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Reading Queenship in Cynewulf's *Elene*

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Just a few years after sending Augustine to convert the English in 596, Gregory followed up his missionary efforts with a letter to Bertha, queen of Kent. Gently scolding the Christian queen for failing to convert her husband, Æthelberht, Gregory urged Bertha to take Helena—the fourth-century Christian empress and mother of Constantine—as a role model and to convert the king as well as the entire race of the English.[1]

> Nam sicut per recordandæ memoriæ Helenam matrem piissimi Constantini imperatoris ad Christianam fidem corda Romanorum accendit, ita et per gloriæ vestræ studium in Anglorum gentem ejus misericordiam confidimus operari. Et quidem jamdudum gloriosi filii nostri conjugis vestri animos prudentiæ vestræ bono, sicut revera Christianæ, debuistis inflectere, ut pro regni et animæ suæ salute fidem, quam colitis sequeretur.[2]

> [For as He kindled the hearts of the Romans towards the Christian faith by means of the ever memorable Helena, mother of the most pious emperor Constantine, so we trust that His mercy is working through your earnestness, O glorious one, upon the English race. And indeed it was your duty this long time past, by the excellence of your prudence, like a true Christian, to have predisposed the mind of our illustrious son, your consort, to follow the faith which you cherish, for the salvation of his kingdom and of his soul.][3]

In viewing Helena as a model of how a queen might ideally direct her energies, Gregory was not alone. Throughout late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, writers frequently drew on Helena as an exemplar of

queenship, invoking the well-known empress as a shorthand for praising and influencing their own empresses and queens. In his *Church History* (440s), Theodoret, for example, commemorates the fourth-century empress Aelia Flaccilla, wife of Theodosius the Great, in terms that bear a striking resemblance to the discussion of Helena in Rufinus's *Church History* (ca. 402).[4] Empress Aelia Pulcheria was honored at the 451 Council of Chalcedon as "The New Helena."[5] Gregory of Tours, in his *Glory of the Martyrs* (585–95), claims that the Frankish Queen Radegund "is comparable to Helena in both merit and faith."[6] And Baudonivia's sixth-century *Vita Radegundi* likens Radegund's efforts to secure relics of the True Cross to Helena's, claiming that "what Helena did in oriental lands, Radegund the blessed did in Gaul."[7] The practice of using Helena as an exemplar of queenship continued long after Gregory's death, as illustrated by Pope Hadrian's 787 letter to the widowed Empress Irene and her son, Constantine VI, urging them to restore the Eastern Church's former practice of image veneration and thus be called "another Constantine and another Helena."[8]

For Gregory the Great, as for so many late antique and early medieval writers, Helena's appeal lay in the fact that she was a powerful empress who used her political power to further the religious life of the nation. Moreover, as the mother of Constantine—the first royal figure in western Europe to bring Christianity under the official recognition of the state—Helena was strongly associated with the emergence of a unity between church and state, the very unity that Gregory so desperately longed to establish in England. To invoke Helena was to invoke a powerful historical precedent for the idea that religion and politics should and in fact could be united and, more specifically, that it was incumbent upon queens to foster this union. Repeatedly held out before royal women as an exemplar and occasionally lauded as an earthly, more political counterpart of the queen of all queens, the Virgin Mary, Helena held extraordinary cultural capital throughout late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, functioning, in short, as a kind of originary Christian queen.[9]

But like most originary figures, Helena was surrounded by a myriad of myths and legends, all of which could be shaped and refigured to create an image of Christian queenship that might speak to the needs of a particular culture. To celebrate the queen's *Inventio* of the Holy Cross was, like all interpretive acts, to perform an act of "invention"—to engage in a critical praxis poised between the word's medieval connotation of finding that which already exists and its more modern sense of creating something

wholly new. Each retelling of the *Inventio* legend thus invested Helena with different meanings, and it is the complex meanings of the queen in Cynewulf's *Elene*, the only extant pre-Conquest poetic account of the legend, that this essay takes as its subject.

Because *Elene* is one of the longest Old English poems that survives and because it deals with a host of issues central to Anglo-Saxon literature and culture — namely, cross worship, conversion, and conquest — both the poem and its female protagonist have generated a wealth of critical interest.[10] Critical responses to *Elene* have taken primarily one of two forms, neither of which is unique to the poem; rather each is so familiar as to be broadly representative of a major strain of criticism within Anglo-Saxon literary studies. The first is Germanic formulaic analysis, which, in its more recent incarnations, takes as its object of investigation not only poetic diction but also stock scenes and characters found within Germanic literary culture. Through this critical optic, Cynewulf's female heroine is thus seen as akin to the Old Norse *valkyrie*, the Old Norse whetting woman, the aristocratic Germanic *ides*, the female *miles Christi*, and the Old English *freoðuwebbe*.[11] The second approach is typology, which transforms woman into a feminized virtue, a biblical figure, or an institution. It is through the latter interpretive lens that Elene has most often been viewed, as numerous critics, beginning in the 1970s, took up the idea of Elene as a militant *mater ecclesia* battling the Synagogue, a type of the New Law struggling against the Old.[12]

Despite their evident differences, both Germanic formulaic analysis and typological interpretation share a tendency to lose sight of a central force driving all Old English poetry: the contemporary culture in which these texts were produced and circulated. Taking as they do the textual as their main context — the former privileging vernacular, Germanic literary works, the latter, Latinate biblical writings and patristic commentaries — both approaches tend to gloss over the historical specificity of Old English poetry and hence to overlook the kind of cultural work these texts might have done for their contemporary audiences. More recently, however, such critics as E. Gordon Whatley, Clare Lees, and Joyce Tally Lionarons, have read *Elene* through a wider range of critical sensibilities, exploring Cynewulf's characters as complex sites of intersection between Germanic and Latinate textual traditions, and as poetic amalgams that reveal their author's deep imbrication in distinctly Anglo-Saxon social, spiritual, and political formations.[13] Perhaps nowhere are the intersections of these different textual traditions and cultural formations more provocative, I would suggest,

than around the figure of Elene. As a queen, Elene bears obvious typological importance as, for example, a figure of Holy Church, and obvious ideological importance as representative of the royal women who figured so centrally in Anglo-Saxon literature and culture. Elene thus offers a nexus between the sweeping historicity of typology and the more immediate historical embeddedness of cultural criticism, and a nexus around which accrue the many symbols, images, and ideas commonly associated with queens in Anglo-Saxon culture. And it is precisely because of her ability to evoke these associations that Cynewulf's queen has the capacity to do so much, and such complex, cultural work.

Any attempt to understand the cultural work of a queen who appears in an Old English poem, however, must confront two difficulties: the first, common to the study of Old English poetry, the second, particular to the study of queens. As is the case for all Old English poems, the language of *Elene* is simply too mercurial to allow us to know either when or where the poem was originally composed. Traditionally seen as Anglian in origin, the poem could be dated, according to R. D. Fulk's linguistic analysis, as not earlier than around 750, if Mercian, and not earlier than around 850, if Northumbrian.[14] While many scholars concur with Fulk's dating and view the poem as either an eighth- or ninth-century composition, the issue is by no means settled; debates have forcefully reemerged with Patrick Conner's recent reassessment of both *Elene* and the entire Cynewulfian canon as possible products of the late-tenth-century Benedictine reforms.[15]

If we are unable to locate the text either temporally or geographically, how, then, are we to historicize and understand the cultural work performed by Elene, or indeed any character within the poem? How, in other words, can the queen be shown to have demonstrable historical meaning if the poem in which she appears cannot be firmly rooted in either time or place? Indeed, it is precisely our inability to date Old English poetry that is, in part, responsible for how very few attempts have been made to read the poetic corpus through the historical or cultural paradigms that can be more easily mobilized to address the vernacular prose, much of which we can date.[16] Difficulties of dating should not, however, deter Anglo-Saxonists from reading the poems as cultural artifacts: while we cannot know either the date or provenance in which *Elene* was originally composed, we do have access to a fairly close approximation of the Latin source with which Cynewulf was most likely working and can therefore use major discrepancies between the Latin and the Old English text as a viable means of identifying aspects of *Elene* that are the product of a distinctly Anglo-Saxon cul-

tural sensibility. Moreover, we know that the manuscript in which the poem is contained, the Vercelli Book, was copied at the end of the tenth century in England, where it remained for at least part of the next century.[17] Contextualizing the queen within the social and symbolic roles available to royal women during the period of the manuscript's reception thus offers a means of ascertaining how *Elene* might have been understood by one, and indeed the only, group of Anglo-Saxon readers whom we can be reasonably certain had access to the poem.

A second difficulty with focusing on Elene as a queen is the sheer elusiveness of the very concept of queenship in Anglo-Saxon England. Unlike fourteenth-century France or Elizabethan England, in which heated debates on gynecocracy thrust queenship into the arena of both oral and written discourse, Anglo-Saxon England has left us no general tracts or treatises on queenship, no historical documents designating queenship as a public office or position with attendant rights and responsibilities. While the roles of other key political players, such as kings and clerics, were laid out in coronation ceremonies, clerical treatises, and monastic rules, queens' roles were far less clearly defined, leading Janet Nelson to question whether queenship as an institution actually existed during the early Middle Ages, or if the concept of early medieval queenship is a presentist assumption imposed on the Middle Ages by modern historians. As Nelson argues, "episcopacy, aristocracy, [and] kingship can be said to have existed as institutions, but it is much harder to identify anything that could be called 'queenship.'"[18] In light of the ill-defined nature of Anglo-Saxon queenship, reading Cynewulf's Elene historically is less a process of situating the queen within a fixed (or even debated) institutional discourse than a practice of reading her in light of the very few pre-Conquest references to general roles for queens and the more numerous references to roles assumed by individual royal women, even though such references might, in fact, point to a later emerging concept of queenship. As Pauline Stafford argues, the late tenth and early eleventh centuries witnessed significant changes in the social and symbolic status of West Saxon queens—in the establishment of new titles for queens and queen-mothers, the increased use of public anointing ceremonies for queens, the formal appointment of a queen as the official patron of female monasteries, and the frequent invocation of the queen's lineage in succession debates.[19] Many of these roles, in practice, differed little from those of seventh- and eighth-century English queens, but the fact that they are referenced in official documents such as the *Regularis concordia*, land-grant charters, and coronation *ordines* suggests an increased interest in codifying

and formalizing queens' roles. While the burgeoning references to queens in these texts may simply be a function of the greater documentary evidence surviving from the later period, if queenship as an institution ever did exist in pre-Conquest England, it was emerging as such during the very period when *Elene* was copied and circulating. Finally, we might note that the same lack of a clearly defined historical discourse of Anglo-Saxon queenship that renders it so difficult to historicize representations of queens in Old English poetry may, paradoxically, be partly responsible for our having so many rich and complex depictions of queens to work with in the poetic corpus. In short, queens may have held a topical appeal for early medieval writers precisely because queenship was less a construction manufactured by rigid institutional definitions than a nascent interpretive possibility that writers such as Cynewulf took power and pleasure in shaping within the fictional courts of their own poetry.

We begin, then, with questions of interpretation: What hermeneutic strategies does Cynewulf invite as most appropriate to an understanding of his queen, Elene, and how might he have intended his audiences to read her? From here we move to the actual representation of queenship in the poem. Focusing on key changes Cynewulf makes to his probable source text, the fifth-century *Inventio Sanctae Crucis*, I argue that he encases Elene in the linguistic, material, and social trappings that were particular to Anglo-Saxon discourses of queenship.[20] Such conspicuous displays of queenliness concomitantly familiarize and defamiliarize Elene, at once bringing the Roman empress more in line with the multivalent rhetorics of Anglo-Saxon queenship and imbuing her with an aura of royal legitimacy that dissociates her from the more unsavory aspects of her historical precursor's questionable sexual past. Such transformations enhance the queen's ability to function as an exemplar, but one impelled by ideological goals that reach far beyond the mere fashioning of model roles for royal women. Cynewulf uses the queen as an exemplar to naturalize and perpetuate a very traditional and highly conservative social hierarchy, figured as coextensive with righteous belief and as critical to the production of communal harmony and personal happiness. Yet he also produces this exemplarity as poetically and interpretively revisionist. In translating the fourth-century Roman empress into an Anglo-Saxon queen, Cynewulf creates a female figure whose renewed, culturally specific potentiality and own capacity to revise history implicitly destabilize his own poetic vision of social hierarchy because they invite historical revision. The reinvented queen thus suggests that highly conservative hierarchies of rank and gender might be reimagined and traditional forms

of institutionalized subservience reenvisioned. Cynewulf's multifaceted treatment of queenship in *Elene* reveals his profound interest in using religious poetry to engage with the more secular aspects of the culture in which he lived, marking the Cynewulfian corpus as a body of work that offers rich insight into the complex social functions that poetry served in Anglo-Saxon culture.

