

Lecture 5:

Old English then and now

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Key Aims

- ❖ Preliminary remarks on 'history'
- ❖ Old English/Anglo-Saxons through the ages
- ❖ Modern day perceptions of the Anglo-Saxons
- ❖ Applying Film Studies to the cultural relevance of Old English

Key Aims

- ❖ To demonstrate the inaccuracy of:
- ❖ 'educationally, linguistically, historically...a cul-de-sac', a wearisome philological diversion from the broad current of English literature rather than a central part of it. In X's argument, the language has no 'essential kinship with our own', the themes and concerns of the literature have left no trace on ours, and the very term 'Old English' implying that such a connection exists, is spurious'
- ❖ 'ape's bum fodder' (Kingsley Amis)

We view history through the present day



Tacitus



St Gildas



Bede

Medieval-Land

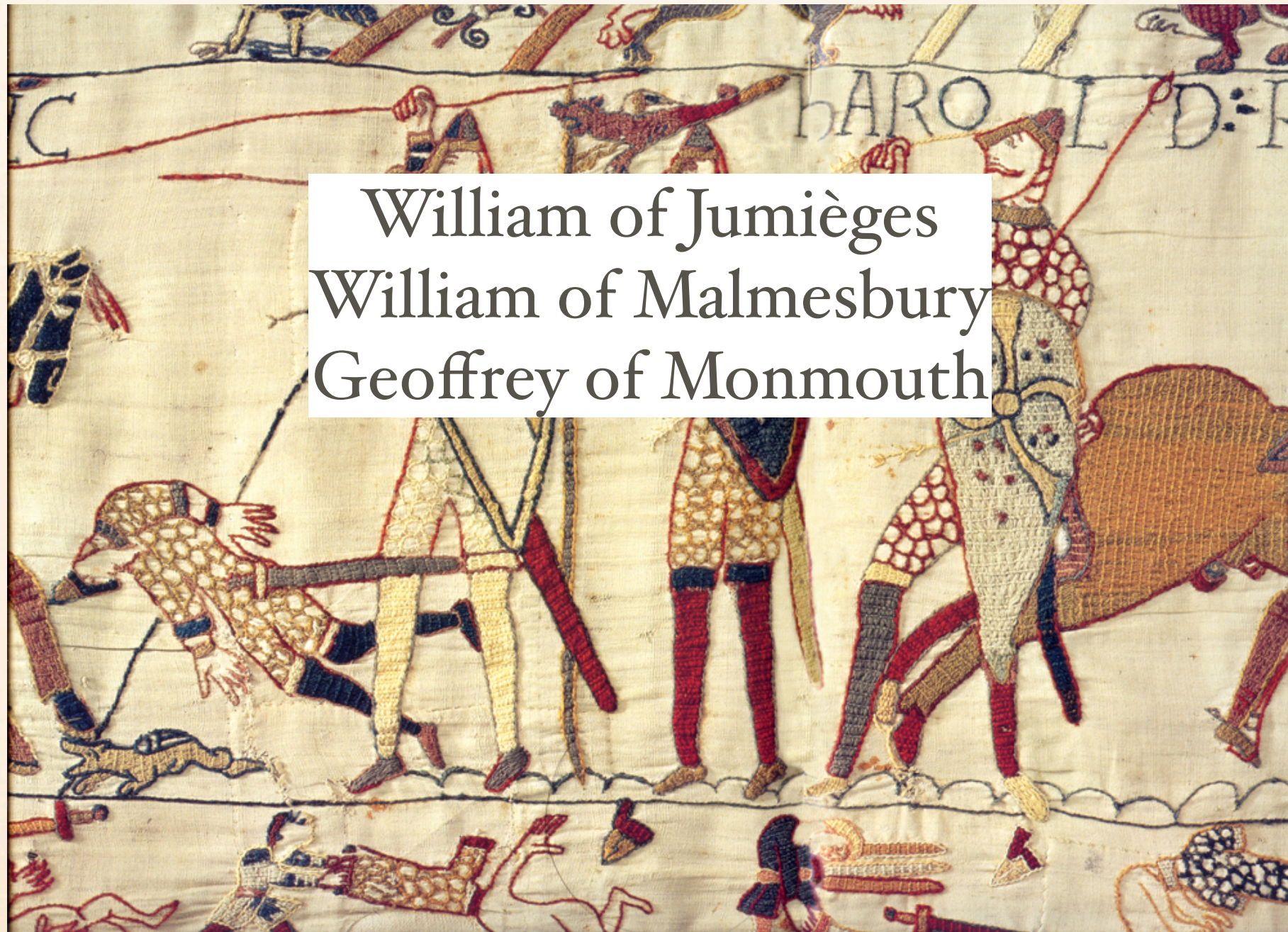
- ❖ A place that exists only in the present not the past
- ❖ A changing set of perceptions based on modern cultural needs or perceptions
- ❖ Where anachronisms are accepted and even perpetuated
- ❖ Constantly reinvented or 'rewritten'



