

A case for a “medievalist historiophoty”? *The Last Kingdom* (BBC Two / Netflix)

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Abstract: In the words of Pierre Sorlin, “We could say that the past is narrated in the present tense, or that it is rebuilt on contemporary references” (*The Film in History*, 71). The 21st century has seen a surge in narratives taking place during the Viking invasion of England in the 9th century; one of the most famous on-screen depictions is the adaptation of Bernard Cornwell’s *Saxon Stories*, entitled *The Last Kingdom* (2015 – 2023, BBC Two / Netflix). But what are the strategies used to depict this period on screen?

To answer this question, this article will draw on the definition of historiophoty. According to Hayden White, who coined the term in his 1988 essay “Historiography and Historiophoty”, historiophoty is “the representation of history and our thought about it in visual images and filmic discourse”. Working on a more precise definition, by attempting to know what parts of history are more likely to be rendered, will allow us to proceed to some cinematic analysis of *how* they are depicted. Examining historiophoty through the lens of cinematic medievalism, including medieval political theories such as the concept of body politic, will reveal how these concepts intertwine to create a “medievalist historiophoty”.

Keywords: Anglo-Saxon England, body politic, Historiophoty, Medievalism, *The Last Kingdom*, Vikings.

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Resumen: En palabras de Pierre Sorlin, “podríamos decir que el pasado se narra en tiempo presente, o que se reconstruye a partir de referencias contemporáneas” (*The Film in History*, 71). El siglo XXI ha sido testigo de un auge de narrativas ambientadas en la invasión vikinga de Inglaterra en el siglo IX. Una de las representaciones audiovisuales más conocidas es la adaptación de la saga literaria *The Saxon Stories*, de Bernard Cornwell, titulada como *The Last Kingdom* en su formato televisivo (2015–2023, BBC Two / Netflix). Pero ¿cuáles son las estrategias empleadas para representar este período en la pantalla? Para responder a esta cuestión, este artículo se apoyará en la definición de historiofotía. Según Hayden White, quien acuñó el término en su ensayo de 1988 “Historiography and Historiophoty”, la historiofotía es “la representación de la historia y de nuestro pensamiento sobre ella mediante imágenes visuales y discurso fílmico”. Avanzar hacia una definición más precisa, tratando de identificar qué aspectos de la historia son más susceptibles de ser representados, permitirá llevar a cabo un análisis cinematográfico de los modos en que estos se plasman. El examen de la historiofotía desde la perspectiva del medievalismo cinematográfico, incluyendo teorías políticas medievales como el concepto de cuerpo político, pondrá de manifiesto cómo estos elementos se entrelazan para dar lugar a una “historiofotía medieval”.

Palabras clave: Inglaterra Anglosajona, Cuerpo político, Historiofotía, Medievalismo, *The Last Kingdom*, Vikingos.

In 1988, Hayden White asserted that “the historical evidence produced by our epoch is often as much visual as it is oral and written in nature. Also, the communicative conventions of the human sciences are increasingly as much pictorial as verbal in their predominant modes of representation” (1193). Well into the 21st century, this statement remains valid: in 2019, Eleftheria Thanouli wrote that “historical cinema [...] should be regarded as the dominant form of history in the twentieth and twenty-first century, because it produces historical knowledge according to a distinct set of epistemic characteristic of our contemporary age” (13). History can be depicted in various ways on screen, including in documentaries, feature films, television series, or docudramas (blending the documentary genre with fictional reconstitutions of events). If these forms are sometimes studied concurrently by researchers, this article will follow Thanouli’s lead and concentrate on historical cinema – television shows and films alike. That is not to say that the

remarks that will emerge from this article could not be applied to documentaries or docudramas; simply that it is not the aim of this article to do so.

More specifically, this article will discuss the television show *The Last Kingdom* (Carnival Films and Television, 2015–2022) and its film sequel, *The Last Kingdom: Seven Kings Must Die* (Carnival Films, 2023). Initially broadcast on BBC Two for a British audience, the show was later picked up by Netflix and broadcast to an international audience. It tells the story of Uhtred, a Saxon warrior living between the 9th and 10th centuries. In the course of his life, Uhtred gets involved with King Alfred’s quest to save his kingdom of Wessex from the Great Heathen Army, and unite the petty kingdoms in England into a single kingdom of England – something that is finally achieved in *Seven Kings Must Die*, under the reign of Alfred’s grandson Æthelstan. *The Last Kingdom* is the adaptation of Bernard Cornwell’s *The Saxon Stories*, published between 2004 and 2020.

If a brief foray into the realm of adaptation studies might help us from time to time, it is not the goal of this article to discuss specific adaptation strategies. Rather, our goal will be to discuss whether there are specific strategies to adapt medieval times on screen. To define what a “historical film” is, in itself, a vast subject; fortunately, various researchers have worked on the subject beforehand and we will draw on their work. This article will also dwell on Hayden White’s “historiophoty”, “the representation of history and our thought about it in visual images and filmic discourse” (1193). If the concept of a historical film is broad, the definition of historiophoty is elusive. After exploring what has already been written about historical film and historiophoty, and confronting these definitions with case studies taken from *The Last Kingdom*, it is my hope that we will be able to refine these definitions further by considering the existence of a medieval historiophoty.

1. Defining the “historical film” and its characteristics

The definition of the “historical film” genre can be contentious. As Robert Burgoyne points out, “other readers [...] will argue that the historical film does not constitute a genre in the common sense of the word, that the category ‘historical film’ is too nebulous a designation” (4). Burgoyne, and other authors like Eleftheria Thanouli, follow the lead of Natalie Zemon Davis,

who stated that “[b]y history films I mean those having as their central plot documentable events, such as a person’s life or a war or a revolution, and those with a fictional plot but with a historical setting intrinsic to the action” (270). The latter part of the quote is what separates historical films and “costume dramas”; for Thanouli, “the phrase ‘a historical setting intrinsic to the action’ is the key, I believe, for differentiating between historical films and those that are vaguely set in the past” (15). For Burgoyne, “[u]nlike the costume drama or the romance set in the past, history provides the referential content of the historical film” (4).

