

## **Northern Maccabees: The Speech of Ralph Nowell, Bishop of Orkney, at the Battle of the Standard, 1138**

*Jesse Patrick Harrington*

IN 1138, in the third year of the long civil war between the cousins Stephen of England and the Empress Matilda, David I of Scotland invaded the north of England for the third time in support of Matilda, his niece.<sup>1</sup> The northern English chroniclers record a palpable sense of terror in the face of the killing and destruction.<sup>2</sup> David's was a composite army, made up of the various peoples of northern Britain, with the chroniclers noting especially the Scots (the Gaelic-speakers from north of the Forth), and the men of Lothian, Galloway, Cumbria, Teviotdale, and the Isles.<sup>3</sup> With David's army advancing into Yorkshire, and Stephen distracted by rebel barons in the distant south, the northern defence of the Anglo-Norman realm was left largely to the northern magnates assembled by the aged Archbishop Thurstan of York (d. 1140). These magnates had lands or friends on both sides of the border, and many had sworn oaths to both kings. There was thus considerable mutual suspicion and even despair within the prospective English ranks, and, in the absence of the English king, it took such a respected figure as Thurstan to mediate and to rally them in common cause.<sup>4</sup> To solidify their support and shore up their flagging morale, the archbishop had a war cart mounted

---

1 For modern accounts of this campaign, see Dalton 1994, 148–52, 205–6; Bradbury 1996, 33–6; and Crouch 2000, 81–2. For the military aspects of the campaign, see Beeler 1966, 86–93; Strickland 1992; and Toolis 2004. For the politics of David's involvement in northern England in the 1130s–40s, see Stringer 1994, Ch. 3; Stringer 1997.

2 See especially the accounts of Richard of Hexham, in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I* iii, 155–77; and John of Hexham, in *Symeonis monachi opera omnia* ii, 291–5.

3 For the ethnically composite nature of the Scottish king's subjects, tributaries, and allies in the period, see especially Broun 2007; Broun 2015a; Broun 2015b; Broun 2017.

4 Nicholl 1964, 221–5; Bliese 1988, 544–5; Storelli 2009, 24, 26–30; Truax 2009, 125–6; Nakashian 2016, 191–3.

with a mast bearing the royal standard and a pyx with the eucharistic host, surrounded by the consecrated banners of the saints of Beverley, Ripon, and York. In many respects, the English rally was given the character of a crusade or defensive holy war.<sup>5</sup> On 22 August, in the mists of Cowton Moor, near Northallerton in Yorkshire, Thurstan's army assembled to meet the invader at the pitched engagement which would be remembered as the Battle of the Standard. David's army was defeated and repulsed, and the king retreated to Carlisle to regroup and to consolidate his gains south of the border; ultimately securing Carlisle and Cumberland for himself and Northumberland for his son Henry, in a truce which largely held for the remaining fifteen years of Stephen's reign.

Because of Thurstan's age and ill-health, his role in the campaign as clerical leader of the northern magnates was deputed in the field to his suffragan, Ralph Nowell. Ralph was one of the most interesting ecclesiastical figures in the York archdiocese of the period. A native, married, and possibly hereditary priest of York, Ralph had been consecrated bishop of Orkney by Thurstan's predecessor, Archbishop Thomas (d. 1114). This consecration followed an election by 'the men of Orkney' which, according to the contemporary chronicler Hugh the Chanter, took place in York at some point between 1109 and 1114.<sup>6</sup> Ralph was the third bishop known to have been consecrated by York to the see since its creation in the mid-eleventh century, and he was treated as one of the Scottish bishops by Pope Calixtus II at the time of the Council of Rheims in 1119.<sup>7</sup> Ralph's hold on the see in the 1130s, however, was merely nominal. His appointment would have been opposed by the authority of the kings of Norway, and he appears to have been contested by 1119 (and forced out by 1128) by the 'intruded' Bishop William of Orkney (d. 1168), who may himself have been consecrated as early as 1102.<sup>8</sup> The election in York was probably the result of political disputes within the earldom of

---

5 Squire 1969, 77; Bliese 1989b, 216; Bliese 1991, 7–8; Tyerman 1995, 561; Storelli 2009, 21–2, 24, 30–1; Nakashian 2016, 193–4.

6 *History of the Church of York*, 52–3. For Ralph's background and career, including his place within one of the most interesting clerical dynasties of the period, see Nicholl 1964, 19, 66, 69, 102, 122, 150, 209, 224–6, 246–7; Crawford 1996, 10–2; Cooke and Crawford 2004, 871; Norton 2006, xvi, 41–3, 64, 67, 70, 125, 229–31; and Antonsson 2007, 93–6.

7 *History of the Church of York*, 124–7; Cooke and Crawford 2004, 871; Norton 2006, 42, 229; Antonsson 2007, 94.

8 Crawford 1996, 3–5, 9–11; Crawford 2004, 38; Antonsson 2007, 92–6. While it is uncertain and even unlikely that Ralph ever took full possession of his see, Crawford 1996, 10–11, suggested the possibility of the *de facto* division of the diocese, with Ralph residing at the episcopal seat of Birsay and William on Egilsay, and the latter removing the seat to Kirkwall in c. 1136x37. Cooke and Crawford 2004, 871, note of the York appointees that 'it is doubtful whether any of the three had full possession', though Antonsson 2007, 95, suggests that Ralph's hold on the see may have been stronger than the sources credit.

