The Two Ages of King Edward the Confessor in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

Matyushina Inna

Russian State University for the Humanities, University of Exeter

*Corresponding Author: Matyushina Inna, Russian State University for the Humanities, University of Exeter

Abstract: The events related to the youth of King Edward the Confessor (1042–1066) can be reconstructed on the basis of several historical and literary sources (Cnut's Laws; Knútsdrápa; Encomium Emmae Reginae; The Life of King Edward who rests at Westminster; Vita Sancti Oswaldi), as well as chronicles of the 11th–12th centuries (The Gesta Normannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Chronicle ex chronicis of John of Worcester, The Gesta Guillelmi of William of Poitiers, Historia Anglorum of Henry of Huntingdon, Gesta Regum Anglorum of William of Malmesbury). The main source describing the old age and death of King Edward is the enigmatic record of the Worcester and Abingdon Manuscripts of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. The record sub annum 1065 stands out among other annals because it is one of the longest in the whole Chronicle; it is preceded by a two-year break when records were not made or were not preserved; it is both prose and also poetic; it describes the events which took place from spring 1065 to spring 1066, including the death of King Edward in January 1066. The prose part in both manuscripts narrates the political and social events of the year in which the main participants were Harold Godwinson and his brother Tostig, whose actions in Northumbria and Wales led to undermining the royal power and had tragic consequences in the fate of the country. The poetic part, on the contrary, is devoted to King Edward and only mentions Harold in its concluding lines. So far it has remained unclear why, at the demise of the Anglo-Saxon alliterative tradition, the creator of the poem chose the traditional vocabulary, syntax, formulaic style and canonical metre (the preceding poem in the Chronicle on the death of Alfred, the brother of Edward the Confessor, is composed in nearly rhymed verse) in his poem describing the death of the last king of the Wessex dynasty.

Keywords: Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Old English poetry, Old English prose, alliterative verse, poetic tradition, metre, hagiography.

The main source of information about the youth and old age of Edward the Confessor who was the last King of the Wessex dynasty and ruled England for twenty-four years is the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. However its testimony is scarce and controversial and, in order to be adequately interpreted, needs to be supplemented by other historical, hagiographical and literary sources: Anglo-Saxon Charters, Encomium Emmae Reginae, Vita Edwardi Regis qui apud Westmonasterium Requiescit (The Life of King Edward who rests at Westminster), as well as the Anglo-Norman and Norman chronicles of the 11th-12th centuries (The Gesta Normanorum of William of Jumièges, The Chronicle of John of Worcester, The Gesta Guillelmi of William of Poitiers).

The paucity of information about King Edward’s youth and old age makes it essential to collect all historical evidence extant. King Edward was the son of Æthelred and Emma of Normandy; the date of his birth cannot be determined with certainty: it is usually considered that he was born around 1003-1005 in Islip (a few miles north of Oxford), which he later granted to Westminster Abbey1. The earliest event in Edward’s life is registered by the Peterborough Chronicle (MS. Laud Misc. 636), sub anno 1013 (when he must have been about ten years old). According to the Chronicle, he and his

younger brother Alfred were sent by their father Æthelred to Normandy, the birth-place of their mother Emma of Normandy, when Svein Forkbeard with his son Cnut invaded England: “And se cyning sende Ælfhun biseop mid þam æþelingum Eadwarde and Ælfgifu of Northampton to return to England. [They] are to be educated in Normandy (alis uero liberales filios educandos direxerunt Normanniæ). The Encomium Emmae does not mention that Edward and Alfred were the sons of Æthelred and therefore implies that it was Cnut and Emma who were their happy parents.

According to some Norman sources, including William of Jumièges, in 1034 Robert, Duke of Normandy, tried to invade England in order to ensure Edward’s accession to the throne but was blown off course. Though Edward was supported by a number of Norman clergymen, including Robert, the Abbot of Jumièges Abbey, who later became the Archbishop of Canterbury, he had to wait for another seven years before he could return to England.

After Cnut’s death in 1035, the chief pretender to the throne became Harold the Harefoot. Cnut’s son by his first wife Ælfgifu of Northampton. According to the Abingdon and Worcester Chronicles (MS. Cotton Tiberius A. vi, B. I, B. iv), Harold the Harefoot began to suppress Emma, as soon as he achieved power (Sub anno 1035, He sende to and let niman of hyre ealle ja bestan gærsuma … þæ Cnut cing ahte⁴, ‘He sent and had taken from her all the best treasures which King Cnut had’). It does not seem improbable that Emma sent a letter to Normandy to her sons by Æthelred, Edward and Alfred, asking them to return to England and to protect her from Harold⁵. However, the Encomium affirms that Emma did not send the invitation, and that it was forged by Harold with the aim of ensnaring her sons⁶. As is implied by the Encomium Emmae, she could not be held responsible for the tragic fate of her younger son Alfred the Ætheling⁷.

Alfred, Edward’s younger brother, embarked on a journey near Boulogne, came to Dover and tried to reach London (or Winchester, if he hoped to visit his mother, as stated in the Abingdon and in the Worcester Chronicles, sub anno 1036). The return of a member of the Wessex dynasty must have

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10 Encomium Emmae Regiae. P. 52–53.
been perceived as a challenge to Danish rule: in some Norman sources (including The Gesta Guillelmi of William of Poitiers) it is even asserted that Alfred’s aim was to capture the paternal throne and inherit his father’s kingdom. Guided by King Harold’s orders, the powerful earl of Wessex, Godwine, caught Alfred, killed his companions and had him blinded and taken to Ely, where he died of wounds or was killed.

