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**CHRISTIAN HEROISM AND HOLY WAR
IN ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND**

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

by

Kent Gregory Hare

B.S., Louisiana Tech University, 1983

M.A., Louisiana State University, August 1992

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASC		<i>Anglo-Saxon Chronicle</i> . Cited by year per manuscript, with corrected date per <i>EHD</i> designated recte where appropriate.
ASP		S. A. J. Bradley, trans., <i>Anglo-Saxon Poetry</i> .
ASPR		Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records.
	1	<i>The Junius Manuscript</i> , ed. G. P. Krapp.
	2	<i>The Vercelli Book</i> , ed. G. P. Krapp.
	3	<i>The Exeter Book</i> , ed. G. P. Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie.
	4	<i>Beowulf and Judith</i> , ed. E. V. K. Dobbie.
	5	<i>The Paris Psalter and the Meters of Boethius</i> , ed. G. P. Krapp.
	6	<i>The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems</i> , ed. E. V. K. Dobbie.
Bede, <i>EH</i>		Bede, <i>Ecclesiastical History of the English People</i> .
CS		Walter de Grey Birch, ed., <i>Cartularium Saxonicum</i> .
DR		The Holy Bible, Douay-Rheims Version.
EETS		Early English Text Society.
<i>EHD</i>		<i>English Historical Documents</i> .
	1	c. 500-1042, trans. and ed. Dorothy Whitelock.
	2	1042-1189, trans. and ed. David C. Douglas and George W. Greenaway.
Haddan and Stubbs 3		Arthur W. Haddan and William Stubbs, eds., <i>Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland</i> , vol. 3.

- Liebermann 1 Felix Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, vol. 1.
- Maldon 991 Donald G. Scragg, ed., *The Battle of Maldon, AD 991*.
- MGH *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*
 AA *Auctores Antiquissimi*.
 SS *Scriptores*
- ODS David Hugh Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 2nd ed.
- PL J.-P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia cursus completus, Series latina*.
- RHC Oc. *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades, Historiens Occidentaux*.
- RS Rolls Series
- Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*
 J. M. Wallace-Hadrill. *Bede's 'Ecclesiastical History of the English People': A Historical Commentary*.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the character and development of a Christian heroic ideal in Anglo-Saxon England between the seventh and eleventh centuries and its manifestation through notions of holy war. It provides a valuable case study of the ongoing synthesis which occurred when the Germanic peoples converted to Christianity. The mutual transformation wrought in the traditional Germanic warrior ethos and Christian faith and values permeates the literary sources for Anglo-Saxon history, from the early hagiographies and Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, through later histories and chronicles, to the unique corpus of Old English poetry.

As early as the first generation of Anglo-Saxon Christianization, the Germanic warrior ethos combined both with an ascetic tradition within Christianity which stressed spiritual warfare and with the martial necessities confronting a Christian society in the violent world of the early Middle Ages. The Viking onslaughts of the ninth and tenth centuries, portrayed in religious terms by Anglo-Saxon contemporaries as a conflict between Christians and pagans, served to crystallize Anglo-Saxon ideas of Christian heroism as expressed in holy war. Whereas previously these ideas had centered around kings, innovations in Christian kingship during the

same period had the effect of broadening the ranks of holy warriors to include non-royal figures.

The Anglo-Saxon evidence shows that a distinctly martial cast to Christianity usually associated with the age of crusading in the eleventh to fourteenth centuries was from the beginning, in the seventh century, fundamental to the Anglo-Saxon conception of their new faith.

CHAPTER 1

CHRISTIAN HEROISM, HOLY WAR, AND THE SOURCES FOR ANGLO-SAXON HISTORY

Late in A.D. 633, Oswald son of Aethelfrith, scion of the royal House of the Idings who had ruled Bernicia in the north of Anglo-Saxon England for a century, staked his claim to kingship in Northumbria upon the outcome of a battle in which he was considerably outmatched. But Oswald brought to the field near the old Roman wall of Hadrian certain resources new to the Anglo-Saxons. A century later, the great historian of the early English, the Venerable Bede, recorded in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* how Oswald arrived "with an army small in numbers but strengthened by their faith in Christ" to face "the abominable leader of the Britons together with the immense force which he boasted was irresistible."¹ Bede proceeds to depict Oswald's actions immediately before the clash of arms:

Oswald, when he was about to engage in battle, set up the sign of the holy cross and, on bended knees, prayed God to send heavenly aid to His worshippers in their dire need. In fact it is related that when a cross had been hastily made and the hole dug in which it was to stand,

¹"*cum paruo exercitu, sed fide Christi munito, infandus Brettonum dux cum immensis illis copiis, quibus nihil resistere posse iactabat,*" Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* [hereafter cited as Bede, *EH*] 3.1, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 214-15.

he seized the cross himself in the ardour of his faith, placed it in the hole, and held it upright with both hands until the soldiers had heaped up the earth and fixed it in position. Thereupon he raised his voice and called out to the whole army, 'Let us all kneel together and pray the almighty, everliving, and true God to defend us in His mercy from the proud and fierce enemy; for He knows that we fight a just war for the salvation of our people.' They all did as he commanded, advanced against the enemy just as dawn was breaking, and gained the victory that their faith merited.

. . . [N]o symbol of the Christian faith, no church, and no altar had been erected in the whole of Bernicia before that new leader of the host, inspired by his devotion to the faith, set up the standard of the holy cross when he was about to fight his most savage enemy.²

Fighting under the sign of the Holy Cross; prayer for God's aid in battle, God's favor proven in victory; the Bernicians' war being a "just war" (*justum bellum*) - Bede's account of the Battle of Heavenfield (as the field of Oswald's victory was known) is suffused

²"[V]enturus ad hanc pugnam Osuald signum sanctae crucis erexit, ac flexis genibus Deum deprecatus est, ut in tanta rerum necessitate suis cultoribus caelesti succurreret auxilio. Denique fertur quia facta citato opere cruce, ac fouea praeparata in qua statui deberet, ipse fide feruens hanc arripuerit ac foueae inposuerit atque utraque manu erectam tenuerit, donec adgesto a militibus puluere terrae figeretur; et hoc facto, elata in altum uoce cuncto exercitui proclamauerit: 'Flectamus omnes genua, et Deum omnipotentem uiuum ac uerum in commune deprecemur, ut nos ab hoste superbo ac feroce sua miseratione defendat; scit enim ipse quia iusta pro salute gentis nostrae bella suscepimus.' Fecerunt omnes ut iusserat, et sic incipiente diluculo in hostem progressi, iuxta meritum suae fidei uictoria potiti sunt.

". . . [N]ullum . . . fidei Christianae signum, nulla ecclesia, nullum altare in tota Berniciorum gente erectum est, priusquam hoc sacrae crucis uexillum nouus militiae dux, dictante fidei deuotione, contra hostem inmanissimum pugnaturus statueret."

Bede, *EH* 3.2, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 214-17. In the trans. I replace Colgrave's trans. of "iusta pro salute gentis nostrae bella suscepimus," "we are fighting in a just cause for the preservation of our whole race" (pp. 214-15) with J. M. Wallace-Hadrill's more correct proposal, "we fight a just war for the salvation of our people," in idem, *Bede's 'Ecclesiastical History of the English People': A Historical Commentary*, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) [hereafter cited as Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*], p. 89. N.B.: Although I use Wallace-Hadrill's trans., a literal rendering would result in the more general statement, "we fight just wars for the salvation of our people."

with Christian significance. The Anglo-Saxons gave a distinctly martial cast to their new Christian faith, one which endured until the coming of the Normans in 1066, and one which was only strengthened by the near destruction of Anglo-Saxon Christian society in the face of pagan Viking invasions in the late ninth century. This dissertation examines the character and development of a Christian heroic ideal among the Anglo-Saxons between the seventh and the eleventh centuries and its expression through notions of holy war.

In this first chapter, I set about defining certain terms and discuss the sources upon which this dissertation is based. First, what is the heroic ethos? I argue that the Anglo-Saxon experience illustrates how the Christianization of the Germanic peoples in the early Middle Ages resulted in a syncretic fusion of Germanic and Christian impulses to give early medieval Christianity a distinctive character. Germanic society centered around the *comitatus* (warband), and its fundamental values were those martial ideals which held together the warband. These ideals took the form of a heroic ethos in which the bond of personal loyalty between chieftain and warrior had at its heart service and sacrifice. In Christian Anglo-Saxon England, the forms and even the ethos of the warband endured in Christianized form. A new ethos of Christian heroism found expression both as Christian impulses motivating heroic figures and as heroic impulses informing Christian life and thought. This

Christian heroic ethos was crucial in the development of Christian holy war ideas among the Anglo-Saxons.

In recent years a question has arisen within the historiography of the Middle Ages. How Christian were the Middle Ages? In part this is a reaction against the traditional, romanticized view of the Middle Ages as an "Age of Faith."³ John Van Engen examines the ongoing debate in an important article.⁴ Some scholars have held that the mass of European population remained un-Christianized until the Reformations of the sixteenth century.⁵ They adhered only superficially to the forms and practices of Christianity while maintaining their pre-Christian "folk" beliefs. Peasant "popular" culture was thus totally separate from the Christian ecclesiastical culture represented in the writings of the clerical elite.⁶ Van Engen, on the other hand, emphasizes the work of Peter Brown who sees in the Middle Ages a continuity of religious culture cutting across

³The name given to the Middle Ages by many commentators into the mid 20th c.: e.g., Will Durant, *The Age of Faith, The Story of Civilization* 4 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1950); Anne Fremantle, *The Age of Belief: The Medieval Philosophers, The Great Ages of Western Philosophy* 1 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1955), cited by Van Engen, "Christian Middle Ages" (as n. 4 below), pp. 520-21 and n. 7.

⁴John Van Engen, "The Christian Middle Ages as an Historiographical Problem," *American Historical Review* 91 (1986), pp. 519-52.

⁵A view often identified with an early proponent, Jean Delumeau, *Catholicism between Luther and Voltaire: A New View of the Counter-Reformation* (London: Burns and Oates, 1977); for discussion and other references, see Van Engen, "Christian Middle Ages," p. 521 ff., including his n. 8.

⁶Van Engen, "Christian Middle Ages," pp. 528-9: Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Jean-Claude Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound: Guinefort, Healer of Children since the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

social and ecclesiastical levels.⁷ The medieval elite perceived no duality of religious cultures between themselves and the peasant masses. As Van Engen points out, the preponderance of evidence clearly indicates that Christianity was central to the self-image of the medieval elite - "Christian" and "Christendom" are their own terms for themselves and the whole of medieval society.⁸ The more intriguing and sometimes overlooked question is, therefore, what was the nature of the Christian faith they espoused?

Van Engen argues that medieval Christianity was the product of a slow process of Christianization which only began with the formal acceptance of the faith by the Germanic peoples as signified by their baptisms. Christianization took the character of a long "transition, from one customary religious culture to another, . . . with much retained from the old and absorbed from the new."⁹ James Russell recently contributed to the exploration of these issues in an important monograph.¹⁰ He contends that the otherworldly orientation of early Christianity was utterly incompatible with the

⁷Van Engen, "Christian Middle Ages," p. 532: Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); see also Brown's "Relics and Social Status in the Age of Gregory of Tours," in idem, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), pp. 222-250, as well as his recent synthesis of his own body of work, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, AD 200-1000*, The Making of Europe (Cambridge, MA, and Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

⁸Van Engen, "Christian Middle Ages," pp. 539-41.

⁹Van Engen, "Christian Middle Ages," p. 550.

¹⁰James C. Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity: A Sociohistorical Approach the Religious Transformation* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

folk-centered and "world-accepting" focus of pagan Germanic religiosity.¹¹ Christian missionary policy between the fourth and eighth centuries was forced to accommodate Germanic ideals in setting forth the Christian message. Their evangelization strategy had as its unintended result what Russell calls the "Germanization" of early medieval Christianity.

The development of a martial ethos of Christian heroism among the Anglo-Saxons illustrates only most graphically the syncretic fusion which had to occur when two such radically different ideologies as early medieval Christianity and Germanic pagan society met in Anglo-Saxon England. At issue is not the thoroughness, and certainly not the sincerity, of the Christian conversion of the Anglo-Saxons, but rather the character of the Christianity which they adopted. That Christianity was one which admitted and even embraced the fundamental warrior values of their *comitatus*-based society.

This first chapter considers a second question as well: What is a holy war, and how is it distinct from a crusade or a just war? I adopt a wide definition of Christian holy war, basically any war in which the Christian faith or the interests of Christian society provided the justification for Christian bellicosity. In the absence of clear terminological precedent in the medieval sources, I argue that in the Middle Ages many "holy wars" were termed "just wars," as long as they were perceived to meet St. Augustine of Hippo's

¹¹Russell, *Germanization*, p. 4.

requirements for a just war, important among which was the legitimacy of authority to wage war.

In chapters two through four, I examine the relationship between the warfare of Christianized Anglo-Saxon society and the Christian sanctity ascribed to various figures from Anglo-Saxon history. As I argue in chapter two, from the beginning certain martial ideas found expression in Christian thought through the use of military metaphors to describe the Christian life as a struggle, even as warfare against sin and temptation, personified as demons. Certainly by the time Christianity came to Anglo-Saxon England ca. 600, the metaphorical image of the monk or hermit as a spiritual warrior was one venerable in Christian tradition. Upon Christianization, the Anglo-Saxon warrior nobility found a new battlefield which offered them the possibility of ultimate victory. In contrast to the old Northern heroism in which, despite the heroic struggle, defeat was inevitable, Christianity offered the promise of ultimate victory. Anglo-Saxon warriors brought to the spiritual warfare of the monastery the Germanic heroic ethos. The best example is St. Guthlac of Crowland. Also, as warrior aristocrats entered the episcopacy, such figures as Bishop Wilfrid and St. Boniface brought the heroic ethos and even the *comitatus* organization into the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Particularly during the period when the Germanic peoples settled down into kingdoms after the upheavals of the Age of Migrations, the king as warleader was central to the *comitatus* and

its heroic ethos. They were also significant in the development of the Christian heroic ethos. Chapters three and four examine the Christian kings of Anglo-Saxon England as holy warriors. Like their nobles, a number of early Christian Anglo-Saxon kings entered into spiritual battle by abdicating to monastic life. But it is more interesting how other Anglo-Saxon kings were considered holy, some even saintly, while remaining in the world and fighting its battles. In fact, for most of the Anglo-Saxon period, the only figures praised as holy warriors of any sort were, on one hand, monks and hermits as spiritual warriors, and on the other, kings in their worldly battles. Bede calls the gentle hermit St. Cuthbert a "soldier of Christ,"¹² but uses the same imagery for King Edwin, who "fought in the kingdom of Christ."¹³ With regard to worldly war, the lack of non-royal holy warriors reflects the requirement that a just or holy war be undertaken by legitimate authority which was, in the medieval context, a king.

Taken together, chapters three and four trace a shifting relationship between secular warfare and royal sanctity and illustrate changing ideas of kingship and war among the Christian Anglo-Saxons. The results included, paradoxically, both legitimization of holy warfare and its detachment from the royal estate. In the early Christian Anglo-Saxon period, pre-Christian

¹²"*miles Christi*," Bede, *Prose Life of St. Cuthbert* chap. 17, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave in *Two Lives of St. Cuthbert* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), pp. 216-17.

¹³"*Christi regno militauit*," Bede, *EH* 2.20, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 202, my trans.

sacral kingship became Christian royal sanctity while expectations placed on kings remained the same, including leadership in war. The tenth-century monastic reformers reinvented Anglo-Saxon Christian kingship modelled on Christ. There was a consequent de-emphasis on the martial activities of kings considered holy or saintly. The change occurred in the Viking age of the late ninth to early tenth centuries. It included sanctification of martial activity through stark contrast between Christian Anglo-Saxons and pagan Vikings and a parallel generalization of the legitimacy of warfare in service to Christian society. In England, the fruition of this shift appears at the end of the tenth century in Ealdorman Byrhtnoth of Essex, the Christian hero of Maldon, a non-royal, pious noble holy warrior killed in battle against the pagans, who was considered in some circles a martyr. The fall of Byrhtnoth and his men was commemorated in the poem, *The Battle of Maldon*, in which the old heroic ethos is expressed most clearly. But the context of that heroism is now one of Christian service and sacrifice - service to and sacrifice for English Christendom.

In the ninth and tenth centuries, when Anglo-Saxon Christian society faced annihilation at the hands of the pagans, notions of Christian service and sacrifice crystallized to form a new Christian heroic ideal. The date when the various Old English poems were originally composed is less important than the fact that they were redacted and copied into the manuscripts we have in the same period as the developments in kingship and holy war just discussed. The

redacted versions thus reflect the interests of the tenth century. Chapter five argues that the rich mine of Old English poetry which illustrates the ethos of Christian heroism was redacted in this context of Christian-pagan conflict and was indeed part of an extended Alfredian program of literary propaganda in service to the House of Wessex. In the Old English poetic corpus, Christian subjects and themes take on a distinctly heroic cast; even Christ in His Passion is conceived as a warrior rather than as a passive sacrificial Victim. But at the same time, so-called "secular" heroic poems display Christian themes and motivations: *Maldon*, for one, but also the tenth-century *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* poems commemorating West Saxon victories against the Vikings, and even *Beowulf* itself. In the tenth-century context, the Christianized heroic ethos which pervades Old English poetry is particularly interesting. In the context of Christian resistance to the pagan Vikings and consolidation by the West Saxon kings of a single kingdom of England, a purpose for the production of the poetic codices seems apparent. The Old English poetry served as a vehicle by which the West Saxon kings sought to inspire the fervor of their Christian warriors toward deeds of Christian service and sacrifice which would redound to the benefit of the House of Wessex.

This dissertation makes an important contribution to the historiography of both medieval Christianity and Anglo-Saxon history. Early medieval England provides a marvelous case study for the transformation wrought on Christianity by the conversion of the

Germanic peoples. Through examination of the Christianized heroic ethos arising from a synthesis of Germanic social and military ideals with Christian faith and values, this dissertation helps to clarify the nature of Christianity in early medieval Europe. In the final chapter I will suggest how the Anglo-Saxon example of developing accommodation between medieval Christianity and warfare in the particular development of Christian heroism expressed through holy war might help elucidate the origins of the crusading movement of the later Middle Ages.

Christian Service and Sacrifice: A New Heroic Ideal

This dissertation explores as a central theme the idea of heroism. It proposes that there developed in Anglo-Saxon England a specifically martial idea of Christian heroism, a Christianized version of the Germanic heroic ethos. What was this Germanic heroic ideal? In what context could it be so fused with something so different as Christianity? Understanding the first of these questions is vital to discussion of the latter, which is a primary focus of this dissertation.

By and large, the Germanic peoples first encountered Christianity during what is known in German historiography as the *Völkerwanderungszeit* - the age of tribal migrations.¹⁴ During this period the Germanic barbarians, pressed from the east by the Huns, penetrated the frontiers of the old Roman Empire and ultimately, on the ruins of the Western provinces of the Empire, established their

¹⁴Russell, *Germanization*, p. 119.

own kingdoms. The period of the *Völkerwanderung*, traditionally dated from the first major incursion by the Visigoths in 376 to the last major invasion by the Lombards in 568, was regarded by later generations as a Heroic Age in which great accomplishments by great individuals won great renown. Much of the literature in the later Germanic kingdoms drew inspiration from the events of this unsettled period (although not from the conflict with the Empire) - for instance, Old English poems such as *Waldere*, *The Fight at Finnsburh*, and especially *Beowulf*.

The identification of the age of migrations with a Germanic age of heroes can be seen explicitly in the Old English poem *Widsith*, which is largely a catalogue of heroic figures known to the Anglo-Saxons. Although positive identification of many of the characters has been lost in the mists of time, it can be no coincidence that the figures mentioned therein span almost exactly the dates of the *Völkerwanderungszeit*. The earliest datable important figure in *Widsith* is the Gothic king Ermanaric, who fell before the Huns ca. 375, after which his people retreated into Roman territory; likewise, the latest character is Aelfwine, identifiable as the Lombard king Alboin, their leader in the 568 invasion of Italy.¹⁵

¹⁵R. W. Chambers' introd. to his ed. of *Widsith: A Study in Old English Heroic Legend* (1912; repr. New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1965), remains the most thorough investigation of the poem as a catalogue of heroic legend.

H. Munro Chadwick identified certain basic characteristics of such a Heroic Age - its context, society, and values.¹⁶ The context was one of great instability, taking the form of migrations and warfare. The basic social structure was identical with the basic military structure - the warband (the Germanic *comitatus*). The fundamental values were personal - those which bound together chieftain and warrior.

The core values of heroic society have been examined at length and set forth plainly by Michael Cherniss, who investigates the dual Germanic and Christian natures of Old English poetry. Drawing examples largely from *Beowulf*, he assigns four dimensions to the heroic ethos: loyalty, treasure, vengeance, and exile.¹⁷ Loyalty formed the basic tie between chieftain and warrior, one of mutual honor and obligation, freely given and freely received. The warrior fought for his chieftain, who looked after his retainer's interests. The chieftain won glory through his own and his warband's martial achievements, and the warrior shared in his chieftain's glory. Treasure symbolized the worth of a man. The chieftain dispensed treasure to his warrior both as reward for past military service and to secure future service. Such a gift incurring a reciprocal

¹⁶H. Munro Chadwick, *The Heroic Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926). Chadwick based his definition (chaps. 16-19) on comparison (chap. 15) of the "Teutonic" (chaps. 1-8) and "Greek" (chaps. 9-14) Heroic Ages. In appended notes he discussed tangentially other such periods as the Celtic and Slavonic Heroic Ages.

¹⁷Michael D. Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ: Heroic Concepts and Values in Old English Christian Poetry* (The Hague: Mouton, 1972), chaps. 2-5.

obligation was, however, in no way a "payment." It was rather a tangible symbol of the bond of loyalty. Vengeance was a consequence of the bond between chieftain and warrior. Offenses against either party, especially violent death, must be avenged by those with whom the victim shared the bond of loyalty. The result was often an extended blood feud. Finally, the absence of a bond between warrior and chieftain left the bereft individual in a state of exile constituting social more than geographic isolation. The state of the lordless man was one of abject misery.

It is obvious that the three latter dimensions of the heroic ethos identified by Cherniss are all part of the first. Treasure symbolizes the bond of loyalty; vengeance is a duty consequent to the bond of loyalty; exile is the absence of that bond. The bond of loyalty and its duties form the very heart of the heroic ethos. The observations made by Tacitus in his *Germania* late in the first century A.D. remain the most incisive description of the world of the *comitatus* and its fundamental values:

On the field of battle it is a disgrace to a chief to be surpassed in courage by his followers, and to the followers not to equal the courage of their chief. And to leave a battle alive after their chief has fallen means lifelong infamy and shame. To defend and protect him, and to let him get the credit for their own acts of heroism, are the most solemn obligations of their allegiance. The chiefs fight for victory, the followers for their chief.¹⁸

¹⁸"*Cum ventum in aciem, turpe principi virtute vinci, turpe comitatus virtutem principis non adaequare. [I]am vero infame in omnem vitam ac probrosum superstitem principi suo ex acie recessisse: illum defendere, tueri, sua quoque fortia facta gloriae eius adsignare praecipuum sacramentum est: principes pro victoria pugnant, comites pro principe.*" Tacitus, *Germania* chap. 14, ed. J.

(continued...)

The duties of the Germanic warrior took the form of service and sacrifice - fighting for the lord, being willing to forsake everything for him.

The *comitatus* described by Tacitus proved an amazingly durable structure. Ultimately the bond between man and lord would manifest itself in feudalism.¹⁹ The martial ideals underpinning it must have been as durable. The strength of those values may have varied in different ages, but they would have been paramount in times of particular unrest and instability. Such an age would have been the *Völkerwanderungszeit*, when the Germanic peoples faced a continuing military crisis with ramifications throughout their society. When all other societal institutions and structures were breaking down, the personal tie between man and lord manifesting itself in the warband would have taken center stage. Writing specifically of the Anglo-Saxons in their settlement of Britain during the same period, Peter Hunter Blair makes the same point: "The most powerful bond in this new society, whose being depended upon the security which had to

¹⁸(...continued)

G. C. Anderson in *Cornelii Taciti De Origine et Situ Germanorum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938 [repr. 1958]), no pg. no., trans. H. Mattingly, rev. S. A. Handford in *The Agricola and the Germania* (London: Penguin, 1970), p. 113.

¹⁹At its simplest, Marc Bloch saw the core of feudalism as ties of dependence, the phenomenon of "a man of another man" - *Feudal Society*, trans. L. A. Manyon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), chap. 11.1, p. 145 (vol. 1).

be won and maintained by its own strength . . . was that which united lord and man²⁰

One result was a radical transformation in early Germanic kingship. The warchief took on the attributes of the old priest-king, including the latter's embodiment of *Heil*. *Heil* is an elusive concept, but seems to have comprised the sacral luck, fortune, even the very *life* of the tribe. *Heil* was necessary for the prosperity of the tribe. Properly employed, *Heil* assured military victory. In the crisis of the *Völkerwanderungszeit*, *Heil* was thus a quality crucial to the leading warchief of the tribe, who thus emerged as a royal figure himself.²¹

Another result was extension of the bond of personal loyalty throughout Germanic society. Its clearest manifestation being in the warband, discussion of the heroic ideal of the *comitatus* inevitably centers around men. All members of the tribe had a role, however, including women and children, who in a very real sense formed the *comitatus* of their husbands and fathers.²²

The Germanic peoples first confronted Christianity, therefore, in the very period when the heroic values of the *comitatus* most thoroughly permeated their society. James C. Russell has recently

²⁰Peter Hunter Blair, *Roman Britain and Early England, 55 B.C.-A.D. 871*, Norton Library History of England 1 (1963; repr. New York: Norton, 1966), p. 247.

²¹See Henry A. Myers and Herwig Wolfram, *Medieval Kingship* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1982), pp. 2-6.

²²Leslie Stratyner, "Forged Ties: The Comitatus and Anglo-Saxon Poetry" (Ph.D. Diss. [English], Louisiana State University, 1991), chap. 2, "'Cynna Gemyndig': Women and the Comitatus," esp. pp. 109-14, "Woman as Thane, Kinship as Comitatus."

examined this encounter and its result. The strong and voluntary personal bonds informing the *comitatus* gave Germanic society an amazing degree of social cohesiveness contrasting sharply with the anomic social environment of the cosmopolitan Roman Empire in which Christianity had hitherto thriven. The otherworldly promise of Christianity held little to attract the Germanic peoples whose ethic and values were very much rooted in the exigencies of this world. The stark disparity of world-views could have proven an insurmountable barrier to the Christianization of the Germanic peoples. But the Church proved quite adaptable in presenting its message in a form acceptable to the Germans. Russell terms the resulting development, as the title of his study, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity*.²³ A central figure in propounding a adaptive missionary strategy was the very Pope who initiated the conversion of the pagan Anglo-Saxons to Roman Christianity, Pope Gregory the Great.

When the Roman missionaries arrived in Kent in the year 597, they encountered a Germanic society preserving many features which had already passed from the Continent. The Anglo-Saxons were a century and a half removed from their conquest of Roman Britain.

²³James C. Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity: A Sociohistorical Approach to Religious Transformation* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), esp. pp. 3-4, 118-19. For the Anglo-Saxons in particular, Russell's thesis was anticipated by Henry Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd ed. (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), esp. chaps. 9, "Wilfrid," and 13, "Saints and Heroes," and Clinton Albertson, *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1967), esp. his introd.

That conquest and settlement had itself been distinctive when compared with events which had transpired on the Continent. On the Continent, once they had penetrated the frontiers of the Empire, the various Germanic tribes had settled down quickly into "Roman" type kingdoms within the Western territories of the old Empire. In Britain the invaders found only the memories of Rome. The legions had withdrawn from the island province during the crisis years surrounding A.D. 410 when the city of Rome itself suffered pillage by Alaric's Visigoths. The Anglo-Saxons overran the eastern regions of what had been Roman Britain, but instead of "Roman" type kingdoms they established a number of smaller tribal kingdoms, many more than even the "Heptarchy" of the seventh century.²⁴ Furthermore, unlike the Continental Germans who settled down in the old Roman territories, the Anglo-Saxons did not readily convert to Christianity. They went right on living the heroic life of their ancestors.

Far more important than Pope Gregory's reasons for dispatching the missionaries to Anglo-Saxon England are the society which they found and the practical measures of advice which Gregory gave his agents. Early in the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons, Gregory sent a letter to Mellitus, a member of a second coterie of Roman

²⁴The Heptarchy: Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Essex, Kent, Sussex, and Wessex. Earlier kingdoms eventually absorbed by these (a process continuing until the late 9th c., when the Vikings toppled three of the four remaining, leaving only Wessex) included Deira and Bernicia in Northumbria; and Lindsey, Surrey, Middle Anglia, as well as the *Magonaetan* and the *Hwicce*. See Peter Hunter Blair, *An Introduction to Anglo-Saxon England*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 27 ff.

missionaries who arrived in 601.²⁵ He made prudent suggestions regarding the missionaries' treatment of Anglo-Saxon paganism and asked that they be passed on to the leader of the original mission, Augustine, now bishop of Canterbury. Pagan temples were not to be destroyed but were rather to be cleansed and converted into Christian churches. Anglo-Saxon festivals and practices were to be given new, Christian meanings, and presumably transferred where possible to Christian feasts. A familiar example would be that the English name for the Feast of the Resurrection is of pagan origin, the name of the Anglo-Saxon goddess *Eastre*.²⁶ This "accommodation" of paganism in the conversion of England on the highest authority in the Roman Church had profound effects. As the following chapters seek to demonstrate, it led to a syncretic fusion of Germanic and Christian principles. The forms and even the ethos of the *comitatus* endured in Christianized form. A new ethos of Christian heroism found expression both as Christian impulses motivating heroic kings and as heroic impulses informing Christian life and thought.²⁷ In the ninth and tenth centuries, when Anglo-Saxon Christian society faced annihilation at the hands of the pagan Vikings, notions of Christian service and sacrifice crystallized to form a new heroic ideal

²⁵The letter is presented by Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* [hereafter cited as *Bede, EH*] as 1.30 [ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969)].

²⁶*Bede, De temporibus ratione* 15, cited by Rudolf Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, trans. Angela Hall (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993), s.v. "Eostra."

²⁷See below, chaps. 2-4.

ultimately employed by the West Saxon kings in creating a united kingdom of England.²⁸ Particularly in the context of clear juxtaposition between Christian Anglo-Saxon society and the pagan Viking raiders and invaders, the defense of England and even the West Saxon conquest of the Danelaw, the areas settled by Scandinavians, was seen as a holy war.

Toward a Definition of Holy War

Modern scholarship recognizes three basic ethical types of warfare in the Middle Ages: just war, holy war, and crusade.²⁹ Just war was the subject of Augustine of Hippo's thought during the period of the Donatist heresy in the early fifth century;³⁰ the crusade received considerable attention from canon lawyers in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.³¹ In the case of holy war, however, there seems to have been no formal definition proposed by

²⁸See below, chap. 5.

²⁹See, for instance, Frederick H. Russell, *The Just War in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 2. The fact that Russell actually enumerates the types of war as two, "just" and "holy," then within the same paragraph proceeds to discuss in terms of "just war," "holy war," and "crusade," itself illustrates the fluidity of definition.

³⁰See Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 230-39. See also Joan D. Tooke, *The Just War in Aquinas and Grotius* (London: S.P.C.K, 1965), pp. 10-12, as well as p. 271 n. 54 where she identifies Augustine's scattered discussion of the topic in *Contra Faustum*, *Ad Marcellinum*, *Ad Bonifacium*, *De Civitate Dei*, *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum*. Finally, see J. E. Cross, "The Ethic of War in Old English," in *England before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, ed. Peter Clemoes and Kathleen Hughes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 271-2.

³¹See Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A Short History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 105, 152-3, and also the documents collected in trans. by Louise and Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: Idea and Reality, 1095-1274* (London: Edward Arnold, 1981).

medieval writers and thinkers. How, then, is a holy war distinct from a crusade? How does it relate to a just war?

These questions are more difficult than first appears. The three types of warfare are obviously related: a crusade at its most basic might be termed a Christian holy war; to fit in with Christian ethics, a Christian holy war must be a just war. It seems that a definition for holy war must be sought that will span the gulf yawning between simple just war and the specifically Christian phenomenon of crusade. Despite the context of religious dissension in which he formulated it, Augustine of Hippo's theory of just war had no necessary religious connotation - defense constituted a just cause for war even when the issue of disparate religion was not present.³² Therefore not just any war fought by Christians could be termed holy. On the other hand, not every Christian war where religion was an issue had the salvific qualities associated with the crusade, a war called by the pope speaking as the vicar of Christ in which participants could gain remission of sins.³³ For the purposes of this dissertation, I therefore propose the following general working definition: Medieval Christian holy war is a conflict which contemporary or later medieval interpreters considered to be sanctified in some manner, most typically by the cause for which and the enemies against whom the Christian participants fought. The cause could be the establishment or consolidation of the Christian

³²See Cross, "Ethic of War," p. 271, citing Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* 3.10 and *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* 6.10.

³³Riley-Smith, *Crusades: Idea and Reality*, p. 1.

faith either against pagans or, in the case of the early Anglo-Saxons, against schismatic Celtic Christians deviating from Roman orthodox practice. Because medieval society was self-consciously Christian, the defense of that society itself against pagan aggression could be seen as a holy cause, as was the case when Viking raids and invasions escalated from the late ninth century.

The arbitrary nature of this definition is a necessary consequence of the lack of a clear medieval definition of holy war. *Sacrum* or *sanctum bellum* does not appear to have been a common medieval construction at least until the age of the crusades. The closest and earliest equivalent I have encountered appears in Guibert of Nogent's early twelfth-century, ca. 1107, chronicle of the First Crusade.³⁴ Guibert marvels at the novelty: "God instituted in our time holy wars [*praelia sancta*]."³⁵ Guibert refers to what later generations would call the Crusade. *Iustum bellum* enjoyed relatively common usage throughout the early Middle Ages. Like much of his thought, Augustine of Hippo's formulation of a just war theory dominated medieval ideas on the ethics of war, and apparently terminology as well.³⁶ But *iustum bellum* seems to appear in clearly religious contexts. Holy wars must be just wars, and might be so termed by medieval writers.

³⁴Regarding Guibert's date: Riley-Smith, *Crusades: Short History*, p. 89.

³⁵"*instituit nostro tempore praelia sancta Deus*," Guibert of Nogent, *Historia quae dicitur Gesta Dei per Francos* 1.1, ed. RHC Oc. 4:124, my trans.

³⁶For instance, Isidore of Seville (ca. 560-636), *Etymologiarum Libri XX* 18.2-4, cited and trans. Cross, "Ethic of War," p. 272 n. 3.

Two sources from Anglo-Saxon England illustrate the medieval usage of *justum bellum*. The first is in Bede's eighth-century account of the victory of Oswald, king of Northumbria, at Heavenfield in 633, quoted above: "We fight a just war for the salvation of our people," declares Oswald.³⁷ The victory at Heavenfield was merited by faith after Oswald erected a wooden cross and invoked God before it against the Celtic Christian king Cadwallon. Second, in his homily on the Maccabees, Aelfric of Eynsham (ca. 995) wrote of one legitimate kind of war: "*Justum bellum* is just war against the cruel seamen, or against other peoples that wish to destroy (our) land."³⁸ Aelfric adapted into Old English the story of the Maccabees, Old Testament warriors for God, in the context of the Viking assaults on England, a conflict often cast in religious terms.³⁹ The literary context of the above quotation clearly implies parallels between the Christian Anglo-Saxons and the Jewish Maccabees on the one hand, opposed to pagan Vikings corresponding to the Seleucid oppressors on the other. Aelfric elsewhere cited the Old Testament example of Judith to inspire his contemporaries to action against the pagan

³⁷"*Iusta pro salute gentis nostrae bella suscepimus*," Bede, *EH* 3.2, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 214, trans. Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 89.

³⁸"*Iustum bellum is rihtlic gefeoht wið ða reðan flot-menn oppe wið oðre þeoda þe eard willað fordon*," Aelfric, *The Maccabees* lines 708-9, ed. and trans. Walter W. Skeat in *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, EETS o.s. 76, 82, 94, 114 (printed in 2 vols. bound as 1) (London: Trübner, 1900), 2:114-15.

³⁹*E.g.*, in Asser's *Life of King Alfred* [ed. William Henry Stevenson (1904; repr. with additional note by Dorothy Whitelock, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), trans. Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources* (London: Penguin, 1983)].

invaders.⁴⁰ Both these examples assign a measure of religiosity to Anglo-Saxon wars which qualify them as holy wars under my proposed definition.

The context and character of many Anglo-Saxon conflicts permit them to be considered holy wars. This is true particularly of those battles waged by various holy kings; toward the end of the period, in the decade when Aelfric wrote, it is true even of a battle fought by the non-royal Ealdorman Byrhtnoth of Essex. The evidence for holy war in Anglo-Saxon England has not been carefully examined as has the development of the ideology of crusading on the Continent.⁴¹ An ultimate goal of this dissertation is to lay the foundation upon which this historiographical imbalance may be redressed.

⁴⁰"Iudith seo wuduwe, þe oferwann Holofernem þone Siriscan ealdormann, hæfð hire agene boc betwux þisum bocum be hire agenum sige; seo ys eac on Englisc on ure wisan gesett eow mannum to bysne, þæt ge eowerne eard mid wæmnum bewerian wið onwinnendne here." "The widow Iudith, who ouercame Holofernes the Sirian generall, hath her booke also among these, concerning her own victory, and Englished according to my skill, for your example, that ye men may also defend your cuntry by force of armes against the inuasion of a forreine host." Aelfric, *On the Old and New Testament* lines 772-80, ed. S. J. Crawford in *The Old English Version of the Heptateuch, Aelfric's Treatise on the Old and New Testament and His Preface to Genesis*, EETS 160 (London: Oxford University Press, 1922), p. 48, trans. William L'Isle of Wilburgham [1623] printed at the bottom of the pages in the same volume.

⁴¹The issue of crusading origins is a thriving topic in medieval historiography. The most important work, and the starting point for any consideration of the problem, is that of Carl Erdmann, *The Origin of the Idea of Crusade*, trans. Marshall W. Baldwin and Walter Goffart (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), originally published in German in 1935. In recent years, the most important contributions to the debate have been those of Jonathan Riley-Smith and his students: Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading* (London: Athlone, 1986); Marcus Bull, *Knightly Piety and the Lay Response to the First Crusade: The Limousin and Gascony, c. 970-c. 1130* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993). See below, chap. 6.

Sources

Although "abundance" is not a word that can be used to describe the amount of source material for any period of the Middle Ages, the historian studying early England is presented with a relative wealth of material from which to work. There were thriving literary traditions both in Latin, the common language of medieval Christianity, and in Old English. The latter forms one of the earliest bodies of literature in a Western European vernacular.⁴² For convenience, the Anglo-Saxon sources upon which this dissertation is based may be grouped into three sets: hagiography; chronicles and histories; and poetry. A possible fourth set would be the writings of post-Norman Conquest historians, mainly William of Malmesbury, Symeon of Durham, and John (commonly called "Florence") of Worcester. In form, these authors produced mainly chronicles or histories. I use them as sources for the pre-Conquest period because they are widely recognized to have employed genuine Anglo-Saxon traditions, sometimes preserving sources now lost.⁴³ I will discuss specific

⁴²The Old English tradition goes deeper than merely literary works. From the very beginning, within a few years of the conversion of Kent, laws were first collected and written in Old English under Aethelberht, the first Christian Anglo-Saxon king: See *English Historical Documents, c. 500-1042*, trans. and ed. Dorothy Whitelock, English Historical Documents 1 (1955; repr. New York: Oxford University Press, 1968) [hereafter cited as *EHD* 1], doc. 29 (extracts); Felix Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 3 vols. (Halle: S. M. Niemeyer, 1903-1916), vol. 1 [hereafter cited as Liebermann 1], pp. 3-8.

⁴³R. M. Wilson, *The Lost Literature of Medieval England*, Methuen's Old English Library (London: Methuen, 1952), chaps. 1-5; C. E. Wright, *The Cultivation of Saga in Anglo-Saxon England* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1939); James Campbell, "Some Twelfth-Century Views of the Anglo-Saxon Past," in *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London and Ronceverte: The Hambledon Press, 1986), pp. 209-28.

questions regarding the authenticity of these Anglo-Norman writers' sources where it becomes crucial to my argument.

A major source for any investigation of religion and society in the Middle Ages must be the hagiographical works characterized by the saints' *Lives* which were the most widespread genre of medieval literature and are sometimes the only surviving texts from a given age and region. The study of saints' *Lives* as historical sources has undergone something of a renaissance in recent years. Scholars have turned toward them new methods and approaches, forcing them to yield valuable information not so much about the saints themselves as about the attitudes of the societies from which they sprang and in which the *Lives* were written.⁴⁴

Anglo-Saxon England produced two major groups of saints' *Lives* useful in this study. The first originated in the "Northumbrian Renaissance" of the early eighth century celebrating in Latin the heroism of early English Christian holy men. The second originated in the monastic reform of the late tenth century and was characterized mainly by both new Latin *Lives* of the principal agents

⁴⁴Stephen Wilson, introd. to *Saints and their Cults*, ed. idem (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 1. See also Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Peter Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Alexander C. Murray, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages* (1978; repr. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 317-404; Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Paul Fouracre, "Merovingian History and Merovingian Hagiography," *Past and Present* no. 127 (1990), pp. 3-38; Paul E. Szarmach, ed., *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints' Lives and Their Contexts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

of reform and homiletic reworkings into Old English of the earlier *Lives*.⁴⁵

Hagiographical elements, however, appear in other works besides the specific genre of saints' *Lives*. Although histories and chronicles are not in the strictest meaning of the term "hagiographical," they nevertheless contain much material which may be treated similarly to saints' *Lives*. This is true particularly of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, the most important product of the Northumbrian Renaissance, but holds as well for such works as Asser's *Life of King Alfred* and even the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Although recent scholarship cautions against too heavy reliance upon these works alone for our view of the ecclesio-political history of Anglo-Saxon England, they remain useful as an entry into the attitudes their writers held or wished to foster.⁴⁶

Regarding these latter two "Alfredian" sources further complexities arise. In the case of Asser's *Life*, there remain nagging doubts regarding its authenticity.⁴⁷ I accept the scholarly consensus that Asser is genuine. The very name of the "*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*" is misleading. It is actually a group of chronicles written at various times in widely separated regions. The initial

⁴⁵Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c. 550 to c. 1307* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 69.

⁴⁶David Rollason, "Hagiography and Politics in Early Northumbria," in *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints' Lives and Their Contexts*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 95-114; R. H. C. Davis, "Alfred the Great: Propaganda and Truth," *History* 56 (1971), pp. 169-82.

⁴⁷See discussion, p. 116 n. 115, below.

compiling of the base chronicle from which all others derive was, however, undertaken during the reign of Alfred the Great (871-99). Furthermore, although the straightforward annalistic format gives the illusion of contemporary authority, some sections of some chronicles were only written up long after and far removed from the events they record; I will discuss proximity of *Chronicle* to source event where appropriate below.⁴⁸

A particularly vexing problem facing the historian seeking to interpret medieval sources is that of literary *topoi*.⁴⁹ The Middle Ages saw a persistent drive toward conventionalization of hagiography along the lines of a succession of models based ultimately upon the Gospel accounts of Christ Himself.⁵⁰ Conventions or *topoi* influencing most medieval hagiographic literature were established by four early saints' *Lives*: those of Antony by Athanasius, Paul of Thebes by Jerome, and Martin of Tours by Sulpicius Severus from the

⁴⁸I will also often refer to it in the text simply as "the *Chronicle*," while designating particular mss. in my notes. The most important mss. are commonly designated A-F. Whitelock, introd. to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* as printed in *EHD* 1, pp. 109-16, gives an excellent short introduction to the mss. and their varying characteristics and qualities. Further complicating matters are scribal errors in entering information. Some mss. vary as much as 2 or 3 years one way or the other from the "true" year; I will indicate corrections in the citations as appropriate according to *EHD*. Whitelock, *op.cit.*, p. 116, briefly summarizes the problems of chronology, both with regard to errors in entry and the differing styles of beginning the year which prevailed in different ages and regions of Anglo-Saxon England.

⁴⁹Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, Bollingen Series 36, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), esp. chap. 5.

⁵⁰Fouracre, "Merovingian History," pp. 3-33; Susan J. Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 4th ser., 9 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 10.

fourth century; and also, from a somewhat later period, the late sixth century, that of Benedict of Nursia contained in the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great.⁵¹ Often entire chunks of one of these earlier works were lifted wholesale into a newly written saint's *Life*, with only the names being changed.⁵² The extent to which such traditional material was incorporated into later writings is important as an indication of whether the author was following or breaking with established convention. A drastic departure from an established hagiographical *topos* may be interpreted as showing how much the world in which the later author wrote had changed from that of the previous authors, necessitating new views of the nature of the holy and its role in this world.⁵³

Besides the peril posed by *topoi*, the historian must avoid other pitfalls. Due concern must be observed for the biases, both conscious and unconscious, of medieval authors. Bede, for all his greatness as "the Father of English History," stands as an exemplary

⁵¹Bertram Colgrave, introd. to *Felix's Life of St. Guthlac*, ed. and trans. idem (1956; repr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 16-17.

⁵²An example is *Felix's Life of St. Guthlac*, which depends heavily both on Bede's *Life of St. Cuthbert* and Evagrius' Latin translation of Athanasius' *Life of St. Antony*. See Benjamin P. Kurtz, "From St. Antony to St. Guthlac: A Study in Biography," *University of California Publications in Modern Philology* 12 (1926), pp. 103-146.

⁵³Michael E. Jones, "The Historicity of the Alleluja Victory," *Albion* 18 (1986), pp. 363-73, applies such a method in examining the miraculous military victory recounted in Constantius' 5th-c. *Life of St. Germanus*. Against those dismissing the tale as a pious invention, Jones concludes "that the Alleluja victory rests on historical fact," partly because of "the sheer implausibility of such an invention in the context of ascetic thought and hagiographic precedent" (p. 373).

case. His work has so shaped our view of the early centuries of Anglo-Saxon England that the seventh and eighth centuries may quite reasonably be given the title, "The Age of Bede." But his *History* is not so straightforward as its sober, clear narrative implies. Patrick Wormald, in fact, argues that Bede was himself something of an anomaly: "Socially speaking," Wormald observes, "Bede was without a background."⁵⁴

Bede (ca. 673-735) was surrendered at the tender age of seven by his parents to Benedict Biscop, to be raised as an oblate in Benedict Biscop's monasteries at Jarrow and Wearmouth. Those twin abbeys seem, under Benedict Biscop and his successors as abbots, somewhat more distant from the royal court of Northumbria than were most ecclesiastical institutions and figures in early Anglo-Saxon England. Although he derived from the Northumbrian warrior nobility, Benedict Biscop seems consciously to have distanced himself and his foundations from the heroic culture of the court and thus serves as a valuable lesson that there could be and were differing syntheses of secular and religious culture at work in Anglo-Saxon England than that argued in this dissertation, the development of a syncretic Christianized heroic ethos. Nevertheless, even in the works of Bede, as will be seen in various places below, intimations of just such an evolution surface, making it clear that Bede was aware of such

⁵⁴Patrick Wormald, "Bede, 'Beowulf' and the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy," in *Bede and Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Robert T. Farrell, *British Archaeological Reports* 46 (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1978), p. 62; this article underpins much of the next few sentences.

developments and indeed strove to conceal them. Particularly striking are instances where later writers, often basing their work on Bede, chose to emphasize those very things Bede covered up. How Aelfric of Eynsham at the end of the tenth century reworked Bede's narrative concerning King Oswald of Northumbria reveals a shifting sensibility regarding the role of warfare in the life of a saintly king. Aelfric's differing treatment of another king, Edmund of East Anglia, implies that the transformation in such ideas was still unsettled.⁵⁵

Brief mention should be made of similar biases complicating interpretation of the major sources from the late ninth-century "Age of Alfred." R. H. C. Davis has argued compellingly that both the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Asser's *Life of King Alfred* sound something of a propagandistic note. He contends that they were written with the conscious end of furthering West Saxon dynastic ambitions and Christian efforts against the pagan Vikings - goals which went hand in hand.⁵⁶ This idea will be developed more fully in my discussion of Old English poetry, which could be seen as a product of the same impulse. In the form in which we have them, the vast majority of Old English poems were at least collected and copied, and were doubtless reworked, during the generations after Alfred the Great.⁵⁷

⁵⁵See chaps. 3 and 4 below. For Bede's and Aelfric's Oswald, see Colin Chase, "Saints' Lives, Royal Lives, and the Date of Beowulf," in *The Dating of Beowulf*, ed. idem (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), pp. 161-71.

⁵⁶Davis, "Alfred the Great."

⁵⁷See discussion below, chap. 5.

Old English prose and poetry provide a window on, and perhaps even a mirror reflective of, the piety of the Anglo-Saxon lay aristocracy as well as the ruminations of the educated elite. It must be remembered that especially the higher clergy were drawn from the ranks of the lay aristocracy and would have shared with them a common system of values.⁵⁸ N. F. Blake observes that Old English "poetry complements the prose in many ways: the latter being suitable for the clergy . . . and the former for a wider audience."⁵⁹ Old English poetry was most clearly intended for an audience wider than the clergy, and it is with this form of lay-oriented vernacular literature that we are most blessed by the Anglo-Saxons in comparison with other western European societies from whom survive little in the way of poetic materials from before the flowering of the High Middle Ages.⁶⁰

The old Germanic warrior ethos which long retained vitality shines nowhere more brilliantly than in the poetry of the Anglo-Saxons. How this heroic ideal pervades even explicitly religious Old English poems is of great interest in elucidating a syncretic

⁵⁸For 7th- and 8th-c. England, see esp. Wormald, "Bede, 'Beowulf'," pp. 49-58; for the general truth of this statement for 10th to 12th-c. Europe, see also Constance Brittain Bouchard, *Sword, Miter, and Cloister: Nobility and the Church in Burgundy, 980-1198* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987), esp. pp. 23, 45-86.

⁵⁹N. F. Blake, "The Dating of Old English Poetry," in *An English Miscellany Presented to W. S. Mackie*, ed. B. S. Lee (Cape Town and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 19.

⁶⁰The value of the Anglo-Saxon poetic materials to the historian was realized long ago and was assessed by Dorothy Whitelock, "Anglo-Saxon Poetry and the Historian," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th ser. 31 (1949), pp. 75-94.

martialization of the Christian ethos. A new order of Christian heroism appears in the Old English poetic record long before the launching of the First Crusade at the end of the eleventh century. The example of Oswald of Northumbria shows early Anglo-Saxon ideas of religious warfare. An examination and analysis of this varied Anglo-Saxon source material reveals the intriguing manner in which Anglo-Saxon society adapted their martial propensities to Christianity and arrived at a conception of Christian holy war.

CHAPTER 2

MILITES CHRISTI, SPIRITUAL WARFARE, AND ECCLESIASTICAL WARBANDS

By the time of Christianity's advent in Anglo-Saxon England at the turn of the seventh century, the mainstream of Western Christian thought had accepted the terms associated with earthly warfare as expressing an otherworldly reality. The early idea of Christian warfare emphasizing a spiritual struggle of monk or hermit against sin and temptation proved immensely attractive to the newly evangelized Anglo-Saxon warrior nobility. The careers of several early English hermits and monks provide compelling evidence as to how enthusiastically the heroic ethos of the Germanic *comitatus* could be applied to the new battlefield of the spirit.

The Early Christian Tradition of Ascetic Warfare

The conception of the Christian as spiritual warrior appears in the earliest of Christian writings, the letters of St. Paul. In his Epistle to the Ephesians, Paul admonishes the Christian Faithful:

Put you on the armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood; but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places. Therefore take unto you the armour of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and to stand in all things perfect. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on

the breastplate of justice, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace: In all things taking the shield of faith, wherewith you may be able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the most wicked one. And take unto you the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit (which is the word of God).¹

Such is the oldest description of the Christian warrior, the *miles Christi* - Paul's own term employed elsewhere.² The Apostle's usage is one clearly metaphorical. The enemies as well as the armor and weapons are spiritual rather than "flesh and blood" - or leather and iron. Paul drew on an older tradition, from Hebrew scripture regarding the armor which God Himself wears and supplies:

And justice shall be the girdle of his loins: and faith the girdle of his reins. . . . He put on justice as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head: he put on the garments of vengeance, and was clad with zeal as with a cloak.³

Yahweh, God of the Hebrews, was after all a warrior God.⁴ But although Yahweh sent His people off to do battle with enemies in this

¹Eph. 6.11-17 Douay-Rheims. Vulgate text: "*Induite vos arma Dei ut possitis stare adversus insidias diaboli. Quia non est nobis conluctatio adversus carnem et sanguinem; sed adversus principes et potestates, adversus mundi rectores tenebrarum harum, contra spiritualia nequitiae in caelestibus. Propterea accipite armaturam Dei, ut possitis resistere in die malo, et omnibus perfectis stare. State ergo, succincti lumbos vestros in veritate, et induti lorica iustitiae, Et calciati pedes in praeparatione evangelii pacis: In omnibus sumentes scutum fidei, in quo possitis omnia tela nequissimi ignea extinguere. Et galeam salutis adsumite, et gladium Spiritus (quod est verbum Dei).*" See also 1 Thess. 5.8; 1 Tim. 1.18, 6.12; 2 Tim 2.3-4.

²2 Tim. 2.3: "*Collabora sicut bonus miles Christi Jesu,*" "Labour as a good soldier of Christ Jesus."

³Is. 11.5, 59.17 DR. Vulgate: "*Et erit iustitia cingulum lumborum eius: et fides cinctorium renis eius. . . . Indutus est iustitia et lorica et galea salutis in capite eius: indutus est vestimentis ultionis, et opertus est quasi pallio zeli.*"

⁴Joan D. Tooke, *The Just War in Aquinas and Grotius* (London: S.P.C.K., 1965), pp. 8-10.

world,⁵ the Christian's battle was rather against denizens of the other, spiritual, world, envisioned both as actual demonic beings and as more abstract threats such as sin and temptation. In the long term, as argued by Adolf Harnack, the acceptance of such martial imagery by Christianity eased the ultimate acceptance by the Church that some earthly wars could accord with God's Will and therefore be considered holy.⁶

The question of the typical Christian's participation in earthly warfare in the earliest centuries is one fraught with controversy, and the scholarship frequently bears a sectarian stamp.⁷ In all likelihood Christians under the pagan Empire did serve as regulars in the Roman army, although Christ's injunctions against violence and killing would have exerted some social pressure toward pacifism.⁸ It was not until the Empire itself became officially Christian over the course of the fourth century that ideas had to

⁵See in particular Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua and Judges, as well as the books of Maccabees. Many of the Psalms are in effect war songs; some are so dissonant with modern pacifistic notions of the Almighty that after the Second Vatican Council they were excised from the Divine Office: Pope Paul VI, *Apostolic Constitution Promulgation: The Divine Office Revised by Decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council* (as printed in *The Liturgy of the Hours*, 4 vols. [New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1975], vol. 1, *Advent and Christmas*), p. 15, "In this new arrangement of the psalms some few of the psalms and verses which are somewhat harsh in tone have been omitted" Omitted entirely are Psalms 58 (Douay 57), 83 (82), and 109 (108).

⁶Adolf Harnack, *Militia Christi: The Christian Religion and the Military in the First Three Centuries*, trans. and introd. David McInnes Gracie (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), p. 63.

⁷Tooke, *Just War*, p. 11 n. 56 and refs. therein.

⁸So concluded John Helgeland in a balanced discussion of the evidence and scholarship, "Christians and the Roman Army A.D. 173-337," *Church History* 43 (1974), pp. 149-63, 200.

change - even a Christian Empire must defend itself, which necessitated a willingness and ability to wage wars as ultimately justified by Augustine of Hippo early in the fifth century.

St. Paul's orthodox use of military imagery to describe the Christian life in general, however, was taken up with great enthusiasm as an ascetic tradition developed within Christianity. Christ Himself both exercised and counselled ascetic practices,⁹ providing an example followed by individuals such as Origen (ca. 185-ca. 254). An overt movement of Christian asceticism developed during the third and early fourth centuries, the age of the great persecutions, but it was only with the sudden end of state-sponsored persecution in 313 with the Edict of Milan that Christian asceticism exploded in popularity. One reason was that whereas martyrdom had previously assured the victim of salvation, a ticket straight to heaven as it were, in the increasingly (at least nominally) Christian world of the fourth-century Empire, that avenue of salvation was cut off. A new form of martyrdom was necessary, and it was found in the form of asceticism, self-denial for the sake of God.¹⁰ "White" martyrdom replaced the "red," bloody, martyrdom of the persecutions. The Age of the Martyrs has been called the Heroic Age of the

⁹Christ fasted for forty days and forty nights (Matt. 4.2) and counselled fasting, at least in certain circumstances (6.16).

¹⁰Thomas F. X. Noble and Thomas Head, introd. to *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints' Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. eidem (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1995), pp. xxiii-iv; Clinton Albertson, *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1967), p. 23.

Church.¹¹ With asceticism, the Christian Heroic Age transformed rather than ended.

The Christian ascetic movement began with a number of isolated individuals fleeing the comforts and temptations of civilization for the harsh solace of the eastern deserts, in Egypt and Syria. The most famous and reputedly the first¹² of these early hermits was St. Antony of Egypt (251-356), significant both because his example led others to emulate him in resisting the wiles of the devil and also because his example was widely disseminated through his biography written in Greek by St. Athanasius of Alexandria. The early (fourth century) translation of this work into Latin by Evagrius of Antioch served as an archetype of a new genre of literature which helps characterize the Middle Ages, that of *hagiography*, the *Lives* of the saints. In the *Life of St. Antony* the nature of the enemy can be seen: they are demons and the prince of demons, "the Devil, the hater and envier of good,"¹³ "the dragon,"¹⁴ "the Black One."¹⁵

¹¹Albertson, *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, p. 23, citing J. Palanque, *The Church and the Dark Ages* (London, 1960), p. 7.

¹²A tradition acknowledged and then, as might be expected, debunked by the irascible St. Jerome in his own *Life of St. Paul [of Thebes], the First Hermit* chap. 1, trans. Mary Magdalene Müller and Roy J. Deferrari, in *Early Christian Biographies*, ed. Roy J. Deferrari, Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1952), p. 225; see also editor's introd., *ibid.*, p. 221.

¹³Athanasius, *The Life of Saint Antony* chap. 5, trans. Robert T. Meyer, *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation* 10 (New York: Newman Press, 1950), p. 22.

¹⁴Athanasius, *Life of Antony* chap. 6, trans. Meyer, p. 23.

¹⁵Athanasius, *Life of Antony* chap. 6, trans. Meyer, p. 24.

They attack the hermit's resolve and strength to endure temptation;¹⁶ they send temptations of the flesh;¹⁷ they seek to intimidate him by appearing in horrific forms, and they physically attack and wound him.¹⁸ Cast as battles of the spirit, Antony's confrontations with demons appear both in Athanasius' narrative¹⁹ and in the long sermon the author attributes to the hermit,²⁰ in which Antony tells his followers: "Great is the number of [demons] in the air around us, and they are not far from us."²¹ Elsewhere in Athanasius' writings concerning demons he draws on Ephesians 2.2 and 6.11-16, the passage on the Christian's spiritual weaponry cited above.²² The weapon most frequently wielded by Antony is the Sign of the Cross which drives the demons away.²³

Antony was a well-off young Egyptian when he took up the spiritual warfare of asceticism, but other Christian ascetic warriors were often indeed drawn from the ranks of secular warriors. They

¹⁶Athanasius, *Life of Antony*, chap. 5; cf. chap. 13.