Reading Elene

It is indeed not at all surprising that the typological reading of Elene as a figure of Holy Church has proven so powerful. It is a critical stance that derives force from no less an authority than the poet himself—abstract, symbolic interpretation is precisely the kind of reading that Cynewulf encourages throughout the poem. *Elene* is filled with such richly allusive and overdetermined figures as the archetypally Judaic Judas, the anachronistically placed protomartyr Stephen, and the first Christian emperor, Constantine. As the mother of this emperor, Elene is a similarly overdetermined figure, her strong association with maternity easily evoking images of the Church, which was commonly identified in both patristic and early medieval writings through the metaphor of *mater ecclesia*—a metaphor rooted in the belief that one was reborn in the Church through baptism.[21] While Cynewulf never explicitly identifies the queen-mother Elene as a figure of *mater ecclesia*, he nevertheless encourages readers to interpret Elene's maternity symbolically by characterizing it, as the poem progresses, through increasingly abstract forms of mothering. As several critics have noted, Elene enters the poem as Constantine's biological mother, then takes up the role of spiritual mother to Judas in his conversion, and ends up as the textual mother-muse of Cynewulf himself—the subject of a Latinate source which inspires and motivates the poet, liberating him from both spiritual lethargy and writer's block.[22]

Cynewulf's transformation of Elene from literal to symbolic mother stands as an apt example of the kind of interpretive practice privileged in *Elene*: the acceptance of Christianity inscribes a necessary movement from literal to more symbolic orders of representation. One of the most pervasive themes in patristic and early medieval anti-Jewish polemics was that the Jews were unable to read figurally, that, unlike Christians, who understood the Old Testament as a prefiguration of the New Testament, Jews were bound to the literal letter of the Old Testament and unable to penetrate its deeper spiritual significance.[23] In keeping with this belief that a fundamen-

tal distinction between Jews and Christians lay in their very different kinds of hermeneutic practice, Cynewulf depicts Judas's conversion as an entrance into symbolic interpretation. After the newly converted Judas emerges from his pit, he eagerly spouts Old Testament history and "correctly" interprets it as a prefiguration of Christian events: Joseph's bone anticipates the Holy Cross, Creation foreshadows Revelation, and he himself becomes the new Moses. The unconverted Jews in the poem are depicted, by contrast, as strictly literal readers, obdurately impervious and willfully blind to symbolic meaning. Hence, they always read Elene as a literal queen, as a very real spokesperson from a powerful family whom they have somehow offended. When Elene accuses the Jews of multiple transgressions against God, for example, they innocently respond:

> ne we eare cunnon
> þurh hwæt ðu ðus hearde,   hlæfdige, us
> eorre wurde;   we ðæt æbylgð nyton
> þe we gefremedon   on þysse folcscere,
> þeodenbealwa   wið þec æfre. (399b – 403b)

[We don't know clearly, lady, why you thus have become so severely angry with us. We don't know the transgression which we have committed against this people, of evils against you ever.][24]

Given that the Jews are depicted throughout the poem as blind, obstinate, and misguided, their strictly literal understanding of Elene as a real queen from a powerful family stands as an example of failed or mis-reading. To read Elene on a strictly literal level, then, would be misguided, for it would, in fact, be to read her precisely as do the Jews in the poem.

It is crucial, however, to recognize that the Jews' misreading of Elene is not that they read her as a queen but that they read her *only* as a queen; their hermeneutic failure lies not in recognizing the literal but in being unable and unwilling to move beyond it. As Erich Auerbach has so thoroughly shown, medieval figural interpretation—except among the fiercest of spiritualists—did not work through discarding literal, historical reality, but by preserving the historicity of both the early event or figure and its deeper meaning: "The two poles of the figure are separate in time, but both, being real events or figures, are within time, within the stream of historical life."[25] This sense of figural interpretation as preserving both literal and more abstract levels of meaning is very much borne out in *Elene.* For while Cynewulf privileges abstract over literal interpretation, he never discounts

literal reading; instead, he prompts readers to see it as the necessary first step in Christian understanding, a point neatly illustrated through the poem's treatment of its main theme, conversion. If, as numerous critics have argued, *Elene* is a poem that is largely about conversion and the individual's discovery of Christianity, this quest for spiritual enlightenment is depicted as a very literal search mission.[26] Discovering the meaning of the Cross is shown to be profoundly dependent upon first actually finding it.

  The poem's depiction of good hermeneutic work as crucially reliant on both literal and symbolic reading is, moreover, part of its broader characterization of the recovery of meaning as complex process rather than singular event, a point highlighted by the poem's expansive rendition of Elene's voyage to Jerusalem: finding the meaning of the Cross is depicted as a lengthy and arduous journey, rather than an instant revelation. So, too, the queen's recovery of the Cross is shown to be only one part of a much larger and far more complicated project of making known the Cross's many meanings. While Elene's recovery of the Cross does indeed effect a metonymic recovery of the Lord's presence—when the recovered Cross reanimates the corpse of a young boy—the full meaning of the Cross is shown to be revealed only by situating it within a wide variety of contexts: oral and written, past and present, psychic and social. Such contexts include the vision of the Cross and interpreting angel which appear to Constantine in a dream, the holy books from which Elene gleans knowledge of the Cross's history, and the advice of the king's wise advisors, who collectively explicate and reveal the Cross's many mysteries. Moreover, the Cross's meanings are most powerfully revealed through their effects on the characters within the poem—effects which, the poem insists, are time-bound, culturally specific, and extremely personal. While the penitent, eschatologically minded narrator at the end of the poem may indeed model Cynewulf's own ideal imagined reader of *Elene*, the narrator's sorrow for his sins of the past and increased reverence for the hereafter reveal a newfound spiritual awareness that he has arrived at only through previous engagement with the meanings of the Cross in his own earthly life, meanings which the poem insists will vary from person to person. For Constantine, the meaning of the Cross inheres in its potential to ensure swift victory against the seemingly endless hosts of Huns and Goths who threaten his homeland; for the nameless Christian converts in the poem, the meaning of the Cross lies in its ability to resurrect the dead; for Cynewulf, the meaning of the Cross emerges from its power to unlock creative energy and allow him to produce poetry. While the Cross is no doubt a unique cultural artifact, Cynewulf's insistence on its multivalence

is, I would suggest, less unique than it is symptomatic of his treatment of characters and events throughout the poem, particularly his treatment of Elene. Moreover, to read Cynewulf's Elene as signifying on diverse levels is simply to acknowledge that the queen is not a replication of the queens found in any single Anglo-Saxon discourse but a conglomerate figure crafted from the dense web of roles that queens are shown enacting within multiple discursive arenas: Latin biblical writings and commentaries, vernacular literature, and the historical writings that offer modern critics a refracted view of the cultural and material worlds in which royal women lived. Such roles do not work in isolation but reinforce, complement, and occasionally conflict with one another. Attending to how they do so offers a powerful means of discerning the complex ways in which images of queenship signified in Anglo-Saxon England and, by extension, the cultural work that *Elene* might have performed for both its author and audiences.

The displays of queenship

The *Inventio* most often refers to Helena by her proper name, rarely referring to her by the title *regina* or *domina*. Cynewulf, however, tends to replace the proper name *Helena* with more generic terms: most often *cwen*, and occasionally *hlæfdige*. He also frequently embellishes these terms, referring to Elene as *sigecwen* (victorious queen [260a, 997a]), *guðcwen* (battle-queen [254a, 331a]), *þeodcwen* (people-queen [1155b]), *æðele cwen* (noble queen [275b, 662a]), *tireadig cwen* (glorious queen [605a]), *Cristenra cwen* (queen of the Christians [1068a]), *cwen selest[e]* (best queen [1169a]), *arwyrðe cwen* (honorable queen [1128b–29a]), and *rice cwen* (powerful or high-ranking queen [411b]). This diverse array of epithets for the queen must be, in part, attributed to the formal demands of the alliterative half-line, as well as to the Anglo-Saxon poetic practice of variation. However, Cynewulf's preference for naming his female protagonist by the generic terms *cwen* or *hlæfdige* as opposed to the personal name *Elene* also suggests an interest in transforming Elene from a particular queen into a more generic exemplar of queenship, an image of female royalty whom Anglo-Saxon readers might view not simply as a phenomenon of a bygone Roman past but as a figure who might be found within their own Germanic world.

Repeated use of the terms *cwen* and *hlæfdige* also serves as a means of invoking Elene's typological status, for both terms were commonly employed to symbolize Holy Church, or the collective congregation of believing Christians; in Ælfric's formulation: "Seo cwen hæfde getacnunge þære

halgan gelaðunge ealles cristenes folces" [The queen was a type of the holy congregation of all Christian people].[27] Moreover, it is not simply the Christian narrator who invokes Elene through generic terms. So, too, do the Jews consistently refer to Elene as both *cwen* and *hlæfdige*, their ease with these typologically laden titles attesting to their collective spiritual state—a knowledge of the inherent superiority of Holy Church but a refusal to acknowledge this knowledge as truth. Repeatedly referring to Elene as *cwen* (533b), *hlæfdige* (400b), or *hlæfdige min* (656b), the Jews seem never to tire of voicing a collective awareness of the supreme power and authority rightfully due to Holy Church. Yet, such iterations of humility are rapidly revealed as mere lip service, undermined as they are by subsequent interactions with the queen indicative of far less respect: the Jews challenge Elene's views on the preservation of textual history, stake claims for their own deep understanding of Scripture, and demand that she enlighten them as to how they have offended her, her lord Constantine, and her people. The irony of these scenes is rich, for by refusing to reveal the whereabouts of the Cross and, more importantly, to recognize the divinity of Christ, the Jews have indeed gravely offended the triumvirate of Elene, her lord, and her people—not, as they believe, in the form of secular wrongs done to another social group, but in the form of spiritual offenses against Holy Church, her Lord (Jesus Christ), and her people, the collective body of Christian believers. Yet while the poem maintains a distinction between secular and spiritual offenses—by depicting the Jews as recognizing only the former—it concomitantly blurs this boundary. Drawing on the power of the terms *cwen* and *hlæfdige* to signal the Jews' offense against Elene as both secular leader and Holy Church, the poem sanctifies royal authority as it backs Christianity with the power of the state. Resistance to the state and resistance to God are conflated as reciprocal offenses, a point driven home in the poem through Cynewulf's use of the term *þeoden* (prince) as a title for both Constantine and God (267b, 487a).[28]

For late-tenth-century readers, the terms *cwen* and *hlæfdige* would have borne not only typological weight but also very particular cultural implications, in light of the new titling practices emerging for queens and queen-mothers. As Asser notes in his *Life of King Alfred*, ninth-century Wessex queens possessed little power, partially reflected by the fact that they were not permitted to be called *regina* but were referred to instead as *coniunx regis* (king's wife).[29] However, by the mid–tenth century, queens had gained more official status and power, one indication of which was an increasing usage of titles for queens and queen-mothers. As Stafford has argued, it

was in the mid–tenth century that the first English queen was formally granted the title *regina*.[30] The closest Old English equivalent for *regina* was *cwen*, and frequent use of the term throughout the poem would probably have been understood by readers as a title serving to heighten and call attention to Elene's social status. Moreover, the term *cwen* appears to have carried a greater sense of official status and power than the more generic *hlæfdige*, which was commonly used to denote the female head of any landed household that contained servants.[31] Contemporary writings suggest that consecration may have been the distinguishing factor between the two titles. The 1051 entry in manuscript E of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* states that Edith was a *hlæfdige* who had been consecrated as *cwen*, and witness lists to Anglo-Saxon charters reveal that Ælfthryth, the first English queen who was certainly consecrated (ca. 973), was the first to witness charters as *regina*.[32] Although this distinction between *cwen* and *hlæfdige* was often ignored — consecrated and nonconsecrated Anglo-Saxon queens were commonly referred to by both titles — the term *cwen* was, by the late tenth century, a title used to stress the queen's official status and the power deriving from her regal position.