Orkney and supported by Earl Magnús Erlendsson, whose murder in 1115 would have heightened the difficulty of Ralph taking possession of his see.<sup>9</sup> Thus, despite strenuous efforts to reinstate Ralph at the head of his diocese, with papal support, made in the context of Thurstan's attempts in the 1120s to establish York's claims over the Scottish dioceses, Ralph's later episcopal career was spent as an absentee bishop in the company or service of the archbishops of York.<sup>10</sup> Ralph had supported Thurstan as archbishop-elect during the Canterbury-York primacy dispute, visiting him in his exile in France and attending his consecration at the Council of Rheims, thereby incurring the wrath of King Henry of England.<sup>11</sup> In 1127, at York, he assisted Thurstan and the bishop of Durham at the consecration of the bishop of St. Andrews.<sup>12</sup> Ralph's contemporary, John of Worcester, explained the Orcadian bishop's participation as being because of his unacceptability to the people of his diocese, having been chosen by 'neither the *princeps terrae*, nor clergy, nor people.'<sup>13</sup> Ralph evidently saw himself as an episcopal exile, giving one of his sons the name Paulinus, after the founder-saint of his archdiocese, who had been similarly sent, with papal support, to a distant northern see, but forced to abandon it in the face of opposition before ending his life in exile.<sup>14</sup>

Ralph's reliable service and proven loyalty to Thurstan and to the see of York made him a trusted deputy at the Standard. Ralph appears in all five major accounts of the battle: those of John of Worcester (*ante* 1140), Henry of Huntingdon (c. 1140), Aelred of Rievaulx (c. 1153x57), and Richard (c. 1140) and John of Hexham (c. 1162x70).<sup>15</sup> Of these, Henry provides the largest role for Ralph, as part of a battle narrative which he added in the third revision of his *Historia Anglorum*, within about two years of the engagement. There, Ralph delivered the main oration and clerical absolution to the English army from a

- 
- 9     Crawford 1996, 5–6, 10–1; Cooke and Crawford 2004, 871; Antonsson 2007, 93–7. Norton 2006, 231, posits the support of an Orcadian community of maritime traders in York, based near the church of All Saints in the Marsh, where Ralph may have been hereditary priest.
- 10    Brett 1975, 15–6; *English Episcopal Acta V*, xxxvii; Crawford 1996, 11–2; Cooke and Crawford 2004, 871; Norton 2006, 63–4, 73, 229–30; Antonsson 2007, 96.
- 11    Nicholl 1964, 66; Crawford 1996, 11; Cooke and Crawford 2004, 871; Norton 2006, 41–3, 229–30.
- 12    Nicholl 1964, 102; Norton 2006, 64, 230.
- 13    *Chronicle of John of Worcester* iii, 174–5. See also Crawford 1996, 5, 11; Cooke and Crawford 2004, 871; Antonsson 2007, 95.
- 14    Norton, 2006, 232. It should be cautiously admitted, however, that Ralph's sons may all have been born before his consecration as bishop. For Ralph's son, Master Paulinus of York, who went on to become a priest of some stature within the York archdiocese, see Carpenter 2009, 9–14, 25, which notably corrects Norton 2006, 229–38.
- 15    *Symeonis monachi opera omnia* ii, 291–5; *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I* iii, 155–77; *Historia Anglorum*, 712–7; *Chronicle of John of Worcester* iii, 252–6; *Aelredi Rievallensis opera historica et hagiographica*, 59–73.

high place in the middle of the battleline. Aelred, writing more than a decade later, assigned the key role of English leader and orator at the battle to his own abbey's patron, Walter Espec, lord of Helmsley, restricting Ralph's role at the battle to that of absolution.<sup>16</sup> Henry and Aelred are the only early chroniclers of the battle to include orations, with the other two only mentioning Ralph's role as providing that of absolution.<sup>17</sup> In fact, the English army at the Standard was almost certainly under a composite leadership, so no single figure should be over-emphasised at the expense of the others.<sup>18</sup>

The rhetorical construction of Ralph's and Walter's respective orations has drawn much valuable scholarly attention, with the principal studies being those of Derek Baker and John Bliese.<sup>19</sup> As Baker and Bliese have argued, both speeches are ultimately the rhetorical inventions of their chroniclers, within a set genre of battle speeches produced as part of a central medieval tradition of historical writing which placed a heavy emphasis on rhetoric. Rather than trying to establish which account more authentically captures the historical 'reality', one should analyse the speeches as the rhetorical, literary products of their chroniclers, which reflect the concerns of their respective authors and audiences.<sup>20</sup> In that respect, Ralph's speech has become something of a *locus classicus* for its contribution to the 'Norman myth', its merging of Norman and English identities into that of a single people, and its uncompromising depiction of the battle between the northern English and the invading 'Scots' as a struggle between the respective forces of Christian civilisation and an apparently undifferentiated horde of sacrilegious 'barbarians'.<sup>21</sup> R H C Davis, indeed, made the speech central to his thesis of the 'Norman myth'. Noting that it was one of two such 'normanizing' battle speeches that Henry inserted in his chronicle's third revision (the other speech being attributed to William the Conqueror), he argued that it represented the beginning of the myth's mid-twelfth-century apogee and that the two speeches 'together form a complete statement of the theme'.<sup>22</sup>