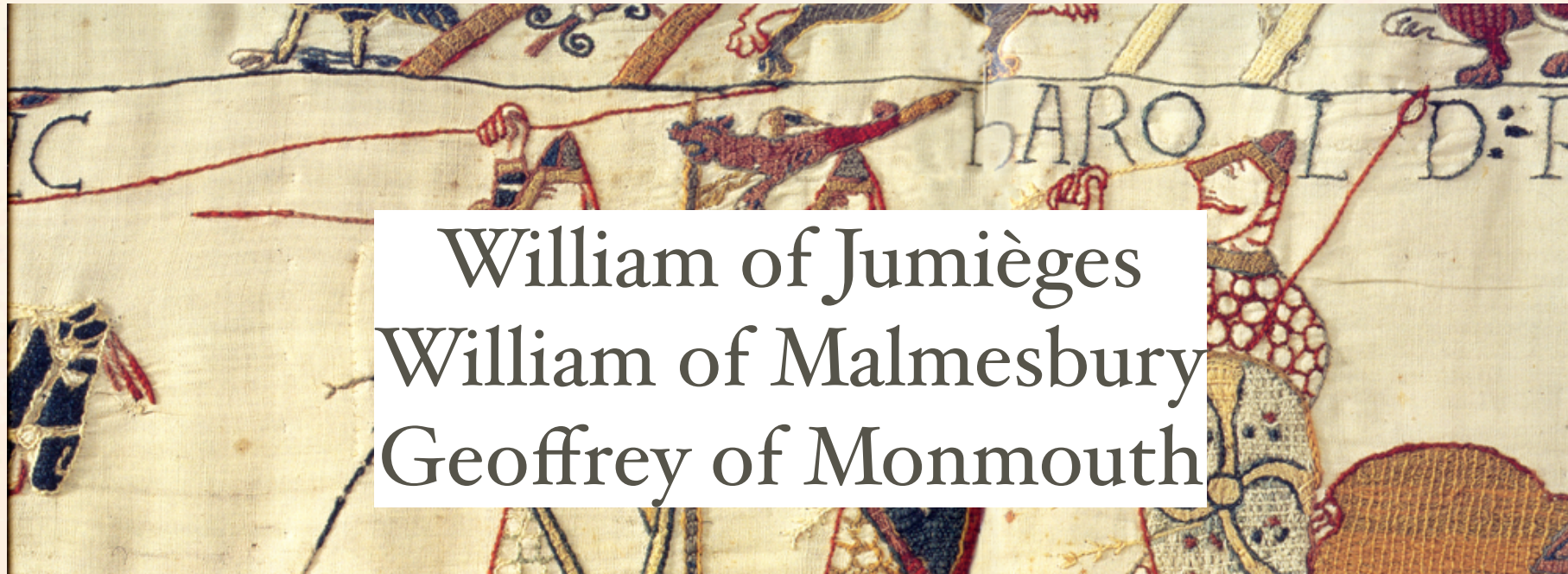
The first rewrite: Hastings and the Norman conquest



