critique of such approaches to burial evidence.

[11] Reinhard Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung* (Cologne, 2nd ed. 1977); Herwig Wolfram, "*Origo et religio*: ethnic traditions and literature in early medieval texts", *Early Medieval Europe* 3 (1994), 19-38; Andrew Gillett, ed. *On Barbarian Identity: Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2002) for a sense of the debate.

[12] See critique of this model in Guy Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 457-62.

own.[13] The interpretation of material culture in such work, however, follows the same logic in identifying 'foreign' influence as the product of a past, ethnicity-defining, migration. This mode of interpretation still aims to identify the core of historical truth behind the origin legends through archaeological evidence.

An 'ethnogenesis'-based approach begins to address, but does not fully overcome, a central problem in using material culture to investigate migration: object types and artistic styles do not reflect ethnicity in a straightforward way.[14] Many interpretations interested in historicity rely on the idea that the people who wore (or were buried with) Scandinavian-made and Scandinavian-style brooches had their origins in Scandinavia, too. The 'ethnogenesis'-type arguments respond to the complexity and fluidity of early medieval ethnic identity by re-interpreting foreign artefacts as *assertions* of a migrant identity that could be adopted by people of diverse backgrounds. However, they still rest on the principle that the primary meaning of such artefacts must have been ethnic: that a Scandinavian-type brooch signalled that its owner identified as Scandinavian. Susan Oosthuizen recently illustrated the fallacy of using 'foreign' artefacts as an index of migrant ethnicities by providing a similar distribution map of IKEA stores in England in 2018, pointing out that this does not provide evidence of Swedish colonisation, or hold any relationship to Swedish ethnicity in Britain.[15] By analogy, there are multiple possible explanations for the presence of Scandinavian brooches in Britain (and this is true also for the Viking-Age context). Moreover, there are multiple possible meanings that may have been attributed to them by wearers and viewers, and different individuals may have ascribed different meanings to the same objects—context is key to their interpretation. None of these objections amount to a complete rejection of the possibility that objects could reflect migration or convey ethnic identity, simply that the connection is not automatic and must be investigated.

Objects, then, convey meanings, and participate in the construction of identity, rather than merely reflecting it. Under the influence of post-processual archaeology, early medievalists since the 1980s have become less ready to label particular object types as the products of defined historical cultures, and have given more thought to how material culture and burial

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[13] Howard Williams noted the 'parity' in approach: *Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain* (Cambridge, UK, 2006), p. 40. Archaeological applications of *Traditionskern* ethnogenesis theory can be quite flexible: Martin, *Cruciform Brooch*, pp. 181-2.

[14] For a full discussion of the methodological and philosophical problems encountered when using early medieval archaeology to discuss ethnicity, see D. J. M. Harland, "Deconstructing Anglo-Saxon Archaeology", unpublished PhD thesis, University of York, 2017. This thesis gives a fuller critical discussion of many of the studies mentioned in the next few paragraphs.

[15] Susan Oosthuizen, *The Emergence of the English* (Leeds, 2019), pp. 59-67 (p. 63 for the map).

practices acted as symbols and expressions of ideology.[16] We as scholars should try to 'read' the messages presented in the material evidence rather than treat it as empirical data. Objects are thus akin to literary texts, making similar claims and open to similar interpretations.[17]

With this shift in methodological perspective, archaeologists and art historians have employed origin legends in a different way. They are now recognised as narratives circulating in society and as products of the same ideologies as material culture. Several influential interpretations of archaeological evidence have suggested that early medieval material culture and mortuary ritual conveyed ideological messages and constructed identities through allusion to just such origin legends. Most commonly, the presence of supposedly 'Germanic' cultural markers is interpreted as evidence of an assertion of migration across the North Sea, whether or not such a migration actually took place.[18] In an alternative form of explanation, Andres Dobat has proposed that a 'stranger-king' origin myth, rather than a more generalised migration, lies behind the foreign objects in Scandinavian ship burials (and, by analogy, at Sutton Hoo).[19] A detailed argument linking objects and rituals to origin legends was made by Heinrich Härke who, in an essay entitled 'Material Culture as Myth', proposed that the rite of weapon burial in the fifth and sixth centuries conveyed a 'conquest myth' that would later be committed to writing in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Härke made the argument for comparability explicitly:

> If material culture can be analysed and discussed as text, the closest material-cultural analogy of the conquest myth must be the Anglo-Saxon weapon-burial rite. Weapons are displayed and buried in the graves of families who consider themselves to be the descendants of the invaders referred to in the written sources. The weapons symbolize the violence of the conquest which is described in such gory detail in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.[20]

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[16] On post-processual archaeology, see Guy Halsall, "Archaeology and Historiography", repr. in idem, *Cemeteries and Society in Merovingian Gaul: Selected Studies in History and Archaeology, 1992-2009* (Leiden, 2010), pp. 19-48 (pp. 32-8).
[17] E.g. Martin Carver, "Burial as Poetry: The Context of Treasure in Anglo-Saxon Graves", in *Treasure in the Medieval West*, ed. E. Tyler (Woodbridge, 2001), pp. 25–48.
[18] E.g. Tania Dickinson, "Review Article: What's New in Early Medieval Burial Archaeology?", *Early Medieval Europe* 11 (2002), 71-87 (pp. 84-5); James Gerrard, *The Ruin of Roman Britain* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 181, 271; see critique in Harland, "Deconstructing Anglo-Saxon Archaeology", pp. 156-61.
[19] Andres Siegfried Dobat, "Viking stranger-kings: the foreign as a source of power in Viking Age Scandinavia, or, why there was a peacock in the Gokstad ship burial." *Early Medieval Europe* 23 (2015), 161-201.
[20] Heinrich Härke, 'Material Culture as Myth: Weapons in Anglo-Saxon Graves', in *Burial and Society: the chronological and social analysis of archaeological burial data*, ed. C. K. Jensen & K. Høilund Nielsen (Aarhus, 1997), pp. 119–27 (p. 123).

A major contribution of these studies is that they have emphasised the ritual performances by which objects came to be placed within graves, and the symbolism of the burial assemblage as a whole and in relation to others. Similar arguments have been developed to explain styles and iconography: the popularity of animal art (especially Salin's Styles I and II) in the fifth to seventh centuries has also been explained as an assertion of masculine, royal, and ethnic identities linked to divine ancestors and Scandinavian myths of origins.[21] This art-historical perspective facilitates the interpretation also of decontextualized objects, and engages primarily with their creation rather than their deposition.