¹⁷Athanasius, *Life of Antony* chaps. 5-7, 23.

¹⁸Athanasius, *Life of Antony* chaps. 8-9, 24, 51-53.

¹⁹Athanasius, *Life of Antony* chaps. 5-13, 51-53, 65.

²⁰Athanasius, *Life of Antony* chaps. 15-43.

²¹Athanasius, *Life of Antony* chap. 21, trans. Meyer, p. 38.

²²Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word* chaps. 25, 47, 48, cited by Benjamin P. Kurtz, "From St. Antony to St. Guthlac: A Study in Biography," *University of California Publications in Modern Philology* 12 (1926), p. 108 n. 9. Eph. 2.2: "*principem potestatis aeris, spiritus, qui nunc operatur in filios diffidentiae*," "the prince of the power of this air, of the spirit that now worketh on the children of unbelief."

²³Athanasius, *Life of Antony* chaps. 13, 35, 53.

gave up the warfare of this world to fight enemies from the next. Among the notable examples stands Pachomius, the writer of the first rule for monks, a central figure in the shift from the anchoritic asceticism of isolated hermits to the cenobitic asceticism of communal monasticism.²⁴ Pachomius, who died ca. 346, had previously served in the Roman army whence he was discharged in 313. Becoming Christian shortly thereafter, he first became a hermit, following the example of Antony, but after a few years (by 320) he realized that he could not match the resolve and steadfastness of Antony. He therefore gathered around himself others of like mind and organized his group into a monastic community, in which each member aided and encouraged his brothers in maintaining the ascetic ideal. Pachomius drew heavily from his military background in organizing this first community monastery; there was a clear chain of command, with himself as "general" demanding absolute obedience from his "troops." The discipline and order of the Roman army had much earlier provided an example urged on the Christians of Corinth by Clement of Rome.²⁵ Pachomius' Rule was influential in both East and West; the Rules of both St. Basil in the East and St. Benedict of Nursia in the West

²⁴Pachomius and the communities he formed are studied by Philip Rousseau, *Pachomius: The Making of a Community in Fourth-Century Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

²⁵Clement, Bishop of Rome (ca. A.D. 95), *The Genuine Epistle to the Corinthians* 37.1-2: "Let us therefore enlist ourselves, brethren, with all earnestness in His faultless ordinance. Let us mark the soldiers that are enlisted under our rulers, how exactly, how readily, how submissively, they execute the orders given them." Ed. and trans. J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer in *The Apostolic Fathers* (1891; repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), ed. p. 25, trans. p. 73.

drew from it.²⁶ Contingents of spiritual warriors augmented the efforts of individual ascetics.

More directly influential in the West was one of the most popular saints of the Middle Ages, Martin of Tours (ca. 336-397).²⁷ Martin provides a more stark example of the transferral of the battlefield from this world to the next, most specifically the exclusive propriety of such transferral. Like Pachomius, Martin served in the Roman army. In fact, he came from a military family. His pagan father was a Roman officer. Martin long felt the draw of Christianity, even becoming a catechumen in his youth. Eventually he became convinced that his own military life was incompatible with Christianity. Martin's internal conflict came to a head when, as recounted in the *Life* by his friend and disciple Sulpicius Severus,

the barbarians were making incursions into Gaul and the Caesar Julian concentrated his army at Worms. There he began to distribute a bonus to the soldiers. They were called up one by one in the usual way until Martin's turn came. But he thought it would be a suitable time for applying for his discharge, for he did not think that it would be honest for him to take the bonus if he was not going to fight. So he said to the Caesar: "I have been your soldier up to now. Let me now be God's. Let someone who is going to fight have your bonus. I am Christ's soldier; I am not allowed to fight."²⁸

²⁶David Hugh Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 2nd ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) [hereafter cited as ODS] s.v. "Pachomius."

²⁷Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, Pelican History of the Church 1 (London: Penguin, 1967), p. 182. On Martin in general, see Clare Stancliffe, *St. Martin and His Hagiographer: History and Miracle in Sulpicius Severus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

²⁸*irruentibus intra Gallias barbaris, Julianus Caesar coacto in unum exercitu apud Vangionum civitatem, donativum coepit erogare militibus: et, ut est consuetudineis, singuli citabantur, donec ad Martinum ventum est. Tum vero opportunum tempus existimans, quo*
(continued...)

In response to the resulting charge of cowardice from Julian, "the Apostate," Martin offered to precede the troops on the morrow armed only with his faith, but the barbarians sued for peace. Martin left the army, to make his way to western Gaul where he became the pioneer spreading monasticism into Gaul, and later became bishop of Tours. As bishop, Martin directly combatted the old gods of paganism in a number of dramatic confrontations.²⁹ He cast down their shrines and cut down their holy trees.³⁰ His weapons and armor included prayer³¹ as well as the Sign of the Cross;³² God defended him as well through angels who "stood before him, looking like heavenly warriors, with spears and shields."³³

Martin placed fighting in this world in stark opposition to soldiering for Christ. His attitude stands in marked contrast to the idea of fighting battles in this world on behalf of Christ. The very language of the opposition nevertheless frames the Christian

²⁸(...continued)

peteret missionem (neque enim integrum sibi fore arbitrabatur si donativum non militaturus acciperet): Hactenus, inquit ad Caesarem, militavi tibi: patere ut nunc militem Deo: donativum tuum pugnaturus accipiat: Christi ego miles sum; pugnare mihi non licet." Sulpicius Severus, *De Vita Beati Martini* chap. 4, ed. PL 20:162, trans. F. R. Hoare in *The Western Fathers* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1954), pp. 15-16.

²⁹Sulpicius, *Vita Martini*, esp. chaps. 11-15.

³⁰Sulpicius, *Vita Martini* chap. 13.

³¹Sulpicius, *Vita Martini* chap. 16: "*illius familiaria . . . arma,*" ed. PL 20:169, trans. Hoare, p. 30, as "his usual weapons."

³²Sulpicius, *Vita Martini* chaps. 4, 12, 37, and elsewhere.

³³Sulpicius, *Vita Martini* chap. 14, ed. PL 20:168, trans. Hoare p. 28: "*Tum subito ei duo angeli hastati atque scutati instar militiae coelestis se obtulerunt*"

vocation, specifically Christian asceticism, as a form of military service. It is perhaps ironic, but consonant with the fact that Martin's fame in the early Middle Ages lay in his status as a soldier-saint and patron of martial values,³⁴ that the premier historian of the Merovingian Franks, an episcopal successor of Martin, Gregory of Tours, portrayed St. Martin as a chastising avenger of wrongs visited on his church.³⁵ Writing in the very decade (the 590s) when Pope Gregory the Great initiated the Roman evangelization of England, Gregory of Tours provides a striking example of a Germanic heroic value intruding into the character of Christian hagiography. The 200 years between the time of Martin and Sulpicius, the late fourth century, and the late sixth century of Gregory of Tours was marked by drastic changes in Gaul. By Gregory of Tours' time, the once-Roman province had been racked for most of a century by incessantly brutal, fratricidal war among the Merovingian descendants of Clovis over that king's legacy, the kingdom of the Franks. As described in detail by Gregory of Tours, Francia writhed in the throes of an endless blood feud. Although Gregory was proud of his Gallo-Roman pedigree,³⁶ the violent times shaped his whole

³⁴Chadwick, *Early Church*, p. 182.

³⁵Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum* 5.1, 5.4, 6.10, 7.42, 8.16 [ed. Henri Ormont and Gaston Collon as *Gregoire de Tours: Histoire des Francs*, new ed. René Poupardin (Paris: Librairie Alphonse Picard et Fils, 1913)].

³⁶See Lewis Thorpe, introd. to Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks* (London: Penguin, 1974), pp. 7-9 and refs. therein.

outlook. One may see in the vindictiveness of Gregory's St. Martin a Christian manifestation of the ideal of vengeance.³⁷

Christian asceticism in both individual and communal forms, but both drawing upon and applying military imagery, thus arose in the East but spread early to the West. In the mid sixth century, Benedict of Nursia deployed military metaphors for the spiritual life throughout his *Rule* for monks which would eventually prevail in Western monasticism. He specifically used *militia* and *militare* coupled with other martial terms (*pugnare*, *arma*) to represent the monastic life as spiritual service to Christ as Lord and King.³⁸ Much later, as Barbara Rosenwein has noted, the martial cast of Benedictine monasticism blossomed at Cluny in the tenth century, wherein the monks were envisioned as active participants in God's

³⁷Another consideration is that, while Sulpicius Severus was a contemporary of Martin, Gregory of Tours lived two centuries later, long after Martin had passed out of living memory. He was thus not as constrained by the character of the "real" Martin. Paul Fouracre, "Merovingian History and Merovingian Hagiography," *Past and Present*, no. 127 (May 1990), pp. 11-13, addresses the problem of temporal as well as spatial proximity of author to subject as it relates to conformity to *topoi* in medieval hagiography.

³⁸From the index to *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English with Notes*, ed. Timothy Fry, et al. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1981), p. 581, "Service (*servire*) as spiritual combat: (*militare*)"
 under Christ as King (*rex*), Prologue 3, 40;
 . . . *servitus*, 2.20; 61.10;
 . . . *indutiae*, Prologue 36;
 under Rule and abbot, 1.2; 58.10;
 . . . *pugnare*, 1.5;
 . . . against the devil (*diabolus*), 1.4;
 . . . against vices (*vitium*), 1.5;
 with weapons of obedience (*arma*), Prologue 3;
 within fraternal army (*acies*), 1.5;
 . . . (*militia*), 2.20.

transcendent war against the Devil.³⁹ Their weapons were the elaborate liturgy of Cluny and intercessory prayer by those living the holiest of Christian lives. In the same period the monastic reformers in England produced a liturgy outlined in the *Regularis Concordia* which is as complex as that of Cluny.⁴⁰ Although one searches the *Regularis Concordia* in vain for overt martial imagery beyond that of Benedict's *Rule*, the common elements shared by England and the Continent in the general climate of tenth-century monastic reform makes one suspect that English monks shared in that mystical warfare as well.⁴¹

The Early Anglo-Saxon Tradition of Ascetic Warfare

The explosive popularity in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages of literary works describing the spiritual battles of Antony, Martin, and their imitators shows clearly that they were considered heroes of the early Church. The idea that the Christian vocation, with special reference to the life of asceticism practiced both in

³⁹Barbara Rosenwein, "Feudal War and Monastic Peace: Cluniac Liturgy as Ritual Aggression," *Viator* 2 (1971), pp. 129-57.

⁴⁰See *Regularis Concordia*, ed. and trans. Thomas Symons (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953). Of particular interest are Symons' charts of the English monastic *Horaria*, pp. xliii-xliv, which may be compared with those for Cluny in Rosenwein, "Feudal War and Monastic Peace," pp. 134-6.

⁴¹The intricacies of relationship between the two Continental strains of monastic reform in the tenth century, Cluny and Gorze, and between those two and England, have been the subject of considerable debate and are not something I wish to deal with in this dissertation. On England and the Continent, see esp. D. A. Bullough, "The Continental Background of the Reform," in *Tenth-Century Studies: Essays in Commemoration of the Millennium of the Council of Winchester and Regularis Concordia*, ed. David Parsons (London and Chichester: Phillimore, 1975), pp. 20-36; Patrick Wormald, "Aethelwold and his Continental Counterparts: Contact, Comparison, Contrast," in *Bishop Aethelwold: His Career and Influence*, ed. Barbara Yorke (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 1988), pp. 13-42.

the hermitage and the monastery, was a form of warfare against the forces of darkness had therefore a venerable tradition. Clearly it formed part of the religious mainstream by the time the pagan Anglo-Saxons were Christianized with the coming of the seventh century. Upon Christianization, many from the Anglo-Saxon warrior nobility became monks or hermits and enthusiastically applied the Germanic heroic ethos to spiritual warfare. A number of early English churches were dedicated to St. Martin,⁴² and the *Lives* of Martin and Antony influenced the earliest examples of Anglo-Saxon hagiography.⁴³

Christianity came to Anglo-Saxon England around the turn of the seventh century. The process of converting the pagan Anglo-Saxons to the new faith over the next century or so thus coincided with the period when Northumbria forged and maintained both military and cultural hegemony within Britain. The late seventh and early eighth centuries constitute what Clinton Albertson has termed a "Northumbrian Heroic Age" forming something of an extension to the great age of the *Völkerwanderungszeit* whose heroes resound in Continental and English Germanic legendry.⁴⁴ Northumbrian ascendancy among the kingdoms of Britain came through the martial exploits of such warrior kings as Aethelfrith (r. 592-617), Edwin (r. 617-33), Oswald (r. 634-42), and Oswiu (r. 642-70), but there was a

⁴²David Rollason, *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 69.

⁴³Rollason, *Saints and Relics*, pp. 75-7.

⁴⁴Albertson, *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, pp. 1-3.

significant religious dimension to this Northumbrian Heroic Age as well. Its heroes were primarily celebrated in the new Christian literary form of hagiography. The heroes indeed included some of those warrior kings just mentioned - most importantly Edwin and Oswald as Christian saints - but also included other figures whose battles were fought in hermitage and cloister. The remainder of this chapter will examine those figures from the Anglo-Saxon warrior aristocracy who chose to channel their martial impulses into the spiritual arena presented by the new faith. The role of warfare in the sanctity of Anglo-Saxon kings will form the subject of chapter three of this dissertation.

Some of the most well-known early Anglo-Saxon saints were members of the warrior aristocracy who became monks.⁴⁵ Some were themselves warriors who entered monastery or hermitage, including Cuthbert of Lindisfarne (ca. 629-687) and Benedict Biscop (ca. 628-89), both of whom served in King Oswiu's *comitatus*; Benedict Biscop's successor at his dual monastic foundation of Wearmouth-Jarrow, Eastorwine (ca. 650-86), fought in the retinue of King Ecgfrith (r. 670-85). Others who came from noble families were Wilfrid of Ripon (633-709/710) and Ceolfrith of Wearmouth-Jarrow (642-716), whose father had fought in Oswiu's *comitatus*. Perhaps with these latter noble progeny should be included the individual whose efforts

⁴⁵On the fundamentally aristocratic nature of early Anglo-Saxon society, as opposed to the Victorian ideal of a sort of "peasant commonwealth," see Richard P. Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), introd. and chap. 1, "Lordship, Land Tenure, and the Early Anglo-Saxon Fyrd," esp. pp. 36-7.

contributed so much to the others' renown, the child oblate Bede himself (ca. 673-735).⁴⁶ All of the above hailed from Northumbria. That Northumbria provides so many examples probably results from Bede's own provenance as a monk in Benedict Biscop's foundation at Jarrow.

The same period of consolidation of Anglo-Saxon Christianity saw similar figures arising in the rest of England. Most notable is Guthlac of Crowland, scion of the blood royal of the kingdom of Mercia, who as a youth gathered a warband and fought as a freebooter, probably against the Welsh, in imitation of the "the valiant deeds of heroes of old."⁴⁷ But further contemplation of the fates of those same heroes inspired a dramatic overnight conversion first to the monastic life, and thence to an isolated hermitage in the fens of East Anglia.⁴⁸ There are records of many lesser-known figures as

⁴⁶Cuthbert: Anon. *Life of St. Cuthbert* 1.7, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave in *Two Lives of St. Cuthbert* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), pp. 72-3; see Colgrave's note, *ibid.*, p. 344 and Albertson, *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, p. 40 n. 14. Benedict Biscop: Bede, *Historia Abbatum* chap. 1 [ed. Charles Plummer in *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), vol. 1]. Eastorwine: Bede, *Historia Abbatum*, chap. 8. Wilfrid: Eddius Stephanus, *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid* chap. 2 [ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave (1927; repr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985)]. Ceolfrith: Anon. *Life of Ceolfrith* chaps. 2 and 34 [ed. Charles Plummer (as *Historia Abbatum auctore Anonymo* in *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica*, vol. 1); see also Albertson, *op cit.*, pp. 19-20 n. 49. Bede: As Patrick Wormald observes in "Bede, 'Beowulf' and the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy," in *Bede and Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Robert T. Farrell, *British Archaeological Reports* 46 (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1978), we just do not know; my feeling is that he came from the "minor" nobility.

⁴⁷"*valida pristinorum heroum facta*," Felix, *The Life of St. Guthlac* chap. 16, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave (1956; repr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 80-81.

⁴⁸Felix, *Life of Guthlac* chaps. 16-27, esp. chaps. 16-18; see Colgrave's introd., pp. 3-4.

well, such as an incidental reference to Ceolfrith's brother Cynefrith and his kinsman Tunberht at Gilling;⁴⁹ most doubtless remain anonymous to history having made it into no record. To one contemporary, the sons of nobles given to the service of God were equated with those joining the king's secular warriors.⁵⁰

In the same period, scores of noble and royal Anglo-Saxon women became nuns both in England and, earlier, on the continent.⁵¹ The heroic ethos does not seem to have been channelled into the female cloister in at least the same sense as when male warriors forsook the world for spiritual battle. Nor did major hagiographical works appear celebrating women religious.⁵² Nevertheless, examination of Anglo-Saxon nun-saints in light of women's role in the *comitatus* might be a fruitful undertaking.⁵³ One interesting comparison might

⁴⁹Anon. *Life of Ceolfrith* chap. 2.

⁵⁰Eddius, *Life of Wilfrid* chap. 21.

⁵¹John Godfrey, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), pp. 159-62. See Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* [hereafter cited as Bede, *EH*] 3.8 [ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969)].

⁵²Several do appear in Bede's *EH*, particularly St. Hild (657-80) in 4.22-3; there is a *Life of St. Lioba (Leofgyth)* (d. 782) (written by Rudolph of Fulda: *MGH SS* 15/1), a kinswoman of St. Boniface who eventually became an abbess in Germany.

⁵³On women in the *comitatus*: Michael Enright, "Lady with a Mead Cup," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 22 (1988), pp. 120-203.; Leslie Stratyner, "Forged Ties: The Comitatus and Anglo-Saxon Poetry," (Ph.D. Diss. [English], Louisiana State University, 1991), chap. 2, "'Cynna Gemyndig': Women and the Comitatus," esp. pp. 109-14, "Woman as Thane, Kinship as Comitatus." Susan J. Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study of West Saxon And East Anglian Cults*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 4th ser., 9 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), is interesting on women saints, esp. on the importance of royal nuns' maintenance of ties with kinsmen.

be made with the tenth-century Ottonians' "sacrifice" of female members of the *stirps regia* (royal line) to the cloister to gain God's favor.⁵⁴ King Oswiu promised his infant daughter to God in perpetual virginity for his victory at *Winwaed* in 655.⁵⁵ Some parallel might be drawn with the pre-Christian tradition of sacrificial kingship;⁵⁶ the subject deserves further study. There are also hints that perhaps the cloister may have provided women with a battlefield upon which they could indeed fight. Anglo-Saxon nuns appear to have practiced the same type of asceticism as their male counterparts; indeed, by and large they did so in the same setting. A prominent feature of the Anglo-Saxon religious landscape was the institution of the double monastery - two closely adjacent cloisters, one for men and one for women, physically separated but spiritually united under a single leader, invariably an abbess. There were few independent nunneries in England before the Norman Conquest.⁵⁷ Female spiritual battle, following the example of the third-century martyr St. Perpetua who had dreamt herself a male warrior against the

⁵⁴K. J. Leyser, *Rule and Conflict in an Early Medieval Society: Ottonian Saxony* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1979), p. 79.

⁵⁵Bede, *EH* 3.24. In this dissertation, I employ the convention of indicating uncertain or disputed locations by means of italics. The locations indicated on the appended maps are no more than informed guesses. *Winwaed* was probably near Leeds (on the authority of Bede, *ibid.*, "*in regione Loidis*", ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 292; see John Marsden, *Northanhymbre Saga: The History of the Anglo-Saxon Kings of Northumbria* [London: Kyle Cathie, 1992], p. 144).

⁵⁶William A. Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England: The Transition from Paganism to Christianity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970), pp. 14-15.

⁵⁷Godfrey, *Church in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 157-9.

devil and who was commemorated in Old English Church calendars,⁵⁸ may explain why women such as St. Juliana and the Old Testament matron Judith of Bethulia figure so prominently in Old English verse hagiography.⁵⁹

Three of the male figures named above, Cuthbert, Wilfrid, and Guthlac, were the subjects of hagiographical biography early on, in the first half of the eighth century. To these three might be added another eighth-century Englishman, Boniface of Crediton (ca. 675-754), who as missionary to the still-pagan continental Germans and as ecclesiastical statesman in early Carolingian Francia had what Christopher Dawson assessed as "a deeper influence on the history of Europe than any Englishman who has ever lived."⁶⁰ Boniface also received hagiographical treatment from a fellow English missionary, his disciple Willibald. All four - Cuthbert, Wilfrid, Guthlac, and Boniface - are cast in a heroic mode, as spiritual warriors. Boniface further exemplifies another Christian manifestation of the Germanic warrior ethos, that of heroic exile. Chronological examination of the four saints in the order listed above reveals an interesting pattern which may be compared with a similar pattern which will become apparent when we examine holy warrior kings.

⁵⁸See *An Old English Martyrology*, 7 March, ed. and trans. George Herzfeld, EETS o.s. 116 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., Ltd., 1900), pp. 34-7. This part of the Martyrology is ed. from ms. Cotton Julius A.x which Niel R. Ker dates ca. 1000 ("s. x/xi"), *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), p. xvii.

⁵⁹See also in chap. 5 below.

⁶⁰Christopher Dawson, *The Making of Europe* (1932; repr. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1994), p. 185.

Besides the obvious fact that Boniface represents an expansion of Anglo-Saxon Christianity beyond the shores of Britain, it is striking that by the mid-eighth century Anglo-Saxon heroic asceticism was being played out on the Continent rather than in England itself.

St. Cuthbert

Cuthbert of Lindisfarne (d. 687) received hagiographical treatment in three works. Earliest was an anonymously written prose biography originating in Cuthbert's monastery at Lindisfarne between 699 and 705.⁶¹ It vies with the earliest *Life* of Gregory the Great by an anonymous monk of Whitby Abbey for the distinction of being the earliest extant piece of literature produced in Anglo-Saxon England.⁶² Bede then followed with two *Lives* of Cuthbert written within a generation of the anonymous *Life* and drawing on it, as Bede admits in the preface to his *Ecclesiastical History* - "first in heroic verse [*heroico metro*] and then in prose."⁶³ Notice Bede's surprising use of the term *heroico*. It is certain that Bede had

⁶¹Bertram Colgrave, introd. to *Two Lives of St. Cuthbert*, ed. and trans. idem (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), pp. 11-13.

⁶²Bertram Colgrave, introd. to *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great by an Anonymous Monk of Whitby*, ed. and trans. idem (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1968), p. 49.

⁶³"et prius *heroico metro* et postmodum *plano sermone*," Bede, *EH* 5.24, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 570-571. See also Bede's prologue to his *Prose Life of St. Cuthbert*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave in *Two Lives of St. Cuthbert* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), pp. 146-7: "*heroicis . . . versibus*," "in heroic verse." Bede's *Verse Life of St. Cuthbert* is ed. W. Jaeger as *Bedas Metrische Vita Sancti Cuthberti in Palaestra* 198 (1935), pp. 56-133 (980 lines). Michael Lapidge discusses "Bede's Metrical *Vita S. Cuthberti*" in Gerald Bonner, et al., *St. Cuthbert: His Cult and His Community to AD 1200* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1989), pp. 77-93.

little sympathy with the Germanic heroic ethos as played out in the *comitatus* and celebrated in vernacular poems and songs.⁶⁴ While perhaps simply designating the *form* in which Bede presented his own first *Life* of Cuthbert, the description could likely be interpreted as evidence that Bede considered the spiritual battles of St. Cuthbert as depicted in both his *Lives* (verse and prose) as worthy to be placed beside the deeds of traditional Germanic heroes.⁶⁵

Both the anonymous monk of Lindisfarne and Bede record an epic confrontation between Cuthbert and a coterie of demons infesting Farne, the isle the holy man chose for a hermitage.⁶⁶ In Bede's account:

No one had been able to dwell alone undisturbed upon this island before Cuthbert the servant of the Lord, on account of the phantoms of demons who dwelt there; but when the soldier of Christ [*milite Christi*] entered, armed with the "helmet of salvation, the shield of faith, and the sword of the spirit which is the word of God, all the fiery darts of the wicked one" were quenched, and the wicked foe himself was driven far away together with the whole crowd of his satellites. This soldier of Christ [*miles Christi*], as soon as he had become monarch of the

⁶⁴See primarily Wormald, "Bede, Beowulf," but also Colin Chase, "Saints' Lives, Royal Lives, and the Date of *Beowulf*," in *The Dating of Beowulf*, ed. idem (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), pp. 161-171, and "Beowulf, Bede, and St. Oswine: The Hero's Pride in Old English Hagiography," in *The Anglo-Saxons: Synthesis and Achievement*, ed. J. Douglas Woods and David A. E. Pelteret (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1985), pp. 37-48; and below, pp. 100 ff.

⁶⁵I have not done the requisite analysis of Bede's verse *Life* of Cuthbert to determine whether heroic diction possibly derived from the Germanic heroic poetic tradition appears more frequently there than in the prose *Life*.

⁶⁶The two islands, Farne and Lindisfarne, should not be confused. See Map 1, "The Age of Bede," appended below.

land he had entered and had overcome the army of the usurpers, built a city fitted for his rule . . .⁶⁷

Besides being a *miles Christi* and the ascetic bane of demons, Cuthbert was also, albeit reluctantly, a player in the politics of late seventh-century Northumbria as a consequence of his elevation to the office of bishop in the primatial see of that kingdom, based at Lindisfarne Abbey.⁶⁸ Although the reluctance of holy men to have dealings with the world is something of a hagiographical *topos*, Cuthbert's contemporary Wilfrid and his eager activity in the ecclesio-political realm stands as a counterpoint reminding us that *topoi* do not always dominate. The two ways of playing out the heroic impulse in the religious arena, both privately in a hermitage and publicly as an ecclesiastical official, may, however, be more effectively compared and contrasted through examination of the other two of these early Anglo-Saxon saints, Wilfrid and Guthlac.

St. Wilfrid

Cuthbert's near-contemporary Bishop Wilfrid is a very different figure from the saint of Lindisfarne. A quite interesting parallel might be drawn between the various aspects of Wilfrid's character

⁶⁷"Nullus hanc facile ante famulum Domini Cuthbertum solus valebat inhabitare colonus, propter uidelicet demorantium ibi phantasias demonum. Verum intrante eam milite Christi, armato galea salutis, scuto fidei, et gladio spiritus quod est uerbum Dei, omnia tela nequissimi ignea extincta et ipse nequissimus cum omni satellitum suorum turba porro fugatus est hostis. Qui uidelicet miles Christi ut deuicta tyrannorum acie monarcha terrae quam adierat factus est, condidit ciuitatem suo aptam imperio" Bede, *Prose Life of Cuthbert* chap. 17, ed. and trans. Colgrave, pp. 214-217; see also Bede's *Verse Life of Cuthbert*, sec. 15, lines 390-405, and the Anon. *Life of Cuthbert* 3.1.

⁶⁸Anon. *Life of Cuthbert*, 3.6; 4.1, 4.8; Bede, *Prose Life of Cuthbert* chaps. 24, 27.

delineated within ten years of the bishop's death in 709 or 710 by his follower Eddius Stephanus⁶⁹ and the triad of qualities encompassed in the later medieval chivalric ideal. Eddius describes in turn Wilfrid's ascetic prowess, his courtliness in his relations with the nobility, and his largesse:

In watching and prayers, in fasting and study, who was to be found like him? . . . Secular chief men, too, men of noble birth, gave him their sons to be instructed, so that, if they chose, they might devote themselves to the service of God; or that, if they preferred, he might give them into the king's charge as warriors when they were grown up. . . . [He was] always making gifts to the clergy as well as to the laity with such munificence that his equal could not be found.⁷⁰

Whereas Cuthbert entered on a public life as bishop only reluctantly, and relinquished it as soon as he could,⁷¹ Wilfrid is best known as the most prominent early Anglo-Saxon example of a "prince-bishop" such as then current in Frankish Gaul. Continental influence is likely; in Wilfrid's youth he did, in fact, travel through Gaul to Rome and back, a journey significant on two counts. Wilfrid ever after remained a staunch champion of Roman Christian religious practice as against Celtic practices which prevailed for a

⁶⁹See Colgrave's introd. to Eddius' *Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, pp. x-xi.

⁷⁰"[I]n vigiliis et orationibus, in lectione et ieiuniis quis similis ei inveniebatur? . . . Principes quoque seculares, viri nobiles, filios suos ad erudiendum sibi dederunt, ut aut Deo servirent, si eligerent, aut adultos, si maluissent, regi armatos commendaret. . . . dans semper tam spiritalibus quam secularibus dona et munera tam large, ut nullus ei aequalis inveniebatur." Eddius, *Life of Wilfrid* chap. 21 "De bonitate pontificis nostri," "Concerning the goodness of our bishop," ed. and trans. Colgrave, pp. 42-5.

⁷¹Anon. *Life of Cuthbert* 4.1 and 4.11; Bede, *Prose Life of Cuthbert* chaps. 24 and 36.

generation in seventh-century Northumbria. The turmoil of his life signifies the wrenching nature of the adjustment of Northumbria, and hence Anglo-Saxon England as a whole, to a formally Roman pattern of Christianity in the decades after the Synod of Whitby in 664, where the young Wilfrid first made a name for himself as the energetic champion of the Roman rite.⁷² Shortly after his successful argument at Whitby, Wilfrid became bishop. As bishop, Wilfrid followed the example he had seen on his Continental travels. In Gaul, Wilfrid had been exposed to the rich, metropolitan bishops who exercised firm dominion in their sees, a legacy of the period of the Germanic invasions when bishops were the only officials with the resources to step into the power vacuum left by the collapse of Roman government.⁷³ In his *History of the Franks*, Gregory of Tours shows the power and position these powerful bishops continued to wield in the new Frankish kingdom of the sixth century. The latter part of Wilfrid's life is largely the tale of attacks on both the power he wielded as an influential diocesan and the control he exercised over the numerous monasteries he had founded all over England. Wilfrid also brought to his role as a powerful ecclesiastical lord the heroic ethos of the Anglo-Saxon *comitatus*.

Wilfrid's two biographers, Eddius Stephanus, who wrote the *Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, and Bede, who included the tale of Wilfrid in his

⁷²Bede, *EH* 3.26; Eddius, *Life of Wilfrid* chap. 10.

⁷³Raymond Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), esp. chaps. 7, "The Transformation of the Aristocracy in the Fifth Century," and 9, "Early Merovingian Gaul: The World of Gregory of Tours."

Ecclesiastical History, contrasted sharply in their respective assessments of the cantankerous bishop. Wilfrid was very much Eddius' hero. To Bede, writing from the shelter of Benedict Bishop's monastery at Jarrow, with well-formed ideas of what was proper for a bishop, Wilfrid seems at times an embarrassment, although this must be inferred from what Bede omits rather than from any direct criticism.⁷⁴ One of Bede's major themes being the triumph of Roman orthodoxy, he could not neglect Wilfrid, far too important a figure in that victory. But one feels that as he wrote, Bede muttered under his breath, "*Superbia, superbia!*"⁷⁵

Wilfrid was imbued with the values of the *comitatus*. His father was closely connected with King Oswiu's court. When at age fourteen young Wilfrid determined to enter into the service of heaven in some manner, his father sent him to Oswiu's queen, Eanflaed, accompanied by his own retinue, for whom "he obtained arms and horses and garments" so that "he could fitly stand before the royal presence."⁷⁶ Wilfrid ever after maintained his princely retinue, perhaps comprising these same retainers. Soon after his election as bishop, when returning from Gaul where he sought a consecration undefiled by Celtic influences,⁷⁷ Wilfrid's ship ran aground on the

⁷⁴Wormald, "Bede, 'Beowulf'," pp. 60-61.

⁷⁵"Hubris, hubris!"

⁷⁶"*arma et equos vestimenta que . . . adeptus est,*" "*ante regalibus conspectibus apte stare posset,*" Eddius, *Life of Wilfrid* chap. 2, ed. and trans. Colgrave, pp. 6-7.

⁷⁷Eddius, *Life of Wilfrid* chap. 12.

shores of Sussex.⁷⁸ The pagan South Saxons threatened to kill or enslave Wilfrid's company, which included warriors as well as clergy. The South Saxon chief priest mounted a tumulus to cast a binding spell against the Christians:

Thereupon one of the companions of our bishop took a stone which had been blessed by all the people of God and hurled it from his sling after the manner of David. It pierced the wizard's forehead and penetrated to his brain as he stood cursing; death took him unawares as it did Goliath, and his lifeless body fell backwards on to the sand.⁷⁹

Wilfrid was later to evangelize pagans in Friesland⁸⁰ and even in Sussex,⁸¹ but when threatened he fought alongside his men in his own way:

. . . St Wilfrid the bishop and his clergy on bended knees lifted their hands again^[82] to heaven and gained the help of the Lord. For as Moses continually called upon the Lord for help, Hur and Aaron raising his hands, while Joshua the son of Nun was fighting against Amalek with the people of God, so this little band of Christians overthrew the fierce and untamed heathen host, three times putting them to flight with no little slaughter, though, marvellous to relate, only five of the Christians were slain. Then the great bishop prayed to God, who straightway bade the tide return before its usual hour and, while the pagans, on the coming of their king, were preparing with all their strength for a fourth battle,

⁷⁸Eddius, *Life of Wilfrid* chap. 13.

⁷⁹"*Tunc vero unus ex sodalibus pontificus nostri lapidem ab omni populo Dei benedictum more Davidico de funda emittens, fronte perforata usque ad cerebrum magi exprobrantis illisit; quem, retrorsum exanimato cadavere cadente, sicut Goliad in harenosis locis mors incerta praevenit.*" Eddius, *Life of Wilfrid* chap. 13, ed. and trans. Colgrave pp. 28-9.

⁸⁰Eddius, *Life of Wilfrid* chap. 26.

⁸¹Eddius, *Life of Wilfrid* chap. 41.

⁸²The first time was, implicitly, the blessing of the stone in the passage immediately above.

the sea came flowing back and covered all the shore, so that the ship was floated and made its way into the deep.⁸³

As the pagans had rushed upon them, Wilfrid's men had declared their loyalty in terms recalling Tacitus and anticipating Byrhtnoth's troop at Maldon:

. . . these companions of our holy bishop being well-armed and brave in heart though but few in number . . . formed a plan and made a compact that none should turn his back upon another in flight, but that they would either win death with honour or life with victory.⁸⁴

In Wilfrid we see clear blending of heroic and Christian lordship; his *comitatus* comprises both clerics and warriors. The war-band system formed a complex web of patronage and dependence, and Wilfrid himself served his own lords⁸⁵ as well as the Lord. As a youth, he was sent by Queen Eanflaed to Lindisfarne as "squire" of

⁸³" . . . sanctus Wilfrithus episcopus cum clero suo, flexis poplitibus genuum et iterum elevatis manibus ad coelum, domini auxilium perpetravit. Sicut enim Moyses, Hur et Aaron sustentantibus manus eius, Iesu Nave cum populo Dei adversum Amalech pugnante, frequenter Domini protectionem implorans triumphavit, ita et hic isti pauci christiani feroces et indomitos paganos tribus vicibus in fugam versos strage non modica obruerunt, quinque tantum viris, quod mirum dictu est, ex sua parte occisis, orante sacerdote magno ad Dominum Deum suum, qui statim iussit ante horam plenam, priusquam consuerat, mare venire. Praeparantibus autem paganis cum rege veniente totis viribus ad quartum proelium, tunc mare redundans fluctibus tota litora implevit, elevataque nave, cimba processit in altum." Eddius, *Life of Wilfrid* chap. 13, ed. and trans. Colgrave, pp. 28-9.

⁸⁴" . . . isti sodales sancti pontificis nostri bene armati, viriles animo, pauci numero . . . inito consilio et pacto, ut nullus ab alio in fugam terga verteret, sed aut mortem cum laude aut vitam cum triumpho . . . habere mererentur." Eddius, *Life of Wilfrid*, chap. 13, ed. and trans. Colgrave, pp. 28-9.

⁸⁵Just as young Beowulf was both a lord and Hygelac's thane (*Beowulf* lines 407-8) and Ealdorman Byrhtnoth declared himself King Aethelred's thane (*The Battle of Maldon* lines 53 and 203).

another nobleman retiring there to religious life.⁸⁶ Having travelled from Lindisfarne to Rome, during the course of the journey Wilfrid was all but adopted by the bishop of Lyons. When that bishop fell victim to Merovingian political intrigue, Wilfrid was thwarted in his effort to follow his lord to death only by the fact that he was an Englishman, a fellow countryman of the Frankish queen Balthild.⁸⁷ One recalls the heroic injunction that a warrior either avenge or die beside his lord in battle. Wilfrid so recalled, as would his men later in Sussex. The applicability of the *comitatus*-tie between man and lord to the relationship of spiritual leader and clergy was explicitly argued to some of Wilfrid's followers by Aldhelm of Malmesbury during one of Wilfrid's political exiles:⁸⁸

Behold, if laymen, ignorant of the divine knowledge, abandon the faithful lord whom they have loved during his prosperity, when his good fortune has come to an end and adversity befallen him, and prefer the safe ease of their sweet native land to the afflictions of their exiled lord, are they not regarded by all as deserving of ridicule and hateful jeering, and of the clamour of execration? What then will be said of you if you should let the pontiff who has fostered you and raised you go into exile alone?⁸⁹

⁸⁶Eddius, *Life of Wilfrid* chap. 2. The characterization of Wilfrid as a "squire" is Albertson's, *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, p. 92 n. 7.

⁸⁷Eddius, *Life of Wilfrid* chap. 6; Bede, *EH* 5.19.

⁸⁸The date of the following letter is disputed: 691 or 705-6. See Dorothy Whitelock's introd. commentary in *English Historical Documents*, c. 500-1042, trans. and ed. idem, *English Historical Documents* 1 (1955; repr. New York: Oxford University Press, 1968) [hereafter cited as *EHD* 1], p. 730.

⁸⁹"*Ecce saeculares divinae scientiae extorres, si devotum dominum quem in prosperitate dilexerunt, cessante felicitatis opulentia, et ingruente calamitatis adversitate, descruerint, et secura dulcis patriae otia exsultantis domini pressurae praetulerint, nonne*
(continued...)

Wilfrid's political exile should not occasion the spiritual exile abhorred by the heroic ethos. Although Wilfrid put his time in exile to good use as a missionary to continental pagans as well as appealing to Rome on behalf of his violated diocesan rights, he did not seek out exile and transform it into a Christian virtue as would St. Boniface.⁹⁰

Wilfrid's *comitatus*-like retinue served as a focus for attack by a later Northumbrian queen once he had fallen out of political favor. Ecgfrith's queen Iurminburg denounced Wilfrid and helped spur the king to banish the bishop,

eloquently describ[ing] to him [the king] all the temporal glories of St Wilfrid, his riches, the number of his monasteries, the greatness of his buildings, his countless army of followers arrayed in royal vestments and arms.⁹¹

At the end of his life, Wilfrid used the riches which Iurminburg condemned to fulfill the role of the heroic lord as "goldgiefa," "gold-giver."⁹² He divided his treasure into fourths. Two parts he distributed to the churches at Rome and to the poor. One part of the remainder was to be divided between his abbeys at Ripon and Hexham -

⁸⁹(...continued)

exsecrabilis cachinni ridiculo et gannaturae strepitu ab omnibus ducuntur? Quid ergo de vobis dicetur, si pontificem qui vos nutrit et extulit in exsilio solum dimiseritis?" Aldhelm, letter to the clergy of Bishop Wilfrid, ed. *PL* 89:101, trans. *EHD* 1:730-31.

⁹⁰See below, pp. 72 ff.

⁹¹"enumerans ei eloquenter sancti Wilfrithi episcopi omnem gloriam eius secularem et divitias necnon coenobiorum multitudinem et aedificiorum magnitudinem innumerumque exercitum sodalium regalibus vestimentis et armis ornatum," Eddius, *Life of Wilfrid* chap. 24, ed. and trans. Colgrave, pp. 48-9.

⁹²Eddius *Life of Wilfrid* chap. 63; see Albertson, *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, p. 158 n. 127.

"so that they may be able to purchase the friendship of kings and bishops."⁹³ As for the balance:

[you are to share it among] those who have laboured and suffered long exile with me and to whom I have given no lands and estates; distribute it according to the needs of each man so that they may have the means to maintain themselves after I have departed.⁹⁴

Bishop Wilfrid, in a more overt and worldly, despite his personal asceticism a less spiritual, way than Cuthbert, united in his very public life the ideals of the northern heroic warrior class and the Christian religion. Guthlac of Crowland, on the other hand, illustrates the heroic impulse deployed into full-scale spiritual warfare in a very different arena, that of the lone hermit in the wilderness.

St. Guthlac

Guthlac provides the clearest, most starkly delineated example of an Anglo-Saxon spiritual warrior in the hagiographical record. The interpretation which Guthlac's East Anglian hagiographer Felix, writing probably in the 730s,⁹⁵ in the generation after Guthlac's passing from this life, placed on the hermit's name is significant as a brief summation of Felix's view:

[T]he name in the tongue of the English is shown to consist of two individual words, namely 'Guth' and 'lac',

⁹³"ut cum muneribus regum et episcoporum amicitiam perpetrare poterint," Eddius, *Life of Wilfrid* chap. 43, ed. and trans. Colgrave, pp. 136-7.

⁹⁴"his, qui mecum longa exilia perpessi laboraverunt, et quibus terras raediorum non dedi, secundum uniuscuiusque mensuram dispertite illis, ut habeant, unde se post me sustentent," Eddius, *Life of Wilfrid* chap. 43, ed. and trans. Colgrave, pp. 136-7.

⁹⁵Colgrave, introd. to *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, pp. 18-19.

which in the elegant Latin tongue is 'belli munus' (the reward of war), because by warring against vices he was to receive the reward of eternal bliss, together with the victor's diadem of everlasting life⁹⁶

Guthlac specifically sought battle in selecting for his hermitage a place infested with demons:

. . . a certain man among those standing by, whose name was Tatwine, declared that he knew a certain island in the more remote and hidden parts of that desert; many had attempted to dwell there, but had rejected it on account of the unknown portents of the desert and its terrors of various shapes. Guthlac, the man of blessed memory, on hearing this, earnestly besought his informant to show him the place. . . . No settler had been able to dwell alone in this place before Guthlac the servant of Christ, on account of the phantoms of demons which haunted it.^[97] Here Guthlac, the man of God, despising the enemy, began by divine aid to dwell alone among the shady groves of this solitude.⁹⁸

And the demons fought back, as graphically and in much the same manner as they had attacked Antony in the Egyptian desert. Guthlac

⁹⁶"Anglorum lingua hoc nomen ex duobus integris constare videtur, hoc est 'Guth' et 'lac', quod Romani sermonis nitore personate 'belli munus', quia ille cum vitiis bellando munera aeternae beatitudinis cum triumphali infula perennis vitae percepisset" Felix, *Life of Guthlac* chap. 10, ed. and trans. Colgrave, pp. 78-79. Colgrave's etymological correction (notes, *ibid.*, p. 174) of the meaning of "Guth-lac" is, on the other hand, irrelevant. Felix testifies to his own and doubtless the current interpretation, or at least the one he wished to impose, which is relevant.

⁹⁷This passage may be specifically compared with that from Bede's *Prose Life of St. Cuthbert* quoted above (p. 53) - which was one of the literary sources Felix plagiarized outright: Colgrave, introd. to *Felix's Life of Guthlac*, pp. 4, 16, et al. In his edition, Colgrave highlights this and other such pilfered passages in italics.

⁹⁸". . . ecce quidam de illic adstantibus nomine Tatwine se scisse aliam insulam in abditis remotioris heremi partibus confitebatur, quam multi inhabitare temtantes propter incognita heremi monstra et diversarum formarum terrores reprobaverant. Quo audito, vir beatae recordationis Guthlac illum locum monstrari sibi a narrante efflagitabat. . . . Nullus hanc ante famulum Christi Guthlacum solus habitare colonus valebat, propter videlicet illic demorantium fantasias demonum, in qua vir Dei Guthlac, contempto hoste, caelesti auxilio adiutus, inter umbrosa solitudinis nemora solus habitare coepit." Felix, *Life of Guthlac* chap. 25, ed. and trans. Colgrave, pp. 88-9.

was tempted to the extremes of despair and fanaticism⁹⁹ and evil spirits carried him bodily to the gates of hell.¹⁰⁰ The demons took on various horrific forms. Felix goes on at length:

. . . they were ferocious in appearance, terrible in shape with great heads, long necks, thin faces, yellow complexions, filthy beards, shaggy ears, wild foreheads, fierce eyes, foul mouths, horses' teeth, throats vomiting flames, twisted jaws, thick lips, strident voices, singed hair, fat cheeks, pigeon breasts, scabby thighs, knotty knees, crooked legs, swollen ankles, splay feet, spreading mouths, raucous cries. . . . they grew so terrible to hear with their mighty shriekings that they filled almost the whole intervening space between earth and heaven with their discordant bellowings.¹⁰¹

They tormented Guthlac in the form of various beasts.¹⁰² To this former raider of the Welsh marches the demons appeared in the form of a British-speaking host.¹⁰³ They attacked him bodily: "they took

⁹⁹Felix, *Life of Guthlac* chaps. 29, 30.

¹⁰⁰Felix, *Life of Guthlac* chaps. 31 ff.

¹⁰¹" . . . Erant . . . aspectu truces, forma terribiles, capitibus magnis, collis longis, macilenta facie, lurido vultu, squalida barba, auribus hispidis, fronte torva, trucibus oculis, ore foetido, dentibus equineis, gutture flammivomo, faucibus tortis, labro lato, vocibus horrisonis, comis obustis, buccula crassa, pectore arduo, femoribus scabris, genibus nodatis, cruribus uncis, talo tumido, plantis aversis, ore patulo, clamoribus raucisonis. Ita . . . immensis vagitibus horrescere audiebantur, ut totam paene a caelo in terram intercapiedinem clangisonis boatibus inplerent." Felix, *Life of Guthlac* chap. 31, ed. and trans. Colgrave, pp. 102-103.

¹⁰²Felix, *Life of Guthlac* chap. 36: lions, bulls, bears, serpents, etc.

¹⁰³Felix, *Life of Guthlac* chap. 31, ed. and trans. Colgrave, pp. 108-111. Most discussion of this passage has centered around some commentators' unfounded assumption that here is evidence for Britons still inhabiting eastern England ca. 700 (Colgrave, introd. to op. cit., pp. 1-2). In addition to the psychological effect the demonic illusion of his old victims attacking him would have on Guthlac, it is interesting to consider the demons-as-Britons in light of Bede's well-established attitudes expressed at about the same time.

whips like iron and began to beat him."¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless Guthlac endured, both through his own efforts wielding the new weapons of Christianity, singing Psalms and "arming his breast with the sign of salvation"¹⁰⁵ (in common with St. Antony), and with the help of his special patron, St. Bartholomew, on whose feast day he had arrived at the island of Crowland.¹⁰⁶

Specific comparisons have been made between Guthlac's life and eremitical environs and the milieu described in *Beowulf*.¹⁰⁷ There are precise parallels. Guthlac called the demons of the fens "seed of Cain,"¹⁰⁸ the same progenitor of the monsters haunting the moors near Heorot.¹⁰⁹ The fens which Guthlac sought out are, according to the Old English *Maxims*, the abode of monsters.¹¹⁰ The barrow where Guthlac makes his hermitage on Crowland is described in terms

¹⁰⁴"*flagellis velut ferreis eum verberare coeperunt*," Felix, *Life of Guthlac* chap. 31, ed. and trans. Colgrave, pp. 104-5.

¹⁰⁵"*armato corde signo salutari*," Felix, *Life of Guthlac*, chap. 36, ed. and trans. Colgrave, pp. 114-15.

¹⁰⁶Felix, *Life of Guthlac*, chap. 31; chaps. 25, 26.

¹⁰⁷See Henry Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd ed. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), pp. 234-9; Dorothy Whitelock, *The Audience of Beowulf* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), pp. 80-81.

¹⁰⁸"*semen Cain*," Felix, *Life of Guthlac* chap. 31, ed. and trans. Colgrave, pp. 106-7.

¹⁰⁹*Beowulf* lines 103-10, 1261-6.

¹¹⁰*Maxims II* lines 42-3, ed. E. V. K. Dobbie in *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ASPR 6 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942) [hereafter cited as ASPR 6], p. 56, trans. S. A. J. Bradley in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London: J. M. Dent - Everyman's Library, 1982) [hereafter cited as ASP], p. 514.: "*þyrs sceal on fenne gewunian / ana innan lande*," "The monster must dwell in the fen, alone in his realm."

tormenters away.¹¹⁴ Mayr-Harting notes that when God saved the warrior Beowulf in his confrontation with Grendel's dam, it was at the point in the story when in Scandinavian parallels a light would suddenly have appeared; a light is indeed mentioned in *Beowulf* a few lines further down.¹¹⁵ Although the *Beowulf* poem appears only in a single late manuscript,¹¹⁶ some such story was known much earlier,¹¹⁷ and there is no reason why Felix and even Guthlac should not have been familiar with it.

The diction of heroic poetry exerted heavy influence on Felix. More than the prose of other Latin *Lives*, Felix's prose features intrusion of almost poetic alliteration with increasing heroic and

¹¹⁴Felix, *Life of Guthlac* chap. 31.

¹¹⁵Mayr-Harting, *Coming of Christianity*, p. 233. *Beowulf* lines 1550-72, ed. ASPR 4:48, trans. ASP, pp. 452-3:

*Hæfde ða forsiðod sunu Ecgþeowes
under gynne grund, Geata cempa,
nemne him heaðobyrne helpe gefremede,
herenet hearde, ond halig god
geweold wigsigor; witig drihten,
rodera rædend, hit on ryht gesced
yðelice, syþðan he eft astod.*

. . . .
*Lixte se leoma, leoht inne stod,
efne swa of hefene hadre scineð
rodores candel.*

Ecgtheow's son, the Geatish campaigner, would have perished then down in the vast deep, had not his battle-corslet, his sturdy soldier's mail-coat, afforded him help; and were it not that holy God held sway over victory in war. The wise Lord, arbiter of the heavens, easily determined the matter on the side of right as soon as he got up again. [Beowulf finds an ancient sword and dispatches Grendel's mother. . . .] A radiance gleamed forth and a light appeared therein, even as the sun, candle of the sky, shines brilliantly from heaven.

¹¹⁶A fact that elsewhere in this dissertation (chap. 5) I argue must govern historical interpretation of the poem.

¹¹⁷See discussion in Part 2 of Calvert Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

military imagery. In chapter twenty-seven, "*Tantae enim fiduciae erat, ut inter torridas tartari turmas sese contemto hoste iniecerit.*" Likewise, in chapter thirty-three: "*Christi athleta, adepto de hostibus triumpho.*"¹¹⁸ Various reasons might be posited for this characteristic of Felix's prose. Colgrave speculates that Felix owes his fondness for alliterative Latin to the scholar Aldhelm of Malmesbury.¹¹⁹ Aldhelm himself, however, may have been influenced by heroic diction. We know that this seventh-century abbot of Malmesbury, a son of the West Saxon royal family,¹²⁰ employed "profane verses" sung from the bridge at Malmesbury to draw men's attention so that he might then instruct them religiously.¹²¹ It is interesting to note that Felix's intended audience was explicitly a king, Aelfwald of East Anglia (r. 713-49),¹²² in whose hall would have been declaimed the same tales of olden heroes as inspired young Guthlac.

There is as much or more resonance with the archetypal saint's life, that of Antony, especially in the battles against the demons of the deserted wilderness cited above, but also on a more

¹¹⁸"So great in fact was [Guthlac's] confidence that, despising the foe, he hurled himself against the torrid troops of Tartarus"; "athlete of Christ, having won the victory over his enemies," Felix, *Life of Guthlac* chaps. 27 and 33, ed. and trans. Colgrave, pp. 90-91, 108-9. See Albertson, *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, p. 184 n. 27, p. 192.

¹¹⁹Colgrave, introd. to *Felix's Life of Guthlac*, p. 17.

¹²⁰Mayr-Harting, *Coming of Christianity*, p. 120.

¹²¹William of Malmesbury, *De Gestis Pontificum Anglorum*, ed. N. E. S. A. Hamilton, RS 52 (London: Longman, 1870), p. 336.

¹²²Felix, *Life of Guthlac* Prologue.

basic level, extending to considerable borrowing both of structure and verbiage.¹²³ Henry Mayr-Harting has discussed the mentalities of Guthlac, Beowulf, and Antony and traced in them an early and profound transformation wrought on old northern heroism by the coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England.¹²⁴ The northern heroes and gods fought together, allied against the demons and monsters of the outer darkness, but the side of heroes and gods was not the winning side - they could look forward only to ultimate defeat in the final Ragnarok. Nevertheless, the fight itself was of worth, and the certitude of ultimate defeat was no refutation of that value. Rather, the courage of the northern hero was in fact perfect precisely because it endured without hope of ultimate victory.¹²⁵ Mayr-Harting contrasts to this the northern Christian battle against the same old enemies and monsters, a battle in which there would be no victory in this world, but in which there is a new prospect of victory in the next world. The Christian fights beside the One God against His enemies, the "seed of Cain" - among whom are the old gods. Whereas one would think that this prospect of ultimate though otherworldly victory would bring with it a new optimism, Mayr-Harting invokes Tolkien's perception that the *Beowulf*-poet still feels the pull of the old despair despite the new confidence in the Christian

¹²³Kurtz, "From Antony to Guthlac," pp. 103-46.

¹²⁴Mayr-Harting, *Coming of Christianity*, pp. 236-9.

¹²⁵See also W. P. Ker, *The Dark Ages, Periods of European Literature* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1904), p. 57.

God.¹²⁶ The new Christian optimism and confidence in ultimate victory do appear in the *Life of Guthlac*, however; the young warrior had felt the same despair of the old heroic life and transience of kings and warriors as did Tolkien's *Beowulf*-poet and rejected it in favor of something new, becoming Christ's man. It is the same mood of confidence that appears in the *Life of St. Antony*, echoed by Felix: the confidence that the Christian warrior with the help of God and the saints will prevail over the forces of darkness. Guthlac displays a masterful reconciliation of northern heroism and the spiritual combat of the Christian ascetic.

Cuthbert, Wilfrid, and even Guthlac are figures from the first century or so of Anglo-Saxon Christianity. The significance of all of these, even Wilfrid, despite his repeated treks across Europe to Rome and back to England and occasional evangelization of Continental pagans, is mainly confined to their homeland. But by the early eighth century when Bede wrote, Anglo-Saxon missionaries were becoming an increasing presence on the continent.¹²⁷ In one sense the Anglo-Saxons were following in the footsteps of those Irishmen active in Northumbria in the earlier stages of Anglo-Saxon Christianization as well as Irish missions to the continent, most

¹²⁶Mayr-Harting, *Coming of Christianity*, p. 236, quoting J. R. R. Tolkien, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics" (1936), repr. in *Interpretations of Beowulf: A Critical Anthology*, ed. R. D. Fulk (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 27: "The shadow of despair, if only as a mood, as an intense emotion of regret, is still there. The worth of defeated valour in this world is deeply felt. As the poet looks back into the past, surveying the history of kings and warriors in the old traditions, he sees that all glory . . . ends in night."

¹²⁷Bede, *EH* 5.9-11.

importantly St. Columbanus. In both Irish and Anglo-Saxon, a Christianized ideal of heroic exile seems to have been at play. Interpreters have noted considerable correspondence of sentiment between the Old English poetic treatment of heroic exile and Boniface of Crediton's decision to forsake hearth and home and embark upon his Continental mission.¹²⁸ The latter is described by Boniface's fellow Englishman and disciple, Willibald:

But because a mind intent on God is not elated nor dependent upon the praise and approbation of man, he began carefully and cautiously to turn his mind to other things, to shun the company of his relatives and acquaintances, and to set his heart not on remaining in his native land but on traveling abroad.¹²⁹

Compare to this the Old English poem, *The Seafarer*:

Now, therefore, my thought roams beyond the confines of my heart; my mind roams widely with the ocean tide over the whale's home, over earth's expanses, and comes back to me avid and covetous; the lone flier calls and urges the spirit irresistibly along the whale-path over the waters of oceans, because for me the pleasures of the Lord are more enkindling than this dead life, this ephemeral life on land.¹³⁰

¹²⁸Albertson, *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, p. 18 n. 46.

¹²⁹"*Sed quia mens etiam Deo dicata favoribus non adtollitur humanis, nec laudibus sublevatur, coeperat ad alia multa sollicitudinis cura attentius properare, et parentum adfiniumque suorum consortia devitare, et peregrina magis quam paternae hereditatis terrarum loca desiderare.*" Willibald, *Vita S. Bonifacii Archiepiscopi* chap. 5, par. 11, ed. G. H. Pertz, *MGH SS* 2:338, trans. C. H. Talbot (as chap. 8) in *The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1954), p. 34.

¹³⁰ Forþon nu min hige hweorfeð ofer hreþerlocan,
 min modsefa mid mereflode
 ofer hwæles eþel hweorfeð wide,
 eorþan sceatas, cymeð eft to me
 gifre ond grædig, gielleð anfloga,
 hweteð on hwælweg hreþer unwearnum
 ofer holma gelagu. Forþon me hatran sind
 dryhtnes dreamas þonne þis deade lif,
 læne on londe.

(continued...)

Among the Irish and the Anglo-Saxons, the condition of exile, formerly the tragedy of a warrior bereft of his lord, has been transformed into a virtue - it is now a form of service to the Lord God.

St. Boniface

Boniface of Crediton spent much of his life evangelizing still-pagan Germans on the continent. Like Martin of Tours in Gaul, Boniface confronted the old gods head on. At Geismar he took an axe to an oak tree sacred to Thunor, which after a single blow delivered by Boniface God struck down and split asunder into four parts.¹³¹ Boniface was also as much an ecclesiastical courtier as was Bishop Wilfrid. As agent of the pope and archbishop of Mainz, Boniface aided in the reordering of the late Merovingian, early Carolingian Frankish church.

The end of Boniface's life, as recounted by Willibald, displays another dimension of the heroic ethos, one which we have seen before and which in a sense brings us full circle to the early days of the Church, but which is now informed by Germanic ideals. The same tie of loyalty counselled on Wilfrid's men by Aldhelm and sworn by Wilfrid's men in confronting the South Saxons also bound the clergy and men of St. Boniface to the missionary even unto their bloody

¹³⁰(...continued)

The Seafarer, lines 58-66, ed. G. P. Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie in *The Exeter Book*, ASPR 3 (New York: Columbian University Press, 1936) [hereafter cited as ASPR 3], p. 145, trans. ASP p. 333.