Nonetheless, Ralph's attributed oration has been compared unfavourably with that ascribed to Walter, even though it appears in the earlier of the two

---

16 For the speech, see *Opera historica*, 62–5; trans. in *Historical Works*, 251–7.

17 Bliese 1988, 545; Baker 1989, 95.

18 Baker 1989, 95.

19 Bliese 1988; Baker 1989; Bliese 1989b. See now also Storelli 2009; Harrington 2020.

20 See Bliese 1988, 545–6, 552, 554–6; Baker 1989, 95–8; Bliese 1989a, 99, 102; Bliese 1989b, 201–26, at 203–4, 217–9, 220 n. 3; Bliese 1991, 2. Note conversely, however, that the 'reality' behind the speeches has been re-emphasised by Storelli 2009.

21 Davis 1976, 66, 124; Gillingham 2000, 44–5, 100, 126, 129–30, 141; Storelli 2009, 21–3, 29; Bates 2013, 51–2. Cf. Loud 1982, 105–6.

22 Davis 1976, 66, 124, quoted at 66.

accounts. Bliese showed how Ralph's speech adheres to the main rhetorical *topoi* of Norman battle rhetoric and described it as 'a well-developed but entirely typical representative of the genre'.<sup>23</sup> He maintained that there is 'almost no attempt at *ethopoeia*, or character delineation, adapting the speeches to the specific speaker or audience', arguing that its persuasive appeals 'are all quite appropriate to the situation facing the English army, but none is specific to it.'<sup>24</sup> Walter's speech, conversely, stood out among the hundreds of battle speeches constructed by central medieval chroniclers, by eschewing the more common reliance on generically arranged *topoi* that could fit any speaker or battle. Many of its details are unusual and 'pertain only to the specific situation', while its characterisation 'clearly fits the person of the speaker and no one else.'<sup>25</sup> The result is a speech that has long been recognised as one of the longest and finest of Norman battle orations. Even Davis, who identified Ralph's speech as inaugurating the Norman myth's apogee, devoted more attention to what he acknowledged as the 'very similar speech' attributed to Walter.<sup>26</sup> Scholars have traditionally taken the view that Aelred's account of the battle was intended as a corrective to presumed inaccuracies in Henry's narrative, by a well-informed northern chronicler who had personally known many of the participants on both sides of the battle. They have thus maintained that he reveals a greater degree of true psychological insight into the participants on the eve of the battle than the southern chronicler could ever have been able to capture.<sup>27</sup> For instance, Aelred's balanced depiction of the Norman nobles on both sides of the battle captures both the ambiguities of war and the sense in which the battle was a conflict between old friends, something which Henry never showed.<sup>28</sup> Here it has been claimed that Aelred was interested in emotions and in 'people and ideas', whereas Henry's interests lay more in demonstrating his rhetorical ability and in producing high literature for a courtly audience.<sup>29</sup> The depth and sophistication of Aelred's narrative has been additionally analysed in detail for its spiritual,

---

23 Bliese 1988, 545–52, quoted at 546. For discussion of these *topoi*, see Bliese 1991, 3–19; and more generally, Bliese 1989b, 204–17, 220.

24 Bliese 1988, 548, 552. See also Bliese 1989a, 99.

25 Bliese 1988, 552, 554, quoted at 552. See also Bliese 1989a, 102: 'This is one of a mere handful of battle orations that are not generic; it is not interchangeable with any other speech.'

26 Davis 1976, 66–7, 124, quoted at 66.

27 Squire 1969, 77, 80; Bliese 1988, 548–9, 555; Bliese 1989a, 101–2; Storelli 2009, 17–8, 19–21; Truax 2017, 51, 131–4. See also, however, Harrington 2020, 170–2, 179–80.

28 Squire 1969, 79–81; Baker 1989, 93, 98; Dutton 2005, 27; Storelli 2009, 20; Truax 2017, 131–4.

29 Squire 1969, 78, quoted; Bliese 1988, 549; Storelli 2009, 20. For Henry's display of his impressive rhetorical abilities in his battle orations more generally, see also *Historia Anglorum*, xxxvii–xxxviii.

liturgical, and homiletic content.<sup>30</sup> Whether fictional or not, Ralph's attributed oration has thus largely come to be seen by historians as either the poor cousin or forgettable ancestor of Walter's. Aelred Glidden (who misidentified Ralph as bishop of Durham) claimed flatly that the inclusion of Ralph's speech in Henry's chronicle 'adds nothing to our knowledge of what occurred' at the battle and 'seems to serve little purpose', suggesting that the only reason for its inclusion was 'apparently... because Bishop Ralph did address the army and this speech represents what it would have been appropriate for him to say.'<sup>31</sup> The *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography's* entry for Ralph cursorily dismisses the oration without even mentioning its chronicler, noting simply, 'He played an active role in exhorting and absolving the English host, although he was probably not responsible for the speech ascribed to him by some authorities (but to Walter Espce by Ailred of Rievaulx).'<sup>32</sup>