Because we do not know precisely when and where Cynewulf was writing, it is difficult to ascertain if the terms *cwen* and *hlæfdige* would have signified for him as titles or if such recognition would have been confined to later readers. That Cynewulf may indeed be employing these terms in an attempt to heighten Elene's social status, however, is further suggested by the various adjectives that he uses to describe the queen. Unlike Ælfric's very brief homily for the Invention or, more notably, Cynewulf's own source text, both of which tend to modify references to Helena with adjectives denoting the queen's religiosity, Cynewulf's poem tends to describe Elene with adjectives that convey a sense of her secular nobility.[33] Over half of the references to Helena in the *Inventio* are accompanied by some form of the adjective *beata*. Cynewulf, however, only very occasionally refers to Elene through such Anglo-Saxon equivalents as *eadig* (619a) or *eadhreðig* (266a), and instead refers to her four times by the adjective or substantive *æðele* (noble [275b, 545a, 662a, 1130b]), once as *geatolic* (adorned or magnificent [331a]), once as *tireadig* (glorious [605a]), and once as *rice* (powerful or high-ranking [411b]).

Cynewulf also enhances the queen's social status by surrounding her with all of the trappings of Anglo-Saxon royalty. Unlike the *Inventio*-author, who never refers to Helena's clothing, Cynewulf claims that when three thousand of the Jewish wise men approach Elene, they find the

"geatolic guðcwen golde gehyrsted" [magnificent battle-queen adorned with gold] (331). And when the queen receives the nails with which Christ was crucified, she bursts into tears which fall "ofer wira gespon" [over a web of wires] (1134a), a phrase suggesting that Elene wears some type of gold-embroidered garment or perhaps a pendant ornamented with gold.[34] More-over, Cynewulf's Elene has both a *salor* (hall [382b]) and a *cynestol* (throne [330a])—in the *Inventio* she has neither—and Cynewulf clearly depicts the queen receiving visitors from a seated position on the throne, as he states:

> þær on þrymme bad
> in cynestole   caseres mæg,
> geatolic guðcwen. (329b–31a)

> [there the kinswoman of the emperor waited on the throne in glory, the magnificent battle-queen.]

Cloaking Elene in elaborate royal garb, Cynewulf departs significantly from his Latin source and produces an image of queenship that lands squarely within stock depictions of queens and upper-class women in Old English poetry. The *goldhroden* (gold-adorned) or *beaghroden* (jewel-adorned) queen makes frequent appearances in such poems as *Beowulf* and *Widsið*; draped in jewels and other finery, she circulates throughout the hall, dispensing gifts and serving guests. *Maxims I*, which proclaims that "gold geriseþ on guman sweorde, / sellic sigesceorp, sinc on cwene" [gold is fitting on a man's sword, an excellent ornament of victory, treasure on a queen], suggests that such conspicuous displays of royal wealth in the fictional courts of heroic poetry may not be too far from Anglo-Saxon social practice.[35] The richly adorned body of the queen may well have served as a means of publicly signaling the wealth and power of her kingdom, inviting traveling guests to broadcast afar that hers was a kingdom with great monetary reserves and hence one that would not prove an easy target of conquest.

Cynewulf's emphasis on the richness of Elene's clothing also brings the queen more in line with her typological status as Holy Church, which homilists—invoking images found in the Psalms, the Song of Songs, and Revelation—often described as an elaborately adorned royal woman decked out for her bridegroom.[36] These textual representations of Holy Church have a material analogue in the Anglo-Saxon custom of decorating churches with elaborate metal and artwork—a cultural practice that Barbara Raw argues was designed to ensure that the earthly church might be understood

as a symbol of the heavenly city and to emphasize that the riches of Holy Church were far superior to the wealth of any secular hall.[37] Elene's throne further enhances her typological significance, the royal seat bringing her more closely in line with images of Mary and Holy Church, which homilists frequently invoked as Christ's enthroned queen. As Ælfric puts it:

> we sprecað be þære heofonlican cwene endebyrdlice æfter wifhade þeahhwæðere eall seo geleaffulle gelaþung getreowfullice be hire singð. þæt heo is geuferod 7 ahafen ofer engla werodum to ðam wuldorfullum heahsetle.

> [We speak about the heavenly queen, as is usual, according to her womanhood, yet all of the believing congregation sing truly about her that she is honored and raised up to the glorious throne over hosts of angels.][38]

While Elene's throne does not place her over hosts of angels, it does place her above all of the denizens of Jerusalem, for when the Jews are brought en masse into her hall, Cynewulf claims that the queen "wlat ofer ealle" [looked over everybody] (385b), a phrase that both reiterates that Elene is physically elevated over the entire assembly and signifies that she has a far-reaching understanding of Christianity in contrast to the Jews' limited vision.

For later readers of the poem, Elene's throne would have had particular cultural significance, in light of changing attitudes toward Anglo-Saxon queens' use of actual material thrones. Asser claims that during the ninth century "the people of the West Saxons did not allow the queen to sit beside the king" [Gens namque Occidentalium Saxonum reginam iuxta regem sedere non patitur], a custom which arose because of the wicked queen Eadburh whose alleged antagonism toward both her husband (whom she poisoned) and her people led to her "expulsion from the queen's throne" [a reginali solio proiceretur] and to the West Saxons swearing "that they would never permit any king to reign over them who during his lifetime invited the queen to sit beside him on the royal throne" [ut nullum unquam regem super se in vita sua regnare permitterent, qui reginam in regali solio iuxta se sedere imperare vellet].[39] But a little over a century later, West Saxon queens appear to have recovered their right to sit on the throne, although there was no ritual for the enthronement of the queen during the coronation ceremony as there was for the king.[40] The frontispiece of the *Encomium Emmae* (ca. 1041–42) depicts Emma seated on a throne, with the Flemish

monk who wrote the text presenting it to her, and two of her sons, Edward and Harthacnut, watching.[41] Similarly, the anonymous author of the mid-eleventh-century *Life of King Edward Who Rests at Westminster* states that both custom and law decreed that a throne at the king's side should always be ready for the queen Edith. However, in extolling the many virtues of his patron Edith, the author also approvingly notes that Edith usually rejected the throne except on very public occasions, suggesting that even by this late date, the queen's sitting on the throne was still not completely customary.[42] It is difficult to ascertain precisely when cultural attitudes toward the queen's sitting on the throne began to change. The sources that attest to legal sanction of this formerly prohibited cultural practice date from the early to mid–eleventh century. However, public acceptance of the queen's throne was very likely another aspect of the increasing social status granted to late-tenth-century queens. For late-tenth- and eleventh-century readers of the poem, then, Elene's throne would have carried multiple meanings, functioning as an object that emphasized her regal status and also brought her more in line with the queens found in Anglo-Saxon texts and culture.

The depiction of queenship in *Elene*, then, is one that places a great deal of interpretive pressure on its audiences, asking them to recognize the queen as hailing from a vast array of discursive arenas — poetry, homiletic writings, history — but more fundamentally, as inhabiting a vast expanse of time. As a figure of Holy Church, image of and exemplar for queens in pre-Conquest England, and a symbol of the heavenly city, the queen was a figure who inhabited all cultural moments — past, present, and future. She thus demanded that readers embrace an understanding of Christian history as timelessly eternal and view her as part of typological history, whose emphasis on recursiveness and claim to provide explanatory force for all historical moments have led many critics to characterize it as a spatial rather than temporal conception of history.[43] Yet *Elene* also offers readers a slightly less grand, more linear, and, perhaps most importantly, more culturally particular means of understanding the queen as a historical figure — the queen as an agent of Christian conversion.

Elene is the only major character in the poem who does not herself convert; rather, throughout the text, she functions as a mediator, a catalyst in the process of helping others to discover Christian truth.[44] Significantly, it is not Elene who actually finds the material remnants of the lost Cross but Judas, for Elene has already discovered the Christian truth symbolized by those fragments, and her role is to convince others to do so as well. By the end of the poem, Elene has converted Judas and a multitude of unnamed

Jews, and she has also effected a metaphorical conversion upon the poet himself—rescuing Cynewulf from both his former spiritual sloth and his inability to write.

Cynewulf's emphasis on Elene's role as an agent of Christian conversion appears to be a fairly accurate depiction of the historical circumstances that eventually drove the fourth-century empress to leave Rome and travel east. As Jan Drijvers has convincingly shown, Helena's "pilgrimage" from Rome to Palestine and her travels throughout other eastern provinces were motivated less by personal piety than by Constantine's programmatic efforts to convert the still largely pagan population of the eastern portion of his empire.[45] Having conquered the eastern provinces in 324, Constantine then sent his mother to travel throughout his newly claimed lands, overseeing his church-building initiatives to render Christianity "visible," giving liberally to the poor, and freeing Christian prisoners—all of which, Drijvers argues, were part of the emperor's attempts to convert his new subjects.[46]

But the particular tactics that Elene uses to convert the Jews—the verbal denigration of their community and intellectual traditions, and the actual physical torture of their leader, Judas—is also implacably anchored in a sentiment that was widespread throughout Anglo-Saxon England: that violence was both a precondition for and an intrinsic part of strengthening and extending Christian *imperium*. Texts such as *The Battle of Maldon* and Asser's *Life of King Alfred* consistently frame Anglo-Saxon warfare as righteous campaigns of *Christiani* against *pagani*.[47] And as Gordon Whatley observes, even the most devout and cultured Anglo-Saxon churchmen, such as Bede and Alcuin, championed kings who waged brutal military campaigns that were deemed necessary to secure a sufficiently peaceful environment for clerics to wage safely their battles of the spirit.[48] In Anglo-Saxon culture, violence and conversion were inseparable, and their imbrication finds voice in Elene's chilling treatment of the Jews—an aspect of the poem that renders it highly disturbing for modern readers and most likely further distances us from its contemporary reception, as there is some evidence to suggest that the anti-Judaic violence of the *Inventio* legend was in part responsible for its popularity.[49]

For tenth-century readers, the image of Elene as an agent of Christian conversion would not only have invoked early Christian Rome or conversionary aggression but also have resonated with contemporary changes in English queenship, as the image of a proselytizing queen was wholly consistent with new attitudes toward the royal family ushered into England by tenth-century reformers and very much in accord with the emphasis placed

on "spiritual queenship" during this period. By the tenth century, the English were indeed converted; however, invasions and settlements in England by pagan Scandinavians rendered conversion a pressing issue throughout the century. The prayer accompanying the giving of the ring in late Anglo-Saxon queens' coronation *ordines* explicitly conveys the sense that during the late tenth century, conversion of the barbarians was considered a duty for which queens were formally responsible:

> Accipe anulum fidei. signaculum sanctae trinitatis. quo possis omnes hereticas prauitates deuitare et barbaras gentes uirtute dei praemere. [*sic*] et ad agnitionem ueritatis aduocare. praestante.[50]

> [Accept this ring of faith, the sign of the Holy Trinity, that you may be able to avoid all heretical depravity and, through your virtue, bring barbarous peoples to God and to recognition of the truth.]

It is also helpful to recall that throughout late antiquity and the Middle Ages, conversion was understood less as a single event than as an ongoing process, namely, a life marked by constant attempts to remake oneself, and be remade, more closely in accordance with the image of God.[51] To convert, then, might be thought of not merely as wholesale change from heathen to Christian but also as a metaphor for spiritual improvement, a social enterprise, which, during the tenth century, was increasingly falling under the domain of the royal family.[52] Tenth-century reformist writings, most notably the *Regularis concordia*, granted both the king and queen increased control over England's religious life, depicting the royal couple as spiritual guardians of the nation, with Edgar and his queen Ælfthryth functioning as a sort of head abbot and abbess of England.[53] Similar sentiments are apparent in the period's art, which placed heightened emphasis on the idea of the royal family as earthly representatives of the heavenly court and as intercessors for the people's spiritual welfare. As Robert Deshman points out, it was during this period that iconographic depictions of the crowned Christ, the crowned magi, and the Coronation of the Virgin first appeared in England, as did unusual ruler portraits likening the king to both Christ and the ideal abbot Benedict and the queen to the Virgin Mary.[54]

While the emphasis that tenth-century reformers placed on spiritual queenship was new, the idea itself was not. It was an idea that was part of England's own history of conversion and was, I would suggest, resurrected by tenth-century reformers as part of an attempt to promote stricter

religiosity in England through nostalgic invocations of a glorious English past. As critics such as Antonia Gransden and Patrick Wormald argue, the tenth-century Benedictine Reform was a movement driven by a profound sense of nostalgia that found voice in clerics' eloquent expressions of longing to return to a faraway Bedan "Golden Age," with its firmly entrenched monastic episcopacy and freedom from Danish invasions.[55] Within this climate of retrospection, the image of Elene as an agent of Christian conversion would have resonated with both tenth-century spiritual queenship and the spiritual queenship of days past, invoking memories of the central role queens played in England's early conversion efforts. Papal letters to the seventh-century kings and queens of Kent and Northumbria testify to the fact that English and Roman ecclesiasts considered Christian queens a potential means of introducing the faith to pagan kings, which was thought to be the first step to converting the entire race of the English.[56] Pope Boniface V's letter to Queen Ethelberga (ca. 624) specifically charges the queen with the duty of converting her pagan husband, while Boniface's letter to Ethelberga's husband, King Edwin of Northumbria, urges the king to convert by reminding him that his wife had already done so.[57] The *Life of Saint Mildrith* similarly links the conversion of Mercia under the reign of Wulfhere to the king's marriage to Eormenhild.[58] And many of the abbesses who took part in the eighth-century missions to convert the Continent were either former queens or the offspring of royal families.