¹³¹Willibald, *Vita Bonifacii* chap. 8, par. 22, ed. Pertz, pp. 343-4.

martyrdom in 754.¹³² Boniface's response to the pagan attack contrasts sharply to that of Wilfrid, who invoked God against the pagans.¹³³ When his own young followers would fight against their attackers, Boniface exhorted instead submission, urged them to cast aside their earthly weapons, and (at least as Willibald relates it) evoked for them an image of their heavenly reward in terms reminiscent of the *comitatus* and heroic poetry. In addition to the reward of eternal salvation, God will "grant you a seat in the celestial hall with the angelic hosts of the heavenly city."¹³⁴ There will be no ultimate defeat but rather victory.

Boniface, as the most famous of the Anglo-Saxon missionaries to the Continent in the eighth century, represents a shift in the geographic arena of spiritual warfare waged by Anglo-Saxon Christians. The timing is significant and may be compared with a pattern that will become apparent in the next chapter, where the religious dimensions of the earthly warfare waged by Anglo-Saxon kings is examined across the centuries. As we shall see, the late eighth and ninth centuries witnessed a dearth of holy warrior kings

¹³²Willibald, *Vita Bonifacii*, chap. 11, ed. Pertz, p. 350, trans. Talbot (as chap. 8), pp. 56-7.

¹³³Eddius, *Life of Wilfrid* chap. 13 (see above).

¹³⁴"*coelestis aulae sedem cum supernis angelorum civibus condonat*," Willibald, *Vita Bonifacii*, chap. 11, par. 36, ed. Pertz, p. 350. Here Whitelock's trans., *EHD* 1:718, is preferred to Talbot's (as chap. 8), pp. 56-7: "He [the Lord] will . . . grant you an abode with the angels in his heaven above." Albertson, *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, p. 17 n. 42, assesses "the real impact of St. Boniface's martyrdom. In one heroic gesture of non-violence he transcended his own Heroic Age and that of Archbishop Turpin who died at Roncevaux sword in hand."

in England. The *Lives* of Cuthbert, Wilfrid, and Guthlac are the most important examples of hagiography produced in Anglo-Saxon England. They are all products of the later stages of the period of Northumbrian greatness in the early eighth century. They demonstrate the various ways that the heroic impulses of the Germanic *comitatus* could appear in both spiritual warfare and ecclesio-political relations.

Later centuries of Anglo-Saxon England, particularly the tenth, produced further hagiographical works, largely in the context of and taking as their subjects the major figures in the Benedictine Reform spearheaded by Dunstan of Canterbury, Aethelwold of Winchester, and Oswald of Worcester.¹³⁵ Each of these figures lived lives of outstanding asceticism. Their *Lives* can contribute greatly to our knowledge of aspects of the problem being investigated here.¹³⁶ Nevertheless these later *Lives* contribute little refinement to the ideas of spiritual warfare exemplified in the eighth-century *Lives*. Perhaps it is an illusion created by the intermittent survival of sources - always a precarious business for the Middle Ages - but with the waning of the Northumbrian golden age in the first third of the eighth century, examples of heroic Christian figures seem to vanish from England. Bede, writing at the very end of the period, in the early 730s, near the end of his *Ecclesiastical History* and even more

¹³⁵Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c. 550 to c. 1307* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 69.

¹³⁶The *Life of St. Oswald* in particular will be used in chap. 4 for its view of a late Anglo-Saxon heroic figure, Byrhtnoth the Christian hero of Maldon.

vociferously a few years later in his famous letter to Archbishop Ecgberht of York,¹³⁷ attests at least to his own perception that the early ardor and enthusiasm of Christianity in England was waning. It may be significant that Boniface's spiritual warfare is directed outward, transferred to the missionary field of the Continent. The phenomenon may parallel the disappearance of holy warrior kings in eighth-century England. It is to the relationship of kingship and warfare in the context of Anglo-Saxon Christianity that we shall now turn.

¹³⁷Ed. Charles Plummer in *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), 1:405-23.

CHAPTER 3

THE HOLY WARRIOR KINGS OF ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

Warfare was an essential function of Anglo-Saxon kingship. The king held central place within the Germanic *comitatus* and therefore within the heroic ethos. As *dryhten* or warlord he led his warband on expeditions of plunder and conquest and defended his people against the same efforts of his royal peers.¹ But with the coming of Christianity at the turn of the seventh century, Anglo-Saxon kings felt the draw of Christian asceticism as fully as did their warriors. A number of early Christian Anglo-Saxon kings entered into spiritual battle by abdicating their royal position and entering monastic life. They abandoned the warfare of this world entirely in a manner which was by the seventh century venerable in Christian tradition. Nevertheless, other Anglo-Saxon kings were considered holy, some even saintly, while remaining in this world and fighting its battles. Examination of these holy warrior kings reveals a shifting relationship between secular warfare and royal sanctity which illustrates changing ideas of kingship and war among the Christian Anglo-Saxons. The results include, paradoxically, both

¹Richard P. Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) pp. 11-12.

legitimization of holy warfare and its detachment from the royal estate. The present chapter will examine the Christian kings of Anglo-Saxon England as warriors - both those in the cloister and those who fought in the world. The tenth century was a critical period of transformation. The last king examined in detail in this chapter will be Athelstan (r. 924-39), a tenth-century king who seems to be the last exponent of an earlier mode of Christian warrior kingship. The following chapter will analyze the tenth-century transformation and its effects, including the appearance late in the Anglo-Saxon period of a non-royal, pious nobleman portrayed as a holy warrior slain - perhaps martyred would not be too strong a word - in battle defending Anglo-Saxon Christendom.

The Holy Warfare of Anglo-Saxon Kings in the Cloister

Clare Stancliffe has examined in detail those "kings who opted out" to monastic life in Anglo-Saxon England. They include Sigebert the Learned of East Anglia ca. 631, Centwine of Wessex ca. 676 or 678, Aethelred of Mercia ca. 704, Sebbi of Essex ca. 694, Ceolwulf and Eadberht of Northumbria in 737 and 758 respectively.² All the

²Clare Stancliffe, "Kings Who Opted Out," in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies Presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill*, ed. Patrick Wormald, et al. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), pp. 154-6. Sigebert: Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (hereafter cited as Bede, *EH*) 2.15, 3.18 [ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969)]. Centwine: Aldhelm, *Carmen Ecclesiastica* 3 [ed. R. Ehwald, *MGH AA* 15]. Aethelred: Bede, *EH* 4.12, 5.19, 5.24; Eddius Stephanus, *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid* chap. 15 [ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave (1927; repr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985)]. Sebbi: Bede, *EH* 4.11. Ceolwulf: Symeon of Durham, *Historia Regum s.a.* 737, 764 [ed. Thomas Arnold in *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia*, RS 72 (London: Longman, 1885), vol. 2]. Eadberht: *Baedae Continuatio s.a.* 758 [ed. Charles Plummer in *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), vol. 1]; Symeon of Durham, *Historia Regum s.a.* 758, 768.

kings just mentioned entered English monasteries. They may be matched by kings who departed on pilgrimage to Rome and the tombs of the Apostles, where they entered Roman monasteries: Caedwalla of Wessex in 688, Coenred of Mercia and Offa of Essex in 709, Ine of Wessex in 726, and Sigeric of Essex ca. 798.³ Rome was increasingly popular as a destination for English pilgrims in general from the late seventh century,⁴ a development which may be related to the triumph of Roman forms and practices within English Christianity which was sealed with the decision in 664 at the Synod of Whitby.

The above lists of royal monks do not include a number of "involuntary tonsures" of kings forced to abdicate by rivals.⁵ Stancliffe's focus in her article is on the more intriguing phenomenon of kings whose conversion to the religious life was free and voluntary. Nor were they, by and large, converts *in extremis*, at the ends of their lives with death looming - most abandoned the world while still in their warrior primes.⁶

³Stancliffe, "Kings Who Opted Out," pp. 156-7, 166 f. Caedwalla: Bede, *EH* 5.7; Coenred and Offa: Bede, *EH* 5.19; Ine: Bede, *EH* 5.7; Sigeric: *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* [hereafter cited as *ASC*] s.a. 798 (ms. F) [ed. J. Earle in *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel with Supplementary Extracts from the Others* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1865)]. Others had the intention but were prevented by opposition or death.

⁴Bede, *EH* 5.7.

⁵Stancliffe, "Kings Who Opted Out," p. 155 n. 7.

⁶The main exceptions are Ine of Wessex and Aethelred of Mercia, both of whom resigned after long reigns: Ine after 37 years (Bede, *EH* 5.7); Aethelred after 31 years (*op.cit.* 5.24). Sebbi might seem an exception, but Stancliffe ("Kings Who Opted Out," p. 155) judges otherwise because, although his formal conversion came only at the end of his life, according to Bede he had long desired it but his wife obstinately refused separation from him; her ultimate consent during his final illness indeed came only reluctantly - see Bede, *EH* (continued...)

The phenomenon of hale and hearty kings abdicating to the monastery is one largely unparalleled in the Germanic West.⁷ Even the kings' erstwhile subjects viewed it with bewilderment. Consider the tragic end of Sigeberht of East Anglia. According to Bede, this king "resigned his kingly office and . . . made it his business to fight instead for the heavenly kingdom." But when Sigeberht's former subjects were later attacked the former king found that they had other ideas regarding the proper field for his battle:

. . . [I]t happened that the East Anglians were attacked by the Mercians under their King Penda. As the East Anglians realized that they were no match for their enemies, they asked Sigeberht to go into the fight with them in order to inspire the army with confidence. He was unwilling and refused, so they dragged him to the fight from the monastery, in the hope that the soldiers would be less afraid and less ready to flee if they had with them one who was once their most vigorous and distinguished leader. But remembering his profession and surrounded though he was by a splendid army, he refused to carry anything but a staff in his hand. He was killed together with King Ecgric [his brother], and the whole army was either slain or scattered by the heathen attacks.⁸

⁶(...continued)

4.11.

It is a striking fact that all but the last of the royal pilgrims to Rome are recorded to have died soon after their arrival there. See references of n. 2 above, plus for Coenred and Offa, Colgrave and Mynors, note to Bede, *EH*, p. 517 n. 3. The significance of this would be easy to overstate, however, because we do not know that the kings expected their deaths to come so swiftly.

⁷Stancliffe, "Kings Who Opted Out," p. 158.

⁸*"relictis regni negotiis et . . . pro aeterno magis regno militare curaret . . ."; "[C]ontigit gentem Merciorum duce rege Penda aduersus Orientales Anglos in bellum procedere, qui dum se inferiores in bello hostibus conspicerent, rogauerunt Sigberctum ad confirmandum militem secum uenire in proelium. Illo nolente ac contradicente, inuitum monasterio eruentes duxerunt in certamen, sperantes minus animos militum prepidare, minus praesente duce quondam strenuissimo et eximio posse fugam meditari. Sed ipse professionis suae non inmemor, dum opimo esset uallatus exercitu, nonnisi uirgam tantum*

(continued...)

There is perhaps no better commentary on the centrality of the king in Germanic Anglo-Saxon warrior society. Although he had relinquished the kingship of East Anglia, Sigeberht's people sought his martial protection. Perhaps they endeavored to harness his royal *Heil* or luck and so gain victory.⁹

Stancliffe comments on the oddity of such kings-turned-monks in Continental perspective, and argues compellingly for heavy Irish influence in the practice. The role of kingship in a Christian society was assessed differently in Ireland than it was in those areas once ruled by Rome, whose rule was succeeded by that of the barbarian kingdoms. Virtually everywhere in the Latin West except Ireland, the ruler played a critical role in Christian evangelization. Conversion of the king and his court was an initial aim of missionaries. Warriors would follow the leadership of their lord even into a new faith. Clovis was accompanied in baptism by more than three thousand of his Frankish retainers.¹⁰ Another prime example is Pope Gregory the Great's dispatching of Augustine and his companion monks to the court of Aethelberht of Kent; Gregory expressed his view of the central role of the king in the salvation

⁸(...continued)
habere in manu uoluit; occisusque est una cum rege Ecgrice, et cunctus eorum insistentibus paganis caesus siue dispersus exercitus." Bede, *EH* 3.18, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 268-9.

⁹See chap. 1, p. 16 above.

¹⁰Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum* 2.31 [ed. Henri Ormont and Gaston Collon as *Grégoire de Tours: Histoire des Francs*, new ed. René Poupardin (Paris: Librairie Alphonse Picard et Fils, 1913)].

of a people in a letter to Aethelberht.¹¹ In such a context, Christian kingship was viewed in a positive light and stress was laid upon royal responsibility to the greater good. The conversion of Ireland, however, followed a different path. Ireland in the fifth century was similar to Anglo-Saxon England ca. 600 with its plethora of small tribal kingdoms - only more so. Unlike England (at least the South of England), there was no concerted and directed effort at evangelization spearheaded by Rome. Ireland was converted from the "bottom up."¹² Where kings played little role in evangelization, there was not as positive a role for the ruler. An Irish king was considered just another layman and was as likely as his warriors to lay aside the warfare of this world for that of the cloister - and Irish kings did so in substantial numbers.¹³

Northumbria was evangelized in turn by Roman missionaries during the reign of Edwin in the 620s then, after an apostasy following Edwin's death in battle in 633, by Irish missionaries called in by King Oswald. The seventh century in England saw the clash of Christian traditions in the North spill out to the rest of England, partly due to the dominant position commanded by Northumbria during its ascendancy, partly due to the energy of the Irish missions. The Synod of Whitby in 664 symbolically decided the issue

¹¹Bede, *EH* 1.32.

¹²See esp. Clare Stancliffe, "Kings and Conversion: Some Comparisons between the Roman Mission to England and Patrick's to Ireland," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 14 (1980), pp. 65-6.

¹³Stancliffe, "Kings Who Opted Out," pp. 157-65, 172-4.

in favor of Roman Christianity by accepting the Roman dating of Easter, but survival of Irish traditions helped make the artistic greatness of the "Northumbrian Renaissance" of the early eighth century. Among the aspects of Irish tradition that endured was the Irish view of kingship. Here, too, there was a clash.

In the 730s, Bede, writing in and promoting the Roman tradition of Christianity, took a dim view of kings forsaking their proper place at the helm of their kingdom, maintaining through law and war, if necessary, the order and peace of a stable society.¹⁴ The Christian virtues of extraordinarily pious kings, including those abdicating to religious life, might be praised by the Northumbrian historian, but those who fulfilled their royal calling received equally fulsome praise in their kingly role. It was possible, even desirable, for a king to live a holy, even saintly life outside the cloister, remaining in the world and fighting its battles. The writings of Bede, promoting Gregory the Great's Roman view of royal responsibility, were an important contribution to the development of a positive assessment of the role of Christian kings as kings,¹⁵ including a martial aspect which would become more crucial when Christian society came under external attack.

¹⁴Stancliffe, "Kings Who Opted Out," p. 175; Rosalind M. T. Hill, "Holy Kings - the Bane of Seventh-century Society," in *Church Society and Politics*, ed. Derek Baker, *Studies in Church History* 12 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell for the Ecclesiastical History Society, 1975), pp. 39-43.

¹⁵Stancliffe, "Kings Who Opted Out," p. 175.

The Holy Warfare of Anglo-Saxon Kings in the World

Across the span of Anglo-Saxon history subsequent to the coming of Christianity ca. 600, there appear a number of kings who were considered holy, some even accorded the status of saints, while remaining in the world and fighting its battles. Their status as kings is significant. One element of the orthodox Christian doctrine regarding just war, as formulated by Augustine of Hippo in the early fifth century, was that only a legitimate public authority could call such a war.¹⁶ For Augustine, such legitimate public authority could be exercised only by a ruler - the Emperor - acting in accordance with the Will of God.¹⁷ But even as Augustine wrote, imperial authority was soon to vanish from the Latin west, and with the formation of the Germanic successor kingdoms, the authority to wage war inevitably devolved to the king. J. E. Cross has shown that, as in the case of the few Continental theologians and writers to deal with such issues in the early Middle Ages (most notably Isidore of Seville), Anglo-Saxon thinkers adhered to Augustine's ideas in their essentials.¹⁸ This fact had ramifications in the realm of martial sanctity. Among the Anglo-Saxons, it appears that only kings were celebrated as Christian saints without their abandoning the bloody warfare of this world.

¹⁶See J. E. Cross, "The Ethic of War in Old English," in *England before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, ed. Peter Clemons and Kathleen Hughes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971, pp. 271-2.

¹⁷Joan D. Tooke, *The Just War in Aquinas and Grotius* (London: S.P.C.K., 1965), pp. 10-11.

¹⁸Cross, "Ethic of War," pp. 269-80 (re Isidore, p. 272).

A survey of holy kings in Anglo-Saxon England reveals interesting patterns. The following discussion is not limited to those kings around whom formal cults of Christian sainthood arose. The process of canonization was much more informal in the early Middle Ages than it would become later. By the twelfth century a powerful Papacy was able to impose both rigid standards and a formal procedure on the recognition of individual sanctity. In the early Middle Ages, however, the "process" had much more the character of acclamation or the formation of a general consensus at the local level, expressed through the local church's celebrating a feast day commemorating the saint.¹⁹ All the Anglo-Saxon kings discussed below were considered extraordinarily pious according to early medieval standards. This is true even in those cases where no formal cult coalesced around them. Sometimes a cult formed on a limited basis only, as in the case of Edgar the Peaceable, who seems to have been venerated only at Glastonbury, the abbey which held his body.²⁰ In the case of kings considered otherwise pious and worthy of veneration, the formation of a formal cult might be retarded if they were associated with some dark event or scandal. The cause of King Edgar was hampered by his well-known peccadillos (seduction of

¹⁹Thomas F. X. Noble and Thomas Head, introd. to *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints' Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. eadem (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), p. xiv; Stephen Wilson, introd. to *Saints and their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore and History*, ed. idem (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 5-6; Eric Waldram Kemp, *Canonization and Authority in the Western Church* (1948; repr. Westport, CT: Hyperion, 1979), pp. 82-106.

²⁰David Rollason, *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 140.

at least one nun of Wilton, who bore him a daughter) as well as the love of "evil foreign customs" and "heathen manners" which the Anglo-Saxon Chronicler notices and sets beside Edgar's even more well-known patronage and promotion of monastic reform in tenth-century England.²¹ King Oswiu's *faux pas* is noted below - the treacherous slaying of a particularly pious king which violated both the heroic ethos and Christian ethics; legend associated a similar misdeed to Athelstan, who was implicated in the mysterious death of his own half-brother.²² More important than the occasional formation of widespread and enduring cults of Christian sainthood around Anglo-Saxon kings is the way in which religion and warfare intersected in their careers and informed the views of them held by writers both contemporary and later.

²¹"[H]e weorðode Godes naman georne. and Godes lage smeade oft and gelome. and Godes lof ræde wide and side. and wislice rædde oftost á simle for God and for worulde eall his þeode. Ane misdæda he dyde þeah to swiðe þ[at] he ælpeodige unsida lufode. and hæbene þeawas innan þysan lande gebrohte to fæste. and utlândisce hider in tihte. and deoriende leoda bespeon to þysan earde." ASC s.a. 959 (mss. DEF) ed. Earle (ms. E), pp. 119, 121, trans. Dorothy Whitelock in *English Historical Documents, c. 500-1042*, ed. idem, *English Historical Documents 1* (1955; repr. New York: Oxford University Press, 1968) [hereafter cited as EHD], :206.

²²As reported in Symeon of Durham, *Historia Regum* s.a. 933, ed. Arnold, 2:124, trans. EHD 1:252: "Rex Ethelstanus jussit fratrem suum Edwinum in mare submergi," "King Athelstan ordered his brother Edwin to be drowned at sea." But see the mid-10th-c. *Gesta Abbatum S. Bertini Sithiensium* by Folcwine, chap. 107, ed. O. Holder-Egger, *MGH SS* 13:629, who notes the drowning of Edwin because the aetheling's body ended up interred in his monastery; here there is no hint of Athelstan's involvement. Nor does ASC, s.a. 933 (ms. E), accuse Athelstan. William of Malmesbury, *De Gestis Regum Anglorum* sec. 193 [ed. William Stubbs, RS 90 (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1887), vol. 1], records the following tradition: Edwin was falsely accused in a conspiracy against Athelstan and at the command of the king was cast adrift in the Channel in a leaky boat with no oars. Upon learning the truth, Athelstan repented, did penance, and exacted vengeance upon his brother's accuser.

The Age of Bede

The conversion of Anglo-Saxon England to Christianity commenced in 597 when King Aethelberht of Kent received the Roman missionaries dispatched by Pope Gregory the Great and gave them leave to preach in his realm.²³ Aethelberht had prior familiarity with Christianity, having some years before married a Christian princess, Bertha, daughter of the Merovingian Frankish king Charibert. Although Aethelberht was tolerant of Bertha's Christianity and of her chaplain, neither the Kentish king nor his people were converted until the coming of the Roman mission. In fact, Aethelberht hesitated perhaps until 600 or early 601, in which latter year a letter from Pope Gregory congratulated him on his conversion and spelled out his responsibilities as a Christian king.²⁴ In recording Aethelberht's death ca. 616-618, Bede emphasizes that he was "the first of them all [among] the kings in the nation of the English] to ascend to the heavenly kingdom."²⁵

²³Bede, *EH* 1.25.

²⁴Bede, *EH* 1.32.

²⁵"*primus omnium [sc. in regibus gentis Anglorum] caeli regna conscendit,*" Bede, *EH* 2.5, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 148, trans. *EHD* 1:610. The dates for Aethelberht based on Bede, traditionally that he ruled Kent from 560-616, have recently been revised, primarily by Nicholas Brooks, "The Creation and Early Structure of the Kingdom of Kent," in *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, ed. Steven Bassett (London: Leicester University Press, 1989), pp. 65-67, seconded by Ian Wood, "The Mission of Augustine of Canterbury to the English," *Speculum* 69 (1994), pp. 10-11. The new consensus, incorporating information from the late-6th-c. contemporary Gregory of Tours, is as follows: "born 560x2, married Bertha c. 580, succeeded to the Kentish kingdom c. 580x93, became overlord c. 593x7, received the Augustinian mission 597, died 616x18" (Brooks, *op. cit.*, p. 67).

Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, whence the preceding sketch of Aethelberht is derived, constitutes our major source for this first Anglo-Saxon Christian king. Bede lauds him as "a very powerful monarch,"²⁶ and further lists him as one of the kings wielding *imperium* in Anglo-Saxon England.²⁷ Hence, much later, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicler calls Aethelberht one of the first seven *bretwaldas*.²⁸ Aethelberht may have turned a dominant political position to the benefit of the Church as enjoined upon him by Pope Gregory - "And now let your Majesty hasten to instil the knowledge of the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, into the kings and nations

²⁶"*rex . . . potentissimus*," Bede, *EH* 1.25, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 72-3.

²⁷Bede, *EH* 2.5.

²⁸Bede, *EH* 2.5; *ASC s.a.* 827 (mss. AE, recte 829). I give little attention in this dissertation to the elusive "office" of *bretwalda* because I judge it to have less to do with theories of kingship than with practicalities of overlordship. If there was such an office of royal overlordship in Anglo-Saxon England - as opposed to harsh realities of military dominance (a doubtful proposition in recent estimations - see esp. Stephen Fanning, "Bede, *Imperium*, and the Bretwaldas," *Speculum* 66 [1991], pp. 1-26; J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's 'Ecclesiastical History of the English People': A Historical Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) [hereafter cited as Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*], p. 59) - its main importance would lie in its promotion as an ideal of political unity to foster religious unity by the church of Canterbury (see Patrick Wormald, "The Age of Bede and Aethelbald," in *The Anglo-Saxons*, ed. James Campbell (1982; repr. London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 99-100; Patrick Wormald, "Bede, the Bretwaldas and the Origins of the *Gens Anglorum*," in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies Presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill*, ed. Patrick Wormald, et al. [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983], pp. 99-129), and even more so in how the Alfredian circle seized upon it as precedent for West Saxon aspirations to overlordship in late-ninth to tenth-century England. It is uniquely in *ASC*, a product of that Alfredian circle, that such putative overlordship is given the title, "*bretwalda*." No other Anglo-Saxon writer ever betrayed knowledge of any special term for the list of seven kings whom Bede cited as ruling "imperially," supplemented by *ASC* with an eighth, Ecgberht of Wessex, by the Chronicler. (I explored this invention of tradition in "The Eighth-Century Mercian Kings and the Bretwaldas," a paper presented to the Fourth International Conference of the Texas Medieval Association [Our Lady of the Lake University (San Antonio), September 1994].)

subject to you."²⁹ Although the practice of a royal overlord standing sponsor as godfather to a converted subject king is first noticed by Bede with relation to Oswald of Northumbria and Cynegils of Wessex ca. 635,³⁰ it seems possible that Aethelberht so sponsored Saeberht of Essex, his nephew as well as subject king, upon the conversion of that people in 604.³¹

Bede would thus appear to transmit a tradition of military greatness surrounding the name of Aethelberht, who held sway over the southern Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in a royal overlordship which in the early medieval context at least implies military dominance. But Bede does not describe how Aethelberht's overlordship was won, nor does he mention any of Aethelberht's battles. It may in fact be that Aethelberht owed his exalted status within Anglo-Saxon England to his marriage alliance with the powerful Merovingians - although the connection would have been a double-edged sword because the Merovingians seem in turn to have claimed some kind of lordship over Kent.³² Aethelberht may have resisted any efforts by Bertha's chaplain to convert him because the Merovingians could have then claimed spiritual dominion as well; connections with the old imperial

²⁹*"Et nunc itaque uestra gloria cognitionem unius Dei, Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti, regibus ac populis sibimet subiectis festinet infundere,"* Bede, *EH* 1.32, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 112-13.

³⁰Bede, *EH* 3.7; Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 98.

³¹Bede, *EH* 2.3.

³²Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 32; J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 29, 45; Ian N. Wood, *The Merovingian North Sea* (Alingsås, Sweden: Viktoria, 1983), pp. 12-17.

center of Rome may explain his ultimate reception of baptism from the Roman missionaries instead.³³ It is probable nonetheless that the Merovingians exerted significant influence in the affairs of late sixth- and early seventh-century England,³⁴ a fact which would have held little interest for Bede especially if it detracted from the glory of the first Christian Anglo-Saxon king. It is probable that Bede elevated Aethelberht, including through his placement among the "imperial" rulers, precisely because he was the first Anglo-Saxon Christian king. Aethelberht thus, in Bede's view, played a special role in the salvation of the English people, but to consider him a "holy warrior king" goes beyond the sources.

No such ambiguities surround the next Christian Anglo-Saxon king commanding Bede's attention, Edwin of Northumbria. Warfare played a vital role in this king's career. Bede accords Edwin much attention,³⁵ describing in detail his slow and considered conversion, which in the end paralleled in many respects that of both Clovis and Constantine in being tied to military victory.³⁶ He

³³Henry Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd ed. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), p. 63; Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship*, pp. 29, 45; Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 33. Mayr-Harting also addressed the politics of conversion in "Two Barbarian Conversions Compared: The Anglo-Saxons and the Bulgarians," a paper presented as the Third Plenary Session, 19th Annual Sewanee Mediaeval Colloquium (Sewanee, TN: The University of the South, 3-4 April 1992).

³⁴Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 59.

³⁵Bede, *EH* 2.9-20.

³⁶Bede, *EH* 2.9, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 166-7: Having been attacked by an assassin sent by Cwichelm of Wessex, Edwin "*promisit se abrenuntiatis idolis Christo seruiturum, si uitam sibi et uictoriam donaret pugnanti aduersus regem, a quo homicida ille,*
(continued...)

continues through Edwin's establishment of a royal peace in Britain in which it became proverbial that "a woman with a new-born child could walk throughout the island from sea to sea and take no harm."³⁷ Finally, Bede describes Edwin's lamented death in battle at Hatfield Chase in 633 at the hands of Penda, pagan king of Mercia, and Cadwallon, Christian king of Gwynedd - "one . . . a heathen and the other a barbarian who was even more cruel than the heathen".³⁸ As a schismatic British Christian, Cadwallon was particularly despised by Bede, to whom the conflict between Celtic and Roman Christianity provided a major theme for his *Ecclesiastical History*.

Edwin came to the Northumbrian throne through battle in 616. Once he was baptized in 627, however, Edwin "fought in the kingdom of Christ."³⁹ Bede employs the same imagery as was current for the spiritual warfare of the monastery to describe the secular warfare by which the Christian king maintained his kingdom. A woman with babe

³⁶(...continued)

qui eum uulnerauerat, missus est, "promised that if God would grant him life, and victory over the king who had sent the assassin who wounded him, he would renounce his idols and serve Christ." See Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 66. Compare Edwin's conversion with that of Clovis as reported by Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum* 2.29-31.

³⁷"*etiam si mulier una cum recens nato paruulo uellet totam perambulare insulam a mari ad mare, nullo se ledente ualeret,*" Bede, *EH* 2.16, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 192-3.

³⁸"*unus . . . paganus, alter quia barbarus erat pagano saeuior,*" Bede, *EH* 2.20, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 202-3.

³⁹"*Christi regno militauit,*" Bede, *EH* 2.20, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 202, my trans. Colgrave (p. 203) trans. "he was . . . a soldier in the kingdom of Christ," and Dorothy Whitelock (*English Historical Documents, c. 500-1042*, trans. and ed. idem, English Historical Documents 1 [1955; repr. New York: Oxford University Press, 1968] {cited hereafter as *EHD* 1}, p. 621) trans. "he . . . was a soldier for the kingdom of Christ."

in arms could walk Britain unmolested for the same reason that cups provided beside springs for the convenience of travellers went unstolen - because:

[n]o one dared to lay hands on them except for their proper purpose because they feared the king greatly nor did they wish to, because they loved him dearly.⁴⁰

Edwin inspired fear as well as affection.

The *Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*, written at Whitby in the early eighth century, provides evidence for an early cult of St. Edwin in that monastery, ruled by members of his own Deiran family.⁴¹ In recounting the deeds of the pope who initiated the Roman Christian evangelization of England, the anonymous author gives extensive attention to Edwin,⁴² thus emphasizing Edwin's Roman connections. Edwin was converted by Paulinus, a member of the second Roman missionary band which arrived in Kent in 601. Paulinus accompanied Princess Aethelburh of Kent to Northumbria when she married Edwin in 625. When Paulinus baptized Edwin in 627, the king was accompanied by "all the nobles of his race and a vast number of the common people."⁴³ Edwin stands as another example of the

⁴⁰"neque hos quisquam, nisi ad usum necessarium, contingere prae magnitudine uel timoris eius auderet uel amoris uellet," Bede, *EH* 2.16, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 192-3.

⁴¹*The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great by an Anonymous Monk of Whitby* chaps. 18, 19 [ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1968)]; Colgrave's introd., *op. cit.*, pp. 42, 46-7, 51.

⁴²*Earliest Life of Gregory* chaps. 12-19 (of 32).

⁴³"cunctis gentis suae nobilibus ac plebe purplurima," Bede, *EH* 2.14, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 186-7.

centrality of the Germanic king in evangelization efforts enjoined by Gregory the Great.

The conversion of the Northumbrians which accompanied the baptism of Edwin did not, however, outlive the king's death at Hatfield Chase. Penda and Cadwallon, the two kings who had crushed Edwin, proceeded to ravage Northumbria. Under such pressure, the kingdom fragmented. Osric, a cousin of Edwin, ruled in Deira while Eanfrith, an heir of the Bernician line, claimed the latter kingdom. Each of these successors, along with many of their respective peoples, then reverted to the old gods. This is perhaps an understandable reaction by a recently Christianized warrior society tasting bitter defeat. The disaster of Hatfield Chase and subsequent despoliation of Northumbria had come quite swiftly after King Edwin had publicly converted to Christianity. But what good is the Christian God of battles if he does not bring victory?⁴⁴ Nevertheless, if to Bede a schismatic Christian such as Cadwallon was worse than a pagan, worse still must be a Christian turned pagan. The apostasy of Osric and Eanfrith made their deletion from the regnal lists seem fitting to Bede and, as he states, "all those who compute the dates of kings."⁴⁵ Bede assigned their year-long reigns (both fell to Cadwallon of Gwynedd) to the next king, whose greatness and holiness earned him Bede's especial admiration.

⁴⁴John Marsden, *Northanhymbre Saga: The History of the Anglo-Saxon Kings of Northumbria* (London: Kyle Cathie Limited, 1992), p. 107.

⁴⁵"*cunctis . . . regum tempora computantibus*," Bede, *EH* 3.1, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 214-15.

Oswald of Northumbria, "a man beloved of God,"⁴⁶ could well be termed (as does Clare Stancliffe) Bede's "ideal Christian king."⁴⁷ Whereas Edwin was of Deiran stock, Oswald was a scion of the Bernician royal line. Upon the death of their pagan father Aethelfrith, by which Edwin came to the throne in 617, Oswald with his brothers and sister were forced to flee into exile. They fled north, to the Irish Christian kingdom of Dál Riata where eventually they themselves became Christian. According to Bede, Oswald was baptized and educated on the holy island of Iona off the western coast of Pictland. Iona was the northern pole of Irish Christianity in Britain. Upon Edwin's death in 633, Oswald's brother Eanfrith became king in Bernicia - then, having apostatized, Eanfrith himself fell to Cadwallon. Oswald made a play for the kingship of Bernicia. His victory at Heavenfield is surrounded by a stark religious aura in various accounts, including that of Bede quoted at the beginning of my introduction describing the battle won after invoking God's aid beneath the Holy Cross.⁴⁸

Bede's is not the only record of divine aid rendered at Heavenfield. Another account preceded Bede's by a half century, although the monk of Jarrow seems unfamiliar with it. In his *Life of St. Columba*, Adomnán (ca. 624-704), abbot of Iona, stresses Oswald's

⁴⁶Bede, *EH* 3.1, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 214-15: "*Oswaldi uiri Deo dilecti.*"

⁴⁷Clare Stancliffe, "Oswald, 'Most Holy and Most Victorious King of the Northumbrians'," in *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint*, ed. idem and Eric Cambridge (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1995), p. 63 and elsewhere.

⁴⁸See above, chap. 1, pp. 1-2.

connections with the island monastery and records a striking instance of saintly intervention on Oswald's behalf.

The monastery on Iona whence Oswald had gained his Christian faith had been founded in the 560s by Columba (521-97), the Irish monk-in-exile who initiated Celtic Christian missions to the Picts in the north of Britain. Colorful legends surrounded the past of this holy man and the circumstances in which this descendant of Niall of the Nine Hostages, founder of the Ui Néill dynasty of Irish High Kings, began his career as evangelist.⁴⁹ Columba's fiery temper is revealed clearly in the conflict which erupted between himself and his erstwhile mentor, Fínián, over a beautiful Psalter owned by Fínián which Columba illicitly copied. The dispute eventually escalated, ca. 562, into open and bloody battle between rival clans associated with Columba's and Fínián's respective monasteries, in which confrontation the two holy men invoked divine aid for their opposed champions. Columba's clan-brothers won the battle at great cost, but the holy man's culpability in the slaughter led to his exile (self- or imposed) and to his vow to convert to Christianity as many pagan souls as Christians who fell at Cul Drébene. Nevertheless, Columba's intercession in military matters continued to be sought and received, according to his kinsman Adomnán:

⁴⁹The following depends largely upon John Godfrey, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), pp. 48-50. Adomnán is less than helpful re the circumstances of Columba's departure from Ireland. He mentions the battle of Cul Drébene only as a reference date. The legends surrounding the incident are discussed by Alan Orr Anderson and Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson, introd. to *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, ed. and trans. eidem, rev. ed. Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. xxx, xxxvi-xxxviii.

[I]n the terrible crashings of battles, by virtue of prayer he obtained from God that some kings were conquered, and other rulers were conquerors.⁵⁰

At Heavenfield, King Oswald benefitted from St. Columba's prayers, even from his presence, encouragement, and tactical advice:

One day when king Oswald was encamped in readiness for battle, sleeping on his pillow in his tent he saw in a vision Saint Columba, radiant in angelic form, whose lofty height seemed with its head to touch the clouds. The blessed man revealed his own name to the king, and standing in the midst of the camp he covered it with his shining raiment, all but a small remote part; and gave him these words of encouragement, the same that the Lord spoke to Joshua ben Nun before the crossing of the Jordan, after the death of Moses, saying, "Be strong, and act manfully; behold I will be with you", and so on. Thus in the vision Saint Columba spoke to the king, and added: "This coming night, go forth from the camp to battle; for the Lord has granted to me that at this time your enemies shall be turned to flight, and your adversary Catlon [= Cadwallon] shall be delivered into your hands. And after the battle you shall return victorious and reign happily."⁵¹

Adomnán proceeds to tell how Oswald heeded the saint's counsel and, in a battle pitting his much smaller army against that of Cadwallon, emerged victorious over the slain Briton and so won the kingship of

⁵⁰"*In bellorum . . . terrificis fragoribus hoc a deo uirtute orationum inpetrauit, ut alii reges uicti et alii regnatores efficerentur uictores.*" Adomnán, *Life of Columba* 1.1, ed. and trans. Andersons pp. 14-15. See also 1.8, ed. and trans. pp. 32-33.

⁵¹"*Nam cum idem Ossualdus rex esset in procinctu belli castarmetatus quadam die in sua papillione supra puluillum dormiens sanctum Columbam in uisu uidet forma coruscantem angelica cuius alta proceritas uertice nubes tangere uidebatur. Qui scilicet uir beatus suum regi proprium reuelans nomen in medio castrorum stans eadem castra, excepta quadam parua extremitate, sui protegebat fulgida ueste. Et haec confiratoria contulit uerba, eadem scilicet quae dominus ad Iesue ben Nun ante transitum Iordanis mortuo Moyse proloquutus est, dicens: 'Confortare et age uiriliter. Ecce ero tecum', et cetera. Sanctus itaque Columba haec ad regem in uisu loquens uice mihi dominus donauit ut hostes in fugam uertantur tui, et tuus Catlon inimicus in manus tradatur tuas, et post bellum uictor reuertaris et feliciter regnes.*" Adomnán, *Life of Columba* 1.1, ed. and trans. Andersons pp. 14-15.

both Bernicia and Deira - of Northumbria.⁵² Adomnán stresses the authority of this tale, that it derived ultimately from the lips of Oswald himself, and we have no reason to doubt Adomnán's testimony:

This was confidently narrated to me, Adomnán, by my predecessor, our abbot Failbe. He asserted that he had heard the vision from the mouth of king Oswald himself, relating it to abbot Ségéne.⁵³

By virtue of Oswald's own association with Iona, he could claim St. Columba as a patron. Oswald's promise of victory based on the saint's intercession would doubtless have energized his warriors. Harnessing Iona and its saint to his cause in such manner as described by Adomnán may be directly compared to Oswald's erecting the Holy Cross as recounted by Bede. Oswald attributed his victory to divine aid against daunting odds. And Adomnán further stresses that the king's warriors heeded the lesson of victory won through the Christian God and accepted baptism after the battle.⁵⁴ Bede hints in his own next chapter that the military victory afforded even Oswald some degree of proof regarding the grace of the Christian faith, thus intimating that the king's subsequent efforts on behalf of Christianity might be compared to Edwin's, Clovis', and

⁵²Adomnán, *Life of Columba* 1.1.

⁵³"*Hanc mihi Adomnano narrationem meus decessor noster abbas Failbeus indubitanter enarrauit. Qui sé ab ore ipsius Osuualdi regis Sigineo abbati eandem enuntiantis uisionem audisse protestatus est.*" Adomnán, *Life of Columba* 1.1, ed. and trans. Andersons pp. 16-17. See Whitelock's introd. commentary to the passage in trans., *EHD* 1:690, and Stancliffe, "Oswald," pp. 50-51.

⁵⁴Adomnán, *Life of Columba* 1.1. Note that according to Bede in the passage quoted at p. 1 n. 1 above, Oswald's army was Christian. Probably it was a mixed force; undoubtedly the members of Oswald's personal *comitatus* would have already followed him into the new faith.

Constantine's conversions.⁵⁵ Despite Oswald's Irish Christian associations, the Roman Pope Gregory the Great doubtless would have approved his active concern for the evangelization of his people.

As king, Oswald drew on his connections with Iona to effect the second, lasting conversion of northern Anglo-Saxon England. He called to his side from Iona the holy man Aidan to be bishop of Lindisfarne, a second monastic center for Irish Christianity in the north of England, an isle close off the coast to the Bernician royal center of Bamburgh. Bede gives much testimony of the holiness of King Oswald - his kindness, gentleness, generosity, and humility, which made the king, "when the bishop was preaching the gospel," an "interpreter of the heavenly word for his ealdormen and thegns, for the bishop was not completely at home in the English tongue, while the king had gained a perfect knowledge of Irish during the long period of his exile."⁵⁶ Oswald reigned for nine years, until 642. He was then struck down in battle by Penda of Mercia at Maserfeld,⁵⁷

⁵⁵Bede, *EH* 3.3, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 218-19: "*Osuald . . . desiderans totam cui praeesse coepit gentem fidei Christianae gratia inbui, cuius experimenta permaxima in expungnandis barbaris iam ceperat . . .*," "Oswald . . . was very anxious that the whole race under his rule should be filled with the grace of the Christian faith of which he had so wonderful an experience in overcoming the barbarians." Whitelock's trans. of "*experimenta permaxima*" as "a very great proof" (*EHD* 1:624) seems, however, to capture the meaning more precisely. See Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 89 for Bede's view of the historical context of Oswald's victory and the literary context within which Bede formulated it.

⁵⁶*"vbi pulcherrimo saepe spectaculo contigit, ut euangelizante antistite, qui Anglorum linguam perfecte non nouerat, ipse rex suis ducibus ac ministris interpretis uerbi existeret caelestis, quia nimirum tam longo exilii sui tempore linguam Scottorum iam plene didicerat."* Bede, *EH* 3.3, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 220-21; see also 3.6.

⁵⁷Bede, *EH* 3.9.

identified by most authorities with Oswestry in Shropshire.

According to Bede, Oswald's last words became proverbial:

[For w]hen he was beset by the weapons of his enemies and saw that he was about to perish he prayed for the souls of his army. So the proverb runs, 'May God have mercy on their souls, as Oswald said when he fell to the earth.'⁵⁸

The thoroughness of the latter-day evangelization of Northumbria was proven in that Oswald's fall to the pagan Penda did not result in any reversion to paganism.

Oswald of Northumbria is the only warrior-king whom Bede unambiguously calls "saint."⁵⁹ He is typically accounted a martyr, falling as he did in battle against the pagan scourge of seventh-century England, Penda of Mercia - later medieval writers, particularly those on the continent where the popularity of Oswald's cult perhaps outstripped that in his native land, explicitly call him such.⁶⁰ Bede, however, does not. For all that Bede admitted some

⁵⁸"[N]amque cum armis et hostibus circumseptus iamiamque uideret se esse perimendum, orauit pro animabus exercitus sui. Vnde dicunt in prouerbio: 'Deus miserere animabus, dixit Oswald cadens in terram.'" Bede, *EH* 3.12, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 250-51.

⁵⁹See Stancliffe, "Oswald," p. 41. See Bede, *EH* 3.11, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 246 ("sanctum"); 3.7, p. 232 ("sanctissimum").

⁶⁰Clare Stancliffe and Eric Cambridge, introd. to *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint*, ed. eidem (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1995), pp. 6-7. Oswald is called "martyr": in 10th-c. English calendars, Alan Thacker, "*Membra Disjecta: The Division of the Body and the Diffusion of the Cult*," in same vol., pp. 124-5; by Aelfric of Eynsham (maybe) ca. 995, see below chap. 4 p. ?; in late 10th-c. Germany and mid 11th-c. Flanders by Hrotswitha of Gandersheim and Drogo of Bergues respectively, Dagmar O Riain-Raedel, "Edith, Judith, and Matilda: The Role of Royal Ladies in the Propagation of the Continental Cult," in same vol., pp. 213-14; in late 11th-c. Germany by Manegold of Lautenbach, a papal partisan in the Investitures Conflict, Carl Erdmann, *The Origin of the Idea of*

(continued...)

religious aspects to the battle of Heavenfield, his stress even there and especially in the rest of his account of Oswald is rather on the king's holy life. He seems in fact to have been at pains to underplay the religious significance of Oswald's death at the hands of the pagan. My own close coupling of a bare notice of Oswald's death at *Maserfeld* with his proverbial last prayer masks a startling feature of Bede's own account - the two details appear separated in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* by three intervening chapters. The death itself of Bede's "ideal Christian king" is given little more coverage than I gave above. Bede seems more concerned to relate the extensive reports of miracles surrounding both the site of the death and Oswald's relics. The latter in particular need have no explicit association with the particular circumstances of Oswald's death. The report of Oswald's last prayer comes in a discussion of the efficacy of Oswald's intercession, which comes as no surprise to Bede since even in this world the king prayed almost unceasingly - as any pious man should.⁶¹ Nevertheless, later writers, primarily Aelfric of Eynsham writing in the late tenth century, who composed a *Life of*

⁶⁰(...continued)

Crusade, trans. Marshall W. Baldwin and Walter Goffart (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 236. By the 12th c. Oswald was firmly established as a martyr. For Oswald's cult on the Continent, see also Peter Clemons, "The Cult of St Oswald on the Continent" (Jarrow Lecture 1983), pp. 3-24, repr. with same pagination in *Bede and His World: The Jarrow Lectures*, Vol. 2, 1979-1993 (Aldershot, England, and Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1994).

⁶¹Bede, *EH* 3.12.

King Oswald based upon the account in Bede, reunited the prayer with the event.⁶²

Colin Chase regards Bede's treatment of Oswald's death as part of a pattern by which the Northumbrian historian consciously de-emphasized aspects of the warrior culture of his people which he saw as dangerous to their recently acquired faith - specifically, any idea that a religious battle had any place outside the spiritual confines of the cloister.⁶³ Particularly disturbing to Bede was the ease with which both of the major battles of Oswald's reign could be placed into the context of a protracted blood-feud. In the battle by which Oswald won Northumbria, the battle of Heavenfield in 633, he killed the British king Cadwallon who had earlier slain his brother Eanfrith.⁶⁴ Bede and Aelfric contrast even more strikingly in their respective treatments of Oswald's final battle, when he fell to Penda of Mercia at *Maserfeld* in 642. Chase points out that Bede struck from his narrative the critical fact that Penda's earlier victim, Edwin of Northumbria, was Oswald's kinsman, his maternal uncle; Aelfric makes this fact plain.⁶⁵ It is the blood-feud nature of

⁶²Aelfric of Eynsham, *St. Oswald, King and Martyr* [in *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. and trans. Walter W. Skeat, EETS o.s. 76, 82, 94, 114 (printed in 2 vols. bound as 1) (London: Trübner, 1900), vol. 2].

⁶³Colin Chase, "Saints' Lives, Royal Lives, and the Date of *Beowulf*," in *The Dating of Beowulf*, ed. idem (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), pp. 161-71.

⁶⁴Aelfric does not pick up on this fact, however. Instead, he identifies Cadwallon as the slayer of "*Eadwine his eam*," "Edwin [Oswald's] uncle," Aelfric, *Oswald* line 7, ed. and trans. Skeat 2:126-7.

⁶⁵Aelfric, *Oswald*, lines 150-52, ed. and trans. Skeat, 2:134-5.

Oswald's two major battles, particularly his last, which Bede took extraordinary pains to mask.⁶⁶ As the barriers between the respective cultures of monastery and mead-hall broke down, later writers felt no such need to underplay the religious significance of Oswald's death and his warrior life. The fact, however, that Bede admitted that a prayer associated with Oswald's death had less than a century later become "proverbial"⁶⁷ - and even more so the unnatural separation he imposes into his narrative - itself reveals that popular tradition was at work handing down another, more heroic while still religiously oriented account of King Oswald. Such might have taken the form of heroic verse - J. R. R. Tolkien saw such a poem celebrating Oswald as both possible and appropriate, and Frederick Klaeber speculated that an Old English Oswald-poem may well have existed.⁶⁸

⁶⁶Chase, "Saints' Lives, Royal Lives," pp. 164-6.

⁶⁷See quotation of n. 58 above.

⁶⁸J. R. R. Tolkien, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics" (1936), repr. in *Interpretations of Beowulf: A Critical Anthology*, ed. R. D. Fulk (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 35; Frederick Klaeber, "King Oswald's Death in Old English Alliterative Verse," *Philological Quarterly* 16 (1937), p. 214. Klaeber notes in particular "the ease with which [Oswald's dying words] lend themselves to being turned into . . . alliterative verses:

*Dryhtin, miltsa duguða sawlum,
Cwæð Oswald cyning, þa he on eorðan sag."*

There is little direct evidence for such a poem, although David Rollason notes that Reginald of Durham, writing in the mid-twelfth century, reports that by then York possessed Old English verses on Oswald - "St Oswald in Post-Conquest England," in *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint*, ed. Clare Stancliffe and Eric Cambridge (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1995), p. 167. (On date of Reginald, see Virginia Tudor, "Reginald's Life of St Oswald," in same vol., p. 183.) R. M. Wilson, *The Lost Literature of Medieval England* (London: Methuen, 1952), perceives lurking beneath the prose of the 12th-c. chronicler Henry of Huntingdon Old English alliterative verses celebrating not only Oswald but also Aethelfrith, Edwin, and

(continued...)

Upon Oswald's demise Northumbria was again sundered into its constituent tribal kingdoms. Deira passed back into the hands of its native royal line, represented by Oswine (r. 644-51), the more pious son of Osric, the short-lived Deiran counterpart to Oswald's apostate older brother Eanfrith in Bernicia.⁶⁹ A third son of Aethelfrith, Oswald's brother Oswiu (r. 642-70), succeeded in Bernicia. Bede praises Oswine of Deira for his exceptional humility which moved Aidan of Lindisfarne to tears - of sorrow as well as joy, for the holy bishop perceived that such a humble king was not long for this world.⁷⁰ And Oswine did soon fall, though not in battle. His demise resulted from treachery. He was betrayed to his rival king Oswiu of Bernicia by a member of his own *comitatus*, and then murdered. Chase interprets Bede's uncharacteristically emotional exclamation lamenting this deed - "*Sed heu! pro dolor!*"⁷¹ - as a rare lapse indicating Bede's personal sympathy for the social world of the *comitatus* which by its exceptionality supports his thesis that Bede consciously avoided such sympathy in his religious writings. Oswine did become the center of a cult, and much later, in the

⁶⁸(...continued)

Oswiu (pp. 32-33). Henry's "*unde dicitur*" passages dealing with these kings, "when turned into Old English, seem to fall naturally into alliterative verse" (p. 32).

⁶⁹See above, p. 92.

⁷⁰Bede, *EH* 3.14.

⁷¹Bede, *EH* 3.14, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 256-7.

eleventh century, would find a biographer embracing the heroic code.⁷²

Edwin and Oswald are the two pre-eminent Christian warrior kings from the Northumbrian Heroic Age around whom cults formed. There were to be sure other holy or pious kings in subsequent generations, especially Aldfrith the scholar king (r. 685-705), one of only two demonstrably literate kings in Anglo-Saxon England before Alfred the Great (the other one being the unlucky king-turned-monk Sigebert the Learned).⁷³ But Aldfrith succeeded to a kingdom which was contracting in the wake of the disastrous loss of his brother, King Ecgfrith, to the Picts at Nechtanesmere in 685. The days of Northumbrian political dominance were waning, and Aldfrith, though a great patron of art and scholarship, was no warrior. Raised and educated at Iona, he may well have been preparing for the religious life when called to be king.⁷⁴ Aldfrith's father Oswiu, who presided over the glory days of Northumbria is a more problematic

⁷²Colin Chase, "Beowulf, Bede, and St. Oswine: The Hero's Pride in Old English Hagiography," in *The Anglo-Saxons: Synthesis and Achievement*, ed. J. Douglas Woods and David A. E. Pelteret (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1985), pp. 37-48. Chase focusses here on the untrans. and neglected anonymous *Life of Oswine* in British Library ms. Cotton Julius A.x. ff. 10-43, ed. James Raine, *Miscellanea Biographica*, Publications of the Surtees Society 8 (1838), pp. 1-59. Like Aelfric with King Oswald, Oswine's anonymous author reshapes Bede's story by reinstilling heroic elements missing in *EH*.

⁷³Marsden, *Northanhymbre Saga*, p. 210. Another possible candidate, Marsden notes, would be Ceolwulf of Northumbria, to whom Bede addressed his *EH* (see his preface); I would add, on the same basis, Aelfwald of East Anglia, who received Felix's *Life of Guthlac* Prologue [ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave (1956; repr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985)].

⁷⁴Marsden, *Northanhymbre Saga*, pp. 192-4.

case. Even Bede seems ambivalent about this king. He portrays Oswiu as politically powerful, the last of his "imperial" kings in Anglo-Saxon England. Oswiu also seems to have been personally pious, or at least properly submissive to Rome. He was the king under whom one of the great themes of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* came to its climax with the triumph of Roman Christianity at the Synod of Whitby. Both Bede and Eddius Stephanus report that the king's personal decision not to alienate St. Peter, the keeper of the keys of heaven, was crucial in the outcome.⁷⁵ Oswiu put an end to that pagan bane of Christian Anglo-Saxon kings, Penda of Mercia, in the Battle of Winwaed, 655. But the fact remains, unmitigated in Bede's account, that Oswiu had also put an end to the holy king of Deira, Oswine. Bede judges this deed as one "to be detested by all."⁷⁶ By instigating the betrayal of Oswine, Oswiu violated both the Germanic heroic code and Christian ethics. Possibly because of this blot on his career, there is no evidence that Oswiu ever became the focus of any cult of sainthood.⁷⁷

Although the Northumbrians are better known through Bede's testimony, pious Christian kings in seventh-century England were by no means a phenomenon restricted to the North. From the South of

⁷⁵Bede, *EH* 3.25; Eddius *Life of Wilfrid* chap. 10.

⁷⁶"*detestanda omnibus*," Bede, *EH* 3.14, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 256; the trans. is Whitelock's, *EHD* 1:631. See also Hill, "Holy Kings," p. 40.

⁷⁷He is conspicuously absent from David Hugh Farmer's thorough coverage of the saints of the British Isles in *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 2nd ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) [hereafter cited as *ODS*].

England in the same period several kings took up the practice of retiring through pilgrimage to Rome and the monastic life, as mentioned above.⁷⁸ Among these was Caedwalla of Wessex in 688. Purists might object that this king was not a Christian warrior king *per se*. He did not accept baptism until the very end of his life, in Rome. Baptism delayed until the death-bed was a feature of the early Church; the best known example is the Emperor Constantine who favored Christians at least since 312 but who was only baptized four days before his death in 337.⁷⁹ The practice endured in the seventh century.⁸⁰ But Caedwalla seems an exception in seventh-century England, whose kings may have considered long and hard before baptism but who seem not to have delayed purposely once their resolve was set. Bede lays particular emphasis at one point on the fact that Caedwalla "was not yet reborn in Christ."⁸¹

Before Caedwalla became king of Wessex, he was a freebooting warband leader similar to another *aetheling*, Guthlac of Mercia. During this period he became a prodigy of Bishop Wilfrid. Once he had taken the kingship, Caedwalla seized the Isle of Wight and

⁷⁸p. 78.

⁷⁹Eusebius Pamphilus, *The Life of the Blessed Emperor Constantine* 4.61-64, trans. Ernst Cushing Richardson in *Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine*, A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, 2nd ser. 1 (repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), pp. 555-7.

⁸⁰Ann Williams, Alfred P. Smyth, and D. P. Kirby, *A Biographical Dictionary of Dark Age Britain: England, Scotland and Wales c. 500-c. 1050* (London: Seaby, 1991), s.v. "Caedwalla."

⁸¹"*necdum regeneratus . . . in Christo*," Bede, *EH* 4.16, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 382, my trans. rather than Colgrave's "he was not yet a Christian" (p. 383).

engaged in a campaign bent on exterminating the still-idolatrous population - as a result of a vow he had made to give over a quarter of the island and its booty to the Lord.⁸² He delivered to Wilfrid the Lord's due. It is uncertain what the fiery bishop's reaction was to his unexpected windfall and the means by which it came to him - Eddius Stephanus omits any mention of the incident.⁸³ Wilfrid was an active missionary to pagans at times during his various exiles, and presumably considered Caedwalla's vow and its fulfillment a gross misunderstanding of the Christian message, but any efforts he might have made to prevent the atrocity were in vain.⁸⁴

A possible explanation for Caedwalla's actions is that he conceived the Christian God literally as a God of battles. Perhaps he was influenced by the pagan image of Woden; maybe the Old Testament God captured his imagination, as speculated by Stancliffe.⁸⁵ Probably both notions blended in Caedwalla's mind, as they doubtless did in many others. The only helmet surviving from Anglo-Saxon times (besides that from Sutton Hoo), found at Benty Grange, Derbyshire, has been dated to Caedwalla's late seventh

⁸²"*quartam partem eius simul et praedae Domino daret,*" Bede, *EH* 4.16, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 382-3.

⁸³Eddius, *Life of Wilfrid* chap. 42.

⁸⁴Bertram Colgrave, notes to Eddius' *Life of Wilfrid*, p. 177. It is unfair to say, as does Patrick Wormald, "Age of Bede and Aethelbald," p. 94, that "Wilfrid had no objection so long as the Church got its cut" - apparently Wilfrid's friend and biographer Eddius was embarrassed by the incident. In accepting, Wilfrid could have been making the best of a bad situation.

⁸⁵Stancliffe, "Kings Who Opted Out," p. 156. In n. 12, Stancliffe points out the Old Testament parallels in Deut. 20.16 and 32.39-42.

century.⁸⁶ It sports both a boar crest atop (fitting descriptions in *Beowulf*)⁸⁷ and a silver cross set in the nose piece - appealing to either power for help in battle.⁸⁸ A similar blending of Christian and pagan appears on the early eighth-century Franks Casket in the form of scenes juxtaposed from both traditions.⁸⁹ These artifacts are evidence for an early accommodation between

⁸⁶See Rupert Bruce-Mitford and Marilyn R. Luscombe, "The Benty Grange Helmet," chap. 11.1 in Rupert Bruce-Mitford, *Aspects of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology: Sutton Hoo and Other Discoveries* (New York: Harper's Magazine Press, 1974), pp. 223-242.

⁸⁷*Beowulf* lines 303-306, 1110-12, 1328, 2152-53. The first of these passages is particularly descriptive of *Beowulf's* warriors:

*Eoforlic scionon
ofer hleorberan gehrodon golde,
fah ond fyrheard; fehrwearde heolde
gubmod grimmon.*

Above their vizors shone images of the boar: that pugnacious beast, ornamented in gold, gleaming and tempered in the forge, afforded vital protection to warriors in their fury.

Ed. E. V. K Dobbie in *Beowulf and Judith*, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records 4 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953) [hereafter cited as ASPR 4], p. 11, trans. S. A. J. Bradley in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London: J. M. Dent - Everyman's Library, 1982) [hereafter cited as ASP], p. 419.

According to Tacitus, the boar was a creature sacred to Germanic gods; of the Aestians, the Roman wrote:

Matrem deum venerantur. Insigne superstitionis formas aprorum gestant: id pro armis hominumque tutela securum deae cultorem etiam inter hostes praestat.

They worship the Mother of the gods, and wear, as an emblem of their cult, the device of a wild boar, which stands them in stead of armour or human protection and gives the worshipper a sense of security even among his enemies.

Germania chap. 45, ed. J. G. C. Anderson as *Cornelii Taciti De Origine et Situ Germanorum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938 [repr. 1958]), no pg. no., trans. H. Mattingly in *The Agricola and the Germania*, rev. S. A. Handforth (London: Penguin, 1970), p. 139.