It is clear, then, that much attention has been given to Aelred's account and Walter's speech, from many different angles and approaches, at the expense of Henry and Ralph. Though comparatively undervalued, Ralph's speech is no less deserving of attention. Given the spiritual and liturgical interpretations which modern scholars have layered on Aelred's account, which has a lay magnate as its hero, it is perhaps surprising that the same has not been done for Henry's account. On the one hand, this is undoubtedly because of Aelred's stature as an ecclesiastical figure and writer. On the other hand, the earlier account had a similarly clerical author and a clear liturgical setting (a sermonic address and granting of absolution), with a bishop, no less, as its main orator and protagonist. Moreover, the episcopal oration is reported to have elicited from the English army a response of 'Amen, Amen!' Nonetheless, excepting some summary comments in the most recent study of Walter's speech, offered only as a prolegomenon to the rhetorical content and framework provided by Aelred, there has been no study of the biblical content of Ralph's speech.<sup>33</sup> This remains a striking historiographical omission. It is even more unusual, perhaps, when one recalls that there has been consideration of the religious content of Henry's other depictions of religious men in war.<sup>34</sup> In what

---

30 Freeman 1999; Garrity 2009; Harrington 2020.

31 Glidden 1987, 176, 178–9, quoted at 178. It should be noted that the actual bishop of Durham, Geoffrey Rufus, does not appear to have been present at the battle or to have played any role in the campaign.

32 Cooke and Crawford 2004, 871, which strangely does not even cite Henry (or for that matter any of the other chroniclers of the *Standard*) as a primary source in its bibliography. Nor does the oration receive any mention in Crawford 1996, 11, which only notes, without further specification, that Ralph 'played a prominent role' at the battle.

33 Harrington 2020, 167–70.

34 See, e.g., Fenton 2013, 73.



follows, developing the preliminary observations given in a condensed form elsewhere, it will be argued that Ralph's speech shows both a clear biblical basis and attempts at *ethopoeia* which have not been sufficiently recognised.

First, Ralph's speech as depicted in Henry's *Historia* may be summarised in its order.<sup>35</sup> In his speech, the bishop exhorts his army to remember the heroic deeds and martial reputation of their Norman ancestors in diverse times and places, from Scotland to Jerusalem, contrasts them with the rashness of their ill-disciplined and lawless enemy, and assures the listeners that there is no cause to fear the people of Scotland, who should, by customary order, be subject to them.<sup>36</sup> He states that he has been deputed by Thurstan to act on the archbishop's behalf, and declares that this most recent invasion is providential, so that the invaders may be punished in England for their violation of the temples of God, bloodshed upon the altars, and indiscriminate murder of priests, children, and pregnant women. He proclaims that God himself will act through the English army and that the rashness of their ill-equipped and naked enemy is no match for their own heavy armour, courage, or the presence of God. He asserts that the enemy's numerical superiority is less important than the merit of the few (*virtus paucorum*) and that the size of the enemy host is a hindrance to them. He concludes with a summary appeal to the army's ancestral glory, regular training, and military discipline in overcoming the enemy, observes that the enemy are already rushing forward in disorder, and grants absolution to all who fall while avenging God's house, priests, and people.

In this oration's motifs and rhetorical structure, it may be suggested that there are possible echoes of the battle speeches and campaign narrative of 1 Maccabees 2–3.<sup>37</sup> This biblical book told the story of the Maccabean revolt, initiated by the priest Mattathias ben Johanan and continued by his priestly son Judas Maccabeus, against the Seleucid king Antiochus IV, who had conquered Judaea and tried to eradicate the Jewish religion. The first part of Ralph's speech generically resembles the speech of the dying Mattathias to his sons (1 Maccabees 2:49–68), with its exhortation to remember the ancestral deeds of the Israelites in diverse times and places (2:50–60), to be assured of the strength of those who trust in God (2:61), to have no fear of the now-exalted sinner who shall soon be overthrown (2:62–63), and to have courage

---

35 *Historia Anglorum*, 714–7.

36 Although *Historia Anglorum*, 716–7 seemingly acknowledges the Scots and the men of Lothian as distinct groups in its main narration of the battle, any distinction between the ethnic components of David's army is wholly collapsed in Ralph's speech, which refers only to *Scotia* and an otherwise undifferentiated enemy.