The latter part of Zemon Davis’ quote is also important for us, because it can be applied beyond the realm of films to fit the definition of a historical television show such as *The Last Kingdom*. Despite the presence of historical characters such as Alfred the Great or the Ealdorman of Devon Odda, the protagonist of *The Last Kingdom* is a fictional character, Uhtred of Bebbanburg. However, due to his martial prowess and his propensity to be present at the right place and at the right time, he becomes a warrior at Alfred’s court, rising through the ranks and becoming one of Alfred’s unofficial councillors in martial matters. Uhtred also becomes the lover of Alfred’s daughter, Æthelflæd, and is later responsible for raising Alfred’s grandson and Edward the Elder’s son Æthelstan – the latter becoming king after his father’s death. Thus, by having personal ties to important historical characters, Uhtred has a valid reason to be present at central historical events, be it battles or coronations, either as a witness or as an active participant. This, in turn, allows the historical facts of the period to shape the narrative plot.

If the importance of having documentable events and a proper historical setting has been underlined by researchers before us, the fictionalisation of events and settings is also an important characteristic of the historical film. Indeed, as Pierre Sorlin notes, “historical films are all fictional. By this I mean that even if they are based on records, they have to reconstruct in a purely imaginary way the greater part of what they show” (21). This fictionalisation is, according to Robert Rosenstone, “[...] the key issue. The most controversial. The one that sets history on film most apart from written history, which in principle eschews fiction [...]” (*Visions of the Past*, 67). This issue is even more important in the case of *The Last Kingdom*, due to the period it seeks to reconstruct on screen and the scarcity of sources

available be used to do so. In the “Historical Notes” of his first novel, Bernard Cornwell writes: “Most of the major events happened; the assault on York, the siege of Nottingham, the attacks on the four kingdoms, all are recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* or in Asser’s *Life of King Alfred*, which together are the major sources of the period” (333). But, if we consider the *Chronicle*’s entry for the siege of Nottingham, we find that it is a factual account of what happened:

868 (869 C) In this year the same army went into Mercia to Nottingham and took up winter quarters there. And Burgred, king of the Mercians, and his counsellors asked Ethelred, king of the West Saxons, and his brother Alfred to help him to fight against the army. They then went with the army of the West Saxons into Mercia to Nottingham, and came upon the enemy in that fortress and besieged them there. There occurred no serious battle there, and the Mercians made peace with the enemy (Whitelock 46).

In order to translate such an event into fiction (whether written or visual), it requires fictionalisation; indeed, nothing is said about how the army of the Mercians and the West Saxons besieged the city proper, what the tactics and weapons used actually were, how many soldiers there were or if the Mercian and the West Saxons fought together or as two separate armies, for instance. Therefore, the scarcity of the sources mentioned above is not only about how few they are, but also about the number of details they offer. Moreover, this fictionalisation aspect is as important in historical written fiction as it does in historical visual fiction.

Nor are these events picked at random by either Bernard Cornwell or the scriptwriters responsible for the adaptation, just because they appear in medieval sources; these events can be linked to what Pierre Sorlin calls the “historical capital” of a community in *The Film in History*:

The cultural heritage of every country and every community includes dates, events and characters known to all members of that community. This common basis is what we might call the group’s ‘historical capital’, and it is enough to select a few details from this for the audience to know that it is watching an historical film and to place it, at least approximately. When the period is less well known, or

does not belong to the common heritage, then the film must clearly stress the historical nature of the events (20).

If Sorlin states that the cultural heritage can be shared by either a country or a community, the notion of community is the one we shall keep from this quote, and this despite the fact that *The Last Kingdom* takes place in the British Isles, mostly England. Although the television show was initially broadcast on the BBC Two channel, and therefore to a British public, the rights to *The Last Kingdom* were later bought by Netflix – an American streaming company broadcasting its shows all around the world. Before that, it can be argued that the universe of the Vikings had already started to permeate the international community, with the success of History's *Vikings* (2013 – 2021). While the idea of a country community was still valid when Sorlin wrote his book in 1980, it seems less convincing in 2025, even if the television show uses the history of one particular country for its plot. Therefore, it would be proper to state that the historical capital that is mobilised belongs to Western culture: a term that not only encompasses the British Isles, but also countries that have been influenced by their culture (in the case of the United States or Canada, with a common early history due to the colonised past of these countries), or countries that have experienced the Viking raids first-hand, as in France, for instance.

Another factor that lends credence to the idea of a cultural heritage shared by a whole Western culture is the existence of “prosthetic memories”, as theorised by Alison Landsberg. In her book *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in an Age of Mass Culture*, she states that “because prosthetic memories are not natural, not the possession of a particular family or ethnic group, they evoke a more public past, a past that is not at all privatised. On the contrary, the pasts that prosthetic memory open up are available to persons of all races and ethnicities” (143). The sharing of prosthetic memories between persons “of all races and ethnicities” (and, in this case, countries) is reinforced not only by the broadcasting being international, but also by the very nature of *The Last Kingdom's* cast: the Danes are played by actors who have ties to Scandinavian countries, either because they were born there (Thomas W. Gabrielsson, who plays Guthrum, is Swedish) or because they were raised there (Tobias Santelmann, who plays Ragnar the Younger, was born in Germany but raised

in Norway), whereas the Saxons are played by British actors. Not only are prosthetic memories, shaped by historical visual media, accessible to the masses, but they also encourage participation in their creation, albeit with limitations to certain ethnic groups.

It is clear that the historical film depicts actions taking place in a remote past, albeit a fictionalised version of them. However, the relationship between the depicted past and the contemporary context of its production, release and consumption is not immediately apparent. As Robert Rosenstone writes, “in fact, as every historian knows, or should know, all historical writing, even the most scholarly is, as historian Natalie Davis has written, always ‘Janus faced’, inevitably looking towards both past and present” (*History on Film*, xvi). Marc Ferro goes into this in more detail, as he states that “in cinematic fiction [...] we select information that appear significant at the time the work is created. It is not the past that is in control, as in memory-history, but the present” (“Dans la fiction cinématographique [...] on choisit des informations qui semblent significatives au moment où l’œuvre s’accomplit. Ce n’est pas le passé qui est aux commandes, comme dans l’Histoire-mémoire, mais le présent”, 213). Similarly, for Pierre Sorlin, “We could say that the past is narrated in the present tense, or that it is rebuilt on contemporary references. This is a general rule, and its application varies according to period and country: political potentialities depend on the reference period and its importance to the society concerned” (71).