⁸⁸See illus. in James Campbell, ed., *The Anglo-Saxons* (1982; repr. London: Penguin, 1991), p. 55 fig. 57 (side-view), p. 43 fig. 43 (the boar), and Bruce-Mitford and Luscombe, "Benty Grange Helmet," Plate 70 (the cross).

⁸⁹See Plates 9 and 10 in Clinton Albertson, *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1967), showing respectively a Germanic battle scene and the Gifts of the Magi from the Franks Casket.

Christianity and paganism in Anglo-Saxon England. The actions of Caedwalla of Wessex provide perhaps only the most unrestrained example of the effects such a fusion could work in the realm of warfare. One must assume that, despite his delayed baptism, Caedwalla believed he fought according to God's will.

Eighth-Century Transitions

The eighth century in Anglo-Saxon England was an age of flux. Although the first half of the century, the autumnal era of Northumbrian greatness, was the period of early Christian Anglo-Saxon England's greatest cultural flowering in the "Northumbrian Renaissance," the new religion of the English was not so young and vibrant as it had been in the age of conversion. Such is one message of Bede's testimony in his famous letter to Ecgberht that the monastic life was degrading dangerously.⁹⁰

The same period saw the rise of another kingdom to dominance in Anglo-Saxon England - the Mercia of Aethelbald and Offa. These two men and many others of the age were pious in their own ways, but few were considered holy or exceptionally religious. Despite his association as *aetheling-in-exile* with the hermit Guthlac of Crowland,⁹¹ Aethelbald as king was fiercely admonished from abroad by the missionary Boniface and others.⁹² Aethelbald's character was

⁹⁰Ed. Charles Plummer in *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), 1:405-23.

⁹¹Felix, *Life of Guthlac* chaps. 49, 52.

⁹²Boniface and seven other missionary bishops, letter to Aethelbald, King of Mercia (wr. 746-747), ed. Arthur W. Haddan and William Stubbs in *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to* (continued...)

such that eventually his own *comitatus* murdered him.⁹³ Offa is a more problematic case. Alcuin praised him while Offa lived,⁹⁴ but after the king's death the same author charged that divine vengeance for the father's own bloody ruthlessness was visited on Offa's son, King Ecgfrith, who died only months after his father.⁹⁵

One can only speculate as to the ultimate reasons these and other eighth-century kings were found wanting. Perhaps one factor was that Anglo-Saxon Roman Christianity had prevailed at least formally over paganism and Celtic Christianity. By the time Bede wrote in the 730s the victory over the latter was all but complete in Britain.⁹⁶ There was therefore less of what much later ages would call a "crusading" motif. Edwin of Northumbria, and more especially Oswald fighting as a Christian king against pagans (such as Penda) or "bad" Christians (such as Cadwallon of Gwynedd - "although a

⁹²(...continued)

Great Britain and Ireland (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1871), vol. 3 [hereafter cited as Haddan and Stubbs 3], pp. 350-56, trans. *EHD* 1:177.

⁹³Frank M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd. ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 205.

⁹⁴See Alcuin, letters to Offa, King of Mercia (wr. 787-796; 796, after 18 April), trans. *EHD* 1 docs. 195, 198. Also see Alcuin's poem on *The Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York*, lines 388-91, ed. Peter Godman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp. 34-5. Traditionally, this latter work has been held to have been composed in 780-82, although Godman ventures a date as late as 792-3 (introd., pp. xlii, xlvii).

⁹⁵Alcuin, letter to the Mercian Ealdorman Osbert (797), ed. Stubbs in William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum* 1:73, trans. *EHD* 1:202.

⁹⁶The final phase of Anglo-Saxon conversions was Sussex by Wilfrid of Ripon in the 680s (Eddius, *Life of Wilfrid* chap. 41; Bede, *EH* 4.13). Regarding the triumph of Roman over Celtic forms, even Iona had conformed by 716 (Bede, *EH* 5.22), although some Welsh remained in schism when Bede was writing in 731, a fact which the Northumbrian monk contemplated with frustration (*EH* 5.23).

Christian by name and profession, [he] was nevertheless a barbarian in heart and disposition"),⁹⁷ could easily be portrayed as fighting for the establishment of Christianity. Their failure in this world was irrelevant - they triumphed in the next. Oswald in particular is, in Bede's estimation, the "king who is now reigning with the Lord" in "the kingdom which is eternal."⁹⁸ Such a theme of Christian versus "infidel" was not present in eighth-century Anglo-Saxon England. With the completion of evangelization and Romanization, all were at least formally "good Christian kings." The problems facing the Church in Northumbria originated in corrupt practice rather than essential error.⁹⁹

Furthermore, the eighth century was the age when, as is apparent from the sources, the old stability of the various tribal dynasties broke down and civil war became endemic. New royal claimants contended with old lines. Feuds which spanned generations racked Northumbria¹⁰⁰ and possibly Wessex as well.¹⁰¹ In Mercia, a spasm of civil war followed the murder of King Aethelbald in 757,

⁹⁷*"quamuis nomen et professionem haberet Christiani, adeo tamen erat animo ac moribus barbarus,"* Bede, *EH* 2:20, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 202-3.

⁹⁸*"re[x] iam cum Domino regnan[s] . . . aeterno regno,"* Bede, *EH* 3.12, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 250-51.

⁹⁹Bede, letter to Ecgberht.

¹⁰⁰Patrick Wormald, "The Age of Offa and Alcuin," in *The Anglo-Saxons*, ed. James Campbell (1982; repr. London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 114-15.

¹⁰¹See esp. the saga-like entry regarding Cynewulf and Cyneheard s.a. 755 in *ASC* (mss. ABC, recte 757).

ultimately clearing the way for the accession of Offa in that same year.

Offa of Mercia (r. 757-96) consolidated the age of Mercian greatness which characterized the mid to late eighth century. He is also representative of the instability of eighth-century England. Distantly related to his predecessors (if at all - it is interesting that the Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies were first written down in the eighth century in the context of dynastic rivalry),¹⁰² Offa during his reign saw the ecclesiastical rite of anointing gain currency for kings. The first English references to royal anointing or consecration come to us in the report to the Pope by his legates recording a church council in England in 786, "Let no one conspire to kill a king, for he is the Lord's anointed,"¹⁰³ and in the (probably subsequent) consecration of Offa's son Ecgfrith as his royal heir.¹⁰⁴ As with the Carolingians in 751, Anglo-Saxon *parvenu* kings of the eighth century likely sought in royal anointing a new Christian aura of sacrality to replace or at least supplement the ultimately pagan idea of *Heil* or "royal/holy blood."

Nevertheless, military conflict in eighth-century was purely political. Christianity provided neither a cause nor an interpretive framework for warfare between Christian kings. Internecine

¹⁰²Wormald, "Age of Offa and Alcuin," p. 116.

¹⁰³"*In necem regis nemo communicare audeat, quia christus Domini est,*" The legates George and Theophylact, report to Pope Hadrian (786), ed. Haddan and Stubbs 3:454, trans. *EHD* 1:771.

¹⁰⁴ASC s.a. 785 (mss. ABC, recte 787); Wormald, "Age of Offa and Alcuin," p. 117

aggression among Christian kings did not tend to make royal saints - with one exception. Offa's efforts at extending Mercian dominion to encompass all England in a "Greater Mercia" did create one "minor" royal saint. In 794, Offa removed by assassination King Aethelberht of East Anglia, who was later celebrated as a martyr.¹⁰⁵ But the opportunity to employ the motif of religious opposition returned with a vengeance on the verge of the ninth century. The coming of the Vikings provided a new pagan opponent to Anglo-Saxon Christianity.

The Age of Alfred and his Tenth-Century Successors

Thematically, the first half of the ninth century in England was in many ways a continuation of the eighth century, albeit under the looming shadow of ever-increasing Scandinavian raiding. These were the early years of the Age of the Vikings, inaugurated by the raid on Lindisfarne in 793.¹⁰⁶ At first, English political developments followed the same trajectory. Mercian dominance waned while West Saxon waxed under King Ecgberht (r. 802-39). Then all-out Viking assault on England commenced with the coming of the "Great Army" in 865.¹⁰⁷ The Vikings transformed utterly the Anglo-Saxon

¹⁰⁵ODS s.v. "Ethelbert (2)"; ASC s.a. 792 (ms. A, recte 794). See also M. R. James, "Two Lives of St. Ethelbert, King and Martyr," *English Historical Review* 33 (1917), pp. 214-44.

¹⁰⁶ASC s.a. 793 (mss. DE, incorporating northern material). The outrage which this act elicited survives for us to read in Alcuin's letter to Aethelred, king of Northumbria, ed. Haddan and Stubbs 3:492-5. The annal for 787 (recte 789) in southern ms. A of ASC, recording a raid on Portland which occurred in the days of Beorhtric, king of Wessex (r. 786-802) ("on his dagum," ed. Earle, p. 56), could refer to events after 793. See also David Hill, *An Atlas of Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), p. 33.

¹⁰⁷ASC s.a. 866 (mss. AB, s.a. 867 ms. C). A point to remember in using the ASC is that the year was counted by the Anglo-Saxons as
(continued...)

political landscape. Christian England came near total collapse. Of the four major tribal kingdoms - Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, and Wessex - only one survived into 870. Wessex would rally under King Alfred the Great (r. 871-99) and hold the Vikings at bay. Alfred's tenth-century successors would turn the tide, reconquer the regions held by Vikings, and build a united kingdom of England. Between 865 and 870, the Vikings cleared the Anglo-Saxon map for West Saxon expansion. In doing so they created at least one martyr for Christ - St. Edmund, king of East Anglia.¹⁰⁸

We actually know very little about Edmund of East Anglia except the fact of his death in late 869 at the hands of the Vikings. The two most nearly contemporary notices, from within a generation or so,¹⁰⁹ are succinct. According to *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*:

¹⁰⁷(...continued)
starting in different seasons at different periods in their history. During the late 9th and early 10th cs., their year began on 24 September. Whitelock, *EHD* 1:116.

¹⁰⁸Writing in the 12th c., Orderic Vitalis states that two other kings were martyred by pagans in Anglo-Saxon England at about the same time as Edmund of East Anglia: "*Edmundus Estanglorum rex cum duobus aliis Angliae regibus paganorum gladio martir occubuit*," *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, bk. 4, ed. Marjorie Chibnall, Oxford Medieval Society, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969-1981), 2:240. Orderic could only have meant the contending claimants to the Northumbrian throne, Osberht and Aelle, who joined forces against the Vikings too late and were defeated and killed by them. See *ASC* s.a. 867 (ms. AB, s.a. 868 ms. C); Asser, *The Life of King Alfred*, chap. 27 [ed. William Henry Stevenson in *Asser's Life of King Alfred* (1904; repr. with additional note by Dorothy Whitelock, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959)].

¹⁰⁹*ASC* ms. A to 891, the oldest surviving ms., was written in one hand at least two removes from the archetype, probably in the late 9th or early 10th c. (Whitelock, *EHD* 1:109-10). It probably conveys the work of the original compiler of 892-3. Asser based much of his *Life of Alfred* upon an early recension of *ASC* (Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, introd. to *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources*, trans. eadem [London: Penguin, 1983], p. 41); as stated above (chap. 1, p. 27) and
(continued...)

In this year the raiding army rode across Mercia into East Anglia, and took up winter quarters at Thetford. And that winter King Edmund fought against them, and the Danes had the victory, and killed the king and conquered all the land.¹¹⁰

Alfred the Great's biographer Asser tells basically the same story:

In the year of the Lord's Incarnation 870 (the twenty-second of King Alfred's life), the Viking army mentioned above passed through Mercia to East Anglia, and spent the winter there at a place called Thetford.

In the same year, Edmund, king of the East Angles, fought fiercely against that army. But alas, he was killed there with a large number of his men, and the Vikings rejoiced triumphantly . . .¹¹¹

By little more than a century later, however, rich hagiographical tradition surrounding the event was put into writing and St. Edmund was venerated as "the Martyr" in England and beyond. The circumstances surrounding Edmund's death in the hagiographical accounts raises crucial questions about the role of warfare in the sanctity of a Christian king as perceived in the ninth and tenth centuries.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹(...continued)

discussed below (n. 114), I accept the historical consensus that Asser wrote in 892 or 893 (Keynes and Lapidge, *ibid.*).

¹¹⁰"*Her rad se here ofer Merce innan East Engle and wiſtsetl namon. æt Þeodforda. And þy wint' Eadmund cyning him wiþ feaht. and þa Deniscan sige namon and þone cyning ofslogon. and þæt lond all geeodon.*" ASC s.a. 870 (ms. A), ed. Earle, pp. 72, 74, trans. EHD 1:177.

¹¹¹"*Anno Dominicae Incarnationis DCCCLXX, nativitatis autem Aelfredi regis vigesimo secundo, supra memoratus paganorum exercitus per Merciam in Orientales Anglos transiuit, et ibi in loco, qui dicitur Theodford, hiemavit.*

"*Eodem anno Eadmund, Orientalium Anglorum rex, contra ipsum exercitum atrociter pugnavit. Sed, proh dolor! pagani nimium gloriantibus, ipso cum magna suorum parte ibidem occiso*" Asser, *Life of Alfred*, chaps. 32-3, ed. Stevenson pp. 25-6, trans. Keynes and Lapidge in *Alfred the Great*, pp. 77-8.

¹¹²Discussed in detail in chap. 4, pp. 158 ff. below.

More successful against the Vikings were the efforts of Alfred of Wessex, who came to his own throne a little more than a year subsequent to Edmund of East Anglia's demise. Although subjected to almost a decade of Viking offensives in the 870s - and the real possibility he too might end up martyred - Alfred managed to rally his people and fight the Vikings to a standstill. Much of the rest of England remained under Viking rule and became known as the "Danelaw," but Wessex survived.

King Alfred the Great is undoubtedly the most renowned of Anglo-Saxon kings, both because of his achievements and because a relative wealth of sources survives for the period of his reign (871-99). Perhaps the most important among these is the *Life of King Alfred*,¹¹³ written while the king yet lived by his friend and cleric the Welshman Asser, as the first stand-alone royal biography in Anglo-Saxon England.¹¹⁴ Despite a historiographical debate recently revived in a major study of Alfred, the scholarly consensus retains the "Genuine Asser."¹¹⁵ The *Life of King Alfred* reveals through its

¹¹³Asser, *The Life of King Alfred*, trans. Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge in *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources* (London: Penguin 1983), pp. 65-110. This is an excellent trans. Until the promised re-edition of Asser's Latin original appears in the sporadically appearing series *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1983-), one must consult that of William Henry Stevenson in *Asser's Life of King Alfred* (1904; repr. with additional note by Dorothy Whitelock, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959).

¹¹⁴Chase, "Saints' Lives, Royal Lives," p. 163. See also n. 109 above.

¹¹⁵The old question regarding the authenticity of Asser lingers on, due in large part - as remarked by Keynes and Lapidge - to the stature of the primary skeptic of recent memory, Vivian H. Galbraith (Keynes and Lapidge, introd. to *Alfred the Great*, p. 50, in a

(continued...)

rather disjointed structure the stages in its composition and compiling. David Kirby relates these stages to the developing political context of the 880s and 890s, with particular reference to the submissions of Welsh lords and kings to the authority of the West Saxon king.¹¹⁶ Asser sought to show by emphasis on Alfred's piety that he was a king worthy spiritually as well as militarily of Welsh allegiance as leader of the Christian peoples of Britain against the pagan Vikings.¹¹⁷ The conflict itself was cast in stark religious terms by Asser, as one of *pagani versus Christiani*; in those passages he derived from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* the biographer even

¹¹⁵(...continued)

comprehensive discussion of the issue, pp. 50-51; Galbraith presented his argument in "Who Wrote Asser's Life of Alfred?" in *An Introduction to the Study of History* [London: C. A. Watts, 1964]). Galbraith's reasons for believing the *Life* to be an eleventh-century forgery were almost immediately addressed and refuted by Dorothy Whitelock, and the overwhelming historical consensus remains in favor of her "Genuine Asser" (The Stenton Lecture 1967; publ. University of Reading, 1969). Nevertheless, Alfred P. Smyth, *King Alfred the Great* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), argues at great length with a mind-numbing barrage of evidence his major point that Asser as the author of a biography was not genuine, obviously necessitating a radical reappraisal of the Alfredian period. The storm surrounding the appearance of Smyth's work has not settled, although his argument seems not to have convinced at least previous scholars accepting Asser's authenticity - see for one, the review by Michael Lapidge (co-editor of Penguin's *Alfred the Great*), "A King of Monkish Fable?" *Times Higher Education Supplement* (8 March 1996), p. 20. Smyth's work on Alfred, issued as it is by a prestigious scholarly publishing house, is doubtless fated to be as controversial as his saga-based reconstruction of the Viking kingdoms in the British Isles (see Donnchadh Ó Corráin's review article, "High Kings, Vikings, and Other Kings," *Irish Historical Studies* 21 [1980]; also p. 159 n. 33 below re the "blood-eagle"). His evidence and reasoning would have to be extraordinarily formidable to overturn the consensus in favor of the authenticity of Asser, and voluminous though it be it is riddled with enough unlikely conjectures and outright errors as to be unconvincing.

¹¹⁶David P. Kirby, "Asser and His Life of King Alfred," *Studia Celtica* 6 (1971), pp. 12-35.

¹¹⁷Keynes and Lapidge, introd. to *Alfred the Great*, pp. 56, 41-2.

sharpened the opposition.¹¹⁸ One condition of the agreement between Alfred and the Viking leader Guthrum after the West Saxon victory at Edington in 878 was that Guthrum and his warriors become Christian.¹¹⁹

Alfred was a great war-leader. Once he obtained victory over the Viking leader Guthrum, sealed by the baptism of the Viking and his followers, Alfred implemented a series of military reforms for which he is famous: organization and outfitting of a navy; reorganization of the *fyrð* or army; creation of the burghal system of fortified strongholds. Together, these reforms nullified to a large degree the Viking advantages and protected the kingdom. His successors built on Alfred the Great's accomplishments and transformed Wessex into England.¹²⁰ But, as noted by Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, "if [Alfred's] military reforms can be regarded as prevention, there is reason to regard his programme for the revival of religion and learning as the intended cure."¹²¹ In the preface which Alfred himself wrote to the *Pastoral Care of Gregory*

¹¹⁸See Keynes and Lapidge, introd. to *Alfred the Great*, pp. 41 and 23, and p. 231 n. 12 where they explain their decision to translate *pagani* as "Vikings" throughout the Asser's *Life of Alfred*. A good example of Asser's sharpening the religious dichotomy may be seen in the passages quoted above re Edmund of East Anglia, from the ASC s.a. 870 and Asser, *Life of Alfred* chaps. 31-2. There are many more.

¹¹⁹Asser, *Life of Alfred* chap. 56.

¹²⁰Both the ASC for the period of Alfred's son Edward the Elder's reign (899-924) and the *Burghal Hidage* show the extension of West Saxon domination during the generation after Alfred. The latter is ed. and trans. A. J. Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), pp. 246-9

¹²¹Keynes and Lapidge, introd. to *Alfred the Great*, p. 25.

the Great, the king expressed his view that the Vikings were a chastisement on the English for their religious decline, and that God's favor must be regained for victory.¹²² Alfred bade the reader:

Remember what temporal punishments came upon us, when we neither loved wisdom ourselves nor allowed it to other men; we possessed only the name of Christians and very few possessed the virtues.¹²³

Alfred set about rectifying the situation both through a literary program which produced translations into Old English of vitally important works from Christian tradition (the *Pastoral Care* was but one) as well as original compositions (the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Asser's biography) and through mandated religious reforms and endowments of monasteries.¹²⁴ Alfred led by example - he displayed personal devotion exceptional in a layman.¹²⁵ At least one contemporary attributed the survival of Alfred's kingdom through the briefly renewed Viking raids of the 890s to renewed divine favor. Coming as it does in the midst of detailed tracking of move and

¹²²I have previously focussed on these ideas (Kent Gregory Hare, "Religion, Warfare, and the *Gens Anglorum*: Aspects of Holy War and its Development in Anglo-Saxon England," M.A. thesis [History], Louisiana State University, 1992, pp. 48-53) in the broader context of Anglo-Saxon conceptions of their election and chastisement (*op. cit.*, chap. 1, "*Gentes Dei, Gens Anglorum*," pp. 14-59).

¹²³"*Geðenc hwelc witu us ða becomon for ðisse worulde, þa þa we hit nohwæðer ne selfe ne lufedon ne eac oðrum monnum ne lifdon: ðone naman anne we hæfdon ðette we Cristene wæren, & swiðe feawe ða ðeawas,*" *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, preface, ed. (from Cotton ms.) Henry Sweet, EETS o.s. 45, 50 (London: Oxford University Press, 1871), p. 4, trans. EHD 1:818. See also Keynes and Lapidge, introd. to *Alfred the Great*, p. 26.

¹²⁴Asser, *Life of Alfred* chaps. 92, 98.

¹²⁵Keynes and Lapidge, notes to *Alfred the Great*, p. 257 n. 154.

countermove on the part of Alfred's forces and the Vikings through the years 893-896, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* entry for 896 reads almost as a sigh of relief: "The Viking army had not - by God's grace! - afflicted the English people to a very great extent."¹²⁶

Alfred laid the foundation for his West Saxon successors to build a kingdom of England upon the ruins of the other three Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. We know much less of those successors, however, than we do of Alfred. None received biographical treatment comparable to that accorded Alfred by Asser.¹²⁷ Although the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records the campaigns of Alfred's son Edward the Elder (r. 899-924) in some detail, the account tapers off dramatically in all manuscripts during the early 920s. The entries remain sparse until the ill-fated reign of Aethelred the Unready and the return of Scandinavian raiders after 980.¹²⁸ It may be no coincidence that

¹²⁶"*Næfde se here. Godes þonces. Angelcyn ealles for swiðe gebrocod,*" *ASC s.a. 897* (ms. A, recte 896), ed. Earle, p. 94, trans. Keynes and Lapidge in *Alfred the Great*, p. 118.

¹²⁷Athelstan is perhaps an exception - see below, pp. 122 ff.

¹²⁸As an estimate, I compared the number of pages in the collated translation of the *ASC* as printed in *EHD* 1 for three spans of time commencing with Alfred's accession in 871 and ending with the long entry for 1016, when England fell to the Danish king Cnut. From Alfred through Edward the Elder (s.a. 871-924 = 53 years), pp. 177-99 (=24 pages inclusive), = approx. 2.2 annals/page; the intervening period (Athelstan through Edward the Martyr, s.a. 924-78 = 54 years), pp. 199 (bottom)-210 (=11 pages), = approx. 4.9 annals/page; Athelred to Cnut's victory (s.a. 978-1016 = 38 years), pp. 210-227 (=17 pages), = approx. 2.2 annals/page, comparable to the first period. Very roughly, the annal/page density for the intervening period is 250% of that to either side. This is perhaps not surprising, considering that the *ASC* could be considered a record of conflicts - in England the first three quarters of the tenth century were free from the external threats which marked Alfred's and Aethelred's reigns; the reign of Edward the Elder saw the steady expansion of West Saxon dominance into the Danelaw, traceable in the establishment of *burhs* throughout Mercia; the great anomaly is perhaps the reign of Athelstan, which record is except for the annal for 937 almost bare.
(continued...)

the last member of the Alfredian circle of scholars, Archbishop Plegmund, passed away in 923; perhaps with him passed for a time a guiding hand behind the *Chronicle*. Through the *Chronicle* account, we know in some detail the public deeds of Edward the Elder; because the *Chronicle* is virtually our only source for this king, his character will forever remain obscure. Paradoxically, although Edward's son Athelstan is particularly ill-served by the Chronicler, we can know this latter king somewhat better through other sources.

Athelstan (r. 924-39) is one of the most interesting although lesser known of the late Saxon kings of England. He was more than any other tenth-century king the real consolidator of a kingdom of England based upon the foundations of Alfred the Great and Edward the Elder. His accomplishments have been occulted in part by the much greater fame of his grandfather Alfred. He was, however, likely a more important figure to contemporaries, particularly his peers on the Continent, than were any of his predecessors. His pride of place within that larger European context can be inferred from the marriage alliances formed in his generation between his sisters and the most powerful men on the Continent.¹²⁹ The marriages of West Saxon princesses to Hugh the Great in West Francia and Otto the Great in Germany in 926 and 928 respectively are significant in the context of

¹²⁸(...continued)

Annal 937 is of course well-known as the poem, *The Battle of Brunanburh*, and it constitutes approx. 3/4 of the ASC's total coverage of Athelstan - note that there are *no* entries for 935, 936, 938, or 939!

¹²⁹See William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum* sec. 135, ed. Stubbs 1:149-50, trans. *EHD* 1:281-2.

early tenth-century Continental history - in both cases the dynasties who supplanted the Carolingians in old Francia gained alliance with a ruling family claiming a pedigree even more venerable than the Carolingians, namely the West Saxon House of Cerdic.¹³⁰ Nonetheless it was their current successes in winning back those areas of England which had fallen under Viking rule that made the West Saxon kings attractive allies. In that achievement, Athelstan was as key a figure as was his grandfather. This fact was doubtless recognized by the Anglo-Saxon Chronicler in his celebration of Athelstan's victory at *Brunanburh* in heroic verse.¹³¹

The fame of Athelstan, "putting all his predecessors to shade by his piety, and all the glories of their triumphs by the splendour of his own,"¹³² was such that this king became a focal point around whom accrued a great deal of perhaps legendary material.¹³³ The major source for this material is a poem which may have given the twelfth-century historian William of Malmesbury most of his information on Athelstan. William's word has long been accepted that he based his account of Athelstan upon a no longer extant tenth-

¹³⁰Williams, et al., *Dark Age Britain*, s.v. "Athelstan."

¹³¹ASC s.a. 937 (mss. ABCD). This poem is discussed in chapter 5 below.

¹³²"*omnes antecessores devotione mentis, omnes eorum adores triumphorum suorum splendore obscuravit*," William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum* sec. 131, ed. Stubbs 1:142, trans. EHD 1:277.

¹³³David Dumville, *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar: Six Essays on Political, Cultural, and Ecclesiastical Revival* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1992), pp. 142-3 n. 9, 168-9 n. 183; C. E. Wright, *The Cultivation of Saga in Anglo-Saxon England* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1939), pp. 74, 76, 144-5, and esp. pp. 146, 156; Wilson, *Lost Literature*, pp. 47-50.

century Latin poem concerning the deeds of Athelstan.¹³⁴ William is for his part unambiguous:

Concerning this king, a firm opinion is current among the English, that no one more just or learned administered the State. A few days ago I discovered that he was versed in letters, from a certain very old book, in which the author struggled with the difficulty of his matter, unable to express his meaning as he wished. I would append here his words for the sake of brevity, if he did not range beyond belief in praise of the prince, in that kind of expression which Tullius [Cicero], the king of Roman eloquence, in his book on rhetoric calls bombastic. The custom of that time excuses the diction; the affection for Athelstan, who was still alive, lends colour to the excess of praise. I shall add, therefore, in a familiar style a few matters which may seem to augment the record of his greatness.¹³⁵

The nature of William's source as authentically tenth-century has, however, been questioned and rejected in recent years by Anglo-Latinist Michael Lapidge on the basis that extracts from the verses which William includes do not display the arcane style and vocabulary

¹³⁴Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 319 n. 1, p. 339 n. 2; Alistair Campbell, introd. to *The Battle of Brunanburh*, ed. idem (London: William Heinemann, 1938), p. 49 and n. 5; Whitelock, *EHD* 1:277; Laura Hibbard Loomis, "The Holy Relics of Charlemagne and King Athelstan: The Lances of Longinus and St. Mercurius" (1950), repr. in *Adventures in the Middle Ages: A Memorial Collection of Essays and Studies, Selected Papers in Literature and Criticism* 1 (New York: Burt Franklin, 1962), pp. 201-205; Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c. 550 to c. 1307* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), pp. 53-5.

¹³⁵"De hoc rege non invalida apud Anglos fama seritur, quod nemo legalius vel litteratius rempublicam administraverit. Quanquam litteras illum scisse, pauci admodum dies sunt quod didicerim in quodam sane volumine vetusto, in quo scriptor cum difficultate materiae luctabatur, iudicium animi sui non valens pro voto proferre. Cujus hic verba pro compendio subjicerem, nisi quia ultra opinionem in laudibus principis vagatur, eo dicendi genere quod suffultum rex facundiae Romanae Tullius in rhetoricis appellat. Eloquium excusat consuetudo illius temporis, laudum nimietatem adornat favor Ethelstani adhuc viventis. Pauca igitur familiari stylo subnectam, quæ videantur aliquod conferre emolumentum ad dignitatis ejus documentum." William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum* sec. 132, ed. Stubbs 1:144, trans. *EHD* 1:278-9.

that appears almost without exception in tenth- to eleventh-century Anglo-Latin compositions.¹³⁶ Nevertheless, the jury must still be considered out. Michael Wood argued subsequently to Lapidge that a genuinely contemporary tenth-century poem does indeed underlie William of Malmesbury's twelfth-century account. The verses William quotes are twelfth-century translations from the tenth-century hermeneutic poem (a practice William demonstrably followed elsewhere).¹³⁷ William's words reveal his own recognition and assessment of the tenth-century style: "*Eloquium excusat consuetudo illius temporis*," "The custom of that time excuses the diction." Finally (*ad hominem* though it be), as Laura Hibbard Loomis began her argument for the authenticity of the "Athelstan Panegyric," "In 1125, if any learned man in England was qualified to recognize an ancient book when he saw it, that man was William of Malmesbury."¹³⁸ Despite Lapidge's objections, the old consensus that William's source

¹³⁶Michael Lapidge, "Some Latin Poems as Evidence for the Reign of Athelstan," *Anglo-Saxon England* 9 (1981), pp. 62-71. See also idem, "The Hermeneutic Style in Tenth-Century Anglo-Latin Literature," *Anglo-Saxon England* 4 (1975), pp. 67-111.

¹³⁷Michael Wood, "The Making of King Aethelstan's Empire: An English Charlemagne?" in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill*, ed. Patrick Wormald, et al. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), pp. 265-6, incl. 265 n. 78. Wood tentatively identifies the lost Athelstan-poem with the "*bella ethel[s]tani regis*" which appears in a 13th-c. catalogue entry at Glastonbury (presently in Trinity College, Cambridge, Ms. R S 33 [f. 103v]), noticed by Lapidge himself ("Latin Poems," p. 61 n. 6) but apparently rejected by Lapidge as William's source.

¹³⁸Loomis, "Holy Relics," p. 201. On the value and reliability of William as a historian, see also Gransden, *Historical Writing*, chap. 9, "William of Malmesbury," esp. pp. 167-8, 173, 175-8, 185.

for Athelstan "ha[s] the authority of a contemporary"¹³⁹ has not been overturned.

Lapidge's more unassailable contribution in that same article is his recovery from obscurity, extensive discussion, and edition of three other tenth-century Latin poems associated with Athelstan. Two of these poems in particular do indicate how that king was viewed by contemporaries.¹⁴⁰ One, the *Carta Dirige Gressus*, Lapidge assigns to the immediate aftermath of the events of 927 when Athelstan expelled Olaf Sigtryggson from York, entered into a pact with Constantine, king of the Scots, and gained the submission of the princes of Wales. In Lapidge's meticulous reconstruction based upon one of the two independent but both corrupted versions of the poem, the poet exults,

Whom he now rules with this
England [now] made whole:
King Athelstan lives
glorious through his deeds!¹⁴¹

The other poem, the *Rex Pius Æthelstan*, comes from a similar historical context. Lapidge strongly suggests that it is associated

¹³⁹Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 339 n. 2.

¹⁴⁰The third (the first discussed by Lapidge, "Latin Poems," pp. 72-83) is an 8-line acrostic Lapidge believes to have been written, possibly by John the Old Saxon (part of the Alfredian circle of scholars - see Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, chaps. 78, 94) on the occasion of Alfred the Great's honoring his very young grandson (b. ca. 894; Alfred d. 899) with arms and royal insignia.

¹⁴¹*Quos iam regit cum ista
perfecta Saxoniam
uiuuit rex Æthelstanus
per facta gloriosus!*

Carta Dirige Gressus stanza 3, ed. and trans. Lapidge in "Latin Poems," p. 98. "*Quos iam regit cum ista*" apparently refers back to stanza 2, which identifies those over whom Athelstan rules - the queen, the prince, ealdormen and thanes.

with the aftermath of Athelstan's 937 triumph at *Brunanburh* which also inspired the Anglo-Saxon Chronicler to wax poetic in Old English heroic meter.¹⁴² Consider the first few lines of the Latin poem:

Holy king Athelstan, renowned through the whole world,
 whose esteem flourishes and whose honour endures
 everywhere,
 whom God set as king over the English, sustained by the
 foundation
 of the throne, and as leader of [His] earthly
 forces,
 plainly so that this king himself, mighty in war, might
 be able
 to conquer other fierce kings, treading down their
 fierce necks.¹⁴³

Athelstan is God's warrior, set by Him over the English to lead His people, supported by God to victory in war. The last verse quoted above uses terms particularly reminding one of the Psalms.¹⁴⁴

A vaguely Old Testament flavor imparted to Athelstan's kingship in the *Rex Pius Æthelstan* becomes explicit in a prayer for victory traditionally associated with this same king. It appears immediately adjacent to one version of the *Carta Dirige Gressus* in a manuscript of unknown provenance. Both poem and prayer were written into the manuscript by the same hand, which probably dates to the early

¹⁴²ASC s.a. 937 (mss. ABCD); see discussion in chap. 5 below. Lapidge, "Latin Poems," p. 97, incl. n. 158.

¹⁴³ *Rex pius Æthelstan, patulo famosus in orbo,
 cuius ubique uiget gloria lausque manet,
 quem Deus Angligenis solii fundamine nixum
 constituit regem terrigenisque ducem,
 scilicet ut ualeat reges rex ipse ipse feroces
 uincere bellipotens, colla superba terrenis.*
Rex Pius Æthelstan lines 1-6, ed. and trans. Lapidge in "Latin Poems," pp. 95-96.

¹⁴⁴E.g., Ps. 58.

eleventh-century.¹⁴⁵ In the nineteenth century, Walter de Gray Birch printed what he entitled the "Prayer of Aethelstan" in both Latin and, from yet another manuscript¹⁴⁶ in Old English:

O Lord God Almighty King of Kings and Lord of Lords in Whose might every victory lies and every war is crushed, grant to me that Thy might may fortify my heart so that, relying on Thy strength and relying on my own hands and powers I may fight well and act manfully, so that my enemies may fall in my sight and may collapse just as Goliath collapsed before Thy servant David and just as the people of Pharaoh before Moses in the Red Sea; and just as the Philistines fell before the people of Israel; and [just as] Amalek collapsed before Moses and the Canaanites before Joshua, so let my enemies fall under my feet, and let them come against me by one path and let them flee from me by seven paths; and may God crush their arms and smash their swords[*conteret Deus arma eorum et confinget framea eorum*¹⁴⁷] and melt them

¹⁴⁵London British Library Cotton Nero A.ii: f. 10v-11v, *Carta Dirige Gressus*; f. 11v-12v, prayer beginning "*Domine Deus omnipotens.*" Lapidge, "Latin Poems," p. 84 n. 111, p. 85 n. 115; he proposes as place of origin St. German's in Cornwall.

¹⁴⁶London, British Library Cotton Galba A. xiv, f. 4v, from ca. 1000 or very early 11th-c. Date per Neil R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), pp. 198-9. The Old English version appears immediately after another Latin version of the prayer (f. 3) which has minor differences from Cotton Nero A. ii, which are noted in the transcription below, following Walter de Gray Birch, ed., *Cartularium Saxonicum: A Collection of Charters Relating to Anglo-Saxon History*, 3 vols. (1885-1893; repr. New York and London: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1964) [hereafter cited as CS].

¹⁴⁷*framea*: a feminine noun, ultimately of Germanic origin, originally meaning 'spear' or 'javelin', but in Late Latin meaning 'sword' (as in Psalm 16.13) - see Charlton T. Lewis [and Charles Short], *A Latin Dictionary* (1879; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), s.v. Other lexicons consulted included: *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968); J. F. Niermeyer, *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976); Alexander Souter, *A Glossary of Later Latin to 600 A.D.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949); R. E. Latham, *Revised Medieval Latin Word List from British and Irish Sources* (London: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1965); as well as *Thesaurus Latinae Linguae* and Du Cange's *Glossarium Mediae et Infimae Latinitatis*. None were of help in explicating this word and its form. The sense of this passage indicates this word to be a plural accusative, which would dictate *frameas*; I can find no precedent for conversion of this noun to neuter gender which would allow *framea*. Perhaps the parallel with
(continued...)

in my sight just as wax melts before a fire, so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the name of Our Lord Jesus has been invoked upon me; and let Thy name be magnified, O Lord, among my adversaries, O Lord God of Israel.¹⁴⁸

Despite Birch's endorsement, the tradition associating this prayer specifically with Athelstan is considered doubtful by modern commentators.¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, an early eleventh-century copyist's

¹⁴⁷(...continued)

arma eorum caused the scribe to duplicate the case ending for *framea eorum*.

¹⁴⁸*Domine Deus omnipotens rex regum et dominus dominantium in cuius manu omnis victoria consistit et omne bellum conteritur concede mihi ut tua manus cor meum corroboret ut in virtute tua in manibus viribusque meis bene pugnare viriliterque agere valeam ut inimici mei in conspectu meo cadent et corruant sicut corruit Goliath ante faciem pueri tui David et sicut populus Pharaonis coram Moysi in mare rubro. Et sicut Philistini coram populo Israhel ceciderunt. Et Amalech coram Moysi et Chananei coram Jesu corruerunt sic cadant inimici mei sub pedibus meis et per viam unam convenient adversum me et per septem fugiant a me et conteret Deus arma eorum et confringet framea eorum et eliquisce in conspectu meo sicut cera a facie ignis ut sciant omnes populi terre quia invocatum est nomen domini nostri Jhesu super me et magnificetur nomen tuum domine in adversariis meis domine Deus Israhel.*

Æla þu dryhten æla ðu ælmihtiga God . æla cing ealra cyninga . & hlaford ealra waldendra . on þæs mihta wunaþ ælc sige . & ælc gewin weorþ to bryt . for gif me drihten þ[æt] þin seo mihtigu hand mines unstrangan heortan gestrangie & þ[æt] ic þurh þine þa miclan mihte mid handum minum & mihte stranglice & werlice ongan mine fynd . winnan mæge swa þ[æt] hy on minre gisihþe feallan . & gereosan swa swa gereas Goliath ætforan Dauides ansyne . þines cnihtes . & swa swa gereas & wearþ besenct Faraones folc on þære readan sæ . ætforan Moyses ansene . & swa swa feollan Filistei . beforan Israela folce . & swa swa gerias Amaleh . ætforan Moisen . & Chananei ætforan Iesu Naue . Swa feallan & gereosan mine find under minum fotum . & hi ealle samod þurh ænne weg ongan me cumen . & þurh seofan wegas hie fram me gewican; For bryt drihten heora wapna & heora sweord to bret & do drihten þ[æt] hy for meltan on minre gisihþe . swa swa weax mylt fram fyres ansyne . þ[æt] eall eorþas folc wite & ongyte þ[æt] ofer me is geciged noma ures drihtnes hælendes Cristes . & þ[æt] þin noma drihten sy geweorþad on minum wiper winum . þu þe eart drihten Israela God.

CS docs. 656 and 657. My translation is based upon the Latin.

¹⁴⁹Lapidge, "Latin Poems," p. 84 n. 111; See also Joseph Armitage Robinson, *The Times of St. Dunstan* (1923; repr. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 68; Campbell, app. 5 "Doubtful References to the Battle" in *Battle of Brunanburh*, p. 161.

placement of the prayer adjacent to a poem clearly celebrating the king's triumph testifies to the early date of such a tradition.

Taken together, the poems and the prayer quoted above reveal the view of Athelstan as a powerful warrior king which was current in the tenth and early eleventh centuries. The prayer is replete with stark martial imagery, drawn from the Old Testament, which would be appropriately assigned to God's own warrior celebrated by the author of the *Rex Pius Æðelstan*. The manuscript contexts of both the *Carta Dirige Gressus* and the *Rex Pius Æðelstan* furthermore highlight the reputation of Athelstan as a great benefactor of the Church in England.

The *Rex Pius Æðelstan* was written into a late ninth- or early tenth-century Gospel manuscript of continental origin (probably from the Empire) on the occasion of Athelstan's donation of the Gospel to Christ Church Canterbury.¹⁵⁰ The manuscript context of the *Carta Dirige Gressus* is even more significant for the relationship of king and church in the military context of the early- to mid-tenth century. One of the two extant versions of the poem appears in a Durham manuscript known to be at Chester-le-Street in the tenth century. Athelstan was quite generous to the congregation of St. Cuthbert at Chester-le-Street.¹⁵¹ From the later (after 995)

¹⁵⁰Lapidge, "Latin Poems," p. 94 - the ms. is London, British Library Cotton Tiberius A.ii.

¹⁵¹Lapidge, "Latin Poems," p. 84 - the ms. is Durham, Cathedral Library, A. II. 17, pt. 1. For Athelstan and St. Cuthbert, see Robinson, *Dunstan*, pp. 51-5. In the chaotic conditions of late 9th-c. Viking-ravaged Northumbria, the guardians of St. Cuthbert's relics had finally in 875 abandoned the exposed Holy Isle of Lindisfarne
(continued...)

residence of the congregation, Symeon of Durham in his early twelfth-century *Historia Regum* embellishes the bare *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* entry for 934 that "King Athelstan went into Scotland . . . and ravaged much of it"¹⁵² with the news that Athelstan

came to the tomb of St. Cuthbert, commended himself and his expedition to his protection, and conferred on him many and diverse gifts befitting a king He then subdued his enemies, laid waste Scotland¹⁵³

By his many gifts Athelstan marshalled the Northumbrian saint's aid against his enemies.

There is earlier evidence than Symeon of Durham's for an increasingly close association of the tenth-century English kings with the guardians of St. Cuthbert's relics, and for that association in the unsettled conditions of the north to be cast in military terms. The *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*, a curious document the bulk of which dates from the mid-tenth century,¹⁵⁴ seems largely

¹⁵¹(...continued)

(site of the first documented Viking raid back in 793). Seven years' wandering brought them to Chester-le-Street, where the congregation and relics found refuge for over a century, until the move to Durham. See Symeon of Durham, *Historia Regum* s.a. 875, 883, 995; idem, *Historia Dunelmensis Ecclesiae* 2.6-13, 3.1; as well as the *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto* sec. 20 [all three of the latter are ed. Thomas Arnold in *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia*, 2 vols., RS 72 (London: Longman, 1882-1885), vols. 2, 1, and 1 respectively].

¹⁵²". . . for *Æpelstan cyning in on Scotland . . . and his micel oferhergade*," *ASC* s.a. 933 (ms. A, recte 934), ed. Earle, p. 110, trans. *EHD* 1:200.

¹⁵³"*ad sepulcrum Sancti Cuthberti venit, illius patrocinio se suumque iter commendavit, multa ac diversa dona quæ regem decerent ei obtulit Deinde hostes subegit, Scotiam . . . vastavit*," Symeon of Durham, *Historia Regum* s.a. 934, ed. Arnold 2:93, trans. *EHD* 1:252.

¹⁵⁴Luisella Simpson, "The King Alfred/St Cuthbert Episode in the *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*: Its Significance for Mid-tenth-century English History," in *St. Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community to A.D.* (continued...)

motivated by such connections - sections 26 and 27 are likely Symeon's source regarding Athelstan's donation. This work pushes the relationship back to the days of King Alfred. On the eve of Alfred's decisive triumph at Edington in 878, St. Cuthbert is said to have appeared to him and assured him of his own and God's aid to victory in a manner similar to and perhaps derived from St. Columba's appearance to Oswald of Northumbria.¹⁵⁵ The Durham monks posited a tradition of West Saxon devotion to St. Cuthbert, urged on Edward the Elder by his father Alfred and by Edward on his own son Athelstan, and continuing under Athelstan's brother and successor Edmund.¹⁵⁶

There is also evidence for West Saxon overtures to St. Cuthbert independent of the Durham monks' own tradition. Among the gifts of Athelstan to Chester-le-Street was a tenth-century West Saxon codex containing Bede's prose and verse *Lives* of St. Cuthbert and as its frontispiece an illustration of the king presenting the book to St.

¹⁵⁴(...continued)

1200, ed. Gerald Bonner, et al. (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1989), pp. 397-411; Rollason, *Saints and Relics*, pp. 144-9.

¹⁵⁵*Historia de Sancto Cuthberto* sec. 16, ed. Arnold 1:205, trans. Rollason, *Saints and Relics*, p. 149. The account probably inspired another account of such militarily-oriented visions received by Alfred, with appropriate substitution of St. Neot for St. Cuthbert, as recorded in the *Vita Prima Sancti Neoti et Translatio* secs. 13, 16, ed. Michael Lapidge in *The Annals of St Neots with Vita Prima Sancti Neoti*, ed. David Dumville and Michael Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition* 17 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1983), pp. 126-8, 130-32. The martialization of the reclusive St. Cuthbert may be compared with the transformation in St. Martin wrought by later tradition as remarked in chap. 2 above.

¹⁵⁶*Historia de Sancto Cuthberto* secs. 19, 25, 28; Rollason, *Saints and Relics*, p. 146.

Cuthbert a book.¹⁵⁷ In the first half of the tenth century a relationship between the West Saxon kings and the congregation of St. Cuthbert would have been mutually beneficial. The monks would gain a measure of protection against threats from the Scots to the north and the Viking kings still reigning in York to the immediate south; the West Saxons gained powerful spiritual support and hence a measure of legitimacy in their bid to dominate Northumbria, where they had no historic claim. Such was a strategy employed by tenth-century West Saxon kings elsewhere. David Rollason cites later evidence that Athelstan also patronized the shrines of St. John of Beverley and St. Wilfrid at Ripon, and includes an illustration of a ring preserved at Bury St. Edmunds in East Anglia bearing as its inscription the names of St. John of Beverley and Athelstan.¹⁵⁸ In the 890s, Abbo of Fleury attested an independent tradition that Athelstan solicited tales of the East Anglian royal martyr.¹⁵⁹

Relics played a crucial role in the West Saxon program of marshalling the cults of non-West Saxon saints to their cause.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷Cambridge, Corpus Christi College ms. 183. For the frontispiece, see Plate 6 in Wormald, et al., ed., *Ideal and Reality*, to accompany Wood's article, "Aethelstan's Empire"; Robinson, *Dunstan*, pp. 53-4, states succinctly this traditional interpretation. See, however, Rollason's alternative interpretation of the action in the scene - that Athelstan is reading from the book as St. Cuthbert appears to him in a vision, and that the ms. was in fact Athelstan's own devotional book and only later made its way to Durham: *Saints and Relics*, p. 150 (and fig. 6.3). Either way, the illustration associates Athelstan with St. Cuthbert.

¹⁵⁸Rollason, *Saints and Relics*, pp. 152-3, incl. fig. 6.4.

¹⁵⁹See below, chap. 4, p. 161.

¹⁶⁰Rollason, *Saints and Relics*, chap. 6, "The Cult of Saints and the Unification of England," esp. pp. 159 ff., "Kings and Relics."

The royal relic-collection made up the king's *haligdom*, which accompanied him always, from at least the late ninth century, when Asser testifies that King Alfred kept candles burning "in the presence of the holy relics of a number of God's chosen saints which the king had with him everywhere."¹⁶¹ Priests were appointed to tend the relics, and the relic collection was considered a safe place to store critical royal documents.¹⁶² Royal possession of relics from throughout England is a clear indication of the breadth of West Saxon influence.¹⁶³ Athelstan stands out among the relic-collectors of late Saxon England. Several churches' traditions attributed their own collections to his religious largesse - one of them was Malmesbury, perhaps explaining that abbey's devotion to him.¹⁶⁴ Athelstan was well-known as an ardent collector of relics from far and wide. The prologue to an Old English relic-list from Exeter (which church received one-third of Athelstan's collection),¹⁶⁵ tells how royal agents purchased "with the king's earthly treasure

¹⁶¹"*coram sanctis multorum electorum Dei reliquiis, quae semper eum ubique comitabantur,*" Asser, *Life of Alfred*, chap. 104, ed. Stevenson, p. 90, trans. Keynes and Lapidge, p. 108; Rollason, *Saints and Relics*, p. 159. See also Margaret Deanesly, *The Pre-Conquest Church in England, An Ecclesiastical History of England 1* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 337. On the specificity of the term *haligdom* for relic-collection, see Rollason, *Saints and Relics*, p. 162-3.

¹⁶²Rollason, *Saints and Relics*, p. 159.

¹⁶³Rollason, *Saints and Relics*, pp. 153 ff.

¹⁶⁴William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum* sec. 135, ed. Stubbs 1:151, trans. *EHD* p. 282.

¹⁶⁵Rollason, *Saints and Relics*, p. 160.

the most valuable treasures of all - holy relics."¹⁶⁶ A letter from the prior at St. Samson's at Dol in Brittany testifies to knowledge of Athelstan's interest in relics even beyond the shores of England.¹⁶⁷

Such a reputation attached to the West Saxon king probably prompted the gifts which accompanied Hugh the Great's 926 solicitation of Athelstan for his sister's hand in marriage.¹⁶⁸ The nature of the relics sent by Hugh is intriguing with regard to the question of the saints' aid in war. According to William of Malmesbury, among Hugh's gifts were:

. . . the sword of Constantine the Great, on which could be read the name of the ancient owner in letters of gold; on the pommel also above thick plates of gold you could see an iron nail fixed, one of the four which the Jewish faction prepared for the crucifixion of our Lord's body; the spear of Charles the Great, which, whenever that most invincible emperor, leading an army against the Saracens, hurled it against the enemy, never let him depart without the victory; it was said to be the same which, driven by the hand of the centurion into our Lord's side, opened by the gash of that precious wound Paradise for wretched mortals; the standard of Maurice, the most blessed martyr and prince of the Theban legion, by which the same king was wont in the Spanish war to break asunder the

¹⁶⁶Rollason, *Saints and Relics*, p. 159, quoting the relic-list prologue from M. Förster, ed., *Zur Geschichte des Reliquienkultus in Altengland* (Munich, 1943), pp. 63-5. *The Athelstan Donation to Exeter* is also trans. Michael Swanton in *Anglo-Saxon Prose*, rev. ed. (London: J. M. Dent - Everyman's Library, 1993), pp. 19-24; for eds. see Swanton's introd., p. 19. See also Robinson, *Dunstan*, pp. 71-80, and pp. 159-90, for a general discussion of Athelstan and his relics and donations.

¹⁶⁷William of Malmesbury transcribed the letter in his *De Gestis Pontificum*, ed N. E. S. A. Hamilton, RS 52 (London: Longman, 1870), pp. 399-400.

¹⁶⁸See above.

battalions of the enemies, however fierce and dense, and to force them to flight¹⁶⁹

The significance of these gifts has been much discussed. Wood speculates that for William they symbolized a "*translatio imperii*" from the Carolingians to Athelstan, and that Athelstan through receipt of these gifts and their Carolingian associations aspired to the Carolingian legacy of empire.¹⁷⁰ More significant here are the martial associations of the relics.

The three relics described by William of Malmesbury included not only a banner associated with a martyred soldier of the early Church (St. Maurice, killed with the Theban Legion ca. 287 for refusing to make pagan sacrifice) but also relics of the Passion either used as a weapon (the Holy Lance) or used to hallow a weapon (the Nails from the Crucifixion fixed into Constantine's sword). The Sword of Constantine and its pommel-relic find curious parallel in the Abingdon sword-hilt, originating in Alfredian Wessex,

¹⁶⁹ . . . *ensem Constantini magni, in quo litteris aureis nomen antiqui possessoris legebatur; in capulo quoque super crassas auri laminas clavum ferreum affixum cerneret, unum ex quatuor quos Judaica factio Dominici corporis aptarat supplicio: lanceam Caroli magni, quam imperator invictissimus, contra Saracenos exercitum ducens, siquando in hostem vibrabat, nunquam nisi victor abibat; ferebatur eadem esse quæ, Dominico lateri centurionis manu impacta, pretiosi vulneris hiatu Paradisum miseris mortalibus aperuit: vexillum Mauricii beatissimi martyris, et Thebæ legionis principis, quo idem rex in bello Hispano quamlibet infestos et confertos inimicorum cuneos dirumpere, et in fugam solitus erat cogere*" William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum* sec. 135, ed. Stubbs 1:150, trans. EHD 1:282. See Loomis, "Holy Relics," pp. 210 ff.

¹⁷⁰ Wood, "Aethelstan's Empire," p. 267.

incorporating the symbols of the Four Evangelists.¹⁷¹ The association of the gift relics with the Emperors Constantine and Charlemagne is interesting beyond Wood's "*translatio imperii*" - the two emperors championed the Church against enemies both pagan and Muslim.¹⁷² Finally, the timing of the gifts in the context of continental developments associating relics with warfare is interesting. Although evidence for England seems to be lacking, it is known that in this period relics were increasingly brought onto the battlefield, serving as standards which invoked the aid of the saints.¹⁷³ Much later tradition did portray Athelstan wearing into battle at *Brunanburh* in 937 what may well have been another of the gifts sent by Hugh.¹⁷⁴ According to a fourteenth-century Malmesbury monk:

¹⁷¹Abingdon Sword-Hilt, illus. in Campbell, ed. *Anglo-Saxons*, p. 156 fig. 144; see also Christopher Tyerman, *England and the Crusades, 1095-1588* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 10.

¹⁷²The latter emphasis would have been appropriate to William of Malmesbury writing in the generation after the First Crusade.

¹⁷³Erdmann, *Origin*, p. 24. See Friedrich E. Prinz, "King, Clergy and War at the Time of the Carolingians," in *Saints, Scholars and Heroes: Studies in Medieval Culture in Honour of Charles W. Jones*, vol. 2: *Carolingian Studies*, ed. Margot H. King and Wesley M. Stephens (Collegeville, MN: Hill Monastic Manuscript Library, Saint John's Abbey and University, 1979), p. 305, referring to canonical permission granted as early as the eighth century to priests to accompany the Carolingian army bearing "(victory bringing) relics" (his parentheses). At the Battle of the Lechfeld in 955, Otto the Great bore another Holy Lance - Widukind of Corvey, *Res gestae Saxonicae* 3.49 (excerpt re Lechfeld trans. Brian Pullan, *Sources for the History of Medieval Europe from the Mid-Eighth to the Mid-Thirteenth Century* [New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966], pp. 116-17). (See Loomis, "Holy Relics," esp. pp. 209-20 for discussion of this multiplicity of Lances.)

¹⁷⁴The tentative identification is made by Wood, "Aethelstan's Empire," p. 267.

. . . the holy cross which he [Athelstan] bore around his neck in battle is yet venerated at Malmesbury among the holy relics, as is fitting.¹⁷⁵

The military relics described above did not exhaust Hugh's gifts to Athelstan in 926, which also included:

. . . a piece of the holy and adorable Cross enclosed in crystal, where the eye, penetrating the substance of the stone, could discern what was the colour of the wood and what was the quantity.¹⁷⁶

That Athelstan received divine aid at *Brunanburh* was a tradition at least by the early twelfth century, much earlier if William of Malmesbury derived the following incident from his tenth-century source.¹⁷⁷ During the battle,

. . . by chance his [Athelstan's] sword [*gladius*] fell from its scabbard; wherefore, when all things were full of dread and blind confusion, he invoked God and St. Aldhelm [of Malmesbury], and replacing his hand on the scabbard he found a sword [*invenit ensem*], which today is kept in the kings' treasury on account of the miracle. It can, as they say, be engraved on one side, but never inlaid with gold or silver. Relying on this gift from God, and at the same time, because it was now getting light, attacking the Norseman [Olaf^r Gothfrithson],

¹⁷⁵"*Sancta . . . crux quod circa collum suum in bellis gestabat adhuc Malmesburiae inter sacras reliquias, ut decet, veneratur, Eulogium (Historiarum sive Temporibus): Chronicon ab Orbe Condito usque ad Annum Domini M.CCC.LXVI., a Monacho Quodam Malmesburiensi Exaratum* chap. 84, ed. F. S. Haydon, 3 vols., RS 9 (London: Longman, 1858-1863), 3:10-11, my trans.

¹⁷⁶". . . *particulam sanctae et adorandae crucis crystallo inclusam, ubi soliditatem lapidis oculus penetrans potest discernere qualis sit ligni color, et quae quantitas.*" William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum* sec. 135, ed. Stubbs 1:151, trans. EHD 1:282. The tradition that Malmesbury held this relic was reported by William: "*partem vero crucis et coronae Malmesburiae delegavit,*" *ibid.*

¹⁷⁷William's source for the following passage is unclear, because it precedes his description of the "very old book."

unwearied he put him to flight with his army the whole day until evening.¹⁷⁸

From the passage as a whole, it is doubtful that *invenit ensem* would better be translated "found the sword," i.e., that the *ensis* found was the *gladius* lost. The intriguing possibility that Athelstan carried into battle at Brunanburh the relic-laden sword of Constantine must be rejected in favor of the more intriguing probability that here we have a second "holy sword" associated with Athelstan.

Athelstan's immediate successor, his younger half-brother Edmund (r. 940-46) who fought beside him at *Brunanburh*,¹⁷⁹ was seen similarly to be acting as God's agent through military activity in the Danelaw. A ten-line poem appearing in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* *sub anno* 942 casts his recovery of five boroughs in the by now Christianized Danelaw as a "redemption" of an oppressed Christian people:

Long had the Danes under the Norsemen
 Been subjected by force to heathen bondage,
 Until finally liberated by the valour of Edward's son,
 King Edmund, protector of warriors.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ . . . *gladius ejus foruitu vagina excidit. Quocirca, cum omnia formidinis et caeci tumultus plena essent, in clamato Deo et sancto Aldhelmo, reductaque ad vaginam manu, invenit ensem, qui hodieque pro miraculo in thesauro regum servatur. Est sane, ut aiunt, una parte sectilis, nec unquam auri aut argenti receptibilis. Hoc Dei dono fretus, simulque quia jam illucescebat, Noricum adorsus, tota die usque ad vesperum indefessus fugavit cum exercitu.* William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum* sec. 131, ed. Stubbs 1:143-4, trans. EHD 1:278.

¹⁷⁹ *The Battle of Brunanburh*, lines 2-3.

¹⁸⁰ *Dæne wæran ær .
 under Norðmannum . nyde gebegde .
 on hæpenra . hæfte clommum .*

(continued...)

Later Saxon kings of England seem not to have received such identification as Christian warriors, at least through celebration of military exploits. The overall context of their reigns within the broad themes of tenth- and eleventh-century English history may provide one explanation.