Two Norman sources (William of Jumièges, Gesta Normannorum Ducum and William of Poitiers, Gesta Guillelmi) mention not only Alfred’s but also Edward’s unsuccessful attempt to return to England after Cnut’s death in 1035. William of Jumièges states that Edward landed in Southampton but saw that he needed a bigger army, so went back to Normandy. According to William of Jumièges, Edward returned to England only six years later when he was invited by his brother Harthacnut (the son of Emma and Cnut): “Soon after he [Harthacnut] became strong as a king, he called his brother [Edward] from Normandy, so that he [Edward] returned and began to live with him [Harthaknut], but in less than two years he [Harthaknut] died, leaving the whole kingdom to Edward.” The same reason (i.e. brotherly affection) for Edward’s return is given in the Encomium Emmae, which was composed between Edward’s return to England in 1041 and Harthaknut’s death in 1042. Another reason is given in the Quadrupartitus (CCCC MS 383, 12th century), a collection of Anglo-Saxon pre- and post-Conquest legal materials, which describes Edward’s return to England, his reception by “the thegns of all England” and the oath to observe the laws of Cnut he had to take. Basing on this treatise, it has been suggested that the main role in securing Edward’s return from exile belonged to earl Godwine and Bishop Ælfwine of Winchester, who made the future king accept the laws putting restraints on his power and made him enter into agreement with his future subjects.

The Chronicle does not give details of Edward’s return to England. All four manuscripts state that Edward was consecrated king in 1043, and the Abingdon and Peterborough manuscripts add that he was accorded ‘great honour’ (‘mid mycelum wyrdescype’), Sub anno 1043. Edward’s first deed as king is mentioned in the same two manuscripts (as well as in the Worcester manuscript) in the annals for the same year: “7 raede þæs se cing let geridan ealle þa land þe his modor ahte him to handa, 7 nam of hire eall þæt heo ahte on golde 7 on seolfre 7 on unasecgendlicum þingum, forðam heo hit heold ær ng let geridan ealle þa land þe his modor ahte him to handa, 7 nam of hire eall þæt heo ahte on golde 7 on seolfre 7 on unasecgendlicum þingum, forðam heo hit heold ær” (“and quickly after that the king brought into his hands all the lands his mother owned and took from her all she owned in gold and silver and in untold things because earlier she had kept it from him too firmly”, Sub anno 1043). The Abingdon Manuscript implies a causal connection between Emma’s falling into disfavour and the punishment of her counsellor, Bishop Stigand: “7 raede þæs man sette Stigant of his bisceoprice 7 nam eal þat he ahte þam cinge to handa, forðam he was nebst his modor raede 7 heo for swa swa he hire raede, þæs ðe men wendon”, “And quickly after, Stigand was put out of his bishopric and all that he owned was taken into the king’s hands, because he was his mother’s advisor and because she did just as he advised her – so men supposed”, Sub anno 1043). Bishop Stigand is portrayed in the Abingdon Manuscript as responsible for misguiding the Queen (possibly, giving her advice to concentrate more property in her hands than could have been tolerated by the King or his advisors, such as Godwine and his clan).

16 Encomium Emmae Reginae. P. 53.
18 The Abingdon Chronicler could have based his supposition on the knowledge that Emma’s property was mostly in the part of the country where Stigand was bishop. She possessed Winchester, Rutland, Devonshire, including Exeter, Suffolk, and Oxfordshire (Honeycutt L. Matilda of Scotland: a Study in Medieval Queenship. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2003. P. 41). However, both Stigand and Emma soon regained their former
It has been suggested that Edward’s displeasure with his mother was caused by her asking the Norwegian King Magnus for protection and promising him her possessions in case he decided to invade England. However the Worcester manuscript gives a different reason for Edward’s actions: “Ælfgifu, Æthelflæd, Æthelthryth, Ælfgas and Æthelfrith, the great lord who held the greatest land from the Danes, but, on the contrary of the life of her mother,” Edward entered into marriage with Godwine’s daughter Edith (Eadgyth): “And on þam ylcan gædre Ælfgynan cing nam Eadgyth, Godwines eorles dohtor him to wife x nihtum æfæ Candelmaessan,” “and the same year King Edward took Edith, the daughter of Earl Godwine, as his wife ten days before Candlemas.”

Like her mother-in-law Emma, Edith commissioned a description of the life of her husband, Vita Æwardi Regis qui apud Westmonasterium Requiescit (The Life of King Edward who rests at Westminster), folios 38–57, British Library, Harley MS 526), which is our main source of knowledge about her own virtues, education, talents and her family. According to William of Jumièges, both Edward and Emma retained purity and their marriage was only in words, though Edward made Edith one of the greatest landowners in the country. Edward’s marriage to Edith is mentioned in the Abingdon and Peterborough manuscripts, though not in the Worcester Chronicle. All three manuscripts dwell on the conflicts King Edward had with Edith’s father Godwine and his sons, as well as Godwine’s outlawry together with his family. The Godwins left England in 1051, but returned the next year, 1052, with a large army, aided by the Flemish. Godwine however did not enjoy power for long, as he died the next year (April 1053) of a stroke.


