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Deadly Hostility: Feud, Violence, and Power in Early Anglo-Saxon England

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DEADLY HOSTILITY: FEUD, VIOLENCE, AND POWER
IN EARLY ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

by

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This dissertation examines the existence and political relevance of feud in Anglo-Saxon England from the fifth century migration to the opening of the Viking Age in 793. The central argument is that feud was a method that Anglo-Saxons used to understand and settle conflict, and that it was a tool kings used to enhance their power. The first part of this study examines the use of *fæhð* in Old English documents, including laws and *Beowulf*, to demonstrate that *fæhð* referred to feuds between parties marked by reciprocal acts of retaliation. This assertion is in opposition to Guy Halsall's argument that words such as *fæhð* referred to ritual vengeance, in which a single act of revenge terminated a dispute, and not to an ongoing relationship between parties. Written evidence further demonstrates that the Anglo-Saxons conceived of multiple types of conflict as feud, providing an intellectual framework for thinking about conflict generally.

Case studies of feuds in the remaining chapters also reveal the changing nature of power in early Anglo-Saxon England. These case studies make use of a wide variety of sources, including written and material evidence as well as anthropological theories. Rulers before 597 lacked lasting authority and acquired power primarily through violent action. They did not control social relationships nor did they have the authority to enforce their wills without the threat of violence. With the arrival of Christian missionaries from Rome, kings beginning with

Æthelberht (d.603) asserted control over dispute resolution in order to build authority. Conversion to Christianity brought Roman methods of rule which Anglo-Saxon kings deployed to varying degrees of success over two centuries. Those rulers who separated themselves from prevailing social bonds came to dominate social relationships, allowing them to gain more followers and control over dispute resolution. Rather than being a chief of a single kinship group, they brought multiple kinship groups together into an ethnic group and created kingship. Not driven by ideals, kings and other leaders adopted whatever tools might provide them with greater power.

Violence remained a key strategy of power throughout the period under consideration. Some kings were unable to rein in feud and direct dispute resolution to their courts, but also engaged in feuds that were destructive to their power. Royal feuds in Northumbria prevented any single ruling family from establishing lasting rule as they were constantly under threat of usurpation. Only those kings of Mercia, such as Æthelbald and Offa, who were able to command the political power afforded by new landholding systems and thus to command a large number of followers, were able to avoid these dynastic feuds. Whether gaining control over feud to build authority or using feud as a political strategy against opponents, feud was a central concept in the construction of power in Early Anglo-Saxon England.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 686, according to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the West Saxon king Cædwalla and his brother Mul attacked Kent, a neighboring Anglo-Saxon kingdom. During the next year, the people of Kent retaliated against this attack by burning Mul and twelve other West Saxons. Cædwalla, seeking vengeance, attacked and plundered Kent again that same year. Soon thereafter, however, the king traveled to Rome to be baptized by the pope, and died there before returning to Britain. In 694, the Kentish people settled the conflict with Cædwalla's successor, Ine, for the burning of Mul by offering 30,000 pounds,[1] equivalent to a king's wergeld according to Mercian law.[2] This payment suggests that the parties involved in the conflict viewed it as a bloodfeud – the conflict included not only retaliation on both sides, but the payment of a wergeld to terminate it. The story of Cædwalla and Mul is one of many in the body of Anglo-Saxon historical and literary records that indicates that feud (Old English *fæhð/fæhþ*)[3] was so pervasive a concept in the Anglo-Saxon imagination that conflicts in general were often presented in those terms. Although the definition of feud used by authors in the Anglo-Saxon period may have been

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1. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* E, a.786-794; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. Susan Irvine, vol. 7, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, ed. David Dumville and Simon Keynes (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 41-42. While the E version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is late, the sections relevant to this study were written during the reign of Alfred (871-899) and form the basis of all versions of the *Chronicle*. Using modern editions which present the different versions alongside each other, the similarities and differences between the versions become readily apparent. Interestingly, the word *fæhð* does not appear in any version. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. and trans. Michael Swanton (New York: Routledge, 1998); *The Dictionary of Old English Corpus*, ed. Antonette di Paolo Healey, s.v. "*fæhð*," http://quod.lib.umich.edu.libproxy.library.wmich.edu/cgi/o/oec/ (accessed June 17, 2008).

2. *Be Mircna Laga*, 2*;* Felix Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, vol. 1 (Halle, 1903–1916), 462.

3. In Old English, the letters ð and þ are often interchangeable, so *fæhð* may at times appear as *fæhþ*.

different from modern scholarly definitions, an examination of uses of the term *fæhð/fæhþ* makes

it clear that the concept of feud played an important role in Old English society and culture.

Through an examination of the sources that either use the term *fæhð/fæhþ* or describe

feuds, I intend to demonstrate the political and cultural importance of feud in early Anglo-Saxon

England. The feud not only provides a theoretical framework for the understanding of conflict

among the early Anglo-Saxons, but also constitutes a prominent theme in the body of sources

that survive from Anglo-Saxon England. Authors writing in Old English used the word *fæhð* to

describe relationships of reciprocal vengeance,[4] God's wrath,[5] warfare,[6] and even the actions of

Grendelkin thought to have been spawned from the kin of Cain.[7] Feud as a concept is such a

common theme that Anglo-Saxons often used the word *fæhð* when referring to broader conflicts,

as in the case of a war between two peoples.[8] Because Anglo-Saxons thought of many types of

conflict as feud, it is apparent that the phenomenon played an important role not only in legal and

social relationships, but also in cultural norms. The early English at times resolved disputes

through violent means, and feud legitimized this violence by placing it within an accepted social

context and by restricting the level of violence through certain rules which had to be followed in

order for the feud to be socially valid.[9] This is not to say, however, that such descriptions of

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4. *Guthlac*, 184-9; ed. George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie *The Exeter Book* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 54-5.

5. *Genesis A*, 1376-80; ed. George Philip Krapp. *The Junius Manuscript* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1931), 43.

6. *Battle of Maldon*, 225-6; ed. Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie. *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), 13.

7. *Beowulf*, 1202-8; ed. R.D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles, *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 42.

8. *The Old English Orosius*, II.5; ed. Janet Bately (London: Oxford University Press, 1980), 45-9.

9. Paul Hyams, *Rancor and Reconciliation in Medieval England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 6-11.

violent behavior indicate an inherently violent or barbaric society.[10] On the contrary, feud was

simply one the ways in which the Anglo-Saxon peoples settled disputes, which also included

negotiation and settlement by legal authorities.[11] Furthermore, writers of the period such as the

Beowulf-poet thought of multiples types of conflict as feud, and thus portrayed other forms of

dispute, including war, as feuds.[12] That is, among the Anglo-Saxons, feud provided the basis for

thinking about conflict generally. Some historians have questioned the existence of true feud in

early medieval Europe by suggesting that it is merely vengeance at work and that the conflicts

described in the sources did not entail ongoing relationships of hostility, but instead refer to

single retaliatory acts.[13] A careful examination of both legal and literary sources, however,

provides clear evidence that *fæhð* referred to an ongoing relationship of hostility between two

parties characterized by reciprocal acts of revenge. Legal sources demonstrate the involvement of

larger social groups, while literary sources such as *Beowulf* provide ample support for the

existence of ongoing hostile relationships. The Anglo-Saxon's use of the words thus clearly

indicated that they believed *fæhð* to be what modern historians consider feud, and not simply

vengeance.