In forming these interpretations, scholars may refer to origin legends known from later texts, and suggest that they circulated in some form in earlier centuries (as Härke), or they may posit the existence of origin legends based purely on the material evidence (as Dobat)—although, since they are developed by anthropological and historical analogy, these end up looking rather similar. Both of these approaches hold their problems. The origin legends contained in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and genealogical lists should be interpreted as creative products of their moments of composition, politicised accounts of contemporary ethnic relations in the eighth and ninth centuries. If we are to relate these legends to identities of earlier centuries, we must believe that they held true to a long-lived narrative core. These are matters of considerable debate and continuing disagreement.[22] Moreover, relying too heavily on a narrative known from texts in order to unlock the meaning of an artefact or an assemblage relegates the material object to always playing a secondary role. The origin legend must exist independently, known from its textual representations and assumed oral tradition, and it must also exist prior to the object invoking it. This perspective leaves no space for the material allusion to the origin legend to influence the narrative or its future employment. However, if we focus entirely on the material, then the narratives remain unknown to us and we can only talk in broad categories such as 'ancestors' and 'migration'. The role of material culture in narrative transmission is again lost, or arguments become highly speculative.

In order to continue, we require a deeper understanding of the precise mechanisms by which objects communicated origin legends. How could material artefacts work as a means

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[21] Tania Dickinson, "Symbols of protection: the significance of animal-ornamented shields in Early Anglo-Saxon England", *Medieval Archaeology* 49 (2005), 109-63; Karen Høilund-Nielsen, "Animal Art and the Weapon Burial Rite—A Political Badge?", in Claus Kjeld Jensen and Karen Høilund-Nielsen, eds, *Burial and Society: The Chronological and Social Analysis of Archaeological Burial Data* (Aarhus, 1997), pp. 129-48.
[22] In assessing the likelihood of earlier versions, the evidence of a particular passage of Gildas's *De Excidio Britanniae* is also crucial: see Yorke, 'Anglo-Saxon Origin Legends', p. 36.

of narrative transmission, and how did their roles relate to texts (including oral texts)? Interest in such questions draws on recent discussions among scholars in the humanities about the active role of objects in historical processes. This 'material turn' has stimulated a range of ways of thinking about how material things act with humans and sometimes independently of them, emphasising object-centred approaches. We can move beyond the textual analogy to consider how material culture may convey meaning in a distinct way to texts.[23] The archaeologist Howard Williams, shifting from Härke's emphasis on myth to see 'Material Culture as Memory', has explored how early medieval objects and funerary ritual operated as 'technologies of remembrance'.[24] In addition to functioning as symbols, objects may communicate memories and identities through their transformation in the ritual process and 'through metaphorical associations based on their provenance and materiality', including their connections to 'famed social actors'.[25] Early medieval texts have also begun to provide insights into how objects conveyed narratives. Elisabeth van Houts has demonstrated how documents from the later Anglo-Saxon period and across the Norman Conquest show objects acting as 'pegs for memory', associated with particular individuals and prompting the telling of stories.[26]

When material things tell stories, they do it differently from texts. The concept of object biography, in its varied applications, ascribes a narrative role to unique artefacts.[27] We cannot interpret all 'weapon burials' in the same way: the particular sword interred mattered. Nor do object biographies begin and end with the grave. Sue Brunning's recent book presented swords in Anglo-Saxon England and Viking-Age Scandinavia—not only in the context of furnished burials—as 'living' artefacts which, as individual objects, accumulated meaning through consecutive ownerships, customisation, reputation, and multiple functions.[28] This argument demonstrates the need to analyse specific, individual objects in order to appreciate

[23] For important reflections on the limitations in seeing furnished inhumations as 'texts' to be 'read', see Guy Halsall, "Burial Writes: Graves, "Texts" and Time in Early Merovingian Northern Gaul", in *Erinnerungskultur im Bestattungsritual*. ed. J. Jarnut and M. Wemhoff, Archäologisch-Historisches Forum (Munich, 2003), pp. 61–74 (repr. in Halsall, *Cemeteries and Society*, pp. 215-31).
[24] Howard Williams, "Material Culture as Memory: combs and cremation in early medieval Britain", *Early Medieval Europe* 12 (2003), 89-128 (p. 90): '…material culture can be identified as a medium (parallel to, and interacting with, words and texts) through which social memories might be transmitted and reproduced in the early Middle Ages'; p. 93 for 'technologies of remembrance'.
[25] Williams, "Material Culture as Memory", p. 117; Williams, *Death and Social Memory*, p. 40.
[26] Elisabeth van Houts, *Memory and Gender in Medieval Europe, 900-1200* (Basingstoke, 1999), pp. 93-120.
[27] For critical discussion of the concept, see Roberta Gilchrist, "The materiality of medieval heirlooms: From biographical to sacred objects", in *Mobility, Meaning and Transformations of Things: Shifting Contexts of Material Culture through Time and Space*, ed. Hans Peter Hahn and Hadas Weiss (Oxford, 2013), pp. 170-82.
[28] Sue Brunning, *The Sword in Early Medieval Northern Europe: Experience, Identity, Representation* (Woodbridge, 2019).

their significance to those who used them. Instead of beginning with typology, we may take individual objects as the starting point and consider how they transmitted, rather than merely reflected, origin legends.

To investigate this relationship between object and origin myth, we are on firmer ground if we turn first to narratives for which we have contemporaneous and/or clearly connected material and textual evidence. This necessity, and the biographical approach to objects, requires a longer chronological perspective, moving beyond the post-Roman centuries into the middle and later Anglo-Saxon periods and beyond. The rest of this chapter explores the possibilities of this approach through two examples. First, we look at the iconography of the Romulus and Remus legend in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Portable objects bearing images of the Roman origin myth acted as an alternative means of narrative transmission to texts, with additional layers of meaning. Second, we investigate the Horn of Ulf—an object which embodies a local origin legend. In this case, the object and its visual representations stimulated and conveyed a narrative for centuries before any text recorded it, and subsequent texts were always to some degree responding to the object. These examples allow us to investigate the key questions raised here: how do objects transmit origin legends? And, specifically, what is the role of foreign objects and iconographies—are they markers of migration, or something else? These two case studies indicate the potential roles played by early medieval objects in the formation, transmission, and social significance of origin legends.

