

GEFFREI GAIMAR

From L'Estoire des Engleis†

***¹two kings once ruled in Britain when Constantine was chieftain; this Constantine was the nephew of Arthur who wielded the sword Excalibur. One of the kings had the name Adelbriht.² He was a powerful man; he was Danish. The other had the name of Edelsi;³ his were Lincoln and Lindsey—from the Humber to Rutland the country was in his command. The other was king of the country which is now called Norfolk. So well acquainted were these two kings that they were companions indeed, and between the two was such love that Edelsi gave his sister [in marriage] to Adelbriht, that powerful king who was of Danish lineage. The other king who had the name of Edelsi was a Briton. His

† Translated by Stephen H.A. Shepherd from the text represented in the edition of Alexander Bell, *Anglo-Norman Text Society*, Nos. 14, 15, 16 (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1960). Paragraphing and punctuation are the translator's; to aid clarity, proper names are sometimes substituted in square brackets for the original pronouns. All references to the *Lai d'Havelok* are to the edition of A. Bell, *Le Lai d'Havelok and Gaimar's Havelok Episode* (Manchester, 1925).

1. The first part of the sentence is subject to different manuscript readings, having the senses of "if what Gildas said he found written in the chronicle is true" or "if what Gildas said in the chronicle he wrote is true." Gildas (c. 500–c. 570, also known as St. Gildas "the Wise") wrote *De Excidio Britanniae* ("Concerning the Ruin of Britain") in the 540s; it is the only surviving historical British work roughly contemporary with the time in which Arthur (if he ever existed) was supposed to have lived. Gildas may have written another work to which Gaimar is referring, but *De Excidio Britanniae* does not mention Havelok.
2. Athelwold in *Havelok*.
3. Godrich in *Havelok*.

sister had the name of Orwain; she was of great nobility and of good descent. By her lord she had a daughter which they called Argentille.⁴

65 The maiden grew and thrived (for she had been raised kindly enough) and it came to pass in very truth that her father did not have any other heir. In the kingdom of Denmark he had four rich earldoms, and in Britain he had conquered Colchester with the [surrounding] country: from Colchester to Holland⁵ at a stretch extended his realm. For as long as he was so powerful, Edelsi was his good friend; but then Adelbriht was dead, in the city of Thetford. To Colchester was the King taken, where he was interred; and Orwain and Argentille—they were the Queen and his daughter—were gone to Lindsey, to [the Queen's] brother, King Edelsi. They delivered the kingdom that Adelbriht held unto Edelsi to guard, for the Queen was infirm—nor but eight days [longer] did she last after Adelbriht. When she had died, they buried the Queen; and Argentille was raised at Lincoln and at Lindsey. As the ancients record,⁶ she did not have any near relative on her father's side, of the Danish.

96 Hear what this felon king did. For the inheritance which he coveted, he had his niece mismarried; he gave her to a knave who had the name of Cuaran. Because he wished to debase her he purposed to give her to him [in marriage].⁷ This Cuaran was a scullion, but a very attractive youth; he had a handsome face and beautiful hands, a shapely body, graceful and smooth. His own countenance was always happy. He had good legs and good feet. But because he was courageous and fought willingly, there was no youth in the household who made him a challenge and who started an altercation with him that [Cuaran] did not throw the [youth's] legs aloft;⁸ and when he was very angry he bound [the youth] with his belt, and, if [the youth] then had no protection, he would beat him well with a rod! And nevertheless he was of such noble disposition that if the youth promised him that he would not love him the less for having done that, immediately he would untie him. When they were reconciled, then was Cuaran pleased! And the King and the knights gave to him from their food; some gave him cakes, some portions of simnel cakes; others gave him pieces of roast meat and fowl which came to them from the kitchens. He had so much such bread and provision because he had two servants with him; and to servants of the household he often made large donations of simnels, of biscuits, and of pieces of roast meat and of cakes. For this he was very well liked and so praised and so esteemed that there was no freeman in the household

4. Goldeboru in *Havelok*.

5. I.e., from Colchester to the district of Holland in Lincolnshire.

6. Another possible translation is "as the old people tell."

7. The *Lai* adds that the dying Achebriht (= Adelbriht) entrusted Edelsi to marry Argentille to the "strongest" (*plus fort*; i.e., most powerful) man in the kingdom (l. 228); as in *Havelok*, ll. 1077–84, the usurper then takes advantage of the strictly literal meaning in justifying the heiress's marriage to the physically superior knave.