In addition to providing evidence for the prevalence of feud in the Anglo-Saxon

mentalité, I intend to examine feuds in order to demonstrate that changes in the relationship

between violence and power on the part of Anglo-Saxon kings point to changes in the nature of

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10. Mark D. Meyerson, Daniel Thierry, and Oren Falk, eds., "Introduction," *A Great Effusion of Blood?: Interpreting Medieval Violence* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 3-6.

11. Patrick Wormald, "Charters, Law, and the Settlement of Disputes in Anglo-Saxon England," *The Settlement of Disputes in Early Medieval Europe*, edited by Wendy Davies and Paul Fouracre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 149-68.

12. *Beowulf*, 2472-80; 85.

13. Guy Halsall, "Reflections on Early Medieval Violence: The Example of the Blood Feud," *Memoria y Civilización: Annuario de Historia* 2 (1999): 11-2.

kingship throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. A careful synthesis of a variety of disparate sources and approaches have allowed me to illustrate the importance of feud during the period under consideration. Feud played three major roles in the political culture of early Anglo-Saxon England. First, feud was a method of dispute resolution which created relationships of mutual enmity, in which opposing parties sought on-going revenge against each other for previously inflicted injuries. Second, as mentioned previously, feud informed the ways that Anglo-Saxons thought about disputes in general. Finally, feud played a role in the development of kingship; kings of the Conversion Period and later deployed new strategies of power to expand their power and authority. Conversion to Christianity brought with it access to new many of these new strategies, particularly written law, which kings such as Æthelberht used to attempt to enlarge their power bases, in part by attempting to intervene in disputes. Rulers took control of feud in order to separate themselves from prevailing social bonds so that they could offer protective power to those within their realms. They also linked multiple kinship groups into ethnic groups that they controlled. By creating these ethnic groups and by establishing authority over these groups through protective power, rulers of the Conversion Period and later created kingship in England. Despite the addition of these new power strategies, however, violence remained key to building power to the beginning of the Viking Age. It was only when rulers such as Æthelbald and Offa were able to combine these strategies of power with new sources of economic power that violence began to diminish as a source of power in the eighth century.

Defining Feud

Anglo-Saxon writers had a multifaceted understanding of feud within their society, as indicated by the many ways in which they used the words *fæhð/fæhþ*. Modern historians have to decipher these words and the descriptions of feud in their context in order to understand Anglo-Saxon feud. To do so, one needs a definition of feud that describes the phenomenon as the people of Anglo-Saxon England would have seen it. Earlier historians have already laid the groundwork, providing a model of early medieval feud against which one may compare feuds in early England. In his work on the Merovingians and early Frankish bloodfeud, J.M. Wallace-Hadrill uses what he describes as a "working definition": "first, the threat of hostility between kins; then, the state of hostility between them; and finally, the satisfaction of their differences and a settlement on terms acceptable to both."[14] He continues by stating that "feud" can be found not in criminal law, but in the sources which use such terms as the Old English *fæhð* or Frankish *faithu* (Latinized as *faidus*) that refer to it. The definitions of these terms have proven problematic at times, and even were to the Anglo-Saxon authors employing such terminology.[15] The Old English words for 'feud' and 'avenge' help elucidate the difficulties. The verb *wrecan* may mean "to avenge," but has other meanings including "to drive," "to press," or "to punish."[16] *Fæhð*, on

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14. J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, "The Bloodfeud of the Franks," *The Long-Haired Kings* (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1962), 122.

15. Wallace-Hadrill, in his study of Frankish bloodfeud, does not mention the Old English term. Wallace-Hadrill, "Bloodfeud of the Franks,"122-3.

16. Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1921), 1272, bosworthtoller.com. See also J.R. Clark-Hall's definition, which fails to include the word 'feud,' but does include 'vendetta:' "hostility, enmity, violence, revenge, vendetta." J.R. Clark-Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 4th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960; reprint Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 109.

the other hand, refers only to acts associated with either feud or vengeance, and Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, in their standard Old English dictionary, renders it as "feud, vengeance, enmity, hostility, deadly feud, that enmity which the relations of the deceased waged against the kindred of the murderer."[17] The Anglo-Saxons may not have distinguished feud and vengeance, perhaps because they saw vengeance as part of a feud. The distinction does matter to modern historians, however, who attempt to describe the operation of such relationships in the early medieval period. Guy Halsall's assertion that the early medieval peoples did not practice "true feud," and that a single act of vengeance terminated a dispute provided the genesis for this project, as I sought to determine what the Anglo-Saxons meant when they used the word *fæhð*.[18]

Although he disputes the existence of true feud in early medieval Europe, Halsall agrees with most of Wallace-Hadrill's definition. For Halsall, feud is "an ongoing relationship between two groups, marked by reciprocal acts of violence, each of which is carried out as revenge for the previous act."[19] Paul Hyams provides perhaps the most elaborate definition. According to Hyams, feud usually begins because of some, often violent, injury, which creates a state of hostility between the wrongdoer and the victim, and into which larger social, sometimes kin, groups become involved. Although leaders may act to enhance group solidarity or increase its numbers, these members often became involved in retaliatory attacks. While notions of parity may have placed limits on acts of revenge, emotions drove such actions. Retaliation is usually met by further retaliation from the opposing side in an escalating manner in which each side commits

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17. Bosworth and Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 264.
18. Halsall, "Reflections," 11-2.
19. Halsall, "Reflections," 9.

acts roughly equivalent those of the other.[20] William Ian Miller, in his work on feud in Iceland, seeks to avoid confusing feud with vengeance, noting that feud created a relationship between two parties, while vengeance did not. Acknowledging that the two can be easily confused because of similar actions which occur in each, he states, "the nonreducible core of what it meant to be in a state of feud. . . ultimately was the obligation to have to kill and in turn suffer the possibility of being killed."[21] Furthermore, according to Wallace-Hadrill, feud is a type of vengeance, but not all vengeance is feud, and the actions in a feud do not necessarily involve the shedding of blood.[22] Halsall also attempts to differentiate feud from vengeance, suggesting that, in "true feud," acts of violence are meant to call attention to a dispute, not to solve it.[23] In the early Middle Ages, Halsall states most vengeance killing ended the dispute if it followed prescribed norms.[24] Thus, according to Halsall, words such as *faida* and its cognates (such as *fæhð*) refer to the legal right to take vengeance, and not to the state of feud. He argues that true feud rarely ends with a single act of violence, but continues beyond the first act of revenge.[25] While I disagree with Halsall on his assertion that early medieval vengeance killing was not feud, I do agree with his definition of true feud. In other words, I argue that true feud as described by Halsall did indeed exist in early Anglo-Saxon England.

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20. Hyams, *Rancor and Reconciliation*, 8-9.

21. William Ian Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 181.

22. Wallace-Hadrill, "Bloodfeud of the Franks,"123.

23. Halsall, "Reflections," 11-2.

24. Halsall is here in opposition to Hyams, Wallace-Hadrill, and Miller, who all argue that true feud did, in fact, exist in early medieval Europe.