The first rewrite: Hastings and the Norman conquest



The first rewrite: Hastings and the Norman conquest



Matilda, wife of Henry I (niece of Edgar Atheling)
House of Wettin (Saxe-Coburg and Gotha)

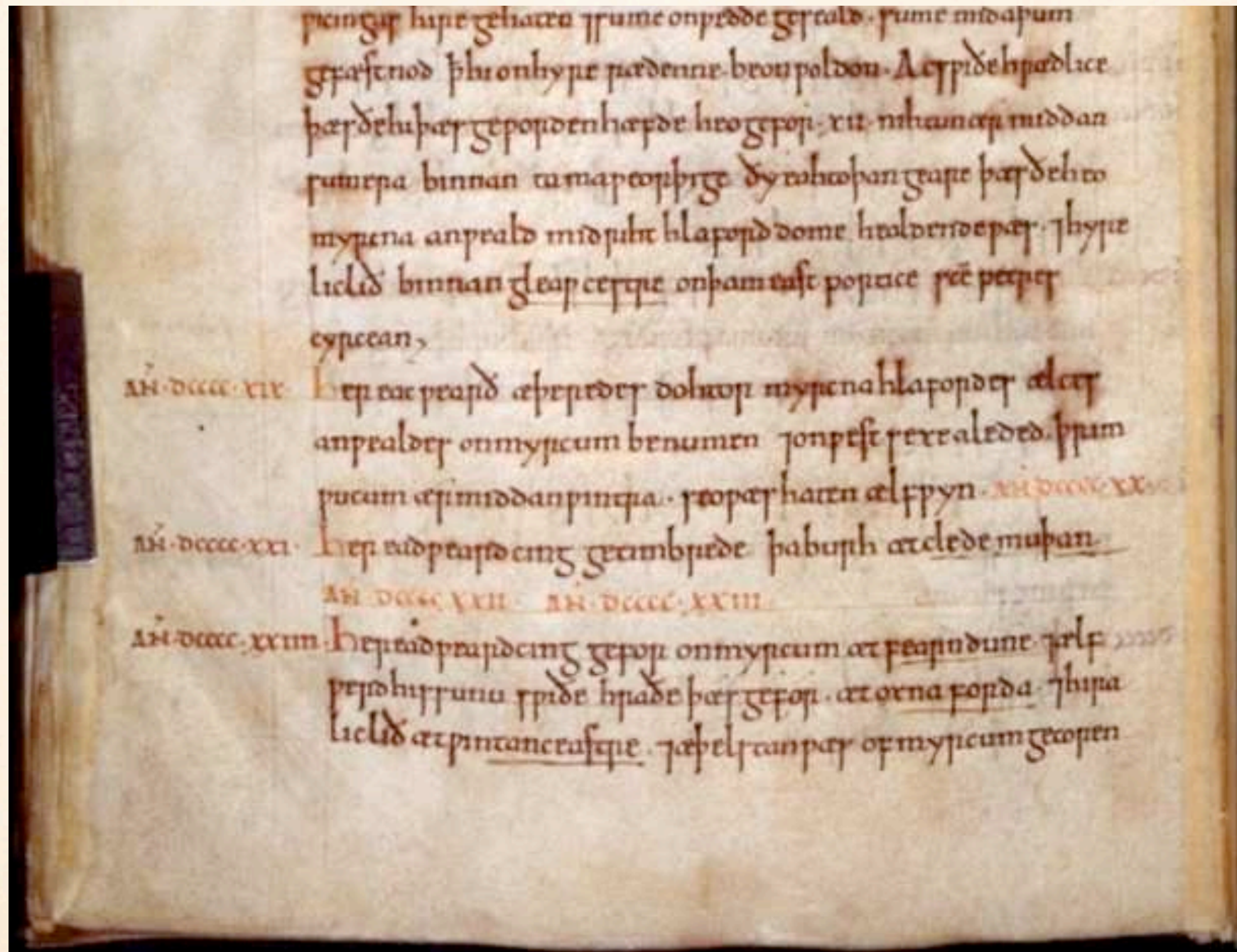


THE SECOND REWRITE