8. I.e., head over heels.

who, if Cuaran needed a donation, would not willingly give to him—but he did not seek rewards. He would give whatever he had—it was little to him—and when he had nothing to give, willingly he would borrow, then give it and spend. That which he borrowed he repaid well. Whatever he had, he gave all—but never asked anyone for anything.

151 He was thus in the household dishwasher to a scullion. There were two servants whom he looked after—hear now why he did that. He thought that they were his brothers—but his father was not theirs, nor his mother, nor his lineage, nor was he of their kindred. Even though he was of such lowliness he was come of noble birth—and if the King had realized that, [Cuaran] would never have had his niece [in marriage]! Of whom he was born, [the King] did not know. He made him his clown; so as to take away the land of Adelbriht he made his niece, the daughter of a king, lie with [Cuaran] in a poor bed.

168 Now is it necessary that God help! For here has great cruelty been done out of covetousness for this kingdom—when, in order to possess the kingdom alone, he subjected his niece to his ambition. He gave her to his scullion who had the name of Cuaran. [Cuaran] did not know what a woman was nor what he should do with her; as soon as he came to bed, he lay facedown and went to sleep. Argentille was in great perplexity about why he lay facedown so and marveled greatly that he never turned toward her nor wished to approach her as a man should do with his wife. The niece complained to the King; she often cursed her uncle who had disinherited her so and given her to such a man—until it came to pass one night that they first took their pleasure. After that they went to sleep; they loved and enjoyed each other very much.

193 In her sleep the daughter of the King dreamed that she was with Cuaran, between the sea and a wood where a savage bear dwelt. Toward the sea she saw come pigs and boars ready to attack this great bear, which was very fierce—which wanted to eat Cuaran. With the bear were many foxes—who were imperiled throughout the day because the boars attacked them, and destroyed and killed many of them. When those foxes were destroyed, this bear—which made great noise—a single fierce and hardy boar alone assailed his body. He gave him a single blow, such that in two pieces he cut the body. When the bear sensed that he was done to death, he threw up a cry and then fell to the ground. And the foxes came running from all sides toward Cuaran, their tails between their legs, their heads bowed like kittens,⁹ and made a show as if to seek mercy from Cuaran on whom they had made war. When he had made them all lie down, toward the sea he wished to repair. The great trees which were of the wood bowed toward him on all sides. The sea rose and the flood came, so that he could not keep to the wood. The wood fell; the sea came; Cuaran was in great distress. After that

9. I.e., with caution.

came two lions; they fell to their knees—but they had killed many of the beasts who in the wood were in their way. Cuaran, for the fear he had, had climbed onto one of the great trees; and the lions came forward, kneeling before that tree.

235 Throughout the wood there was such a great cry that the lady roused herself; and because she had had this dream, she embraced her lord tightly. She found him lying on his back; between her arms she clasped him. For fear she opened her eyes; she saw a flame which issued from the mouth of her husband,¹ who was still fast asleep. She marveled at the vision, at the mouth of her lord and at the flame which she saw.

248 Now listen to what she said. “Sir,” said she, “you burn! Wake yourself, if you would! From your mouth a flame issues—I know not who put it there!” She embraced him and drew him toward her, so that he awoke, and said, “Why have you wakened me, beautiful beloved? Why are you frightened? So he entreated her, so he blandished her to recount to him and reveal all concerning the flame and the vision concerning her lord which she had seen. Cuaran responded to her concerning the vision which she had had of him. According to his understanding he explained the dream (whatever he said, all of it was wrong!): “Lady,” said he, “this will be fitting both to your use and mine. This is my opinion about what that may be: the King will hold a feast tomorrow. Many of his barons will be there; stags and roe deer and venison and much other meat will be left over there in the kitchen; so much will we take in abundance—I will make the squires wealthy with good sides of meat and roast meats from the dishes of the barons! The squires are devoted to me both night and day: that is what the foxes that you dreamed of signify—this is they. And the dead bear, it was killed yesterday, taken wild, in a wood. Two bulls there are for the lions; and for the sea, take the boiling-caldrons where the water rises like the sea until cooling makes it stop—the meat of the bulls will be cooked therein. Lady, the vision is explained!”