The first part of Vita Edwardi could have been written during Edward’s rule and focuses on Edith’s family; the second part concentrates on Edward’s holiness and could have been written after his death (The Life of King Edward who rests at Westminster attributed to a monk of Saint-Bertin. 2nd ed. Ed. and transl. by Frank Barlow. Oxford Medieval Texts. OUP: OUP, 1992).


Having lost his most powerful subject, Edward could have felt himself in complete control for the first time, but in the later years of his life his name almost entirely disappears from historical sources. After 1053 the Chronicle annals become more and more scarce, and for some years (1062 and 1064) there are none. The King’s name is hardly ever mentioned in them at all, the only exception being the enigmatic record of the Worcester and Abingdon Manuscripts, for the year 1065. The record sub annum 1065 stands out among others because it is one of the longest in the whole Chronicle; it is preceded by a two-year break, when no records were made or none preserved; it is both prose and also poetry; it describes the events which took place from spring 1065 to spring 1066, including the death of King Edward in January 1066.

In both Worcester and Abingdon manuscripts the prose part narrates the political and social events of the year: Harold Godwinson’s winning an estate (Portskewett) in Wales, gathering goods and people there and ordering construction works (1 August); a Welsh ruler Caradog, son of Gruffydd killing people and capturing goods on St Bartholomew’s day (24 August); the thegns of Yorkshire and Northumberland outlawing their earl Tostig and choosing Morcar, son of Earl Ælfgar, as their earl; Morcar joining forces with his brother Edwin, going to Earl Harold Godwinsson and charging him with a message to King Edward; Edward confirming Morcar as their earl and sending Harold to Northampton on the eve of St Simon and Jude (28 October); the Northumbrians rebelling against Tostig, killing his people, burning houses and corn; Tostig and his family leaving England and going across the sea to Earl Baldwin, ruler of Flanders.

According to the prose part of the annals for 1065, the main participants in these events were Godwine’s two sons: Harold Godwinson and his brother Tostig, whose actions in Northumbria and Wales led to the undermining of royal power and had tragic consequences for the country. In the prose part of the annals for the year 1065 very little is said about King Edward. His only royal deed in the whole year was coming to Westminster and consecrating the minster, which he had built to the glory of God and St Peter and all God’s saints. The King consecrated the Church eight days before his death and was buried in it: “And Eadward kingc com to Westmynstre to þam Middanwintre 25, and þæt mynstær þær let halgian þe he sylf getimbrode Gode to lofe 26, 27, and hyne man bebyriged on Twelftan Æfen on þam ylcan mynstre swa hyt her æfter seigð”, “And King Edward came to Westminster towards midwinter, and had consecrated there that minster which he himself built to the glory of God and St Peter and all God’s saints; and the church consecration was on Holy Innocents’ Day; and he passed away on the eve of Twelfth Night and he was buried on Twelfth Day in the same minster, as it says hereafter” (Abingdon Manuscript, Sub anno 1065). Like the church in Westminster, the poem of the Chronicle commemorates the glory of the King who would be called the Confessor 28.

In the Peterborough Chronicle (Sub anno 1066, describing the events of both 1065 and 1066), in which the poetic text on Edward’s death is omitted, the death of the King is also related to the consecration of the Westminster Church: “On þissum geare man halgode þæt mynster æt Westmynstre on Cildæ assaultæg 7 se cyng Eadward forðferde on twelftan Æfen æfen. 7 hine mann bebyrgedæg on twelftan messæ Æfen. innan þære niwan halgætre circean on Westmynstre. 7 Harold earl æfiræ Norse ænkeæt Ænglandæs cynerice. swa swa se cyng hit him gæðæ. 7 eac men hine þær togecuræn. 7 was gebyrstædæ to cyngæ on twelftan messæ Æfen. 7 þær geare þe he cyng æenas”, “In this year the minster at Westminster was consecrated on Holy Innocents’ Day, and King Edward passed away on the eve of Twelfth Night, and was buried on Twelfth Night inside the newly consecrated church in Westminster.

And Earl Harold succeeded to the kingdom of England just as the king granted him – and also men chose him for it – and he was blessed as king on Twelfth Night”. The prose record of 1066 on the death of King Edward in the Peterborough Chronicle gives the name of his successor, the Earl of Wessex Harold, second son of Godwine. Peterborough Chronicle goes on to relate the events of the year including Harold’s victory in the battle of Stamford Bridge, his defeat and his death at Hastings.

Maintaining, like the compiler of the Petersborough Chronicle, that King Edward entrusted the country to Harold and the people chose him as their ruler, John of Worcester affirms that Harold was nominated by King Edward as his successor (subregulus), chosen by the witan of the country and consecrated by Ealdred, archbishop of York, on the day of King Edward’s funeral. He gives a brief characterisation of Harold as a ruler, stating that he immediately abolished unjust laws and made good laws, was reverent towards the Church, was firm with those who committed evil deeds and laboured by land and sea, to protect the country. William of of Poitiers also confirms that Edward on his death bed appointed Harold as his successor but tries to provide a justification of William’s claim to the English throne.

In the Abingdon and Worcester manuscripts the annals for 1065 also conclude with statement of Harold’s anointment, which follows the poetic text on King Edward’s death: “Her wearð Harold eac to kyngge gehalgod, 7 he lytle stillnesse þar on gebad þa hwile þe he rices weold”, “And here also Harold became consecrated as king and he experienced little quietness in it while he ruled the kingdom”. The added references to the troubled time of Harold’s rule could testify to the later date of the composition of the annals for 1065: the prose text of the annals, which follows the poem on King Edward’s death, could have been compiled in autumn of 1066 after Harold’s death, i.e. after the Norman conquest. Although both the prose and the poetic parts of the annals for 1065 were written by one scribe, it is possible that different sections of the annals for 1065 were made at different times. The prose part, preceding the poem, could have been compiled during spring-autumn 1065; the poem on King Edward’s death could have been composed during winter 1066; the last part on Harold’s troubled times could have been added after the Norman Conquest. If this is the case, then the last lines of the poem can be interpreted as giving additional justification to Harold’s claim to the throne.