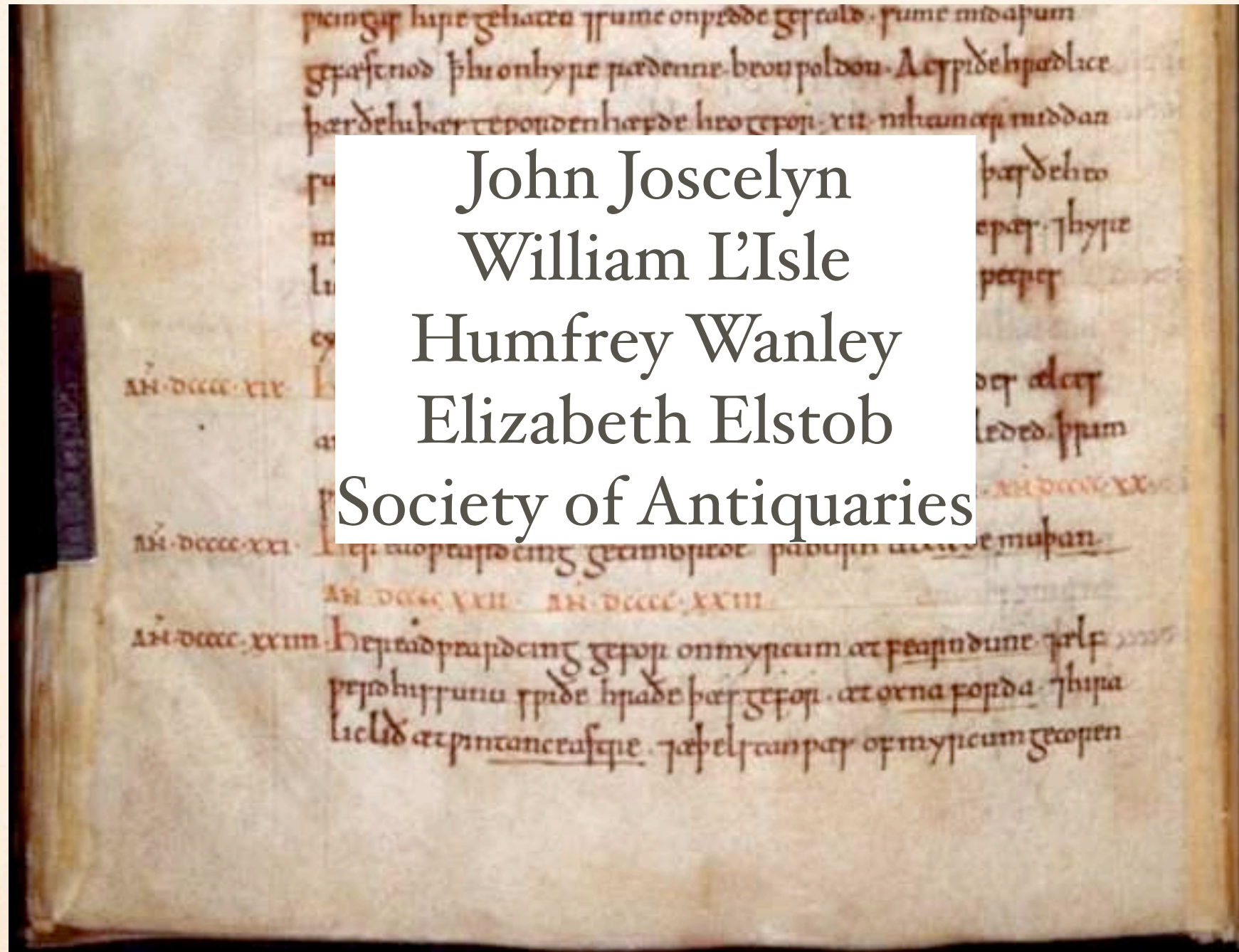
- ❖ Wycliffe (1382) Tyndale (1525)
- ❖ 16th - 17th centuries: religious conflict between Protestants and Catholics
- ❖ Could the teachings of Ælfric be used to defend the new beliefs?
Marriage & transubstantiation
- ❖ A
r
c
h
b
i