37 The biblical identification is given in summary form in Harrington 2020, 168–70, citing at 168 n. 26 the present essay.

and grow in the law (2:64). The placement of the bishop's statement that he has been deputed by the ailing Thurstan, and that the offending invaders must be punished, neatly parallels the ailing Mattathias's own deputising of the command of the army to his son, Judas Maccabeus (2:66), to punish those who break the law (2:67–68). His contrast of the naked and ill-equipped enemy with the heavily armoured Normans echoes the imagery of the breastplate and armour of Judas Maccabeus, biblically compared with that of a giant (3:3).<sup>38</sup> Ralph's comments about numbers echo the speech of Judas Maccabeus before the Battle of Beth Horon (3:17–22), with its assurance that victory depends not on numbers but on the strength of heaven (3:17–19) and its dismissal of the enemy as a rash multitude (3:20). Finally, Ralph's conclusion about the need to avenge God's house, priests, and people upon their enemy echoes Judas' conclusion regarding the destructiveness of their enemy, the need to fight for their lives and laws, and the assurance that God will grant victory (3:20–22). Both Ralph's and Judas's speeches end abruptly with the dramatic rush of battle.

The model of the Maccabees – outnumbered but victorious instruments of the divine will, who revolted against foreign persecution and defended Jerusalem against subsequent invasion – became popular in the Latin west in the wake of the First Crusade.<sup>39</sup> Adaptation of the biblical book can be found in the battle speeches of other central medieval chroniclers. Bliese observed, for example, that the dialogue of 1 Maccabees 3:17–19 seems to have been adapted in the *Annals of Margan* as the basis of part of the battle oration attributed to the king of Castille during the Reconquista.<sup>40</sup> For the protagonists and setting of Henry's account, however, Ralph's evocation of 1 Maccabees is especially fitting. Both the biblical Maccabees and the English northerners saw themselves as a beleaguered few who were facing, with divine help, the invasion of a sacrilegious, foreign multitude. The role of the priest Mattathias in raising the revolt against the foreign invader is appropriately echoed by that of the archbishop Thurstan, while the deputised leadership of the war by Mattathias's priestly son, Judas Maccabeus, is suitably recapitulated by the

---

38 It is telling that, at this point, Ralph mentions his people's superior armour but makes no mention in his oration of their superiority in archery – the latter not being in his oration's biblical exemplar – even though Henry made clear in the subsequent narrative that it was this latter technological superiority which was most responsible for the victory and which assimilated the English army to the Norman martial legacy. Cf. *Historia Anglorum*, 716–7; Strickland 1992, 222–3; Gillingham 2000, 130.

39 Morton 2010, 275–93; Staunton 2017, 38–9. See also *Historia Anglorum*, 434, for a possible allusion in the context of the First Crusade.

40 Bliese 1989b, 214. Further instances are noted by Storelli 2007, 60; Storelli 2009, 19. It is surprising that neither seems to have noted it of Ralph.



deputised leadership of the northern campaign by Thurstan's suffragan and spiritual son, Ralph.

Moreover, the Battle of the Standard was fought in August, the same month in which the western Christian calendar celebrated the feast of the Maccabean martyrs (1 August), the sole Old Testament martyrs to be so celebrated.<sup>41</sup> Thurstan ordered the preaching of the defensive holy war throughout the York diocese on 27 July, and the speeches which the chroniclers place at the Standard may reflect speeches which spanned many days or weeks leading up to the battle.<sup>42</sup> The Maccabean theme may thus have formed an original element of the preaching of the campaign, the beginning of which overlapped that important and highly appropriate feast in the liturgical calendar. Indeed, the fortuitous timing of Thurstan's order – which came with a delay of more than month after the English defeat at Clitheroe on 10 June – may have been partly a deliberate decision by the archbishop, allowing him to capitalise on the Maccabean feast to maximise the impact of his preaching campaign. In that respect, Henry's report of the Maccabean exhortation may afford a genuine, if partial, glimpse into the general mobilisation efforts and individual motivations of the English combatants at the Standard, no less authentic than the historical and psychological insights traditionally attributed to Aelred's more expansive account. If Ralph did not actually deliver his oration at the battle as a homiletic sermon on the Maccabees, then this is nonetheless one which Henry has fittingly constructed for its historical occasion; in much the same way, perhaps, that Aelred has been recognised as having fittingly constructed his speech for Walter.<sup>43</sup>

The attempt to suitably delineate the biblical parallels and to achieve an appropriate *ethopoeia* is carefully built into Henry's account of Ralph's speech. The rhetorical shift within the speech from the model of Mattathias to the model of his deputised son Judas, signalled by the appropriate placement of Ralph's statement that he is deputising for Thurstan, is both clever and compelling. Henry wrote his account of the Standard c. 1140, the year in which Thurstan died, and his account has the effect of casting Thurstan in the role of the dying Mattathias and Ralph in the role of the appointed

---

41 Morton 2010, 276. Henry of Huntingdon does not give the exact date (22 August) but notes *hoc bellum mense Augusti factum est* ('this battle was done in the month of August'); for which see *Historia Anglorum*, 718–9. If one takes the Maccabean theme as actually preached for the Standard, it may perhaps reconcile the two dates to situate it within the wider campaign for mobilisation preached throughout the York diocese in the weeks leading up to the battle, for which see Storelli 2009, 24–6.