For tenth-century audiences, then, Cynewulf's textual celebration of the late antique Christian queen offered an experience of reading that was distinctly historical. For them, Elene might be read not only as a figure who lived during various moments within typological history, but also as a figure who inhabited three different moments of distinct relevance to their own cultural identity: early Christian Rome, from which the Anglo-Saxons derived so many of their social and psychological formations; tenth-century England, in which they were living; and a Golden Age of English conversion nostalgically produced by reformers. While interpreting Elene as a figure who inhabited an Anglo-Saxon cultural past as opposed to a typological past required a slightly different, namely, more linear conceptualization of history, both methods of reading relied on a deep engagement with history and an ability to keep multiple levels of meaning in one's mind simultaneously. Reading Elene as a multivalent historical presence within the Anglo-Saxons' cultural past may thus have reinforced and helped encourage the hermeneutic skills necessary for understanding her typologically, a way of

reading which the poem presents as integral to and synonymous with conversion and a comprehension of the Cross's true meaning.

As Cynewulf worked to transform Elene into an exemplar of queenship that might be readily recognizable in terms of the literary, typological, and historical roles available to queens within Anglo-Saxon culture, he would have known that his own portrayal of the queen was only one of many factors that might determine how contemporary audiences understood her. As historian William Sewell reminds us, "What things in the world *are* is never fully determined by the symbolic net we throw over them—this also depends on . . . the different symbolic meanings that may have been attributed to them by other actors."[59] And indeed, as Cynewulf no doubt knew, the symbolic meanings attributed to Elene by other actors in Anglo-Saxon culture were many; she was one of the most well-known female figures in Anglo-Saxon England. Celebrated twice a year at the annual Invention and Exaltation of the Cross festivals, the queen was also invoked repeatedly in English calendars, homilies, coins, litanies of the saints, public church dedications, saints' lives, letters, church histories, and other versions of the *Inventio* legend besides Cynewulf's.[60] While Cynewulf could expect his readers to know about the queen, precisely what they would know might very well be cause for concern. Cynewulf's insistent emphasis on Elene's nobility and his efforts to endow the Roman empress with all of the accoutrements of Anglo-Saxon royalty is, I would argue, an attempt to familiarize the queen and hence create a more culturally accessible exemplar of queenship for Anglo-Saxon audiences. However, the poet's painstaking construction of Elene as a noble and regal queen may have been given additional impetus by information circulating in England at this time regarding Helena's actual social status and, by extension, Constantine's dubious descent.

According to late antique pagan and Christian historians, Helena was born into an extremely lower-class family. Because Roman law forbade men of high rank to marry beneath their social station, it was most likely that Helena was never legally married to Constantine's father Constantius Chlorus (who belonged to the provincial aristocracy of Dalmatia), but served as his concubine for approximately nineteen years (ca. 270–289).[61] The fourth-century pagan writer Eutropius, in his *Breviarium historiae Romanae*, claims that Constantine was born "ex obscuriore matrimonio" [out of an obscure marriage].[62] Likewise, Ambrose repeatedly calls attention to Helena's low social status in his funeral oration for Theodosius I, claiming

that "Christ raised her [Helena] from dung to power" and referring to her as a *stabularia*, a term suggesting that Helena worked in a stable or, because in late antiquity stables were often associated with inns, that she was a female innkeeper or servant at an inn.[63] During this time, such positions possibly entailed enforced prostitution and certainly brought with them very low social prestige.[64] Overt references to Helena as a concubine include the anonymous early-fifth-century *Origo Constantini*, in which the writer refers to Helena as *vilissima* (cheapest or most common) of women; the mid-fifth-century writer Philostorgius who claims that Constantine "had emanated from Helena, a common woman not different from strumpets"; and the late-fifth-century Zosimus who refers to Constantine as "the son of the illegal intercourse of a low woman with the Emperor Constantius" and "the son of a harlot."[65]

Precisely how Anglo-Saxon writers learned of Helena's low birth and illicit marriage is difficult to ascertain.[66] Nonetheless, the fact that Helena was a concubine appears to have been fairly common knowledge among Anglo-Saxon writers. Aldhelm's prose *De virginitate* refers to Constantine as "Constantii filius in Britannia ex pelice Helena genitus" [son of Constantius born in Britain from the concubine Helena].[67] Bede states in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* that "Hic Constantinum filium ex concubina Helena creatum imperatorem Galliarum reliquit" [He (Constantius Chlorus) left a son Constantine, who was made emperor of Gaul, being the child of his concubine Helena].[68] Similarly, in his *De temporum ratione*, Bede again refers to Constantine as "Constantii ex concubina Helena filius" [son of Constantius from the concubine Helena].[69] And the Old English *Orosius* claims that "On þæm dagum Constantius, se mildesta monn, for on Brettannie 7 þær gefor, 7 gesealde his sunu þæt rice Constanti[n]use, þone he hæfde be Elenan his ciefese" [In those days, Constantius, the mildest man, traveled to Britain and died there and gave that kingdom to his son Constantine, whom he had by his concubine Helena].[70]

Apparently, neither Bede nor the *Orosius* translators viewed Constantine's descent from a concubine and subsequent inheritance of his father's Western empire as in any way problematic. Both the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and the *Orosius* describe Constantine in terms commonly used to designate legitimate male offspring, *filius* or *sunu*, as opposed to terms used to refer to illegitimate male offspring, such as *nothus* (born out of wedlock but of a known father), *spurius* (born of an unknown father), *hornungsunu* (illegitimate son), and *hornungbrothor* (illegitimate brother).[71] Moreover, both texts matter-of-factly relate Constantine's regnal inheritance in the same line as they describe his mother as a concubine. The fact that neither

Bede nor the *Orosius* translators exhibit any concern over Constantine's descent from a concubine is perhaps explained as a recognition of the fact that concubinage was a common practice among Roman emperors.[72] So too, this apparent lack of concern may be read as tacit acknowledgment of the frequency with which royal concubinage was practiced in early Anglo-Saxon culture and of the hereditary rights commonly granted to the children of such unions.[73]

By the tenth century, however, Constantine's descent from a concubine was likely to have become a less acceptable part of the Helena legends, for cultural attitudes toward concubines and their children had undergone significant shifts in the previous two centuries. Beginning in the eighth century, Anglo-Saxon ecclesiasts began to launch increasingly strong attacks against concubinage, and particularly royal concubinage, attempting to redefine this traditional Anglo-Saxon practice as both illegal and immoral and to bar concubines' children from their previous rights of inheritance.[74] In 786, a legatine commission visited England from Rome, drawing up a series of injunctions to the Anglo-Saxons, the twelfth chapter of which prohibits the children of concubines from acceding to the throne, stating that "kings are . . . not to be those begotten in adultery or incest" and "neither can he who was not born of a legitimate marriage be the Lord's anointed and king of the whole kingdom and inheritor of the land."[75] By the tenth century, prohibitions against a concubine's child succeeding to the throne had tightened to the point where the social and somatic status of the queen at the time of her son's birth began to figure centrally in disputes over a particular prince's "throneworthiness." The period witnessed a host of succession debates, in which accusations that sons such as Æthelstan and Edward were the sons of concubines or women of low birth appear to have temporarily impeded their claims to the throne.[76] Leading churchmen such as Dunstan and Æthelwold played a major role in these debates, casting slurs on the sexual proclivities of various queens and conducting investigations into their lineage to create arguments discrediting the claims of particular princes to the throne.[77] Given the rather frenzied pitch surrounding the topic of royal concubinage during the tenth century, Helena's historical status as concubine had the potential to be particularly inflammatory for contemporary readers, or at least to interfere with her being taken up as a symbol of unity between leaders of church and state.

Regardless of when Cynewulf was writing, however, Elene's historical status as concubine had the potential to pose problems, in that it directly conflicted with her typological status. Indeed, a woman associated

with concubinage was a rather unfortunate choice as a symbol of Holy Church, for throughout the early Middle Ages, commentators typically used the concubine as a symbol for Synagogue, reserving the legally recognized wife as the usual figure for Holy Church.[78] Hence Jews were depicted as the illicit offspring of such slave-women and concubines as Hagar and the mother of Abimelech, and Christians as the freeborn children of such legally recognized wives as Sarah and Ruth, and thus by extension, as the offspring of Christ's true spouse, Holy Church.[79] As Bede remarks in his *Expositio in primum librum Mosis*, "Agar autem, id est, Synagoga, in servitutem genuit priorem populum: Sarra, id est, Ecclesia, in libertatem genuit populum Christianum" [Hagar, that is, Synagogue, gave birth to the first people in servitude; Sarah, that is, Church, gave birth to the Christian people in freedom].[80] Numerous commentators, including Hrabanus Maurus and Isidore of Seville, drew similar comparisons.[81] Thus, if Elene's historical status as mother and also mother of the first Christian emperor rendered her particularly suitable as an allegorical figure of Holy Church, her historical status as concubine made her a somewhat less-than-ideal figure for performing this kind of symbolic work.

There are no references to Helena's low social status in any of the Latin texts that most likely served as immediate sources for Cynewulf's *Elene*. However, as we have seen, this information would have been available to Cynewulf through both late antique and Anglo-Saxon writings. It seems probable, therefore, that Cynewulf was both aware of Constantine's precarious parentage and—given the popularity of the Helena legends—could have reasonably expected some of his readers to be aware of it as well. Given the social and symbolic difficulties presented by Elene's historical status as concubine, Cynewulf may have had some anxiety about offering her to readers—either as an exemplar of queenship or as an image of Holy Church. One way to ameliorate these difficulties was to elevate Elene's social status, which is what other writers did when discussing both Constantine and Elene.[82] The late-ninth-century translators of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, for example, translate Bede's reference to Elene as *concubina* with *wif*—a term that was commonly employed in Anglo-Saxon England to designate a man's lawful wife—thus transforming Constantine from the king's bastard into his legitimate son and rightful heir.[83] And I would suggest that this is precisely what Cynewulf did: he painstakingly constructed Elene as a noble queen, surrounded by all of the royal props that Anglo-Saxon readers would have associated not with a low-born concubine but with the legally recognized widow of a deceased ruler and the honored mother of a legitimate king.[84]

Queenship, hierarchy, and Christian community

While Cynewulf's portrayal of a heroic battle-queen, encased in all of the social and symbolic trappings of royalty and successfully spreading the Word, might seem a straightforward and delightfully refreshing example of a pre-Conquest writer endorsing the autonomy of royal women, such is not wholly the case. As many critics have pointed out, Elene's autonomy, and indeed her entire role in Cynewulf's poem, is in many ways seriously diminished in comparison to her Latin counterpart in the *Inventio*. Earl Anderson, for example, argues that Cynewulf presents Elene as a physical surrogate for her imperial son and her mission to Jerusalem as an extension of Constantine's will; and Gordon Whatley contends that Cynewulf invokes the emperor's name and imagines his physical presence more often than the *Inventio* does, all of which serves to "re-emphasize Elene's dependence on her imperial son for direction," to enhance Constantine's role in the integration of the Holy Land into the Christian empire, and to diminish Elene's.[85]

Yet if critics insist that Cynewulf takes pains to emphasize Elene's devotion and subservience to Constantine, what has gone largely unexamined is the larger matrix of human relationships in which the queen's interactions with her son are situated. While Cynewulf emphasizes Elene's close relationship with Constantine, this relationship is but one example of Cynewulf's efforts to portray the queen as firmly ensconced within a larger network of kin and community. Throughout the poem, the queen is never far from any of her own people but almost always surrounded by a vast group of her own armed warriors. When the vessels land on the eastern shores, the ships are left until the queen should seek them again "gumena þreate" [with a band of men] (254b); the warriors are said to be "ymb sigecwen siðes gefysde" [around the queen ready for the journey] (260); Elene embarks toward Jerusalem "heape gecoste, / lindwigendra" [with an excellent band of shieldbearers] (269b–70a) and "secga þreate" [with a band of men] (271a); and when the group finally arrives in the city they are described as "corðra mæste, / eorlas æscrofe mid þa æðelan cwen" [the greatest of companies, illustrious warriors, with the noble queen] (274b–75). With her son frequently in her thoughts, her own men always around her, and her regular correspondence with the imperial court, Elene is hardly ever alone or lacking in company. And when her mission is completed, the queen happily prepares to return to her "eðel" [homeland] (1219a). Cynewulf's effort to foreground kinship and community as central forces in Elene's life is notable as a sharp departure from the *Inventio*, which rarely mentions Helena's ties to

her own people. In fact, the Helena of the *Inventio* is so infrequently represented within a community that she seems to have been abandoned in Jerusalem; although we are told that she enters Jerusalem with a mighty army, this army scarcely appears thereafter, and the end of the *Inventio* simply states that Helena left many gifts with the bishop and then died, making no mention of her intent to return to Rome.