In Clive Donner’s *Alfred the Great* (1969), we first see Alfred inside a church, as he is about to become a priest. A soldier, Æthelstan, interrupts Alfred, who is reluctant to leave the ceremony until he is told that “the King your brother has been wounded, and you must come!” (6:22). It is clear in the film that Alfred’s reluctance to become King of Wessex after his brother’s death is due to him not being able to become a priest as a consequence. In *The Last Kingdom*, almost fifty years later, Alfred is just as reluctant to become king, but the reason is different: he doesn’t see himself worthy because he is a “grievous sinner” (Season 1, episode 2, 08:38), as he is unable to resist the advances of a servant despite being married. If this interpretation is more in line with what has been reported in Asser’s *Life of King Alfred* (“[...] when [Alfred] realized that he was unable to abstain from carnal desire, fearing that he would incur God’s disfavour if he did

anything contrary to His will [...]”, Keynes 89), then the shift in emphasis from priesthood to religious fervour may be related to changes in religious practices in the 20th and the 21st centuries. As Gina A. Zurlo notes, “Europe became substantially more diverse in its religious makeup over the course of the twentieth century. In 1900 nearly 95 per cent of Europe’s population professed some form of Christianity; in 2020 the continent is 76 per cent Christian” (793).

The period of the Middle Ages seems particularly appropriate for the creation of prosthetic memories, as mentioned above: as Andrew B.R. Elliott writes, “The memory of the Middle Ages lingers like the air of a clear, windful day in the collective mind of the West [...]” (Elliott 36). That Elliott mentions the “West” rather than a specific country (or specific countries) also confirms that the historical capital that is being mobilised comes from a culture shared by different countries. It also hints at the fact that some characteristics of historical visual fiction are more closely linked to a depicted period, and to the idea of a medieval “subgenre”.

In the introduction to *Filming the Middle Ages* (2011), Bettina Bildhauer defines medieval films as “films that are set between the years 500 and 1500 AD, and/or perceived to be medieval by their makers and recipients (which can include films set in a fictional world, or in the present or in a future that bear medieval elements)” (5). Since *The Last Kingdom* takes place in the 9th century, and since it is associated with the Viking Age, which is, itself, associated with the Middle Ages, it can be said to fit both elements of this definition. Two years earlier, in the introduction of their book *Medieval Film*, Anke Bernau and Bettina Bildhauer stated that “this rehabilitation of medieval film fits with current attempts to rehabilitate medievalism, that is, the representation and imagination of the Middle Ages in a post-medieval period” (5). *The Last Kingdom*, then, is a contemporary interpretation of the Viking invasion of England, not a historically faithful that seeks to accurately represent the period.

The study of films depicting the Viking Age, specifically, has been steadily gaining currency since the 2010s. One of the most important contributions is *The Vikings on Film: Essays on Depictions of Nordic Middle Ages*, edited by Kevin J. Harty (Jefferson: McFarland, 2001); nearly twenty-five years later, he and Scott Manning edited *Cinema Medievalia – New Essays on*

the Reel Middle Ages (Jefferson: McFarland, 2024). Closer to the date of publication of this article is *Un Moyen Âge en clair obscur. Le médiévalisme dans les séries télévisées* by Justine Breton (Tours: PU François Rabelais, 2023), which directly tackles *The Last Kingdom* amongst other television shows. Finally, in recent years, some researchers such as Pierre-Brice Stahl have introduced the notion of “boreal medievalism” to specifically discuss representations of the Viking Age in products such as *Vikings*.

As we have seen, historical films and television shows share some characteristics that transcend the period represented on screen: they use a common historical capital (either national or, in the 21st century, transnational) in order to depict past events. Cinematic medievalism, more specifically, draws on the period of the Middle Ages as well as its subsequent recreations in media. In so doing, these past events are made to relate to the present – that is, the context of production. This, in turn, creates “prosthetic memories” that shape the perception and understanding of subsequent historical visual media. Historical films (or historical television shows) therefore rely on invention – something that, in the eyes of historians accustomed to the written media, can be akin to artificiality, and the source of criticism.

2. Why do (most) historians loathe historical films?

In 1978, Ian Jarvie wrote that:

In so far as history is the telling of interesting, enlightening and plausible stories, film can probably cope – although length, attention span and detail are difficult points. In so far as history is scholarship, mastery of sources, argumentation, weighing and testing of stories against evidence, there is about as much hope of film being the vehicle of choice as there is of its being the vehicle of criminal trial (379).

For Jarvie, the problem of history on screen is not so much fictionalisation, as the lack of comparison with evidence and sources – something that a prose account sets out to do. Furthermore, Jarvie also takes issue with the filmic medium itself: “length, attention span, and detail”. The matter of length and detail can be seen as related: at the time of Jarvie’s article, in 1978, the average length of films was one hour and forty minutes.

Although the average length has since increased to nearly one hour and fifty minutes, and stretches to around two and a half hours for the most popular films discussed in *The Economist's* article (*Seven Kings Must Die* being just under two hours), it remains fairly short compared to a book addressing a similar subject. Most historical films also have additional constraints, since they follow, most of the time, a preset structure: as David Bordwell notes,

The classical Hollywood film presents psychologically defined individuals who struggle to solve a clear-cut problem or attain certain goals. In the course of this struggle, the characters enter into conflict with others or with external circumstances. The story ends with a decisive victory or defeat, a resolution of the problem and a clear achievement or nonachievement of the goals (157).

In historical films or television shows, there is a tension between the codes of the film and the events it seeks to depict in order to develop the characters (their relationship with other characters and their involvement in their struggle), the film also needs time – while the historian can use this time to insert more details about the subject they are discussing, for instance.

But Jarvie's quote is also interesting, as it reveals differences in goals between written history and visual history. Jarvie considers that the goal of cinema is to tell a story, first and foremost, whereas the goal of history is to discuss the events that happened. More than forty years later, when discussing religious ceremonies in *Vikings* and *The Last Kingdom*, Alban Gautier states that “the first question I will ask myself when confronted with images and dialogues belonging to [*Vikings* and *The Last Kingdom*] will be that of their conformity to historical reality, or more precisely, their alignment with what the current state of historical scholarship says about the ‘Viking Age’” (“En termes plus concrets, cela veut dire que la première question que je me poserai face aux images et aux dialogues des deux séries sera celle de leur conformité à la réalité historique, ou plus exactement de leur conformité à ce que l'état actuel de la science historique dit de ‘l'âge des vikings’”, 72). Gautier's statement also reveals that when confronted with an on-screen recreation of history, the first

instinct of the historian will be to look for fidelity: is it conforming to what is known about the period through documents, archaeology, and the previous works of other historians? The answer is rarely positive: “Film is not the material of history. Documents are the material of history. At best, film is a visual aid” (Jarvie, 377).