25. Halsall, "Reflections," 11-2.

Building on the various definitions of these prominent historians, I argue that the difference between feud and vengeance is clear. Feud is an ongoing relationship of hostility between two parties which may include multiple retaliatory acts of violence, while vengeance is a single act of revenge. Feud includes acts of vengeance between two parties in an ongoing hostile relationship, but not all vengeance is feud. This distinction will aid in determining whether *fæhð* meant feud or vengeance in a social context. In order to determine the distinction between the two, I have developed several criteria based on the above modern definition of feud. According to the definitions laid out above, a feud must consist of the following:

1. Injury, often violent

2. Retaliation for this injury

3. Involvement of larger social groups which are held together by bonds of personal loyalty

4. An ongoing hostile relationship between the two parties, marked by reciprocal acts of retaliation

Other factors may have been in play, such as the use of ritual, the role of feud in maintaining peace, or the expectation of relatively equal retaliation, but these four criteria should suffice to determine whether *fæhð* meant feud or vengeance.[26] In cases of vengeance, only the first two criteria must be met, although the third may come into play. To differentiate it from mere vengeance, however, a feud must include all four criteria.

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26. William Ian Miller, "Choosing the Avenger: Some Aspects of the Bloodfeud in Medieval Iceland and England," *Law and History Review* 1 no. 2 (Autumn 1983): 159-204; Max Gluckman, "The Peace in the Feud," *Past and Present* 8 (1955):13-14; Hyams, *Rancor and Reconciliation*, 9.

Methods and Approach

This dissertation seeks to prove the existence of feud in Anglo-Saxon England and the pervasiveness of feud in Anglo-Saxon thought concerning conflict. Overall, my approach is to undertake a comprehensive analysis of all surviving written sources in Old English to gain a better understanding of what the Anglo-Saxons meant by feud, and to examine those feuds which are recorded from the period before the Viking Age (793-1066).[27] This dissertation also seeks to illustrate the ways in which kings took advantage of feud to increase their power. This transition began in the cultural conflict between sets of cultural practices which the Anglo-Saxons presented as being either pagan Germanic (*Germanitas*) or Roman Christian (*Romanitas*). This clash of cultures took place in early Anglo-Saxon England and helped lead to the development of kingship in England. The Roman Christian ideal emerged victorious from this conflict as kings used ideologies associated with Rome and Christianity to build their bases of power and authority in England. In their expansion of power, these kings sought to gain control over dispute resolution, especially feud.

With a solid foundation of what we mean by feud as outlined in the previous section, we can begin an examination of what Anglo-Saxon authors meant when they used the word *fæhð*, which is my goal for Chapter 2. Through the close reading of the sources to be discussed below, I first examined the use of the Old English word *fæhð* (or *fæhþ*) to determine its meaning. The

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27. 793 is the date of the raid on Lindisfarne, and is often considered the beginning of the Viking Age, but debates about the opening of this period continue. For the purposes of this study, 793 also marks a change in the written sources as, after around that date, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* focuses more on Viking raids and events other than feuds between royal families in Northumbria (See Chapter 6). Angus A. Somerville and R. Andrew McDonald, *The Vikings and Their Age* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 2; *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* E, a.793-900; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. Susan Irvine, vol. 7, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, ed. David Dumville and Simon Keynes (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 42-54.

body of written material from Anglo-Saxon England uses *fæhð/fæhþ* to describe a variety of

phenomena: the feud between the sun and the moon,[28] the Persian Wars,[29] the war between Christ

and Satan,[30] and the war between man and God.[31] The sources also use the term to describe

relationships of reciprocal vengeance, including the many feuds in *Beowulf*,[32] and the attempts of

kings to regulate feud through the publication of law.[33] I also examined conflicts described by

different terms in order to obtain a deeper understanding of ritual vengeance, but focused

primarily on the use of the word *fæhð*.[34]

      An in-depth examination of the uses of the word *fæhð* in Old English sources makes it

clear that Anglo-Saxon authors not only had a clear conception of what they believed to be feud,

but also distinguished it from vengeance. For example, in the Blickling Homily for the first

Sunday in Lent, the homilist beseeches his audience to follow Christ's examples, specifically by

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28. *Riddle 29*, 7-15; edited by George Philip Krapp and Elliot van Kirk Dobbie, *The Exeter Book* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 195.

29. Orosius, *Historiae adversus paganos*, II.5; edited by Janet Bately, *The Old English Orosius* (London: Oxford University Press, 1980), 47.

30. *Christ and Satan*, 365-403; edited by George Philip Krapp, *The Junius Manuscript* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), 148.

31. *Christ* 367-9, 611-8; edited by George Philip Krapp and Elliot van Kirk Dobbie, *The Exeter Book* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 13, 20.

32. Hyams counts more than a dozen; Hyams, *Rancor and Reconciliation*, 74.

33. The laws will be discussed in Chapter 3, and may be found in multiple editions,such as Liebermann's *Gesetze der Angelsachsen*. These laws include *Ine* 28, 46.2, 54, 74; *Alfred*, 42; *II Edmund*, Preface, Preface§1; *VIII Æthelred*, 23; *I Canute* 5§2b-5§2d. F. Liebermann, ed. *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen,* vol. 1, *Text und Übersetzung* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1903).

34. Some sources use the word *wrecan*, primarily defined as "to avenge," to refer to the behavior of those engaged in feud. For example, God avenges human wickedness with the Flood, and Grendel's mother avenges her dead son in *Beowulf* as part of the larger feud between Hrothgar and the Grendelkin. According to Clark-Hall, the form *gewrecan* may be translated as "revenge, avenge, punish." J.R. Clark-Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 4th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press , 1960), 422; *Genesis A*, 1273-1276; ed. George Philip Krapp, *The Junius Manuscript* (New York: Columbian University Press, 1931), 40; *Beowulf*, 1274-9; R.D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles,eds., *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 44.

avoiding the temptations of the Devil. The author exhorts the audience to follow Christ's

teachings and endure the harmful actions of evil men rather than take revenge for their wrongs.

The author notes that people are too quick to take revenge, and should follow the example of

Christ, who refused to take vengeance upon the Devil for tempting him towards evil. The homily

does not specifically mention reciprocal relationships of revenge or the involvement of larger

groups, and appears to condemn any type of revenge, whether part of a feud or not.[35] Other

sources provide clearer evidence of parties to a conflict committing acts of revenge as part of a

feud. Although the events of the poem may not be historical, *Beowulf* is perhaps the best Old

English source on the feud.[36] *Beowulf* and other works of literature can provide insight into

historical phenomena such as feud because these writings are products of the culture in which

they were written. In other words, although the poem contains fictional events, the culture in

which the actions take place reflects the mind-set of the author of *Beowulf*.[37] Mark Amodio

describes the written version of the poem as a performance of the work enmeshed in the Anglo-

Saxon cultural landscape. Because it was written, it has survived longer than oral performances

of other works that represent that culture.[38] Furthermore, Amodio notes, ideals presented in

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35. *Dominica Prima in Quadragesima*, Blickling Homily III; edited by R. Morris, *The Blickling Homilies*, Early English Text Society, no. 58 (London: Oxford University Press, 1874; Reprint, Millwood, NY: Kraus Reprint, 1990), 33.