The strong sense of community that Cynewulf's Elene experiences is by no means unique to the queen. All of the Christians in the poem are presented as firmly embedded within a community, which is figured as a felicitous by-product of Christianity, a reward for and feature of faith. Every time that someone converts or that any portion of Christian history is brought to light is an occasion for communal celebration, public rejoicing, and collective interaction. When Constantine learns that the cross in his vision is a sign from God, Cynewulf adds that all of the Christians rejoice. As soon as the Old English Constantine receives baptism, he begins to proclaim publicly the word of God day and night, unlike the Latin Constantine who heads to his books for solitary study. The *Inventio*'s description of Judas's release from the pit is figured as a private matter between Judas and Helena; after enduring seven days of starvation, Judas promises to show Helena the Cross, and when he is released, he hurries off to Calvary. In *Elene*, by contrast, Judas's newfound freedom is the occasion for a public ceremony of communal reintegration: Elene orders a group of retainers to release Judas; he is led up "mid arum" [with honor] (714a); a troop of people then rush off with him to Calvary to search for the Cross (716); and when Judas finally unearths three crosses, he rejoices and lifts them up "mid weorode" [before the host] (843b). In the following episode, the *Inventio* simply states that Judas brought the crosses into the city. In Cynewulf's version, the finding of the crosses prompts a procession of guests and noblemen, who enter the city to witness a ceremonious presentation of the crosses at Elene's knees. After the crosses are brought into the city, the *Inventio*, once again, portrays a rather dull state of affairs: the people simply sit and wait for the glory of Christ. However, in Cynewulf's text, the wait is portrayed as a communal celebration: the people sit around, raise up song, and rejoice in their newfound glories, and Cynewulf explicitly states that "þa þær menigo cwom / folc unlytel" [many came there, not a few folk] (870b–71a).

In *Elene*, then, to be Christian is to be surrounded by an ever-present community that is loving and harmonious, an idea that coheres most forcefully when Elene teaches the converted Jews that they must not only love God but also keep friendship and peace among themselves:

> þa seo cwen ongan
> læran leofra heap   þæt hie lufan dryhtnes
> 7 sybbe swa same   sylfra betweonum,
> freondræddenne   fæste gelæston,
> leahtorlease   in hira lifes tid. (1204b–8)

[Then the queen began to teach the beloved group, sinless in the time of their lives, that they should keep firmly the love of God and likewise peace, friendship among themselves.]

Indeed, it is crucial for Elene to instruct the newly converted Jews in friendship and communal harmony, for, according to the poem's own logic, these are ideas as foreign to them as that of Christ as their savior. Cynewulf's depiction of Christianity as a kind of ongoing collective celebration enacted by members of a tightly knit community that functions harmoniously and abounds in peace and friendship presents a sharp contrast to his depiction of Judaism, which is characterized either as encouraging solitude or as producing a community rife with dissent, sadness, and acute anxiety. For example, when Judas is most insistently enacting his Judaism, that is, during his seven nights in the pit when he refuses to reveal the whereabouts of the Cross, he is most completely alone. Moreover, Cynewulf enhances Judas's solitude by claiming that Elene commanded her men to lead Judas "corðre" [away from the company] (691b), and by explaining Judas's sorrowful state of mind as in part due to his "duguða leas" [lacking a retinue] (693b). The Jewish elders do frequently come together for counsel, but such gatherings are filled with discord, confusion, and an anxious preoccupation with the expected fall of the Jews. While the appeal of Christian community is potentially overshadowed by the poem's more explicit and showy promise of Christianity's ability to guarantee military victory and hence protect against physical harm, I would argue that Cynewulf's depiction of loving community offers a powerful lure by promising protection against a less obvious but more insidious personal threat than that of invading armies, namely, that of loneliness. The poem holds out a delightful vision of Christianity as an effective bulwark against this painful state, assuring company—not the eternal company of the hundred and forty-four thousand virgins or the angels on high but an ever-present earthly fellowship—and acceptance within a family joined by bonds of belief as well as those of blood.

Yet, the price for such fellowship is rather steep, requiring, as the poem makes clear, absolute conformity to a rigid social hierarchy that

demands unquestioning obedience from every member. This obedience is felt quite palpably in Elene's utter subservience to Constantine; he is figured as unquestionably superior to her, and her own will as a mere extension of her sovereign son's desires. However, such subjection is not Elene's alone, but a condition of harmonious Christian life. The queen's subservience to her son is mirrored in her people's to her: she is surrounded by servants and retainers who are ever-ready and eager to fulfill her every command. When Elene orders that Judas be pushed into a pit, Cynewulf claims that "scealcas ne gældon" [the servants did not delay] (692b), and when she commands that Judas be released from the pit, "Hie ðæt ofstlice efnedon sona" [They performed that immediately, without delay] (713). Cynewulf emphasizes Elene's power to control her retainers, describing the queen as "sio þær hæleðum scead" [she who ruled over warriors there] (709b) and reinforces that power through repeated use of the verb *bebeodan* (to command [710, 715]).

Moreover, Elene seems to have little trouble accepting her place within this hierarchy. She dutifully carries out her son's orders, offers requisite homage to both the newly appointed bishop and the nameless wise man skilled in God's mysteries, and appears, as Jackson Campbell has noted, to be a generally far happier character than that in the *Inventio*.[86] Far from challenging the notion of subservience to authority, Elene herself propagates it. The very last lesson that the queen teaches the people of Jerusalem is that they should be obedient to the instructions of the bishop:

> þa seo cwen ongan
> læran leofra heap . . .
> . . . .
> ond þæs latteowes larum hyrdon
> cristenum þeawum þe him Cyriacus
> bude, boca gleaw; wæs se bissceophad
> fægere befæsted. (1204b–5a, 1209–12a)

> [Then the queen began to teach the beloved group . . . that they should be obedient to the instructions of the leader, to the Christian customs, which Cyriacus, wise in books, proclaimed to them. The bishopric was fairly established.]

Nowhere in the *Inventio* is it stated that Helena taught the people to be obedient to ecclesiastical authority, and Cynewulf's final, rather maximlike comment that "the bishopric was fairly established," placed as it is after

Elene's teaching the people to obey authority, serves to further highlight obedience as a defining characteristic of harmonious Christian community. The queen's teachings are part of a rigid chain of command in *Elene*, in which Constantine obeys God, Elene obeys Constantine, the retainers obey Elene, the newly converted Christians obey the bishop, and the Jews are utterly excluded. Even the animals seem to find Christianization a rather ordering experience. Before Constantine's vision of the Cross, the beasts of battle are divided between the Huns and the Romans and hence scattered over approximately twenty-five lines (27b–31a, 52b–53a), yet after the emperor's vision, the rejoicing raven, dewy-feathered eagle, and forest-dwelling wolf all line up neatly behind Constantine's troops, their descriptions tidily completed in four short lines (110b–13a).

Within Cynewulf's formulation, hierarchy proves to be not only a rigid but also an enduring construct, surviving as a hale and hearty presence well beyond life on earth. The poem ends with a horrific vision of Judgment Day, on which a terrifying God, flanked by a troop of angels, comes forth to divide the human race into a hierarchy of his own making: a raging fire comprised of three tiers of flames which effect various levels of distress. No one is exempt from the tripartite inferno, for it incorporates "folc anra gehwylc / þara þe gewurdon on widan feore / ofer sidne grund" [all people who have ever lived on the wide earth] (1287b–89a), and neither social rank nor gender bolster one's chances for securing a place within the uppermost, or coolest, level of the fire. Rather, it is moral and spiritual righteousness that emerge as the operative criteria for ranking within God's hierarchy, as the "soðfæste" [truefast] (1289b), the "synfulle" [sinful] (1295b), and the "awyrgede womsceaðan" [accursed evil-doers] (1299a) are all relegated to respectively lower tiers of flames, with descent accompanied by increasingly uncomfortable temperatures and lack of physical mobility.

While it is not unusual to find depictions of social and spiritual hierarchy in Old English poetry, what is unusual about *Elene* is that it offers us a glimpse of the complex strategies by which such poetry was mobilized, and may have provided some of the impetus necessary, to sustain cultural faith in these hierarchies. As Elene delves deeper and deeper into the Jewish heartland to create new Christian communities, she and the Roman community from which she hails model for these emergent communities an "ideal Christian social order," one in which the autonomy of every social actor is seriously compromised by Cynewulf's assertion of a Christianity circumscribed by a rigidly defined social hierarchy. Entrance into the faith entails acceptance of that hierarchy, but it also rewards such acceptance by

a vision of community that is excitingly melioristic—that promises that the adoption of the hierarchy presages both personal happiness and ever-present human fellowship. To disregard the poem's larger portrait of human relationships is to risk viewing Elene's subservience to Constantine as merely another one of the numerous literary indices of medieval misogyny and to overlook its crucial exemplary function with respect to the poem's broader and more ambitious ideological goals: to validate and naturalize contemporary ideologies of social hierarchy by projecting them back into a glorious Roman past, a move that brought with it the weight of tradition and the authority of founding figures. But if the poem looks backward for the purposes of shoring up existing social formations for the present, it also does so in order to imagine a future in which such formations are preserved for generations to come. *Elene* thus exhibits the same Janus-like logic as the archive, which poses, as Jacques Derrida points out, "not . . . a question of the past . . . [but] a question of the future."[87] Indeed, if one accepts the traditional dating of *Elene* as an eighth- or ninth-century composition, the poem uncannily presages the future, envisioning, as it does, rigidly defined hierarchies of status and gender that exhibit striking similarities to the actual social climate in which the manuscript was received.

The Benedictine reforms ushered into England a profound emphasis on hierarchy, specifically, a demarcation of clear boundaries between various classes of people—clergy and laity, male and female—and the duties appropriate to people of different social stations.[88] As Clare Lees argues, while homilists constructed compelling visions of Christian community as an inclusive social space that incorporated all believers and based rank solely on good works, such images were overshadowed by more numerous depictions of Christian community as hierarchical, unequal, and reliant on conceptions of social rank as a series of fixed and natural states that it was the individual's godly duty to enact.[89] Late Anglo-Saxon homilies are rife with promises of an eternal kingdom free from social rank in exchange for happily enacting one's given rank on earth, definitions of the only true servitude as acquiescence to the rule of vices and hence subjection to not one but multiple masters, and injunctions that deviation from one's earthly rank would result in everlasting servitude in hell.[90]

Reformers' efforts to stress the importance of social hierarchy were accompanied, not surprisingly, by a hardening of gender boundaries. While modern historians have perhaps overstated the misogyny of the reformers' policies and their deleterious effects on women, the reformist emphasis on priestly celibacy, monastic chastity, and the regulation of lay marriage tended

to align women with notions of impurity, to insist on an increased separation of the sexes and a cloistering of women in monastic life, and to encourage general anxieties around the female body.[91] The royal status of queens did not exempt them from increasingly rigid attitudes toward gender. While the late tenth and early eleventh centuries indeed witnessed increased emphasis on the social and symbolic status of queens, royal women were still frequently abandoned by their spouses and their sexual behavior was subjected to close scrutiny.[92] Moreover, while the queen Ælfthryth was indeed formally named as the patron of nunneries, this position was less prominent than it would have been in earlier centuries, as the majority of the houses established during the tenth century were not nunneries but single male houses.[93] Read within such a cultural climate, the various hierarchies depicted in *Elene* seem to offer poetic affirmation of a traditional Pauline social vision of both rank and gender; even the queen is as carefully circumscribed as any other social actor and she, like her people, will eventually be free of earthly circumscriptions once everyone is consigned to the flames.