reclaiming old english: the first scholars



reclaiming old english: the first scholars



The third rewrite: english ideals

- ❖ 1714 - George I (Hanover) is King revives idea of English constitution as Germanic > Witan > 'Norman Yoke' (Macaulay 1848)
- ❖ 1776 American Revolution and formation of constitution. Anglo-Saxon political structures idealised. Witan = New England townhouse.
- ❖ Thomas Jefferson - Americans are "the children of Israel in the wilderness, led by a cloud by day and a pillar by night; and on the other side, Hengist and Horsa, the Saxon chiefs from whom we claim the honour of being descended, and whose political principles and for of government we have assumed'. US coins should contain Hengest and Horsa.
- ❖ As Saxon England was to Norman England, so US would be to George III's England
- ❖ I
8
I

the gothic revival

- ❖ Gothic Revival = medieval
- ❖ Art, Architecture, Literature
- ❖ Carlyle, Pugin, Ruskin, Pre-Raphaelites ...
- ❖ William Morris:
 -



literature

- ❖ Aelfric Society 1840s
- ❖ Early English Text Society 1864
- ❖ Tennyson 'The Battle of Brunanburgh' (1880) and play based on Hastings
- ❖ Oxford's first chair in English was in Anglo-Saxon (1795)
- ❖ Gerard Manley Hopkins 'Spring and Fall' (publ. 1918) - 'unselve' compound words
- ❖ Ezra Pound's 'The Seafarer' (1911)
- ❖ W