289 Argentille, when she heard this [said]: “Tell me further, sir, how that fire can be explained which I saw burning in your mouth.” “Lady,” said he, “I know not what it should be, but in sleeping it deceived me so. While I sleep my mouth catches fire; I sense nothing of the flame. Truly, I have great shame for it, that it happens to me in my sleep!”² Said Argentille, “Beloved, listen: we exist here shamefully—it were better we became exiles among strangers and the banished than dwell here in such shame. Beloved, where is your family?” “Lady,” said he,

1. The *Lai* mentions the flame as part of its introductory account of Havelok and adds that the flame was accompanied by a pleasant odor (ll. 71–76).

2. At this point in the *Lai* (ll. 491 ff.), Argentille, assisted by a chamberlain, the next day seeks out a hermit who will explain the dream: he says that the dream indicates that Cuaran is of royal birth, that he and she will be king and queen, and that they both must go to Cuaran's country of birth to realize their destiny.

“at Grimsby; from there I departed when I came here. If I do not find my relatives there, I know not where I was born.” “Beloved,” said she, “then let us go there to know if we will ever find any there—who love me or you better or give us better counsel.” Said Cuaran, “My own beloved, if it be wisdom or if it be folly, I will do what you wish; there will I take you, if you so advise.” They lay all night until clear day. In the morning they went to their lord; to the King they came to take his leave. When he heard that, he was pleased; all smiles, he granted it them. To all his men he made fun of it, and said, “If they are just a little hungry, by tomorrow or the third day they will direct themselves to return when they can fare no better.”

327 Then they take themselves to Grimsby. There they find a good friend who was a fisherman; there he dwelt. The daughter of Grim he had [as his wife]. When he recognized the three young men—Cuaran and the two sons of Grim³—and he knew of the daughter of the King (who was his better according to the law), he was very thoughtful in his heart. He said to his wife, who was very wise: “Lady,” said he, “what will we do? If you so advise, we will reveal to Haveloc,⁴ the son of the King, our counsel and the secret—let us tell him quite openly of whom he was born and of what people.” Said the lady, “If he knew it—I think that he would reveal it in such a situation, through his own recklessness—soon great harm would come to him. He is certainly not so wise that he would know how to conceal his aspirations. If he knew that he was born of a king, for a brief time would it stay secret—and yet let us now call him, let us now ask of whom he was born; and if his wife comes with him, I think we can tell him of whom he was born and of what land, how he went into exile because of war.”

357 With that they called Haveloc, and Argentille came with him. And the worthy man and his wife began intently to speak with them: “Friend,” they say, “of whom were you born? In what place is your family?” “Lady,” said he, “here I left my family when I departed. You are my sister; I am your brother by both mother and father. Grim was my father, a fisherman;⁵ my mother, his wife, had the name of Sebruc.⁶ When they were dead, I departed from here, took my two brothers with me. Now we are grown, we have returned; but we do not recognize our

3. I.e., Cuaran travels with the two servants usually in his charge—the true identity of whom the fisherman recognizes. (In *Havelok Grim* has an additional son, and all three are given names: see *Havelok* ll. 1397–98.)

4. Cuaran's true identity is thus revealed. (At this point it is worth noting that the name *Cuaran* probably recalls that of a true historical figure, Anlaf Cwaran, a Viking ruler of York and Northumbria, on separate occasions, during the first half of the tenth century; the name *Haveloc* can be shown, consequently, to be a linguistic descendant, via Welsh, Irish, and Icelandic intermediary equivalents, of the name *Anlaf*. Unfortunately, too few details about Anlaf Cwaran survive to enable one securely to draw further links between his life and the events of the *Havelok* story.)

5. The *Lai* makes Grim a baron as well as a fisherman (l. 57).

6. Dame Leve in *Havelok*.

relatives—except only you and your lord. I know well you are our sister!” Kelloc⁷ replied, “All that is otherwise! Never did your father sell salt, nor was your mother a salter; Grim sold salt, was a fisherman. For my brothers I owe you great rewards—I will repay you for having raised them. Yesterday, down at the port, arrived a good ship, large and strong; bread and meat and wine and wheat—such have they in very great plenty. Over the sea they will pass. If you would like to go with them, I think that they will go to the country where your supporters and family are. If you would like to go with them, we can hire them for you; we will give you cloth to offer in exchange; also, you will partake of our money, and bread, and meat, and good clear wine to take at night and in the morning. You will have provision, as much as you wish. You will take with you your two servants.

