

Fleeing the Normans – a pentathlonic journey.

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Oswyn of Baðon of Shire of Wurmwald

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1066 was a watershed in English history. It is a clean break from the Anglo-Saxon tradition to the Norman one. I have three personae all named Oswyn. This pentathlon looks at how the second of them, Oswyn of Londina's, came to the world of the 12th Century eastern Mediterranean.

There has not been much attention given to the fact that what we call New England is actually the second area to have that name. Some good scholarship [1, 2] has come to light recently that says that the lands described in the Edwardsaga [3], Orderic Vitalis [4], and Chronicon universale anonymi Laudunensi [5] actually existed.

The story goes thusly: after the Battle of Hastings, Siward of Gloucester led a group of Anglo-Saxon nobles from England. It is known that after the Battle of Hastings, Harold's mother Gytha, was part of a resistance movement based in the West of England and they held out for a while. There was hope that perhaps Svein of Denmark might be persuaded to invade. But that did not happen. Gloucester is not far from Somerset which contains Bath and Bristol. This region is also known for the "os-" protoneme in Old English as evidenced by Saint Oswald's remains in Gloucester and the old Hwicce king Oswic. Someone named Oswyn or carrying the "os-" protoneme is not out of place for this region.

This group fled England when it was clear that the fight would be over. They sailed south through the Straits of Gibraltar and stopped in perhaps Sardinia or Sicily (the sources are not too clear). At some point, they heard that the Emperor in Constantinople needed help with driving heathens from his lands. The group sails to Constantinople, assists in the fight, and are rewarded. Some join the Varangian Guard but others ask for lands of their own. The Emperor tells them that there was a land what once belonged to him to the East. If they could take it, they could have it. Modern scholarship has determined that this land was part of the Crimean peninsula [6]. Also, it is quite possible that this land continued to exist as "New England" until late in the 13th Century as stated in the Edwardsaga and in a mission from Pope Innocent IV to the Mongols.

This pentathlon is inspired by this journey that Oswyn of Londina or his ancestors made. The elements are:

- 1) Pinot Noir wine vinegar – Catholics greatly preferred Pinot Noir as the sacramental wine. Oswyn being from Bath and its Cathedral and Abbey would have had access to the wine and some of it would have turned to vinegar.

- 2) Messages in the Tapestry – a research paper talking about hidden messages in the Bayeux Tapestry. Hence the start of our journey.
- 3) A Taste of Sicily – Cotton Honey Mead - while mead was no longer a common drink to these English, it was not an unknown one. And exposure to the Scandanavian elements of the Varangian Guard might have renewed a desire for it.
- 4) A Taste of Sicily – Orange Blossom Honey Mead - while mead was no longer a common drink to these English, it was not an unknown one. And exposure to the Scandanavian elements of the Varangian Guard might have renewed a desire for it.
- 5) A Roman Mosaic Bowl – this style of glasswork is a product of 1st century BC Roman glasswork but the likelihood for finding one would increase in the areas where Romans were more common.
- 6) A telling of Alfred and the Loaves - This is a story of how Alfred let some bread burn but in doing so, learned what he needed to do to drive the Vikings out of England. Oswyn contemplates this story while on pilgrimage but knows it is too late to restore the England he knows.

References

[1] Christine Fell

[2] Caitlan Green

[3] Edwardsaga

[4] Orderic Vitalis

[5] Chronicon universale anonymi Laudunensi

[6] J. Shepard, 'Another New England? – Anglo-Saxon settlement on the Black Sea', *Byzantine Studies*, 1 (1978), 18-39. Much of what follows is based on this important but somewhat difficult to obtain article, which offers a convincing and in-depth analysis of the evidence for a medieval 'New England' in the region of the Crimean peninsula and the north-eastern Black Sea coast.