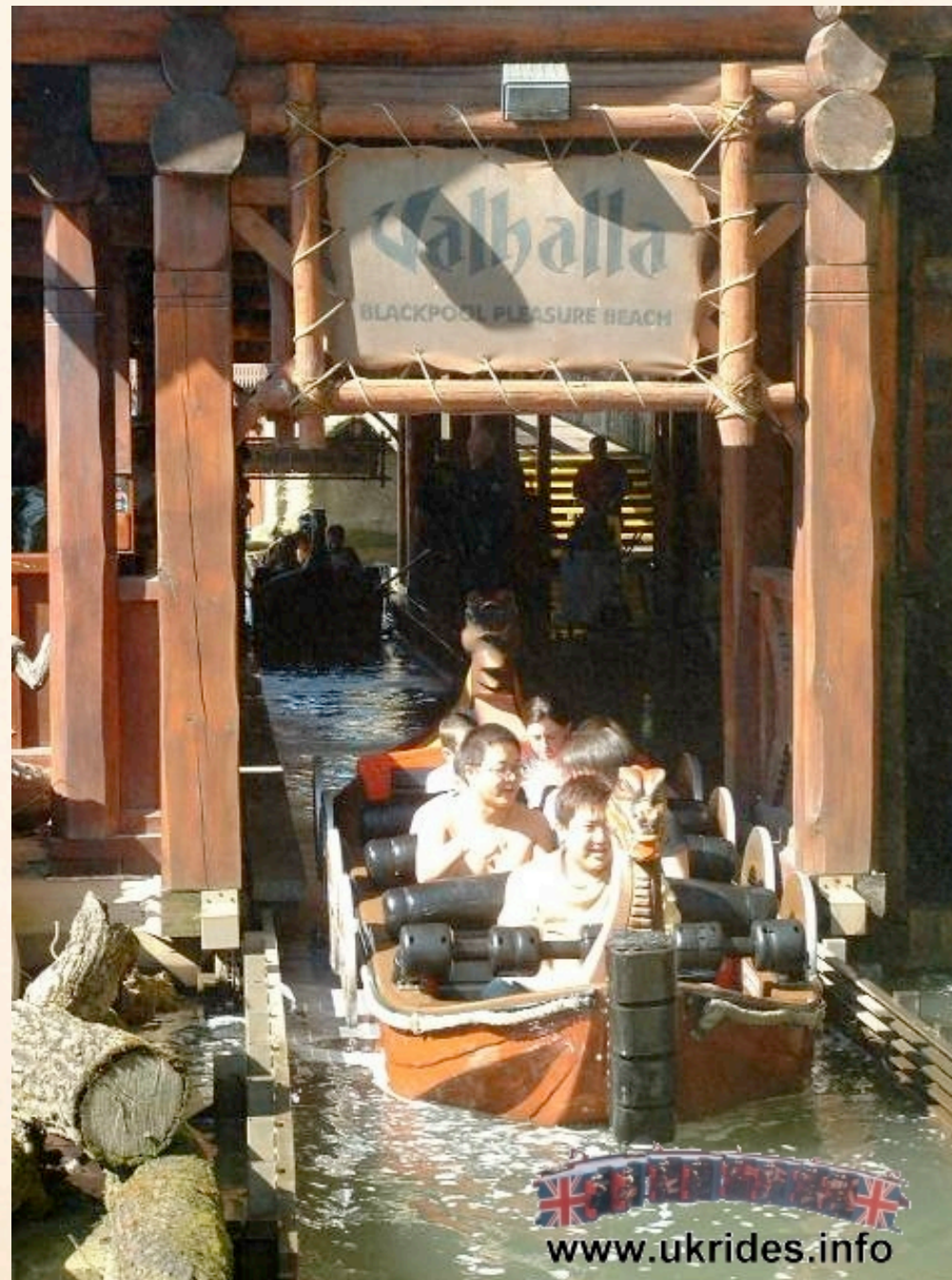
‘Beowulf and Judith seemed good poems to me. Beowulf lying wrapped in a blanket among a platoon of his drunken thanes in the Gothland billet; Judith going for a promenade to Holofernes’s staff-tent; and Brunanburgh with its bayonet-and-cosh fighting - all this was closer to us at the time than the drawing room and deer-park atmosphere of the eighteenth century.’

R. Graves *Goodbye to All That* (Chapter xxvii, 1929)

So...

- ❖ Rewriting history is not new
- ❖ Old English/Anglo-Saxons have been used as a defence or inspiration for:
 - religious beliefs
 - royalty
 - political structures and processes
 - nationalist ideas
 - cultural movements
 - poetry

so far so good



But ...

- ❖ What does the term 'Anglo-Saxon' mean today?

Some Films made about Vikings

- » 1. Viking's Daughter: The Story of the Ancient Norsemen, (1908)
- » ...aka Viking's Daughter, The (1908) (USA: short title)
- » 2. Viking Queen, The (1914)
- » 3. Oath of a Viking, The (1914)
- » 4. Viking, The (1928)
- » 5. Viking, The (1931)
- » 6. Ceux du viking (1931)
- » ...aka Those of the Viking (1931) (International: English title) (USA)
- » 7. Return of the Vikings (1945)
- » 8. Saga of the Viking Women and Their Voyage to the Waters of the Great Sea Serpent, The (1957)
- » 9. Vikings, The (1958)
- » 10. Tales of the Vikings (1960)
- » 11. Invasori, Gli (1961)
- » Fury of the Vikings (1961)
- » 12. Ultimo dei Vikinghi, L' (1961)
- » Dernier des Vikings, Le (1961)