II. Romulus and Remus

Narrative images are relatively rare in visual and material culture from the Anglo-Saxon period, and there are no known pre-Conquest images representing the *adventus Saxonum* or foundational ancestors such as Hengest and Horsa. However, one origin legend appears in Anglo-Saxon art with some frequency and from early in the period: that of Romulus and Remus, the legendary founders of Rome. In each case, the twins are represented as infants or children suckling from the she-wolf, as in numerous ancient Roman depictions of the legend. The earliest such image, which appears on the fifth-century Undley Bracteate, almost certainly derived from a Roman coin exemplar, as did many bracteate motifs.[29] Nevertheless, the image is clear, suggesting that the copyist understood what it was intended to represent,

[29] BM 1984,1101.1; Sonia Marzinzik, *Masterpieces of Early Medieval Art* (London, 2013), 92-3.

even if it is not conclusive evidence of knowledge of the legend itself. After this, we know of a number of depictions produced in eighth-century England: the Series V silver pennies from southern England, perhaps Kent, in the 720s **(Fig. 2)**; silver coins minted by the moneyer Lul for Kings Æthelberht of East Anglia and Offa of Mercia in the 790s **(Fig. 3)**;[30] a fragment of a whalebone plaque from Larling, Norfolk, probably from a similar period **(Fig. 4)**;[31] and a more detailed narrative image filling the left panel of the whalebone Franks Casket, carved around 700 in Mercia or Northumbria **(Fig. 1)**.[32] For visual representations of a clearly identifiable, non-Christian, narrative, this selection is without equal for the early Anglo-Saxon centuries.

The population of early medieval England probably encountered the legend of Romulus and Remus primarily through their iconographic representation. Their appearance on three different issues of coinage meant that images of the wolf and twins passed through the hands of a wide variety of people. Moreover, late Roman coinage bearing the image was familiar enough to have provided the original models.[33] In addition, gems and medallions seem to have inspired the designer of the Series V coinage.[34] The variety of images produced in the eighth century, in different Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, and in both coin and whalebone, suggests multiple sources of inspiration from various late Roman models. Iconography thus constituted a major mode of transmission for the origin legend, largely independent of written versions.

Various texts including the story of Romulus and Remus, or some reference to it, did circulate in eighth-century England. The most likely form in which the origin legend may have been encountered is in Vergil's *Aeneid* although, as a pagan work of Latin verse, this text was probably only accessible to the most learned. Orosius's *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, and its ninth-century Old English translation, refer briefly to Rome's

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[30] *The Making of England: Anglo-Saxon Art and Culture, AD 600-900*, ed. Janet Backhouse and Leslie Webster (London, 1991), no. 222a; Anna Gannon, "Three Coins in a Fountain", in *Roma Felix. Formation and Reflections of Medieval Rome, Church, Faith, and Culture in the Medieval West*, ed. Éamonn Ó Carragáin and Carol Neuman de Vegvar (Aldershot, 2007), pp. 287-306 (pp. 299-302).

[31] Norwich Castle Museum 184.970; *Making of England*, no. 139 (p. 179).

[32] BM 1867,0120.1; Leslie Webster, *The Franks Casket* (London, 2012).

[33] Carol Neuman de Vegvar, "The Travelling Twins: Romulus and Remus in Anglo-Saxon England", in *Northumbria's Golden Age*, ed. Jane Hawkes and Susan Mills (Stroud, 1999), pp. 256-67 (pp. 259-60, and figs 21.6 and 21.7 on p. 262): Neuman de Vegvar identified the URBS ROMA type coinage of Constantine I, examples of which have been found in Anglo-Saxon graves, as the source of motifs on the Undley Bracteate. Coins with variations on the iconography still circulated as prestige items in later centuries—she provides an early fourth-century bronze example from Ostia as possible model for the Franks Casket's Romulus and Remus panel.

[34] Gannon, "Three Coins", pp. 293-9. Neuman de Vegvar, "Travelling Twins", p. 260, provides the example of a Roman gem used in a seventh-century Merovingian ring.

founders, and further reference is made to the story in Augustine's *City of God* and other early Christian discussions of Rome. However, none of these texts gives the she-wolf foundation story particular prominence. It may be that, as Nicholas Howe suggested, as a 'canonical' myth the story had 'general currency in the literary as well as the popular imagination': if so, the narrative must have circulated by other means.[35] The images, therefore, provide us with evidence for the narrative's transmission and its importance in this local context that texts do not.

Some of the images do suggest a degree of intersection between visual and textual traditions. The Franks Casket panel is framed by an inscription captioning it 'Romulus and Remus, the two brothers. A she-wolf nurtured them in the city of Rome, far from their/our native land'.[36] This panel largely follows the iconographic type of Romulus and Remus's discovery by the shepherds, but it also supplies additional details not found in any other images.[37] Some of these, such as the wolf licking one child's foot, recall literary versions of the legend: the *Aeneid* describes the she-wolf licking the boys into shape with her tongue.[38] Yet, on the Franks Casket, the tongue belongs to a second wolf, entirely unattested in textual or visual representations. It is either the designer's own innovation, or perhaps refers to an unknown oral version of the legend.[39] Other images also show innovation. The Series V coinage displays an image quite different to that of Roman precursors, emphasising different details, such as the droplets of milk falling from the wolf's teats.[40] Literary evidence for the Roman foundation myth is therefore of limited use in explaining the significance of these objects and the specific meanings of the images they bear.

However, we may contextualise them among further representations of Romulus and Remus from across early medieval Europe. For centuries, the image of the wolf suckling twins had condensed the origin legend into a defined, reproducible image, particularly on coinage, which symbolized Rome. Rulers in the 'barbarian' kingdoms continued to utilise this powerful symbol. Ostrogothic kings in the late fifth and early sixth centuries had used exactly the same Constantinian issue as did Offa and Æthelberht, as a model for their own

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[35] Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, p. 62.
[36] Webster, *Franks Casket*, p. 23; P. W. Souers, "The Franks Casket: Left Side", *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature* 18 (1935) 199–209 (p. 208).
[37] Neuman de Vegvar, "Travelling Twins", pp. 256-7.
[38] Vergil, *Aeneid*, 8.633-4; on this tradition, see Cristina Mazzoni, *She-Wolf: The Story of a Roman Icon* (New York, 2010), pp. 101-8.
[39] Michael Hunter, "Germanic and Roman Antiquity and the Sense of the Past in Anglo-Saxon England", *Anglo-Saxon England* 3 (1974), 29-50 (p. 40).
[40] Gannon, "Three Coins in a Fountain", pp. 294.

bronze *nummi*, with the text INVICTA ROMA.[41] The iconography, here, clearly acted as a symbol for the city of Rome, equivalent to the contemporary FELIX RAVENNA issues. In reviving this centuries-old design, the Ostrogothic rulers invoked the authority of the city of Rome, rather than their own or the eastern emperor's names (as on their silver and gold coinage). As Alessia Rovelli has pointed out, it was through these bronze coins that royal imagery reached the greatest number of people.[42] The cities of Rome and Ravenna were under Ostrogothic control and provided unifying focuses for their mixed subject populations of Goths and Romans; relying on the cities as authorising symbols for coinage was perhaps the most widely acceptable strategy. Charlemagne also appropriated the image, placing a bronze statue of the 'she-wolf' in his palace at Aachen, in echo of the Capitoline wolf standing outside the Lateran palace in Rome.[43] Of course, Æthelberht, Offa, and the minters of the Series V coinage did not mint their coins in Rome, nor did they lay claim to the imperial title. Yet we should probably view their coins as a similar endeavour, as part of the broader history of post-Roman kings accruing Roman imagery to themselves as a means of legitimising and aggrandising their rule, albeit with particular inflexions in each local context.