42 Storelli 2009, 24–6.

43 Cf. Squire 1969, 78; Baker 1989, 95–8; Bliese 1988, 552, 554–5; Harrington 2020.

Judas Maccabeus.<sup>44</sup> By having Ralph promise absolution to the men, Henry implicitly evokes the similar promises made to the crusaders who had renewed the legacy of the Maccabees in the East.<sup>45</sup> No lay commander at the battle could have made such a promise so effectively and no lay commander could have fulfilled the relationship of priestly father and priestly son that the Maccabees provided. So too, by invoking the deeds of the Norman crusaders at Jerusalem at the opening of his speech – notably absent from Aelred’s later account – Ralph implicitly evokes the Normans’ renewal of Maccabean legacy. The bishop’s similarly unique description of *ferax Anglia* (‘fruitful England’) falling to the Normans in the west effectively casts the kingdom as their equivalent, fruitful, promised land.<sup>46</sup> Ralph’s promise that the north of Britain should rightfully be subject to the northern English, despite its people having thrown them back, is another instance of the intersection of biblical precedent and *ethopoeia*. The Maccabean kings expanded the boundaries of Judaea by conquest, which would have served as a suitable precedent for contemporary English imperial aspirations for an English Britain.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, the promised subjugation of the peoples of northern Britain fulfils Ralph’s own ethos: as an English-born bishop of Orkney, Britain’s northernmost see, who had advanced the claims of his native York to the northern churches, but who had been temporarily thrown back from his rightful subjects. The parallels are not obtrusive: as Bliese has argued, medieval battle speeches might adapt biblical or classical rhetorical techniques and motifs, but they were never simply ‘copied’ from ancient sources.<sup>48</sup> Thus, taken individually, these are generic *topoi*, and nowhere in Henry’s account does Ralph appear to use specific phrasing lifted directly from 1 Maccabees. Taken together, however,

---

44 It is unclear how literally or how seriously Henry may have envisioned Ralph as a potential successor to Thurstan. Henry, a married priest himself, may not have seen Ralph’s marital history as a disqualifier. Viewed from Huntingdon in 1140, the suffragan bishop was arguably a more obviously qualified, senior, and sympathetic figure in the northern hierarchy than either of the two candidates (Waltheof, prior of Kirkham, and Henry de Sully, abbot of Fécamp) whose respective elections to the archiepiscopal see in 1140 were quashed; or even the eventually successful but strongly opposed William of York, who was elected archbishop early in 1141. In any event, none of these clerical figures receive mention by Henry, until the lone addition of William to the list of archbishops in the final version of Henry’s chronicle made in 1154; for which, see *Historia Anglorum*, lxvi, 613 n. 80. For the bitter and complicated York succession disputes of 1140–43, see Norton 2006, 76–106.

45 Bliese 1988, 547–8, 551; Bliese 1989b, 215–6; Bliese 1991, 7–8; Tyerman 1995, 561.

46 Diane Greenway has identified poetic analogues to the phrase *ferax Anglia*, for which see *Historia Anglorum*, 714 n. 51. The appearance of the phrase at the Standard, however, is unique to Henry’s account.

47 For the development of English imperialism in the twelfth century see Gillingham 2000, 3–18, 101–5, 130.

48 Bliese 1989b, 203, 219 n. 2; Bliese 1991, 2.

in the similar order of motifs credited to Ralph and present in 1 Maccabees, the likelihood of inspiration or deliberate allusion would certainly have been detectable to its medieval audience.

Henry was not alone in thinking of the Maccabees when writing his account of the wars between Stephen and his royal adversaries. Instructive comparisons can be made with the *Gesta Stephani*. This chronicle is unfortunately missing its section on the Standard, so it is not possible to compare the two accounts directly.<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, when the author of the *Gesta* wrote of Stephen's endless struggles during the year 1138, he described them as 'many times as great and heavier to bear' than 'the many anxieties of the Maccabees in restoring peace to their country.'<sup>50</sup> On the eve of David's invasion, the chronicler explicitly links the portents with those in 2 Maccabees 5:3: '... when men saw fiery battle-lines charging in the sky and the clash of aery soldiers whose breath was naught but flame, they recognised most surely the coming evil; and historical record gives most certain confirmation that it so befell.'<sup>51</sup> The sections which immediately follow introduce the kingdom of Scotland and the beginning of the invasion, at which point the relevant material on the campaign and its defeat has been lost.<sup>52</sup> The fact that the sole explicit, surviving references in the *Gesta* to the Maccabees appear in the context of 1138, the year of the most severe Scottish invasion of Stephen's reign, strongly suggests that English contemporaries would have recognised the appropriateness of the Maccabean references in Ralph's oration at the Standard.

Baker made an important observation regarding the relationship between Walter's attributed oration and historical reality:

Shorn of his speech and denied his command, Espec is not, nonetheless, deprived of his prominence and importance. In the *Relatio*, Ailred (*sic*) portrays an Espec who as an individual is physically and personally credible and, as a type, is reliably representative of his class and attitudes, given literary expression through an Ailredian articulation to which Espec himself could never have aspired. Further, Ailred's presentation of Espec furnished a finely shaped statement ... which reflect[s], proclaim[s], and elevate[s] the motivation and ethos of Espec and his peers.<sup>53</sup>

---

49 The relevant section would fall in *Gesta Stephani*, 56.

50 *Gesta Stephani*, 70.

51 *Gesta Stephani*, 50–2.

52 *Gesta Stephani*, 52–4.