...more

- » 13. Erik, il vichingo (1965)
- » ...aka Erik, the Viking (1965)
- » ...aka Vengeance of the Vikings (1965) (UK)
- » 14. Coltelli del vendicatore, I (1965)
- » ...aka Viking Massacre (1965)
- » 15. Vicious Viking (1967)
- » 16. Viking Queen, The (1967)
- » 17. Warum hab ich bloß 2 x ja gesagt? (1969)
- » ...aka Viking Who Became a Bigamist, The (1969) (USA)
- » 18. Vichingo venuto dal sud, Il (1971)
- » ...aka Viking Who Came From the South, The (1971)
- » 19. Tarkan Viking kani (1971)
- » 20. Norseman, The (1978)
- » 21. Viking Visitors to North America (1979)
- » 22. Vikings Go Pumping (1987)
- » 23. Erik the Viking (1989)
- » 24. Sigurd Drakedreper (1989)
- » ...aka Littlest Viking, The (1989) (USA)

...and more

- » 25. Lost in the Barrens II: The Curse of the Viking Grave (1991) (TV)
- » 26. Hvite viking, Den (1991)
- » ...aka White Viking, The (1991) (International: English title)
- » 27. Lost Vikings, The (1992) (VG)
- » 28. Lost Vikings 2 (1994) (VG)
- » 29. Viking Sagas, The (1995)
- » 30. Sidste viking, Den (1996)
- » 31. Vikings, The (1999)
- » 32. 13th Warrior, The (1999)
- » 33. Kapitän - Das Geheimnis der Viking, Der (2000)
- » 34. Hiking Viking, The (2000) (V)
- » 35. VeggieTales: Lyle, the Kindly Viking (2001)
- » 36. Viking (2003)
- » 37. Viking (2008)
- » 38. A Viking saga (2008)
- » 39 Vicky the Viking (2009)
- » ALSO yields 'Beowulf' and Medieval Total War - Viking Invasion (2003)

Films made about the Anglo-Saxons

- » 1. Last of the Saxons, The (1910)
- » 2. Harold, the Last of the Saxons (1919)
- » 3. Saxon Charm, The (1948)
- » 4. The Adventures of Sir Galahad (1949)
- » 5. Lady Godiva (1911) & (1955)
& (2008)
- » 8. Arthur of the Britons (1972)
- » 9. Woo fook (1977)
- » ...aka Operation Foxbat (1977)
- » ...aka Saxon (1977)
- » 10. Anglo Saxon Attitudes (1991)
- » 11. Milk and Cookies, or The
Ballad of Norman Saxon (1996)
- » 12. Saxons River (2002) (TV)
- » 13. Beowulf

Films made about the Anglo-Saxons



The Beowulf Movies

- » *Beowulf* (1998) TV Animation
- » *Beowulf* (1999)
- » *The 13th Warrior* (1999)
- » *Beowulf and Grendel* (2005)
- » *Beowulf* (2007)
- » *Beowulf: Prince of the Geats* (2008?)

Medieval-land

- » 'I realized that virtually none of my medieval films was reconstructing the past at all, at least not in the detailed, this-is-what-they-had-for-lunch-and-this-is-the-actual-china-they-had-it-on way of, say, Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence* (USA 1993). More importantly, also unlike Scorsese, the medieval films were not working from the assumption that the past was of inherent interest or historically connected to the present' Lindley (1998)

- ❖ Films are our fourth rewriting of history, or period of medieval-land
- ❖ They perpetuate the image of the Vikings - masculine, fierce, brave, adventurous, victorious
- ❖ They create an image of the Saxons - weak, effeminate, ineffective, losers
- ❖ But are they creating or merely reflecting?

let's begin the fightback

- ❖ Films studies can be used to show that Old English has strong cultural links with the present day
- ❖ Plots and type-scenes common in Old English are also common in modern day films
- ❖ Devices used by the Old English poets are very akin to devices used by film directors and editors

‘Fight at Finnsburg’