Art-historical analysis of the images themselves, and the objects they appear on, suggests that images of the suckling she-wolf and twins had acquired a religious meaning, too. Most clearly, on the Larling Plaque, the wolf and twins shelter under the arm of the cross. Leslie Webster has suggested that, in eighth-century England, the image was understood as the Roman church in a specifically nurturing sense, with the suckling wolf representing the church as a nursing mother;[44] such a meaning would explain the emphasis on the milk and the action of suckling in the Anglo-Saxon representations.[45] Again, a broader set of early medieval images reinforces a Christian reading. Within the British Isles, both the Donaghmore Cross (County Tyrone, Northern Ireland, 9th/10th c.) and Maen Achwyfan (Flintshire, Wales, 10th c.) possibly depict the scene at the base of their cross-shafts.[46] A more

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[41] Elena Baldi. 2014. *Ostrogothic Coinage in the British Museum: online catalogue*. Available at https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/online_research_catalogues/ocg/ostrogothic_coinage.aspx Accessed 2019 August 29.
[42] Alessia Rovelli, "From the Fall of Rome to Charlemagne (c. 400-800)", in *Money and Coinage in the Middle Ages*, ed. Rory Naismith (Reading Medieval Sources) 1 (Leiden, 2019), pp. 63-92 (p. 72).
[43] Mazzoni, *She-Wolf*, p. 43.
[44] Leslie Webster, "The Iconographic Programme of the Franks Casket", in *Northumbria's Golden Age,* ed. J. Hawkes and S. Mills (Stroud, 1999), pp. 227-47 (p. 241).
[45] Anna Gannon, *The Iconography of Early Anglo-Saxon Coinage: Sixth to Eighth Centuries* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 119-21.
[46] Hilary Richardson and John Scarry, *An Introduction to Irish High Crosses* (Cork, 1990), pl. 76; Howard Williams. Memory, Movement and the Early Medieval Cross: Maen Achwyfan, *Archaeodeath* blog. Published

certain parallel is found on the Rambona diptych, an ivory carving of around 900 from a Lombard abbey in central Italy, which presents with an identifying inscription Romulus and Remus suckling from their adoptive wolf-mother at the foot of a crucifixion; the wolf's back appears to support the twin mountains of Golgotha.[47] In each case, the image may be seen as supporting, but subordinate to, the cross. The association with Christianity was made, not by chronological narrative, but by spatial relationship. Moreover, the formal content of the iconography, as an image of nurture, may have facilitated the development of a new meaning. Augustine of Hippo had Christianised the Roman origin legend through rationalisation of God's plan for the Roman Empire—the image could adapt to a Christian meaning through metaphor instead.[48]

Some scholars have turned to vernacular texts and cultural traditions to provide an explanation of how the images may have been read in a specifically Anglo-Saxon context. For instance, Sonia Marzinzik read the Undley Bracteate as a transformation of Roman imagery into a representation of Woden, with the wolf as his attribute.[49] Such ideas have gained support from the prevalence and significance of wolves in Old English and associated literatures. Similarly, Rovelli, discussing the Ostrogothic kings' use of Romulus and Remus on their coinage, has even suggested that interpretation of the image may have divided on ethnic lines: while the Roman population likely recognised the Romulus and Remus narrative, the wolf may have evoked different connotations in 'the Germanic imaginary'.[50] Carol Neuman de Vegvar, in her analysis of the Franks Casket image of Romulus and Remus, noted the similarity of the story with numerous tales in 'Indo-European' folklore; she emphasised the association of wolves and warriors, the two brothers as 'dioscuri', and the apparent hierarchy displayed in order to suggest that the image 'found sympathetic echoes in indigenous culture, and its meaning was likely enhanced by comparisons that such similarities invited'—specifically, with origin legends of the *adventus Saxonum*.[51]

These arguments rely on texts ranging from Tacitus's *Germania* of 98 AD to Middle High German and late medieval Irish vernacular texts, so the chronological development of such narratives is difficult to define. However, we can say more certainly that some of these

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online: 8 October 2017. Available at https://howardwilliamsblog.wordpress.com/2017/10/08/memory-movement-and-the-early-medieval-cross-maen-achwyfan/ Accessed 2019 July 23.

[47] Mazzoni, *She-Wolf*, pp. 193-7.

[48] Augustine of Hippo, *De civitate Dei libri XXII*, 18.21.

[49] Marzinzik, *Masterpieces*, p. 92.

[50] Rovelli, "Fall of Rome to Charlemagne", p. 72.

[51] Neuman de Vegvar, "Travelling Twins", pp. 264-6 (quotation p. 266).

objects bearing images of Romulus and Remus were produced in Kent and Mercia or Northumbria in the early eighth century, and that they all precede the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* accounts of founder ancestors. Might we not rather, then, highlight how the Romulus and Remus legend was known and used by Anglo-Saxon rulers, ecclesiastics, and elites in the period in which their own ethnic origin legends were coming into being? Nicholas Howe has suggested that Bede's account may have been influenced by the story of Romulus and Remus, while Guy Halsall has emphasised the relevance of the legend to various supposedly 'Germanic' origin myths, pointing out that Jordanes wrote the *Getica* as a pair with his *Romana*.[52] The objects from fifth- and eighth-century Britain provide further evidence that the literary production of origin legends for 'barbarian' peoples occurred within a milieu familiar with both the content and the political use of the Roman foundation myth.

The image has been linked more specifically to the founder ancestors of the East Anglian royal house. It had long been supposed that Æthelberht of East Anglia used the image of the wolf on his coins as a symbol of his royal dynastic identity. This connection derived, it was claimed, from a pun on the name of Æthelberht's dynasty, the Wuffings, and the argument was strengthened by the suggestion that the East Anglian royal house claimed Caesar also as an ancestor through its genealogy. The 2003 discovery of the coin of Offa with the same image cast doubt upon this explanation.[53] In any case, it is unnecessary to invoke genealogy to explain the connection. The coin itself created the desired association between the king and the image of Roman authority: with Æthelberht's name on the obverse, and the wolf and twins on the reverse, the link was made by material means. Early medieval genealogies incorporated eminent ancestors into royal houses in order to complete a similar aim: we should see this coinage as an alternative to genealogy, performing an equivalent function, rather than as necessarily referring to the same origin legend.