³⁹⁷ “But conceal well your secret: you were son to a good king. He had Denmark for his inheritance, as had his father and his lineage. Your father had the name of Gunter,⁸ who took [as wife] the daughter of King Gaifer—Alvive was her name (‘She kept me well; for as long as she lived she raised me’—so said my mother). I was the daughter of Grim, one of [the Queen’s] companions. But this came to pass in your land: King Arthur came to conquer it for his tribute, which they withheld; with a very large army he came to the country. To King Gunter he seemed a threat; beside the sea he proffered him battle. King Gunter was killed there, and many knights on both sides; the land yielded whatever pleased Arthur. But, because of the war, the Queen could not remain in the country; so she fled, with the rightful heir—who I believe is you—Lord Haveloc, the son of the King. My father had a very good boat and took the Queen secretly. Toward this country he took her—when it came to pass, as it pleased God, that pirates attacked us. All were thrown into the sea, our knights and our people, and the Queen likewise. No man was saved there but my father, nor any woman but my mother. My father was known to them—for that they spared the children, and me and you and my two brothers, by the entreaties of my father.

⁴³⁵ “When we had arrived in this country⁹ we cut our great boat in two—for it was smashed and damaged throughout when the Queen was killed. We made a house of our boat; with a [second] boat were we well provided for, in which our father went fishing. We had fish to eat—turbot, salmon and mullet, whale, porpoise, and mackerel. In great plenty and in abundance we had bread and good fish—the fish we exchanged for the bread (for men brought us plenty). And, when we had some money, my father became a salter. While he lived, he and

7. Gunnild in *Havelok*.

8. Birkabeyn in *Havelok*.

9. The *Lai* adds at the equivalent point (l. 132) that the place of landing was thence named Grimsby, after Grim.

my mother nurtured you well—better than my brother. And I stayed and took a husband; he has kept me with great honor. He is a merchant; he knows how to cross the sea and he knows well how to buy and sell. He was in Denmark the other day and heard many plead that if any man found you, you should come and challenge [possession of] the country. We will advise you to return there; take with you your two servants to be with you so as to serve you. If all goes well for you, send for us; we will follow you, if you wish—if God restores to you your inheritance.”

⁴⁶⁷ Said Haveloc and his wife, “We will give to you a very good reward—we will give you more than you desire—if God restores to us our inheritance. And we will take the servants with us. Know that we will cross for God!” The lady responded, “Truly, here shall you stay until you have a wind—and, if I can see to it before you cross, in better clothes you will be dressed.” They remained then, waiting; they were clothed with great honor. They waited until a breeze came; and then they had entered into the boat—and master Algiers, the merchant, made the deal for them. He and Kelloc gave the clothes for Haveloc’s retinue and he put away for them ample victuals (he would not have them fail for as long as a month; he put in the boat for them bread and wine and meat and fish in great abundance). And forthwith the boat was afloat; the steersman conducted himself well. There were two boats, in fact; they set their sails against the wind.

⁴⁹³ So far have they been rowed and guided that they are arrived in Denmark. In the region where they arrived, they went to a town; there they sought packhorses and carts and had their effects brought there. The merchants were all returned with their gear back to the two boats, and Haveloc and his wife went to the town to take lodgings. A powerful man dwelt there who had the name of Sigar Estalre;¹ he had been a seneschal to King Gunter and justiciar of his land. But now was it so that he kept his own peace and had developed a hatred for the [current] king—who then was a powerful king over the people of this country—on account of his lord whom he had had killed (through the power of Arthur the strong, who, by treason, he had empowered and who had won for him this country). Because he was a traitor and cruel, others had taken the counsel never to hold with him or take land from him, until they knew of the rightful heir, of the truth about his life or death. This King who then was in the country (he was brother to King Aschis who for Arthur suffered death there where Mordred did him great wrong)² had the name of Odulf the King;³ much was he hated by his Danes.