For historians, history on film suffers from two main defects: such production are rarely conform to what is known about the period and the medium is too short and too dense to fully discuss the events shown. However, since the 1980s, scholars have argued that this is a matter of perspective on the part of the historian. Robert Rosenstone, who was a historian himself before tackling the matter of history on film, wrote that:

Often the approach is the wholly naive one which I used when first confronting a history film - focusing on the work's “mistakes”, that is, its differences from a written text, scoring major points by showing how the director has gotten the facts wrong, and at the same time remaining wholly oblivious to the idea that as a visual and fictional work, the dramatic history film must of necessity be different from a book, for it has its own rules of engagement with the past (*History on Film*, xxi).

According to Rosenstone, historians lack the necessary tools to engage effectively with history on screen. Their criticism stems from an inability to fully understand the “rules of engagement with the past” and the appropriate objectives of this practice. This opinion is also shared by Eleftheria Thanouli: “Traditional historians, to this day cling to standard notions of objectivity and fact-oriented research in an effort to tell ‘what really happened,’ without worrying at all if and how their goal is attainable” (36). This is why, for Pierre Sorlin, “The cinematographic conception of historiography — in other words, the way in which men and their relations in the past are described — is a very specific one, and does not necessarily coincide with the historian’s conception of historiography” (79). By discussing two different historiographies (the historian’s conception, related to written media, and the cinematic conception, related to visual media), Sorlin highlights their differences and the need to treat them differently.

Enters historiophoty.

3. Defining historiophoty

In 1988, Hayden White wrote an article entitled “Historiography and Historiophoty”, which marks the first time the word “historiophoty” appears. White’s definition of historiophoty is simple and, like Sorlin’s, is separate from the definition of historiography: “The first is that of the relative adequacy of what we might call ‘historiophoty’ (the representation of history and our thought about it in visual images and filmic discourse) to the criteria of truth and accuracy presumed to govern the professional practice of historiography (the representation of history in verbal images and written discourse)” (1193). If White doesn’t explicitly define historiophoty further, some of his sentences still list what might be taken into account in order to do so. As such, he states that “[i]t is obvious that cinema (and video) are better suited than written discourse to the actual representation of certain kinds of historical phenomena – landscape, scene, atmosphere, complex events such as wars, battles, crowds, and emotions” (1193). Although White doesn’t mention it explicitly, we can think of the different shots that can be used in order to convey these phenomena: some, such as landscapes, crowds and wars, will make use of very long shots. Other phenomena, such as battles and emotions, might make use of close-ups: it is, for instance, what happens when a specific character is killed in battle.

In other words, the “language” used within historiophoty is somewhat different from the language used within historiography. Rosenstone affirms that “[t]his new historical past on film is potentially much more complex than any written text, for on the screen, several things can occur simultaneously – image, sound, language, even text – elements that support and work against each other to render a realm of meaning as different from written history as written was from oral history” (*Visions of the Past*, 15). To continue with our previous example of a battlefield, the spectator will simultaneously see the battle, hear the swords clashing against each other and the warriors’ grunts, or even the orders of the commander of the army. Both this passage by the senses and this simultaneity are not possible *via* the written medium; it is a different way to convey one event and is part of what Rosenstone calls the “unique power of representation” (*History in Images*, 1179) of the film medium.

If, as we have seen, the toolbox used in historiophoty is sometimes different from written history, there are also similarities in some of the tools written history and history on film use. White states that “[e]very written history is a product of processes of condensation, displacement, symbolisation, and qualification exactly like those used in the production of a filmed representation. It is only the medium that differs, not the way in which messages are produced” (1194). To come back to Jarvie’s criticism of history on film, especially “length, attention span, and detail”, then, we can see that it is somewhat misplaced if books written by historians are also subject to condensation: to condense is to “reduce something, such as a speech or a piece of writing, in length” according to the Cambridge Dictionary, yet it is exactly what Jarvie holds against historical films. White is not the only one to mention such strategies; Robert Rosenstone mentions condensations, displacements and alterations as components of the “staging of the past” in historical film (*History on Film*, 44), to which he adds dialogue (“a crucial element that allows us to understand characters and their motivations”, *History on Film*, 44) and characters (“[characters] become on screen an invention, for they are created by the intonations, gestures, and movements of the actor who is called upon to impersonate an historical figure whose intonations, gestures, and movements are [...] wholly unknown to us”, *History on Film*, 44).

What Robert Rosenstone adds about characters highlights another key point in the definition of historiophoty: the need to fictionalise what is happening on screen. As François Amy de la Brétèque writes, “In every work on historical fiction, two discourses merge with each other. One is the scholarly *historiographical discourse*, made of everything in the narrative that echoes the historian’s discourse and that is meant to faithfully refer to History. The other one, the *fictional discourse*, is made of the characters and the plot invented by the author” (“Dans toute œuvre de fiction historique s’interpénètrent deux discours. L’un est le *discours historiographique* savant: il est constitué de tout ce qui, dans le scénario, répète le discours de l’historien et est censé renvoyer fidèlement à l’Histoire. L’autre, le *discours fictionnel*, est composé par les personnages et l’intrigue imaginés par l’auteur”, 43). This fictional discourse made of the characters allows the public to have an emotional connection to them, something that has been theorised in film studies as part of Murray Smith’s “structure of sympathy”.

Finally, this need for fictionalisation extends beyond the characters and the plot to other parts of the product. This reaches the visual identity of the product, as with costumes: for instance, in her article “Film and Theater: Costume and Convention”, Anne Hollander writes, “Queen Elizabeth is always recognizable because of the familiar image; but for many others less easily schematized, specific costume conventions have long been established (originally for the stage, but lately adapted for the cinema) that now serve to signal the person or period in question without resembling anything actually worn at that date” (672).

To sum it all up, historiophoty uses codes that are partially different from historiography; this stems from the difference of medium between the two. This does not mean that there is no historiographical discourse, but simply that it is rendered differently, using strategies that belong to film studies rather than historical academic studies.

So far, the considerations have largely been mostly theoretical – however, a television show like *The Last Kingdom* allows us to apply these considerations to concrete materials.