Finally, we need to consider the wider geographical currency of these images, rather than just the local. In early medieval England, visual representations of the wolf and twins may have gained specific meanings and connotations, drawing on particular folkloric associations of wolves and the contemporary significance of Rome. However, the image transcended ethnic identification and would have been familiar throughout early medieval Europe. It may not be coincidental that two Anglo-Saxon examples of wolf and twins were discovered

[52] Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, pp. 62-3; Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 460-1.
[53] Gannon, "Three Coins", pp. 299-302; Sam Newton, *The Origins of Beowulf and the pre-Viking Kingdom of East Anglia* (Cambridge, UK, 1993), pp. 108-9.

outside the British Isles: the Franks Casket came to antiquarian attention in Auzon, Haute-Loire, France, while one of the Æthelberht coins emerged in Tivoli, near Rome.[54] Both objects bear runic Old English inscriptions that would have been unintelligible to the populaces of these two regions (although, interestingly, both also display Latin text in Roman letters), but the images would have been recognised. To a viewer in Francia or Italy, or indeed to a continental visitor to early medieval England, these objects would have communicated both similarity—in the appeal to Roman heritage—and difference—in the use of runic script.[55] The meanings ascribed to these objects by their subsequent users and viewers were almost certainly different from those intended by their creators, hundreds of miles and centuries away.

III. Object as origin legend: The Horn of Ulf in York Minster

A second means by which objects could transmit origin legends is in their embodiment of the legend itself, prior to the development of any textual narrative. An intriguing example of this is the Horn of Ulf in York Minster.[56] This ivory horn is categorized as an 'oliphant', made from the hollow section of an elephant's tusk and carved with decorative designs; some eighty examples survive from medieval Europe.[57] The Horn of Ulf has a faceted but plain body between zones of carved decoration near either end. A wide frieze of fantastical animals parades around the wide mouth of the oliphant, facing each other across rather ornate trees; they resemble a griffin, a dragon, a unicorn-like beast, and a lion attacking a deer, and smaller creatures appear above them, below them, and from the ends of their tails. Underneath are two narrow bands of foliate designs, and two more near the tapered end. These bands lie either side of two inscribed silver-gilt mounts added in the seventeenth century, to which is attached a chain, and the horn is also mounted with metal rims at either end. In an important art-historical reassessment, Mariam Rosser-Owen has demonstrated the likelihood that most oliphants were created in Italy, principally in the south, from the late eleventh century and

[54] George Stephens, *The Old-Northern Runic Monuments of Scandinavia and England*, 4 vols (London, 1866-1901), I, 470-1; P. W. P. Carlyon-Britton, "A Penny of St Æthelberht, King of East Anglia', *British Numismatic Journal* 5 (1908), 73-84.
[55] See Helen Foxhall Forbes's discussion of runic graffiti at the shrine of St Michael in central Italy: "Writing on the Wall: Anglo-Saxons at Monte Sant'Angelo sul Gargano (Puglia) and the Spiritual and Social Significance of Graffiti", *Journal of Late Antiquity* 12 (2019), 169-210 (pp. 199-202).
[56] Avinoam Shalem, *Die mittelalterlichen Olifante*, 1 (Berlin, 2014) pp. 270-4 (B4).
[57] Mariam Rosser-Owen, "The Oliphant: A Call for a Shift of Perspective", in *Romanesque and the Mediterranean: Patterns of Exchange across the Latin, Greek and Islamic worlds c. 1000- c. 1250*, ed. Rosa Bacile (London, 2015), pp. 15-58; Shalem, *Die mittelalterlichen Olifante*.

throughout the twelfth. The Horn of Ulf is part of a group that may be attributed more specifically to a workshop in Amalfi or Salerno.[58]

Tradition holds that a nobleman named Ulf gave the Horn to the Minster sometime in the eleventh century, as a mark of his donation of extensive landed property. Two sixteenth-century references add the detail that Ulf was the son of a certain Thorald; this identification has generally been taken as authentic, though we should be cautious because of the late date at which it is first recorded.[59] The tradition as a whole, however, is highly plausible. We could list various examples of objects presented as gifts in themselves or as symbols of land transactions.[60] In his early Norman history *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae ducum* (c. 1015), contemporary with the supposed date of Ulf's donation, Dudo of St-Quentin had the viking Rollo declare to King Æthelstan, 'The kingdom which you have given to me of your own accord I return to you by this sword, which has a hilt bearing twelve pounds of gold'.[61] The act was almost certainly fictional, but the gesture must have made sense, and further examples demonstrate that a sword was seen as an appropriate object for transfer of a kingdom.[62] More regularly, land was transferred by objects such as a knife, staff—or horn.[63] In the central Middle Ages, rituals of vassalage incorporated symbolic objects in similar ways, and a horn acted as a symbol for the custom of *cornage*.[64] In the early medieval cases, however, we may see the material object used as an alternative, or occasionally a complement, to a textual charter. It was not always necessary for the object to bear any

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[58] *The Salerno Ivories, Objects, Histories, Contexts*, ed. Anthony Cutler, Francesca Dell'Acqua, Herbert L. Kessler, Avinoam Shalem and Gerhard Wolf (Berlin, 2016). Rosser-Owen, "The Oliphant", esp. pp. 34-6, 47-50, argues against the 'Islamic' interpretation proposed by Avinoam Shalem, *The Oliphant: Islamic Objects in Historical Context* (Leiden, 2004).

[59] The first reference to Thorald is given in an inventory list, which records that the Minster treasurer John Neuton (1393-1414) provided the horn 'ex dono Ulfi filii Thoroldi' with a new mount or hanging strap: *Fabric Rolls of York Minster*, ed. James Raine, Surtees Soc. 35 (1859), 223; Samuel Gale, "An Historical Dissertation upon the ancient Danish Horn kept in the Cathedral Church of York", *Archaeologia* 1 (1770), 168-82 (p. 181); Sarah Brown. The Mystery of Neuton's Tomb. In: *1414: John Neuton and the Re-Formation of York Minster Library*, History of Art Research Portal. Available at https://hoaportal.york.ac.uk/hoaportal/yml1414essay.jsp?id=10 Accessed 2019 August 5. The second is in William Camden's *Britannia*, discussed further below.