36. David Day, "*Hwanan sio fæhð aras*: Defining the Feud in *Beowulf*," *Philological Quarterly* 78 no. 1 (Winter 1999): 77-95; There are a number of feuds which appear in the poem, including: Hrothgar and Beowulf against the monsters, Weohstan versus Onela, the Swedes versus the Geats, and Beowulf's father versus the Wilfings. *Beowulf* lines 1333-4, 2602-19, 2472-80, 459-70; 50, 98, 93, 18.

37. Stephen White, "Clotild's Revenge: Politics, Kinship, and Ideology in the Merovingian Blood Feud," *Portraits of Medieval and Renaissance Living*, ed. Samuel K. Cohn and Steven A. Epstein (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), 128; Jesse L. Byock, *Feud in the Icelandic Saga* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1982), 2.

38. Mark Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition: Oral Poetics and Literate Culture in Medieval England* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 45-6.

poetry reflect cultural norms of Anglo-Saxon England,[39] further lending credence to the assertion that literature may provide insight into culture. In the poem, Grendel's mother avenges the killing of her son as part of the larger feud involving the monster and his mother against Hrothgar and his followers.[40] In this situation, does our definition of feud, derived from some of the great historians of feud in the early Middle Ages, hold up? The incidents described as *fæhð* by the *Beowulf*-poet certainly meet the criteria for feud as laid out above, and the treatment of feud in the Blickling homily may as well.[41] In addition to these and other literary sources, those intended for the pulpit and those intended for the mead hall, I have examined the use of the term *fæhð* in historical sources such as the Old English translation of the *Historiae adversus paganos* of Orosius and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* as well as the early Anglo-Saxon legal compilations that use *fæhð*. While the legal and historical sources generally do not present the conflicts in such detail as does the literature, they provide valuable information regarding the understanding of feud within Anglo-Saxon society. These sources, taken together clearly indicate that not only did the Anglo-Saxons view feud in a way that conforms to the criteria laid out above, but that feud played a considerable role in the life of the early English.

Feud also played an instrumental role in the development of kingship from chieftaincy in the early Anglo-Saxon period. In order to discuss the political meaning of feud, however, I examined how kings treated feud in their acquisition of greater royal authority. Archaeology has provided the political context of the early Anglo-Saxon period in which feud operated, and anthropology provides comparisons of the workings of feud and the political environment, the

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39. Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition*, 49.

40. *Beowulf*, 1333-4; 50.

41. I will discuss the degree to which the events of *Beowulf* and other sources meet the criteria for feud at length in Chapter 3.

chiefdom, in which feud was the key form of dispute resolution.[42] By interpreting the historical

and literary sources in the light of these other sources, it has helped me to illuminate the meaning

of feud in the context of the political culture of Anglo-Saxon England. Archaeological records

indicate that a significant cultural change began around the year 600, very shortly after Christian

missionaries arrived in England from Rome via Francia.[43] As Martin Carver argues, material

culture can provide evidence of shifting cultural norms, such as the Christian culture that spread

north from the Mediterranean in the early Middle Ages.[44] A cultural shift accompanied the

conversion of England, in which Anglo-Saxon rulers abandoned Saxon and Anglian material

styles in favor of Roman goods as demonstrated by archaeological evidence. The result was a

shift in elite culture which took place throughout the seventh century, and during which Anglo-

Saxons sought to emulate Roman styles of dress and jewelry imported from Franks, Byzantines,

and others.[45] At the time that this attempt to adopt Roman culture took place, Anglo-Saxon

political units were both small and numerous, with each chieftain leading a small group of

warriors loyal to him and collecting tribute from locals.[46] These cultural adaptations reflect a

strategy on the part of certain rulers to create an identity broader than that of their individual

polities and to convince the people of England that they needed kings. Archaeological findings

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42. Helen Geake, *The Use of Grave-Goods in Conversion-Period England, c.600-c.850* (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1997); N.J. Higham, *The Convert Kings: Power and Religious Affiliation in Early Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997); Martin Carver, *Sutton Hoo: Burial Ground of Kings* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); Timothy Earle, *How Chiefs Came to Power: The Political Economy in Prehistory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

43. Geake, *The Use of Grave-Goods*, 133-6.

44. Martin Carver, "Introduction: Northern Europeans Negotiate their Future," *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300*, edited by Martin Carver (York: York Medieval Press, 2003), 7.

45. Geake, *Use of Grave-Goods*, 128-36.

46. Robin Fleming, *Britain after Rome: The Fall and Rise, 400 to 1070* (London: Penguin Books, 2011), 65-75; Geake, *Use of Grave-Goods*, 128-36.

indicate that by the end of the eighth century, elites ceased investing in furnished burial as a marker of their status, and high status inhumations were no longer accompanied by grave goods as a marker of wealth. Instead, elites invested in the new ecclesiastical customs by buying church buildings, manuscripts, metalwork, and other goods in order to distinguish them from persons of lower status.[47]

The purpose of this change in investment was the establishment of the institution of kingship in England as rulers sought to connect themselves to the Roman past of Britain to enhance their authority and convince their people that they needed kings.[48] Nicholas Higham agrees that Anglo-Saxon kings did not convert for spiritual, but rather political reasons, as they used the teachings, organization, and authority of the Church to bolster their own authority as they moved from being tribal chieftains of small, local polities to being kings of regional ones.[49] Evidence lies in the shifting religious affiliations of Northumbrian kings after the death of Edwin, the first Christian king of the region. In the wake of Edwin's death at the hands of Cadwallon, his successor, Osric, abandoned Christianity in order to gain the support of Edwin's political opponents, and returned to the worship of the traditional Deiran gods.[50] Royal control over religious and ritual sites, festivals, and cults reinforced royal authority, which was believed to derive from divine sources.[51] While these kingdoms had begun as military lordships,[52] Anglo-Saxon paganism was unable to provide "such useful mechanisms for social control and political

47. Geake, *Use of Grave-Goods*, 128-36.

48. Geake, *Use of Grave-Goods*, 128-36.

49. Higham, *Convert Kings*, 2.

50. Higham, *Convert Kings*, 202.

51. Higham, *Convert Kings*, 40.

52. Barbara Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England* (London: Seaby, 1990), 157.

advantage as they could obtain from the Christian missionaries."[53] Conversion thus appears as a strategy of power undertaken by rulers in order to change the nature of rule so that they might expand their own power.[54]

As rulers began to exert greater control within their polities and became kings, they demonstrated their expanded authority and adoption of new political culture with an expanded regulation of violence. In his work on violence, Guy Halsall describes two types of controls on violence: the horizontal, with limits enforced by the community, and the vertical, with limits enforced by a ruler.[55] The rules of feud ensured that control of violence as part of the feud was horizontal; in other words, these limits were enforced by members of the social order who enjoyed the same rank.[56] Once kings began to issue laws governing the use of violence, they exerted a vertical control, thereby placing themselves above the social order governed by their laws.[57] The result was a change in the nature of power, from rule based on violence and mere force, especially that in war, to rule based on authority.[58] In other words, in pagan Anglo-Saxon England the sources of power were military might and social relationships, i.e., the kin. With conversion, the Roman political culture of the missionaries provided new viable sources of power, with which leaders claimed the authority to rule.[59] For anthropologist of power Timothy

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53. Higham, *Convert Kings*, 2.