With the reigns of Athelstan, Edmund, and a third brother, Eadred (r. 946-55), the expansion of West Saxon power and the formation of a united kingdom of England reclaimed from Viking domination came to essential completion. Northumbria, contested for a generation by the West Saxons and Scandinavians, finally submitted to Eadred in 954 after the last Viking king of York, Eirikr Bloodaxe, fell at Stainmore.¹⁸¹

The third quarter of the tenth century in England was a period of relative peace and prosperity - the "Age of Edgar"¹⁸² (r. 959-75) in which royally-backed church reform in England took root and effected a redefinition of Christian kingship in England whose

¹⁸⁰(...continued)

*lange þraga . op hie alyside eft .
for his weorþscipe . wiggendra hleo .
afera Eadweardes . Eadmund cyning .*

ASC s.a. 942 (ms. ABCD), ed. (ms. A) Earle p. 116, trans. G. N. Garmonsway (1953; new ed. London: J. M. Dent and Sons - Everyman's Library, 1972), pp. 110-11, discussed in more detail in chap. 5 below. See also A. Mawer, "The Redemption of the Five Boroughs," *English Historical Review* 38 (1923), pp. 551-7.

¹⁸¹See Wood, *Dark Ages*, chap. 7 "Eric Bloodaxe," pp. 151-76, for excellent discussion of this fascinating figure. King Eadred, although an enthusiastic promotor of the early stages of monastic reform in England, sank in the eyes of the Church due to an embarrassing incident in his Northumbrian war - the deliberate burning of St. Wilfrid's church at Ripon, a symbol of northern separatism. See ASC s.a. 948 (ms. D); Wood, *op. cit.*, pp. 165-6.

¹⁸²So is titled, for instance, Eric John's chap. 7 in *The Anglo-Saxons*, ed. James Campbell (1982; repr. London: Penguin, 1991).

effects on the role of warfare in kingship will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter. And when external raiders and invaders again descended on England from Scandinavia ca. 980, the English won few successes which could be attributed to divine aid. Kings remained pious and some were venerated as saints on however limited a basis. The only royal cult which actually blossomed from this period was that of the young king Edward (b. 962, r. 975-79), a surly lad disliked in life but venerated as "the Martyr" mainly because his assassination constituted a violent affront to the office of kingship.¹⁸³ The magnitude of the crime was heightened by developments in the conception of Christian kingship during the tenth century.

Pre-Christian Sacral Kingship and Christian Royal Sanctity

This chapter has surveyed the kings of Anglo-Saxon England into the tenth century, highlighting instances of sanctity ascribed to them and the varying role that warfare played in that sanctity. A

¹⁸³ASC s.a. 979 (mss. DE, recte 978), ed. (ms. E) Earle, p. 129: "Ne wearð Angelcynne nan wærsa dæd gedon / þonne þeos wæs / syððon he ærest Brytonland gesohton"; "And no worse deed than this for the English people was committed since first they came to Britain," trans. EHD 1:210; Wulfstan, *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* [ed. Dorothy Bethurum in *The Homilies of Wulfstan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957)]. See also Susan J. Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 4th ser., 9 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 167. On young Edward's charming character, see *Vita Oswaldi Archiepiscopi Eboracensis*, ed. James Raine in *The Historians of the Church of York and its Archbishops*, 3 vols., RS 71 (London: Longman, 1879-94), 1:449: "Senior vero non solum timorem sed etiam terrorem incussit cunctis, qui non verbis tantum, verum etiam diris verberibus, et maxime suos secum mansitantes [sic]"; "The elder, in fact, inspired in all not only fear but even terror, for [he scourged them] not only with words but truly with dire blows, and especially his own men dwelling with him," trans. EHD 1:841 (Whitelock's note re bracket: "Some such words must be supplied to complete the sense here."); Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 372.

trend may be noticed. A number of early Christian Anglo-Saxon kings shared a tendency common to their warrior nobility: entry into the cloister and its world of spiritual battle, for which they abdicated their royal state and the warfare of this world. Such royal conversion to the religious life while still in the prime of warrior life was almost unique to the early years of Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England. It was in fact little understood by contemporaries of the seventh to eighth centuries. Bede, the premier theologian and historian of early Anglo-Saxon England, seems to have been less than enthusiastic about the idea, although he nowhere explicitly attacks it. To Bede, the idea that a king should abandon his kingdom for the minster was somehow improper - it were better that the king remain in the world and fight its battles while striving to live a holy life within his royal state. Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, with its greater enthusiasm for such kings as did not "opt out" to the cloister, was important in legitimizing martial activities by holy kings, ultimately setting the framework within which Christian English resistance to the pagan Vikings in the late ninth century could be cast as religious warfare. Such was not, however, something foreseen by Bede, and had he been able to predict it he doubtless would not have favored the idea of "religious war." He took pains, in fact, in the case of his "ideal Christian king" Oswald of Northumbria, to dissociate the saint from his battles. Bede recognized that leadership in war was a necessary function of a king

for the good of the kingdom, even for the good of the Church in the kingdom, but he did not therefore consider war to be "holy."

Regardless of Bede's ideas, popular tradition appears to have been more willing to assign direct religious significance to warfare. Popular imagination seems early on to have considered Oswald of Northumbria's death in battle a martyr's death at the hands of a pagan. The celebration of Anglo-Saxon warrior kings as Christian saints actually waxed and waned through the earlier three centuries of Anglo-Saxon history. A tripartite periodization can be observed in which Oswald falls in the first, earlier phase. In the seventh century, the first century of Anglo-Saxon Christianity, the century when the conversion was taking place, something akin to a "crusading" motif could be applied to kings, such as Oswald and Edwin, who fought against outright pagans and even "bad" Celtic Christians. Their struggles were for the establishment of the new faith in England. In the eighth century, however, such a motif was no longer viable. Formal Christianization had been completed, and the conflict between the Roman and Celtic traditions had been resolved in favor of Rome. In this second phase, there is a lack of holy warrior kings celebrated as saints, despite the fact that warfare went on unabated, possibly even escalated as Aethelbald and later Offa of Mercia strove to complete that kingdom's dominance over the others. Despite the appearance in the last decade of the eighth century of a new pagan force from outside England, the early to mid ninth century, when Ecgberht of Wessex and his immediate heirs replaced Mercian with West

Saxon hegemony, continues the trajectory of the eighth. The third phase commenced only in the late ninth century, when all-out assault on Anglo-Saxon Christianity by pagan Vikings created a context wherein earlier tendencies to associate religion and war could crystallize. Alfred the Great's battles were a defense of Christian Anglo-Saxon society against pagan onslaught.

The shifting relationship between secular warfare and royal sanctity was accompanied by and indeed necessitated changes in ideas of kingship and war among the Christian Anglo-Saxons. The results included, paradoxically, both legitimization of holy warfare and to some extent even its detachment from the royal estate. The Age of Alfred, the period when the conflicts of the "First Viking Age"¹⁸⁴ reached their greatest intensity, was crucial in these developments which were, however, still being worked out into the tenth century.

A key background to the shift may lie in an earlier transformation wrought upon the pre-Christian tradition of Germanic kingship among the Anglo-Saxons which accompanied their Christianization after 600. The expectations placed upon Christian Anglo-Saxon kings remained substantially the same as those of their pagan forebears, including the centrality of leadership in war to their royal office. Such was the most important social function of a Germanic king, particularly in the unsettled age of the *Völkerwanderungszeit*. William Chaney argued convincingly that a

¹⁸⁴Peter H. Sawyer, et al., "The Two Viking Ages of Britain: a Discussion," *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 2 (1969), pp. 163-207; see also Peter H. Sawyer, *The Age of the Vikings*, 2nd ed. (London: Edward Arnold, 1971), pp. 215-17.

crucial element in the sanctity of Christian Anglo-Saxon kings was a surviving pre-Christian notion of sacral kingship in which not just the office but the man himself had critical religious significance.¹⁸⁵ Others, in recent years most notably Susan Ridyard,¹⁸⁶ contend that Chaney overstates his case and that Anglo-Saxon royal sanctity owed more to sincere adherence to Christian teachings on the part of such kings as St. Oswald than any survival of a pagan notion of *Heil* - the holy aura of "luck" or "fortune" which in some sense embodied within the royal person the very life of the tribe.¹⁸⁷ Chaney bases his interpretation on a wider variety of source material than does Ridyard, however, who concentrates her analysis on hagiographical texts. He would seem to have at least the potential of approaching a clearer perception of the largely unrecorded thoughts of the masses. Furthermore, Ridyard's indisputably ecclesiastically-oriented sources would be unlikely to stress pagan survivals such as sacral kingship.¹⁸⁸

Chaney's thesis of a continuity between pagan sacrality and Christian sanctity would indeed seem the only plausible explanation

¹⁸⁵William A. Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England: The Transition from Paganism to Christianity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970).

¹⁸⁶Susan J. Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 4th ser., 9 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), esp. p. 4.

¹⁸⁷Regarding *Heil*, see above, chap. 1, p. 16.

¹⁸⁸William A. Chaney, Review of Susan J. Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England* (1988), in *Speculum* 66 (1991), pp. 684-6.

for one of his more intriguing observations. That there arose an obscure, barely-attested cult of Christian sainthood devoted to Osric of Deira is particularly astounding considering that from Bede's evidence we know that Osric, one of the successors of Edwin of Northumbria in 633, died apostate and was even stricken from the regnal lists. Nevertheless, Osric appears, commemorated on 8 May, in an early eighth-century calendar of Northumbrian provenance.¹⁸⁹ Osric's sole claim to the Kingdom of Heaven would seem to be that, apostate Christian or no, he fell in battle against Cadwallon. Cadwallon's own less than pristine Christian status in the eyes of Roman Christians may have played a role. Bede, after all, compares that Celtic Christian king unfavorably to the outright pagan Penda.¹⁹⁰ Chaney draws a link between Osric's "sanctity" and the pagan practice of sacrificial king-slaying for the good of the tribe.¹⁹¹ Osric's death helped pave the way for Oswald's triumph and the return of Christian evangelization to Northumbria. In any case, it is small wonder that there was undoubtedly a popular undercurrent assigning martyrdom to the saintly King Oswald despite Bede's avoidance of such identification. Conversion from one faith system to another rarely or never is complete and overnight. The idea that Germanic tribal kings were somehow infused with *Heil* would

¹⁸⁹Chaney, *Cult of Kingship*, p. 80, incl. n. 155; see also pp. 77-8 n. 146. Bede on Osric: *EH* 3.1; see above p. ?.

¹⁹⁰Bede, *EH* 2.20, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 202-3: "*barbarus erat pagano saeuior*," "a barbarian more cruel than a pagan."

¹⁹¹Chaney, *Cult of Kingship*, p. 80.

have persisted and found some expression in the new religion. Within a Christian context the only mode of expressing such belief would have been to ascribe Christian sanctity to the *Heil*-bearing king. Through all, the king's function did not change - he remained essentially a warlord, and so did his people perceive him, even when he attempted to abandon this world to fight spiritually in the cloister. When the East Anglians dragged the unwilling St. Sigeberht from his monastery to the battlefield, they likely sought to harness the *Heil* of their former ruler.

Over the course of the tenth century, however, monastic reformers in England effected something of a re-invention of Christian kingship. Drawing on earlier developments on the continent in the circle of Hincmar, the ninth-century bishop of Reims, they increasingly identified the earthly king with Christ the Heavenly King.¹⁹² This shift in emphasis was perhaps implicit and foreshadowed in the rite of anointing which gained currency in the eighth century.¹⁹³ The shift in the theology of Christian kingship precipitated uncertainty regarding the role of warfare in the life of

¹⁹²See Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), esp. chap. 3 "Christ-centered Kingship." Perhaps the most significant work in this area of Anglo-Saxon studies is Robert Deshman's iconographic analyses: "Christus rex et magi reges: Kingship and Christology in Ottonian and Anglo-Saxon Art," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 10 (1976), pp. 367-405; "Benedictus Monarcha et Monachus: Early Medieval Ruler Theology and the Anglo-Saxon Reform," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 22 (1988), pp. 204-40; and *The Benedictional of Aethelwold* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), esp. chap. 6, "The Royal Program."

¹⁹³See above in discussion of Offa.

a Christian king which had ramifications explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

HOLY KINGS, HOLY WARRIORS, AND CHRISTIAN HEROISM IN ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

The two most famous incidents in the reign of King Edgar the Peaceable (r. 959-75) occurred probably within a short period in 973. Both concern Edgar's assumption of the fullness of his royal authority. Both are puzzling and difficult of interpretation. Of the two events, Edgar's coronation and the subsequent "Rowing on the Dee," it is primarily the former which concerns us here.

Although Edgar had actually succeeded to the crown over a decade before, upon the death of his brother Eadwig in 959, it was only on Pentecost Sunday 973 that Archbishop Dunstan of Canterbury, the principal ecclesiastical mover behind the tenth-century monastic reform in England, solemnly crowned and anointed him king.¹ The long delay between accession and consecration has attracted much scholarly attention. There were clearly imperial connotations to the ceremony, not least its location at the old Roman center of Bath, on the borders between Wessex and Mercia.² A show of force followed,

¹See *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* [hereafter cited as ASC] s.a. 973 (mss. AB, ms. C s.a. 974, mss. DE s.a. 972) [ed. J. Earle in *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel with Supplementary Extracts from the Others* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1865)].

²See particularly Janet L. Nelson, "Inauguration Rituals," in *Early Medieval Kingship*, eds. Peter H. Sawyer and Ian N. Wood (Leeds: University of Leeds, 1977), pp. 63-71.

climaxing with a public display of submission when according to legend the other kings in Britain pulled oars while Edgar held the rudder steering down the course of the river Dee in Chester.³ The two associated events may well be seen to culminate the creation of a united kingdom of England in the tenth century. But the religious significance of the timing of Edgar's royal consecration and the background of the rite according to which it was conducted must be considered similarly as a culmination of developments in Christological kingship. This development had important consequences in a function central to kingship. Only in the tenth century do there appear non-royal Christian warriors celebrated in religious terms.

Christological Kingship in Late Saxon England

Laying emphasis on analogies between Christian kingship and Christian priesthood was undoubtedly one of the purposes of the ceremony at Bath. The sources for the 973 coronation emphasize that Edgar was in that year age twenty-nine, in his thirtieth year - a fact those sources must have known more as an ideological truth than as a chronological fact, because several happen to get the specific

³Florence [recte John] of Worcester, *Chronicon ex Chronicis s.a.* 973, ed. Benjamin Thorpe, 2 vols. (1848; repr. Vaduz: Kraus Reprints, Ltd., 1964), 1:144, trans. Thomas Forester, *The Chronicle of Florence of Worcester* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854), p. 105. Cf. ASC s.a. 972 (ms. DE, recte 973) and Aelfric, *St. Swithun, Bishop*, lines 450-53, ed. and trans. Walter W. Skeat in *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, EETS o.s. 76, 82, 94, 114 (printed in 2 vols. bound as 1) (London: Trübner, 1881-1900) 1:468, which mention only submission and pledges of loyalty made by the kings.

year wrong.⁴ Christ had begun His own ministry with His baptism in His thirtieth year, a parallel which may have been foremost in the writers' minds. Moreover, Pentecost was a traditional date for baptism, the essential Christian rite of consecration or transformation. As to the coronation ritual itself, drawn up by Dunstan of Canterbury from several sources including West Frankish *ordines* going back to Hincmar of Reims, there were deliberate and significant parallels to episcopal consecration *ordines*. The timing is again significant - the thirtieth year was an age commonly accepted as the minimum appropriate for priestly ordination. The various correspondences symbolized the transformation that was envisioned as taking place in the person of Edgar as a Christological king, embarking upon his career as *Christus Domini*, the Lord's Anointed.⁵ Late Saxon kings in England played a quasi-priestly role.

⁴Eric John, "The Age of Edgar," in *The Anglo-Saxons*, ed. James Campbell (1982; repr. London: Penguin, 1991), p. 188: ASC ms. D places the event s.a. 972, as does the closely related ms. E. Niel R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), pp. 253-5, dates ms. D as mid to 2nd half of the 11th c. ("s. xii¹, xii med."). The 10th-c. entries to ms. E were copied from ms. D in the early 12th c. The fact that ms. D may have varied from the main chronicler's method of counting the year (ms. A: from Christmas; ms. D: from the Annunciation on 25 March [Whitelock in *EHD* 1:116]) would seem to have no bearing for Pentecost. Note that ms. E, although placing the event s.a. 972, specifies the date as "on Pentecoste masse dæi on v id' Mai . . . and he was þa ana wana xxx wintra" (ed. Earle, p. 125), i.e. 11 May - the correct date of Pentecost for 973 - when Edgar "was but one year off thirty" (trans. *EHD* 1:207) - i.e., 29, in his 30th year. Likewise, ASC ms. C enters the coronation s.a. 974.

⁵E. John, "The Age of Edgar," p. 188; Eric John, "King Edgar's Coronation," in *Orbis Britanniae and Other Studies* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1966), pp. 287-8; Eleanor Shipley Duckett, *St. Dunstan of Canterbury: A Study of Monastic Reform in the Tenth Century* (New York: Norton, 1955), pp. 105-6; Robert Deshman, "Benedictus Monarcha et Monachus: Early Medieval Ruler Theology and the Anglo-Saxon Reform," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 22 (1988), pp. 234-5.

The monks of the tenth-century reform saw the king as their teacher.⁶ The later Anglo-Saxon royal laws, particularly those which can be ascribed to the hand of Archbishop Wulfstan of York, are quite homiletic in tone.⁷ The monastic reformers emphasized the king as *mediator inter clericos et laicos*⁸ through liturgy, prayers, and preaching. The preface to the *Regularis Concordia*, drawn up in all likelihood by Dunstan's associate Bishop Aethelwold of Winchester,

⁶*Regularis Concordia* sec. 4, ed. and trans. Thomas Symons (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 3: "*Huius praecellentissimi regis sagaci monitu spiritualiter compuncti non tantam episcopi, verum etiam abbates ac abbatissae, quod talem ac tantum meruerunt habere doctorem erectis ad aethera palmis immensas celsithrono grates uoti compotes referre non distulerunt*"; "Deeply moved by the wise advice of this excellent King, the bishops, abbots and abbesses were not slow in raising their hands to heaven in hearty thanksgiving to the throne above for that they were thought worthy to have so good and so great a teacher."

⁷See esp. IV Edgar, issued at *Wihthordestan* (962x963), ed. Felix Liebermann in *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 3 vols. (vol. 1: texts) (Halle: S. M. Niemeyer, 1903-1916) [hereafter cited as Liebermann 1], pp. 206-15, trans. and ed. Dorothy Whitelock in *English Historical Documents, c. 500-1042*, English Historical Documents 1 (1955; repr. New York: Oxford University Press, 1968) [hereafter cited as *EHD* 1], pp. 397-401. Wulfstan drew up laws after 1008: V Aethelred (1008), VII Aethelred "when the 'Great Army' came to England" (1009), VIII Aethelred (1014), respectively ed. Liebermann 1:236-47, 260-62, 263-68, trans. *EHD* 1:405-14. VIII Aethelred proclaims Wulfstan's view that "*Cristen cyning is Cristes gespelia on Christenre peode*," "a Christian king is Christ's deputy in a Christian people" (art. 2.1, ed. Liebermann 1:263, trans. *EHD* 1:411). Wulfstan's views on kingship are also expressed in his *Institutes of Polity*, ed. Karl Jost as *Die "Institutes of Polity, Civil and Ecclesiastical"* (Bern: Franke, 1959), trans. Michael Swanton in *Anglo-Saxon Prose* (1975; rev. ed. London: J. M. Dent - Everyman's Library, 1993), pp. 187-201, esp. secs. 1-3. Wulfstan continued in service to the Danish king Cnut, drawing up I and II Cnut (1020-23), ed. Liebermann 1:278-371, extracts trans. *EHD* 1:419-30.

⁸Eric John, "The King and the Monks in the Tenth-Century Reformation," in *Orbis Britanniae and Other Studies* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1966), p. 177.

another great instigator of reform, specifically likens Edgar to "Pastorum Pastor," a title applied to Christ.⁹

The reign of King Edgar the Peaceable was not altogether surprisingly considered a golden age in hindsight from the next generation when the Scandinavians had returned and England was spiralling downward into oblivion. After his death, Edgar was venerated in a cult limited to Glastonbury, where he was buried.¹⁰ Edgar's delayed coronation of 973 is of critical importance in the idea of Christian kingship as it was developing in the tenth century; his close and active association with tenth-century monastic reform in England brought in return exaltation of his office by the monastic reformers.¹¹ But Edgar does not seem to have been a warrior, despite the submissions in Chester which indicate that he was clearly the dominant king in Britain. For the duration of his reign, England enjoyed peace. The writer of a northern version of the *Chronicle* emphasized this fact as a sign of God's favor:

[I]n his days things improved greatly, and God granted him that he lived in peace as long as he lived; and, as was necessary for him, he laboured zealously for this; he exalted God's praise far and wide, and loved God's law; and he improved the peace of the people more than the kings who were before him in the memory of man. And God also supported him so that kings and earls willingly submitted to him and were subjected to whatever he

⁹Literally "Shepherd of Shepherds," although Symons trans. "the Good Shepherd": *Regularis Concordia*, sec. 3, ed. and trans. Symons, p. 2 incl. n. a.

¹⁰David Rollason, *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 140.

¹¹E. John, "King and Monks," p. 177; E. John, "Age of Edgar," p. 189.

wished. And without battle he brought under his sway all that he wished.¹²

Edgar's sway in Britain is likewise explained by the second-generation reform homilist Aelfric of Eynsham as the just fruit of his holiness. Ranking Edgar with the English kings who "were often victorious through God" - Alfred and Athelstan through their military exploits - Aelfric praises the later king precisely because he need not fight:

Edgar, the noble and resolute king, exalted the praise of God everywhere among his people, the strongest of all kings over the English nation; and God subdued for him his adversaries, kings and earls, so that they came to him without any fighting, desiring peace, subjected to him for whatever he wished, and he was honoured widely throughout the land.¹³

Modern interpreters have rather argued that Edgar lived off the fruits of those predecessors' achievements and a fortunate lack of

¹²"On his dagum hit godode georne. and God him geuðe þ[æt] he wunode on sibbe þa hwile þe he leofode. and he dyde swa him þearf wes. earnode þes georne. He arerde Godes lof wide. and Godes lage lufode. and folces frið bette swiðost þara cyninga þe ær him ge wurde be manna gemynde. and God him eac fylste þ[æt] cyningas and eorlas georne him to bugon. and wurden under þeodde to þam þe he wolde. and butan gefeohte eal he gewilde þet he sylf wolde." ASC s.a. 959 (mss. DEF), ed. (ms. E) Earle, p. 119, trans. EHD 1:205-6.

¹³"On Engla lande eac oft wæron cyningas sigefæste þurh God, swa swa we secgan gehyrdon, swa swa wæs Ælfred cining, þe oft gefeagt wið Denan, oþ þæt he sige gewann & bewerode his leode; swa gelice Æðestan, þe wið Anlaf gefeagt & his firde ofsloh & aflimde hine sylfne, & he on sibbe wunuðe sippan mid his leode. Eadgar, se æbela & se anræda cining, arerde Godes lof on his leode gehwær, ealra cininga swiðost ofer Engla ðeode, & him God gewilde his wiðerwinnan a, ciningas & eorlas, þæt hi comon him to buton ælcum gefeohte friðes wilniende, him underþeodde to þam þe he wolde, & he wæs gewurðod wide geond land." Aelfric, *Judges (Epilogue)*, ed. S. J. Crawford in *The Old English Version of The Heptateuch, Aelfric's Treatise on the Old and New Testament and his Preface to Genesis*, EETS 160 (London: Oxford University Press, 1922), pp. 416-17, trans. EHD 1:854.

interest in England on the part of Scandinavia.¹⁴ Edgar contrasts with his warrior forebears because of his lack of military activity. In the face of such firm tradition of a "peaceable" king, the application of heroic epithets to him in poems commemorating his coronation and death can only be interpreted as adherence to poetic convention.¹⁵ The true importance of his reign lay in the development of ideas of kingship.

In the generation after Edgar's passing the strength of the kingdom of England was shown to have hollow foundations. Despite her wealth which attracted renewed Scandinavian attentions, England did not mount a successful defense. The tale of the reign of King Aethelred the Unready¹⁶ is that of a long decline into treachery and defeat, an assessment which remains true even when one corrects for the overtly dim view of the king presented by the pessimistic

¹⁴On Edgar, most notably Frank M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 368. On the Scandinavians' other interests in the first three quarters of the tenth century, see Peter H. Sawyer, *The Age of Vikings*, 2nd ed. (London: Edward Arnold, 1971), pp. 207-17.

¹⁵ASC s.a. 975 (mss. ABC), Edgar's death poem ("in alliterative metre, of a quality to make one glad that the chroniclers mainly used prose" - Whitelock, *EHD* 1:208 n. 2): "beorna beahgyfa," "dispenser of treasure to warriors" (ms. A ed. Earle p. 126, trans. *EHD* 1:208), literally "ring-giver to warriors." Similarly, the coronation poem s.a. 973 (mss. AB, ms. C s.a. 974): "niðweorca heard, bold in battle" (ms. A ed. Earle p. 123, trans. *EHD* 1:208).

¹⁶"The Unready" is a corruption which distorts the original meaning of the nickname. The literal meaning of *Æðel-ræd* is "noble council"; the pun *un-ræd*, first attested in the thirteenth century, can mean "no-council," "evil council," and even (perhaps most significant with regard to how Aethelred attained the throne, by the assassination of his brother, Edward the Martyr) "a treacherous plot." Christopher Brooke, *From Alfred to Henry III, 871-1272*, A History of England 2, gen. eds. Christopher Brooke and Denis Mack Smith (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1961), 58-59. I doubt Aethelred was ready, either.

annalist who retrospectively recorded the reign in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.¹⁷ In 1016, Cnut of Denmark seized the kingdom, and for 26 years thereafter England was ruled by Cnut and his sons. By the second decade of the eleventh century there was little or no religious dimension to the conflict between English and Viking; Cnut in fact seems eager to please his Christian English subjects.¹⁸ In 1042, however, the crown of England passed back to a scion of the House of Wessex, Aethelred's son Edward.

One point regarding Edward is that his reign came at the tail end of the Anglo-Saxon period in England *per se*. His death on 5 January 1066 left a disputed succession which in fact precipitated the fall of Anglo-Saxon England in the Norman Conquest of 14 October. Known to later generations as St. Edward the Confessor, Edward was only canonized in the twelfth century, a fact which actually has less significance than one might think considering that a formal process of papally-dominated canonization was only finalized in that same

¹⁷H. R. Loyn, *The Vikings in Britain* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), p. 82.

¹⁸See the Preface to the version of Cnut's laws contained in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, ms. 201 (1018), ed. Liebermann 1:278, trans. *EHD* 1:414; his Letter to the English people (1019-1020), ed. Liebermann 1:273-5, trans. *EHD* 1:415-16; his letter of 1027, ed. Liebermann 1:276-7, trans. *EHD* 1:416-18; and his laws of 1020-23, ed. Liebermann 1:278-371, extracts trans. *EHD* 1:419-30; all of which show great respect for the Christian heritage of the English. Cnut had accepted Christianity shortly before gaining the English crown; he exhibited the fervor of a convert. He also employed religious patronage to make a statement of continuity with his predecessors as English kings through his devotion to the cults of St. Edith of Wilton, daughter of King Edgar and half-sister to Kings Edward the Martyr and Aethelred the Unready (Susan J. Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 4th ser., 9 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988], p. 168), and of St. Aelfheah, the archbishop of Canterbury martyred by Vikings in 1012 (Loyn, *Vikings in Britain*, p. 93).

twelfth century.¹⁹ Contemporaries revered Edward as a pious, holy king even during his lifetime. The *Life of Edward the Confessor* comprises two books, of which the longer first may have been begun during the king's lifetime and appears to have been brought to an abrupt end by and shortly after his death; the second book likely followed in 1067, immediately after the Norman Conquest.²⁰ The radically differing circumstances in which the author, probably a Flemish-born clerk in the following of Edward's queen Edith,²¹ wrote the two books help explain their different characteristics. Although the second book is more purely hagiographical, the first employs hagiographic conventions in a manner similar to another eleventh-century royal biography, that of the second Capetian king, Robert the Pious, by Helgaud of Fleury.²²

The *Life of Edward the Confessor* established the predominating view of the king as anything but a warrior, truly a milquetoast of a man - even physically: "[with] thin white hands, and long translucent fingers"²³ - pious, chaste, a healer and worker of

¹⁹Eric Waldram Kemp, *Canonization and Authority in the Western Church* (1948; repr. Westport, CT: Hyperion, 1979), pp. 82-106.

²⁰Frank Barlow, introd. to *The Life of King Edward who Rests at Westminster*, ed. and trans. idem (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962), pp. xxvi-xxx.

²¹Barlow, introd. to *Life of Edward*, pp. xli-lix.

²²Barlow, introd. to *Life of Edward*, p. xxiii. See also Joel T. Rosenthal, "Edward the Confessor and Robert the Pious: 11th Century Kingship and Biography," *Mediaeval Studies* 33 (1971), pp. 7-20.

²³"manibus macris et niueis, longis quoque interlucentibus digitis," *Life of Edward* 1.1, ed. and trans. Barlow, p. 12. See the representations of Edward the Confessor in *The Bayeux Tapestry: the Complete Tapestry in Colour*, ed. David M. Wilson (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), Plates 1, 28.

miracles²⁴ whose main accomplishment was as a calm center maintaining his throne amid storms of competing Danish and Norman magnates raging around him. There are, to be sure, hints in other sources that there was more to Edward than this. He did enter the political fray occasionally, particularly coming into conflict with Earl Godwine, the most powerful English magnate, a fact that the *Life* minimizes by blaming others' bad counsel but cannot disregard entirely.²⁵ The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in fact assigns to the king in a poetic obituary terms resonating from heroic tradition: Edward was "ruler of heroes," who "came forth in lordly array," commanding "eager soldiers," "guarding his homeland."²⁶ Scandinavian saga-tradition had an even more martial assessment of Edward - in the words of Edward's modern biographer, "as a typical character of that warlike age"²⁷ - in whose hall the heroic poems of old may have found eager ears. According to the *Longer Saga of Olaf Tryggvason*,

²⁴*Life of Edward* bk. 2, ed. and trans. Barlow, pp. 61-3.

²⁵ASC s.a. 1048 (ms. E, recte 1051); *Life of Edward* 1.3, ed. and trans. Barlow, pp. 17-23. For Barlow's view that the conflict resulted mainly from Edward's own desires to be freed from Godwin's domination, see his *Edward the Confessor* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970), chap. 5 "The Victorious King (1049-1051)," esp. p. 117.

²⁶"hæleða wealdend," "forð becom freolice in geatwum," "oretmægcum," "eðel bewerode," ASC s.a. 1065 (mss. CD), ed. (ms. C) Earle, pp. 196, 198, trans. David C. Douglas and George W. Greenaway in *English Historical Documents, 1042-1189*, trans. and ed. eadem, *English Historical Documents 2* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981) [hereafter cited as *EHD 2*], p. 143.

²⁷Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*, p. xxi.

it was at King Edward's behest that Easter saw the reading of the *Saga of King Olaf* to nobles and warriors.²⁸

The heroic values of the *comitatus* may well have been celebrated in Edward the Confessor's court, but in all there is no real evidence that pious and chaste St. Edward was indeed a warrior-king. By and large his battles were private and interior. He would seem to have more in common with early ascetics such as Antony and Guthlac than with Oswald or Alfred. As in the case of Edgar, the application of heroic titles to Edward the Confessor more likely results from poetic convention than from authentic martial propensities. But the image which the *Life of King Edward* invokes, with his chastity and healing touch, is more than anything that of a Christ-like figure. Even more than Edgar the Peaceable, Edward the Confessor stands as the culmination of a radical shift in the conception of Christian kingship which occurred in England in the tenth century. This transformation had crucial ramifications for ideas of religious warfare and who might wage it. To understand the

²⁸Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*, p. 15; see also Clinton Albertson, *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1967), p. 79 - the passage from *The Longer Saga* is trans. C. E. Wright, *The Cultivation of Saga in Anglo-Saxon England* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1939), p. 67. In the early 12th c., Snorri Sturluson knows no such warrior King Edward of England. His scattered references to Edward in *Heimskringla* evoke only the saint. Typical is Edward's proclamation in *The Saga of Magnús the Good* chap. 37, trans. Lee M. Hollander in *Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway* (Austin: University of Texas Press for the American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1964), p. 576: "Now I have been consecrated king of this country with as complete authority as had my father before me. And I shall not give up this title while I live. But if King Magnús comes here with his army, I shall gather no army against him, and he may then take possession of England after depriving me of my life." Snorri's Edward would emulate Abbo's or Aelfric's St. Edmund of East Anglia (see below).

transformation and its ramifications it will be useful to examine how tenth-century writers recalled warrior kings from the Anglo-Saxon past.

Christological Kingship and Warrior Kings

One of the central texts concerning Christological kingship to come out of the tenth-century English milieu was Aelfric of Eynsham's *Passion of Saint Edmund, King and Martyr*.²⁹ Edmund of East Anglia had fallen victim to the Vikings during their great invasion and near-conquest of England after 865.³⁰ Although contemporary accounts record little more than the fact of Edmund's death as just one more calamity in a series, by the late tenth century this king was remembered much differently.

Aelfric, writing ca. 995, based his Old English homily on St. Edmund upon the central account of the king's martyrdom which had appeared less than a decade before. Abbo of Fleury, a monk from the Continent, recorded the legend in Latin during his years teaching in the school at Ramsey Abbey between 985 and 987.³¹ Abbo's tale can be summarized briefly.³² The Vikings invaded East Anglia, sacked

²⁹Aelfric, *Passion of Saint Edmund, King and Martyr*, in Aelfric's *Lives of Saints*, ed. and trans. Walter W. Skeat, EETS o.s. 76, 82, 94, 114 (printed in 2 vols. bound as 1) (London: Trübner, 1881-1900), 2:314-35.

³⁰See above, chap. 3, pp. 113 f.

³¹Abbo of Fleury, *Life of St. Edmund*, ed. from Ms. Cotton Tiberius B.ii by M. Winterbottom in *Three Lives of English Saints*, Toronto Mediaeval Latin Texts (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies for the Centre for Mediaeval Studies, 1972), pp. 67-87.

³²From Abbo, *Life of Edmund* chaps. 5-10. Aelfric's account, *Passion of Edmund*, lines 36-167, is substantially the same in the particulars noted here.

and burned an unspecified city, and ravaged the countryside to impair resistance by Edmund, whom the raiders had heard was a great warrior. They sent a messenger to the king demanding he accept the Viking leader as overlord. Edmund's bishop advised submission or flight, but the king declared he did not wish to survive his slain men nor to bear the shame of flight. Confident that death at the hands of the pagan invader was preferable to staining his own hands with blood, he further declared that he would submit to the Viking leader only if the pagan became Christian. Edmund thus combined in his person Christian ethics with the *comitatus* ideals of pride and (less often stressed but implicit) loyalty of warchief to thane. Ultimately, having cast aside his weapons, Edmund was seized in his hall by the Vikings, was tortured by scourge and arrow, and was finally decapitated. Miracles and wonders commenced almost immediately as Edmund's subjects recovered his body and head, hidden by the Vikings, to give the slain king Christian burial first at Hellesdon in Norfolk, whence the relics were translated ca. 915 to Bedricesworth which soon acquired the name Bury St. Edmunds.

It has been suggested that the brutality of Edmund's death is itself significant, that Abbo and Aelfric present a confused account of a ritualistic human sacrifice by the Vikings to their war-god Odin, taking the form of the gruesome "blood-eagle."³³ If this is

³³Alfred P. Smyth, *Scandinavian Kings in the British Isles, 850-880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 189-94, 209-23. Smyth also alleges King Aelle of Northumbria (d. 867) as a "blood-eagled" sacrifice. This hypothesis, based largely upon later Scandinavian tradition, seems to have passed quickly into historical orthodoxy as well as to have informed the popular conception of the
(continued...)

true, Edmund's death takes on a whole new order of religious significance. A Christian king made blood-sacrifice to a pagan god would truly constitute a martyrdom. Such an interpretation renders all the more amazing the early development of the cult of St. Edmund. The slain king was venerated in East Anglia very quickly after his death. Within a generation coins were minted bearing the Latin legend *S[an]c[t]e Eadmund rex*, probably a "blundered" version of the vocative case, *Sancte Eadmund rex*, "O holy king Edmund!"³⁴ Probably the earliest specimens of the "St. Edmund memorial coinage" were struck by 895, barely two-and-a-half decades after the martyrdom, but more amazingly still, while the Vikings still ruled East Anglia. The East Anglian moneymen minted the coins under the authority of their Viking rulers. The Viking settlers were by the 890s Christian - conversion had been a condition of the peace concluded in 878 between King Alfred of Wessex and the Viking leader Guthrum, who then settled his people in East Anglia. They probably sought through patronage of the native cult to bolster their own political position, seeking the saint's acceptance, be he victim of their own fathers or no.³⁵

³³(...continued)

Vikings (perhaps because it makes a great anecdote for freshman surveys); however, see Roberta Frank's refutation: "Viking Atrocity and Skaldic Verse: The Rite of the Blood-Eagle," *English Historical Review* 99 (1984), pp. 332-43.

³⁴"Picture Essay Nine: Anglo-Saxon Coins 2: Alfred to Edgar," in *The Anglo-Saxons*, ed. James Campbell (1982; repr. London: Penguin, 1991), p. 131, incl. fig 6. "Blundered" is the essayist's term; the translation is mine.

³⁵Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, pp. 214 ff. The old Viking god Odin yielding to the new Christian God is one interpretation that has been
(continued...)

Although removed from the event by more than a century, Abbo's record does command respect. He is unusually explicit in citing as his authority no less than Archbishop Dunstan of Canterbury (ca. 909-88) in a prefatory letter addressed to that aged archbishop. Dunstan had told the story in Abbo's presence, citing as his own authority the very arms-bearer of the martyred king himself (*armiger beati uiri*). That arms-bearer, as an old man (*sene decrepito*) during Dunstan's youth at the court of King Athelstan (r. 924-39), had recounted the events to the king simply and faithfully (*simpliciter et plena fide*).³⁶ A young man accompanying King Edmund in 869 would have been in his seventies when Athelstan took the throne. There is little reason to doubt the basic veracity of the tale and its authority.

The basic account of Edmund's death as handed down orally from the arms-bearer through Dunstan to Abbo and thence in writing to Aelfric must be judged reliable. The circumstances bear little resemblance, however, to the spare contemporary accounts of Asser and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicler. The glaring question is: Did Edmund

³⁵ (...continued)

placed upon the curious imagery surrounding the recovery of Edmund's severed head, which his slayers had hidden to prevent proper Christian burial. Both Abbo (*Life of Edmund* chap. 13) and Aelfric (*Passion of Edmund* lines 146-63) tell how the East Anglian survivors found the head being guarded by a wolf which tamely accompanied the Christians to the place of entombment. As were the eagle and the raven, the wolf was a creature of the battle field, associated particularly with the war-god Odin. "Odin, offered the corpse of the murdered Edmund, refused the sacrifice, and protected it for the true God in whose service the king had died" (Ann Williams, et al., *A Biographical Dictionary of Dark Age Britain: England, Scotland and Wales, c. 500-c. 1050* [London: Seaby, 1991], s.v. "Edmund, St.," p. 126).

³⁶Abbo, *Life of Edmund* Preface, ed. Winterbottom, p. 67.

fight? A major point in Abbo is that he refused to fight - because he had no army, but more significantly because he wished not to stain his hands with blood. West Saxon contemporaries of the late ninth century, on the other hand, believed he did resist unsuccessfully.

Dorothy Whitelock dealt with the problems presented by the sources in her article on "Fact and Fiction in the Legend of St. Edmund." Her careful reconstruction of the events of 865-870 concludes that oral tradition and distant memory had by the late tenth century telescoped the events of two years into one: when the Vikings first came to East Anglia in 865, Edmund was unable to raise an army and was forced to cut a deal with them and conclude a peace, whereupon the Vikings turned their attentions to Northumbria; but when the raiders returned in the autumn of 869, the East Anglians engaged them unsuccessfully in battle, after which the king was killed. The arms-bearer, a half-century and more later, recounted only the actual death; or perhaps by the time pen hit parchment after another half century the tale had been filtered through both Dunstan's and Abbo's considerable knowledge of hagiographic tradition - in Dunstan's case through a half century or more of retelling and contemplation of the role of warfare in the actions of a Christian king.³⁷

There is independent evidence that even while Abbo was recording the monastic version of the martyrdom, the tradition

³⁷Dorothy Whitelock, "Fact and Fiction in the Legend of St. Edmund," *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology* 31 (1969), p. 221.

endured that Edmund's death came after battle. The ealdorman Aethelweard translated, probably late in the decade 978-88,³⁸ a now-lost version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* from Old English into Latin, writing:

After a year, [the army] moved again, and struck across the kingdom of the Mercians to East Anglia, and there laid out a camp in the winter season at Thetford. And King Eadmund decided on war against them, and after a brief interval he was killed by them there.³⁹

Ealdorman Aethelweard was Aelfric's patron and was indeed the recipient of Aelfric's dedication of his collected *Lives of Saints*, in which appeared Aelfric's *Passion of St. Edmund*.⁴⁰ We may assume with some confidence that the monk of Eynsham was aware of the tradition upon which the Ealdorman drew. Even in Abbo there are hints that Edmund was in fact a warrior king - the account is after all based on that of his *arms*-bearer. Moreover, the Vikings take pains to prevent the possibility of his opposing them because they have heard his fame as one "strenuous in war."⁴¹ It seems certain that Edmund did meet the Vikings on the battlefield in 869, then died

³⁸Alistair Campbell, introd. to *The Chronicle of Aethelweard*, ed. and trans. idem (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962), p. xiii, n. 2.

³⁹"*Iterum post annum migrantur, trans regnumque Merciorum itinera cedunt ad orientalem partem Anglorum, ibique castra metantur tempore hiemali in loco Theotforda. Aduersus quos optauit bellum rex Eadmundus, breui spatio a quibus et interimitur ibi.*" Aethelweard, *Chronicle* 4.2 [s.a. 869], ed. and trans. Campbell, p. 36.

⁴⁰Campbell, introd. to *Chronicle of Aethelweard*, pp. xiv-xv. Re dedication, see Aelfric, Preface to *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. and trans. Walter W. Skeat, *Early English Text Society*, o.s. 76, 82, 94, 114 (Printed in 2 vols. bound as 1) (London: Trübner, 1881-1900), 1:4.

⁴¹"*bello . . . strenuus,*" Abbo, *Life of Edmund* chap. 6, ed. Winterbottom, p. 73.

at their hands. Nevertheless, Aelfric followed Abbo's version and mentions no battle. Apparently Aelfric was willing to reproduce Abbo's image of the martyred king as a passive victim accepting his fate after the fashion of St. Sigebert - or of St. Boniface who like Edmund had invoked a *comitatus*-ideal transcending this world. The hagiographers of St. Edmund, however, invoked another model, that of Christ Himself.⁴² According to Abbo, Edmund had received a three-fold anointing, the third being that of Christian kingship⁴³ - he was therefore *christus Domini*, "the Lord's anointed."⁴⁴ Abbo's and Aelfric's treatments of the royal martyr are intriguing as they relate to changes in Christian kingship during the tenth-century period when the legend of St. Edmund was in development.

Aelfric of Eynsham, like Wulfstan of York a second-generation reformer and student of Aethelwold, followed Abbo of Fleury in equating the role of a Christian king with that of Christ Himself,

⁴²See esp. Abbo, *Life of Edmund* chap. 11, as well as Aelfric, *Passion of Edmund* lines 100-105.

⁴³Abbo, *Life of Edmund* chap. 8, ed. Winterbottom, pp. 75-6: "*Qua abrenuntiatione contigit ut ad laudem et gloriam aeternae trinitatis tertio mererer consecrari, delibutus ob compendium perennis uitae sanctificati chrismatis perunctione: . . . tertio ubi uestra et totius populi communi acclamatione usus sum hac regni perfunctoria potestate. Sicque unguento mysticae consecrationis tripliciter irroratus . . .*"; ". . . [B]y that renunciation [of Satan] it ensued that I gained a triple title to the praise and glory of the Eternal Trinity, having been cleansed with a view to the reward of endless life by the anointing of the consecrated chrism. . . . [T]hirdly, by general acclaim of yourself and the people at large, I acquired the sovereign power of this realm. And thus bedewed in threefold manner with the ointment of mystic consecration . . ." (trans. Francis Hervey in *Corolla Sancti Eadmundi: The Garland of Saint Edmund, King and Martyr* [New York: E. P. Dutton, 1907], p. 29).

⁴⁴Abbo does not use the specific term, but see above, p. 111, discussion of beginnings of royal consecration in England a century before.

inviting identification between the king and the suffering Christ.⁴⁵ Were Aelfric's *Passion of St. Edmund* our only window into his ideas, his view of the role of warfare in the sanctity of a Christian king would be fairly clear - pagan aggression provided an opportunity for glorious martyrdom. Things are not so simple, however. They are complicated by Aelfric's articulation of a very different notion elsewhere in the same series of Old English homilies as contains his *St. Edmund*.

In his *Lives of Saints*, Aelfric also celebrated the royal saint Oswald of Northumbria, largely deriving his account from Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, as pointed out in the previous discussion of Oswald, Aelfric, through his skillful reorganization of Bede's material, reasserts those elements of heroic tradition present in the life and battles of the saintly king which Bede had underplayed or avoided entirely.⁴⁷ Ideas which Bede had found repugnant, primarily that a Christian king's battles might have as their motivation the heroic pattern of the blood feud, Aelfric had no compunction about recounting. Considering the king no less a saint, Aelfric more freely portrayed the martial side of Oswald than did Bede. Although not explicit within his text, it is likely that

⁴⁵Eric John, "The Return of the Vikings," in *The Anglo-Saxons*, ed. James Campbell (1982; repr. London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 203 and 206.

⁴⁶Aelfric, *St. Oswald King and Martyr*, in *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. and trans. Walter W. Skeat, EETS o.s. 76, 82, 94, 114 (printed in 2 vols. bound as 1) (London: Trübner, 1881-1900), 2:125-43.

⁴⁷See chap. 3, pp. 100 ff. above.

Aelfric shared in the increasing tendency of the tenth century to consider St. Oswald as a martyr. In fact, the main surviving manuscript of Aelfric's *Lives of Saints*, which dates from the beginning of the eleventh century and thus probably from within Aelfric's lifetime (he died ca. 1010),⁴⁸ bears at the beginning of the text dealing with Oswald the title, "*Natale Sancti Oswaldi Regis et Martyris.*"⁴⁹

Aelfric's treatment of St. Edmund of East Anglia is altogether different. Here he followed rather faithfully, albeit in somewhat condensed form, the story told by Abbo of Fleury. He did not, however, restore to the narrative any indication that the king fought and lost a battle with the Vikings before his martyrdom. Perhaps he was not aware of the probable fact that Edmund did fight, although we have seen that the tradition that the martyrdom was preceded by a battle was alive into the late tenth century, as attested by Aethelweard the Chronicler - one of Aelfric's own aristocratic patrons. Like Saints Sigeberht and Boniface, Aelfric's St. Edmund is meek as the Savior Himself, casting aside his weapons and accepting death at the hands of the pagan.

In Aelfric's radically different treatment of the two kings we see the uncertainty that must have accompanied the fundamental

⁴⁸Ker, *Catalogue*, p. xvii, dates ms. British Library Cotton Julius E.vii, which Skeat used as the basis for his ed., as "s. xi. in."

⁴⁹See Aelfric's *Lives of Saints*, ed. Skeat, 2:124. The significance is discussed by Alan Thacker, "*Membra Disjecta: The Division of the Body and the Diffusion of the Cult,*" in *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint*, ed. Clare Stancliffe and Eric Cambridge (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1995), pp. 124-5.

rethinking of the role of a Christian king in the tenth century. Different writers and thinkers in the English reform movement may well have come to different conclusions regarding the proper relationship between Christian kingship and warfare.⁵⁰ It appears that there may have been a tendency in some quarters to de-emphasize the martial activities of kings considered holy or saintly. Such may provide an explanation for the curious fact that the warrior king Alfred the Great, who received what can only be termed hagiographical treatment in a contemporary biography, nevertheless seems not to have been the center of any saint's cult however obscure. Significantly, the Age of Alfred, the late ninth to early tenth centuries, seems to have been pivotal both in legitimization of religious warfare and its detachment from the royal estate.

Such would be an implication of Colin Chase's suggestion in his studies of the differing literary treatments of early Anglo-Saxon kings, particularly Saints Oswald and Oswine. The de-emphasis of the heroic ethos in the battles of the Christian kings which seemed so necessary to Bede was apparently not an issue concerning later writers. Without explicitly implicating the Vikings (the intimation is clear, however), Chase suggests the late ninth century as a probable date for the composition of the *Beowulf* poem because he considers it to exhibit in common with Asser's *Life of King Alfred*

⁵⁰The fact must not be overlooked that Abbo of Fleury, Aelfric's literary source for the *Passion of St. Edmund*, despite his short residency in England wrote from the perspective of the Continental monastic reform movement of the 10th c. given the name Cluniac. The relationship between the Cluniac and English reforms is not something I deal with in this dissertation.

"an unresolved but balanced duality between heroic values and Christian piety."⁵¹ Keeping in mind that such a conflict between the demands of this world and the ideals of the next is a constant throughout the ages, Chase's basic perception is sound. Overt martial prowess and pious reflection complement each other in the two works, *Asser* and *Beowulf*, in a way unlike that of eighth-century lives - where Bede for one took pains to avoid identification of heroic and Christian culture - or of tenth-century lives, where such identification is more readily made. In the latter contrast, however, Chase perhaps draws too stark a comparison. As we have seen above, not all writers of the tenth-century seem to have been so willing to assign a martial quality to the heroism of a Christian king. Resolution of Chase's "balanced duality" seems not to have been achieved through the tenth century.

The necessary defense of Christian society against pagan onslaught in the late ninth century would have imbued the old martial ethos which motivated the Anglo-Saxon warriors with a new religious significance. The implications of the shift were still being worked through among religious thinkers and writers a century later. But those implications are clear. They include both the sanctification of martial activity through stark contrast between the Christian Anglo-Saxons and the pagan Danes and a parallel generalization of the

⁵¹Colin Chase, "Saints' Lives, Royal Lives, and the Date of *Beowulf*," in *The Dating of Beowulf*, ed. idem (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), p. 170; see also his "Beowulf, Bede, and St. Oswine: The Hero's Pride in Old English Hagiography," in *The Anglo-Saxons: Synthesis and Achievement*, ed. J. Douglas Woods and David A. E. Pelteret (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1985), pp. 37-48.

legitimacy of war in service to Christian society. Asser testifies to the heightened sense of religious difference present as the intermittent raids of the mid ninth century became a desperate fight for survival on the part of Alfred and the West Saxons after 865. It is through comparison of Asser's literary portrait of King Alfred with an almost exactly contemporary, albeit non-English, figure that clarification of the sanctification and generalization of martial activity in the service of Christian society may be sought.

King Alfred the Great and Count Gerald of Aurillac

Gerald, count of Aurillac in southern Francia, was born ca. 855 and died ca. 909 - within a decade of King Alfred's own life-span of 849-899. Despite the gulf otherwise separating the two men historiographically as well as geographically, scholars have long recognized the importance of each in the developing accommodation of the Christian Church with the martial elite dominating medieval society. Yet their lives, both actual and literary, have not hitherto been examined together for what they might reveal about the critical stages of this development in the ninth and tenth centuries. One striking parallel between Alfred and Gerald has been remarked before⁵² but never explored in depth - that of their Christian piety. How this found expression and the contrasting ways in which the two men fulfilled the martial expectations incumbent upon them yield important insights into a means by which warfare in service to

⁵²Most recently by Stuart Airlie, "The Anxiety of Sanctity: St. Gerald of Aurillac and his Maker," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 43 (1992), p. 393.

Christian society could be legitimized. Gerald is significant as well because he is not a king but nevertheless wages such warfare.

In contrast to the relatively full documentation we have for King Alfred - Asser's *Life*, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and even the king's own writings - the *Life of St. Gerald of Aurillac* is virtually our only source for this southern Frankish noble.⁵³ It was written ca. 930 by Odo, the second abbot of Cluny, a major actor in the highest secular and ecclesiastical circles throughout early tenth-century Europe.⁵⁴ Odo's *Life* leaves much to be desired in trying to know the man Gerald. This is so largely because, although Odo was a younger contemporary of his subject (living 879-942), he had not known him personally. Within little more than two decades of Gerald's death a popular cult of St. Gerald already existed on the ground, so to speak,⁵⁵ but it seems that both laity and religious were taking the wrong messages from the stories in circulation. Odo is explicit:

⁵³Odo of Cluny, *De Vita Sancti Geraldi Auriliacensis Comitum*, ed. PL 133, trans. Gerard Sitwell in *St. Odo of Cluny, The Makers of Christendom* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1958). Sitwell's trans. is generally acceptable, but is not always as accurate as might be wished. A new ed. of Odo's *Vita Geraldi* is reportedly in preparation (Airlie, "Anxiety of Sanctity," p. 375 n. 13). Until it appears, one must fall back on that cited above.

A 10th-c. chronicle of Aurillac also mentions Gerald, and there is a will (both are discussed by Sitwell, p. 136 nn. 1 and 2), but neither adds substantially to our knowledge of Gerald.

⁵⁴Thomas F. X. Noble and Thomas Head, eds., *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints' Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), p. 293.

⁵⁵Marcus Bull, *Knightly Piety and the Lay Response to the First Crusade: The Limousin and Gascony, c. 970-c. 1130* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 227, collects evidence for enduring popularity of the cult of St. Gerald outside Odo's *Life*.

To those who find satisfaction in remarking that Gerald was both a man of great position and holy, I would point out (lest they congratulate themselves on this) that unless they become poor in spirit and, as he did, season their power with religion, their little house will not be able to stand.⁵⁶

As Stuart Airlie recently remarked, the riotous lay nobility in southern Francia seems to have thought that since Gerald was both noble and saint, their own "sordid secular ways" were somehow justified.⁵⁷ On the other hand, Odo says,

There are some professed religious, great eaters and drinkers, who making excuses for their own sins assert in their cups that Gerald used to eat meat and yet was holy, but their profession clearly condemns them. For many things are lawful to a layman which are not lawful to a monk.⁵⁸

Being the great monastic reformer that he was, but with concerns beyond the cloister, Odo could let neither laymen's nor monks' misconceptions stand. Despite some modern controversy over exactly who constituted Odo's intended audience,⁵⁹ it seems obvious that the

⁵⁶"Porro his qui gloriantur, dicentes, quod Geraldus potens fuit, et sanctus est, suademus ne sibi de hoc applaudant, quia nisi pauperes spiritu feurint, et sicut ille, suam potentiam religione condierint, casa eorum parva esse non poterit." Odo, *Vita Geraldii*, Preface to bk. 2, ed. PL 133:668, trans. Sitwell, p. 132.

⁵⁷Airlie, "Anxiety of Sanctity," p. 373.

⁵⁸". . . [M]anducones vero et bibaces, et de quibusdam religionis professoribus dicam, qui sibi excusationes in peccatis fingentes, inter pocula fateri solent quia Geraldus carnibus vescebatur, et sanctus est, sua professio manifeste revincit. Nam laico homini multa licent quae monacho non licent." Odo, *Vita Geraldii*, Preface to bk. 2, ed. PL 133:668-9, trans. Sitwell, p. 132.

⁵⁹Traditionally, the lay nobility: among others, Georges Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 97; Kassius Hallinger, "The Spiritual Life at Cluny in the Early Days," in *Clunian Monasticism in the Central Middle Ages*, ed. Noreen Hunt (London: MacMillan Press, 1971), p. 47; Airlie, "Anxiety of Sanctity," p. 373. But Bull, *Knightly Piety*, p. 227, judges as
(continued...)

writer intended the *Life of St. Gerald* for both lay and religious readers.

The *Lives* of both Alfred the Great and Gerald of Aurillac provide windows into standards of piety which could at least be attributed to members of the secular aristocracy in the late ninth and early tenth centuries. The portraits are remarkably similar. Both men exhibited from an early age a love for letters and religious devotions.⁶⁰ Both participated in Mass on a daily basis and moreover prayed the hours of the Divine Office and the Psalter as obligatory for monks.⁶¹ Both may well have been steered toward the professed religious life in their youth, although circumstances dictated other paths. Odo is explicit for Gerald: although a sense of duty to the general welfare kept him in a lay state, the count lived the ascetic life of a monk, complete with hidden tonsure.⁶² The possibility is more tenuous in Alfred's case, although Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge speculate that preparation for eventual admission to the holy orders may have been one reason this fifth among five royal brothers was sent to Rome for the first time as a

⁵⁹(...continued)

compelling P. Rousset's argument ("L'Idéal chevaleresque dans deux *Vitae* clunisiennes," in *Études de civilisation médiévale [IX^e-XII^e siècles]: mélanges offerts à Edmond-Réné Labande [Poitiers, 1974]*, pp. 628, 631) that the message of the *Life* was directed at an audience of professed religious in promotion of monastic reform.

⁶⁰Asser, *The Life of King Alfred* chap. 22 [ed. William Henry Stevenson (1904; repr. with additional note by Dorothy Whitelock, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959)]; Odo, *Vita Geraldi* 1.4-5.

⁶¹Asser, *Life of Alfred* chaps. 24, 76; Odo, *Vita Geraldi* 1.11, 1.15; 2.14.

⁶²Odo, *Vita Geraldi* 1.6-8, 2.2, 1.4, 2.3.

lad of but four years' age.⁶³ In any event, the judgment of Keynes and Lapidge regarding Alfred that especially his "daily (*cotidie*) participation in the 'day-time and night-time offices' reveals exceptional devotion in a layman"⁶⁴ could equally apply to Gerald. Indeed, Odo judges:

If one considers [Gerald's] desire he was true to the monastic profession through his devotion to Christ. And it is indeed high praise for a man in secular dress to keep the rule of religious.⁶⁵

Both biographers, Odo and Asser, emphasize for their subjects an intense concern for sexual purity. Gerald remained unmarried, rejecting even the politically lucrative offer of the sister of Duke William of Aquitaine.⁶⁶ He successfully resisted in favor of God's love the carnal temptation posed by a fair young lass (although the brief flirtation earned him temporary blindness as punishment),⁶⁷ and he was greatly distressed by what Odo euphemistically calls "nocturnal illusion[s]."⁶⁸ His modesty dictated that his most

⁶³Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, notes to *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources*, trans. eidem (London: Penguin, 1983), p. 211 n. 7. The pilgrimage itself: Asser, *Life of Alfred* chap. 8. See Keynes' and Lapidge's discussion of this baffling passage, which says the pope anointed the child as king, *op.cit.*, p. 232 n. 19.

⁶⁴Keynes and Lapidge, notes to *Alfred the Great*, p. 257 n 154.

⁶⁵"*Si igitur votum illius inspicias, monasticae professionis fidem Christe per divotionem servavit. Et laus valde eminens est, in habitu saeculari, religionis proposito deservire*" Odo, *Vita Geraldi* 2.16, ed. PL 133:679, trans. Sitwell, p. 145.

⁶⁶Odo, *Vita Geraldi* 1.34 (misnumbered as 1.31 in PL 133:662-3.

⁶⁷Odo, *Vita Geraldi* 1.9-10.