[60] Van Houts, *Memory and Gender*, pp. 107-8; Michael Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 3rd ed. (Chichester, 2013), pp. 256-62.

[61] Dudo of St-Quentin, *History of the Normans*, trans. Eric Christiansen (Woodbridge, 1998), p. 41; Dudo of St-Quentin, *De Moribus et Actis Primorum Normanniae Ducum*, ed. Jules Lair (Caen, 1865), p. 160.

[62] Susan Reynolds, "Afterthoughts on 'Fiefs and Vassals'", *Haskins Society Journal* 9 (2001 for 1997), 1-15 (pp. 9-12).

[63] Emily Zack Tabuteau, *Transfers of Property in Eleventh-Century Norman Law* (Chapel Hill, 1988), pp. 127-29; Shalem, *Oliphant*, pp. 120-4.

[64] Jacques le Goff, "The Symbolic Ritual of Vassalage", in idem, *Time, work and culture in the Middle Ages* (Chicago, 1980), pp. 237-87; Reynolds, "Afterthoughts", pp. 9-12; John Cherry, "Symbolism and Survival: Medieval Horns of Tenure", *Antiquaries Journal* 69 (1989), 111-18.

particular resemblance or connection to the gift, although it has been suggested that the horn symbolized hunting land.[65] Perhaps more important was the object's association with its previous owner—its prior life history. In order to continue in their function as symbolic of the gift, objects needed to have narratives spun around them.[66] In the eyes of their medieval users, the life histories of things gave them their meaning—perhaps even more than their physical form.

In the repeated telling of this story throughout the Middle Ages and up until the present, Ulf acted as an eminent 'ancestor' for the Minster (although, of course, he was not the only figure of note in the Minster's genealogy). Historical investigation of the case has concentrated on identifying Ulf and assessing the authenticity of the legend.[67] Art-historical discussion, on the other hand, focuses on the Horn as an example of an oliphant, and has been concerned primarily with the location and milieu in which this type of object was created. Moreover, as Rosser-Owen has pointed out, the early eleventh-century date suggested by the historical tradition has until recently been used by art historians as a fixed point for the Horn of Ulf's manufacture and donation.[68] Historians, therefore, cannot use the art-historical dating of the object to the early eleventh century in support of the historicity of the tradition: in fact, recent assessments of the Horn suggest the 1080s as a more likely time of manufacture. On the whole, scholarly interest has focused on the origins of the object, not the messages it conveyed, and on the historicity of the origin story, rather than its transmission, elaboration, and social impact.

Yet the narrative tradition associated with the Horn has not remained stable over the centuries: the object has been framed within the Minster and interpreted by its visitors in various ways. Our earliest evidence (other than the object itself) is provided in the fabric of the building, in representations of a faceted horn carved in relief high on the stone walls of the nave (1290s), the Lady Chapel, and the south choir arcade. In each case, the horn appears alongside a heraldic shield, *vert, six lioncels or*. The coat of arms must have been newly developed for the first of these representations and retrospectively attributed to Ulf as a pre-Conquest figure: while heraldic conventions were not yet in use in the eleventh century, it

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[65] Rosser-Owen, "The Oliphant", p. 46.
[66] E.g. Mathieu Arnoux, "Before the *Gesta Normannorum* and beyond Dudo: Some evidence on early Norman historiography", *Anglo-Norman Studies* 22 (1999), 29-48 (pp. 35-6).
[67] Gale, "Historical Dissertation"; Robert Davies, "The Horn of Ulphus", *Archaeological Journal* 26 (1869), 1-11; T. D. Kendrick, "The Horn of Ulph", *Antiquity* 11 (1937), 278-82; David Woodman, ed., *Charters of Northern Houses* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 8-9.
[68] Rosser-Owen, "The Oliphant", pp. 34, 48.

was relatively common by the mid-thirteenth century to attribute fictitious arms to historical (and even biblical) figures. The scheme of the new nave, adorned with the heraldic shields of lay patrons in each bay, explains the impetus for the arms' creation.[69] Perhaps the lions were chosen to resemble the fabulous beasts depicted on the Horn.

The invention of the arms was a successful elaboration of the Horn's story, and they were consistently represented in subsequent medieval depictions in stone and glass throughout the cathedral.[70] Additionally, a stained-glass window in the choir, of around 1400, depicts the horn twice—once in the hand of a male figure, and once above his head. The stone carvings show the horn hanging, suggesting that the real object may have been suspended in the cathedral for all to see.[71] The Minster representations probably needed an interpreter, however. The window with the two horns, in particular, is so high as to be indecipherable to the viewer on the ground.

Wooden *tabulae* displaying accounts of the Minster's history furnished this interpretation from the end of the fourteenth century onwards. These 'visitors' guides' to the cathedral displayed various documents of interest on parchment pasted onto wooden boards, including a metrical chronicle which contains the first textual reference to the Horn.[72] The text states that it was written in the time of Archbishop Thomas Arundel (1388-96), and apparently for this very purpose, since it also refers to its own function and placement within the Minster.[73] The chronicle claims that the Horn 'testifies to' Ulf's generosity, signalling that the visitor was expected to be viewing the object while they read the narrative information about it.[74] It follows historical and literary sources in linking York to national developments; Ulf is sandwiched between Cnut and Edward the Confessor. (The chronicle, incidentally, includes

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[69] Sarah Brown, *York Minster: An Architectural History c. 1220-1500* (Swindon, 2003), pp. 91, 122-5.
[70] One window in the nave includes also a derivative coat of arms now designated 'son of Ulf', presumably on account of its related heraldic composition.
[71] Parallels in Shalem, *The Oliphant*, pp. 126-8.
[72] York Minster Library, Additional MS 533, panel 2. The extant *tabula* bearing the text of the metrical chronicle, which dates from c. 1400 (and so, if not the original version, is an early copy), has been overlooked in scholarly treatments of the Horn of Ulf, largely because Kendrick, "The Horn of Ulph", stated that the fifteenth-century manuscripts were the earliest still surviving. On *tabulae* in general: Michael Van Dussen, "Tourists and *Tabulae* in Late-Medieval England", in *Truth and Tales: Cultural Mobility and Medieval Media*, ed. Fiona Somerset and Nicholas Watson (Columbus, 2015), pp. 238-54; Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England: c. 1307 to the sixteenth century* (London, 1982), p. 495 (Appendix E).
[73] *Historians of the Church of York and its Archbishops*, ed. James Raine (Rolls Series) 71 (London, 1886), 446-68 (p. 446): 'Hic Eboracensis temple, metropolis, Urbis, Ecclesiaeque statum praesens pandit Tabulatum… Haec ex archivis de multis paucula scripsi; Ne lateat latebris Tabula sic publice fixi. Nunc pater et primas haec dum descipta fuere, En quartus Thomas praesidet et cathedrae; Ecclesiae jura noscas ut carmine plura, Plenius in Tabula scribitur historia'.
[74] *Historians of the Church of York*, p. 339: 'Cornea buccina, candida, lucida, testificatur | Munus et eximium largifluum Comitis'.

an abundance of origin stories, preceding the *adventus Saxonum* with an account of the founding of a temple at York by Ebraucus 1200 years before Christ, based on Geoffrey of Monmouth; it seems to relate to the East Window which includes the figure of Ebraucus).[75] Since the text is in Latin, it is likely that many visitors accessed it through oral translation and discussion.[76] The chronicle framed and interpreted the object—but the object remained the central focus, communicating directly with the viewer.