54. As discussed in Chapter 4.

55. Guy Halsall, "Violence and Society in the Early Medieval West: An Introductory Survey," *Violence and Society in the Early Medieval West*, edited by Guy Halsall (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1998), 7.

56. Hyams, *Rancor and Reconciliation*, 8-9.

57. Beginning with the first few laws in Æthelberht's legal compilation. *The Laws of Æthelberht*, 2; edited by F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen,* vol. 1, *Text und Übersetzung* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1903), 3.

58. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 157; Higham, *Convert Kings*, 40.

59. Earle, *How Chiefs Came to Power*, 4-10.

Earle, there are four sources of power: control over social relationships, economic power, military might, and ideology. That is, to wield power, one may manipulate the relationships between kin, purchase obedience, coerce obedience through the threat of force, or create a set of ideas and routines which guide social actions. Ideology becomes a source of power when leaders use a set of ideas to establish and maintain their right to rule. Accepting the authority of one's rule means accepting the leader's right to rule, and, conversely, to disobey a ruler is not simply an offence against him, but the entire social order which is derived from that ideology.[60] The earliest Anglo-Saxon kings adopted an ideology derived from Roman political culture in which they wielded the right to rule. Additionally, according to Earle, in order for ideology to become a source of power, it must be manifested physically in such a way that the members of the group of followers may identify with this ideology as part of a shared experience.[61] Or, to borrow a term from the Vienna School, the ideology must become part of the kernel of tradition (*Traditionskern*) with which the members of a group must identify in order to be part of that group.[62]

Helen Geake argues that this transition to ideology as a base of power can be found in the archaeological remains, as Anglo-Saxon leaders shifted focus away from Anglian and Saxon identities to an English identity which derived its authority from its Roman inheritance. These leaders connected themselves with the empire through the adoption of Roman religion and styles of dress because the Romans were the last supreme leaders in Britain to govern a large group of

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60. Earle, *How Chiefs Came to Power*, 8-10.

61. Earle, *How Chiefs Came to Power*, 8-10.

62. Walter Pohl, "Ethnic Names and Identities in the British Isles: A Comparative Perspective," *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the Eighth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, edited by John Hines (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1997), 7-10.

peoples. The Germanic heritage of the Anglo-Saxons thus became an origin myth, and leaders

began to convince the people that they needed kings as they adopted the affectations of Roman

rule. By the eighth century, the institution of kingship had firmly taken root, as the population no

longer needed convincing of the need for kings.[63] I will argue that Anglo-Saxon feud played a

key role in this transition because kings exerted ever greater control over feud in order to expand

their power and create a new order in which the king, not the kin, was the wielder of legitimate

social authority. The kin group, the crucial element of the old order, was key to the conduct of

feud, and feud helped to reinforce the social hierarchy.[64] Once elements of Roman political

culture were available to bolster the hierarchy that held society together and provide rulers with

new strategies of control, feud was no longer necessary for maintaining the social order.[65]

Furthermore, feud conflicted with Christian teaching, which did not condone vengeance.[66] A

negotiation between the pagan Germanic and Mediterranean Christian cultures ensued, and

became the crucible in which Anglo-Saxon England was forged.[67]

    It would be prudent at this point to note that, although some practices, customs, or styles

may be described as Germanic or Roman, the differences between the two should not be over-

stressed by the modern historian. Material remains indicate that blending took place frequently,

as demonstrated by archaeological remains. Blending was not only a cultural synthesis, but a

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63. Geake, *Grave Goods*, 130-4.

64. Hyams, *Rancor and Reconciliation*, 9-10.

65. Higham, *Convert Kings*, 2.

66. Ælfric, *Dominica Prima in Quadragesima*, ed. Benjamin Thorpe, *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church* vol. II (London: The Ælfric Society, 1846), 100-2.

67. Martin Carver, "Boat-Burial in Britain: Ancient Custom or Political Signal," *The Ship as Symbol in Prehistoric and Medieval Scandinavia*, edited by Ole Crumlin-Pedersen and Birgitte Munch Thye (Copenhagen: Nationalmuseet, 1995), 110-24.

practical necessity, as the collapse of the Roman economy necessitated the recycling and

reworking of metal and stone from abandoned Roman sites into new tools and structures.[68]

Ethnic identities were fluid, and ethnic markers could be attached to whatever traditions the

leaders of ethnic groups might use to distinguish themselves from other groups.[69] Further

complicating the material interactions between Romano-British inhabitants and the descendants

of the Continental migrants who came to be known as Anglo-Saxons was the high volume of

North Sea trade in such goods as high-quality iron.[70] With such a great deal of interaction

between the cultures of the North Sea and the Mediterranean, it is nearly impossible to point to

the origin of any specific element. On the other hand, there are instances when the Anglo-Saxons

did adopt a practice which they associated with the Romans in Augustine of Canterbury's

mission; one such moment was the adoption of written law. Law, in fact, presents an example of

this type of blending, as it was written in the vernacular rather than Latin. In addition, there are

other moments at which chieftains, as a strategy of power, made grand displays of adherence to a

certain cultural practices, such as Sutton Hoo, which they would have identified as part of their

Germanic heritage. We should not imagine these events as the Anglo-Saxons glancing backward

to a Germanic past. Rather, it is the chieftain seeking to enhance or regain power who associated

with perceived notions of a past, making them part of his kernel of tradition.[71] In other words,

Rædwald did not have himself interred in an elaborate ship burial because that was what his

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68. Robin Fleming, "Recycling in Britain after the Fall of Rome's Metal Economy," *Past and Present* 217 (Nov. 2012): 3-45.

69. Don Henson, *The Origins of the Anglo-Saxons* (Hockwold-cum-Winton, Norfolk: Anglo-Saxon Books, 2006), 177-187.

70. Fleming, "Recycling in Britain," 28-33.

71. Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 90.

Germanic ancestors had done. Rather, he did so in order to signal adherence to a set of traditions with which his rule had been associated before he had to acknowledge the overlordship of Æthelberht, who built his power on a kernel of tradition different from that of Rædwald. Once he was no longer under the aegis of his former Kentish overlord, Rædwald found it necessary to create a physical declaration of power held in his own right, by connecting himself to a perceived Germanic past that was in opposition to Æthelberht's kernel of tradition.[72]

In the heated political climate of England around the year 600, rulers were creating ethnicities in order to build their followings and enhance their power. In order to distinguish their own groups from those of others, leaders added elements to their kernels of tradition that opposed those of others. They added the cultural practices of certain groups in order set themselves apart from their political rivals. Essentially what you have are two competing sets of cultural practices; one with its roots in the Germanic culture that the Anglo-Saxons brought with them from the Continent during their migrations, the other based in Roman and Christian traditions brought to Britain in part by Augustine and the Roman mission but also by the Franks through their connections with the Kentish kingdom. That is not to say, however, that these sets of cultural practices were uniquely German or Roman, or that they were based in anything more than an imagined past. I have adopted the terms *Germanitas* and *Romanitas* to refer to them, as they are distinct, and the terms allow us to use a short-hand to refer to competing sets of political and cultural norms. That is to say, when Æthelberht converted, he did so in part to gain access to strategies of power associated with *Romanitas* – written law, the use of bishops, and others – so