⁶⁸"*Quantopere enim carnis obscoenitatem exhorruerit, per hoc animadverti potest, quod nocturnam illusionem sine moerore nullatenus*
(continued...)

intimate attendants never see him unclothed, and Odo tells us that even after death Gerald's hands sprang back to cover his *genitalibus membris* as the corpse was prepared for interment⁶⁹ - to Odo this was no mere *rigor mortis*. While Alfred married and fathered children, Asser attributes an unidentified illness which plagued the king from youth to Alfred's own prayers that he might receive some such affliction to help him resist the carnal desires of puberty and so not lose God's favor.⁷⁰

The piety of the two men found expression outside their personal reverences and scruples. Their devotion to the mother Church of Western Christendom was well known and expressed through patronage and pilgrimage.⁷¹ Both established monasteries.⁷² The charity and kindness of both men find praise, especially their care for the poor, which extended beyond the alms they distributed, particularly to matters of justice. "Throughout the entire kingdom," Asser reports, "the poor had either very few supporters or else none at all, except for [King Alfred] himself."⁷³ Gerald took seriously

⁶⁸(...continued)
incurreret," Odo, *Vita Geraldi* 1.34, ed. PL 133:662, trans. Sitwell, p. 123. The issue of chastity recurs - see also 2.34.

⁶⁹Odo, *Vita Geraldi* 1:34, 3:10, the latter ed. PL 133:696.

⁷⁰Asser, *Life of Alfred* chap. 74.

⁷¹Alfred's pilgrimages: Asser, *Life of Alfred* chaps. 8 and 11; alms to Rome, chap. 86. Gerald's pilgrimages: Odo, *Vita Geraldi* 2.17 (re frequency - at least seven times); also 1.27 and 1.29, 2.22; gifts to Rome, 2.2 and 2.4.

⁷²Alfred, *Life of Alfred* chaps. 92, 98; Odo, *Vita Geraldi* 2.4-6.

⁷³"*Nam in toto illo regno praeter illum solum pauperes aut nullos aut etiam paucissimos habebant aduitores.*" Asser, *Life of Alfred* chap. 105, ed. Stevenson, p. 92, trans. Keynes and Lapidge, p. 109.

the biblical injunction,⁷⁴ "believing that he received Christ in the poor, and reverencing Him in them."⁷⁵

Such are the literary portraits of Alfred's and Gerald's piety. In all candor, the descriptions seem in their broad outlines quite conventional, and doubtless are so. Brief comparison with Einhard's description of Charlemagne illustrates this point. In the *Life of Charlemagne*, Einhard specifically reports that Charlemagne "practised the Christian religion with great devotion and piety, for he had been brought up in the faith since earliest childhood."⁷⁶ Charlemagne was in regular attendance at church, morning and evening, from early Mass to the late night offices - and he demanded dignity in performance of the ceremonies, because "he was . . . an expert."⁷⁷ He gave alms to the poor and traveled to Rome three times besides the most famous journey that gained him imperial dignity.⁷⁸

Are these descriptions then no more than literary conventions? For Gerald the question is more problematic as we have no knowledge of the man independent of Odo's *Life* and that *Life* falls, as Derek

⁷⁴Matt. 25.40.

⁷⁵"*In his utique Christum se suscipere credens, et ipsum reverenter in his honorans,*" Odo, *Vita Geraldi* 1.14, ed. PL 133:652, trans. Sitwell, p. 108; See also 1.17, 1.28, 3.5, and elsewhere.

⁷⁶"*Religionem christianam, qua ab infantia fuerat imbutus, sanctissime et cum summa pietate coluit,*" Einhard, *Vita Karoli Imperatoris* chap. 26, ed. G. H. Pertz in *MGH SS* 2:247, trans. Lewis Thorpe as *The Life of Charlemagne in Two Lives of Charlemagne* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 79.

⁷⁷"*Erat . . . eriditus,*" Einhard, *Vita Karoli* chap. 26, ed. Pertz, p. 247, trans. Thorpe, p. 79.

⁷⁸Einhard, *Vita Karoli* chaps. 26-8, 33

Baker observed,⁷⁹ squarely within the mainstream of conventional medieval hagiography even if a layman were an unusual subject. Other sources than Asser's *Life* attest to Alfred's interest in matters spiritual, not least his own pen in the English adaptations and elaborations of certain great Latin books he considered "most necessary for all men to know."⁸⁰ These works yield unique insights into the mind and concerns of Alfred. No other early medieval king has left such a record. Although Asser definitely knew Einhard's work,⁸¹ we need not charge him with imposing on his West Saxon king a *topos* of royal Carolingian piety perhaps more applicable to Einhard's latter-day patron Louis the Pious than to Charlemagne himself.⁸² The independent corroboration of Alfred's piety and its accord with that of Gerald tend to confirm a basic impression that these conventional descriptions can be taken as reflective of an actual standard of royal and aristocratic piety in the eighth to tenth centuries, on the Continent and in England. But in a world where Christian religiosity retained the pacifistic example of St. Martin and where killing even in just and public war still carried

⁷⁹Derek Baker, "Vir Dei: Secular Sanctity in the Early Tenth Century," in *Popular Belief and Practice*, ed. G. J. Cuming and D. Baker, *Studies in Church History* 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 51.

⁸⁰"*nidbeðyrfesta sien eallum monnom to witanne*," *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care* Preface, ed. (from the Cotton ms.) Henry Sweet, *EETS o.s.* 45, 50 (London: Oxford University Press, 1871), p. 6, trans. *EHD* 1:819. See also Patrick Wormald, "The Ninth Century," in *The Anglo-Saxons*, ed. James Campbell (1982; London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 134-5, 156-7.

⁸¹Keynes and Lapidge, introd. to *Alfred the Great*, pp. 54-5.

⁸²Einhard wrote *Vita Karoli* some time between 829 and 836. See Thorpe, introd. to *Two Lives*, pp. 13-14.

penitential burdens,⁸³ the fact remains that Alfred and Gerald - along with their peers - fulfilled duties seemingly anathema to a life of piety. For they were both war-leaders, members of a warrior aristocracy for whom fighting was necessary.

Alfred, of course, organized and led the defense of Christian Anglo-Saxon society against the pagan onslaught of the Vikings. Gerald lived in a different milieu, with a threat more internal than external, one not so easily cast in religious terms because the antagonists were all orthodox Christians. Although collapse of the short-lived unity forged by Charlemagne in his Frankish Empire was doubtless hastened after his death in 814 by external pressure on three fronts, internal dynastic squabbles contributed to profound disintegration. An urgent need for local defense against not only invaders but also one's own opportunistic neighbors drove political decentralization down to the level of the individual landholders, who assumed public rights and offices formerly due to the distant king and his officials. By Gerald's lifetime the political context of south Francia was one of bitter internecine conflict - the world of incipient feudalism where, cliché though it may be, might makes right. All lords, excepting Odo's St. Gerald, were predatory, out to

⁸³Joan D. Tooke, *The Just War in Aquinas and Grotius* (London: S.P.C.K., 1965), p. 18. See also G. I. A. Draper, "Penitential Discipline and Public Wars in the Middle Ages," *The International Review of the Red Cross* 1 (1961), pp. 4-18 and 2 (1961), pp. 63-78, referenced by Tooke.

seize lands and subjugate their neighbors. Odo tells us several times of Gerald's battles to defend himself and his domains.⁸⁴

Leaving aside for a moment the difference in rank between Alfred the king and Gerald the middle-ranking noble and the implications this may have for the question of legitimate authority to wage war according to orthodox Christian doctrine,⁸⁵ the fact remains that Gerald and Alfred fought in radically different contexts. There seems no question in Asser's treatment of Alfred but that his martial activities were proper to his state and role in society - as king of a Christian people engaged in a life-and-death struggle against pagan invaders. But what about Gerald? Defensive though his wars might be, his enemies were different from himself only in the quality of their common Christianity.

Odo had a problem portraying a warrior saint. Some nobles were taking the sanctity of Gerald, one of their own, as sanction for their way of life. Odo's obvious reluctance to portray his saint's participation in bloodletting and so validate their misconception yielded what is undoubtedly the most memorable image in the *Life* - that of Gerald and his men fighting "with the backs of their swords and with their spears reversed" so as not to shed blood.⁸⁶ Odo's fulsome praise for this peculiar fighting style as one "mingled with

⁸⁴Odo, *Vita Geraldi* 1.32, 1.35-6.

⁸⁵See Tooke, *Just War*, pp. 10-11.

⁸⁶"*mucronibus gladiatorum retroactis, hastas inantea dirigentes*," Odo, *Vita Geraldi* 1.8, ed. PL 133:646, trans. Sitwell, p. 100.

piety" with victory proving God's intervention⁸⁷ does not diminish the fact that its very inclusion demonstrates that Odo could not in the end ignore Gerald's martial side.⁸⁸ He therefore must justify it and thus establish a standard of conduct whereby to regulate the rapacious military elite, providing them an example as to how they could rightly fulfil the martial life necessary not to be overrun by their predatory peers. He sought to channel might to the service of right. He accomplished this by making St. Gerald the defender of the defenseless poor.

Now Alfred also looked out for the poor. In fact, concern for the poor and oppressed might seem just another convention of piety as it appears also in Einhard's portrayal of Charlemagne. But for neither Charlemagne nor Alfred is any particular emphasis placed upon this aspect of piety. It is in no way connected with their military efforts. It is, on the other hand, emphasized throughout the *Life of St. Gerald*, where Odo makes it the centerpiece of his justification of Gerald's warfare.

He was not incited by the desire for revenge, as is the case with many, or led on by love of praise from the multitude, but by love of the poor, who were not able to protect themselves. . . . It was licit . . . for a layman placed in the order of fighters [*in ordine pugnorum*] to carry the sword, that he might defend the unarmed common people [*inermes vulgus*] as the harmless flock from evening wolves according to the saying of Scripture [Acts xx.29], and that he might restrain by arms or by the law those whom ecclesiastical censure was not able to subdue. . . . Hereafter, let him who by

⁸⁷"*mista pietate*," Odo, *Vita Geraldi* 1.8, ed. PL 133:647, trans. Sitwell, p. 100.

⁸⁸Baker, "*Vir Dei*," pp. 49-50.

[Gerald's] example shall take up arms against his enemies, seek also by his example not his own but the common good.⁸⁹

Georges Duby discusses this description of Gerald as the defender of the poor in the context of the development of the traditional "three orders" of medieval society. Odo was legitimizing the warrior function of the aristocracy as an *ordo pugnorum*, an order of fighters, by emphasizing its role as protector of those who could not protect themselves - the poor, a group defined in the ninth and tenth centuries not by economic or legal status but rather in terms of that criterion of ever-growing dominance: bearing arms. The *pauperes* were the *inerme vulgus* - the unarmed common people.⁹⁰

The idea of a tripartite ordering of society and concern for the poor resonate in late Saxon England. Duby concentrates his study on early eleventh-century West Frankish writings, but acknowledges that the ideas appeared earlier in Anglo-Saxon thought. King Alfred himself in the late ninth century, in his free translation of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, stated that "in the case of the

⁸⁹"Non tamen, ut plerisque moris est, ulciscendi libidine percitus, aut vulgaris amore laudis illectus, sed pauperum dilectione, qui seipsos tueri nequibant infervens. . . . Licuit . . . laico homine in ordine pugnatorum posito gladium portare, ut inerme vulgus velut innocuum pecus a lupis, ut scriptum est, vespertinis defensaret. Et quos ecclesiastica censura subigere nequit, aut bellico jure, aut vi judiciaria compesceret. . . . Porro autem, qui exemplo ejus adversus inimicos arma sumpserit, ejus quoque exemplo non propriam commodiatem, sed communem quaerat." Odo, *Vita Geraldii* 1.8, ed. PL 133:646-7. The trans. is basically Sitwell, pp. 100-101, except for the second sentence, which is my own trans. Here is an instance where Sitwell's trans. obscures rather than illuminates: he trans., "It was lawful . . . for a layman to carry the sword in battle that he might protect defenseless people"

⁹⁰Duby, *Three Orders*, pp. 95-6, in an overall discussion on pp. 92-99. "*Ordo pugnorum*" and "*inerme vulgus*" are, of course, Odo's own terms, cf. above quotation.

king, the resources and tools with which to rule are that he have his land fully manned: he must have praying men, fighting men and working men."⁹¹ Late in the tenth century, Aelfric of Eynsham and Wulfstan of York echoed Alfred's thought.⁹² The legitimacy of warriors as one of the three orders underpinning divinely constituted Christian society lends necessarily a degree of legitimization to their function within that society, their martial activity. Alfred distributed alms to the poor. Such concern for the poor was indeed always stressed as a Christian virtue.⁹³ Nevertheless, *Regularis Concordia*, the "handbook" for the tenth-century English counterpart of the monastic reforms associated with Odo's Cluny, seized upon charity to the poor from among the various counsels of the *Benedictine Rule* to a degree which strikes its modern editor as "remarkable."⁹⁴ Asser, however, makes no direct connection between Alfred's concern for the poor and his military activity.

⁹¹From Alfred's trans. of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* chap. 17, trans. Keynes and Lapidus in *Alfred the Great*, p. 132. The passage is ed. in *Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Reader in Prose and Verse*, 2nd corrected rev. ed. Dorothy Whitelock (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 15-16: "þæt bið þonne cyninges andweorc ond his tol mid to ricianne, þæt he hæbbe his land fulmannod. He sceal habban gebedmen ond fyrdmen ond weorcmen."

⁹²Aelfric, "Beadsmen, Labourers, and Soldiers," appended to his homily on *The Maccabees* as lines 812-62, ed. and trans. Walter W. Skeat in *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, EETS o.s. 76, 82, 94, 114 (printed in 2 vols. bound as 1) (London: Trübner, 1881-1900), 2:120-123; Wulfstan, *Institutes of Polity*, sec. 4, ed. Karl Jost as *Die "Institutes of Polity, Civil and Ecclesiastical,"* (Bern: Franke, 1959).

⁹³See e.g. Eddius Stephanus, *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid* chap. 63, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave (1927; repr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), where Wilfrid directs that one-quarter of his treasure be given to the poor.

⁹⁴Symons, introd. to *Regularis Concordia*, p. xxxvii. See esp. *Regularis Concordia* itself, secs. 40, 62-3, 69.

The linking of the two ideas by Odo ca. 930 so that the *ordo pugnorum* had a religious duty to defend militarily the *inermes vulgus* would develop on the Continent by the late tenth and early eleventh centuries into the Peace of God under which warfare in defense of those shielded by the Peace was sanctioned and actually led by churchmen. Warfare for such a religious ideal constituted a major step toward the calling of ecclesiastically directed war in the First Crusade.⁹⁵ In England, such a contrived justification for an order of warriors was less necessary both when Alfred wrote and a century later when Aelfric and Wulfstan wrote. In both cases, Christian society itself in England was under pagan attack.

It was only from a sense of duty that Gerald abstained from the cloistered life and remained in the lay state. Immediately before his justification of Gerald's military activities, Odo comments:

[H]e yearned for . . . spiritual refreshment, but his household and dependents demanded that he should break into his repose and give himself to the service of others.⁹⁶

⁹⁵See Georges Duby, "Laity and the Peace of God," in *The Chivalrous Society*, trans. Cynthia Postan (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 131-2; Duby elaborates the case for connections made by Loren C. MacKinney, "The People and Public Opinion in the Eleventh-Century Peace Movement," *Speculum* 5 (1930), pp. 181-206, and, far more influentially, by Erdmann, *Origin*, pp. 57-94. Bull, *Knightly Piety*, pp. 66-69, in his chap. on "The Peace of God and the First Crusade" (pp. 21-69), de-emphasizes, however, explicit continuities as being more apparent to early 12th-c. First Crusade chroniclers in hindsight than it was important to contemporaries as a factor in the creation of the Crusade. The connections between the Peace and virtually every innovative aspect of 11th-c. society, noted by the various authors contributing to *The Peace of God: Social Violence and Religious Response in France around the Year 1000*, ed. Thomas Head and Richard Landes (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), would nonetheless tend to confirm the traditional view.

⁹⁶"[A]d istam cordis refectionem . . . inhiabat, sed domesticus tamen, et familiaribus exigebatur, ut otia contereret, et aliorum
(continued...)

They demanded service to the poor, as it turns out. Gerald waged warfare in service to Christian society. The idea of service resonates - service and sacrifice are at the heart of the old Germanic heroic ideal informing the *comitatus* - service to one's lord, loyalty to him even to the death. With Gerald, as portrayed by Odo, the martial energies of the aristocracy were diverted to service of a Christian ideal, protection of the poor. Although Gerald was not called upon to make the ultimate sacrifice through his martial efforts, he did give up his desired life of religious retreat and devotion to God in favor of an active life in which he "fought for the cause of God,"⁹⁷ while secretly living the "white martyrdom" of personal asceticism.

Notions of service characterize the struggles of both St. Gerald in feudalizing south Francia and the Christian Anglo-Saxons. In both cases the service is explicitly or at least implicitly Christian. Their battles accord with God's will. How far really is the clear statement that Gerald "fought for the cause of God" from the notion of fighting on God's behalf that formed the context for the crusade? And while the wars of Alfred of Wessex may seem little different from those of Charlemagne, Einhard presents a warrior king who is Christian, while Asser, framing the struggle against the Vikings in starkly religious terms, writes of a Christian warrior

⁹⁶(...continued)
sese utilitatibus impenderet." Odo, *Vita Geraldi* 1.6, ed. PL 133:646, trans. Sitwell, p. 99.

⁹⁷"*pro causa Deis pugnavit,*" Odo, *Vita Geraldi* 1.8, ed. PL 133:647, trans. Sitwell, p. 101.

king "supported by divine counsel and strengthened by divine help."⁹⁸

As presented by their respective biographers, the lives of King Alfred and the saintly count Gerald present essential similarities and differences which are both intriguing and illuminating. Both profoundly pious men, with tendencies toward a religious life, fulfilled with great success the military roles necessary to their respective situations. Gerald defended the *inermis vulgus*; Alfred defended an island of Christendom. Despite the stark contrast between Odo of Cluny's reluctance to portray his saint's participation in bloody feudal conflict and the struggles of Asser's king against the pagan Vikings beleaguering his Christian people, the overt Christian militancy of the age of crusading finds early foreshadowing in the different but complementary and converging standards of martial piety in Christian service embodied by these two figures.

Ealdorman Byrhtnoth of Essex, the Christian Hero of Maldon

The fact that Gerald of Aurillac was not a king and was yet considered by Odo of Cluny as an appropriate martial agent of God's will is particularly significant. In the south Frankish context it is another sign of the devolution to the local level of public functions formerly reserved to the king and royal officials. Among those royal functions was, in the orthodox Christian tradition

⁹⁸"*divino fretus consilio et adiutorio fultus*," Asser, *Life of Alfred* chap. 38, ed. Stevenson p. 29, trans. Keynes and Lapidge, p. 79.

following Augustine of Hippo, the legitimate authority to wage public war. Such political decentralization was not a characteristic of tenth-century England, where the House of Wessex was indeed capitalizing upon the destruction wrought by the Vikings to build a new, centralized kingdom of England. Nevertheless it seems that the necessity of Christian military resistance to the pagan Vikings combined with upheavals in ideas of kingship accompanying the development of a Christological model had the effect of generalizing the legitimacy of religious warfare during the tenth century. Byrhtnoth of Essex, a celebrated Christian warrior in the last decade of that century, illustrates if not a fruition of this shift, at least a monumental step along the way.

In August 991, the senior ealdorman of eastern England, the aged Byrhtnoth, confronted a large raiding party of Vikings which had harassed its way up the southeastern coast of England. The resulting defeat for the Byrhtnoth and his companions nevertheless captured the imagination of contemporaries, and probably within a few years received poetic treatment enunciating both the heroic ethos of the faithful core of Byrhtnoth's *comitatus* and, perhaps, something new. Although Ealdorman Byrhtnoth clearly and explicitly acted as an agent of his earthly lord, the king,⁹⁹ he is himself the first non-royal Anglo-Saxon who nevertheless seems to have been celebrated as a holy warrior killed in battle defending Christendom.

⁹⁹*The Battle of Maldon*, lines 53-4.

The treatment of Byrhtnoth's character in the *Maldon* poem has excited much debate. In short, the poet's Byrhtnoth has been condemned by some as a deeply flawed "hero who is Christian"¹⁰⁰ whereas others see him as a Christian saint, even a martyr.¹⁰¹ My reasons for favoring the latter view are given elsewhere.¹⁰² The poem is not, however, our only view of Byrhtnoth. Contemporary chroniclers as well as tradition only written down later also took notice of him. The medieval consensus is clear that Byrhtnoth was a profoundly pious member of the aristocracy.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰From the title of J. E. Cross, "Oswald and Byrhtnoth: A Christian Saint and a Hero who is Christian," *English Studies* 46 (1965), pp. 93-109; George Clark, "The Battle of Maldon: A Heroic Poem," *Speculum* 43 (1968), pp. 52-91; Cecily Clark, "Byrhtnoth and Roland: A Contrast," *Neophilologus* 51 (1967), pp. 288-93. All these follow in spirit J. R. R. Tolkien, "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son" (1953), repr. in *The Tolkien Reader* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1966), pp. 1-24.

¹⁰¹N. F. Blake, "The Battle of Maldon," *Neophilologus* 49 (1965), pp. 332-45. Also Bernard F. Huppé, *Doctrine and Poetry: Augustine's Influence on Old English Poetry* (Albany: State University of New York, 1959), pp. 23-38; N. F. Blake, "The Genesis of The Battle of Maldon," *Anglo-Saxon England* 7 (1978), pp. 119-29; Fred C. Robinson, "God, Death, and Loyalty in The Battle of Maldon," in J. R. R. Tolkien, *Scholar and Storyteller: Essays in Memoriam*, eds. Mary Salu and Robert T. Farrell (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1979), pp. 76-98; Richard Hillman, "Defeat and Victory in 'The Battle of Maldon': The Christian Resonances Reconsidered," *English Studies in Canada* 11 (1985), pp. 385-93.

¹⁰²See chap. 5, pp. 247 ff. below.

¹⁰³E. V. Gordon, introd. to *The Battle of Maldon*, ed. idem (1937; repr. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976), pp. 18-20. See also the 12th-c. *Liber Eliensis* 2.62, ed. E. O. Blake, *Camden* 3rd ser. 92 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1962), p. 134, trans. Alan Kennedy in "Byrhtnoth's Obits and Twelfth-Century Accounts of the Battle of Maldon," in *The Battle of Maldon, AD 991*, ed. Donald G. Scragg (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell in association with the Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies, 1991), p. 67, which remembers the Ealdorman as "*vir iste religiosus*," "that religious man."

The *Life of the reformer St. Oswald, bishop of Worcester*, which dates from the same period as (perhaps even earlier than) the poem,¹⁰⁴ illustrates the martial cast of Byrhtnoth's piety.

Byrhtnoth champions reform monasticism in a milieu where violence in this holy cause was lauded by Byrhtferth of Ramsey, the reform monk who authored the *Life of St. Oswald*.¹⁰⁵ According to the twelfth-century historian John of Worcester, Byrhtnoth himself used at least a show of force to hold the enemies of monastic reform in check, and the suggestion is clear that force was more than just shown: "they [Byrhtnoth and others] therefore assembled troops and defended the monasteries of the Eastern-Angles with great spirit."¹⁰⁶ The account of Byrhtnoth's final battle in the *Life of St. Oswald* is also notable in that the author seems to compare Byrhtnoth favorably with Moses - because the ealdorman fought with the aid of God, sustained by his religious devotion and good deeds which included alms:

[H]is hand was not sustained by Aaron and Hur, but supported by the manifold faithfulness of the Lord, since he was worthy. He smote also on his right hand,

¹⁰⁴Michael Lapidge, "The *Life of St Oswald*," in *The Battle of Maldon, AD 991*, ed. Donald G. Scragg (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell in association with the Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies, 1991), p. 51: "within a decade or so of the battle of Maldon."

¹⁰⁵See *Vita Oswaldi Archiepiscopi Eboracensis*, ed. James Raine in *The Historians of the Church of York and its Archbishops*, 3 vols., RS 71 (London: Longman, 1879-94), 1:445-6. See also E. D. Laborde, *Byrhtnoth and Maldon* (London: William Heinemann, 1937), p. 28. On the authorship of *Vita Oswaldi*: Lapidge, "Life of Oswald," p. 51.

¹⁰⁶"congregato dein exercitu, monasteria Orientalium Anglorum maxima strenuitate defenderunt," Florence [recte John] of Worcester, *Chronicon s.a. 975*, ed. Thorpe 1:144, trans. Thomas Forester, *The Chronicle of Florence of Worcester* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854), p. 106. Symeon of Durham, *Historia Regum s.a. 975*, depends on Florence of Worcester: see Kennedy, "Byrhtnoth's Obits," p. 71.

unmindful of the swan-like whiteness of his head, for alms-deeds and holy Masses strengthened him. He protected himself on his left hand, forgetful of the weakness of his body, for prayers and good deeds sustained him.¹⁰⁷

Byrhtnoth's body was recovered from the battlefield by the monks of Ely, who buried it with honor in their abbey church, as attested by the twelfth-century *Liber Eliensis*.¹⁰⁸ Ely also held an embroidery commissioned by Byrhtnoth's widow, Aelflaed, depicting the warrior's deeds - a "document" comparable to the Bayeux Tapestry but which is lamentably now lost.¹⁰⁹ A proto-cult of the fallen hero of Maldon arose at Ely. None of the sources explicitly call Byrhtnoth a "martyr"; the tone of each has, however, makes such a title seem a reasonable inference to some scholars.¹¹⁰ Byrhtnoth sacrificed his life defending a Christian society against pagan attack.

¹⁰⁷ . . . [C]uius manum non Aaron et Hur sustentabant, sed multimoda pietas Domini fulciebat, quoniam ipse dignus erat. Percutiebat quoque a dextris, non reminiscens cigneam canitiem sui capitis, quoniam elemosinae et sacrae Missae eum confortabant. Protegebat se a sinistris debilitationem oblitus sui corporis, quem orationes et bonae actiones elevabant." *Vita Oswaldi*, ed. Raine 1:452, trans. *EHD* 1:843. Cf. *Exod.* 17.12.

¹⁰⁸ *Liber Eliensis* 2.62, ed. Blake p. 136, trans. Kennedy in "Byrhtnoth's Obits," p. 68. The recovery of Byrhtnoth's body from the battlefield at the behest of the Ely monks forms the subject of J. R. R. Tolkien's alliterative verse dramatization in "Homecoming," pp. 6-18.

¹⁰⁹ *Liber Eliensis* 2.63, ed. Blake p. 136, trans. Mildred Budny in "The Byrhtnoth Tapestry or Embroidery," in *The Battle of Maldon, AD 991*, ed. Donald G. Scragg (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell in association with the Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies, 1991), p. 263.

¹¹⁰ In addition to previous references, n. 101 above, see S. A. J. Bradley, introd. to *The Battle of Maldon in Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, trans. idem (London: J. M. Dent - Everyman's Library, 1982), pp. 518-19: "The Latin *Life of Oswald* . . . represents Byrhtnoth . . . as a Christian martyr in his death. . . . In both works [*Oswald* and the *Liber Eliensis*] are the makings of a martyr-cult."

Of the sources for Byrhtnoth outside the poem, the most significant is the *Life of St. Oswald* both because of its early portrayal of Byrhtnoth as a Christian warrior fighting in service to God's church and Christian society and also for its probable authorship. Byrhtferth of Ramsey was a student of Abbo of Fleury during the latter's short residency at Ramsey from 985 to 987. Abbo, in his hagiographical account of the martyrdom of King Edmund of East Anglia, portrayed that king as a passive victim who cast aside his weapons rather than resist the pagan. Bearing in mind that even a single writer could treat various figures differently (e.g. Aelfric of Eynsham's Kings Oswald and Edmund), it is nevertheless interesting that Abbo's disciple gives the piety of Byrhtnoth of Essex such an actively martial cast and assigns religious significance to his final battle, if not to his death itself. In the context of tenth-century developments in kingship, the very fact that Byrhtnoth was not a king doubtless made it easier for Byrhtferth of Ramsey in the *Life of St. Oswald* to portray the ealdorman as an active holy warrior.

Byrhtnoth of Essex stands at the end of the tenth century as a clear indication that in late Saxon England holy warfare was being detached from the royal estate as a result of the evolution to a model of kingship based on Christ, the Prince of Peace. Nevertheless, Christ Himself shortly, by the end of the eleventh century, could be said to become the warrior God of the Crusade. This fact explains why Edgar the Peaceable and especially Edward the Confessor both represent an image of Christian kingship which would

not prevail. One seeks in vain for such celebrated examples of non-martial holy kings in later ages. The Christian royal ideal of the High Middle Ages was more like the thirteenth-century French crusader king Louis IX, whose very reason for his royal station was the holy war of the crusade, and who was quickly canonized as Saint Louis.¹¹¹ It must be significant, however, that the same tenth century which saw the coronation of Edgar culminate a significant shift in royal theory saw such incredible developments in the legitimization of warfare for non-kings. The warfare of a southern Frankish noble was justified as service to a segment of Christian society early in the century. By century's end, the death of an Anglo-Saxon aristocratic warrior was recorded and celebrated in terms recalling Christian martyrdom, the ultimate sacrifice. Christian service and sacrifice formed a new ethos of Christian heroism.

¹¹¹See Jean de Joinville, *The Life of Saint Louis*, trans. M. R. B. Shaw in *Joinville and Villehardouin: Chronicles of the Crusades* (London: Penguin, 1963).

CHAPTER 5

CHRISTIAN HEROISM IN OLD ENGLISH POETRY

In 797, the Northumbrian scholar Alcuin, resident in the Frankish court of Charlemagne, addressed a question to Higbald, bishop of Lindisfarne: "What has Ingeld to do with Christ?" So Alcuin declared succinctly his disapproval of the fondness displayed by the monks of Lindisfarne (and undoubtedly elsewhere) for listening to heroic song and poetry rather than to sacred wisdom.¹ Ingeld was a heroic figure from Germanic tradition whose renown is attested by the bareness of the allusion to his story in the *Beowulf* poem² and the weight of heroic legend with which Alcuin burdens him. Christ was of course the proper model for Christian monks. Alcuin's

¹"*Quid Hinieldus cum Christo?*" Alcuin, letter to Higbald, ed. *MGH Epistolae Karolini Aevi* 4/2:183. Alcuin's question has been cited and discussed with regard to the issues dealt with in this dissertation by numerous scholars, among them: Michael D. Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ: Heroic Concepts and Values in Old English Christian Poetry* (The Hague: Mouton, 1972); Robert Levine, "Ingeld and Christ: A Medieval Problem," *Viator* 2 (1972), pp. 105-28; J. R. R. Tolkien, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics" (1936), repr. in *Interpretations of Beowulf: A Critical Anthology*, ed. R. D. Fulk (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 28.

²*Beowulf* lines 2020 ff. Tolkien, "Beowulf: Monsters and Critics," p. 22; R. W. Chambers, *Widsith: A Study in Old English Heroic Legend* (1912; repr. New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1965), pp. 78-81. See also Patrick Wormald, "Bede, 'Beowulf' and the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy," in *Bede and Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Robert T. Farrell, *British Archaeological Reports* 46 (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1978), p. 43.

placement of Ingeld and Christ in opposition stands in a long tradition of such rhetorical queries which St. Paul initiated in his second Epistle to the Corinthians, "[W]hat concord hath Christ with Belial?"³ The paradox was perhaps expressed most clearly by Tertullian's "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What has the Academy to do with the Church?" or Jerome's three-fold query, "What does Horace have to do with the Psalter? Maro with the Gospels? Cicero with the Apostles?"⁴ As "Maro" was of course Virgil, the pagan poet of an heroic epic, Jerome's question most closely parallels that of Alcuin - pre-Christian heroism is opposed to Christian teachings. It is obvious from the literary and historical context that for Alcuin the pagan and worldly nature of the songs entertaining the Lindisfarne community made them utterly unsuited for recitation in the monastic refectory where attention should be given not to the concerns of this world but to the next. In the context of Alcuin's other letters to Lindisfarne and Northumbria during same decade, a charge is implicit that such deviation from Christian ideals brought disaster in the form of the infamous raid of 793 which in hindsight inaugurated the period of Viking incursions.⁵

³2 Cor. 6.15. Vulgate: "*Quae . . . conventio Christi cum Beliar . . . ?*"

⁴Tertullian and Jerome cited by George Hardin Brown in his review of Michael Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ* (1972), in *Speculum* 50 (1975), p. 482.

⁵To Alcuin's criticism of 797 might be added several canons of the 747 Council of Cloveshoe (ed. Arthur W. Haddan and William Stubbs in *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 3 [hereafter cited as Haddan and Stubbs] [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1871], pp. 364-69): canon 7 warns monks against "*inanis gloriae cupiditatibus*," "desires of empty glory"; canon 12
(continued...)

Despite the stark opposition between the heroic and the Christian which Alcuin and others perceived, the fact that the Lindisfarne community could fall under such criticism is itself evidence that others even within the Church saw things differently. Previously in this dissertation I have argued that the old Germanic warrior ethos informed early Anglo-Saxon expressions of Christian asceticism and episcopal activity while Christian motives and interpretations could be imposed upon the military activities of Anglo-Saxon kings. But in the context of necessary defence of Christian society against the pagan Vikings in the late ninth century and changing ideas of Christian kingship in the tenth century there resulted, paradoxically, both legitimization of holy warfare and its detachment from the royal estate. Ealdorman Byrhtnoth of Essex illustrates a fruition of this shift in England. Byrhtnoth is a non-royal, pious nobleman, a holy warrior killed (martyred?) in battle defending English Christendom.

The fall of Byrhtnoth is most widely known through the poetic commemoration of his last battle - *The Battle of Maldon*. The old Germanic warrior ethos which long retained vitality shines perhaps nowhere more brilliantly than in this late Old English poem, through the words of the old retainer Byrhtwold in the final moments of defeat:

⁵(...continued)
 admonishes "ut presbyteri saecularium poetarum modo in ecclesia non garrant," "that priests not prattle in church in the manner of worldly poets"; canon 20 warns against monasteries becoming "ludicrarum artium receptacula, hoc est, poetarum, citharistarum, musicorum, scurrorum," "refuges of ludicrous arts, that is, of poets, harpists, musicians, clowns" (my trans.).

The spirit must be the firmer, the heart the bolder,
 courage must be the greater as our strength diminishes.
 Here lies our leader all cut to pieces
 the great man in the dirt. He will have cause to mourn
 forever
 who thinks of turning away from this battlegame now.⁶

But Christian themes too appear in the *Maldon* poem - in the character of Byrhtnoth, in his words and sentiments before and during battle, in his final prayer - as they do in other heroic poems - those from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* commemorating tenth-century West Saxon victories against the Vikings and even in the epic masterpiece of Old English verse, *Beowulf* itself.⁷ Heroic themes appear in a number of Old English poems taking as their subjects various events and figures from Christian tradition as will be discussed below. In the Old English poetic tradition, the Christian religion takes on a heroic cast and transforms the heroic ethos in turn.

The syncretic martialization of the Christian ethos in the Old English poetic record expresses a new order of Christian heroism

⁶*Hige sceal þe heardra, heort þe cenre,
 mod sceal þe mare, þe ure mægen lytlað.
 Her lið ure ealdor eall forheaven,
 god on greote. A mæg gnornian
 se ðe nu fram þis wigplegan wendan þenceð.*
The Battle of Maldon lines 312-16, ed. and trans. Donald G. Scragg in
The Battle of Maldon, AD 991, ed. idem (Oxford and Cambridge, MA:
 Basil Blackwell in association with the Manchester Centre for Anglo-
 Saxon Studies, 1991), pp. 30-31.

⁷A number of more secular poems (such as the *Finnsburh Fragment*, *Waldere*, *Widsith*, *Deor's Lament*, *The Husband's Message*, and *The Wife's Lament* [to name a few]) sometimes show varying intrusions of Christian ideas. Primarily heroic in nature, however, and thus of use in examining the Germanic warrior ethos of the *comitatus* (Cherniss bases his definition and discussion of heroic concepts upon these "least overtly Christian poems in the Old English corpus" as well as *Beowulf* [Ingeld and Christ, p. 28]; see also Leslie Stratyner, "Forged Ties: The Comitatus and Anglo-Saxon Poetry" [Ph.D. Diss. {English}, Louisiana State University, 1991]), these poems are of limited use to the present study because the warrior ethos therein is little Christianized.

which was in fact marshalled through the poems to the dynastic interests of the House of Wessex in the tenth century. In the historical context of resistance to the pagan Vikings and consolidation of the kingdom of England in the tenth century, the Christian heroism which permeates the poems played a crucial role. Heroic deeds celebrated in religious poetry, as well as religious significance invested in Christian contemporaries such as the pious ealdorman Byrhtnoth in the current struggle, could serve to inspire the audience gathered in the halls of the late Saxon warrior aristocracy to comparable deeds of valor in service to the House of Wessex.

Old English Poetry: The Corpus and its Date

Critical to my argument are the date and context within which the Old English poetic corpus appeared. Most of the poetic material we have in Old English - a total of about 30,000 lines⁸ - comes to us in four codices, datable paleographically to the late tenth century or no later than soon after ca. 1000.⁹ Two of these four manuscripts are poetic anthologies: the Junius manuscript, containing the "pseudo-Caedmonian" poems adapting scriptural stories; and the Exeter

⁸*Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed.-in-chief Joseph R. Strayer, 13 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1982-1989), s.v. "Anglo-Saxon Literature," 1:275. See also the introduction to *A Concordance to the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, ed. J. B. Bessinger, Jr., programmed by P. H. Smith, Jr. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1978) p. ix.

⁹Niel R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), pp. xv, xvii, and xviii, dates the four codices as follows: *The Exeter Book* "s. x²"; *The Junius Manuscript* "s. x/xi" for *Genesis*, *Exodus*, and *Daniel*, and "s. xi¹" for *Christ and Satan*; *The Vercelli Book* "s. x²"; and *The Beowulf Manuscript* (Ms. Cotton Vitellius A.15) "s. x/xi."

Book, a mixture of religious and more secular verse as well as the famous Old English riddles. The Vercelli Book contains a mixture of poetry and prose, the latter being mostly homiletic in nature. Finally there is the fire-damaged *Beowulf* manuscript, which contains in addition a substantial fragment from a poem on the Old Testament character *Judith* as well as a few bits of other material.¹⁰ Besides these four manuscripts we have few other substantial examples of Old English poetry, most important among which are the fragmentary *Battle of Maldon* (which we actually have only in an early eighteenth-century transcript from an original which was lost to fire soon thereafter), a scattering of poems inserted into the manuscripts of the collectively-named *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (beginning with the annal for 937 on *The Battle of Brunanburh*), and Old English versions of a seventh-century *Hymn of Creation* attributed by Bede to the Northumbrian cowherd Caedmon.

Dating the composition of individual Old English poems is a particularly vexing problem for scholars seeking to interpret

¹⁰*Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, s.v. "Anglo-Saxon Literature," pp. 277; Ker, *Catalogue*, pp. 281-2. Citations are here made generally from the editions of the poems of the four codices as printed in the pertinent volumes of the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records [hereafter ASPR] as follows: ASPR 1 - *The Junius Manuscript*, ed. G. P. Krapp (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931); ASPR 2 - *The Vercelli Book*, ed. G. P. Krapp (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932); ASPR 3 - *The Exeter Book*, ed. G. P. Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936); ASPR 4 - *Beowulf and Judith*, ed. E. V. K. Dobbie (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953). Likewise, unless specified otherwise, Old English poetry is quoted according to S. A. J. Bradley, trans., *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: An Anthology of Old English Poems in Prose Translation with Introduction and Headnotes* [hereafter ASP] (London: J. M. Dent - Everyman's Library, 1982). Aesthetically, I would prefer a verse trans., but most sacrifice faithfulness of trans. for poetic effect. There are exceptions, and these are used where possible.

historical trends and events from the poetic materials. The various efforts to date the poem *Beowulf* provide the most notorious example of the fluidity in dating to which Old English poetry is subject and can serve as a paradigm. An endless round of articles has been written in a veritable cottage industry, with the traditional placement of the poem in the seventh century or the "Age of Bede" giving way after Dorothy Whitelock's justly influential work on *The Audience of Beowulf* to a new consensus placing the poem in the late eighth century, probably in Offa's Mercia before the coming of the Vikings.¹¹ Although an earlier date has not been precluded and there remain steadfast partisans for a date in the eighth century,¹²

¹¹Colin Chase, "Opinions on the Date of *Beowulf*, 1815-1980," in *The Dating of Beowulf*, ed. idem (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), p. 7. Dorothy Whitelock, *The Audience of Beowulf* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951). The most significant effect of Whitelock's reassessment was to open the dating of the poem wider than she ever intended. Whitelock's terminal date of 835 for composition, "when the Viking invasions began in earnest" (p. 25), is disputed by some later scholars as too much an imposition of modern notions of ethnicity onto the early Middle Ages (Alexander C. Murray, "Beowulf, the Danish Invasions, and Royal Genealogy, in Chase, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 102-3 and entire article; R. I. Page, "The Audience of *Beowulf* and the Vikings," in Chase ed., *op. cit.*, p. 113: "It implies an unsophisticated audience for a sophisticated poem.") One point that emerges below is that religion was more important than race: see ASC s.a. 943, "The Redemption of the Five Boroughs," discussed below, p. 244. Roberta Frank, "Germanic Legend in Old English Literature," in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), points out the prevalence of Danish fashions in England even during the Viking age, and argues that it was probably only in the 9th c. that the Anglo-Saxons became aware of the larger Germanic - "Gothic" - world that forms much background knowledge the *Beowulf*-poet presumed in his audience, e.g. Ermanric (pp. 93-5). The Anglo-Saxons were previously part of a "northern" world. The implication is that *Beowulf* would have to be 9th-c. or later, at least in its present redaction.

¹²R. D. Fulk, *A History of Old English Meter* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), p. 390, concludes for *Beowulf* ca. 725, in Mercia - and proposes similarly early (and therefore traditional) dates for the rest of the Old English poetic corpus.

the trend in the last quarter century has been to argue for an even later date, perhaps into the early eleventh century, even to making the single manuscript as we have it the poet's original composition.¹³ One is tempted to join James W. Earl in declaring with frustration that "the problem of the poem's date is insoluble" and that hence "we cannot safely use the poem to help us interpret Anglo-Saxon history . . . [, and] we cannot assume the poem is representative of any period, or even, finally, representative of anything at all."¹⁴ But for the historian, that way lies oblivion; I dare not take it, particularly if the same could then be said for the rest of the corpus of Anglo-Saxon poetry. It is imperative nonetheless that readers always retain crystal clear in their minds I. L. Gordon's caveat that the dating of Old English poetry "must to some extent depend on the interpretation we give to its subject matter."¹⁵ Gordon wrote specifically of *The Seafarer*, but her statement in truth holds for the bulk of the texts.

¹³See the articles in Chase, ed., *Dating of Beowulf*. Wilhelm Busse, *Altenglische Literatur und ihre Geschichte: Zur Kritik des gegenwärtigen Deutungssystems*, *Studia Humaniora* 7 (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1987), argues for a 10th-c. compositional date for *Beowulf* and virtually the entire corpus of Old English poetry. I unfortunately could not obtain this book; see John C. Pope's review in *Speculum* 64 (1989), pp. 135-43. Kevin S. Kiernan's provocative argument that *Beowulf* was composed during the eleventh-century reign of Cnut is presented in his article therein, "The Eleventh-Century Origin of *Beowulf* and the *Beowulf* Manuscript," and elaborated in his similarly named monograph, *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1981).

¹⁴James W. Earl, *Thinking about Beowulf* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 16, 17.

¹⁵I. L. Gordon, introd. to *The Seafarer*, ed. and trans. idem (London: Methuen, 1960), p. 29.

In the absence of any firm consensus obtainable from linguistic and metrical dating methodologies,¹⁶ it seems reasonable to give priority to the one real fact that we do possess - that the four codices which contain the lion's share of Old English poems are indeed paleographically datable to some time around the year 1000, with that specific date probably late in the total span of time which must be considered possible. Probably the most sensible generalization for the collecting of the materials which went into the four codices is simply "the tenth century," reading this in an extended sense to include the late ninth century as well. Whether or not the poems are contained therein in the forms in which they were originally composed, or at least originally put into writing, is another question. It is widely accepted that the Germanic peoples had a thriving oral tradition¹⁷ and that forms of many of the poems which we have must go back to ancient stories handed down from generation to generation by the Old English *scops* or bards. There stands in Northumbria an example carved into stone. The Ruthwell Cross sports an early eighth-century runic inscription in the Anglian dialect which corresponds closely to parts of the poem, *The Dream of*

¹⁶See Ashley Crandall Amos, *Linguistic Means of Determining the Dates of Old English Poetic Texts* (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1980), esp. p. 167: "Most of the linguistic tests . . . are so limited by qualifications that they do not provide clear, unambiguous, objective evidence with respect to date."

¹⁷Tacitus, *Germania* chaps. 2 and 3 [ed. J. G. C. Anderson as *Cornelii Taciti De Origine et Situ Germanorum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938 [repr. 1958]), no pg. no.] attests to German "songs" in the 1st c.

the Rood, as it was written into the Vercelli Book ca. 975.¹⁸ As another example, in addition to the many names and stories from Germanic continental tradition which are included in the epic story of *Beowulf*, the name of his foe Grendel occurs as a place-name element in several Old English charters from the early eighth to the tenth centuries;¹⁹ all, by their association of Grendel with pits and meres to which the creature has given his name, imply early familiarity with some form of a story similar to that as we have it in a manuscript written ca. 1000. Nevertheless, as we have them, the poems can reasonably be considered representative of the interests of the tenth century when they were ultimately collected and copied into their "final" forms.

The poems outside the four codices are sometimes datable with more precision. Bede, of course, testifies to Caedmon's "epiphany" which led to his bursting into divinely inspired song sometime in the late seventh century. Although that poem on the creation is preserved only in Latin in the main text of Bede's eighth-century *Historia Ecclesiastica*, two early manuscripts of that work record it

¹⁸Bruce Dickens and Alan S. C. Ross, introd. to *The Dream of the Rood*, ed. eadem (London: Methuen, 1934), pp. 1-13. On the date, see also Douglas Mac Lean, "The Date of the Ruthwell Cross," in *The Ruthwell Cross: Papers from the Colloquium Sponsored by the Index of Christian Art, Princeton University, 8 December 1989*, ed. Brendan Cassidy, Index of Christian Art, Occasional Papers 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press - Department of Art and Archaeology, 1992), pp. 69-70. See Cassidy, ed., *op. cit.*, Plates 3-32 for the Cross itself, full shots and details; Plates 33-46 for engravings and transcriptions of the runic carvings. The Ruthwell Cross also appears in James Campbell, ed., *The Anglo-Saxons* (1982; repr. London: Penguin, 1991), p. 91, fig. 89.

¹⁹See examples excerpted in *Beowulf and its Analogues*, trans. G. N. Garmonsway and J. Simpson (London: J. M. Dent, 1980), pp. 301-2.

in its original Old Northumbrian dialect.²⁰ It is obvious that the "late" poems of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* as well as the poem on *The Battle of Maldon* must postdate the events to which they refer and upon which they are based. But the question remains as to how closely poem followed event. In the case of *Maldon* this question has sparked enduring controversy. Did the poem closely follow the battle of 991 and was it therefore written in the last decade of the tenth century, or was it not composed until some decades later, well into the eleventh century?

At least one compilation of Old English verse into book form appeared by the mid-ninth century when, as Asser attests in a famous anecdote, the child Alfred won from his mother such a collection of English poetry.²¹ What appeared in that volume will forever remain a mystery. No such codex apparently survived the devastation of the Viking Age or the vicissitudes of time.

In regard to the poems preserved in the four surviving codices, N. F. Blake in his article on "The Dating of Old English Poetry" postulates a specific historical context. Accepting the paleographical dating, Blake argues radically, but most cogently, that most, if not all, of the poems are products of the late ninth to

²⁰Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* [hereafter cited as *Bede, EH*] 4.24, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 416-17 and n. 2. The two mss. are the "Moore" and "Leningrad" mss., respectively "in or soon after the year 737" and "not later than the year 747" - Colgrave and Mynors, introd., pp. xliii-xliv.

²¹"*quendam Saxonium poematice artis librum*," Asser, *The Life of King Alfred* chap. 23, ed. William Henry Stevenson (1904; repr. with additional note by Dorothy Whitelock, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 20.

early tenth centuries, and that they were written for a specific reason - to supplement the vernacular prose works of the great Alfredian program of collection, translation, and composition (including the original compilation of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*) which had as its ultimate goal the recovering and safeguarding of the English people's cultural and religious heritage almost lost during the onslaught of the Vikings. The motive for including poetry along with prose collected into the four codices was, Blake believes, consonant with the most obvious principle and reason for making the collections: "the desire to provide educational material for the Christian religion" suitable for both clergy and laity.²² In the Vercelli Book, for instance, religious poems appear intermingled with sermons and homilies.

Although Blake does not consider in detail within the space of his article each and every poem, his hypothesis elegantly explains two features of the poetry. One is that the poems give the impression of being written in no particular Old English dialect but rather in what Kenneth Sisam called a literary *koiné* including elements from them all. There is as well an amazing unity of outlook and attitude common not only to the poetry and prose in the four codices but between those and other works more certainly datable to the tenth century. The former fact is explained by Blake as the natural literary result of Alfred's gathering of scholars from all

²²N. F. Blake, "The Dating of Old English Poetry," in *An English Miscellany Presented to W. S. Mackie*, ed. B. S. Lee (Cape Town and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 21.

over England (and beyond). The interaction of the Alfredian scholars resulted in the texts they indisputably produced exhibiting a high degree of linguistic diversity. Blake proposes that "[i]t would not be unreasonable to suppose that the mixture in the poetic texts arose because the poems were also either written or composed in the later ninth or early tenth century before regularity was again established in what we call late West Saxon."²³ The seemingly static cultural outlook over hundreds of years which has stumped interpreters, for instance in the apparent continuity in the values of the *comitatus* between what have been thought "early" and "late" poems,²⁴ is more easily understood if the corpus of poetry were all redacted within a relatively short time.

As Blake comments, "[a] paper on the dating of Old English poetry cannot fail to give special attention to *Beowulf*."²⁵ This poem is the most hotly debated in Old English poetic dating. Blake observes that whether one considers it as basically religious or basically secular (another issue of some controversy), *Beowulf* would fit as well as does any other poem into the period he has proposed, whether as an example of court-centered heroic poetry or even as part of a program of religious instruction.²⁶ Colin Chase basically agrees by assigning *Beowulf* to the "Age of Alfred," seeing in both

²³Blake, "Dating," p. 17.

²⁴Stratyner, "Forged Ties," p. 6.

²⁵Blake, "Dating," p. 23.

²⁶Blake, "Dating," p. 24.

Beowulf and Asser's biography of Alfred the Great, written in the 890s, products of a time when there was "an unresolved but balanced duality between heroic values and Christian piety."²⁷

This perception of a perhaps uneasy but nonetheless fruitful wedding of the heroic and Christian is fundamentally correct; the body of Old English poetry as we have it, all dating from the tenth century or from within a few decades either way, clearly displays an ethos of Christian heroism well on its trajectory of development. The fact that the existing redactions of the Old English poems in the four codices are roughly contemporary means that there can be little in the way of any diachronic comparison to illustrate that trajectory in any detail. But the heroism of the latest Old English poems, those commemorating current events of the tenth-century conflict against Vikings, is suffused with an aura of Christian martial piety which clearly foreshadows that of the age of the crusades a century later.

The Ethos of Old English Poetry: Christian, Heroic, or Both?

Alcuin's opposition of Ingeld to Christ with which this chapter opened provided for Michael Cherniss the title of his valuable study dealing with the question of the relationship of the Christian and the heroic in Old English poetry.²⁸ Cherniss sees Alcuin's "Ingeld"

²⁷Colin Chase, "Saints' Lives, Royal Lives and the Date of *Beowulf*," in *The Dating of Beowulf*, ed. idem (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), p. 170, citing as support N. Jacobs, "Anglo-Danish Relations, Poetic Archaism and the Date of *Beowulf*: A Reconsideration of the Evidence," *Poetica* (Tokyo, 1978), pp. 23-43.

²⁸Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ*. I feel obliged here to make clear that, while contemplation of the Old English poetic corpus led me to
(continued...)

not so much as a catch-all reference to paganism in general as a reference to the heroic poetry of the Germanic peoples in particular. This poetry expresses an ethos which was, although ultimately rooted in pagan tradition, not specifically reflective of the pagan Germanic religion. Cherniss argues as follows:

The adjectives 'pre-Christian', 'Germanic', and 'heroic' are appropriate to these concepts," he argues - "'pagan' and 'heathen' are not. The opposition which I intend to investigate in this study is not that of Christian and pagan, but that of Christian and heroic, concepts and values.²⁹

Such divorce of the ethical and moral dimensions from religion perhaps seems odd to those whose views have been informed by centuries of Judaeo-Christian religiosity where the concepts are indeed inseparable. Cherniss nevertheless recognizes a fundamental quality of pre-Christian Germanic religiosity, part of a wider Indo-European "folk" religiosity where the absence of an ethical dimension to religion was the rule. Failure to recognize the essential difference between the religiosities of Christianity and Germania was a major stumbling block to be overcome by Christian evangelists. Their efforts to present the Christian message in a form acceptable to their listeners, James Russell argues, resulted in a Germanization of Christianity.³⁰

²⁸(...continued)
conclusions very different from Cherniss', his work was immensely helpful in my foray into very unfamiliar territory and gaining familiarity with the crucial issues and problems of the field.

²⁹Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ*, p. 29.

³⁰James C. Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity: A Sociohistorical Approach to Religious Transformation* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

Traditional scholarship has seen in the "worldly" Anglo-Saxon church of the eighth century, represented by such figures as Bishop Wilfrid of Ripon and attested by such as Bede in his letter to Ecgberht in addition to Alcuin's admonition cited above, a decline in the quality of the English church from an early glory in the seventh-century Age of Conversion as described by Bede's rather idealistic *Ecclesiastical History*. Recently, however, Patrick Wormald argued that those same figures represent the thorough success of the syncretic fusion of Christianity with the Germanic aristocratic culture of the Anglo-Saxon elite.³¹ Wormald's basic perception is correct. Nevertheless, as argued above,³² the early martial enthusiasm of conversion-era Christianity did wane as external "enemies" were "defeated." The late ninth century saw new opportunities for a heroic brand of Anglo-Saxon Christianity to gain new vitality.

After identifying and expounding upon four fundamental concepts which he considers at the heart of the pre-Christian Germanic heroic ideal (loyalty, vengeance, treasure, and exile),³³ Cherniss treats these elements as literary conventions derived from oral-formulaic

³¹Wormald, "Bede, 'Beowulf'." Wormald accepts the traditional dating of *Beowulf* to the "Age of Bede" and indeed argues that the poem, representing the aristocratic milieu, is a better guide, or at least a view alternative to Bede's, to that Germanic-Christian fusion. A later date for *Beowulf* would not, however, invalidate his overall argument; he marshals much indisputably contemporary evidence to support his interpretation of the basic tenor of aristocratic Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England.

³²pp. 108 ff.

³³Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ*, chaps. 2-5.

tradition and examines their usage in a selection of Old English poems. He considers *Beowulf* the most clearly representative exposition of the old heroic ideal;³⁴ in addition to using this poem to demonstrate the importance of the four concepts, he concludes that rather than being a Christian poem, *Beowulf* is instead marked by a "pervasive but superficial" Christianity,³⁵ the product of a Christian poet singing a traditional song using the traditional heroic motifs. The Christianity of the poem is totally separate from the heroic values which motivate the characters in the poem. *Genesis B* is very different in Cherniss' estimation.³⁶ He considers it a heroic poem based upon a Christian story: "The poet has managed to compose a Christian poem in which secular heroic ideals maintain positive value, are never questioned, and do not conflict radically with the Christian story," he maintains, adding that the poem is "probably the finest fusion of Christian and Germanic tradition in Old English."³⁷ This statement contains some irony considering that *Genesis B* is a translation into Old English of a continental Old Saxon original.³⁸ Cherniss proceeds to consider in turn a selection of Old English poems on religious subjects.³⁹ He sees in *Andreas*

³⁴Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ*, chap. 6.

³⁵Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ*, p. 133.

³⁶Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ*, chap. 7.

³⁷Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ*, p. 170.

³⁸See below, p. 231.

³⁹Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ*, chaps. 8-11.

essentially a Christian poem where the heroic concepts and motifs play a secondary role. In *Juliana* and *The Seafarer* Cherniss posits outright opposition between the two value systems, Christian being clearly presented as superior to the latter.⁴⁰ The relationship between the heroic and the Christian have passed beyond opposition in *Christ II (The Ascension)* and *Guthlac A*; heroic standards have been absorbed into Christian values to become a metaphor drained almost completely of martial connotations. Finally, Cherniss judges that heroic elements are seldom employed even as metaphor in *Christ III (Judgment)*, *Guthlac B*, and especially *Judgment Day II*, having been drained absolutely of their heroic connotations.

Cherniss proposes a chronological trajectory of development in Old English Christian poetry wherein at first old Germanic heroic concepts were imported wholesale to Christian subjects (and vice versa), but then gradually lost their significance and were rejected, eventually to fade from use even as convenient poetic devices. The poetic formulae from the pre-Christian heroic tradition which early Anglo-Saxon Christian poets employed to treat Christian themes and subjects necessarily brought with themselves pre-Christian concepts and values. As the poets became more adept at composing Christian poetry as its own genre, they decreasingly depended upon and ultimately rejected traditional poetic formulae. In the end, however, Cherniss considers *The Battle of Maldon* to constitute

⁴⁰C. Schneider, "Cynewulf's Devaluation of Heroic Tradition in *Juliana*," *Anglo-Saxon England* 7 (1978), agrees.

evidence that a parallel secular tradition of more purely heroic poetry flourished into the last century of Anglo-Saxon England.⁴¹

Cherniss' proposal of a developing relationship between heroic and Christian ideals merits discussion for two reasons. First, he both presumes and implies a thoroughly traditional dating sequence for the individual poems that he analyzes. Second, he is quite selective in the poems upon which he bases his conclusions. I will address these points in reverse order, having been unable to discern a clear principle which governed Cherniss' selection of religious poetry. Most, but not all, of his poems are from the four poetic manuscripts.⁴² But he does not include all the poems which might be of interest in dealing with the issues he has taken up. Most conspicuously absent from his survey is *The Dream of the Rood*.⁴³ Cherniss leaves us to wonder just where he would place within his overall model this striking poem, with its astounding evocation of the *comitatus* with Christ as both Thane to his Father and Lord to the Rood and the Dreamer. Other religious poems from the four codices conspicuous by their absence or lack of analysis by Cherniss are

⁴¹Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ*, pp. 249-57.

⁴²*Judgment Day II* is from another ms. besides the big four - Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 201, which Ker, *Catalogue*, pp. 82-3, dates to the same period, the beginning of the 11th c. ("s. xi in.").

⁴³Cherniss does admittedly discuss *The Dream of the Rood* in a subsequent article, from a different perspective, that of the literary tradition of prosopopeia where inanimate objects are given poetic voice: "The Cross as Christ's Weapon: The Influence of Heroic Literary Tradition on *The Dream of the Rood*," *Anglo-Saxon England* 2 (1973), pp. 241-52. See below, p. 228.

Genesis A, Exodus, and Judith, as well as Elene and The Harrowing of Hell.