These representations of the Horn and its donor tied both to the Minster as an important part of its history and reinforced the narratives told about the object. In his *Britannia*, William Camden recounted the story of the Horn as part of his account of York Minster's history, despite it having been removed in the Reformation.[77] Camden stated that his information came 'from an old book' ('ex veteri libero'), which is transparently the metrical chronicle. However, he added further details after this. The new story told by Camden elaborated on the reasons for Ulf's gift by introducing a dispute over inheritance between Ulf's sons. William Dugdale, visiting in the seventeenth century, referred to the stone carvings in the Minster in the absence of the Horn itself, and sought out the object in the possession of Thomas, Lord Fairfax.[78]

To a degree, textual accounts of the Horn allowed the narrative to separate from the object. The metrical chronicle was copied in at least two manuscripts in the fifteenth century, which disseminated it as part of York's history further afield.[79] Camden, too, drew on the metrical chronicle rather than observation of the object, and his account then seems to have become the definitive version, widely printed and read. A late-seventeenth-century visitor, Celia Fiennes, had either read or been told a version of Camden's story, since she explained the donation as being due to 'a dislike to disobedient Children'.[80] However, Celia had also seen

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[75] M. L. Holford, "Locality, Culture and Identity in Late Medieval Yorkshire", unpublished PhD thesis, University of York, 2001, p. 130.
[76] Holford, pp. 129-30.
[77] William Camden, *Britannia*, 3rd ed. (1600): 'Quod cornu ad patrum usque memoriam reservatum fuisse accepimus' ('Which horne was there kept as a monument (as I have heard) until our fathers daies'). As Gale demonstrated ("Historical dissertation", 1750), the Horn was sold during the Reformation, before being returned by Henry, Lord Fairfax in 1675. (This does then raise the question of where the horn was for over 100 years, before Dugdale saw it in the possession of Henry's father Thomas in 1666—and if it is in fact the original horn).
[78] William Dugdale, "A Historical Account of the Catholic Church of York", p. 7, quoted in Gale, "Historical Dissertation", pp. 169-70.
[79] London, British Library Cotton MSS Titus A XIX, fol. 8b (provenance Kirkham Abbey: see Jeanne E. Krochalis, "History and Legend at Kirkstall in the Fifteenth Century", in *Of the Making of Books: Medieval Manuscripts, their Scribes and Readers. Essays presented to M. B. Parkes*, ed. P. R. Robinson and Rivkah Zim (Aldershot, 1997), pp. 230-56) and Cleopatra C IV, fol. 16. Holford adds London, British Library, MS Harley 1808 to this list (Holford, p. 129).
[80] Celia Fiennes, *Through England on a Side Saddle in the Time of William and Mary*, ed. Emily Griffiths (London, 1888).

the Horn itself, restored to its home in the Minster, and provided the additional comment that it was used as both a hunting horn and a drinking horn—its function being an obvious question to ask of the object. The textual accounts now governed the narrative, but visitors also sought new information from their encounters with the object itself. Unlike a text, the Horn was not easily reproducible; even the various attempts made, from an eighteenth-century engraving to the first photographs published alongside Thomas Kendrick's 1937 article, cannot give a sense of the size, weight, and materiality of the object.[81] It has to be seen—and perhaps held, heard, or even drunk from—to convey its messages in full.[82]

Moreover, the Horn's appearance had changed again by the time Celia saw it, and it was now 'tipt with Silver and Garnish'd over and Engrav'd ffinely all double Gilt wth a Chaine': the silver fittings in which the Horn was remounted by Henry, Lord Fairfax (Thomas's son) before he restored it to the Minster in 1675. On these fittings, Fairfax inscribed an account of the horn's history, thus adding himself as an illustrious donor in the lineage of the horn's original owner, so that Samuel Gale in 1755 now called it 'a noble monument of modern, as well as ancient piety'.[83] The object was now inscribed with its own biography. In this respect, it resembled even more closely an oliphant in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna which seems to have originated in the same workshop.[84] Its own history is directly inscribed into the plain body of this oliphant, in a Latin text recording that Count Albert von Habsburg 'enriched this horn with holy relics' in 1199.[85] The gift was made to the Abbey of Muri (Switzerland), which held it until 1702, when the abbey in turn presented the oliphant to the contemporary Habsburg emperor.[86] The inscribed biography had formed a relationship between the object, the abbey, and the Habsburg line which continued over the space of five centuries and influenced the horn's future travels.

Does the Horn of Ulf reveal anything else about itself as a means of narrative transmission? I have suggested that the beasts that decorate the Horn may have inspired the

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[81] The Minster's Undercroft Museum contains a life-size replica for visitors to lift; similarly, the Muri horn discussed below was recreated in wood by the abbey before it gave it away, and the replica is now in the Museum Aargau (Switzerland): http://museumaargau.ch/blog/objekt-des-monats-44-das-reliquienhorn-aus-dem-kloster-muri/ Accessed 2019 August 21.
[82] On sounding and drinking from horns, Shalem, *The Oliphant*, pp. 131-5.
[83] Gale, "Historical Dissertation", p. 182.
[84] Hanns Swarzenski, "Two Oliphants in the Museum", *Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts* 60 (1962), 27-45 (pp. 34, 37).
[85] Relics, of course, were the prime medieval example of objects that carried narratives, though they may not have been viewed as objects by their users.
[86] Vienna, Kunshistorisches Museum, Kunstkammer 4073. Sogenannter Olifant Graf Albrechts III. von Habsburg. Available at https://www.khm.at/objektdb/detail/90080/ Accessed 2019 August 21.

lions on Ulf's coat of arms, while Davies suggested a connection between these beasts and the owner's name (which means 'wolf').[87] The most striking fact about the Horn is the distance of its own origins, first as an elephant's tusk likely in sub-Saharan West Africa and then in its transformation into an oliphant in southern Italy.[88] Despite this, and despite its decoration with Mediterranean designs and fantastical beasts, the Horn has always been associated with a northern nobleman and the pre-Conquest city of York. Camden situated it in the Anglo-Saxon period, before the arrival of the Danes, while antiquarians and more recent historians have investigated the historical personage of Ulf as a member of York's Anglo-Scandinavian elite. The origins of the material, the design, and the actual manufacture seem largely irrelevant to the legend that grew up around it.[89] The importance of the object's foreignness, its distinctive appearance and exotic material within the cathedral, treasury, or museum, is surely that it provokes the question 'how did it get here?'—the question that the origin legend answers. But its displacement has been answered in terms of secular wealth or Scandinavian mobility, rather than with any links to the object's real, historical origins much further south.