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72. Martin Carver, "Boat burial in Britain: ancient custom or political signal?," in Ο. Crumlin-Pedersen (ed), *The Ship as Symbol in Prehistoric and Medieval Scandinavia* (Copenhagen: National Museum of Denmark, 1995), 111-24.

that he could create authority for himself.[73] His political opponents rejected these new sources of

power, not necessarily because they were opposed to them per se, but because they were opposed

to Æthelberht.[74] Competitors such as Æthelfrith displayed their rejection of Æthelberht by

rejecting *Romanitas* and instead displaying their *Germanitas* by, for instance, constructing halls

such as the one at Yeavering, or, in the case of Redwald, employing ship burial. Whatever can be

said about *Germanitas*, we must not insist that feud was a solely, or even fundamentally,

Germanic institution; it does appear in numerous other cultural groups.[75] We do know, however,

that both the Romans and Christians were opposed to feud as a method of dispute resolution,

while it was an acceptable practice to those tied to notions of *Germanitas*.[76] Other historians have

described ethnicity as a political construct in this way, in which elites used specific ethnic

markers to enhance their power and status to create the perception of a connection with an

imagined historical past which served to build legitimacy.[77] My contribution has been to

synthesize these ideas concerning the creation of ethnic groups with the evidence describing the

construction of kingdoms beginning in the Conversion Period to demonstrate that the two were

intimately connected. Adoption of ideologies associated with *Romanitas* or *Germanitas* were part

of the construction of ethnicities in this period, which itself was part of the construction of

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73. Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 150.

74. As Don Henson notes, ethnicities could form in opposition to others. Henson, *Origins of the Anglo-Saxons*, 186.

75. Wallace-Hadrill, "Bloodfeud of the Franks," 121-3.

76. Wallace-Hadrill, "Bloodfeud of the Franks," 125-8.

77. See especially Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 62-151; Henson, *Origins of the Anglo-Saxons*, 102-131, 186; Nicholas J. Higham and Martin J. Ryan, *The Anglo-Saxon World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 136; Higham Heinrich Härke, "Anglo-Saxon Immigration and Ethnogenesis," *Medieval Archaeology* 55 no. 1 (2011): 1-28;

power. Since feud was an acceptable practice in one and not the other, it was caught up in the competition between differing sets of traditions.

As Anglo-Saxon kingship developed, it brought various changes to the culture of England. For example, Alfred the Great, lamenting the loss of learning in England in the wake of the Viking onslaught, embarked on a translation program whereby he and scholars at his court translated Latin works into Old English to enable the English people to be able more readily to understand and use these texts. Translation into the vernacular became important for the dissemination of ideas found in these texts, as Alfred lamented that fewer and fewer could engage with them. Although literacy in Latin declined during the Viking Age, after the reign of Alfred lay consumption of texts in England rose due to the use of Old English in a variety of texts. While the laity may not have been able to read themselves, they did have texts read to them, and lay patrons also commissioned translations from Latin into English to be read aloud to them by educated persons.[78] Although literate clerics may have been responsible for the creation and reading of texts, others participated in the dissemination of the ideas found within them. Thus, ideas of feud do not merely reflect those of clerics trained in reading and writing Latin, but also those to whom clerics read texts written in the vernacular. Because they were able to participate in the cultural diffusion of ideas via texts, at least on a passive level through listening, laymen may be included in a study of feud because it was highly likely that such writing informed their conceptions of feud. Many Anglo-Saxons encountered homilies, psalms, saints' lives, and Biblical stories read in the vernacular in church. Other sources, such as heroic poetry and laws, may have derived from oral accounts and records of public gatherings with which

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78. R.D. Fulk and Christopher Cain, *A History of Old English Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 22-3.

many people in England were familiar.[79] The laity would have encountered these sources both in the courts of their rulers and in the mead halls of the elite.[80] Furthermore, the textual communities which received the literature in early England were often broad, as some texts were intended for wide audiences consisting of both popular and elite segments of society.[81] England thus provides the historian with access to sources which reflect the ideas of a larger segment of the population than simply those educated in Latin.

For the purpose of comparison with other regions, I have also briefly examined the phenomenon of the use of violence among the Franks, because of the connections between the two peoples.[82] Such a comparison is useful in increasing the scope of this study, as feud was by no means unique to the Anglo-Saxons, even among Germanic peoples, and nor were the complex interactions between feud and political power.[83] The Scandinavians have also provided useful comparisons, as not only does much of their literature consists of tales of feuds, but they experienced much the same transition from chiefdom to kingdom through access to new strategies of power.[84] As with Francia, significant cultural connections existed between early England and Scandinavia, as can be seen in the Sutton Hoo burial.[85] Francia, however, proves

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79. Daniel Donoghue, *Old English Literature: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 2, 52.

80. Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 169.

81. Hugh Magennis, "Audience(s), Reception, Literacy," *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano and Elaine Treharne (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 91.

82. Wilhelm Levison, *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1946).

83. See especially Wallace-Hadrill's "Bloodfeud of the Franks" and Miller's *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*.

84. Byock, *Feud in Icelandic Saga*, 1; Somerville and McDonald, *Vikings and their Age*, 49-53.

85. C Hans Frede Nielson, *The Early Runic Language of Scandinavia: Studies in Germanic Dialect Geography* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 2000); Carver, "Boat-Burial," 110-24.

more useful for the sake of comparison, as many of the Icelandic sagas in which feud plays a prominent role date from later centuries, while Frankish sources are nearly contemporary with those of Anglo-Saxon England.[86] In fact, Wallace-Hadrill takes much of his evidence for Frankish feud from the history of Gregory of Tours, focusing on the Merovingian civil wars and other sources contemporary with either Anglo-Saxon migration or conversion.[87] Additionally, the Merovingian Franks influenced the development of Anglo-Saxon England and were, in large part, a source of cultural conflict in England. The Roman missionaries to England arrived from Francia, and evidence of the Frankish association with the new English Christianity can be found in the increased Frankish influence on Kentish metalwork of the period.[88] In fact, Frankish-Kentish connections may have extended to political influence with Æthelberht emulating elements of Merovingian rule.[89] Kentish elites certainly adopted elements of Frankish culture, including dress and burial practices, in order to demonstrate their elevated status.[90] Another Anglo-Saxon dynasty, that of East Anglia, used the Sutton Hoo ship burial to publicly reject the introduction of these elite cultural practices imported from Francia with a grand celebration of a competing culture – the imagined pagan maritime culture of its Scandinavian ancestors, in which feud played an important role.[91] The Franks therefore present not only a useful comparison, but played an important role in historical events of early Anglo-Saxon England.

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86. Byock, *Feud in Icelandic Saga*, 35.

87. Ian Wood, "'The Bloodfeud of the Franks:' A Historiographical Legend," *Early Medieval Europe* 14 no. 4 (Nov. 2006): 491.

88. Geake, *Grave Goods*, 129.

89. N.J. Higham, *An English Empire: Bede and the Early Anglo-Saxon Kings* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 192.

90. Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 71.

91. Carver, "Boat-Burial," 121.

I will, however, limit the historical examples used in the study to the early Anglo-Saxon period, from the migration of these peoples to Britain to the end beginning of the Viking Age immediately before 800. The opening of the ninth century is not only a good breaking point for an examination of the political culture of England, but it is also avoids overlapping with the work of Thomas Lambert, whose 2009 dissertation and subsequent articles discuss feud, royal protection, and crime in the later Anglo-Saxon period.[92] Not only is ending with the Viking AGe useful because of Thomas Lambert's works, but as Richard Abels notes, the Viking incursions into England brought an end to the competition between the Anglo-Saxon polities, if only because the Vikings knocked out all the competition other than Wessex.[93]

Sources

A large number of sources in the corpus of Old English writings discuss feud or vengeance. Although most historians who have studied feud have concentrated on either laws or descriptions of dispute resolution in historical writings, I have been able to arrive at a more complete picture of early Anglo-Saxon feud by incorporating a larger variety of sources.[94] Many of the sources in the body of Old English writing which have proven useful are either poetic or legal texts. A simple search of the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus*, which searches the entire extant body of Old English written material (with the exception of a few variant copies),

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92. Thomas Lambert, "Protection, Feud, and Royal Power: Violence and its Regulation in English Law, c.850-c.1250" (PhD diss., Durham University, 2009).

93. Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation*, 1.

94. Hyams, xiii-xv; Wallace-Hadrill, 122.

indicates that the word *fæhð* or *fæhþ* appears sixty-seven times.[95] Of these instances, sixty may be

found in either Old English poetry or Old English law.[96] In addition to laws and historical

accounts, Anglo-Saxon sources include religious texts, poetry (including heroic and wisdom),

charters, wills, and archaeological material – all of which have proven useful. The study of such

a variety of sources has allowed for a fuller understanding of feud than had been attempted

previously. Furthermore, because many of these sources were written in the vernacular, they

allow for a more complete understanding of how English peoples viewed the feud than that

gained by a reliance on clerical texts.[97] Most of the textual sources used for this project may be

found in modern editions of Old English texts.[98] Many Anglo-Saxon sources have been

reproduced in facsimile through the *Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile* Series, or, more

conveniently, are now available as images online.[99] In addition, recent digitization projects have

made a wealth of sources available online, among them *Early English Laws*, a collaborative

effort by many Anglo-Saxonists to make editions of the Anglo-Saxon laws widely available; this

has been particularly valuable as many of the best manuscripts are no longer available for

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95. "The Old English Corpus in Machine-Readable Form," *Old English Corpus*, http://ets.umdl.umich.edu.libproxy.library.wmich.edu/o/oec/moreoec.html (accessed 5 July 2007).

96. "Simple Search of Old English Corpus: *fæhð*," *Old English Corpus*, http://ets.umdl.umich.edu.libproxy.library.wmich.edu/cgi/o/oec/oec-idx?index=Fragmentary&type=simple&q1=fAh D&restrict=Cameron+number&resval=&class=All&size=First+100 (accessed 5 July 2007); "Simple Search of Old English Corpus: *fæhþ*," *Old English Corpus*, http://ets.umdl.umich.edu.libproxy.library.wmich.edu/cgi/o/oec/oec-idx?index=Fragmentary&type=simple&q1=fAh T&restrict=Cameron+number&resval=&class=All&size=First+100 (accessed 5 July 2007);

97. Donoghue, *Old English Literature*, 2, 52.

98. See bibliography for an extensive list.

99. Relevant volumes listed separately in bibliography.

viewing.[100] Other important online tools include a digital version of the *Monumenta Germaniae Historia* and the *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England* reference database.[101]

Fortunately for the Anglo-Saxonist, most of the relevant poetry can be found in one of four manuscripts: the Junius Manuscript, the Exeter Book, the Vercelli Book, and the Beowulf Manuscript. The Junius Manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 11) contains the poems *Genesis A*, *Genesis B*, and *Christ and Satan*, all of which describe feuds.[102] Of the six texts in the Vercelli Book (Vercelli, Biblioteca Capitolare CXVII), only *Andreas* contains information about the feud in Anglo-Saxon England.[103] The relevant works in the Exeter Book (Exeter, Cathedral 3501, fol. 8-130) that make use of the word *fæhð* include *Guthlac A*, *Guthlac B*, *Wife's Lament*, *Christ I*, *Christ II*, *Christ III*, *Precepts*, *Vainglory*, *Maxims I*, *Riddle 29*, and the *Husband's Message*.[104] Finally, the Beowulf Manuscript (London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A.xv) contains, in addition to *Beowulf*, the poem *Judith*.[105] All the relevant law collections may be found in *Textus Roffensis* (Rochester Cathedral Library Manuscript A.3.5), which includes the legal compilations of Æthelberht, Alfred, Ine, II Edmund, and also a list of wergelds.[106] All these

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100. My attempts to see in person the original manuscripts of *Textus Roffensis* and the Peterborough recension of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* were unsuccessful. *Early English Laws*, University of London – Institute of Historical Research, 2015, accessed 19 June 2015, http://www.earlyenglishlaws.ac.uk/.

101. *Monumenta Germaniae Historia*, accessed 10 October 2016, http://http://www.dmgh.de; *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, accessed October 10, 2016, http://http://www.pase.ac.uk/index.html.

102. George Philip Krapp, editor, *The Junius Manuscript* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931).

103. George Philip Krapp, editor, *The Vercelli Book* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932).

104. George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, eds., *The Exeter Book* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936).

105. R.D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles, *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

106. Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Tenth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 246-7; Ernulf, Bishop of Rochester, *Textus Roffensis: Rochester Cathedral Library Manuscript A.3.5,* Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile Series, vol. 7 (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1957-62).

legal texts are included in Felix Liebermann's *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, and may be found

on the *Early English Laws* website both in editions and in manuscript facsimiles.[107] Another

manuscript written by Archbishop Wulfstan (London, British Library, Cotton Nero A.I) contains

the law collections VIII Æthelred and I Canute, two legal compilations that address feud.[108] Other

useful historical accounts include the Peterborough Recension of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*

(Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Laud 636)[109] and the Old English version of Orosius's *Historiae*

adversus paganos (London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius B.i, fols. 3-111). Written texts

which are not readily available in facsimile include two poems, the *Battle of Maldon* and the

Fight at Finnsburh. The original manuscripts of both these poems have been lost, but copies of

these originals may be found in modern editions.[110] In addition, only one of Ælfric's homilies

relating to feud is available in facsimile: Homily I.15. The other two, *In Sabbato Sancto*, and

Nativity of Christ, are only available in editions of Ælfric's homilies.[111] Because of the ready

availability of these editions and facsimiles, I have not had to rely heavily on research in

archives. Furthermore, some of these sources are no longer open to public viewing, and I was

thus not able to see *Textus Roffensis* or the Peterborough recension of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*

in manuscript form on my research trip.

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107. Felix Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*. 3 vols. (Halle: Max Niermeyer, 1903); *Early English Laws*.