53 Baker 1989, 96.

Though Ralph's oration has won fewer modern admirers than Walter's, similar observations must be attempted regarding Henry's depiction. As the representation of a concrete, historical individual, the literary expression which Ralph is given in Henry's *Historia* is at least consistent with the known experiences, attitudes, and aspirations of the Orcadian bishop which can be glimpsed through the main sources. The otherwise unattested antipathies which Henry attributes to Ralph, which might plausibly have followed the bishop's experiences with the Gaelic Scots and the disputes in the Norse Orkneys, are no less plausible than the antipathies which Aelred himself displayed toward the Gaelic Scots and Norse following his own dealings with disputes in Galloway.<sup>54</sup> The southerner's portrait of the exiled bishop may have been largely imagined, but it is plausibly representative of its subject. Moreover, as a type, cast as the new Judas Maccabeus and as leader of the new northern Maccabees, Ralph is clearly representative of a biblical expression which southern chroniclers found especially appropriate to engage with the harsh and challenging realities of civil war and foreign invasion. It is hardly adequate to describe his attributed oration simply as a well-developed but typical representative of its genre. Rather, as the new Judas Maccabeus, the bishop of Orkney – and with him, the expansionist aspirations of the English in the north – are elevated to a far higher role in the imagination of one twelfth-century chronicler than scholars have previously recognised.<sup>55</sup>

## **Bibliography**

### **Printed Primary Sources**

- Aelred of Rievaulx. The Historical Works*, M L Dutton (ed.) and J P Freeland (trans.), 2005, Collegeville, MI: Cistercian Publications.
- Aelredi Rievallensis opera historica et hagiographica*, D Pezzini (ed.), 2017, Turnhout: Brepols.
- The Chronicle of John of Worcester, III. The Annals from 1067 to 1140*, P McGurk (ed. and trans.), 1998, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I*, R Howlett (ed.), 1884–9, London: Longman.
- English Episcopal Acta V: York, 1070–1154*, J E Burton (ed.), 1988, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gesta Stephani*, K R Potter and R H C Davis (ed. and trans.), 1976, Oxford: Clarendon.

---

54 Cf. Aird 2007, 64–7.

55 This article originates in the reviewers' comments to Harrington 2020 that the speech of Ralph Nowell at the Standard deserved an independent study, which went beyond the scope of that piece. I am grateful to Kathrin Zickermann, the anonymous reviewers, and the Scottish Society for Northern Studies, as well as to Laura Gathagan and Fiona Griffiths of the Haskins Society, for making this study possible.

- Historia Anglorum: the History of the English People*, D Greenway (ed. and trans.), 1996, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- The History of the Church of York, 1066–1127*, C Johnson (ed. and trans.), M Brett, C N L Brooke and M Winterbottom (rev.) Rev. edn. 1990, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Symeonis monachi opera omnia*, T Arnold (ed.), 1882–5, London: Longman.

## Secondary Sources

- Aird, W M 2007, ‘“Sweet Civility and Barbarous Rudeness”: A View from the Frontier. Abbot Ailred of Rievaulx and the Scots’, in S G Ellis and L Klusáková (eds.), *Imagining Frontiers, Contesting Identities*, Pisa: Pisa University Press, 59–75.
- Antonsson, H 2007, *St. Magnús of Orkney: A Scandinavian Martyr-Cult in Context*, Leiden: Brill.
- Baker, D 1989, ‘Aelred of Rievaulx and Walter Espec’, *Haskins Society Journal* 1, 91–8.
- Bates, D 2013, *The Normans and Empire: The Ford Lectures Delivered in the University of Oxford during Hilary Term 2010*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Beeler, J 1966, *Warfare in England, 1066–1189*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Bliese, J R E 1988, ‘Aelred of Rievaulx’s Rhetoric and Morale at the Battle of the Standard, 1138’, *Albion* 20:4, 543–56.
- Bliese, J R E 1989a, ‘The Battle Rhetoric of Aelred of Rievaulx’, *Haskins Society Journal* 1, 99–107.
- Bliese, J R E 1989b, ‘Rhetoric and Morale: A Study of Battle Orations from the Central Middle Ages’, *Journal of Medieval History* 15, 201–26.
- Bliese, J R E 1991, ‘The Courage of the Normans: A Comparative Study of Battle Rhetoric’, *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 35, 1–26.
- Bradbury, J 1996, *Stephen and Matilda: The Civil War of 1139–53*, Stroud: A Sutton.
- Brett, M 1975, *The English Church under Henry I*, London: Oxford University Press.
- Broun, D 2007, *Scottish Independence and the Idea of Britain from the Picts to Alexander III*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Broun, D 2015a, ‘Britain and the Beginning of Scotland’, *Journal of the British Academy* 3, 107–37.
- Broun, D 2015b, ‘Rethinking Scottish Origins’, in S Boardman and S Foran (eds.), *Barbour’s Bruce and its Cultural Contexts: Politics, Chivalry and Literature in Late Medieval Scotland*, Cambridge: D S Brewer, 163–90.
- Broun, D 2017, ‘Kingdom and Identity: A Scottish Perspective’, in K J Stringer and A J L Winchester (eds.), *Northern England and Southern Scotland in the Central Middle Ages*, Martlesham: Boydell Press, 31–85.
- Carpenter, D X 2009, ‘The Several Lives of Paulinus, Master of St. Leonard’s Hospital, York: *Ex Uno Plures*’, *Northern History*, 46:1, 9–29.
- Crawford, B E 1996, ‘Bishops of Orkney in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries: Bibliography and Biographical List’, *The Innes Review*, 47:1, 1–13.
- Crawford, B E 2004, ‘William [William the Old] (d. 1168)’, in H C G Matthew and