4. Historiophoty in *The Last Kingdom*

4.1. Landscape and location

The Last Kingdom makes use of establishing shots to show where the action is going to take place; these establishing shots either show the natural landscape or a town. Their goal is to guide the audience and show them the place in which the characters will act in the near future.

The first establishing shot occurs in the third minute of the first episode (03:17). The camera, which is moving forward for the duration of the shot, shows the audience a wild landscape, with forests and an unidentified river. It also explicitly mentions the place (“Kingdom of Northumbria, Northern England”) as well as the period (“866 AD”) in which the story that is about to unfold takes place, through the use of extradiegetic text present on the screen. Therefore, by blending the natural and the contemporary (“Northern England” being an entity that does not yet exist in 866 AD), this establishing shot helps the audience to immerse themselves in the worldview of the specific time period depicted.

In his article “Boréalisme. Le Nord comme espace discursif,” Sylvain Briens writes: “Borealism can be seen in this idea of the North and in its various constructs: geographical construct (with spaces to be conquered), climatic construct (mostly linked to cold and winter) and cultural construct (shaped by the social, cultural and psychological configurations of the North)” (“Le boréalisme se relève dans cette idée du Nord et dans ses différents imaginaires: imaginaire géographique (les espaces y sont à conquérir), imaginaire climatique (lié principalement au froid et à l’hiver) et imaginaire culturel (formé par l’ensemble des conditions sociales, culturelles, psychologiques du Nord)”, 182). Despite *The Last Kingdom* taking place in the English Isles, and therefore not showing where the Vikings came from, these markers associated with the North extend themselves to the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Indeed, the first episode takes place in what appears to be autumn; the leaves on the trees are starting to get red instead of being fully green. In the third episode of the first season, snow is starting to fall; by the next episode, the landscape is fully covered in snow. What could be simply considered as the passing of time coincides with the arrival of the Great Heathen Army on Saxon land and, most importantly, with the threat it poses to the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms: the third episode also displays the battle of Ashdown, in which the Saxon king Æthelred (Alfred’s brother and predecessor) dies. Thus, winter does not only represent the passing of time within the story, but also becomes an intradiegetic marker of danger associated with the Viking threat on the land that the audience can visually identify.

Similarly, cities are also introduced by establishing shots. They are sometimes completed with extradiegetic text, much in the manner of the first establishing shot mentioned, or can be easily identified by specific recurring landmarks. It is the case of the main Saxon city, Winchester, that is presented through three types of establishing shots. The first type shows the city from afar, surrounded by nature, and is always completed by an extradiegetic text that reads “Winchester – Kingdom of Wessex”. These specific establishing shots usually occur at the beginning of a season, when the audience is still unfamiliar with the story and with the landscape and needs more guidance. They also correspond to a pivotal moment in the intradiegetic story, as a central character arrives in Winchester and provides a key element that propels the plot forward.

The second type of establishing shot also uses the extradiegetic text to introduce Winchester, but instead of showing the city from afar, the camera shows the city from up above. Instead of appearing as a mass lost in nature, the city then appears as a place in which Saxons are living; the camera shows people walking in the streets or the smoke coming out of a chimney. Moreover, the angles that are used for these shots seldom change, so that it is easier for the audience to place the action even without needing to the extradiegetic text when it does not appear. Another consequence of this lack of angle change is that the camera always shows the royal residence, which, in turn, is marked not only as one of the most important places in the city intradiegetically, but also as a visual landmark which the audience can recognise.

The royal residence also appears in the third kind of establishing shot used in *The Last Kingdom* to illustrate Winchester; in this kind of shots, it actually takes centre stage, since it is the only building that is clearly recognisable. This third type of shot also shows what appears to be a market place, and people moving about; thus, much like the second type of shot and unlike the first one, the city of Winchester appears as a living, breathing entity, and thus much more realistic to the audience – the “crowds” were one of the elements listed by White in what historiophoty is able to catch that historiography struggles with.

Establishing shots play different roles at the same time and, therefore, are important within historiophoty. First, they help an audience that is not familiar with the time and place to immerse themselves in the epoch by giving them concrete elements that act as an intermediary between our contemporary epoch and the epoch that is being reconstituted on-screen. Moreover, in the case of cities, these shots also provide the audience with a feel of the atmosphere by depicting an established society; the display of crowds engaged in mundane activities, such as walking or shopping, not only helps the place look alive but also shows what might be lost if the Vikings succeed in their invasion.

4.2. The body politic and the representation of kings

Much like there is an emphasis on the royal residence of Winchester in establishing shots of the city, the Saxon kings are also important characters that

appear predominantly on the television show. More specifically, three kings are shown: Alfred, his son Edward, and Edward’s son Æthelstan. Alfred is a well-known example that has been exploited in other narratives representing the Viking invasion of England, including the eponymous 1969 film and the contemporary television show *Vikings*; meanwhile, both Edward and Æthelstan are seldom represented in fictional narratives. In *The Last Kingdom* (and in history), both Edward and Æthelstan become king of Wessex after Alfred’s death; Æthelstan, more specifically, is noted to have been the first to “[hold] sway over all the Anglo-Saxon peoples of Britain” (Foot, 20).

As Elliott writes in *Remaking the Middle Ages*,

One explanation which offers itself is that their use of the king as a symbol for their nation finds a much more striking rapport with the earlier medieval period, since the personal character transformations are set against the backdrop of the era in which national states began to emerge in the form in which we know them today. Consequently these large-scale conflicts offering an inchoate form of national identity can be much more easily transferred to the concept of a king as a personification of the nation over which he reigns.

Since *The Last Kingdom* takes place at a time when the very Saxon identity is threatened by Viking invaders, it makes sense to find an emphasis on a form of national identity. Even when the Vikings do not threaten Wessex that much, the political subplot shifts to Alfred’s desire to become King of a united England, and so remains a matter of national identity being shaped.

According to Stephen H. Rigby, the metaphor of the body politic “[has] long been central in medieval political thought” (463). In her book *Representing Mental Illness in Late Medieval France*, Julie Singer explains that “in medieval political theory, it is commonplace to compare the body politic to a living human body, one whose health depends on the healthy and complementary function of all its members” (121), and goes further by paraphrasing John of Salisbury’s *Policratus* (1159): “In Books V and VI, John of Salisbury famously assimilates the body politic to a human body, with sociopolitical hierarchies mapped onto human anatomy” (122). The metaphor of the body politic, with the sovereign as the head of the country, “[has] usually been invoked in order to [...] demonstrate the need for hierarchy, deference and subordination within the social order” (Rigby, 463).