Temporal data, which interest the compiler of the prose part of the annals for 1065 in the Abingdon Chronicle infinitely more than the composer of the poem, also lend veracity to the events narrated and implicitly confirm Harold’s right as Edward’s successor. In the poem dates are mentioned only twice (“XXIII wintra gerimes and healfe tid”, “24-and-a-half in number of years”, “XXVIII wintra gerimes”, “twenty eight years in number”), whereas the prose text contains eight temporal indications: “to pam Middanwinte”, “towards midwinter”; “on Cilda mæssædag”, “on the Holy Innocents’ Day”; “on Twelftan Æfen”, “on the Twelfth Night”; “Twelftan Dæig”, “Twelfth Day”; “on þissum geare foran to hlafmæssan”, “this year before Lammas” (i.e. 1 August); “on Sancte Barpolomeus mæssædag”, “on St Bartholomew’s Day”; “þa after Michealæs massan”, “after Michaelmas”; “on þon dæig Simonis 7 Iude”, “on Simon and Judes’ Day”. It is possible that in the prose text of the annals the exact day, infrequently coinciding with a Church feast, is stated for each event with the aim of establishing a connection between the events of earthly history and eternity. The events of earthly history, precipitating the passing away of King Edward and the future succession of Harold, which form the theme of the poetic part of the annals, are related to the days of martyrdom of saints, who on these days ended their earthly existence but entered the realm of eternal glory.

The Two Ages of King Edward the Confessor in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

The poetic part of the annals for 1065 is devoted entirely to King Edward and only mentions Harold in its concluding lines. In the Abingdon and Worcester manuscripts the poem on Edward’s death is introduced by the phrase “swa hyt her æfter seigð” (“as it says hereafter”) and is separated from the preceding prose text with the help of a capital letter. Similar to the majority of poetic annals, the poem on the death of the King opens with the initial adverb “her” which refers not only to space but also to time:

1 Her Eadward kinge, Engla hlaford,
2 sende sōþfæste sawle to Criste
3 on godes wara, gast haligine.
4 He on worulde her wunode þrage
5 on kyneþrymme, craeftig reeda,
6 XXIII, freolic wealdend,
7 wintra gerimes, weolan brytnode,
8 and heafle tid, heæðæa wealdend,
9 wœold wel gehungen Walum and Scottum
10 and Bryttum eac, byre Æðelredes,
11 Englung and Sexum, oretnægæcum,
12 swa ymbelyppað cælade brymmas,
13 þet eall Eadwarde, æþelum kinge,
14 hyrdon holdlice hærran sinum
15 cælæað þæt rice
16 æþelne of eorðan; englas feredon
17 æþelne of eorðan; englas feredon
18 æþelne of eorðan; englas feredon
19 and Dena weoldon deore rice
20 Engla landes XVIII
21 wintra gerimes, welan brytnodon.
22 Æðelœas freolice in gatwum
23 kyningc kystum god, clæne and milde,
24 Eadward se æðela, ædæl bewerode,
25 land and leode, oððet longre becom
26 deað se bitera, and swa deore genam
27 æþelne of eorðan; englas feredon
28 sōþfæste sawle innan swegles leoth.
29 And se froda swa þeah befaeste þet rice
30 heathpungenum menn, Haroldc syfleum,
31 æþelum eorle, se in ealle tid
32 hyrde holdlice hærran sinum
33 wæordum and dædum, white ne ægelde
34 þæs þe þearf wæs þæs þæodkyninges.

Here King Edward, lord of the English, sent a righteous soul to Christ, a holy spirit into God’s keeping.

The poem does not give the exact date of Edward’s death, using instead a formula referring to the number of years of his rule: “XXIII wintra gerimes freolic wealdend, weolan brytnode”, 6a-7, “23 and a half, a noble ruler, in number of winters, distributed riches”. It is not easy to agree with those scholars who consider that the poem offers “a clumsy calculation of Edward’s date of death”, as the creator of the poem is less interested in establishing the date of King’s death than in celebrating the duration of his unusually long rule. The formulaic phrase, mentioning the length of Edward’s

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34 It is considered that the Chronicle scrivens usually separate the poetic text from the prose with the help of a capital letter (Bredehoft T. A. Textual Histories: Readings in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Toronto, 2001. P. 82).
distribution of riches (the twenty three and a half years of his rule), is echoed in another temporal indication, referring to the length of the Danish rule: “XXVIII wintra gerimes welan brytnodon”, 20b-21, “for 28 winters in number, dispensed riches”38. Both formulas having identical meaning are used with opposite connotations: if Edward is distributing riches, the Danes are dispersing and wasting the wealth of a country which does not belong to them.