- ❖ ‘No, this is not the dawn from the east, nor here does a dragon fly ...’
- ❖ Danish warriors trapped in a hall
- ❖ Attacked from the outside
- ❖ Bar the doors
- ❖ Flyting/taunting
- ❖ Frisians break in and there is fierce fighting

other examples

- ❖ Rio Bravo
- ❖ Zulu
- ❖ Night of the Living Dead
- ❖ Straw Dogs
- ❖ Assault on Precinct 13
- ❖ Dog Soldiers

a common 'type-scene':
Arming the Warrior

- ❖ Beowulf readies himself for battle (against Grendel, Grendel's mother, the Dragon)
- ❖ Judith readies herself for 'battle' against Holofernes
- ❖ Christ readies himself for the struggle on the Cross in *The Dream of the Rood*

old english literature as film

- ❖ ‘Point of View and Design for Terror in Beowulf’ and ‘Judith and the limits of poetry’ (A. Renoir)
- ❖ ‘if the poet must hold the attention of his audience while recounting a tale of action, he must make them visualize the action ... as fast as they hear the words that describe it’
- ❖ When Grendel attacks POV is shifted back and forth from within the hall to outside, i.e. ‘cut shots’

Cynewulf and Cyneheard

He overtook him there and surrounded
the chamber outside ...

EXT shot

... and then the king understood that, and
he went to the door... and then he rushed
out at him ...

INT shot

EXT shot

... and then because of the woman's cries
the king's thanes discovered that...

CUT TO HALL

EXT shot

audience understanding and emotional engagement: The Battle of Maldon

- ❖ Byrhtnoth with troops
- ❖ Hawk flies to woods
- ❖ Byrhtnoth rides amongst warriors
- ❖ Viking messenger
- ❖ Byrhtnoth replies
- ❖ General description of armies moving
- ❖ Wulfstan *et al* in combat on causeway

/ / \ x / \ x /	enge anpaðas, uncuð gelad,	D E
/ x / x / \ x /	neowle næssas, nīcōrhusa fēlā.	A E
x / x / x / / x	He feara sum befōrān gengde	B C
/ x / x / / \ x	wisra monna wong sceawian,	A D
x x x / / x / x / x	oþþæt he færinga fyrgenbeamas	C A
x x / x / / x / x	ofer harne stan hlēonīan funde,	B A
/ \ x / / / x \	wynleasne wūdū; wætēr under stod	E D
/ x x x / x / / x \	dreorig ond gedrefed. Dēnūm eallum wæs,	A D
/ / \ x / x x / x	wīnūm Scyldinga, weorce on mode	D A
x x / / x / x / x	to geþoliāne, ðegne mōnēgum,	C A
/ x / x x \ x x / / x	oncyð eorla gehwæm, syðþan Æscheres	D C
x x / / x / x / x	on þam holmclife hāfēlan metton. (1408–21)	C A

SumMary

- ❖ The history of the Anglo-Saxons and of Old English has been rewritten over the years but has been used for all manner of issues
- ❖ In modern-day the image of the Anglo-Saxon is at best vague
- ❖ Old English has a lot to offer when we look imaginatively at what 'interested' them, or apply our knowledge to other disciplines (e.g. film studies)

❖ "educationally, linguistically, historically...a cul-de-sac', a wearisome philological diversion from the broad current of English literature rather than a central part of it. In X's argument, the language has no 'essential kinship with our own', the themes and concerns of the literature have left no trace on ours, and the very term 'Old English' implying that such a connection exists, is spurious'

⚔️ “...etymologically, linguistically, historically, ...
runes, formation of england, why english is germanic language,
birth of english legal system, placenames, manuscripts, authorship,
performance, audience, poetry, metrics, stylistic devices, prose,
english as a national language, days of the week, months,
halloween, pagan beliefs, old norse,
nazis, auden, eminem, hitchcock, monty python, tolkien ...
such a connection exists, is spurious

Wes þu hal!

Wassail!



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