Rigby also quotes John of Salisbury to state that “just as nature has ordained that the members of the body should be subject to the head in order that ‘all of them may move correctly provided that the will of a sound head is followed’, so the prince, as head of the body politic, has ‘power over all his subjects’, enjoying such a primacy that he constitutes ‘a certain image on earth of the divine majesty’ ” (469).

The re-enactment of the coronation of a sovereign in cinematic medievalism is both a reinterpretation of medieval political theory where the sovereign officially becomes the head of the political body and is given divine authority through priestly anointment, and an exemplification of the king becoming the “personification of the nation” as mentioned by Andrew B.R. Elliott. The first coronation that can be witnessed in *The Last Kingdom* is that of Alfred, in the third episode of the first season. It is a fairly lengthy scene that lasts for three minutes, during which the audience can see the full ceremony taking place. In this, Alfred is wearing a red coat. The colour red carries a certain meaning, as Michel Pastoureau writes that it “was taken [as an emblem] by many kings who received a garment or banner of that color during their coronations” (71) in the Middle Ages. This colour was originally chosen by sovereigns of the Carolingian period, who “became the true heir of the ancient Roman emperors and the alter ego of those in Byzantium” (69) by choosing to wear this specific colour. In the Middle Ages, red means power.

The camera follows Alfred through a corridor, separating the room he was in from another he is about to enter; this corridor also allows a few people from Winchester to see their future king. Alfred seems to be sensitive to this, as he can be seen half-smiling at a young girl before entering the room he is going to be anointed in. This smile has to be noted, since all of the other close shots on Alfred’s face show him wearing a solemn expression. If the corridor is filled with people coming from the city, easily identifiable by their bland, grey attire, the chamber in which Alfred is about to be anointed is filled with noble people, as it can be guessed from their bland, grey outfits, the room Alfred is going to be anointed in is filled by noble people, as exemplified by the variety of colours on their clothes. Once in front of the bishop leading the ceremony, the red coat is removed from Alfred’s shoulders as well as the shirt, leaving him bare-chested for the ceremony. As he is about to be crowned King of Wessex, Alfred appears without any

attributes marking him as a man of importance; he is but a man amongst others in the flock of God.

During the ceremony, the bishop addresses God and asks Him to bless Alfred. The bishop wishes for “courage, strength and wisdom” as well as “pure and holy thoughts” – a sentence quite ironic considering that Alfred’s sexual desire for his maidservant has been made clear earlier. Nonetheless, this sentence also marks a transition between the old Alfred, who thought himself unworthy of succeeding his brother as King of Wessex, and the new Alfred, who strives to be the best king possible for his country, since from this point onwards, Alfred remains faithful to his wife. Furthermore, despite Alfred’s doubt of himself, it doesn’t seem to be an opinion shared by other people: at the end of the anointment, the bishop declares Alfred “our king”, in the name of the people of Wessex. Moreover, as Alfred is dressed once again and given the sceptre and the crown symbolising his kingship, the people of Wessex chant “Vivat Rex Alfredus”.

In comparison, the ceremony of his grandson Æthelstan’s coronation in the film *Seven Kings Must Die* appears much more impersonal, and yet more kingly as well. Contrary to Alfred’s coronation, the camera (and the audience) enters as Æthelstan is already in the middle of the nobles, about to be anointed and crowned. The camera also shows Æthelstan from farther away, with no close-up on his face – and therefore, no way for the audience to readily access his feelings. Furthermore, liturgical chants can be heard in the background, something that was not present during Alfred’s coronation. The bishop officiating, Pyrlig, is a secondary character known both to the audience and to Æthelstan; thus, one could expect a more personal touch to the ceremony. Yet, it is not what happens, and is even the contrary: Pyrlig says that “[Æthelstan] is this day crowned King”, without the possessive pronoun “our” that was used during Alfred’s coronation, despite the bishop not knowing Alfred personally during this ceremony. In the same manner, once Æthelstan is anointed, the crowd chants “Vivat Rex”, without referring to the name of their new king. Moreover, the ceremony also appears more codified due to the references that Pyrlig makes throughout; if the previous bishop wishes Alfred were blessed with “courage, strength and wisdom”, Pyrlig wishes for Æthelstan to be endowed with “the faith of Abraham, the wisdom of Solomon,

and the courage of David” – all the while making biblical references that were not present in the coronation of Æthelstan’s grandfather. Yet, the more regal ceremony also comes with a less regal posture from Æthelstan, as the sequence directly after the ceremony shows him discarding the crown as soon as no one can see it. Despite the coronation nominally giving him a regal appearance, with the crown, the liturgical chants, and the throne on which he sits after his coronation (something Alfred did not have either), he paradoxically appears less ready to assume the role of king and become the head of Wessex’s body politic.

Coronations are an important event in the reign of a king or queen, as it marks its official start. As we have seen in Alfred’s coronation, this event sets the tone for what kind of sovereign he aims to be: one close enough to his people that he takes the time to briefly smile at them on his way to be crowned; one recognising and accepting the importance of the role and not running away from it; one carrying the attributes of a king (the crown and the sceptre) without removing them straight away afterwards. Conversely, coronations can also be used to underline the unreadiness of a person to become a leader, as we have seen with Æthelstan.

It is interesting to notice that Edward, Alfred’s son and Æthelstan’s father, had no coronation shown on-screen, suggesting that while it is not the most popular option, it is possible to somewhat dispense with it to a degree. One reason that could justify the lack of a coronation when it comes to Edward is a desire to condense or simplify. This is one of the strategies that was underlined by White and Rosenstone. Indeed, Alfred’s reign is marked not only by his fights against Vikings, but also by a desire to be king of a unified England. This desire does not stop with Alfred’s death at the end of the third season of *The Last Kingdom*, but is carried on by Edward and Æthelstan as part of their own agendas for the land they have inherited. As a result, neither Edward nor Æthelstan appear to harbour a personal project for their country; they merely continue (and finish, in the case of Æthelstan) what Alfred started before his death. With his reign framed by Alfred’s and Æthelstan’s, Edward’s time as a ruler seems to be overshadowed by the legacies of his father and of his son, which may account for the absence of a separate coronation ceremony.