The Horn of Ulf, however, is one of around 80 oliphants held in western European ecclesiastical treasuries in the Middle Ages. The intrinsically local story attached to it, and the reconstruction of its narrative framing within York Minster, may be more broadly contextualised. Oliphants, such as that in Muri Abbey, were associated elsewhere with lay donors, but also used as reliquaries; others accrued legends giving them magical properties or linking them to famous figures—the most well known, of course, being Charlemagne's horn in Aachen which gave the group their name.[90] The diversity of these stories is indicative of the range of meanings that oliphants could convey, but the similarity of their biographies in other respects suggests that patterns may be found. To do so, however, would require detailed analysis of each oliphant's presentation and narrative role over time, along the lines of that presented here. Moreover, the Horn of Ulf may be categorized in other ways, too. Rosser-Owen has argued that it should be understood within a broader category of horns, rather than a modern art-historical classification. These examples may lead into a more general

[87] Davies, 'Horn of Ulphus', p. 11.
[88] Rosser-Owens, "The Oliphant", p. 202.
[89] Elsewhere in its narrative, the metrical chronicle makes a pun on *Eboracum* (York) shining as if it were made *ex ebore* (from ivory), but if such a pun was intended in the reference to the horn, it is very subtle. (*Historians of the Church of York*, p. 447).
[90] Shalem, *The Oliphant*, pp. 107-35.

consideration of how objects within medieval church treasuries embodied myths about their communities.[91]

We cannot know for sure the stories that were told about the Horn over the centuries, since we only have fragments of evidence. Yet, even if the basic components of the origin story remained essentially the same, the significance and social impact of the legend evolved to fit the Minster's and its visitors' needs. The Horn of Ulf seems, in the Middle Ages, to have represented pre-Conquest lay patronage of the Minster, carrying that heritage through into the new building. The destruction of the Anglo-Saxon cathedral, library, treasures and archives in 1069 may have determined the choice of object or its role.[92] No doubt the Minster clergy were eager to encourage lay donations. Latterly, it has become symbolic of the presence—and support—of Anglo-Scandinavian nobility in York, and most recently of the viking impact on the city. If you visit the Undercroft Museum of the Minster, you will now find the Horn presented as 'a viking gift', while a detail from the incised decoration, showing a dragon-like creature, illustrates the introductory panel for the Minster's early history under the headings 'A Crossroads of Empires' and 'Waves of invaders'. The story of Ulf and his Horn is flexible enough to mould itself into an explanation for various aspects of York's, and York Minster's, history—and it is only very recently that it has had an ethnic label attached to it.

Conclusions

These two very different case studies indicate some of the ways in which early medieval objects conveyed narratives and tied those narratives to identities. In this sense, objects were analogous to texts and did operate under similar ideological pressures. Yet objects also operated in distinct ways. Images could attract metaphorical and multiple readings and create associations through their employment on particular kinds of objects or in adaptations to iconographical models. Distinctive objects could act as anchors for changing narratives, or be tied to specific places and meanings by visual echoes and by how they were exhibited. Objects, more so than texts, featured in their own narratives.

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[91] Philippe Cordez, *Trésor, mémoire, merveilles: Les objets des églises au Moyen Âge* (L'histoire et ses representations) 11 (Paris: Éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2016), p. 97.
[92] Christopher Norton, "York Minster in the Time of Wulfstan", in *Wulfstan, Archbishop of York: The Proceedings of the Second Alcuin Conference*, ed. Matthew Townend (Studies in the Early Middle Ages) 10 (Turnhout, 2004), pp. 207-34 (pp. 207-12).

However, it is difficult to read those narratives directly from the objects which, as we have seen, could convey multiple meanings. Contemporary parallels, particularly from elsewhere in western Europe, can assist in their interpretation. In particular, we cannot assume that exotic objects and imported iconographies were read as 'foreign'. It may be that their users did not know—or care—where they had been created. Different aspects of the object's biography may have held more relevance than its ultimate origins. When investigating the life histories of objects, we must be careful not to conflate our own research into their travels and display with early medieval perceptions.

As well as being analogous to texts, objects interacted with them. In the case of Romulus and Remus, images had originally derived from the narrative, and seem to have been adapted under knowledge of textual accounts. However, they also operated as a distinct line of transmission. The Horn of Ulf, on the other hand, may at first have acted in place of a text (a charter), and much later stimulated the production of textual narratives. In both cases, the texts and objects provide distinct forms of evidence to the historian: not corroboration, but complexity. Objects, of course, are enmeshed with texts and speech, places and performances. If we are interested in the reception and social function of origin legends—for instance in linking them to identities—then we need to think about the multiple, overlapping ways in which early medieval people and their successors engaged with these narratives.

These observations lead to further strands of research not considered here. The materiality of early medieval objects is an area under increasing investigation, and could profitably be pursued in relation to origin legends. Exploring the embodied nature of early medieval people's interactions with material culture would help us to address the emotional aspects of identity, as well as its political manipulation, which has come to dominate in discussions of origin myths. This might allow incorporation of personal items—such as brooches—that have previously featured in discussion of origin legends. If information can be gathered for the narrative role of specific personal objects, this may provide some insight into individual identification with origin legends that existed in the Early Middle Ages—something that texts do not reveal.

Origin Legends and Objects

Figures

1. The Franks Casket, c. 700, Mercia or Northumbria, left side. Trustees of the British Museum.
2. Series V penny, c. 720s, southern England. Trustees of the British Museum.
3. Penny of Æthelberht of East Anglia (d. 794), East Anglia. Trustees of the British Museum.
4. Larling Plaque, late eighth century, Norfolk. Norfolk Castle Museum.
5. Horn of Ulf, perhaps eleventh century. York Minster.
6. York Minster Library Additional MS 533, c. 1400.
7. The Horn and Arms of Ulf depicted on the wall of the nave, c. 1290s, York Minster.

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