Critics have not failed to note the rather conservative gender dynamics at work in *Elene*. In a compelling reading of the poem, Joyce Tally Lionarons, for example, argues that Elene's power over Judas and her assumption of command over a host of armed men each constitutes a brief "citation of 'masculine' categories of behavior [which] in the absence of any expectation . . . of female reiteration, invariably forces her return to the performance of a normative 'feminine' role."[94] Within such logic, the poem's gender dynamics enact a familiar drama of subversion and containment, in which the queen's assumption of the role of Germanic war-lord can only "temporarily displace gendered norms," which are then powerfully reasserted when the queen subsequently "acts out a normative 'feminine' role as spiritual daughter to Cyriacus and dutiful mother to Constantine."[95] Indeed, sustained gender transgression simply cannot be found in *Elene* at the level of individual female behavior. For Elene is never truly free from her subservience to Constantine; even her most potentially powerful moment—her voyage to Jerusalem and assumption of command over a host of armed men—is a performance of her son's will. Viewed solely in terms of her actions, the queen is always already contained—contained by a rigidly defined social hierarchy in which disobedience to the will of her earthly *þeoden*, Constantine, would, because of the term's denotative indeterminacy, concomitantly entail transgression of the will of her heavenly *þeoden*, behavior that would be unthinkable for a model Christian queen. Indeed, far from a celebration of women's autonomy, the poem might easily be read,

if one focuses solely on Elene's actions, as a tale of female energy channeled wholly into the fulfillment of male fantasy. In the first half of the poem, Constantine worries about his martial prowess and dreams of a jewel-encrusted Cross; in the second half of the poem Elene actualizes his fantasies by recovering the Cross, decorating it with jewels, and sending him the Crucifixion nails as adornment for his war-steed's bridle and guarantor of future military success.

While analysis of the queen's behavior reveals a severely compromised portrait of female agency, I would nevertheless argue that *Elene* resists being read as an unequivocal championing of a traditional and conservative social order that requires female subservience. Revisionist possibilities may not inhere in the autonomy of individual characters, but they are suggested elsewhere. While Elene's unquestioning subservience to Constantine marks her as an active participant in Cynewulf's attempts to instantiate a very traditional gender hierarchy, that hierarchy is rendered rather precarious by a narrative emphasis and poetic investment that mark the queen as a clear victor in the contest for Cynewulf's imaginative energy. To be sure, Cynewulf strains to focus his own and his audience's attention on the emperor, creating an original opening for the poem that details Constantine's fierce efforts to stave off invading barbarian tribes. Yet, attention to the emperor's military exploits quickly gives way to a wholesale absorption with the queen's spiritual warfare, and it is ultimately Elene who captivates the bulk of Cynewulf's creativity. Once past the poem's opening scenes, it is she who is the main beneficiary of the rich kennings, weighty verbs, appositions, and understatement—all of the lexical choices and figurative devices that signal the supreme importance of a character or event in Old English poetry. Cynewulf even seems a bit surprised that a woman might be the recipient of such grandiloquent verse, for he interrupts his expansive account of Elene's sea-voyage, a passage marked by all of the verbal artistry typically lavished on descriptions of male warriors' journeys, to remark:

> Ne hyrde ic sið ne ær
> on egstreame   idese lædan,
> on merestræte   mægen fæg[e]rre. (240b–42)

[I have never heard before this time of a woman leading a fairer troop on the ocean stream, on the sea road.]

As the boats are launched and the poem gains momentum, the emperor is relegated to a back seat and positioned in relation to the queen much as the

Godhead is to Christ in so many late medieval texts—as a familiar quantity and one whose expected appearance in incipit, coda, or short sequence functions primarily as a rote reminder of superior power positioned predictably outside the text's diachronic imperatives. And Cynewulf even seems to perceive the problem with his imaginative investment in Elene, intruding urgent, veiled injunctions throughout the text to the reader to recall that Rome is the real source of Christian conversion and Constantine the real leader of the mission.

As Rome and its masculine figurehead recede, both the queen and the symbolic value of femininity emerge in full force. Moreover, Cynewulf suggests that such an emergence is coextensive with the project of conversion and that a fluidity of gender hierarchy enables its accomplishment. Judas's conversion, for example, inscribes a reversal of the usual configuration of gender relations, in both hagiography-as-genre and Pauline logic. In torturing Judas, Elene reverses the typical hagiographical formulation of the female saint tortured by a male pagan, and Judas's subjection to a woman is figured as an enabling force in his conversion.[96] To be sure, the gender inversion inherent in Judas's subjection to Elene is rather brief. As Lionarons argues, such inversion is predicated in part on the patristic logic that Elene's Christianity renders her spiritually male, while Judas's Judaism renders him spiritually female, a logic which explains why Elene's power over Judas is significantly lessened after he converts and is imbued with a newfound spiritual masculinity.[97] Nevertheless, I would argue that the brief span of time during which a Jewish man is placed under the power of a Christian woman unsettles traditional gender hierarchy by fiercely asserting that spiritual gender takes precedence over biological sex—that it is belief rather than the body that determines hierarchy.

That the instantiation of Christianity might usher in new and more fluid attitudes toward gender hierarchy that are more enduring than those witnessed in Judas's conversion is suggested in the poem's gendering of religiosity. Although widely known as a faith that places great importance on female genealogy and whose devotional texts are filled with powerful female figures, Judaism in *Elene* is imagined as an all-male faith that is sustained through a masculine intellectual tradition disseminated through patrilineage. There are no Jewish women in the poem, the end of Jewish supremacy is imagined as a period in which "sien . . . þa fæderlican / lare forleten" [the teachings of the fathers will be abandoned] (430b–32a), and the Jews' refusal to reveal the whereabouts of the Cross is the product of an oral tradition that has been passed from Judas's grandfather to Judas's father and

finally to the young Judas (426b–53, 528–30). The queen's arrival in Jerusalem marks the intrusion of a woman into a formerly all-male space, a gender disruption that is figured as wholly positive by the Christian poet. The disruption of a biologically codified male space is further inscribed as a symbolically gendered transition from the wholly masculinized Judaism to the more feminized Christianity. The ways of the Jewish fathers give way before the teachings of the queen-mother, Judas's conversion is followed by a heartfelt speech in which he twice acknowledges Mary (774–75, 782), and the penultimate fitt, which ends the narrative component of the text, depicts heaven as a female space, offering a rousing injunction that all people who remember the festival of the Cross might enjoy eternal bliss with Mary.

As it refigures traditional gender hierarchy, the poem concomitantly highlights the idea of tradition itself as a flexible and dynamic entity. The sheer act of rewriting the *Inventio* foregrounds the vitality of tradition, signaling that the social structures of the past—even a past as foundational to the Anglo-Saxons' cultural heritage as late antique Rome—were neither static nor fixed, but perpetually open to revision. Similarly, the queen's most profound act, her conversion of Judas, powerfully asserts that the human relationships of the past need not, and indeed must not, be slavishly imitated but revised and rewritten. When Elene converts Judas Cyriacus, she radically revises a past that unfolded roughly three centuries earlier between Christ and Judas Iscariot. The breaking of bread and subsequent symbolic perversion of that act in the breaking of a trust are re-visioned when Elene convinces Judas to accept the spiritual loaf over which he has been dickering and to pledge eternal devotion to Christ—a rewriting of history that greatly irks the Devil, who appears midway through the poem to lament:

> Ic þurh Iudas ær
> hyhtful gewearð   7 nu gehyned eom
> goda geasne   þurh Iudas eft,
> fah 7 freondleas. (921b–24a)

[I was once made hopeful by a Judas, and now again by a Judas I am humiliated, bereft of goods, guilty, and friendless.]

But it is perhaps the interpretive strategies that the queen elicits which most profoundly destabilize any attempt to read the poem's depictions of social and spiritual hierarchy as straightforwardly prescriptive. "Remembering" the Roman empress through all of the various discourses of

Anglo-Saxon queenship at his disposal, Cynewulf creates a queen whose typological, literary, cultural, and historical multivalence discredits any unequivocal interpretation of a text. Just as it condemns slavish adherence to literal levels of textual analysis and insists at every turn that characters and events are polysemous, so too does *Elene* militate against reading any representation of social hierarchy as either temporally or historically fixed. To be sure, the poem lauds the benefits of inserting oneself into a Christian community and, in so doing, accepting highly traditional and conservative hierarchies of rank and gender. But it also demands that readers refuse to interpret these hierarchies as reductive prescriptions, through a complex and multivalent depiction of queenship that stakes a fierce claim for the utter banality and spiritual depravity of believing that a text means only and exactly what it says.

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Notes

1   Gregory's letter to Bertha is dated to 601. In that same year, Gregory also sent a letter to Æthelberht, urging the king to make conversion of his people a primary concern and invoking Constantine as a worthy exemplar in this project. The letter to Æthelberht is cited in full in Book 1, chap. 32 of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, in *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 110–15, yet the letter to Bertha is absent. Stephanie Hollis argues that Bede's failure to include the letter to Bertha is indicative of his general hostility to female influence, particularly in ecclesiastical affairs. See Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church: Sharing a Common Fate* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1992), 220–27 and 225 n. 104. For more on the letter, see Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, ca. 500–1100* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 191–95.

2   *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, ed. Arthur West Haddan and William Stubbs, 3 vols. (1871; repr. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 3:17.

3   *The Mission of St. Augustine to England According to the Original Documents, Being a Handbook for the Thirteenth Centenary*, ed. Arthur James Mason (Cambridge, 1897),

58–59. I have emended Mason's translation as follows: "Helena" rather than "Helen" for "Helenam," "most pious" rather than "most religious" for "piissimi," and "O glorious one" rather than "illustrious lady" for "gloriæ." All translations, except where noted, are my own.

4 Kenneth G. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses: Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 25–26 and 26 n. 77.

5 Cited in ibid., 216.

6 *Gregory of Tours: Glory of the Martyrs*, trans. Raymond Van Dam (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1988), 22.

7 Baudonivia, *Vita Radegundis*, ed. Bruno Krusch, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, Scriptores rerum merovingicarum 2 (Berlin, 1888), chap. 16, 387–89. A translation of Baudonivia's *Life of Radegund* appears in *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, ed. and trans. Jo Ann McNamara and John E. Halborg, with E. Gordon Whatley (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992), 86–105.

8 The letter was presented and read at the Second Council of Nice in 787. For the Latin letter, see PL 96:1216–32, at 1217. A translation is found in *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church*, ed. Henry R. Percival, A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, 2nd. series, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, vol. 14 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900; repr., Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 536–37.

9 In his *De obitu Theodosii oratio*, Ambrose draws an explicit comparison between Helena and Mary, claiming that "visitata est Maria ut Evam liberaret; visitata est Helena ut imperatores redimerentur" [Mary was visited to liberate Eve; Helen was visited that emperors might be redeemed]. See Sister Mary Dolorosa Mannix, *Sancti Ambrosii oratio de obitu Theodosii: Text, Translation, Introduction, and Commentary*, Patristic Studies, vol. 9 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1925), 61 (Latin); 80 (trans.). For more on the association between queenship and Mary, see Pauline Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith: Queenship and Women's Power in Eleventh-Century England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 163, 166–68, 172–74, 178, and passim; and Mary Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 59, 146, 164–65, 171–72, 273, and passim.

10 For useful bibliographies, see P. O. E. Gradon, ed., *Cynewulf's "Elene,"* rev. ed. (London: University of Exeter Press, 1977), 76–81; Gordon Whatley, "The Figure of Constantine the Great in Cynewulf's 'Elene,'" *Traditio* 37 (1981): 161–202, at 162–63 n. 7; and *Cynewulf: Basic Readings*, ed. Robert E. Bjork (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), which contains landmark essays on Cynewulf, and suggestions for further reading at xv.

11 See Helen Damico, *Beowulf's Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 25–32, 35–39, 49–50; Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, "Cynewulf's Autonomous Women: A Reconsideration of Elene and Juliana," in *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, ed. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 222–32; and Jane Chance, *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 31–38, 46–52.

12 The first critic to read Elene as a figure for *Ecclesia* was Thomas Hill, although it should be noted that Hill's typological reading maintains a profound sensitivity to the literal and historical levels of the poem. See Thomas D. Hill, "Sapiential Structure and Figural Narrative in the Old English *Elene*," *Traditio* 27 (1971): 159–77; rev. and repr. in *Cynewulf: Basic Readings*, ed. Bjork, 207–28, esp. 213–14. Other critics who read Elene as a type of *Ecclesia* or the New Law include Jackson J. Campbell, "Cynewulf's Multiple Revelations," in *Cynewulf: Basic Readings*, ed. Bjork, 229–50, esp. 234–36 (first published in *Medievalia et Humanistica* 3 [1972]: 257–77); Catharine A. Regan, "Evangelicism as the Informing Principle of Cynewulf's *Elene*," in *Cynewulf: Basic Readings*, ed. Bjork, 251–80, esp. 253–55 (first published in *Traditio* 29 [1973]: 27–52); Whatley, "Figure of Constantine the Great," 200; Earl Anderson, "Cynewulf's *Elene*: Manuscript Division and Structural Symmetry," *Modern Philology* 72 (1974): 113; and John P. Hermann, *Allegories of War: Language and Violence in Old English Poetry* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 99–100.