4.3. *The arms and legs of the body politic – The lords*

Contrary to royal figures, who always have an existence that is attested historically, lords in *The Last Kingdom* are a mix of characters with an existence that is attested historically, such as Odda, and fictional characters, like the protagonist Uhtred. These lords have a role of advisors to the kings, and they also physically fight in the various battles, sometimes as leaders of the army. This allows us to study another important event depicted in medieval historiophoty: battles. Indeed, the plot of *The Last Kingdom* is delimited by the battle of York in 867, on the one hand, and the battle of Brunanburh in 937 on the other. Both are shown on screen: the battle of York is part of the first episode of the television show and the battle of Brunanburh represents the climax of the film *Seven Kings Must Die*. The manner in which a battle is filmed has previously been covered by François Amy de la Brétèque in his book *L’Imaginaire médiéval dans le cinéma occidental*. As he states, “A battle generally takes the shape of a parabolic curve with a setup and waiting period, a rising action leading to a climax (during which spatial and temporal markers may become more confused), followed by a decrescendo” (“Une bataille suit généralement une courbe en parabole avec un temps de mise en place et d’attente, une courbe ascendante et un climax (à ce moment, les repères spatiaux-temporels peuvent se faire plus confus), puis un decrescendo”, 742).

The setup and waiting period make use of establishing shots so that the spectator is able to fully understand how the battle is set up and what sides are being represented. Establishing shots of this kind will usually show both armies; or it will show one army being watched from the point of view of the other army, by combining the use of very wide shots or wide shots and the shot / reverse shot editing technique. The use of the shot / reverse shot editing technique entails greater identification with the “allied” army (that is, the army in which the protagonist is fighting), since the opposing army is represented in a fearsome manner; in *The Last Kingdom*’s battle of York, the army of the Vikings is standing in the middle of a burnt field, with trees still aflame nearby, while awaiting the arrival of the Saxon army (S1E1, 16:42). Meanwhile, the leader of the Saxon army (whom the audience has been following until now) appears visibly unsettled by the scene he is witnessing. Therefore, these establishing shots not only situate the armies in

the field, they also participate in setting the mood before the battle. In this case, as one army appears much more confident than the other, and as the leader of the Saxon army appears afraid of what he is seeing, the spectator also gains a sense of foreboding – the battle is not going to go well for the characters he has got to know so far.

The slow rhythm of the start of the battle is succeeded by a quicker pace once the battle starts. This pace is also conveyed through a difference in the shots used, since the battle is shown through shots that are closer to the action and the characters as well as a shaking handheld camera, demonstrating the chaos. These closer shots are associated with different individual confrontations, allowing the camera to capture gruesome injuries and deaths. By using a close-up shot, the spectator not only sees how the character is killed, but also the depth of his / her pain, all of this without being distracted by the battle that still unfolds in the background. Moreover, the use of a close-up places the spectator in the middle of the battle, as opposed to a very long shot in which the spectator is kept outside of it. Moreover, as the camera keeps coming back to characters the audience knows, the tension within the battle is increased, since the risk of injury or death seems real. While the main protagonist appears to be protected by plot armour, it is not the case with secondary characters and some of them actually die during these battles: Uhtred's friend Leofric dies in the battle of Edington at the end of the first season.

These close shots also allow the audience to see the weapons and the armour the warriors are endowed with. In that sense, they fully contribute to a display of medievalist historiophoty: as Amy de la Brètèque writes, “[...] the iron armour is one of the signs differentiating the medieval adventure film from other related genres such as the swashbuckler film. To wear this panoply is to step directly into the Middle Ages” ([...] l’armure de métal est l’un des signes démarcatifs entre le film de chevalerie et des genres apparentés comme le film de cape et d’épée. Revêtir cette panoplie, c’est entrer dans le Moyen Âge”, 1072). Indeed, during the battle of Eoferwic, the Vikings start the fight by making a shield wall with their round shields, while the Saxons use rectangular shields (18:46). It is attested that historical Viking warriors used round shields; for instance, Roger Atwood’s article in *Archaeology* in 2015 shows the photography of a Viking warrior

skeleton, partially covered by a shield’s round boss. It is also a marker of Vikings on-screen, as seen in *The Vikings*, by Richard Fleischer (1958), for instance. Therefore, the display of round shields in *The Last Kingdom* is an implicit sign that the viewer is able to recognise, marking the opponents as Vikings – not Saxons, as well as marking the period in which the action is taking place.

Battles usually culminate in individual battles between key characters who, often, are leaders in their respective armies. As Amy de la Brétèque writes, “[It is], in the classical model, a decisive diegetic moment: the final confrontation between the two sides, leading to the resolution of the plot. It is the ideal setting for the hero’s main trial” (“[C’est], dans le modèle classique, un moment diégétique décisif: celui de l’affrontement déterminant des deux camps, qui doit conduire à la résolution de l’intrigue. Elle est le cadre idéal pour accueillir l’épreuve principale du héros”, 1058). More than just a key moment for the hero, it is also a key moment for the battle as a whole, since it rarely lasts beyond the death of the defeated army’s leader. The leader represents the soul of his or her army; without him or her, nothing is possible for them. Each battle ends with a moment of reflection on the battle itself and its immediate consequences, whether personal (a death, a disappearance or an injury) or political (the fate of the victorious army, or of the defeated one).

Battles are omnipresent in medieval narratives on-screen, and even more so in television shows; in the first season of *The Last Kingdom* alone, there are eight battles, one per episode. Apart from the narrative tension it provides, another reason is that the protagonist, Uhtred, is himself a soldier; thus, the television show displays every battle that Uhtred takes part in. As Pierre Sorlin wrote, “For professional soldiers, the historical event is also a personal event: their life is marked by history” (149). Thus, for many intradiegetic and extradiegetic reasons, battles are an integrated part of the events marked as important within historiophoty. The alternance of camera shots close to the characters also helps to establish a stressful atmosphere.

4.4. Priests and the diplomatic “arm” of the body politic

In medieval political theory, the metaphor of the body politic also extended to members of the church: as Stephen H. Rigby explains, “This hierarchical

understanding of the body (and of its application to society) has a number of sources. One was the Pauline idea of Christ as the “head” of the Church and of the Church as the members of His body [...], an image which was commonplace throughout the Middle Ages” (469). The Pauline conception of the church as a body politic can be partially found in *The Last Kingdom*, with the priests being presented as members of the Church first; but the figure of the priest can also be perceived as an extension of the body politic headed by the monarch. For instance, the figure of Asser, a real-life figure known in history for his hagiographic biography *The Life of King Alfred*, briefly appears as a councillor to King Alfred in the second half of the first season. Other fictional priests appear in the plot, and remain for a long time as councillors to their respective kings, such as Beocca and Pyrlig, who are the two most recognisable priestly figures at Alfred’s, Edward’s and Æthelstan’s courts due to their proximity to the sovereign as well as their friendship with the protagonist.