Temporal formulas are not the only ones used in the poem. Each of the lines contains formulas which have parallels in the main poetic corpus39 or have potential reproductibility (cf. “Engla hlaford”, “lord of the English”; “on Godes wræa”, “into God’s keeping”; “Engle and Seaxe”, “Angles and Saxons”; “lænde bereafod”, “bereft of land”; “welan brytnodon”, “dispensed riches”; “land and leode”, “land and people”; “swegles leoth”, “heaven’s light”; “in ealle tid”, “at all times”; “wide geond eorðan”, “widely through the earth”; “wintra gerimes”, “in number of winters”; “wordum and dædum”, “words and deeds”). Approximately half of the formulas are reproduced in the poetic corpus unchanged, the other half allow variations in highest degree of formularity, as formulas occur in it more frequently than in Beowulf or the Battle of Brunanburh or any other surviving old English poem. The use of formulas brings the poem on Edward’s death close to the tradition of classical alliterative verse, which must have been largely shuttered by the time the poem was composed. Since, in terms of quantity of formulas and frequency of their use, the poem substantially surpasses all other poems in the poetic corpus, it is possible to suggest that formulaic style is used in the poem as a poetic device.

Not only formulaic language but also other stylistic features going back to the Anglo-Saxon poetic tradition are characterised by a kind of superfluity in the poem. Syntactic enjambments (e.g. Her Edward kinge, / En gla hlaford, // sende sopfeste / sawle to Criste, 1-2, se in ealle tid // hyrde hollidic / harran sinum // wordum and dædum, 31b-33a) are used in the poem more frequently than in classical alliterative verse (in 29 lines out of 33), and syntactical borders coincide with metrical ones in only four lines (3, 14, 21, 28), whereas in the first 64 lines of Beowulf they coincide in 11 lines (3, 11, 19, 25, 31, 37, 42, 46, 52, 58, 64). It is possible to conclude that syntactic enjambements are used in the poem on Edward’s death more frequently than in classical alliterative verse.

Like phraseology and syntax, metre in the poem can also be said to be characterised by hypercorrectness. All sound devices used in the poem correspond to the alliterative canon. The prevailing scheme of alliteration is ax/ax, e.g. He on worulda her / wundode þragze), double alliteration is used more rarely, i.e. in thirteen lines (aa/ax, e.g. hyrdon holdlice / hagestale menn, cf. also lines 2, 9, 13, 14, 17, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 31, 32), cross alliteration is used twice with a compound proper name (and Bryttum eac, / byre ædelredes, syðdan Cnut ofercom / kynn æelredes). All metrical types in the poem are distributed exactly as in classical alliterative verse40: A-type occurs in more than half the lines (1b, 2b, 4b, 5b 6a, 6b, 7a, 8a, 9a, 9b, 11a, 11b, 12b, 13b, 16b, 17b, 19b, 20a, 20b, 21a, 22b, 23b, 24a, 24b, 25a, 26a, 27a, 27b, 28a, 29b, 30b, 31a, 32b, 33a, 33b); other types are also used as in classical alliterative verse, with B-type prevailing over C (B: 1a, 4a, 8a 10a 15a, 18a22a, 25b, 26b, 28b, 31b, 29a; C: 3a, 5a, 12a, 13a, 19a, 34b), and D-type prevailing over E (D: 2a, 3b, 7b, 10b, 14a,

38 The Danish rule started with Sveyn’s invasion in November 1013 and finished with the death of Harthacnut in June 1042, so lasted for 28 years with some breaks.
40 The high metrical regularity of the poem has been commented upon by several scholars. Thomas Cable remarks that “despite the extra syllable in 28a, the poem as a whole can be said to be in the classical meter” (Cable Th. English Alliterative Tradition P. 55); Julie Townsend thinks that the regularity of metre in the poem indicates a shift towards rhythmic verse (Townsend J. The Metre of the Chronicle-verse. In: Studia Neophilologica, Vol. 68. Issue 2. 1996. P. 158).
17a, 18b, 23a, 32a; E: 14b, 30a). The creator of the poem uses A and D types more frequently than C and E types, which contributes to the rhythmical stress on the initial syllables of half-lines. The number of unstressed syllables, varying from four to six, is also exactly the same as in classical alliterative verse.

Variation in the poem is also characterized not only by strict adherence to the canons of alliterative verse but also by a kind of superfluity. In comparison with the variation in Beowulf, the variation in the poem on Edward’s death is expanded and comprises more members: “Syððan for becom / freolice in geatwum // kyninge kystum god, clæne and milde, // Eadward se æðela, / eðel bewerode, // land and leode”, “Afterwards came forth, noble in array, a king good in virtues, pure and mild, Edward the noble defended homeland, country and people”, 22-25a. In Beowulf variation usually involves two or three members (e.g. “him þæs Liffrea, // wuldres Wealdend / woroldare forgeaf”, “them for that the Life-Lord, Ruler of Glory, granted honor on earth”, 16b-17; þær æt hyðe stod / hringedstefna // isig ond ufus, // æþelingas fær, “there at the harbour stood with a ringed-prov, icky and keen to sail, a hero’s vessel”, 32-33); but in the poem on Edward variation includes four appositional constructions, expanding the subject group (“freolice in geatwum // kyninge kystum god, clæne and milde, // Eadward se æðela”, “noble in array, a king good in virtues, pure and mild, Edward the noble”), two appositional constructions expanding the object group (“eðel bewerode, // land and leode”, “defended homeland, country and people”), as well as two predicates (“for becom”, “came forth”; “bewerode”, “defended”). The expansion of variation creates the effect of retardation, slowing down the development of the main theme and making the poem static.