13 Whatley, "Figure of Constantine the Great"; Clare A. Lees, "At a Crossroads: Old English and Feminist Criticism," in *Reading Old English Texts*, ed. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 146–69, esp. 159–67; and Joyce Tally Lionarons, "Cultural Syncretism and the Construction of Gender in Cynewulf's *Elene*," *Exemplaria* 10 (1998): 51–68.

14 R. D. Fulk, "Cynewulf: Canon, Dialect, and Date," in *Cynewulf Basic Readings*, ed. Bjork, 3–21, at 16. For a more extensive discussion of date and locale for Cynewulf's works, see R. D. Fulk, *A History of Old English Meter* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 351–68, and passim.

15 Patrick W. Conner, "On Dating Cynewulf," in *Cynewulf: Basic Readings*, ed. Bjork, 23–55. Conner's argument rests on three contentions: a reconsideration of Cynewulf's habit of spelling his name as both CYNWULF and CYNEWULF and refutation of former arguments that the different spellings reflect linguistic changes taking place in the eighth or possibly ninth centuries; a reconsideration of the West-Saxon near-rhymes in the epilogue to *Elene* and refutation of received opinion that these near-rhymes represent what were once exact rhymes in an earlier Anglian dialect; and the contention that *Fates of the Apostles* takes as its source an augmented version of the *Martyrologium* of Usuard which, Conner contends, would not have been available in England until the tenth century. Conner's argument, particularly the portion that rests on source evidence, has been favorably received by Fulk, "Cynewulf: Canon, Dialect, and Date," 16–17; however, John M. McCulloh, "Did Cynewulf Use a Martyrology? Reconsidering the Sources for *The Fates of the Apostles*," *Anglo-Saxon England* 29 (2000): 67–83, challenges Conner's use of source evidence, arguing that the martyrology under question is neither the work of Usuard nor a likely source for *Fates*.

16 There have, however, been a number of important historicist readings of *Judith*, the *Chronicle* poems, and *The Battle of Maldon*. See, for example, David Chamberlain, "*Judith*: A Fragmentary and Political Poem," in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation for John C. McGalliard*, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson and Dolores Warwick Frese (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 135–59; Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, "Body and Law in Late Anglo-Saxon England," *Anglo-Saxon England* 27 (1998): 209–32; and W. G. Busse and R. Holtei, "*The Battle of Maldon*:

A Historical, Heroic, and Political Poem," *Neophilologus* 65 (1981): 614–21. For a stimulating account of historicist criticism in Anglo-Saxon studies, see Nicholas Howe, "Historicist Approaches," in *Reading Old English Texts*, ed. O'Brien O'Keeffe, 79–100.

17 *The Vercelli Book: A Late Tenth-Century Manuscript Containing Prose and Verse*, ed. Celia Sisam, EEMF 19 (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1976), 44, and 13–50 for more on the date, provenance, and compilation of the manuscript; and D.G. Scragg, "The Compilation of the Vercelli Book," *Anglo-Saxon England* 2 (1973): 189–207.

18 Janet L. Nelson, "Queens as Jezebels: The Careers of Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History," in *Medieval Women*, ed. Derek Baker, Studies in Church History, Subsidia 1 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), 31–77; repr. as "Queens as Jezebels: Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History," in *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. Janet L. Nelson (London: Hambledon Press, 1986), 1–48, at 9.

19 Pauline Stafford, "The King's Wife in Wessex, 800–1066," *Past and Present* 91 (1981): 3–27; repr. in *New Readings on Women*, ed. Damico and Olsen, 56–78. For further discussion of the issues raised in this essay, see Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*.

20 References to the *Inventio Sanctae Crucis* are to *Inventio Sanctae Crucis*, ed. Alfred Holder (Leipzig, 1889), specifically, to Holder's transcription of the eighth-century manuscript from the Benedictine monastery of St. Gall, Switzerland, St. Gall 225, which Gradon, *Cynewulf's "Elene*," 18–19, takes as representing the type of version Cynewulf used. The legend is also available in G. Henschen and D. Papebroch, eds., *Acta Sanctorum, Maiis I* (Antwerp, 1680), 445–48; and it is translated in *Sources and Analogues of Old English Poetry: The Major Texts in Translation*, ed. Michael J. B. Allen and Daniel G. Calder (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1976), 59–68. The version contained in the *Acta Sanctorum* is a conflation of several different manuscripts and hence less reliable than Holder's transcription. Gordon Whatley contends that by the ninth century, the *Inventio* legend was circulating in England in manuscripts that show little variation from one another. He suggests further that the legend had early acquired a fixed form and that changes made between the seventh and tenth centuries were mainly editorial in nature ("Figure of Constantine the Great," 161–62 n. 2). Because the Latin legend has changed so little over the years, one feels justified in drawing tentative conclusions based on careful comparisons between *Elene* and the St. Gall MS.

21 Wulfstan's third homily on the Christian life offers a typical early medieval formulation of the idea of the Church as a mother: "Ealle we habbað ænne heofonlicne fæder 7 ane gastlice modor, seo is ecclesia genamod, þæt is Godes cyrice" [We all have a heavenly father and a spiritual mother who is called *Ecclesia,* that is, God's Church]. *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, ed. Dorothy Bethurum (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 202, item xc, ll. 41–43.

22 See Chance, *Woman as Hero*, 47; and Lionarons, "Cultural Syncretism," 68.

23 See Erich Auerbach, "Figura," in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (1959; repr. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 40–41; and Hill, "Sapiential Structure and Figural Narrative," 212.

24 All citations from *Elene* are by line number and refer to Gradon, ed., *Cynewulf's*

"*Elene.*" I have rendered the Old English letters *wynn* and insular form of the letter *g* in this edition as modern *w* and *g*.

25 Auerbach, "Figura," 53.

26 For important discussions of conversion in *Elene*, see Robert Stepsis and Richard Rand, "Contrast and Conversion in Cynewulf's *Elene*," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 70 (1969): 273–82; Daniel G. Calder, "Strife, Revelation, and Conversion: The Thematic Structure of *Elene*," *English Studies* 53 (1972): 201–10, which is reworked in Daniel G. Calder, *Cynewulf* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981), 104–38; and Campbell, "Cynewulf's Multiple Revelations."

27 *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies, The Second Series: Text*, ed. Malcolm Godden, EETS s.s. 5 (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), xl, p. 340, homily 40, ll. 175–76. *Cwen* and its closest Latin equivalent *regina* appear to have been the preferred terms for invoking the queen's typological significance as Holy Church. The corpus contains no instances in which *hlæfdige* is unequivocally used to symbolize Holy Church. However, in his sermon on Christianity, Wulfstan states: "Ecclesia enim sponsa Cristi est et omnium domina" [The church is the spouse of Christ and the lady of all things], and opposite these lines in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Hatton 113, *domina* is glossed as *hlæfdige* (*Homilies of Wulfstan*, 195, item xb, l. 33). While this gloss is, admittedly, in a later hand, *hlæfdige* was a standard gloss for *domina* (Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 58); it thus seems likely that *hlæfdige* carried a typological resonance similar to that of *domina*.

28 Jackson Campbell, "Cynewulf's Multiple Revelations," 235, notes that *þeoden* in line 267 could equally well be referring to Constantine or to God.

29 The Latin is contained in *Asser's Life of King Alfred Together with the Annals of St. Neots*, ed. William Henry Stevenson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1904), 11. For a translation of the relevant passages, see *Alfred the Great: Asser's "Life of King Alfred" and Other Contemporary Sources*, ed. and trans. Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (London: Penguin Books, 1983), 71.

30 Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 62; see also Stevenson, *Asser's "Life of King Alfred*," 200–202.

31 Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 57–59.

32 Ibid., 57 n. 9.

33 Ælfric's homily for the Invention of the Cross is very brief. Other than a few remarks on Elene's piety, Ælfric takes little interest in her, and the text is focused mainly on Constantine's battle with the bloodthirsty general Maxentius and the emperor's resolve not to shed the blood of his own people (*Catholic Homilies, Second Series*, 174–76, homily 18). Malcolm Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary, and Glossary*, EETS s.s. 18 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 513, argues that Ælfric was most likely aware of the more traditional version of the legend—which is what Cynewulf was retelling—but evidently preferred the account of the Invention given in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Eusebius and Rufinus (Ælfric's main source).

34 I am here following Gradon's suggestion that the phrase "wira gespon" refers to a type of gold filigree ornament on Elene's breast (*Cynewulf's "Elene*," 67 n. 1134a). However, it is worth noting that the phrase is ambiguous and may simply refer to the nails of Christ. Perhaps the most accurate reading of the phrase is to see it as encapsulating

both a sense of royal wealth and also spiritual riches, and thus reminding readers that the saintly queen is in possession of both.

35 *Maxims I*, in *The Exeter Book*, ed. George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records 3 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 156–63, ll. 125–26.

36 Ælfric's homily on the dedication of a church clearly formulates the idea of the elaborately adorned queen as a symbol for Holy Church: "Seo gastlice cwen godes gelaðung is geglencged mid deorwurðre frætewunge and menigfealdum bleo goddra drohtnunga and mihta [The ghostly queen, God's Church, is adorned with the precious ornament and manifold color of good habits and virtues] (*Catholic Homilies, Second Series*, 341, homily 40, ll. 191–93). Scriptural passages that explore this idea include Ps. 44:9–14, much of the Song of Songs, and Rev. 12:1 and 21:2.

37 Barbara C. Raw, *Anglo-Saxon Crucifixion Iconography and the Art of the Monastic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 8–11.

38 *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies, the First Series: Text*, ed. Peter Clemoes, EETS s.s. 17 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 490, homily 36, ll. 122–26.

39 The Latin citation is from *Asser's "Life of King Alfred,"* 11; the translation is from *Alfred the Great*, 71.

40 Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 167.

41 *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, ed. Alistair Campbell with a supplementary intro. by Simon Keynes (London: Royal Historical Society, 1949; repr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), xli–xlii.

42 "Cui cum ex more et iure regia sedes assidue pararetur a regis latere, preter ecclesiam et regalem mensam malebat ad pedes ipsius sedere, nisi forte manum illi porrigeret, uel nutu dextere iuxta se ad sedendum inuitaret siue cogeret" [Although by custom and law a royal throne was always prepared for her at the king's side, she preferred, except in church and at the royal table, to sit at his feet, unless perchance he should reach out his hand to her, or with a gesture of the hand invite or command her to sit next to him]. *The Life of King Edward Who Rests at Westminster*, ed. and trans. Frank Barlow (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962), 42.

43 For a stimulating discussion of how allegory and typology generate spatial conceptions of temporality, see Magnus Ullén, "Dante in Paradise: The End of Allegorical Interpretation," *New Literary History* 32 (2001): 177–99.

44 While Elene does not undergo a spiritual shift of the same magnitude as those experienced by Constantine, Judas, or the poet, after receiving the nails with which Christ was crucified, she is filled with the gift of wisdom and inhabited by the Holy Spirit, an inner renewal that could be interpreted as a kind of conversion: ("heo gefylled wæs / wisdomes gife 7 þa wic beheold / halig heofonlic gast, hreðer weardode, / æðelne innoð" [1142b–45a]). I am grateful to Dabney Anderson Bankert for this point.

45 Jan Willem Drijvers, *Helena Augusta: The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of Her Finding of the True Cross* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), 65–67.

46 Ibid., 66–70.

47 For more on Anglo-Saxon attitudes toward "just war," see J. E. Cross, "The Ethic of War in Old English," in *England before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, ed. Peter Clemoes and Kathleen Hughes (Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press, 1971), 269–82; and J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, "War and Peace in the Earlier Middle Ages," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 25 (1975): 157–74.

48 Whatley, "Figure of Constantine the Great," 171–72.

49 Early legends recounting the discovery of the Cross are mildly antipagan rather than virulently anti-Jewish, and it was not until the fifth and sixth centuries that the virulently anti-Jewish Judas Cyriacus legend became widely known across Europe (Drijvers, *Helena Augusta*, 183–88). Drijvers argues that "[i]t was in all likelihood because of its anti-Jewish character that the legend featuring Judas Cyriacus ousted the original legend of Helena, at least in the West, and became in the Middle Ages the most popular version of the legend of the discovery of the Cross" (188). E. Gordon Whatley points out that the feast of the Invention was one of a small number of feasts that the Jews of Spain, under the aggressively anti-Judaic Visigothic kings, were required by law to observe. E. Gordon Whatley, "Constantine the Great, the Empress Helena, and the Relics of the Holy Cross," in *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology*, ed. Thomas Head (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 80.