Interestingly, the presence of the religious “arm” of the body politic within the court of the king is linked to the act of writing. For instance, the first time the audience sees a priest, Beocca, he writes a letter and tells young Uhtred that “it’s important for you to be able to read and write”, before insisting that “what these letters will represent is history, facts”. The same discourse occurs again a few episodes later, but this time, while the act of writing is still carried on by priests, the sentence is said by Alfred: “They record history. We are here creating history. People will read of this very meeting” (S1E3, 35:25). The different declarations that what is being written is history are meaningful, as we consider that the reign of Alfred coincides with the compilation of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, a series of annals recording the history of the English kingdoms from the 4th century onwards. As Susan Irvine writes, “The close association between the *Chronicle* project and the political goals of the Alfredian era, which have been discussed above, indicates that the most likely context for the compilation of the *Chronicle* is Alfred’s court and the circle of scholars who were active there during his reign” (349-350). Therefore, the act of writing the medieval chronicle is not only about recording history, but also about recording what is later going to be one of the bases for *The Last Kingdom*.

Yet, it is also through the priesthood that some flaws appear in the body politic of the nascent country. These flaws also reflect contemporary feelings on clerical issues; as Elliott writes in *Remaking the Middle Ages*,

In addition to the mainstream image of a leader and pillar of society, we can clearly see a body of literature into which is instilled a current of anticlericalism typified by the stock figure of the avaricious, licentious priest found in the fabliaux. The figure of the priest is here linked to all types of consumption, such as an insatiable appetite, monetary greed, and unchecked concupiscence bordering on lechery, as he remorselessly “consumes” the poor man’s goods—his wife included (117).

One such priest appears in the sixth episode of the first season. As he enters the home of Uhtred’s wife Mildrith in order to reclaim the payment of a debt that he owes to the Church, he can be seen in the background thoroughly enjoying the food that is left at his disposal, with a close shot on his face showing that he does not wait until he has finished chewing what he is already eating to take another mouthful of the dish. Moreover, as he speaks, his mouth is still full of food and his words are garbled. Thus there is a performance of the sin of gluttony – the over-consumption of food – by a person supposed to hold religious authority. This is not the only sin that the priest is guilty of in this extract; as Mildrith learns that if the debt is not paid, her husband’s property will be confiscated, the priest attempts to “reassure” her by saying, “should your land be confiscated, it is the Church that will benefit!”, still with his mouth full of food and in a gleeful tone. Not only does he personify gluttony, he also personifies greed – an insatiable desire for material property – in the name of the Church. Later, as Uhtred comes into the bishop’s church to pay his debt, he is told that the bishop cannot receive him, for “he is at prayer”; yet, when Uhtred enters the room, the bishop and other priests can be seen counting coins in a room full of golden treasures – and the sound of coins can be heard in the room as well, yet another personification of greed. Lastly, it is due to the bishop’s greed that Uhtred is able to blackmail him. This is not the only instance of a priest being corrupt (Kjartan Kjartansson, in his thesis, also mentions another example present in Bernard Cornwell’s books, but not in the adaptation), but it is the most telling.

The contemporary undertones exemplified by the flaws of some members of the clergy are also accentuated by the personal beliefs of the author of the original book series, Bernard Cornwell. Raised in a religious sect, he freely admits that “a lot of the fun I have in my writing is a smack at my childhood” (Thomson) in an interview. But the flaws that are shown on screen in small events are not enough to threaten the integrity of the body politic. Contemporary discourse around the clergy does not permeate the structure of the plot enough for the integrity of the body politic to be threatened by it, as the members of the clergy that are close to the king are not concerned. Rather, the example of the bishop above, who is showing both greed and gluttony, is a way for the audience to feel pity for Mildrith, whose property (which became Uhtred’s upon marriage) is threatened when her husband is not here to defend it. It is more a way to create ties between the audience and the characters than a way to threaten the body politic of the country.

5. Conclusion

By using the metaphor of the body politic in this essay, we have identified several strategies that could belong to a specific medieval historiophoty. Most of them deal with the events represented on-screen; for instance, we have mentioned battles and coronations.

While battles as such are not a category of events that can only be found in medieval films (think of films depicting the Civil War, for example), there are several elements that make a battle in *The Last Kingdom* representative of a medieval battle, like swords and shields; shields, in particular, can be very specific: round shields used by Vikings are characteristic of the early Middle Ages.

The other important event in medievalist historiophoty, on which this article focuses, is the coronation of a monarch, since it is the event that gives the audience their first glimpse at a sovereign. It can either be the coronation of a person who will turn into a capable monarch, as with Alfred in the series, or the coronation of a person who is not yet ready to successfully lead the country, such as Æthelstan in the film. In any case, these coronations always capitalize on a religious atmosphere in order to impart dignity to the ceremony. This religious atmosphere is not only conveyed through props (as with the incense burner) but also through religious chants – something that could not be transmitted through the written medium directly.

Religion also permeates the way society is represented as a whole; for instance, priests are portrayed and sometimes given a place of importance at the king’s court. Yet, despite its connection to ancient times, it is (perhaps paradoxically) strongly associated with the period of production. A contemporary vision permeates the plot; there, we can note a desire to separate Alfred the king from Alfred the would-be monk, which was not the case in the 1969 film *Alfred the Great*. The presence of corrupt priests associated with some of the seven deadly sins is also noteworthy.

Therefore, the manner of historiophoty that is carried out by *The Last Kingdom* is consistent with the pro-English alignment that was already present in Anglo-Saxon sources, such as in Asser’s *Life of King Alfred* or in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. It is also consistent with a rise in atheism in our contemporary society, or at the very least, religion being given less of an important place. One could also wonder if the nationalist alignment carried out by *The Last Kingdom* through cinematic medievalism is also a reflection of a turn towards political conservatism, as Bernau and Bildhauer have mentioned in *Medieval Films* that “Susan Aronstein, Roberta Davison and Kathleen Coyne Kelly, for example, have all recently argued that medieval films are more often than not indicative of a conservative outlook, with medieval analogies confirming traditional political ideals like democracy and monogamy” (3).

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