Poetic synonyms going back to the common alliterative poetic stock also occur with a higher frequency in the poem on Edward’s death than in other Old English poems: in 33 lines 13 denotations of ruler are used, all of which occur in other poetic texts: Eadward (13a) or King Edward (Eadward kingc 1a) is called “Engla hlaford”, “lord of the English” 1b; “freolic wealdend”, “a noble ruler” 6b; “hæleða wealdend”, “ruler of heroes” 8b; “byre Æðelredes”, “Æðelred’s son” 10b; “æðele king”, “the noble king” 13b; “bealuleas kyng”, “blameless king” 15b; “kyninge kystum god”, “a king good in virtues” 23a; “Eadward se æðela”, “Edward the noble” 24a; “deore æðela”, “dear prince” 26b-27a; “se froda”, “the wise (man)” 29a; “hærre”, “the lord” 32b. Not only do the denotations of ruler find parallels in all Anglo-Saxon poems, but several lines are partially reproduced in other poetic texts: e.g. the first line of the poem echoes the initial half line of the Battle of Brunanburgh (“Her Æðelstan cyning”) and almost literally repeats the first line of another Chronicle poem (The Capture of the Five Boroughs: “Her Eadmund cyning / Engla þeoden”) 42. It is possible to suggest that the creator of the poem not only followed old models but constructed his poem by reproducing those which already existed in the poetic corpus.

The adherence to the old heroic style in the poem influences the depiction of Edward as a real Germanic hero, the leader of the comitatus, “æðele king” (13b), dispensing treasures (“weolan brytnode” 7b), protecting homeland, country and people (“eðel bewerode, // land and leode” 24b-25). The adjective “æðele” becomes the key word in the poem and is reproduced 6 times in 34 lines (10b, 13b, 18b, 24a, 27a, 31a), including Edward’s father’s name Æðelþræl. As in Old Germanic epic, the weak adjective in post-position (“Eadward se æðela” 24a) is used with the function of conferring eminence underlining Edward’s noble descent, his belonging to the Wessex dynasty, stressed once again in Edward’s denotation as “byre Æðelredes”, “Æðelred’s son” 10b. Edward’s genealogy is echoed in his denotation as “skilful on counsel” (“craeftig ræda” 5b), because it contains a veiled reference to Æðelred’s name, which means “noble counsel”, and to his nick-name “un-ræd” 43. Æðelred’s nickname (unræd), in which the same root “ræd” is used as in his name (Æðelræd), could be understood as “lacking advice or evil advice”, perhaps containing a hint of the murder of his step-brother Edward, which cleared the way to the throne for Æðelred. Unlike his father Æðelræd, who


was called “un-ræd”, “lacking advice”, Edward is presented in the poem as “craeftig ræda”, “skillful in counsel” 5b, “wise”, “se froda” 29a, “bealuleas kyng”, “blameless king” 15b, i.e. an ideal ruler for his country and people.

In accordance with the canons of heroic poetry, Edward is shown as a “ruler of warriors” (“hæleða wealdend” 8b), “noble ruler” (“freolic wealdend” 6b), “noble in array” (“freolice in geatwum”, 22b), “greatly renowned” (“wel geþungen” 9a), a “king great in virtues” (“kyningc kystum god” 23a, reminding the audience of the formula “guma cystum god”, “man great in virtues” used in Beowulf (1486, 2543), ruling all the peoples inhabiting his kingdom: Walum and Scottum and Bryttum eac … Englum and Sexum (9b-11b). Enumerating different peoples of the King’s realm, the creator of the poem composes a list of nations similar to the one in the Anglo-Saxon Widsith and singles out Edward’s main characteristics as a ruler, his ability to unite his kingdom, to bring together many nations inhabiting it.

The poem contrasts the two ages of Edward the Confessor: his youth when he like an elegiac hero wandered along the paths of exile45 (“þeah he lange ær, / lande bereafod, // wunode wraeclastum / wide geond eorðan, // syððan Cnut ofercom / kynn Æðelredes // and Dena weoldon / deore rice // Engla landes / XXVIII // wintra gerimes, / welan brytnodon”, “when he long before, bereft of land, lived in places of exile widely through the earth, after Cnut had overcome the race of Æðelred, and Danes ruled the dear kingdom of the land of the Angles for 28 winters in number, dispensed riches” 16-21) and his death in old age (“oðhæt lungere becom // deað se bitera, / and swa deore genam // ægelne of eorðan”, “until the very bitter death suddenly came and seized so dear a prince from the earth” 26-28). King Edward’s old age is associated with his purity, mildness and wisdom, which leads him to appointing Harold as his heir and descendant on the English throne46.