1. Ubbe in *Havelok*.

2. A reference to Arthur’s final battle against Mordred, at which, according to the great Arthurian chronicler Geoffrey of Monmouth, the Danish king Aschil(lus) was one of Arthur’s allies.

3. Godard in *Havelok*.

527 As God and destiny would have it, God placed Haveloc in [Sigar's] care. Because of his wife (Lady Argentille, daughter of the King) who was so beautiful, six young men then assailed him. They took his beloved, they beat him, and injured his servants—in many places bruised their heads. As they went off with his beloved, Lord Haveloc was enraged. He took up a very sharp ax which he found hanging in the house. He caught them in the road as they took away Lady Argentille: he killed three, mortally wounded two, and cut off the hand of the sixth. He took up his wife and went to their lodging—[but] behold the [public] outcry of foul play! He took his servants and his wife and so fled into a church; he closed the doors for fear. Then they ascended into the tower. There he had such a defensible position that he would never be taken without great travail—indeed they defended themselves so well that they wounded all those who attacked. When master Sigar came riding there he saw how Lord Haveloc, who was very strong, went on throwing stones—[and] he had [already] killed the five brigands! Sigar saw this and reflected; he was reminded of King Gunter. As soon as he had recognized Haveloc, he no longer hated him for the sake of his [dead and injured] men; he resembled his [old] lord so much that when he saw him he had such pity that he could speak only with great pain. He had the assault fully stopped, promised peace and truce to him, and led them to his hall—Haveloc and his wife and his companions (the two servants mentioned before); and when they were safe, this powerful man asked who he was and what his name was and who his companions were. And concerning the lady he asked him whence she came and who gave her to him [in marriage].

575 “Sir,” said he, “I know not who I am—I believe I was born in this country; a mariner who had the name of Grim took me away as a little boy. He made for Lindsey; when we were making way on the high sea, we were assailed by pirates by whom I was badly treated. My mother was there; she was slain. I was spared—I know not in what manner—and the good man escaped, who then raised me and loved me very much. He and his wife raised me, loved me very much, and cherished me. When they were dead, I left; I served a king where I went, and two young men were with me all the time I was with that king. For some time I was with him in my youth—and this lady was of his kindred; as it pleased him, he gave her to me and together we were married. Then I came to this country; I know none of my supporters, nor do I know if in fact I have a single relative here. But, according to the report of a merchant—he is living at Grimsby, a very good man who has the name of Algier—he and his wife advised me to come here, to search for my supporters and relatives in this land. But I cannot name one of them, and I do not know if I can find them.” The worthy man said, “What is your name?” “Sir, I do not know,” (so he responded to him), “but when I was at the great court they called me Cuaran—and, though I

was a servant, I now know well that I have the name of Haveloc; when I was at Grimsby the other day, Algier called me Haveloc. Now I am here, by which of these two names will you call me?”

619 Sigar stood and listened; he remembered the son of the King by this name of which he spoke—the son of Gunter had that name. Then he was reminded of another means of identification which he long ago learned from the [boy's] nurse, concerning the flame which issued from his mouth when he was sleeping. That night he had him very closely watched, there where he lay with his wife. Because [Haveloc] was greatly tired from the battle and from the anxiety which before he had had in the day, he went to sleep without taking leave of anyone. As soon as he slept, the flame issued from his mouth—and the servants who had observed that quickly related it to their master; and the worthy man rose out of bed. When he went there, he saw the flame. Then he knew well that what he had suspected about him was true—but that knowledge was then so precious to him that he would never tell [even] his wife, until the next day when he rose. Then he sent for his men; he called for his knights, for spearmen, and for foot soldiers. Many came from all parts. After he had assembled many of them, he then went to speak with Haveloc. He had him bathed and provided for; in new clothes he had him dressed. He had him come into the hall.

653 When he had entered into the hall, where he saw so many men assembled, he had great fear that this group would make a bad judgment for him—he thought they had assembled on account of the five men he had killed. He wanted to make for an ax which a young man held there; he wanted to seize it to defend himself. Sigar saw that and had him taken. As they held him, from all sides, Sigar said to him, “Do not be afraid, do not be defensive, my friend. Fully I assure you—I promise you—that now I love you more than I ever did yesterday when I sat you at my dinner.” Then he seated him beside him and had the Horn of the King brought; this was the horn of King Gunter. Under the skies there had been no knight who could ever sound that horn—not hunter, not young man—such that no one ever heard the horn blown, unless the King or rightful heir did so. Truly, the rightful heir of Denmark could blow the horn well, but another man could never blow it; any other man tried for nought.