Regarding the dependence of Cherniss' thesis upon the traditional dating of Old English poetry, it is necessary to reconsider the implications of Blake's suggestion that all the poems of the four codices are roughly contemporary, all from the tenth century more or less. If all the texts as we have them were redacted at roughly the same time and for basically the same reason, why is there then the range of treatments of the Christian and the heroic that Cherniss grasps onto and makes the very foundation of his argument? Is there really such a range in treatments or is it all in his perception? It is my impression that, although there are indeed a variety of treatments, as one might expect given that the poems were not all written by the same poet, Cherniss has overemphasized and stressed the differences and sometimes discounts heroic elements in poems which he prefers to see as essentially Christian. For instance, Cherniss argues that *Christ III* and *Guthlac B* rarely present heroic elements, and when they do so the elements are devoid of heroic connotations. Nevertheless, the heroic lord-thane relationship is clearly present in both. In *Christ III* the heroic Christ leads a warrior following:

. . . round about him on every side journey squadrons of
celestial angels, flocks of radiant beings, armies of
saints, teeming in throngs . . .⁴⁴

⁴⁴ . . . him on healfa gehwone heofonengla preat
ymbutan farað, ælbeorhtra scolu,
hergas haligra, heapum geneahhe . . .
Christ III lines 927-9, ed. ASPR 3:28-9, trans. ASP, p. 231.

Then mighty God will come, King of heaven's angels, [with the highest heavenly host] into that famed mountain; holy, glorious, he will shine out above the hosts, the reigning God, and round about him that supreme and noble multitude, the holy warrior bands will shimmer clear, the blessed company of the angels.⁴⁵

The King of heaven wields with His right hand "the sword of victory."⁴⁶ Against Stanley Greenfield's assessment regarding *Guthlac B* that "[t]he lord-thane relationship - at heart a Germanic concept - is developed gradually as the poem proceeds, culminating in the end . . . as the servant flees to his ship to seek the saint's sister and reports to her in exile-elegiac fashion,"⁴⁷ Cherniss specifically argues that "the lord-thane relationship not only is not developed, but . . . it is not really present at all."⁴⁸ Greenfield's judgment seems more perceptive, not only for Guthlac's relationship with his Lord (as a "soldier"⁴⁹) but particularly for the relationship between Guthlac and his own servant,⁵⁰ whose chant

⁴⁵ *Ðonne mihtig god on þone mæran beorg
mid þy mæstan mægenþrymme cymeð,
heofonengla cyning, halig scineð,
wuldorlic ofer weredum, waldende god,
ond hine ymbutan æþelduguð betast,
halge herefeðan, hlutre blicað,
eadig engla gedryht.*

Christ III lines 1007-1013, ed. ASPR 3:31, trans. ASP, p. 233; I added the bracketed phrase to trans. *mid þy mæstan mægenþrymme*, which Bradley inexplicably gaps.

⁴⁶"sigemece," *Christ III* line 1530, ed. ASPR 3:45, trans. ASP, p. 245.

⁴⁷S. B. Greenfield, *A Critical History of Old English Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 1965), p. 122, quoted by Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ*, p. 245.

⁴⁸Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ*, p. 245.

⁴⁹"cempa." See *Guthlac B* lines 889 and 901, ed. ASPR 3:74, 3:75: "godes cempa"; "Dryhtnes cempa," trans. ASP, pp. 271 and 272.

⁵⁰See *Guthlac B* lines 1047-59 ed. ASPR 3:79, trans. ASP, p. 275.

for his deceased lord conveys the emptiness of exile felt by a retainer bereft of the comforts of the *comitatus*, a theme common in the elegies.⁵¹

Ultimately, Cherniss' judgment seems quite subjective. Rather than development in the treatment of heroic themes by Christian poets over the course of generations it is more likely that the variety of viewpoints exhibited - which are not as extreme as Cherniss argues - are the result of composition and redaction by a variety of poets. That even poems showing what is probably a unity of authorship may not display precise unity of viewpoint with regard to this question is clear from the fact that two "signed" poems by Cynewulf - *Juliana* and *Christ II* - are categorized differently by Cherniss. The former he judges to exhibit Christian values effectively negating heroic standards, showing their limitations and inferiority; the latter he deems an example of metaphorical use of heroic elements absorbed into Christian ideas. In *Juliana* the two systems are opposed; in *Christ II* they have moved beyond opposition so that heroic diction is effectively made to serve the interests of Christian ideals.

There is an interesting parallel between Cherniss' argument that any meaningful heroic element in Old English Christian poetry was decreasing over time with the conventional wisdom among scholars that the quality of Old English poetry in general was likewise decreasing over time. Blake's common-sense observation refuting this

⁵¹See *Guthlac B* lines 1348-79 ed. ASPR 3:87-8, trans. ASP, p. 283. This is the end of the poem as we have it - a few lines at least were lost due to trimming of the manuscript: Bradley, comment appended to *Guthlac B* in ASP, p. 283.

notion, that "[g]ood and bad poems can be composed at the same time, as any period of English literature makes clear,"⁵² may be matched by the assertion that absolute consistency in the treatment of a theme in Old English poetry could not be expected at any time, and that to interpret from perceived (and overemphasized) differences therein that there was a developmental trend over time goes beyond what the poems actually tell us. We must look at the poems as they have come to us, accept that the redacted versions in the present codices are all products of the tenth century, and examine what they can tell us about how the English people of that age, or at least their poets, viewed the relationship of Christian and heroic ideals. If indeed Blake is correct in his suggestion that the poetic corpus was part of an extended Alfredian program collected or compiled to serve as didactic material for the inculcation of the values of the Christian religion in Anglo-Saxon England in the tenth century, then what were those values and how do the poems of the four codices reflect them? Cherniss presumes much more exclusivity between Christian and heroic values and concepts than is warranted. Anglo-Saxon Christians of the tenth century would have interpreted their religion in heroic terms. It could be that *The Battle of Maldon* and other late battle poems represent not, as Cherniss would have it, a parallel heroic tradition outside the developments within the body of religious poetry but rather are expressive of the very same ethos as the Christian poetry.

⁵²Blake, "Dating," p. 15.

The Tenth-Century Historical Context

Crucial to understanding the literary context proposed here for the bulk of the Old English poetic corpus is the historical context of tenth-century England, which was founded in the last quarter of the ninth century. From the late eighth century and with escalating ferocity in the ninth century, Anglo-Saxon England came under attack from the pagan Vikings and fought for its very existence. Three of the four major kingdoms which existed in England in the mid-ninth century had been overrun by the mid-870s; only Wessex, under the rule of Alfred the Great, managed to fight the invaders to a standstill culminating in division of the southern part of the island into two regions - that ruled by the House of Wessex to the southwest of a line running roughly from London to Chester, and that under the domination of the Vikings to the northeast of that line - the "Danelaw." Important in the resistance of the West Saxons to the Danes, especially in the mind of King Alfred, was the Christian education of his people whom he considered to be suffering this onslaught because they had lapsed from favor with their God. Alfred outlined the backbone of his religious and educational reform in the same preface to his Old English translation of Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care* in which the king identified the problem:⁵³

[I]t seems better to me . . . that we also should turn into the language that we can all understand some books, which may be most necessary for all men to know; and bring it to pass, as we can very easily with God's help, if we have the peace, that all the youth now in England, born of free men who have the means that they can apply

⁵³See chap. 3 above, p. 118.

to it, may be devoted to learning as long as they cannot be of use in any other employment until such time as they can read well what is written in English. One may then teach further in the Latin language those whom one wishes to teach further and to bring to holy orders.⁵⁴

Among the works Alfred and his scholars translated into the Old English vernacular for the spreading of knowledge and the revival of religion were, in addition to the *Pastoral Care*: Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*, and Orosius' *History against the Pagans*. Each was immediately relevant to the Anglo-Saxon situation in the 880s and 890s. The *Pastoral Care* provided bishops with the necessary instructions to carry out and to fulfill their duties and to retain God's favor. According to the *Consolation of Philosophy*, the pursuit of wisdom is the obligation of a godly man. Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* was a reminder to the English people of their Christian heritage, while Orosius' *History* provided comfort to Christians beleaguered by the pagan Danes in the ninth century as it had those

⁵⁴"[M]e ðyncð betere . . . ðæt we eac sumæ bec, ða þe nidbeðyrfesta sien eallum monnum to witanne, þæt we þa on ðæt geðeode wenden þe we ealle gecnawan mægen, & ge don, swa we swiðe eaðe magon mid Godes fultume, gif we þa stilnesse habbað, ðætte eal sio gioguð þe nu is on Angel kynne friora monna, ðara ðe ða speda hæbben þæt hie ðæm befeolan mægen, sien to leornunga oðfæste, þa hwile þe hi to nanre oðerre note ne mægen, oð ðone first þe hie wel cunnen Englisc gewrit arædan: lære mon siððan furður on Lædengeðeode þa þe mon furðor læran wille & to hierran hade don wille." *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, preface, ed. (from the Cotton ms.) Henry Sweet, EETS o.s. 45, 50 (1871; repr. London: Oxford University Press, 1934), p. 6, trans. EHD 1:819.

after the sack of Rome by the Visigoths in 410.⁵⁵ Directly applicable to the situation of Alfred himself in this respect is the king's own rendering of the first fifty Psalms into English prose. A particular theme through this first third of the Psalter is the lamentations of another warrior king facing odds against a foreign, ungodly foe which were surmountable only with the aid of God.⁵⁶ The Alfredian circle of scholars did not limit their literary efforts to translations alone. They produced original works in both Latin and Old English - the two major contemporary sources for ninth-century England, the *Life of King Alfred*, written in Latin by Alfred's cleric, Asser, and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, composed in the vernacular and first compiled as a national chronicle in the early 890s. And Alfred carried on the tradition of king as lawgiver by his collection and issuance of a new law code based not only upon scripture and patristic tradition but upon earlier legislations by Mercian and Kentish kings in addition to his own West Saxon forebears.⁵⁷

⁵⁵Patrick Wormald, "The Ninth Century," in *The Anglo-Saxons*, ed. James Campbell (1982; repr. London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 155-57; R. H. C. Davis, "Alfred the Great: Propaganda and Truth," *History* 56 (1971), p. 180; Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, introd. to *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources*, trans. eidem (London: Penguin, 1983), pp. 23-33.

⁵⁶Keynes and Lapidge, introd. to *Alfred the Great*, pp. 31-2, 153, 301-3. Psalms 51-150 were also at a later date trans. into Old English verse and appended to Alfred's prose trans. of the first 50. They appear together in ms. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, lat. 8824. The metrical Psalms, along with verses based upon Alfred's trans. of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, are ed. G. P. Krapp in *The Paris Psalter and the Meters of Boethius*, ASPR 5 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932).

⁵⁷Keynes and Lapidge, introd. to *Alfred the Great*, p. 39.

The propagandistic nature of this body of literary sources for the reign of Alfred the Great has been persuasively argued by R. H. C. Davis.⁵⁸ Alfred placed himself as heir to the earlier kings of the various Anglo-Saxon peoples, and especially to those kings who could be presented as "overlords" or *bretwaldas*, a title appearing only in the *Chronicle*.⁵⁹ The purpose was to give the people reason for hope by showing that the House of Wessex had always emerged victorious despite inevitable reverses and opposition. The success of Alfred's efforts in religion and learning was recognized by contemporaries contemplating the survival of England in the briefly renewed Viking attacks of the 890s.⁶⁰

Under Alfred's successors in the tenth century, Wessex gradually reconquered the Danelaw and consolidated the whole into one unified kingdom of England. Recent scholarship has emphasized continuity between Alfred's reform efforts and those of the late tenth century through the reigns of his successors.⁶¹ The role of

⁵⁸Davis, "Alfred: Propaganda and Truth."

⁵⁹See in particular the laws of Alfred, int. 49.9, ed. Felix Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 3 vols. (vol. 1: texts) (Halle: S. M. Niemeyer, 1903-1916) [hereafter Liebermann 1], p. 46, trans. Dorothy Whitelock in *English Historical Documents*, c. 500-1042, trans. and ed. idem, *English Historical Documents* 1 (1955; repr. New York: Oxford University Press, 1968) [hereafter *EHD* 1], p. 373; Asser's *Life of King Alfred and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* [hereafter *ASC*] in general. Re "bretwalda": *ASC* s.a. 827 (ms. A, recte 829) [ed. J. Earle in *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel with Supplementary Extracts from the Others* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1865)] (and p. 87 n. 28 above).

⁶⁰*ASC* s.a. 896 (mss. AB; mss. CD s.a. 897) - see p. 119 above.

⁶¹See David N. Dumville's essays in *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar: Six Essays on Political, Cultural, and Ecclesiastical Revival* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 1992), esp. chap. 6, "King Alfred and the Tenth-Century Reform of the English

(continued...)

the tenth-century Anglo-Saxon church in cooperation with the House of Wessex, especially through the monastic reform effected by Dunstan of Canterbury, Aethelwold of Winchester, and Oswald of Worcester, is well documented.⁶² Blake proposes this basic historical context for the composition and collection of the poems of the four codices - one of a thoroughly militarized Christian society in a state of expansion and consolidation. As Richard Abels has shown, personal lordship was one of the "twin pillars" (the other being dependent land tenure) upon which rested the military organization of Anglo-Saxon England. "In a very real sense, the royal host never ceased being the king's following arrayed for war."⁶³ While dependent land tenure provided the material means enabling warriors to fulfill their military duties, the ideological glue that held together the army or *fyrd*, the royal warband, and which imposed those military duties, was that of the old Germanic *comitatus*. Tacitus stated hundreds of years before,

⁶¹(...continued)
Church," pp. 185-206; also, D. A. Bullough, "The Educational Tradition in England from Alfred to Aelfric: Teaching *Utriusque Linguae*," *Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi Sull'Alto Medioevo* 19 (1972), pp. 454-94.

⁶²Eric John, "The King and the Monks in the Tenth-Century Reformation," in *Orbis Britanniae and Other Studies* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1966); see also idem, "The Age of Edgar," in *The Anglo-Saxons*, ed. James Campbell (1982; repr. London: Penguin, 1991).

⁶³Richard P. Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 186.

the Germanic warrior fought for his lord,⁶⁴ whatever that lord's motivations might have been.

Alfred, and doubtless his successors, sought to enhance the strength of the lord-thane bond as well as to rebuild the Christian character of their people, and they showed the two sets of values as not incompatible but rather indeed complementary. Their most important audience would have been the lay aristocracy who formed the core of the royal warband. For such an audience, accustomed to hearing the heroic poems and songs of Germanic tradition, the medium of poetry would have been ideal. And so was conceived an essentially new corpus of poetry, doubtless based upon the traditional songs of the *scops*, as well as upon stories from Christian scripture and legend. In the newly developing literary tradition of the Old English vernacular, born in the Alfredian program, it was only natural as well as useful that these would be written down. The existing body of Old English poetry, especially that produced in the tenth century, affords us a glimpse into a poetic re-imagining of Christian characters and concepts in heroic terms as well as traditional Germanic themes cast in Christian terms.

⁶⁴*principes pro victoria pugnant, comites pro principe*, "The chiefs fight for victory, the followers for their chief," Tacitus, *Germania* chap. 14, ed. J. G. C. Anderson in *Cornelii Taciti De Origine et Situ Germanorum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938 [repr. 1958]), no pg. no., trans. H. Mattingly, rev. S. A. Handford in *The Agricola and the Germania* (London: Penguin, 1970), p. 113.

A Heroic Christian Tradition

The innovation was not entirely new. As early as the seventh century, the aforementioned cowherd Caedmon (d. 680)⁶⁵ incorporated into the religious vocabulary of Anglo-Saxon Christianity the language of the Germanic warband. Within fifty years of the conversion of Northumbria came this earliest appearance of any form of the Old Germanic secular and military word *truhtin*, "warlord," applied to the Christian God:⁶⁶

Now we must laud the heaven-kingdom's Keeper, the Ordainer's might and his mind's intent, the work of the Father of glory: in that he, the Lord (*dryctin*) everlasting, appointed of each wondrous thing the beginning; he, holy Creator, at the first created heaven for a roof to the children of men; he, mankind's Keeper, Lord (*dryctin*) everlasting, almighty Ruler, afterwards fashioned for mortals the middle-earth, the world.⁶⁷

⁶⁵Ann Williams, et al., *A Biographical Dictionary of Dark Age Britain: England, Scotland and Wales, c. 500-c. 1050* (London: Seaby, 1991), s.v. "Caedmon."

⁶⁶D. H. Green, *The Carolingian Lord: Semantic Studies on Four Old High German Words: Balder, Frô, Truhtin, Hërro* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 287.

⁶⁷*Nu scylun hergan hefaenricaes uard,
metudæs maecti end his modgidanc,
uerc uuldurfadur, sue he uundra gihuaes,
eci dryctin, or astelidæ.
He aerist scop aelda barnum
heben til hrofe, haleg scepen;
tha middungeard moncynnæs uard,
eci dryctin, æfter tiadæ
firum foldu, frea allmectig.*

Caedmon's Hymn (Old Northumbrian dialect, Moore ms., Cambridge, University Library Kk. 5.16.), ed. ASPR 6:105, trans. ASP, p. 4. On the Moore ms. of Bede, *EH*, see Colgrave and Mynors, introd., pp. xliii, xliv. A late 9th-c. West Saxon version of the hymn may be found in *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* 4.2, ed. and trans. T. Miller, 2 vols., EETS o.s. 95-96, 110-111 (London: Trübner, 1890-98), 1:344, also ed. ASPR 6:106.

The poem is translated above from the Northumbrian dialect as it appears in the Moore manuscript of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. *Dryctin* in its later normalized West Saxon form *Dryhten* is the most common form of reference to the Lord, God or Christ. Although Bede states that Caedmon sang of many other Christian subjects, from the Old Testament and the New,⁶⁸ the nine-line poem quoted above is all that we have from him; the poems of the Junius manuscript were once thought to be his, but scholarly consensus has long since discarded any possibility that they are canonically Caedmonian. Bede's statement is important testimony to the fact that by the early to mid-eighth century there were other such poetic versions of Christian materials, but the fact remains that there is no indication that we have any of them.

That such poems may have had a wide circulation, oral if not literary, is evident if indeed the Old Saxon *Heliand* from the early ninth century was inspired in form by them as some scholars believe. As with so many issues in this area of literary studies, the dependence of the *Heliand* on Anglo-Saxon poems is a disputed point. Some scholars argue that the *Heliand* is an independent Continental development.⁶⁹ Those seeing a connection, such as Patrick Wormald, detect in the preface to the *Heliand* clear reference to the Caedmon

⁶⁸Bede, *EH* 4.24, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 418-19.

⁶⁹See J. K. Bostock, *A Handbook on Old High German Literature*, 2nd ed. rev. K. C. King and D. R. McLintock (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 177 and n. 2.

This speech introduces a radical recasting of the Passion and Death of the Lord in terms of a Germanic "last-stand" and is comparable in spirit to the speeches by the retainers of the Ealdorman Byrhtnoth in *The Battle of Maldon*. A man's place is at the side of his Lord in all things - in battle, in exile, even in death.

Despite Thomas' stirring declaration of the warband ethos, Christ's warband does desert Him. Even Peter flees, but only after flying into a "berserker-rage" and inflicting a much worse wound to Malchus than is the case in the canonical Gospel,⁷³ for which the apostle suffers rebuke from his Lord not only because, as in scripture, "all that take the sword shall perish with the sword,"⁷⁴ but also for the second, more thoroughly Germanic reason that "We cannot by our deeds avert anything."⁷⁵ Thus are paralleled Christian and Germanic notions of fate and the will of God. The desertion of Peter is likewise presented as fated or as what God wanted, as a sort of learning experience for the first among the apostles, who was to be ruler of his Lord's kingdom in this world.⁷⁶ Christ is led off captive, as a prisoner of war, only to elude His enemies through death and Resurrection to return in triumph to His

⁷³See *Heliand* lines 4865-82, ed. Behagel, pp. 172-3, trans. Murphy, p. 160. Cf. Matt. 26.51.

⁷⁴Matt. 26.52.

⁷⁵ *uui mid ūsum dādiun ni sculun
uuiht auuerdian*
Heliand lines 4899-4900, ed. Behagel, p. 174, trans. Murphy, p. 161.

⁷⁶Murphy, *Saxon Savior*, pp. 108-9.

regathered warband.⁷⁷ The Christ of the *Heliand* transforms by His defeat the old northern prospect of inevitable defeat into the new Christian hope of ultimate victory.⁷⁸

In the context of the poetic program suggested for tenth-century England, such a portrayal of Christ as a Germanic hero with an ultimately-faithful warband would have been ideal. Although there is no evidence that there was a comparably full re-imagining of the Gospel story in Old English as there was in the Old Saxon *Heliand*, the better of the two complete manuscripts of the poem was copied at Winchester in the second half of the tenth century⁷⁹ and may well have been known there earlier. There are in the four Old English poetic codices several poems presenting a comparably heroic Christ.

One of these is the long poem entitled simply *Christ*. In actuality, stylistic and other considerations clearly indicate this work to comprise three separate poems, but the fact that they were copied continuously into the Exeter manuscript reveals that the late tenth-century copyist considered them to form a unit. Modern scholars number the three parts as *I*, *II*, and *III*, and give them the individual titles, *Advent Lyrics*, *The Ascension*, and *The Judgment*. *Christ I* is a gathering of short lyrics based mostly upon the Latin antiphons of the liturgy for Advent. Not only is the "Lord of

⁷⁷Murphy, *Saxon Savior*, p. 110.

⁷⁸See above, p. 69.

⁷⁹Murphy, *Saxon Savior*, pp. 26-7; Ute Schwab, "The Battle of Maldon: A Memorial Poem," in *The Battle of Maldon: Fiction and Fact*, ed. Janet Cooper (London and Rio Grande: The Hambledon Press, 1993) pp. 79, 80, n. 24; Bostock, *Old High German Literature*, pp. 168-9.

victory" praised as the "Defender of those fighting the fight, Protector of all creatures,"⁸⁰ but His Mother is praised as the "Lady of the heavenly host and of the earthly orders below the heavens and of the dwellers in hell," envisioned as "a ring-adorned bride," as a queen of the Heroic Age like *Wealhtheow* in *Beowulf*.⁸¹ Judgment was one of the functions of a medieval lord. As He is the Lord of all men, *Christ III* evokes the harsh judgment due to those who betrayed their Lord to death, the most evil of sins in the world of the *comitatus* - and to those who continue to betray Him by their continued sin:

What does he expect who is unwilling to remember in his conscience the gentle precepts of the ordaining Lord and all the sufferings he underwent on men's behalf, because he wished that we might own the abode of heaven in everlastingness? So it will be a sad thing on that grim day of the great judgment for him who, seduced by sins, has to gaze upon the Lord's scars, the woundings and the torture. In their wicked spirits they will see the greatest of griefs - how that same King out of his gentle heart loosed them from sins with his body, so that they might live free from evil deeds and own the everlasting splendour of glory. For this patrimony they expressed thanks to their Ruler not at all: to their reproach therefore, unhappy people, they will behold those conspicuous marks upon God, when Christ sits upon his royal throne, upon the high seat, God of the heavenly hosts, Father almighty. To each one of the people the

⁸⁰"*sigores frea,*" "*wigendra hleo . . . / helm alwihta,*" *Christ I* lines 404, 409-10, ed. ASPR 3:14, trans. ASP, p. 215.

⁸¹"*hlæfdige . . . / wuldorweorudes, ond worlðcundra / hada under heofonum, ond helwara,*" "*bryd beaga hroden,*" *Christ I* lines 284-6, 292, ed. ASPR 3:11, trans. ASP, pp. 212-13. See Margaret Williams, *Word-Board: Passages from Old English Literature from the Sixth to the Eleventh Centuries Translated and Arranged* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1940), p. 227 n. 22.

radiant Creator, Ruler of the skies, will prescribe according to his deeds, all according to justice.⁸²

I have above cited allusions in *Christ III* to the warrior leader of a warband of angels; in *Christ II* is told how that "Prince" and "Hero" passed from this world to heaven, joining His celestial *comitatus* while remaining the chieftain of "His band of thanes" in this world;⁸³ He is envisioned as "their Dispenser of treasure"⁸⁴ whose gifts will continue, as He Himself proclaims:

"Rejoice in spirit! I shall never leave you, but I shall always continue in love towards you and give you power and remain with you forever and ever so that by my grace you will never be wanting in virtue. . . . I shall remain with you henceforth as a comfort and preserve you

⁸² *Hwæs weneð se þe mid gewitte nyle
gemunan þa mildan meotudes lare,
ond eal da earfeðu þe he fore ældum adreag,
forþon þe he wolde þæt we wuldres eard
in ecnesse agan mosten?
Swa þam bið grone on þam grimman dæge
domes þaes miclan, þam þe dryhtnes sceal,
deaðfirenum forden, dolg sceawian,
wunde ond wite. On werigum sefan
geseoð sorga mæste, he se sylfa cyning
mid sine lichoman lysde of firenum
þurh milde mod, þæt hy mostun manweorca
tome lifgan, ond tires blæd
ecne agan. Hy þaes eðles þonc
hyra waldende wita ne cuþon;
forþon þær to teonum þa tacen geseoð
orgeatu on gode, ungesælge,
þonne Crist siteð on his cynestole,
on heahsetle, heofonmæga god,
fæder ælmihtig. Folca gehwylcum
scyppend scinende scrifeð bi gewyrhtum,
eall after ryhte rodera waldend.*
Christ III lines 1199-1220, ed. ASPR 3:36-7, trans. ASP, p. 237.

⁸³"æpeling . . . beorn," "his þegna gedryht," *Christ II* lines 448-9, 457, ed. ASPR 3:15, trans. ASP, p. 219.

⁸⁴"hyra sincgiefan," *Christ II* line 460, ed. ASPR 3:15, trans. ASP p. 219.

in peace with a steadfast strength in any place
whatsoever."⁸⁵

The gifts bestowed by Christ include:

martial success in battle when bowmen send flying barbed
missiles at the armed contingent above the shield-
phalanx.⁸⁶

There is no indication that these gifts are meant figuratively in
this passage. In *The Descent into Hell or The Harrowing of Hell* (the
title varies),⁸⁷ John the Baptist, greeting his kinsman Christ come
to release the righteous souls, refers to more obviously spiritual
gifts he has received in terms Dorothy Whitelock saw as *heriot*, the
return due to a lord upon the death of his retainer:

I have endured much since you came journeying to me when
you gave me sword and breastplate, helmet and fighting-
gear - this I have constantly held fast until now . . .
.88

⁸⁵ "Gefeoð ge on ferðe! Næfre ic from hweorfe,
ac ic lufan symle læste wið eowic,
ond eow meaht giefe ond mid wunige,
awo to ealdre, þæt eow æfre ne bið
þurh gife mine godes onsien.
. . . .
. . . . Ic eow mid wunige,
forðe on frofre, ond eow friðe healde
strengðu stapolfæstre on stowa gehware."
Christ II lines 476-80, 488-90, ed. ASPR 3:16, trans. ASP, p. 219.

⁸⁶ . . . sped
. . . æt gupe, þonne gargetrum
over scildhreadan sceotende sendað,
flacor flangeweorc.
Christ II lines 673-76, ed. ASPR 3:20, trans. ASP, p. 224.

⁸⁷The titles of all Old English poems are in fact the creations
of later editors. The poems in the mss. have no titles.

⁸⁸ . . . Ic adreag fela
sippan þu end to me in sipadest,
þa þu me gesealdest sword ond byrnan,
helm ond heorosceorp, (a ic þæt heold nu giet)
The Descent into Hell lines 70-73, ed. ASPR 3:221, trans. ASP, p.
393. See Dorothy Whitelock, "Anglo-Saxon Poetry and the Historian."
Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 4th ser. 31 (1949), p.
90.

These are doubtless the gifts of Ephesians 6:11-17.⁸⁹ In the Old English poem, despite the stark martial imagery, note that:

[f]or that battle [the Lord] gave no thought to helmet-wearing warriors, nor was his will to lead armoured fighting men to the stronghold gates.⁹⁰

As in *The Dream of the Rood*, the Crucifixion is envisioned in *Christ III* as an active self-sacrifice rather than as passive submission:

The third leap was the heavenly King's bound when he, the Father, the comforting Spirit, mounted upon the Cross.⁹¹

The Dream adds another dimension to the Anglo-Saxon re-imagining of the Crucifixion of the "young hero, who was almighty God."⁹² Not only is the event seen as a victory by a warrior Christ over His enemies, but it is indeed effected by His wielding the Cross as a weapon. In a long tradition of weapons considered as retainers or thanes of their bearer and therefore lord, swords have been most

⁸⁹See above, chap. 2, p. 34.

⁹⁰ [n]e rohte he to þære hilde helmberendra,
ne he byrnwigend to þam burggeatum
lædan ne wolde
Descent lines 37-9, ed. ASPR 3:220, trans. ASP, p. 393.

⁹¹ Wæs se þridda hlyp,
rodorcyniges ræs, þa he on rode astag,
fæder, frofre gæst.
Christ III lines 726-8, ed. ASPR 3:23, trans. ASP, p. 225. The poet here built upon Cant. (Song of Songs) 2:8, "The voice of my beloved, behold he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping over the hills," and the interpretation given thereto by Ambrose of Milan, Gregory the Great, Alcuin, and others. See Williams, *Word-Hoard*, p. 229 n. 23.

⁹²"geong Hæleð, (þæt wæs god ælmihtig)," *The Dream of the Rood* line 39, ed. ASPR 2:62. The trans. is basically ASP, p. 161, except that I follow Kathleen E. Dubs, "Hæleð: Heroism in 'The Dream of the Rood'," *Neophilologus* 59 (1975), p. 614, "'Hæleð' . . . clearly signifies 'hero'."

frequently so personified in Germanic tradition.⁹³ The Cross resembles a sword both in form and, as the instrument of Christ's victory, in function. And in another long tradition of prosopopoeia, of objects personified and, given voice, allowed to recount their tales, the Cross is here allowed to relate how it served as a faithful thane, following its Lord's command, becoming the instrument of His victory by serving as the instrument of His death.⁹⁴

In medieval tradition, the phoenix which rises from its own ashes was seen as an allegory of Christ. When an Anglo-Saxon poet reworked Lactantius' fourth-century Latin *Carmen de Ave Phoenixe* into the Old English poem, *The Phoenix*, he made the figure explicit in an original extension which begins at line 381.⁹⁵ We may further see in lines 335-49 describing this king and lord of the company of birds Christ as the leader of the *comitatus* comprising the souls of the blessed.⁹⁶

Christ is of course the greatest example to Christians, but other figures from Christian history and legend provided equally heroic examples to the Anglo-Saxons. Notable are the "Caedmonian" poems of the Junius manuscript, in particular *Genesis A* and *B* and

⁹³"Personification" is Cherniss' word, "Cross as Christ's Weapon," p. 242. He cites (pp. 244-6) Old English Riddle 20 in the Exeter Book (ed. ASPR 3:190-91) as an example of a sword as a heroic retainer.

⁹⁴Cherniss, "Cross as Christ's Weapon", pp. 241-52; M. L. delMastro, "The Dream of the Rood and the Militia Christi: Perspective in Paradox," *American Benedictine Review* 27 (1976), pp. 171-86.

⁹⁵Bradley, introd. to *The Phoenix* in ASP, pp. 284-5.

⁹⁶Greenfield, *Old English Literature*, p. 186; *Phoenix* lines 335-49.

Exodus from the Old Testament. Also important among these heroic religious poems is another reworking of an Old Testament story, that of *Judith*, as well as the legends of several Christian saints: *Andreas, Elene, Juliana, and Guthlac*. Cherniss deals with some but not all of these poems in his monograph as discussed above; all contain heroic elements to one degree or another.

In addition to the portrayal in *Genesis A* of Abraham as a warrior, effecting the rescue of his captive kinsman Lot, in which the poet "skilfully draws upon the formulas, the terminology, and the images of conventional Germanic battle-poetry (lines 1982-2005 and 2039-95),"⁹⁷ *Genesis B* tells the story of the Fall of the Angels and of Man in a stirring narrative thoroughly suffused with the values of the *comitatus*. In the poet's conception, Satan is a rebellious thane proudly defying his Maker, who woos Adam and Eve away from their rightful Lord by playing on the respective roles of males and females in the *comitatus*.⁹⁸

The relationship between the two parts of the *Genesis* poem, *A* and *B*, is interesting. *Genesis A*, comprising lines 1-234 and 852-2935, serves as a frame for lines 235-851, *Genesis B*, which is markedly different in style. *Genesis B* is very much superior to *Genesis A*. Some scholars have compared the poetic power of *Genesis B* to that of *Paradise Lost*, going so far as to speculate that Milton

⁹⁷Bradley, introd. to *Exodus* in *ASP*, p. 48.

⁹⁸Stratynner, "Forged Ties," pp. 126-39.

may have indeed been familiar with the earlier poem.⁹⁹ *Genesis B* is in fact a translation from an Old Saxon original from the mid-ninth century, from which survives only a fragment corresponding to lines 791-817 in the Old English poem. Cherniss proposed that its (in his opinion) unparalleled fusion of heroic and Christian values may have been a result of its having been composed in a region only recently converted to Christianity by the forces of Charlemagne ca. 800.¹⁰⁰ *Genesis B* therefore comes ultimately from the same milieu which produced the *HeLiand*. The "purely" Old English *Genesis A* is usually dated very early, maybe as early as the beginning of the eighth century.¹⁰¹ *Genesis B* must be later than its Old Saxon original and probably was translated into Old English no earlier than the late ninth century. It was then intruded into the more expansive *Genesis A* at some unknown date no later than the compilation of the Junius manuscript around 1000.

Such is at least the traditionally understood relationship between the two components. Blake, however, proposes that this scheme, and particularly the dating of *Genesis A*, is wrong. In line with his contention that by the time the Junius manuscript was conceived whatever earlier Old English poetry that might have existed and would have been suitable for the collectors' didactic purposes had been lost, Blake suggests that *Genesis A* was written to serve in

⁹⁹Greenfield, *Old English Literature*, p. 150.

¹⁰⁰Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ*, p. 153.

¹⁰¹Bradley, introd. to *Genesis* in *ASP*, p. 10.

exactly the capacity that it does, as a frame and completion to the story told by *Genesis B*. It would have made no sense otherwise for a poet to have based the middle part of the *Genesis* story upon a translation if a suitable Old English version of the whole already existed. But it would have been natural for an Anglo-Saxon poet, beginning with the Old Saxon original and needing to fill in the rest of the story, to produce a version much closer to the Vulgate than had the Old Saxon poet. The result is exactly what we have in *Genesis A* - a poetic rendering essentially faithful to scripture.¹⁰² Here we can also see the difference between a workmanlike product of a capable but uninspired poet "just doing a job" and a truly great work of art. The dual nature of *Genesis* thus seems to result from the conception and creation of the Old English poetic corpus in the late ninth to tenth century; and, as Cherniss perceived, the Old Saxon original for *Genesis B* was indeed produced in a region much more recently converted where Christianity was for whatever reason viewed in more purely Germanic heroic terms seen also in the *Heliand*.

In the Old English *Exodus*, Moses is envisioned as the God-sent war-leader of the Children of Israel:

Him the Lord of the heavenly hosts, the King steadfast in truth, distinguished in the desert with his own authority, and the eternal ruler of all put many miraculous powers at his disposal. He was loved by God, a shrewd and wise elder of his people, leader of the army and a bold commander. He curbed the nation of Pharaoh, God's adversary, by chastisement with the rod, when the Lord of victories vouchsafed to him, their courageous mentor, the life of his compatriots, and to the sons of Abraham the habitation of a homeland. Divine was the

¹⁰²Blake, "Dating," pp. 22-3.

retribution of his hand and loyal his Lord: he granted him supremacy of arms against the violence of raging foes, and by this means he vanquished in battle the sovereignty of many tribes, his enemies.¹⁰³

The Old English poet emphasized the martial character of Moses' leadership. The Hebrews themselves are of course described in terms which would have been familiar to tenth-century aristocratic warriors, as are their armor, weapons, and formations:

Watchful, the whole company of kinsfolk assembled together and awaited the superior military force, until at daybreak Moses commanded warriors with their brazen trumpets to summon the folk, the soldiers, to get up, to don their mail-coats, set their minds on courageous conduct and take up their bright battle-gear; and by these signals to muster the army close to the shore. Briskly the defenders attended the battle-call; the host was alerted. The seafarers - they were obeying the trumpet - hustled with their tents over the hills; the army was in haste.

Then they detailed twelve battalions of brave-minded foot-soldiers to be in the vanguard against the enemy onslaught: their vigour was stirred. In each single battalion the flower of the nation's noble stock was appointed to arms, fifty select contingents in total. Each contingent of this distinguished host held ten hundred spear-bearing warriors all told, gloriously favoured men. It was a warlike host.¹⁰⁴

103 *þone on westenne weroda drihten,
soðfæst cyning, mid his sylfes miht
gewyrðode, and him wundra fela,
ece alwalda, in æht forgeaf.
He wæs leof gode, leoda aldor,
horsc and hreðergleaw, herges wisa,
freom folctoga. Faraones cyn,
godes andsacan, gyrdwite band,
þær him gesealde sigora waldend,
modgum magoraswan, his maga feorh,
onwist eðles, Abrahames sunum.
Heah wæs þæt haldlean and him hold frea,
gesealde wæpna geweald wið wraðra gryre,
ofercom mid þy campe cneomaga fela,
feonda folcrist.*

Exodus lines 8-22, ed. ASPR 1:91, trans. ASP, p. 51.

104 *wæccende bad
eall seo sibgedriht somod ætgædere*

(continued...)

Moses assured the Israelites that God would fight for them:

The mighty Lord by my hand wills this day to give them [the Egyptians] all their deeds' reward This is the everlasting God of Abraham, the Lord of things created, who, valiant and renowned of strength, will guard this army with that mighty hand.¹⁰⁵

And of course, as the sea fell in upon itself and the Egyptians,

God's adversary quickly found, when he sank into the abyss, that the Guardian Lord of the ocean was the greater in might. . . . They had been contending against God.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴(...continued)

maran mægenes, oð Moyses bebead
 eorlas on uhttid ærnum bemum
 folc somnigean, frecan arisan,
 habban heora hlencan, hycgan on ellen,
 beran heorht searo, beacnum cigean
 sweet sande near. Snelle gemundon
 weardas wigleoð, werod wæs gefysed,
 brudon ofer burgum, (gyman gehyrdon),
 flotan feldhusum, fyrð wæs on ofste.
 Siððan hie getealdon wið þam teonhete
 on þam forðherge feðan twelfe
 moderofra; mægen wæs onhrered.
 Was on anra gehwam æðelan cynnes
 alesen under lindum leoda duguðe
 on folcgetal fiftig cista;
 hæfde cista gehwilt cuðes werodes
 garberendra, guðfremmendra,
 X hund geteled, tireadigra.
 þæt wæs wiglic werod;

Exodus lines 213-33, ed. ASPR 1:97, trans. ASP, p. 56.

¹⁰⁵

Him eallum wile
 mihtig drihten þurh mine hand
 to dæge þissum dædlean gyfan,

 þis is se ecea Abrahames god,
 frumsceafta frea, se ðas fyrð wereð,
 modig and mægenrof, mid þære miclan hand.

Exodus lines 261-3, 273-5, ed. ASPR 1:98, trans. ASP, p. 57.

¹⁰⁶

[h]e onfond hraðe,
 siððan grund gestah godes andsaca,
 þæt wæs mihtigra mereflodes weard;

 Hie wið god wunnon!

Exodus lines 502-504, 515. ed. ASPR 1:105, trans. ASP, p. 63.

Elene, *Andreas*, and *Juliana* are all adaptations into Old English meter of saints' lives from the early Middle Ages. Each presents its saint as a hero or heroine contending against unbelievers. All three are considered "Cynewulfian" because of their similarity in treating stories from Christian tradition, but of these only *Elene* and *Juliana* contain near their endings the trademark runic signature of the obscure poet named Cynewulf, which they share with *Christ II* and *The Fates of the Apostles* (the latter poem presents a short catalog of the missions and martyrdoms of the twelve in heroic terms as warriors for the Lord). Scholarly consensus has for a half-century followed Kenneth Sisam's philologically-based assignment of Cynewulf to the ninth century.¹⁰⁷ Although lacking the runic signature, *Andreas*, along with a number of other Old English religious poems,¹⁰⁸ is considered to be the product of a so-called Cynewulfian school or circle of poets. To a greater degree than either *Elene* or *Juliana*, *Andreas* employs heroic vocabulary in describing the apostles upon their dispersal - "twelve famous heroes . . . the thanes of the Lord."¹⁰⁹ In his mission to save Matthew from the cannibalistic Mermedonians, Andrew is a "noble soldier," "eager for the fight and ready for God's warfare."¹¹⁰ *Elene* and

¹⁰⁷Kenneth Sisam, "Cynewulf and his Poetry," in *Studies in the History of Old English Literature* (Oxford, 1953), pp. 1-28.

¹⁰⁸Including *Christ I* and *III*, *The Dream of the Rood*, *The Phoenix*, and *Guthlac*.

¹⁰⁹"*twelfe . . . tireadige hæleð, / beodnes þegnas*," *Andreas* lines 2-3, ed. ASPR 2:3, trans. ASP, p. 112.

¹¹⁰"*æðelum ceman*," "*gearo, guðe fram, to godes campe*," *Andreas* lines 230-34, ed. ASPR 2:9, trans. ASP, p. 117.

Juliana cast the conflict with evil in more clearly spiritual terms. In the latter poem a great deal of martial imagery is employed in describing her disputations with the Devil.¹¹¹ The spiritual plane provided a battlefield upon which women could fight as well as any man.¹¹²

These three hagiographic poems, along with *Exodus* and *Judith*, have been recently examined by John Hermann, who places them in the tradition of *Psychomachia* allegory, following Prudentius' conception of the life of the soul as a warfare between contending personified virtues and vices.¹¹³ He further indicts the Old English poetic representation of spiritual life in terms of violent conflict against personified vices as "complicitous with social violence."¹¹⁴ Adolf Harnack argued long ago that militaristic analogies in religious expression, going ultimately back to St. Paul's symbolizing the spiritual virtues as military garb and weaponry in Ephesians 6:11-17, and the Christian as the *miles Christi*, had prepared the way for Christian holy wars.¹¹⁵ Such was precisely part of the Alfredian

¹¹¹*Juliana* lines 242-529.

¹¹²See above, chap. 2, p. 50.

¹¹³John P. Hermann, *Allegories of War: Language and Violence in Old English Poetry* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), p. 8.

¹¹⁴Hermann, *Allegories of War*, p. 5.

¹¹⁵Adolf Harnack, *Militia Christi: The Christian Religion and the Military in the First Three Centuries* (1905), trans. and introd. David McInnes. Gracie (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), p. 63. Joyce Hill, "The Soldier of Christ in Old English Prose and Poetry," *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 12 (1981), pp. 57-80, examines the Old English image of the saint as the *miles Christi* and concludes that the imagery was inspired by patristic tradition and not by an enduring Germanic heroic impulse.

and West Saxon agenda in the late ninth and tenth centuries - the "social violence" that they advocated was warfare against the Danish Vikings, first invaders and then unwelcome settlers on English soil. Aelfric, writing ca. 1000, testifies that the story of *Judith* provided an example to men of his own age, during the second wave of Danish invasions which commenced in the late tenth century to culminate ultimately in the conquest of England by Cnut in 1016, that they might also defend their country by force of arms against the invasion of a foreign host.¹¹⁶

A tenth-century date for the *Judith* poem, which Bradley deems most likely based upon stylistic features,¹¹⁷ would fit the stirring Old English poetic expansion of the Biblical story, with its added martial elements. In a prayer anachronistic on the lips of this Jewish matron, Judith invokes the Triune God to her aid:

God of beginnings, Spirit of comfort, Son of the
universal Ruler, I desire to entreat you for your grace
upon me in my need, Majesty of the Trinity. My heart is
now sorely anguished and my mind troubled and much
afflicted with anxieties. Give me, Lord of heaven,
victory and true faith so that with this sword I may hew
down this dispenser of violent death. Grant me my safe
deliverance, stern-minded Prince over men. Never have I
had greater need of your grace. Avenge now, mighty Lord,
illustrious Dispenser of glory, that which is so bitter
to my mind, so burning in my breast.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶Aelfric, *On the Old and New Testament* lines 772-80, ed. S. J. Crawford in *The Old English Version of the Heptateuch, Aelfric's Treatise on the Old and New Testament and his Preface to Genesis*, EETS 160 (London: Oxford University Press, 1922), p. 48.

¹¹⁷Bradley, introd. to *Judith* in ASP, pp. 495-6.

¹¹⁸ *Ic ðe, frymða god ond frofre æst,
bearn alwaldan, biddan wylle
miltse þinre me þearfendre,*

(continued...)

This is another departure from scripture, where Judith receives only "gold, and silver, and garments and precious stones, and all household stuff" ¹²¹

The story of Judith probably appealed to tenth-century English Christians because the situation so closely paralleled their own. And they had historical warrant for such a strong female figure. A traditional, though often disputed, hypothesis is that the heroine of *Judith* in some way represents the character of Aethelflaed, "Lady of the Mercians." Such a stark literary parallel is perhaps not necessary, but it is certainly attractive considering the valiant efforts of the daughter of Alfred the Great, sister of Edward the Elder, and wife of Aethelred the ealdorman of Mercia in the reconquest and consolidation of the Danelaw. ¹²²

Christian English Heroes of the Tenth Century

Old English religious poetry shows how elements of heroism were present in the Anglo-Saxon conception of sacred subjects, from Christ Himself to His saints. A series of poems firmly datable to the tenth century because based upon definite historical events shows, on the

¹²⁰(...continued)

*gerenode readum golde, ond eal þæt se rinca baldor
swiðmod sinces ahte oððe sundoryrfes,
beaga ond beorhtra maðma, hi þæt þære beorhtan idese
ageafon gearoþoncolre.*

Judith lines 334-41, ed. ASPR 4:108, trans. ASP, p. 504.

¹²¹Judith 15.14 DR. Vulgate: "Porro autem universa quae Holofernis peculiaris fuisse probata sunt dederunt Iudith in auro et argento et vestibis et gemmis et omni suppellectile et tradita sunt illi omnia a populo."

¹²²The most significant overview of the Lady Aethelflaed remains F. T. Wainwright, "Aethelflaed, Lady of the Mercians" (1959), repr. in his *Scandinavian England: Collected Papers*, ed. H. P. R. Finberg (Chichester, Sussex: Phillimore, 1975), pp. 305-24.

other hand, how the reverse could be true as well: contemporary figures and events could be given religious significance.

The ongoing conflict with the Vikings settled in the Danelaw, of course, itself inspired several pieces of poetry in the tenth century. Two in particular appear in the context of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*; the entry for 937 which appears in four of the manuscripts (A-D) is particularly notable because here, for the first time, an annalist recording the passage of years in the *Chronicle* "breaks into song" commemorating the great victory won by King Athelstan and his brother Edmund, grandsons of Alfred the Great, over an alliance of Scots, Picts, and Vikings from Dublin led by King Constantine of Scotland, at *Brunanburh*.¹²³ The change in tone is actually quite welcome after the preceding annals noting little more than consecrations and deaths in the *Chronicle*'s more typically terse and uninspired manner. The poem on *The Battle of Brunanburh* - for despite S. A. J. Bradley's caveat¹²⁴ the stark contrast between this

¹²³The location of *Brunanburh* is uncertain. Speculation has ranged from Scotland to southern England. Michael Wood, however, makes a compelling case for placing the site in the region of Brinsworth, about 40 miles south of York - on the frontier between Northumbria and southern England: "Brunanburh Revisited," *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* 20 (1980), pp. 200-217. In his "excellent television programme on King Æthelstan" (part of the series upon which is based his *In Search of the Dark Ages* [New York and Oxford: Facts on File, 1987]), Wood reportedly surveys the field from helicopter - Simon Keynes, *Anglo-Saxon History: A Select Bibliography*, 2nd ed., *Old English Newsletter Subsidia* 13 (Binghamton: State University of New York - Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1993), p. 38 (G73).

¹²⁴"[S]ince no distinction of layout was observed between prose and poetry in AS manuscripts it is hardly less arbitrary to print the annal for 937 according to the typographical conventions of poetry than it would be to print large tracts of Wulfstan . . . in the same way." Bradley, introd. to *The Battle of Brunanburh* in *ASP*, p. 515.

annal and especially the bare annotations that immediately precede it make it obvious that here we have an intentionally different annal - deploys the traditional formulaic diction of Germanic heroic poetry in celebrating this victory of the tenth-century English under the House of Wessex. Oddly enough, although one (F) of the two *Chronicle* manuscripts (E and F) mentioning the battle in a much shorter, non-poetic entry makes clear that "with the help of Christ they had the victory,"¹²⁵ such an explicit sense of Christian militancy is missing from the poem itself, when such an interpretation might well have been expected given Athelstan's patronage of the Church.¹²⁶ Perhaps casting the Battle of *Brunanburh* as one of Christian versus pagan would have been too difficult considering that Constantine's Scots at least were Christians in an unholy alliance with the

¹²⁵"*Her Æðelstan cing and Eadmund his broðer lædde fyrde to Brunan byri . . . and [Crist]e fultumegende sige hæfde,*" ASC s.a. 937 (ms. F), ed. Earle, p. 113, trans. G. N. Garmonsway (1953; new ed. London: J. M. Dent and Sons - Everyman's Library, 1972), p. 107. (N.B.: Garmonsway trans. according to the sense of the passage, which has a dual subject, rather than adhering to the grammatically incorrect singular verb *hæfde*.) Ms. F is a twelfth-century bilingual (Old English and Latin) version of the ASC. The compiler, who derived the Old English from ms. E, which has merely a single-line prose notice that Athelstan led the *fyrð* to Brunanburh, also worked from a Latin text closely related to a lost Winchester chronicle, from which he translated the attribution of the victory to Christ. Alistair Campbell, app. 4.A.2 "Notices of the Battle Not Derived from the Poem," in *The Battle of Brunanburh*, ed. idem (London: William Heinemann, 1938), pp. 149-50.

¹²⁶Bradley, introd. to *Brunanburh* in ASP, p. 516. The gifts that Bradley cites from Athelstan to the shrine of St. Cuthbert at Durham must have included those given by the king three years before on an earlier expedition against the Scots. See above, chap. 3, pp. 129.

Vikings,¹²⁷ but the poem does convey an indefinable "feel" of Christian exultation and almost seems to invoke the watchful eye of God over the battlefield:

The field grew wet with men's blood from when in the morning-tide that glorious star, the sun, glided aloft and over earth's plains, the bright candle of God the everlasting Lord, to when that noble creation sank to rest.¹²⁸

There are certain similarities and differences between *The Battle of Brunanburh* and the Old High German *Ludwigslied*.¹²⁹ The latter fifty-nine-line poem celebrates in clearly martial Christian terms (and within one year of the event) the 881 victory won by the West Frankish King Louis III over the Vikings at the Battle of Saucourt. John Bostock bluntly assesses the poem as "a glorification of the Church Militant, and of the king, its servant."¹³⁰ The historical events are portrayed as entirely in God's hands, from the coming of the Vikings as a scourge on the Frankish people because of

¹²⁷The 7th-c. Northumbrian kings vs. a similar unholy alliance between Cadwallon and Penda is not a parallel because Cadwallon represented schismatic Celtic Christianity, a condition worse than a pagan in Bede's estimation, but no longer a consideration in the 10th-c.

¹²⁸

Feld dunnade
secga swate, siðpan sunne up
on morgentid, mære tungol,
glad ofer grundas, Godes condel beorht,
eces Drihtnes, oð sio æpele gesceaft
sah to setle.

The Battle of Brunanburh (= ASC s.a. 937) lines 12-17, ed. Campbell, p. 93, trans. ASP, p. 516.

¹²⁹Recently discussed in some detail by Alois Wolf, "Medieval Heroic Traditions and Their Transitions from Orality to Literacy," in *Vox Intexta: Orality and Textuality in the Middle Ages*, ed. A. N. Doane and C. B. Pasternack (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), particularly pp. 75-6 and 80-81.

¹³⁰Bostock, *Old High German Literature*, p. 241.

their sins, to Christ's calling Louis to battle to help the repentant people, to the Frankish victory through the valor of Louis.¹³¹ In his discussion of the fundamental literary nature of these two texts, *Brunanburh* and *Ludwigslied*, Alois Wolf sees them as each "steeped in patriotism, king, Christianity, and territory"¹³²

The other of the tenth-century *Chronicle*-poems growing out of the English conflict with the Vikings appears in an annal from a few years after the Battle of *Brunanburh*, by which time the aetheling Edmund had succeeded his brother Athelstan as king. This ten-line poem is more similar than the *Brunanburh* poem to the *Ludwigslied* in casting the 942 recovery of five boroughs in the Danelaw - Leicester, Lincoln, Nottingham, Derby, and Stamford - as a "redemption" of an oppressed Christian people.

Long had the Danes under the Norsemen
 Been subjected by force to heathen bondage,
 Until finally liberated by the valour of Edward's son,
 King Edmund, protector of warriors.¹³³

This annal is interesting furthermore because it reveals that the conflict was indeed seen in fundamentally religious rather than ethnic terms - the Christian population of the boroughs liberated

¹³¹See trans. in Bostock, *Old High German Literature*, pp. 239-41.

¹³²Wolf, "Medieval Heroic Traditions," p. 81.

¹³³
 Dæne wæran ær .
 under Norðmannum . nyde gebegde .
 on hæþenra . hæfte clomum .
 lange þraga . oþ hie alydde eft .
 for his weorþscipe . wiggendra hleo .
 afera Eadweardes . Eadmund cyning .

ASC s.a. 942 (ms. ABCD), ed. (ms. A) Earle, p. 116, trans. Garmonsway, pp. 110-11. See also A. Mawer, "The Redemption of the Five Boroughs," *English Historical Review* 38 (1923), pp. 551-7.

from the pagan Norse ruling in York are called Danes; as far back as 878 the leader of the Danish Vikings who had contended with Alfred had accepted baptism for himself and his people settling the Danelaw as the price of peace. Certainly since the beginning of the tenth century the Danes resident in England had been more or less Christianized; Oda, the archbishop of Canterbury in 942 and an early proponent of ecclesiastical reform, was himself of Danish parentage.¹³⁴ The heroism of a Christian king in defense of an oppressed Christian people is clearly here employed poetically in the service of the House of Wessex in a manner very similar in spirit to that of the *Ludwigslied*.

By far the most famous battle poem in Old English poetry is *The Battle of Maldon*, a 325-line fragment missing its beginning and end, commemorating not a glorious victory but rather a devastating defeat suffered by the English early in the second phase of the Viking Age, when invasions from Scandinavia resumed after a long lull. In August 991, the senior ealdorman of eastern England, Byrhtnoth, met a large raiding force of Vikings which had harried the southeastern coast of England; battle was joined, and Byrhtnoth fell; many of his retainers fled. The second half of the poem celebrates the loyalty of those who remained to die by the body of their lord and condemns the betrayal of the *comitatus* ethic by the deserters. Godric son of Odda is singled out for especial censure. His flight from the battlefield

¹³⁴Williams, et al., *Dark Age Britain*, s.v. "Oda."

upon his fallen lord's own steed was mistaken by many of his fellows as that of their leader abandoning the fight.¹³⁵

In the estimation of Christopher Tyerman, the *Maldon* poet had, a century before its time, the "spirit of crusading . . . close by the hand" in two passages.¹³⁶ At the height of the battle, already wounded yet having dispatched his attacker and indeed another Viking,

The earl [Byrhtnoth] was the more exultant:
the proud man roared with laughter, gave thanks to his
Maker
for the day's work that the Lord had given him.¹³⁷

And later, after Byrhtnoth had fallen and as the thanes who remained faithful to him proclaim their intent to avenge him or die trying, they . . .

¹³⁵On Godric, see *The Battle of Maldon* lines 185-201, 237-43, 325. The question of whether the loyal retainers' actions and sentiments as recounted in the poem accurately reflects a living heroic ethos at the end of the tenth century or is instead merely a literary convention has been much discussed, most notably by R. Woolf, "The Ideal of Men Dying with their Lord in the *Germania* and in *The Battle of Maldon*," *Anglo-Saxon England* 5 (1976), pp. 63-81 (a literary convention), and R. Frank, "The Ideal of Men Dying with their Lord in *The Battle of Maldon*: Anachronism or *Nouvelle Vague*," in *People and Places in Northern Europe, 500-1600: Essays in Honour of Peter Hayes Sawyer*, ed. I. Wood and N. Lund (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1991), pp. 95-106 (a tenth to eleventh-century reality).

¹³⁶Christopher Tyerman, *England and the Crusades, 1095-1588* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 11.

¹³⁷ [s]e eorl wæs þe blipra:

hloh þa modi man, sæde Mitode þanc
ðæs dægweorces þe him Drihten forgeaf.

The Battle of Maldon lines 146-8, ed. Donald G. Scragg, *Old and Middle English Texts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), p. 61, trans idem, "The Battle of Maldon," in *The Battle of Maldon, AD 991*, ed. idem [hereafter cited as *Maldon 991*] (Oxford and Cambridge [MA]: Basil Blackwell in association with the Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies, 1991), p. 25.

prayed to God
that they might avenge their beloved lord
and bring destruction on their enemies.¹³⁸

Although Byrhtnoth's exultation was quickly followed by his own fatal wound, and the retainers' prayer went unanswered, the poet clearly saw no incongruity in such battlefield invocations of God.

With the exception of *Beowulf*, the *Maldon* poem is undoubtedly the most discussed and debated poem in Old English. Controversy rages over the date when the poem was written, with dates being posited from essentially contemporary with, certainly within a few years of, the battle (a view favored by historians, who wish to see a reliable account of the battle) to as late as the reign of Cnut in the eleventh century (the later view favored mainly by linguists).¹³⁹ But even if *Maldon* is early eleventh-century, it could still work as an example of didactic heroic poetry. The English resistance to the Danes in the period after *Maldon* was hampered by disloyalty and treachery, lamented by Wulfstan of York in his *Sermo Lupi* and exemplified by the career of the infamous Eadric Streona.¹⁴⁰ The condemnation of the men who fled following

138 . . . God bædon
þæt hi moston gewrecan hyra winedrihten
and on hyra feondum fyl gwyrcean.

Maldon lines 262-4, ed. Scragg, p. 65, trans. idem in *Maldon 991*, p. 29.

¹³⁹Donald G. Scragg, "The Battle of Maldon: Fact or Fiction?" in *The Battle of Maldon: Fiction and Fact*, ed. Janet Cooper (London and Rio Grande: The Hambleton Press, 1993), p. 26.

¹⁴⁰Fred C. Robinson, "God, Death, and Loyalty in *The Battle of Maldon*," in *J. R. R. Tolkien: Scholar and Storyteller*, ed. Mary Salu and Robert T. Farrell (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1979), pp. 76-90; Eric John, "The Return of the Vikings," in *The Anglo-Saxons*, ed. James Campbell (1982; repr. London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 192-213.

Byrhtnoth's death is clear and accentuated by the series of speeches expressing the loyalty of those who remained.