- B Harrison (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, vol. lix, 38–9.
- Cooke, A M and Crawford, B E, 'Ralph [Ralph Nowell or Nouell] (d. in or after 1151)', in H C G Matthew and B Harrison (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, vol. xxxv, 871.
- Crouch, D 2000, *The Reign of King Stephen, 1135–1154*, Harlow: Longman.
- Dalton, P 1994, *Conquest, Anarchy and Lordship: Yorkshire, 1066–1154*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Davis, R H C 1976, *The Normans and Their Myth*, London: Thames & Hudson.
- Dutton, M L 2005, 'Aelred's Historical Works: A Mirror for Twelfth-Century England', in *Aelred of Rievaulx: The Historical Works*, M L Dutton (ed.) and J P Freeland (trans.), Collegeville, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1–37.
- Fenton, K A 2013, 'Writing Masculinity and Religious Identity in Henry of Huntingdon', in P H Cullum and K L Lewis (eds.), *Religious Men and Masculine Identity in the Middle Ages*, Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 64–76.
- Freeman, E 1999, 'The Many Functions of Cistercian Histories, Using Aelred of Rievaulx's *Relatio de Standardo* as a Case Study', in E Kooper (ed.), *The Medieval Chronicle: Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on the Medieval Chronicle*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 124–32.
- Garrity, M 2009, "'Hidden Honey": The Many Meanings of Aelred of Rievaulx's *De bello Standardii*', *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 44:1, 57–64.
- Gillingham, J 2000, *The English in the Twelfth Century: Imperialism, National Identity and Political Values*, Woodbridge: Boydell Press.
- Glidden, A 1987, 'Aelred the Historian: The Account of the Battle of the Standard', in J R Sommerfeldt (ed.), *Erudition at God's Service*, Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 175–84.
- Harrington, J P 2020, 'Harangue or Homily? Walter Espec and the Deuteronomic Covenant in Aelred of Rievaulx's *Relatio de Standardo*', *Haskins Society Journal* 32, 163–83.
- Loud, G 1982, 'The *Gens Normannorum* – Myth or Reality?' *Anglo-Norman Studies* 4, 104–16.
- Morton, N 2010, 'The Defence of the Holy Land and the Memory of the Maccabees', *Journal of Medieval History* 36, 275–93.
- Nakashian, C M 2016, *Warrior Churchmen of Medieval England, 1000–1250: Theory and Reality*, Woodbridge: Boydell Press.
- Nicholl, D 1964, *Thurstan: Archbishop of York (1114–1140)*, York: Stonegate Press.
- Norton, C 2006, *St. William of York*, Woodbridge: York Medieval Press.
- Squire, A 1969, *Aelred of Rievaulx: A Study*, London: SPCK.
- Stanton, M 2017, *The Historians of Angevin England*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Storelli, X 2007, 'Convaincre pour vaincre: place et fonction des harangues militaires dans l'historiographie anglo-normande (XIe siècle-début du XIIIe siècle)', in M Aurell (ed.), *Convaincre et persuader: communication et propagande aux XII et XIIIe siècles*, Poitiers: CESC, 53–80.
- Storelli, X 2009, 'Les harangues de la bataille de l'Étendard (1138)', *Médiévales* 57, 15–32.



- Strickland, M J 1992, 'Securing the North: Invasion and the Strategy of Defence in Twelfth-Century Anglo-Scottish Warfare', in M J Strickland (ed.), *Anglo-Norman Warfare: Studies in Late Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman Military Organization and Warfare*, Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 208–29.
- Stringer, K J 1994, *The Reign of Stephen: Kingship, Warfare and Government in Twelfth-Century England*, London: Routledge.
- Stringer, K J 1997, 'State-Building in Twelfth-Century Britain: David I, King of Scots and Northern England', in J C Appleby and P Dalton (eds.), *Government, Religion and Society in Northern England, 1000–1700*, Stroud: Alan Sutton, 40–62.
- Toolis, R 2004, "'Naked and Unarmoured": A Reassessment of the Role of the Galwegians at the Battle of the Standard', *Transactions of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society*, 78, 79–92.
- Truax, J 2009, 'All Roads Lead to Chartres: The House of Blois, the Papacy, and the Anglo-Norman Succession of 1135', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 31, 118–34.
- Truax, J 2017, *Aelred the Peacemaker: The Public Life of a Cistercian Abbot*, Collegeville, MI: Cistercian Publications.
- Tyerman, C J 1995, 'Were There Any Crusades in the Twelfth Century?' *The English Historical Review*, 110:437, 553–77.