681 Sigar had guarded this horn; King Gunter had entrusted it to him. When he took it, he could not sound it; he had it presented to a knight, and said to him, all [the while] laughing, “He who sounds it, he who knows how to blow the horn, I will give him a good ring, which, if needs be, is worth a castle. He who has it on his finger, if he fall in the sea, will not drown; nor can fire damage him at all, nor can any weapon wound him—such as I tell you is the ring.” Then the company, the knights and the men-at-arms, came to blow the horn. It would not sound at any time for anyone; for none of them would it ever sound.

698 Then they handed it to the young man—whom they called “the prisoner”—who had the name of Haveloc. When he took it, he looked at it and said that he had never blown a horn. To the lord he said, “I will leave it be. Since no other man can blow the horn, I withdraw from any claim to your ring; I do not wish to offend the company.” Responded Sigar, “Do it you will! Put it to your mouth.” “Sir,” said he, “I do not refuse you that; now will it be tried by me.” Then he took up the horn, made the sign of the cross over it, and tried it at his mouth. As soon as it touched his mouth the horn sounded so superbly that no one had ever heard its equal; no man could blow a horn so well! Sigar heard it, jumped to his feet, and embraced him in his arms. Then he cried, “God be praised! Now have I found my rightful lord, now I have him whom I have desired—for whom I will wage war. This is the rightful heir and the person who must wear the crown of gold!”

725 He then summoned all his men who forthwith swore fealty to Haveloc; [Sigar] himself kneeled and vowed to hold with him. Then he sent for his barons with whom the King [(Odulf)] had had disputes; they then became [Haveloc’s] men and received him as their lord. When they had done that, they assembled forces; in four days they had many hundreds, and, on the fifth day, of knights they had fully thirty thousand. They then challenged King Odulf; and on a level field they met. Many great blows were wrought; King Odulf was then vanquished—indeed Haveloc conducted himself so that he alone slew more than twenty! Two princes of the country⁴ were there who had been his enemies, who had held with Odulf; now they came to [seek] Haveloc’s mercy. The common people of the country came likewise to [seek] his mercy; and Haveloc gave them pardons by the counsel of his barons. All of them pledged fidelity to him; the knights of that realm and the worthy men and the burgesses made him their lord and king. They made great festivity and great rejoicing, as the true history tells us.

757 After that he summoned his entire fleet and all the forces of his realm; and his great host crossed the sea. Then he challenged King Edelsi. To him he declared that he defied him unless he handed over to him the rightful inheritance of his beloved. And Edelsi replied to him that he would fight against him. They fought in a field from morning until evening. There were many men wounded and killed on both sides, until black night separated them, until the next day dawned. But, by counsel of the Queen, who disclosed a remedy to make good their misfortune and the battle, he won his realm without [further] great harm. All night he had stakes erected, taller and greater than large staffs; they stood the dead men up and through the night set them thereupon. They so assembled two divisions of them, who truly appeared as if they were alive and eager for battle—they [who] the day before had been killed! For

men who regarded them from a distance, all their flesh crept; both from a distance and from up close hideous seemed the unconfessed dead. The next day they prepared themselves, very much determined to fight. And the enemy scouts went ahead to see the valiant “Lord Cuaran.” When they saw the resources he had there, all their flesh crept; for, against one man that they had, they saw seven on the other side! Back they went to declare to the King that it was no use fighting, to give to the lady her rightful inheritance, and to make peace before things got worse. The King could not proceed otherwise. Thus was it necessary for him to concede—for so had the barons advised him.

803 He caused to be handed over to [Haveloc] all the kingdom from Holland to Colchester. There King Haveloc held his festivities, [and] received the homage of his barons from throughout his territories. King Edelsi lived little more than fifteen days after. He had no heir with rightful claims such as Haveloc and his wife; he had children, but they were dead. The barons fully granted that Haveloc and his beloved should have the land of King Edelsi. Once he had it so, he was King for twenty years and with the Danes obtained much by conquest. [816]

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4. The Earl of Chester and Earl Gunter in *Havelok*.