Of seemingly more import is the question of whether the poem is at heart a heroic or a Christian work. Byrhtnoth has been considered anything from a (flawed) "hero who is Christian" to a Christian saint in an essentially hagiographical poem having more in common with the Old English poetical and prose lives of saints than with battle poems such as *Brunanburh*.¹⁴¹ The major stumbling block to the latter view has always been the interpretation of a single passage, even a single word in the poem in which the poet seems to express extreme criticism of a figure otherwise clearly heroic:

Then because of his pride [*ofermode*] the earl set about
allowing the hateful race too much land . . .¹⁴²

After holding against the raiders the causeway from the island on which the Vikings were gathered, Byrhtnoth accepted their request for an unobstructed crossing to the mainland and the implied pitched battle. The key word of contention is *ofermod*,¹⁴³ about which much ink has been spilt at least since J. R. R. Tolkien suggested that Byrhtnoth suffered from overmastering pride for which he and his men

¹⁴¹See above p. 186 nn. 99 and 100.

¹⁴² *ða se eorl ongan for his ofermode
alyfan landes to fela laþere ðeode;*
Maldon lines 89-90, ed. Scragg, p. 60, trans. idem in *Maldon 991*, p. 21.

¹⁴³The two individual elements are *ofer* 'over' and *mod* 'pride', although it is not certain that the semantics of the compound represent merely the sum of the constituent elements.

paid with their lives.¹⁴⁴ That the word does convey a pejorative meaning is generally accepted,¹⁴⁵ but dissenting views remain, and it is very possible that the semantic range of *ofermod* would bear a positive as well as a negative connotation, just as does "pride" in modern English, particularly in a heroic rather than specifically religious context.¹⁴⁶ Consideration of the lines in their context within the poem as a whole indeed shows that the poet's criticism of Byrhtnoth was not as damning as certain modern critics would have it - certainly Byrhtnoth did not fall prey to the deadly sin that made Satan contend against his Lord. Contemporary homiletic writers considered such prideful disruption of the ideal of societal *ordo* as the most evil of deeds.¹⁴⁷ Byrhtnoth acted according to the dictates of his station in society both as leader of the English and as retainer of his own lord, the king. To the Viking messenger who had demanded tribute he retorted:

¹⁴⁴J. R. R. Tolkien, "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son" (1953) repr. in *The Tolkien Reader* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1966).

¹⁴⁵See esp. Scragg, p. 36 n. 10 to his trans. in *Maldon 991*, that *ofermod* "has to be interpreted in the light of other instances of this and related words in Old English as a pejorative term meaning 'pride,'" accepting H. Gneuss, "The Battle of Maldon 89: Byrhtnoð's *Ofermod* Once Again," *Studies in Philology* 73 (1976), pp. 117-37, as the definitive study.

¹⁴⁶See in particular George Clark, "The Hero of Maldon: *Vir Pius et Strenuus*," *Speculum* (1979), pp. 273-80, who argues specifically against Gneuss, "Maldon 89."

¹⁴⁷Clark, "Hero of Maldon," pp. 264-5, 280-82; Clark specifically argues against J. E. Cross, "Oswald and Byrhtnoth: A Christian Saint and a Hero who is Christian," *English Studies* 46 (1965), pp. 93-109, as well as others who would thus implicitly consign Byrhtnoth to hell.

. . . [H]ere stands with his company an earl of unstained
 reputation,
 who intends to defend this homeland,
 the kingdom of Aethelred, my lord's
 people and his country.

And the poet reemphasized Byrhtnoth's place after his death:

Then the head of the army had fallen,
 Aethelred's earl. They all saw,
 the companions of his hearth, that their lord lay
 dead.¹⁴⁸

Loyalty and duty are the great themes of the latter half of the
 poem.¹⁴⁹

Paul Szarmach has recently examined the *Maldon* poem in the
 context of what he calls a literary "(sub-)genre" of Christian-Viking
 conflict which includes the *Ludwigslied* as well as Abbo of St.-
 Germain's *Bella Parisiacaе urbis*.¹⁵⁰ Szarmach explains the
 appearance of *ofermod* in the *Maldon* poem as fulfilling a necessary
 literary element in the "(sub-)genre," whereby the only possible
 explanation for failure was moral.¹⁵¹ In light of the well-known

¹⁴⁸ . . . [H]er stynt unforcuð eorl mid his werode,
 þe wile gealgean eþel þysne,
 eþelredes eard, ealdres mines
 folc and foldan.

. . . .
 þa wearð afeallen þæs folces ealdor,
 eþelredes eorl. Ealle gesawon,
 heorðgeneatas, þat hyra heorra læg.

Maldon lines 50-54 and 202-4, ed. Scragg, pp. 58 and 63, trans idem
 in *Maldon* 991, pp. 21 and 27. See Clark, "Hero of Maldon," p. 281.

¹⁴⁹Robinson, "God, Death, and Loyalty."

¹⁵⁰Paul E. Szarmach, "The (Sub-)Genre of *The Battle of Maldon*,"
 in *The Battle of Maldon: Fiction and Fact*, ed. Janet Cooper (London
 and Rio Grande: The Hambledon Press, 1993), pp. 43-61. Abbo's work,
 a long Latin poem in three books totalling about 1400 lines,
 describes the Viking siege of Paris and related events from 885 into
 the 890s.

¹⁵¹Szarmach, "(Sub-)Genre," p. 59.

outcome of the battle the *Maldon* poet faced the ancient paradox of why the good suffer and how a good man could have fallen - he explained it the only way he could by seeing as faulty the only actions open to Byrhtnoth, both from the standpoint of strategy (the alternative being to allow the Vikings to sail away to further harry his lands)¹⁵² and from personal honor, as the Vikings were directly challenging him to meet them in battle.¹⁵³

A brief comparison with a wider range of literature may help clarify the matter. Throughout Anglo-Saxon history, and especially with the coming of the Vikings, national ill fortune, including military disaster, had been recognized as resulting from sins.¹⁵⁴ Alcuin saw the Viking raid which devastated Lindisfarne monastery in 793 as a sign of divine wrath, and he proclaimed his horror in many epistles. In a letter to King Aethelred of Northumbria, he gave full rein to his outrage in detailing the crimes of the English which merited "such terror . . . from a pagan race":

[F]rom the days of King Aelfwold fornications, adulteries and incest have poured over the land, so that these sins have been committed without any shame and even against the handmaids dedicated to God. What may I say about

¹⁵²Eric John, "The Return of the Vikings," in *The Anglo-Saxons*, ed. James Campbell (1982; repr. London: Penguin, 1991), p. 198. See also Clark, "Hero of *Maldon*," p. 273 on Byrhtnoth's lack of any other choice, as well as p. 262 regarding the relative numbers of the two forces - there is no reason to assume that Byrhtnoth accepted a battle he knew he would lose.

¹⁵³Why, if the poet had to assign fault, did he not use the more obvious scape-goats, the English who fled? Maybe because that would have left Byrhtnoth's death still unexplained?

¹⁵⁴This is considered in more detail than follows in Kent Gregory Hare, "Religion, Warfare, and the *Gens Anglorum*: Aspects of Holy War and its Development in Anglo-Saxon England" (M.A. Thesis [History], Louisiana State University, 1992), pp. 39-59.

avarice, robbery, violent judgements? - when it is clearer than day how much these crimes have increased everywhere, and a despoiled people testifies to it. Whoever reads the Holy Scriptures and ponders ancient histories and considers the fortune of the world will find that for sins of this kind kings lost kingdoms and peoples their country; and while the strong unjustly seized the goods of others, they justly lost their own.¹⁵⁵

Possibly among the sins of the Lindisfarne monks in particular was devotion to the old songs where attention to spiritual matters was more appropriate.¹⁵⁶ In addition to this gamut of specific evils, we have already seen that Alfred the Great took steps to deal with an apathetic malaise in the quality of English Christianity to which he ascribed the tribulations of the later ninth century. And in the very age of the Battle of Maldon, Archbishop Wulfstan of York was able to recite a litany of English sins for which the Vikings served as God's chastisement.¹⁵⁷

Anglo-Saxon ideas were thus as a whole very much in line with those expressed in the continental poems Szarmach analyzed. From outside the Anglo-Saxon milieu and slightly later, we find in the

¹⁵⁵"*talis terror . . . a pagana gente*"; "[A] *diebus Elfwaldi Regis fornicationes, adulteria, et incestus inundaverunt supra terram ita ut absque omni verecundia etiam et in ancillis Domino dicatis hæc peccata perpetrabantur. Quid dicam de avaritia, rapinis et violentis judiciis, dum luce clarius constat quantum ubique hæc crimina succreverint et populus testatur spoliatus? Qui sanctas legit scripturas et veteres revolvit historias et sæculi considerat eventus, inveniet pro hujusmodi peccatis reges regna et populos patriam perdidisse, et dum aliena potentes injuste raprerunt propria juste perdiderunt.*" Alcuin, letter to Aethelred, king of Northumbria (793), ed. Haddan and Stubbs 3:493, trans. *EHD* 1:776.

¹⁵⁶See beginning of this chapter.

¹⁵⁷Wulfstan, *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, ed. Dorothy Bethurum in *The Homilies of Wulfstan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), pp. 267-75, trans. *EHD* 1:854-9.

early accounts of the First Crusade that Christian failures are likewise ascribed to sins, usually sexual but also religious, with God's renewed favor and successes obtainable through various penitential exercises as well as putting away the occasions of carnal sin.¹⁵⁸ In all these cases the sins for which punishment is due are clear and specific, at least in the minds of the contemporary writers, and the connections are, moreover, crystal clear. Even in the *Song of Roland*, the tale of another Christian hero whose pride led his men to disaster which has been often compared and contrasted to the *Maldon* poem,¹⁵⁹ the specificity of the sin precipitating the disaster is apparent, not least to Roland himself, who before his death prays for his own forgiveness and that of his followers, who had urged him against his course of action.¹⁶⁰ Not so in *Maldon*. If Byrhtnoth's action in accepting pitched battle with the Vikings

¹⁵⁸See, for example, *Gesta Francorum et aliorum Hierosolimitanorum*, 9.24, 9.29, 10.34, 10.38, ed. and trans. Rosalind Hill (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962), pp. 58, 67-71, 81, 90); Raymond d'Aguilers, *Historia Francorum Qui Ceperunt Iherusalem*, chaps. 4, 7, 11, 14, trans. John Hugh Hill and Laurita L. Hill (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1968), pp. 34, 36, 56, 83, 121-3; Fulcher of Chartres, *A History of the Expedition to Jerusalem, 1095-1127*, 1.11.8-10, 1.12.1-5, 1.15.13-14, 1.19.3-4, 1.20.3, trans. Frances Rita Ryan, ed. with introd. Harold S. Fink (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1969), pp. 85-87, 95, 101-2.

¹⁵⁹See Wolf, "Medieval Heroic Traditions," pp. 81-3; Cecily Clark, "Byrhtnoth and Roland: A Contrast," *Neophilologus* 51 (1967), pp. 288-93.

¹⁶⁰*The Song of Roland* lines 2369-72, 2384-88, 1854-68 ed. and trans. G. J. Brault in *The Song of Roland: An Analytical Edition*, Vol. 2, *Oxford Text and English Translation* [University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978], pp. 144-47, 114-15. Note esp. line 1863, "*Barons franceis, pur mei vos vei murir*" (p. 114), for which I prefer the trans. "French lords, because of me I see you dying" (R. Harrison, *The Song of Roland* [New York: New American Library - Mentor, 1970], p. 108) as clearer than Brault's "French knights, I see you dying for my sake" (p. 115).

was indeed a tactical error motivated by sinful pride, the poet never elaborates on the point and none of the participants seems to recognize it. Byrhtnoth's last words, a prayer to his God,¹⁶¹ express no remorse for his deed. None of his followers bewail his actions. The poet in fact puts words of praise for that "wellbeloved man" into the mouth of the aged retainer Byrhtwold as he declares near the end of the poem the warriors' resolve to go down fighting.¹⁶² And the specific "ofermod-passage" in question is followed immediately by clear indication from Byrhtnoth that his "pride" was not that of presumption in assuming that victory would be with the English:

¹⁶¹See *Maldon* lines 171-8, ed. Scragg, p. 62:
Ne mihte þa on fotum leng fæste gest[a]ndan;
he to heofenum wlat:
 '[Ic] *geþanc þe, ðeoda Waldend,*
ealra þæra wynna þe ic on worulde gebad.
Nu ic ah, milde Metod, mæste þearfe
þæt þu minum gaste godes geunne,
þæt min sawul to ðe siðian mote,
on þin geweald, þeoden engla,
mid friþe ferian. Ic eom frymði to þe
þæt hi hellsceaðan hynan ne moton.'

Trans. idem in *Maldon* 991, p. 25:

He could not then stand firmly on his feet any longer:
 he looked to the heavens.
 'Thank you, O Lord of Hosts,
 for all the joys which I have experienced in this world.
 Now, merciful God, I have the greatest need
 that you should grant grace to my spirit,
 so that my soul might journey to you,
 into your dominion, Lord of angels,
 travel with your protection. I entreat you
 that thieves from hell should not drag it down.'

¹⁶²"*swa leofan men,*" *Maldon* line 319, ed. Scragg, p. 67, trans. idem in *Maldon* 991, p. 31.

God alone knows
who will control the battlefield.¹⁶³

The character of the pious ealdorman Byrhtnoth is in no source besmirched by even the hint of sin.¹⁶⁴

Tolkien argued that Byrhtnoth's "fault" was one characteristic of the heroic ethos of his age:

Owing to a defect of character, no doubt; but a character, we may surmise, not only formed by nature, but moulded also by 'aristocratic tradition,' enshrined in tales and verse of poets now lost save for echoes.¹⁶⁵

But the poet was more likely constrained by convention than was the ealdorman, who had little choice but to fight then and there, or watch the Vikings sail away to further harry his lands. The literary tradition identified by Szarmach, part of a wider and ancient tendency to attribute disaster to sin, may have forced the *Maldon* poet to posit some such explanation for the resulting defeat. But in doing so he cleverly employed a term of brilliant vagueness and otherwise betrays only admiration for his Christian hero.

¹⁶³ God ana wat
hwa þære wælstowe wealdan mote.
Maldon lines 94-5, ed. Scragg, p. 60, trans. idem in *Maldon* 991, p. 23. See N. F. Blake, "The Battle of Maldon," *Neophilologus* 49 (1965), p. 338.

¹⁶⁴See *Vita Oswaldi Archiepiscopi Eboracensis*, ed. James Raine in *The Historians of the Church of York and its Archbishops*, 3 vols., RS 71 (London: Longman, 1879-1894), 1:446, 456; Alan Kennedy, "Byrhtnoth's Obits and Twelfth-Century Accounts of the Battle of Maldon," in *The Battle of Maldon, AD 991*, ed. Donald G. Scragg (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell in association with the Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies, 1991), pp. 59-78, esp. the 12th-c. *Liber Eliensis* 2.62, ed. E. O. Blake, *Camden* 3rd ser. 92 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1962), repr. and trans. Kennedy, *op.cit.*, pp. 63-5, where Byrhtnoth's piety and devotion to the Church receive particular praise; and above, chap. 4, pp. 186 ff.

¹⁶⁵Tolkien, "Homecoming," p. 21. See Clark, "Hero of Maldon," p. 263.

Beowulf: A Godly Hero

It remains to discuss briefly the epic masterpiece of Old English poetry, around which all else seems to orbit, in the specific context of the tenth century and the proposed argument that the Alfredians and their successors sought to provide models of Christian heroism to serve as examples in the expansion of Wessex and the consolidation of England. Despite indications that the story was known earlier, Blake's theory of a tenth-century date for the present redaction of the *Beowulf* poem is at least as reasonable as any other assignment.¹⁶⁶ As Cherniss argues and others have observed, the poem as we have it is the product of a Christian poet telling a traditional story. But contrary to Cherniss' judgment that the Christianity of *Beowulf* is merely a superficial overlay, the poet's view that Beowulf is essentially a Christian hero - or more correctly, a godly hero - shines clearly in the text. The distinction between "Christian" and "godly" is necessary because the poet was perhaps nowhere more skilled than in what David Wright called his display of "historical tact . . . in addressing to a Christian audience a work which is set, in time, in a pagan world."¹⁶⁷ The poet consistently envisioned a single God¹⁶⁸ and laments the error of those Danes who in their desperation turned to

¹⁶⁶See discussion above, pp. 203.

¹⁶⁷David Wright, introd. to *Beowulf*, trans. idem (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1957), p. 18.

¹⁶⁸*Beowulf* lines 13, 73, 106, 114, 2795-2796, and throughout.

pagan idols.¹⁶⁹ But there are no anachronistic references to the Trinity as in *Judith* or to specifically Christian themes. The only allusions to Christian tradition are limited to the earliest parts of the Old Testament, which may have been considered by the poet as part of a heritage common to all men, even pagans, as part of natural law.

To see *Beowulf* as an allegory of salvation as have some interpreters¹⁷⁰ perhaps goes too far, but *Beowulf* is a hero who fights with God's aid and in his service. He is sent by God to the aid of Hrothgar's Danes:

The heaven-King, so people heard, had appointed against
Grendel a hall-guard who had a special duty towards the
lord of the Danes¹⁷¹

He contends with the enemy of God, Grendel - the monster who "bore . . . God's anger," was "God's adversary," and was "antagonistic towards God."¹⁷² *Beowulf's* strength comes from God:

¹⁶⁹*Beowulf* lines 175-188. Frederick Klaeber discusses "The Christian Colouring" of the poem in the introd. to his ed., *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 3rd. ed. with supplement (Boston: Heath, 1941), pp. xlvi-li.

¹⁷⁰Esp. M. B. McNamee, "Beowulf - An Allegory of Salvation?" *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 59 (1960), repr. in *Interpretations of Beowulf: A Critical Anthology*, ed. R. D. Fulk (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 88-102.

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<i>Grendle togeanes,</i>	<i>Hæfde kyningwuldor</i>
<i>seleweard asetad;</i>	<i>swa guman gefrungon,</i>
<i>ymb aldor Dena</i>	<i>sundornytte beheold</i>

Beowulf lines 665-8, ed. ASPR 4:22, trans. ASP, p. 429. See also lines 1055-7, ed. ASPR 4:33, trans. ASP, p. 439.

¹⁷²"godes yrre bær," "godes ondsacan," "fæg wið god," *Beowulf*, lines 711, 786, 811, ed. ASPR 4:23, 4:26, trans. ASP, pp. 430, 432, and 433. Other examples include: line 807, "ellorgast," "alien being" (ed. ASPR 4:25, trans. ASP, p. 433); line 788, "helle hæfton," "hell's prisoner" (ed. ASPR 4:26, trans. ASP, p. 432); line 101, "feond on helle," "fiend in torment" (ed. ASPR 4:6, trans. ASP, p. 432).
 (continued...)

he bore in mind the potency of his strength, the liberal gift which God had granted him, and he entrusted himself to the grace of the one Lord, to his mercy and help.¹⁷³

He trusts in that strength and in God against Grendel -

[a]nd certainly the Geatish leader readily trusted in his own intrepid strength and the protection of the ordaining Lord.¹⁷⁴

- and is aided by God in battle against Grendel's mother:

Ecgtheow's son, the Geatish campaigner, would have perished then down in the vast deep, had not his battle-corslet, his sturdy soldier's mail-coat, afforded him help; and were it not that holy God held sway over victory in war. The wise Lord, arbiter of the heavens, easily determined the matter on the side of right . . .
¹⁷⁵

In the end, the poet tells us that Beowulf is saved:

[T]he soul departed from him to seek the glory of those steadfast in the truth.¹⁷⁶

172 (...continued)

414), more lit. "fiend in hell." See Edwin Duncan, "Was Grendel a Bigfoot?" *McNeese Review* 33 (1994), p. 96.

173 *he gemunde mægenes strenge,
 gimfæste gife ðe him god sealde
 ond him to anwaldan are gelyfde,
 frofre ond fultum;*

Beowulf lines 1270-73, ed. ASPR 4:40, trans. ASP, p. 445; see also lines 2181-3, ed. ASPR 4:67, trans. ASP, p. 469.

174 *[h]uru Geata leod georne truwoðe
 modgan mægenes, metodes hylðo.*

Beowulf lines 669-70, ed. ASPR 4:22, trans. ASP, p. 429.

175 *Hæfde ða forsiðod sunu Ecgþeowes
 under gynne grund, Geata cempa,
 nemne him heaðobyrne helpe gefremede,
 herenet hearde, ond halig god
 geweold wigsigor; witig drihten
 roðera ræðend, hit on ryht gesced
 yðelice*

Beowulf lines 1550-56, ed. ASPR 4:48, trans. ASP, p. 452.

176 *[H]im of hreðre gewat
 sawol secean soðfæstra dom.*

Beowulf lines 2819-20, ed. ASPR 4:87, trans. ASP, p. 485. See E. B. Irving, Jr., "The Nature of Christianity in *Beowulf*," *Anglo-Saxon*

(continued...)

As E. B. Irving cautions with specific regard to the Christian poet's recapitulation of the battle between Beowulf and Grendel, where Beowulf's victory is attributed to God's aid,¹⁷⁷ "that is certainly not the way Beowulf would describe it, or does describe it."¹⁷⁸ But that is the way the Christian poet describes it all for a Christian audience. Such a reworking of a suitable traditional story could have been a natural product of the didactic impulse posited for the Alfredians and the West Saxons in the late ninth or early tenth century.

Certain relationships observable or merely hypothesized between *Beowulf* and other Old English texts are of interest as well. If the present *Beowulf* text can be considered a product of the late ninth or tenth century, the seeming dependence upon it as a written text by *Andreas* as well as by the seventeenth Blickling homily is more explicable, as Blake argues:

The further away in time the source is from its beneficiaries, the more difficult it becomes to explain the influence. . . . It is more natural to assume that *Beowulf*, *Andreas*, and the seventeenth Blickling homily are close in time, since the immediate popularity of one

¹⁷⁶(...continued)
England 13 (1984), p. 21.

Beowulf fell forsaken by his men (so charges the faithful Wiglaf, lines 2633-60, 2864-84) - as did Christ. McNamee, following Klaeber, comments on this parallel with the Passion ("*Beowulf* - An Allegory?" p. 99). Beowulf had commanded his men to stay clear (lines 2516-2537) - like the cosmic drama of the Passion, this was the Plan. Wiglaf disobeyed (although his lord does not rebuke him). If Beowulf is to be seen as a Christ figure, is Wiglaf then the Beloved Disciple who remained faithful though inactive, or is he Peter who took up the sword, was rebuked, and then fled? The analogy does not extend.

¹⁷⁷In the passage quoted above, *Beowulf* lines 1270-73.

¹⁷⁸Irving, "Christianity in *Beowulf*," p. 10.

could account for its use by the others and a speedy falling into relative obscurity would account for its failure to influence more authors.¹⁷⁹

The same argument might be made regarding similarities between *Beowulf* and *Exodus*.¹⁸⁰ And the manuscript context of *Beowulf*, adjacent to the poem of *Judith* which we have seen works quite well as a piece intended to stir men's hearts to fight for their homeland against the Vikings, also is notable. *Judith*, in fact, fits better beside *Beowulf* than with the "Caedmonian" Old Testament poems of the Junius manuscript or the hagiographical poems of Cynewulf and his "school." Marie Nelson recently termed *Judith* "a story of a secular saint"¹⁸¹ - "Judith fights a secular fight against hostile human beings, not a spiritual fight against devils" as do the other two great heroines of Old English religious poetry, Saints Helen and Juliana.¹⁸² But the heroism displayed by all three, and indeed by all the heroes and saints of Old English poetry, is presented as equivalent. *Beowulf* and *Judith*, no less than Saints Andrew, Guthlac, and the rest, contend heroically against enemies of the Christian God and His people, although they fight on different fields - all are motivated by notions of service and self-sacrifice very much

¹⁷⁹Blake, "Dating," p. 26. The 17th Blickling Homily, A *Michaelmas Sermon*, contains near its end an account of St. Paul's vision of hell which recalls Grendel's mere.

¹⁸⁰See Bradley, introd. to *Exodus* in *ASP*, p. 50 for reference to the similarities; Bradley dismisses efforts to see dependence of either one on the other in favor of oral-formulaic correspondences.

¹⁸¹Marie Nelson, "*Judith: A Story of a Secular Saint*," *Germanic Notes* 21 (1990), pp. 12-13, my emphasis.

¹⁸²Nelson, "*Judith*," p. 13.

compatible with a Christian, saintly ethic. In a way the postulated dependence of *Andreas* on *Beowulf* would suggest that the Old English poet reconceived St. Andrew as an explicitly Christian saintly counterpart to a great pre-Christian heroic figure of Anglo-Saxon tradition.

Christian Heroism and the West Saxon Achievement

Such efforts to create a new tradition of literature carried out by the Alfredian scholars in the late ninth century and their successors in the tenth century would have served the interests of the House of Wessex well in its drive for expansion and consolidation of the Danelaw while they fulfilled Alfred the Great's program of rebuilding the Christian character of the English people. The two purposes were by no means incompatible and could be viewed as inseparable. Asser's religiously motivated Alfred, a Christian warrior king, had, after all, "saved" England - such was at least the message of the frankly propagandistic literary sources we have from his circle of scholars. As Tyerman observes, "The efficacy of Alfred's policy depended less on intellectual niceties than on the blending of an ideal of the holy warrior with secular niceties and with the existing military habits and cultural expectations of his thegns."¹⁸³ This fusion finds expression in the codices of Old English poetry which, as we have them, were produced in the century after Alfred. As usually posed, the often-debated question regarding the origin and nature of the heroic ethos that permeates the poetry

¹⁸³Tyerman, *England and the Crusades*, p. 11.

has little relevance. Sometimes framed as a conflict between opposed pagan and Christian impulses, more (but not most) correctly by Cherniss as competition between "'pre-Christian', 'Germanic', and 'heroic'"¹⁸⁴ concepts and Christian values, the distinction between heroic and Christian is in fact less important than the fact of their reconciliation. In the poems as they have come down to us, products by and large of the tenth century, the dominant ethos is one of Christian heroism. Sacrifice and endurance are at the heart of heroism whatever the cause, and we have seen that it was easy - in fact inevitable - that a Christian society placing such value on heroism would reimagine the Sacrifice of Calvary in heroic terms as Christ's decisive victory over the greatest enemy of God and man. As Christ is for Christians the center around which all sacred history orbits, it was just as inevitable that the Old Testament figures that preceded Him, and His saints who followed, contending against various enemies of God both natural and supernatural, would be likewise reimagined in similarly heroic terms. And if heroes of the past such as even Beowulf could be cast as Godly heroes, why not Christian contemporaries such as the pious Ealdorman Byrhtnoth in the current struggle? The deeds of all, celebrated in poetry in the halls of the aristocracy, could serve to inspire the audience to comparable feats of valor in service to the House of Wessex. The old controversy over the heroic or the Christian nature of *The Battle of Maldon*, for one, is therefore of little import. Certainly that question would have

¹⁸⁴Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ*, p. 29.

far less meaning for men of tenth- and eleventh-century England than it does for twentieth-century critics and historians who approach the matter from what would have been to their forebears a totally alien perspective. An aristocratic and fundamentally Christian heroic ethos was an integral part of Anglo-Saxon civilization. The loyalty of Byrhtnoth's thanes, based ultimately in the old ideal of the Germanic *comitatus*, could only be strengthened by notions of Christian service and sacrifice which could themselves inspire deeds of great heroism.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

The development of ideals of Christian heroism and holy war in Anglo-Saxon England illustrates clearly that Christianization is a process rather than an event. Seldom does even an individual, much less a society, undergo a radical shift in patterns of behavior or thought upon conversion. In the case of the Anglo-Saxons of the seventh century, a tendency to interpret their new Christian faith within the conceptual framework of the Germanic *comitatus* or warband, the central institution within their society, was only encouraged by a new, adaptive evangelization strategy employed by Roman Christian missionaries who sought to accommodate and lend Christian meaning to cultural elements that they could neither supplant nor suppress. This strategy was approved and even mandated by Gregory the Great, the first pope to make a concerted effort at converting a Germanic people.¹ The result was a mutual transformation of the Germanic heroic ethos and the Christian religion as the new faith was taken up by the Anglo-Saxons.

Much within Christianity could readily be interpreted in terms familiar to the Anglo-Saxons, sometimes in ways they found more

¹Gerhart B. Ladner, "On Roman Attitudes toward Barbarians in Late Antiquity," *Viator* 7 (1976), p. 25.

appealing even than elements of paganism. For instance, the idea of spiritual warfare as practiced by Christian ascetics, celebrated in heroic terms in hagiography, proved extremely attractive to the newly-Christianized Anglo-Saxon martial elite of the seventh century. Christian asceticism provided a new battlefield on which, unlike the old Northern hero, the new Northern Christian hero could hope for ultimate victory. Such was clearly the attitude of Guthlac of Crowland, who turned in despair from the warrior life of the old Germanic heroes to the new Christian warfare of the hermitage. As seen in chapter two above, the ideals of the Germanic heroic ethos were played out by Anglo-Saxon clerics in the world as well as in the cloister. Some bishops such as Wilfrid of Ripon were hardly distinguishable from secular lords. Wilfrid commanded a following after the fashion of a *comitatus*, comprising both clerics and warriors, to whom he dispensed lands and treasures, and who accompanied him on his various political exiles. Boniface of Crediton, the Anglo-Saxon "Apostle to the Germans," probably was more like Wilfrid than is commonly recognized. He too was a great episcopal statesman leading a retinue of warriors and clerics. In Boniface, however, appeared a key transformation in one of the prime heroic values: exile was no longer the abject misery of the lordless man, but was now a form of service and sacrifice in the following of a new Lord, the Christian God. Unlike Wilfrid, who had supported his warriors with his prayers as they repulsed pagan South Saxon attackers, Boniface recalled to his following the promise of

otherworldly reward from their new Lord and they not resist martyrdom at the hands of Frisian pagans.

The writings of Bede provide clear evidence that the Roman form of Christianity which eventually prevailed in Anglo-Saxon England granted to kings as central a role in Christian society as they had enjoyed in the Germanic warband as warchiefs leading their warriors. Kings had the responsibility to promote, through warfare if necessary, the good of Christian society. Their royal responsibilities included, according to Gregory the Great, the salvation of their people.² Bede, a monk himself, shows more enthusiasm for kings active in this world, such as Edwin and Oswald of Northumbria, than he does for those kings who entered the monastery, as did Sigeberht of East Anglia. Bede's account of the latter's martyrdom can be read as an admonitory piece showing what happens when a king forsakes his proper calling.

Chapter three surveyed the kings of Anglo-Saxon England from the coming of Christianity into the tenth century. A pattern emerged in the celebration of warrior kings as saints across the seventh through the ninth and tenth centuries. This study proposed a tripartite periodization. The first phase commenced with the coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England at the beginning of the seventh century. Anglo-Saxon Christian kings in this period of early enthusiasm, such as Edwin and Oswald, were portrayed as fighting for

²Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* [hereafter Bede, *EH*] 1.32 [ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969)].

the establishment of the new religion, specifically in its Roman form, against pagans and "schismatic" Christians. The second phase ensued in the eighth century, when Roman Christianization of England had come to formal completion, removing such a holy cause for warfare. Warrior kings no longer received praise as Christian saints. Warfare between orthodox Christian kings was not a mark of sanctity. The second phase continued into the ninth century even as the appearance of the pagan Vikings in a series of sporadic raids foreshadowed a new age of Christian warfare in England.

The Vikings' depredations and slaughters in mid to late ninth-century England brought a third phase in the history of warfare and Christianity in Anglo-Saxon kingship. In the context of a desperate fight for survival on the part of the Christian English, earlier tendencies toward the association of religion and warfare crystallized into overtly Christian holy warfare. The battles of King Alfred the Great were a defense of Christian England. His son, Edward the Elder, and his grandson, Athelstan, built upon his accomplishments to bring all England under West Saxon rule, reconquering those regions which had fallen under Viking domination.

This last-mentioned king, Athelstan, is perhaps the most unjustly neglected king of late Saxon England. He and his immediate successors were the last actively martial kings in Anglo-Saxon England. Innovations in kingship which had appeared in England two centuries before wrought during the tenth century a radical shift in the conceptual basis upon which Christian kingship was founded.

Previously the leadership role of the king in the warband had melded well with Roman Christian notions of the responsibilities of a Christian king to Christian society and also with the Augustinian notion that a just war must be fought by legitimate public authority. The sacral nature of Germanic warrior kings may even have lent, in a Christian context, an aura of sanctity to the early Christian kings and their battles. But the rite of royal anointing which first appeared in England during the 780s ultimately implied, through analogies with sacerdotal consecration, a new model of kingship based upon Christ. The earthly king was held to figure the Heavenly King. Such a development in royal theory inevitably affected the relationship between warfare and royal sanctity.

As discussed in chapter four, the evolution of a Christological model of kingship resulted in a generalization of holy warfare. The tenth century was an especially unsettled time when consequences crucial to the relationship between war and religion had to be worked out. There was no consensus of ideas among various authors and thinkers. Even the same writer might expound different notions. How the late tenth century viewed a king martyred a century before illustrates one dimension. The Vikings probably slaughtered Edmund of East Anglia subsequent to a battle he fought and lost in 869. According to ideas of kingship gaining currency in late tenth-century England, a king as the "Lord's anointed" should not stain his hands with blood. Therefore Edmund's first hagiographer, Abbo of Fleury writing in the 980s, placed upon the king's lips such sentiments when

the king accepted his fate. Probably the analogy with priestly ordination apparent in the 973 anointing of Edgar the Peaceable is valid here.³ Abbo's St. Edmund did not fight but rather suffered torture and finally decapitation at the hands of the Vikings.

Abbo's primary affiliation was with the Continental monastery of Fleury. Fleury was a daughter house of the Cluniac monastic reform movement. It had been reformed by Odo, the second abbot of Cluny. In composing a *Life* of the southern Frankish noble Gerald of Aurillac, Odo had, in the first half of the tenth century, faced some of the same issues of war and religion which confronted Abbo near the end. Chapter four above drew a useful comparison between the near-contemporaries Gerald of Aurillac and Alfred the Great. Odo's St. Gerald and Abbo's St. Edmund provide another comparison, one which may be as enlightening as the contrasting treatments accorded by Aelfric of Eynsham to Abbo's St. Edmund and Bede's St. Oswald of Northumbria, detailed in chapter four to illustrate the unsettled implications of tenth-century developments in kingship.

There are important contrasts between late Anglo-Saxon England and the context of feudal chaos in south Francia in which Gerald of Aurillac, although a middling noble and not a king, fought for a Christian ideal, on behalf of the poor who figured Christ, against

³See above, pp. 148 ff. In a forthcoming article I examine the question of "Clerics, War, and Weapons in Anglo-Saxon England" [to be published in *The Final Argument: The Imprint of Violence on Society in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Donald J. Kagay and L. J. Villalon (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 1997)] and conclude that Anglo-Saxon priests appear to have adhered faithfully to prohibitions against clerical arms-bearing promulgated by both the Continental and English churches across the period of the 7th to 11th cs.

opponents who were his own aristocratic peers and fellow Christians. Critical above all were both the fact that strong kingship endured in England and the presence of a clear non-Christian enemy in the pagan Vikings. But the Christological nature of late Anglo-Saxon kingship provided an impetus to a spread of holy war activity outside the royal sphere similar to that epitomized on the Continent by Gerald of Aurillac.

The late Anglo-Saxon figure who best illustrates the expansion of the ranks of holy warriors is the English hero of the Battle of Maldon in August 991, Ealdorman Byrhtnoth of Essex. The fleeting image of Byrhtnoth provided by sources outside the famous poem commemorating his final battle is important because those sources tend to confirm the instincts of those who see the poem as quasi-hagiographical.⁴ Primary among the non-poetic accounts is the *Life* of the reforming monk St. Oswald, written by Byrhtferth of Ramsey, a student of Abbo of Fleury during the latter's tenure in the English monastery of Ramsey.⁵ Byrhtferth's Ealdorman Byrhtnoth provides a hitherto unremarked English example of a non-royal warrior taking on a duty previously borne by the ruler, that of protecting the Church.

In his *Life of St. Oswald*, Byrhtferth of Ramsey praises the martial enthusiasm of those nobles who championed monastic reform

⁴See above, p. 189 at n. 110.

⁵*Vita Oswaldi Archiepiscopi Eboracensis*, ed. James Raine in *The Historians of the Church of York and its Archbishops*, 3 vols., RS 71 (London: Longman, 1879-94), 1:399-475. Authorship: Michael Lapidge, "The *Life of St Oswald*," in *The Battle of Maldon, AD 991*, ed. Donald G. Scragg (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell in association with the Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies, 1991), p. 51.

when the premature death of Edgar the Peaceable in 975 removed the monks' royal protector.⁶ Among the pro-reform nobles was Byrhtnoth of Essex. His virtues, according to Byrhtferth, were martial, employed in service to the Church. Byrhtferth's portrayal of the ealdorman in his last stand at Maldon is profoundly symbolic. He compares Byrhtnoth favorably to Moses precisely because Byrhtnoth fought.⁷ Moses, as a Levite, is a priest; kings by the end of the tenth century have taken on a sacerdotal character. It is essential to remember that the *Life of St. Edmund, King and Martyr* and the *Life of St. Oswald*, which enthusiastically portrayed Byrhtnoth as a warrior for the Church and Christian society, were products of the same small circle. Abbo of Fleury was Byrhtferth of Ramsey's teacher. A slightly larger circle could include Odo of Cluny as well, with his *Life of St. Gerald*.

Taken together, the three hagiographies display coherent views of the relationship between war and religion consequent to ninth and tenth-century developments in kingship and society. St. Edmund the Christ-like king unresistingly shared in his Lord's passion and death at the hands of unbelievers. St. Gerald the count fought bloodlessly⁸ in service to a religious ideal against "bad" Christians. Byrhtnoth the ealdorman symbolized a fruition of conceptual developments implicit in both figures. Like St. Gerald he

⁶See above, p. 187.

⁷See quotation, chap. 4 above, p. 188.

⁸See above, p. 178 at n. 86.

championed an ideal, monastic reform, against "bad" Christians. But whereas King Edmund had meekly accepted martyrdom from the pagans, Byrhtnoth fought them to his own death in battle, a death nevertheless considered in some circles a martyrdom. The passivity of St. Edmund and the martial activities of Ealdorman Byrhtnoth, comparable to that of St. Gerald, signify the detachment of Christian holy war from the royal estate. It also signifies the development of a new order of heroism based in Christian service and sacrifice.

Chapter five of this dissertation examined a body of evidence all but unique to Anglo-Saxon England among early medieval societies. The Old English vernacular poetry presents an explicit re-imagining of Christianity in Germanic terms, informed with the structure and ethos of the *comitatus*. A Christian heroic ethos of service and sacrifice for God and His people permeates the corpus of Old English poetry, which was redacted during the tenth century, and may have served to inspire the fervor of English warriors to the benefit of the House of Wessex. The Old English poems provide valuable evidence for a clear idea by the year 1000 that there was a religious dimension to warfare. This is perhaps most obvious as a contemporary reality in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* poetic entry for 942 recounting a Christian king's "redemption" of five boroughs from pagan domination; the prayers in *The Battle of Maldon* are equally telling as sentiments considered appropriate in the warriors' situation.

The situation of the English warriors in the Battle of Maldon, one resulting in defeat, was itself significant. It has been

suggested that the holy war idea developed later in the Latin West than in the Greek East because during the Germanic invasions there were few Western successes that could be attributed to divine aid.⁹ A similar pattern appears in late Saxon England. The period of the crystallization of holy war ideas was the late ninth century - the "First Viking Age" - to the reigns of Athelstan and Edmund in the tenth century. Alfred, Athelstan, and Edmund were all depicted as "holy warriors." But the "Second Viking Age" commencing ca. 980 saw no significant victories to ascribe to God and His favor, but only defeat. Nevertheless, the poet transformed disaster at Maldon into a tale of Christian service and sacrifice, with critical significance as eloquently described by Roberta Frank:

The man/lord devotion featured in *Maldon* . . . draws attention to a Boethian world in which bad fortune is better than good, and life is won by its loss; it posits a military class imbued with notions of Christian service and sacrifice. *Maldon* . . . peers, not backward through the mists to Germania, but just around the corner, to an eleventh-century Europe in which the profession of warrior was a way of achieving religious perfection and a martyr's crown.¹⁰

In Anglo-Saxon England, the Christianized *comitatus* ideal celebrated in *Maldon* had roots going back four centuries, to the age of the Anglo-Saxons' conversion.

⁹See Erdmann, *Origin* (as in n. 11 below), pp. 6-7.

¹⁰Roberta Frank, "The Ideal of Men Dying with their Lord in *The Battle of Maldon: Anachronism or Nouvelle Vague*," in *People and Places in Northern Europe, 500-1600: Essays in Honour of Peter Hayes Sawyer*, ed. Ian Wood and Niels Lund (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1991), pp. 105-6.

A little more than a century after the Battle of Maldon in 991, Western Christians swept across the Mediterranean to capture the Holy Land in what would later be called the First Crusade (1096-99). The major historiographical debate surrounding the causes of that extraordinary phenomenon has only intensified in the present century, especially in the decades since Carl Erdmann produced his magisterial study, *The Origin of the Idea of Crusade*.¹¹ Erdmann explicitly argued against the traditional emphasis on pilgrimage as the root of the crusading movement. He instead sought the origin of the crusade in a long prehistory of Christian holy war. He deemed the Carolingian ninth century a critical period in the formation of Christian ideas of holy war which were only catalyzed into crusade by eleventh-century ecclesio-political events, primarily the conflict between the Gregorian Reform Papacy and the German Empire. He therefore concentrated his study on France, Germany, and Italy. Because there are no obvious connections between England and the First Crusade, scholars ever since have trodden dutifully in Erdmann's geographically circumscribed footsteps. The prevailing modern interpretations have been based upon exhaustive study of Continental evidence and developments. The experiences of the

¹¹Carl Erdmann, *The Origin of the Idea of Crusade*, trans. Marshall W. Baldwin and Walter Goffart [of *Die Entstehung des Kreuzzugsgedankens* (1935)] (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

Christian Anglo-Saxons studied in this dissertation have been largely neglected in the debate on crusading origins.¹²

One of the purposes of this present dissertation has been to begin the process of rectifying this lacuna in the historiography of crusading origins. The Anglo-Saxon experience of Christian heroism and holy war can, I believe, furnish a useful basis for comparison with the well-studied Continental developments in several points. Demonstration that ideas of Christian holy war were present among the Anglo-Saxons provides important support for Erdmann's perception that the idea of crusade drew heavily upon an existing tradition of Christian holy war. The developments in late Saxon kingship which served to broaden the ranks of holy warriors supports the idea that the rise of Western knighthood and its assumption of formerly royal responsibilities, including protection of the Church, was essential to the development of crusading.¹³ The ninth- to tenth-century

¹²Erdmann admitted the omission in his own work: see *Origins*, p. 97 n. 3. The major exception to this generalization is Christopher Tyerman, but his work on *England and the Crusades, 1095-1588* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), is "a study of the effects of the crusade movement on the politics and society of medieval England . . . [and] only looks from that perspective at the English, and occasionally Welsh, contributions to the crusading campaigns themselves" (p. 1). In an insightful section of his first chapter entitled "Origins of an Idea" (pp. 8-14), Tyerman observes, however, that elements contributing to the formation of the crusade idea were present and thriving in England well before the eleventh century. Nevertheless, his quick survey of the evidence as background to his main work serves mainly as a call for further research into the Anglo-Saxon experience of holy war ideas.

¹³See Erdmann's discussion of advocacies, *Origins*, p. 59, and also his statement on p. 105: "As we established before [his chap. 2, "Peace of God, Church Reform, and Military Profession"], the new development leading to the crusades had as its essential characteristic that the ethics of war were separated from the person of the ruler, and that Christian duties were transferred to the warriors or to the army."

historical context in which was redacted the Old English poetic corpus with its clear evocation of a Christian heroic ideal tends to confirm that the pagan invasions which racked Christian Europe from the ninth century were crucial in the formation of a popular mindset that made Western Europe receptive to the papal call to crusade which went forth in 1095. The Anglo-Saxon English experience parallels closely the West Frankish in this respect: conflict with pagan invaders served to catalyze a martialization of Christianity in defense of Christian society.

The Anglo-Saxon experience further suggests, however, that the Germanic heroic ethos was more important in the development of Christian holy war than Erdmann and subsequent scholars have considered. The eleventh-century Church sought to channel the martial impulses of the Western European warrior nobility to ecclesiastical ends. While recent scholarship has turned its focus toward the religious mentality of that warrior nobility,¹⁴ it has not given due regard to the martial nature of their religiosity. The Anglo-Saxon sources show how this drew, as did much of medieval society, from Germanic traditions, particularly from the heroic ethos which had at its heart service and sacrifice. Christianity was central to the self-identification of early medieval peoples, not least the Christian Anglo-Saxons. Anything worth believing in so

¹⁴See esp. Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading* (London: Athlone, 1986); Marcus Bull, *Knightly Piety and the Lay Response to the First Crusade: The Limousin and Gascony, c. 970-c. 1130* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993); H. E. J. Cowdrey, "Pope Urban II's Preaching of the First Crusade," *History* 55 (1970), pp. 177-88.

strongly would be considered worth fighting for, especially when the enemy was outside the pale of Christianity and the struggle could be cast as one in defense of Christian society. This was precisely the situation when the Vikings beset England from the ninth century. In such a context, the fundamental warrior values of their *comitatus*-based society which were admitted and even embraced by Anglo-Saxon Christianity to form a new Christian heroic ideal found new currency in service to Christian society through holy war.

Based on the Anglo-Saxon evidence, this dissertation suggests furthermore that the essential synthesis of Germanic and Christian impulses which formed that Christian heroic ideal occurred much earlier than the Viking Age and is rooted in the Germanic peoples' conceptualizing Christianity in terms of their own values and institutions from the beginning of their Christianization. Further research into Continental sources is necessary, with due regard given to the differing circumstances in which Christianity came to the various Germanic peoples, before this finding can be safely generalized. Nevertheless, the episode with which this dissertation opened presents a clear evocation of ideas of Christian heroism and holy war manifested during the first decades of Anglo-Saxon Christianization. In hindsight, Bede's description of the Battle of Heavenfield in 633, for which Oswald and his *comitatus* prepared to meet an enemy worse than a pagan by praying before the Holy Cross, beseeching the Christian God for a victory He granted the Northumbrians because of their faith, seems to anticipate the spirit

of an age of Christian warfare Bede could never have foreseen. The Battle of Heavenfield shows that a distinctly martial cast to Christianity, usually associated with the age of crusading, was from the beginning fundamental to the Anglo-Saxon conception of their new faith.

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APPENDIX A

BRITAIN IN THE AGE OF BEDE

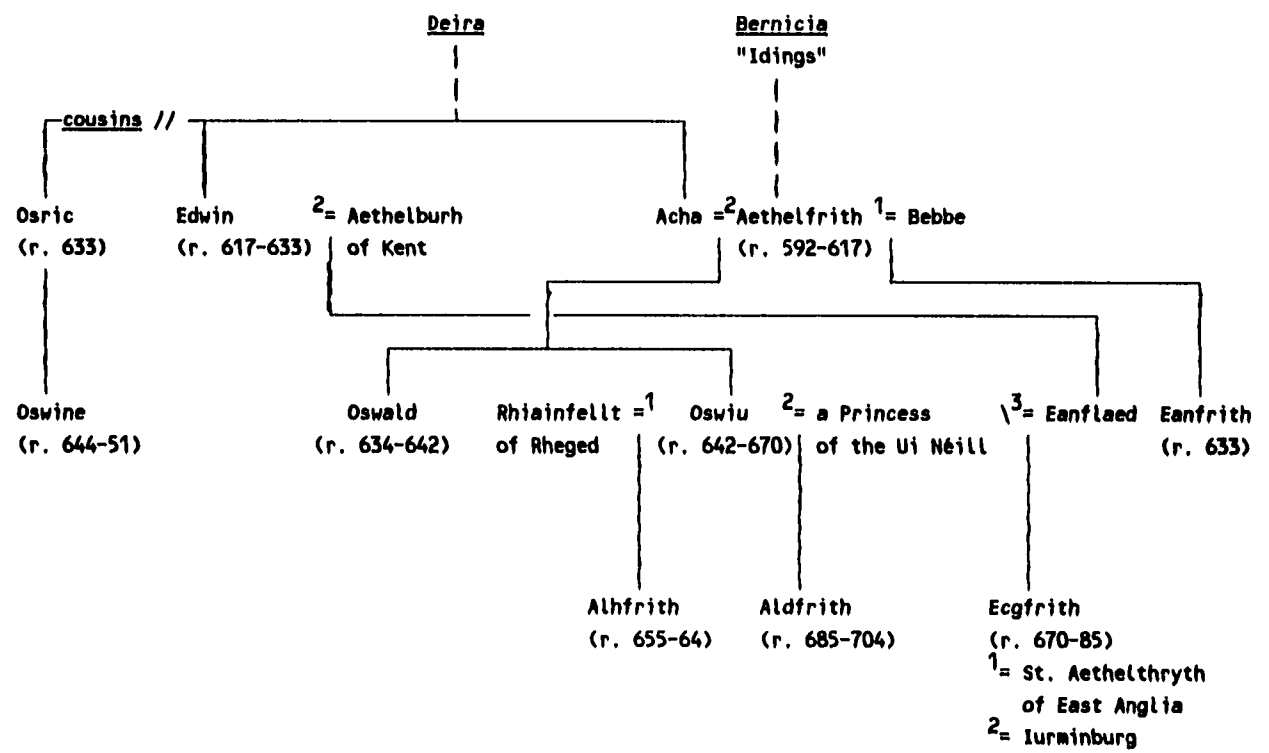
APPENDIX B

BRITAIN IN THE AGE OF THE VIKINGS

APPENDIX C

THE ROYAL LINES OF NORTHUMBRIA IN THE SEVENTH CENTURY

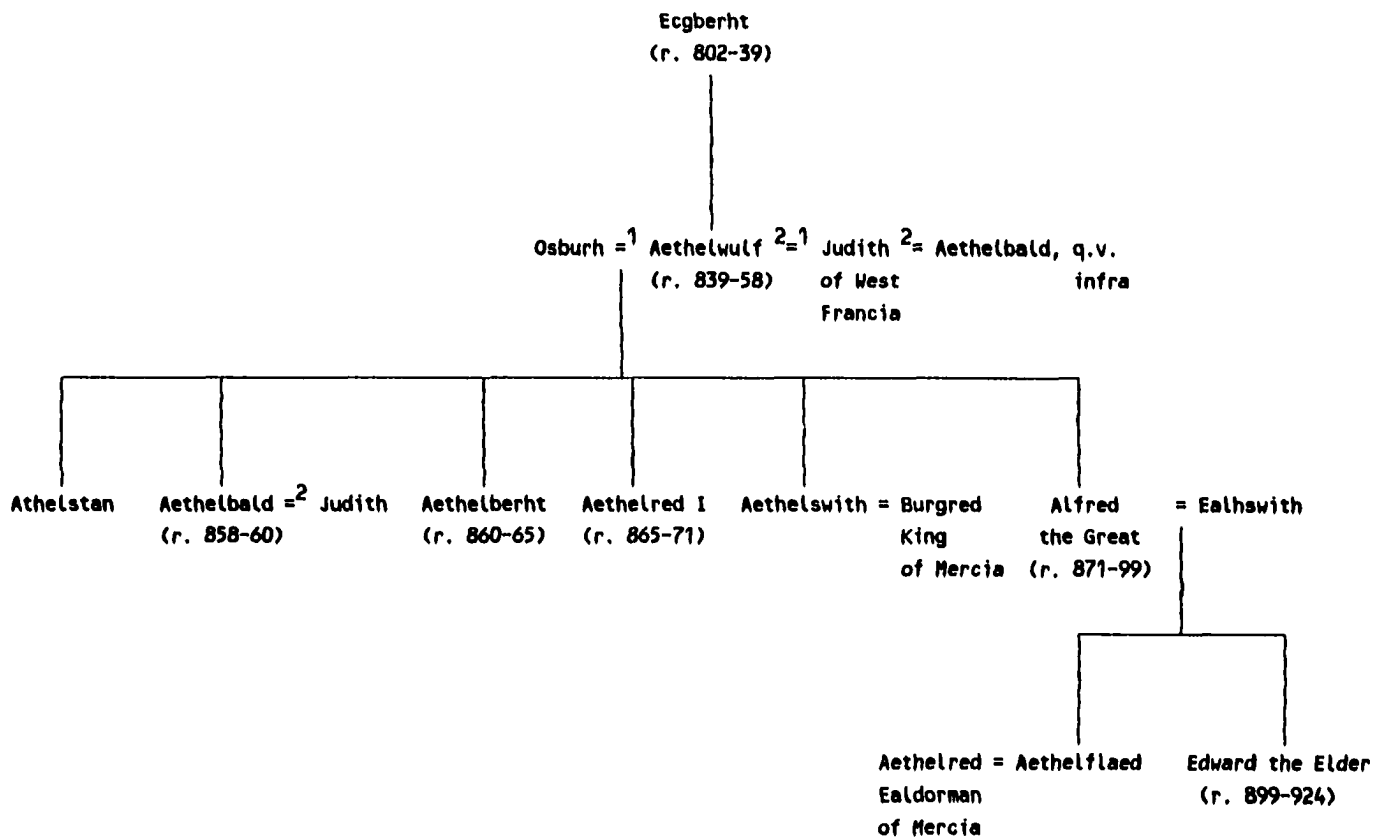
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APPENDIX D

THE HOUSE OF WESSEX FROM ECGBERTH TO EDWARD THE ELDER

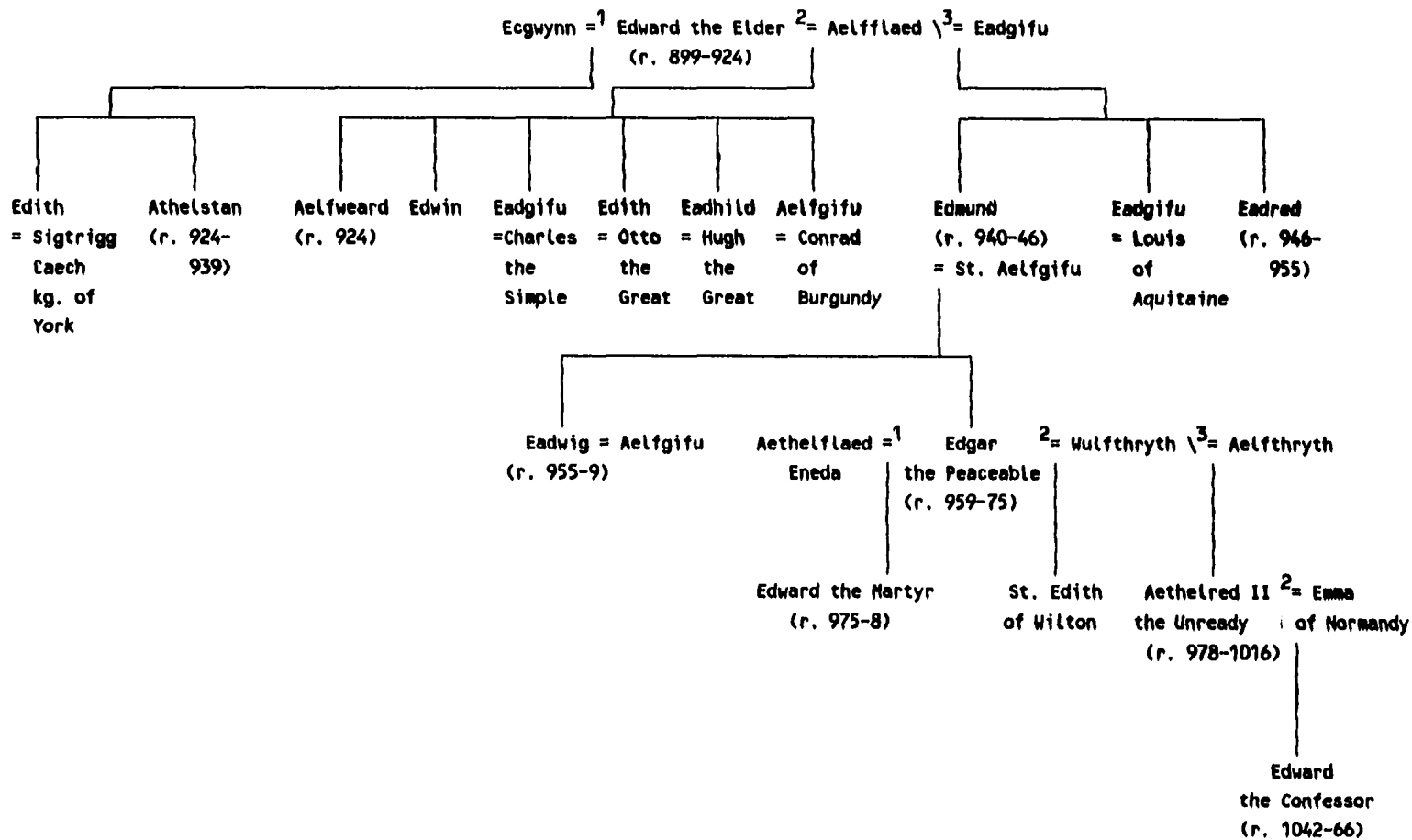
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APPENDIX E

THE HOUSE OF WESSEX FROM EDWARD THE ELDER TO EDWARD THE CONFESSOR

310



VITA


Kent Gregory Hare was born in 1961 and is a native of Monroe, Louisiana. He married the former Anne Maudene Granger of Lafayette, Louisiana, in November, 1984. In January, 1996, Mr. and Mrs. Hare were blessed with a son, Tristan Gregory.

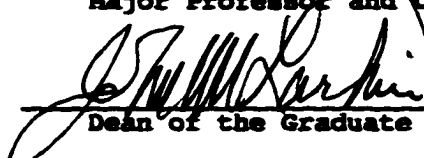
Mr. Hare was graduated from Ouachita Parish High School, Monroe, Louisiana, in May, 1979. He was granted a Bachelor of Science degree in Chemical Engineering by Louisiana Tech University in August, 1983. After several years pursuing a career as an engineer in El Dorado, Arkansas, Mr. Hare determined to follow his true interest in history. In August, 1990, he entered the graduate school at Louisiana State University, whence he received the degree of Master of Arts in History in August, 1992. Mr. Hare continued studying European History in the doctoral program at L. S. U., with a concentration in Anglo-Saxon England, minoring in Medieval Latin and Habsburg Austrian History. He has taught as a graduate teaching assistant in History and as an instructor in the L. S. U. Evening School. Mr. Hare completed his final year of doctoral studies as an L. S. U. Graduate School Dissertation Fellow for the academic year 1996-1997. He will receive the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History from L. S. U. in August, 1997, and will pursue a career in academia.

DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate: Kent Gregory Hare
Major Field: History
Title of Dissertation: Christian Heroism and Holy War in Anglo-Saxon England


Approved:

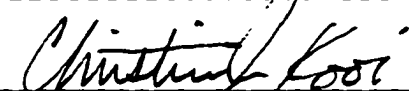



Major Professor and Chairman


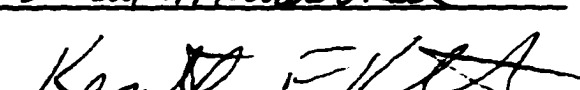
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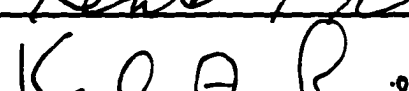
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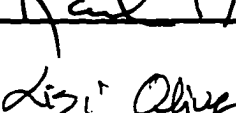












Date of Examination:

June 20, 1997