It is the same two ages that are given greatest attention in the prose annals of the Chronicle: the youth of Edward is referred to in the annals for 1013 (Peterborough manuscript: “And se cyning sende Ælfun biscoep mide þan æþelingum Eadwarde and Ælfredes ofer sce þæt he hi bewitan sceolde”, “And the King (Æðelred) sent Bishop Ælfun across the sea with the æþelings Edward and Alfred in order that he should look after them” and for 1014 (Peterborough manuscript: “Dæ sende se csyng his sunu Eadward mid his æþendræcan hider. 7 het gretan ealne his leofscipe”, “Then the king sent his son Edward here with his messengers, and ordered [them] to greet all his nation”) which, like the poem, narrate his exile and subsequent return to England. After the narrative of exile and return, Edward’s name disappears from the Chronicle till 1041, when it is mentioned again in connection with his final return to England and his coronation (Abingdon manuscript, sub anno 1041: “7 þæs gere sona com Eadward his broðor on meden fram begeondan sce, Æþelrædes sunu cinges, ðe ðe ær for fela gearon of his earde adrifan, 7 dæh ðæs to cinge gesworen, 7 he wunode þa swa on his þræor hireda þa hwile ðæ þe leofode”, “And soon in that year came from beyond the sea Edward, his [Harthacnut’s] brother on the mother’s side – King Æðelred’s son, who had been driven from his country many years earlier, and yet was sworn in as king; and then he dwelled thus in his brother’s court as long as he lived”; sub anno 1042: “7 eall folc underfeng ða Eadward to cinge, swa him gecynde wæs”, “And all the people then received Edward as king, as was his natural right”; sub anno 1043: “Her wæs Eadward gehalged to cinge on Wincestre on forman Easter dæg mid mycellum wyræscype”, “Here Edward was consecrated as king in Winchester on the first day of Easter with

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44 Britt Mize suggests that the poem memorializes King Edward not only by his holiness but also by his mental qualities: wisdom and skill in counsel (Mize Br. Traditional Subjectivities: The Old English Poetics of Mentality. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013. P. 240).
45 Renée Trilling draws attention to parallels with “Biblical heroes, in whom the Anglo-Saxons saw literary models for their own identity… being deprived of edel and forced to wander on wraeclastum marks the breaking of faith with God; it is the fate suffered by Adam and Eve, by Cain, and by the Israelites in the desert, and it also informed the myth of migration that was so important to Anglo-Saxon cultural identity” (Trilling R.R. P. The Aesthetics of Nostalgia: Historical Representation in Old English Verse. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009. P. 210).
46 Katherine O’Brien O’Keefe has suggested that the tropes of lordship and heroic verse are used in the poem in order to shore up Edward’s image and to assist in legitimating Harold as Edward’s heir (O’Brien O’Keefe K. Deaths and Transformations: Thinking through the ‘End’ of Old English Verse. In: New Directions in Oral Theory. Ed. M. Amodio. P. 165).
great honour”), Edward must have been around forty when he became King and therefore could hardly have been considered young.

Subsequent prose annals for 1047-1057 narrate King Edward’s deeds between the age of forty four and fifty four: he is bestowing bishoprics (1047-1048), ending contracts (1049), promising payments (1049), calling council-meetings (1051), abolishing taxes (1052), having armed conflicts with Godwine and his sons (1051-1052), abandoning his wife (Godwine’s daughter) and sending her to a nunnery at Wherwell (1051). At the age of sixty King Edward is said in the Chronicle to have appointed rulers in Wales and Northumbria (Worcester manuscript, sub anno 1063, 1065) and to have consecrated the minster in Westminster, in which he was buried (Worcester and Abingdon manuscripts, sub anno 1065).

It is possible to compare the way Edward’s youth and old age are presented by the Chronicle poetry and prose with the two ages of the Anglo-Saxon epic hero par excellence who is also shown through the contrast of his youth and old age. The two ages of Beowulf make him crucially different from other epic heroes, who are usually shown as if outside aging, either conventionally old (like Hildebrand or Hroðgar) or conventionally young (like Roland or Old Norse epic heroes, such as Sigurðr). Beowulf is the only epic hero whose age changes through the poem: in the first (longer) part of the poem, describing his feats in the Danish realm, the epithet “geong”, “young” (13, 854) is more than a constant epic epithet, together with the formulaic denotations “Ecgþeowes sunu”, “the son of Ecgþeow” 1550, 2367, 2398; “bearn Ecgþeowes”, “the child of Ecgþeow” 529, 631, 957, 1383, 1473, 1651, 1817, 1999, 2177, 2425 (cf. “byre Æðelredes”, “the son of Æðelred” 10b in the Chronicle poem about Edward), which occur more often in the first part than in the second, and are thus endowed with a compositional function. Yet Beowulf’s youth is not merely as a temporal characteristic but as a quality of a victorious hero reaching the height of his fame, defending the Danes and restoring the status of their realm. In the poem about Edward the protective function of the hero is also brought into prominence as his main role (Syððan for becom / freolice i) in later time (it has been suggested that in later time more attention would have been given to his moral spiritual qualities than to his heroic traits, such as the warrior’s fame, wisdom in ruling). Similarities which were noticed between Edward’s list of virtues and the hero of the Chronicle poem lies not in the frailty associated with it but in its proximity to death (cf. in Beowulf: “wyrd ungemete neah se ðone gomelan / kyninge kystum god, / clæne and milde, / Eadward se æðela, / æðel bewerode, / land and leode, “Afterwards came forth, noble in array, / a king good in virtues, pure and mild, / Edward the noble defended homeland, / country and people” 22-25), although it is contrasted with the exile in his youth.

Old age for Beowulf as well as for the hero of the Chronicle poem lies not in the frailty associated with it but in its proximity to death (cf. in Beowulf: “wyrd ungemete neah se ðone gomelan” 47). Both poems lead their heroes to the same end: like Beowulf, Edward in the Chronicle is shown as close to death. As in epic poetry, in the Chronicle poem it is not the victory of the hero but his death which becomes the high point in the narration. Beowulf’s death, like Edward’s, foreshadows the ruin of the whole realm:

| nu se herewisa hleahtor alegde | ‘now that their leader of warriors has laid down |
|-------------------------------| laughter, joy and merriment. Therefore many, |
| gamen ond gleodream. Forðon sceall gar wesan | morning-cold spears must be grasped in palms, |
| monig morgenceald munund bewunden, | raised in hands, but not at all the sound of harp, |
| hæfen on handa, nalles hearpan sweg | waking the warrior, but the black raven, eager |
| wigend weceæan ac se wonna hreftn | over those who are doomed to death, speaking of |
| fus ofer fægum fela reordian, | many things, telling the eagle, how he succeeded |
| earne secgan hu him æt æte speow | in eating, while he with the wolf plundered |
| þenden he wið wulf weal reafode | corpses’.