50 *The Claudius Pontificals*, ed. D. H. Turner, Henry Bradshaw Society 97 (Chichester: Regnum Press for the Henry Bradshaw Society, 1971), 95; noted in Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 166. The cited *ordo*, contained in Claudius Pontifical II (London, British Library MS Cotton Claudius A.iii), belongs to a recension known as the "Second English *Ordo*." It survives in multiple manuscripts (both English and Continental), which are discussed at length by Janet L. Nelson, "The Second English Ordo," in *Politics and Ritual*, ed. Nelson, 361–74, at 372–74, who argues that a version of the *ordo* was composed for Ælfthryth's coronation in 973. For more on early medieval queens' coronations, see Nelson, "Early Medieval Rites of Queen-Making and the Shaping of Medieval Queenship," in *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe*, ed. Anne J. Duggan (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1997), 301–15; and also Julie Ann Smith, "The Earliest Queen-Making Rites," *Church History* 66 (1997): 18–35.

51 Karl F. Morrison, *Understanding Conversion* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), xii–xiv.

52 It is worth noting that many of the Old English verbs used to denote the act of conversion (e.g., *gewendan*, *gebugan*, and *gecierran*) were also frequently used to convey a more general sense of change or turn.

53 *Regularis Concordia Anglicae Nationis Monachorum Sanctimonialiumque: The Monastic Agreement of the Monks and Nuns of the English Nation*, ed. and trans. Thomas Symons (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1953), 2.

54 See Robert Deshman, "*Christus rex et magi reges*: Kingship and Christology in Ottonian and Anglo-Saxon Art," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 10 (1976): 367–405; and Deshman, "*Benedictus Monarcha et Monachus*: Early Medieval Ruler Theology and the Anglo-Saxon Reform," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 22 (1988): 204–40.

55 On the nostalgia driving the reforms, see Antonia Gransden, "Traditionalism and Continuity during the Last Century of Anglo-Saxon Monasticism," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 40 (1989): 159–207, esp. 161–64, 180; and Patrick Wormald, "Æthelwold and his Continental Counterparts: Contact, Comparison, Contrast," in *Bishop*

Æthelwold: His Career and Influence, ed. Barbara Yorke (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1988), 13–14, esp. 38–41.

56 The extent to which Anglo-Saxon queens were actually able to effect royal conversion and clerics' responses to the "conversion by marriage" model are vexed issues, particularly when considered with respect to Bede's depictions of queens in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. For further discussion, see Dorsey Armstrong, "Holy Queens as Agents of Christianization in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*: A Reconsideration," *Medieval Encounters* 4 (1998): 228–41; Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church*, 208–42; and Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex*, 176–209, which also discusses the phenomenon of early medieval "domestic proselytization" outside of England.

57 Both of Boniface's letters are reproduced in Book 2, chaps. 10–11 of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*; see *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, 167–75.

58 "S. Mildryth," in *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England*, vol. 3, ed. and trans. Oswald Cockayne (London, 1866), 430–31; qtd. in Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church*, 225 n. 100: "Eormenhild, daughter of Eorcenberht and Seaxburg, was given to Wulfhere, son of Penda, king of the Mercians, for his queen; and in their days the people of Mercia received baptism."

59 William H. Sewell, Jr., "The Concept(s) of Culture," in *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, ed. Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 35–61, at 51.

60 Elene is cited in two eleventh-century English calendars (*English Kalendars before A.D. 1100, Volume 1: Texts*, ed. Francis Wormald, Henry Bradshaw Society 72 [1934; repr. Wolfeboro, N.H.: Boydell and Brewer, 1988], 37 and 261). She appears seven times in Anglo-Saxon litanies of the saints (*Anglo-Saxon Litanies of the Saints*, ed. Michael Lapidge, Henry Bradshaw Society 106 [London: Boydell Press, 1991], 118, 130, 200, 238, 242, 294, 298). A gold coin circulating in early-seventh-century England bears Elene's portrait and the inscription "Helena" on one side (Leslie Webster and Janet Backhouse, eds., *The Making of England: Anglo-Saxon Art and Culture, A.D. 600–900* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991], 37). The *Inventio* of the Cross was celebrated with an annual festival on 3 May on which one or more versions of the *Inventio* legend were read. The four extant vernacular versions of the legend are Cynewulf's *Elene*, Ælfric's homily entitled *Inventio Sanctae Crucis* (992), an anonymous mid- to late-eleventh-century homily contained in the *Classbook of Saint Dunstan*, and a very brief account of the *Inventio* in the anonymous ninth-century *Old English Martyrology*. See, respectively, *Cynewulf's "Elene"*; *Catholic Homilies, Second Series*, 174–76, homily 18; *The Old English Finding of the True Cross*, ed. and trans. Mary-Catherine Bodden (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987); *An Old English Martyrology*, ed. George Herzfeld, EETS o.s. 116 (London: Kegan Paul, 1900), 72–73. Elene was also invoked at the annual Exaltation of the Cross festival on 14 September. The only surviving homily for the day is Ælfric's *Exaltatio Sancte Crucis* (*Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. W. W. Skeat, EETS o.s. 76, 82, 94, 114 [London, 1881–1900]; repr. in 2 vols. [London: Oxford University Press, 1966], 2:144–59). An additional legend, commonly referred to as *The History of the Holy Rood* and dated to the eleventh century, does not indicate

a specific occasion for its use (Allan Phillipson Robb, "The History of the Holy Rood-Tree: Four Anglo-Saxon Homilies," [Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1975], 14–109).

61   Drijvers, *Helena Augusta*, 18–19.

62   Ibid., 15.

63   Ibid., 15–16.

64   Ibid., 15.

65   Ibid., 16.

66   It is possible that this information was conveyed through Eutropius's *Breviarium historiae Romanae*, which circulated in Anglo-Saxon England and served as an important source for Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Ambrose is another possibility, as many of his works were known to the Anglo-Saxons, although there is no concrete evidence that *De obitu Theodosii* was among these known texts.

67   The Latin text is from *Aldhelmi Malmesbiriensis Prosa de virginitate cum glosa latina atque anglosaxonica*, ed. Scott Gwara, 2 vols., CCSL 124, 124A (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 2:655. Gwara's edition of the *Prosa de virginitate* is a revised version of Rudolf Ehwald's in *Aldhelmi opera*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi 15 (Berlin: Weidman, 1919; repr., 1961). The translation is from *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, trans. Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1979), 115.

68   *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, 36; trans. on 37.

69   PL 90:556A.

70   *The Old English Orosius*, ed. Janet Bately, EETS s.s. 6 (London: Oxford University Press, 1980), 148, ll. 7–9.

71   For a thorough discussion of these terms, see Margaret Clunies Ross, "Concubinage in Anglo-Saxon England," *Past and Present* 108 (1985): 3–34, at 16–18.

72   Although concubinage was considered an acceptable practice for Roman emperors, the hereditary rights of their children were not automatic, and the fact that Constantine's parents were never legally married was cause for controversy in the early fourth century. See Drijvers, *Helena Augusta*, 18–19.

73   Clunies Ross, "Concubinage in Anglo-Saxon England," 13–18 and 24–27. Given Bede's generally strict stance on sexual morality, it is quite probable that Bede was one of the early ecclesiasts who attempted to eradicate the practice of royal concubinage, and hence somewhat surprising that the *Historia* so openly acknowledges Constantine's descent from a concubine. Thomas Tipton, "Inventing the Cross: A Study of Medieval *Inventio Crucis* Legends," (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1997), 95–101, argues that the *Historia* reflects a general desire to dismiss Constantine's achievements, indicated by Bede's failure to mention Constantine's well-known role in putting down Arianism and his suggestion that it was under Constantine's rule that Arianism in fact arose. Tipton's logic thus offers another possible explanation for Bede's frank reference to Helena as a concubine: an attempt to downplay Constantine's heroism by invoking his lowly birth.

74   Clunies Ross, "Concubinage in Anglo-Saxon England," 18–33.

75 *English Historical Documents, Volume 1: c. 500–1042*, ed. Dorothy Whitelock, 2nd ed. (London: Eyre Methuen, 1979), 837–38; qtd. in Clunies Ross, "Concubinage in Anglo-Saxon England," 27.

76 For more on these debates and on the increasing recourse to maternal genealogy as a means to back the accession of particular princes, see Barbara Yorke, "Æthelwold and the Politics of the Tenth Century," in *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, ed. Yorke, 65–88, esp. 69–73 and 81–84; and Stafford, "The King's Wife."

77 Ibid.

78 Margaret Schlauch, "The Allegory of Church and Synagogue," *Speculum* 14 (1939): 448–64, at 453–55.

79 These points are clearly formulated in the New Testament; see Gal. 4:22–31. See also Schlauch, "Allegory of Church and Synagogue," 453–54.

80 PL 91:242A.

81 Citations from Hrabanus Maurus are found in Schlauch, "Allegory of Church and Synagogue," 453–54. Isidore's discussion appears in his *In Genesin*, PL 83:268A.

82 The most well-known fiction about Helena's descent derives from Geoffrey of Monmouth's claim in his *Historia Regum Britanniae* that Helena was the daughter of Coel, king of the Britons. Tipton convincingly argues that Geoffrey's invention was motivated by a desire to establish a genealogical link between Rome and Britain, and hence a case for British imperialism (Tipton, "Inventing the Cross," 105–7).

83 *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. Thomas Miller, EETS o.s. 95 (London, 1890), 42. The translators further attempt to legitimize Constantine's claims to both Gaul and Britain by asserting that he was a "god casere" (good emperor), a phrase that is not present in the Latin, and that "Constantinus se casere wære on Breotone acenned," a phrase that can only mean "the emperor Constantine was born in Britain" as opposed to the rather ambiguous Latin, "Constantinus in Brittania creatus imperator," which could mean either that Constantine was born in Britain or that he was elected as emperor in Britain.

84 That Cynewulf may have had some anxiety about Constantine being perceived as the rightful heir is also suggested by his reference very early in *Elene* to Constantine as "riht cyning" (13).

85 Earl Anderson, "Cynewulf's 'Elene': Manuscript Division," 118, 120; Whatley, "Figure of Constantine the Great," 175–77.

86 Campbell, "Cynewulf's Multiple Revelations," 237 and 239–40.

87 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 36 (first published as *Mal d'Archive: une impression freudienne* [Éditions Galilée, 1995]).

88 See Pauline Stafford "Queens, Nunneries, and Reforming Churchmen: Gender, Religious Status, and Reform in Tenth- and Eleventh-Century England," *Past and Present* 163 (1999): 3–35, esp. 6–10.

89 Clare A. Lees, *Tradition and Belief: Religious Writing in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 122–23.

90 For further discussion of social hierarchy as depicted in homiletic literature, see M. R. Godden, "Money, Power, and Morality in Late Anglo-Saxon England," *Anglo-Saxon England* 19 (1990): 41–65, esp. 56–57.

91 For sensitive accounts of the reforms' gender implications, see Patricia Halpin, "Women Religious in Late Anglo-Saxon England," *The Haskins Society Journal* (1994): 97–110; Barbara Yorke, "'Sisters under the Skin'? Anglo-Saxon Nuns and Nunneries in Southern England," *Reading Medieval Studies* 15 (1989): 95–117; and Stafford, "Queens, Nunneries, and Reforming Churchmen." All of these scholars productively complicate earlier, more simplistic understandings of the Benedictine reforms as a movement underwritten by wholesale misogyny and contributing to a general decline in women's autonomy. Stafford, for example, argues that the reformers' increased emphasis on chastity and celibacy rather than ordination created religious ideals that were (at least theoretically) possible for women to achieve (7–12). Halpin and Yorke take up the issue of "lessened" opportunities for women religious during the tenth century, questioning the actual impact that the reforms had on women's houses, and raising the possibility that alternative, more informal opportunities for female religious practice developed during this period.

92 Stafford, "The King's Wife," 58–62.

93 Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, "Women's Monastic Communities, 500–1100: Patterns of Expansion and Decline," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14 (1989): 261–92, esp. 279–82.

94 Lionarons, "Cultural Syncretism," 56.

95 Ibid., 56 and 66.

96 Rosemary Woolf, "Saints' Lives," in *Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature*, ed. Eric Gerald Stanley (London: Nelson, 1966), 37–66, at 47, first made the important observation that Elene's torturing of Judas might be read as an "inverted passion, in which the ruler is the Christian and the prisoner the pagan."

97 Lionarons, "Cultural Syncretism," 62–64.