The death of the king (both in Beowulf and in Edward’s poem) signifies the ruin of the kingdom, massive slaughter of people, preyed on by the beasts of battle, the ruin of the nation and of the whole heroic world. Edward’s description as a heroic ruler embodying the might of his kingdom could hardly have been created in the time of his rule (it has been suggested that in later times more attention would have been given to his moral spiritual qualities than to his heroic traits, such as the warrior’s fame, wisdom in ruling). Similarities which were noticed between Edward’s list of virtues in the poem (“clæne and milde”, “clean and mild”, “craeftig ræda”, “wise in counsel”) and the end of

Encomium Emma Reginae in the Paris manuscript\(^{49}\) seem to suggest that the creator of the Chronicle poem could have been influenced by the Encomium. It has also been considered that the poem was based on the re-use of old material, as Anglo-Saxon churches made use of Roman foundations\(^{50}\). But so far it has remained puzzling why, at the demise of the Anglo-Saxon alliterative tradition, the creator of the poem chose the traditional vocabulary, syntax, formulaic style and canonical metre in his poem on the death of the last king of the Wessex dynasty. The demise of the alliterative tradition is manifest in the poem on the murder of Alfred\(^{51}\) (immediately preceding in the Chronicle the poem on Edward’s death) in which rhyme (e.g. seald : ascwealde, bende : blende, lende : blende, hamelode : hættode) is used in more than half the lines (the number of rhymed lines in the poem equals the number of lines with alliteration: 14 out of 20\(^{52}\)) and formulas are virtually absent.

It can be suggested that the creator of the poem deliberately chose to imitate the old heroic style of Anglo-Saxon poetry. Contrary to the views of some scholars, it may be argued that the poem was composed after Edward’s death, most likely after the Norman Conquest\(^{53}\). Like Germanic epic poetry (and unlike other Chronicle poems) it evokes not the present but the past, and is permeated with yearning for that past, for the peaceful times associated with Edward’s reign as opposed to the troubled times of Harold and William\(^{4}\). It is possible to see an expression of this longing in the choice of the traditional poetic style at the time when the alliterative verse was going out of use. Thus it might be suggested that the poem, in which each line reminded the audience of the glorious past, was composed as a panegyric to the Anglo-Saxon rulers (encomium regis)\(^{55}\) in whose line Edward was destined to be the last. Its art lies in the use of the characteristic features of alliterative verse (metre, poetic vocabulary, phraseology, syntax) as an extended technical device, reconstructing characteristic features of heroic epic, in elegiac celebration of a lost social world. It is also possible to see another, an ideological, function in the use of the archaic poetic form of alliterative verse. It could have been used by the chroniclers, for the last time after the Norman Conquest, in order to proclaim that it was Edward they considered to be the last Anglo-Saxon King and Harold (not William) his descendant on the English throne. A poetic lament for the last Anglo-Saxon King could best be expressed in the traditional Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse style. The end of the Wessex dynasty would be marked by the last alliterative poem composed in England. With Edward’s death not only the dynasty, which had ruled England for five centuries, came to an end, but also the tradition of alliterative verse, which had

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\(^{52}\) Rhyme in the poem on Alfred’s death is used so frequently that Ferdinand Holthausen managed to get fully rhymed text only with a few conjectures (Holthausen F. Zu dem Gedichte von Ælfreds Tode (1036). In: Beiblatt zur Anglia. Bd. 50. 1937, S. 157-158)

\(^{53}\) As has been suggested by Katherine O’Brien O’Keefe, the writing of the entry for 1065 was done in three parts: first the opening prose, then the verse which was added afterwards, then the final comment as a later addition (O’Brien O’Keefe K. Deaths and Transformations: Thinking through the ‘End’ of Old English Verse. In: New Directions in Oral Theory. Ed. M. Amadio. P. 165).


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existed in England for several centuries and, as foreshadowed in Beowulf, the whole heroic world embodied in that poetic tradition.

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AUTHOR’S BIOGRAPHY

Inna Matyushina, is currently leading researcher of the Russian State University for the Humanities (Moscow) and honorary professor of Exeter University. She has published over 150 articles on Old English and Old Norse literature, Old High German epic poetry, issues in translating medieval poetry. Her publications include the following monographs: Rhyme in Alliterative Verse (1986), The Magic of the Word. Skaldic Libellous Verse and Love Poetry (1994); The Earliest European Lyrics (1999, Two volumes); Skaldic Poetry. Co-authored with Elena Gurevich (2000); The Poetics of Chivalric Sagas (riddarasögur) (2002); Words before blows: The Tradition of Flying in Old Germanic Culture (2011); and the edited collection The Origin and Development of Lyrical Poetry, with Sergey Neklyudov (2007). She is the editor of Arbor Mundi: the Journal on the History and Theory of Culture (published since 1992). Her current research projects include: Old English Heroic Poetry, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and Old Norse Hagiography.

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