108. Henry R. Loyn, ed. *A Wulfstan Manuscript Containing Institutes, Laws, and Homilies: British Museum Cotton Nero A.I.*, Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile Series, vol. 17 (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1971).

109. Susan Reynolds, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle,* vol. 7*, MS. E* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), xiii.

110. Klaeber, 231-5; D.G. Scragg, ed. *The Battle of Maldon* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981).

111. Aelfric, Abbot of Eynsham, *Aelfric's First Series of Catholic Homilies*, Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile Series, vol. 13 (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1966).

Additionally, archaeology has shed light upon the cultural milieu in which feud operated, especially how that culture reacted to the influx of a new religion and its new values. Of key importance in this matter is the Sutton Hoo excavation, which may be interpreted as a grand display of adherence to pagan Anglo-Saxon culture in the face of challenges from Mediterranean Christianity. Sutton Hoo also demonstrates reactions to the importation of Continental influence, as the Christianity of Augustine and Bertha had Frankish influences.[112] Furthermore, it provides evidence of the beginnings of kingship in England in the form of a pagan, perhaps Scandinavian, mold that was in direct competition with the type of kingship practiced in Kent and on the Continent.[113] Feud, as a key feature of Germanic culture, came into conflict with the new religion, which advocated not taking vengeance. As Sutton Hoo demonstrates, archaeology provides evidence of this conflict of cultures.

Historiography

Questions concerning the transformation of dispute resolution, including feud, pertain directly to the way in which the history of the Middle Ages has been written. Interpretations of the early Middle Ages which portray the period as one of violence and chaos have allowed historians to present succeeding periods, such as the High Middle Ages or the Renaissance, as ones of greater order, progress, and rationality.[114] The portrayal of the early medieval period as a "Dark Age" remains relevant in the popular imagination,[115] even if historians have worked

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112. Carver, *Sutton Hoo: Princely Burial Ground*, 120-2.

113. Carver, *Sutton Hoo: Princely Burial Ground*, 134-6.

114. Janet L. Nelson, "The Dark Ages," *History Workshop Journal* 63 (Spring 2007): 191-201.

115. Christopher Cassel, *The Dark Ages*, directed by Christopher Cassel (History Channel, 2007), DVD.

diligently to inform the public about the simplicity of this assessment.[116] Historians who see the

High Middle Ages in these terms tend to value the state-oriented justice of the later period more

highly than they do the justice of the early medieval era, and find practices such as feud irrational

and even incomprehensible.[117] These historians believe that feud could, in theory, occur only in

places where there was no recourse to law and where central authority was lacking, and that feud

was common chiefly in eras of marked anarchy.[118] Such interpretations rely on prescriptive

documents produced by royal officials, such as law collections and texts created for the study of

law.[119] A view which takes into account only those early medieval texts which prescribe how

agents of the king wish disputes to be resolved, and not how people actually settled conflicts,

however, overlooks the importance and variety of methods of dispute resolution in the early

Middle Ages. Since the 1980s, many historians have shifted their focus away from such

prescriptive texts as laws, and, using charters and other records of disputes, have begun to

concentrate on the disputes themselves and how individuals resolved them,. They have

concluded that the early Middle Ages was not a time of irrationality and regression from ancient

practice awaiting the fabulous renaissance of the twelfth century; rather, people of the early

medieval period had their own characteristic ways of dealing with problems. Although their

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116. Chris Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome: Illuminating the Dark Ages, 400-1000* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009).

117. Wendy Davies and Paul Fouracre, eds. *The Settlement of Disputes in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 214-5.

118. Heinrich Fichtenau, *Living in the Tenth Century*, trans. Patrick Geary (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 423-7.

119. R.C. Van Caenegem, *An Introduction to Private Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Peter Brown, "Society and the Supernatural: A Medieval Change," *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Charles Radding, *The Origins of Medieval Jurisprudence: Pavia and Bologna, 850-1150* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); Manlio Bellomo, *The Common Legal Past of Europe, 1000-1800*., trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995); John Langbein, *Torture and the Law of Proof: Europe and England in the* Ancien Regime (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).

methods are more alien to modern sensibilities than are those of the high Middle Ages in part due
to lack of centralized authority, modern scholars should not take this lack of authority to
condemn them.[120] These conclusions have helped to temper the perception of the Middle Ages as
having been marked by a progression from barbarity after the collapse of Rome to the rationality
and order of the modern era, and have helped to revitalize the study of the early medieval period
for its own sake.

Both historians such as Paul Hyams and anthropologists such as Max Gluckman have
contributed to changing the perception of the early Middle Ages as a period of barbarity. For
example, recent studies on medieval violence and dispute resolution have enabled the historian of
feud to place this phenomenon within its social and cultural context. Since the publication of
Paul Hyams's 2003 book *Rancor and Reconciliation in Medieval England*, several others have
been published which also deal with feud and vengeance, including a number of collaborative
volumes.[121] Although several historians have written specifically on feud in recent years, only a
few have treated it as a form of dispute resolution. I have already discussed in this chapter some
of the historians who have worked on feud. William Ian Miller and Jesse Byock studied the feud
in Iceland, relying primarily on saga literature to demonstrate how the feud worked in Icelandic

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120. Davies and Fouracre, *Settlement of Disputes*; Warren Brown, *Unjust Seizure: Conflict, Interest, and Authority in an Early Medieval Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Patrick Geary, "Living with Conflicts in Stateless France," *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Stephen White, "*Pactum. . . Legem Vincit et Amor Judicium*: The Settlement of Disputes by Compromise in 11th Century Western France," *American Journal of Legal History* 22 (1978): 281-308; Mark D. Meyerson, Daniel Thierry, and Oren Falk, eds., *A Great Effusion of Blood?: Interpreting Medieval Violence* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

121. Hyams, *Rancor and Reconciliation*; Jeppe Bücher Netterstrøm and Bjørn Poulsen, eds., *Feud in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2007); Susanna A. Throop and Paul R. Hyams, eds., *Vengeance in the Middle Ages: Emotion, Religion, and Feud* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); Belle S. Tuten and Tracey L. Billado,eds. *Feud, Violence, and Practice: Essays in Medieval Studies in Honor of Stephen D. White* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

society.[122] Paul Hyams treated the English feud from the late Anglo-Saxon period through the

reign of Edward I from a legal and social perspective, but avoided examining feud as a

characteristic part of the culture of England.[123] Some historians have focused on monastic

reactions to the feud and the beginnings of the Peace movement, which served to remove the

social legitimacy of this form of violent self-help.[124] Although he denies the existence of true

feud in early medieval Europe, Guy Halsall described this age as a violent one, but not

necessarily more or less so than other periods.[125] While it is virtually impossible to determine

whether this period was any more or less violent than others, it is clear that many violent actions

took place, including vengeance and warfare.[126] Studies of anger, a key feature of feud, include

Barbara Rosenwein's collection of articles, *Anger's Past*.[127] Dispute resolution has become a

vibrant area of study since the 1985 publication of Davies and Fouracre's *Settlement of Disputes*,

as is evidenced by the large number of books and articles that follow their method.[128] Many

anthropologists have also begun to study dispute resolution, claiming that a centralized

government was unnecessary for maintaining social order, that multiple resolutions to a dispute

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122. Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*; Jesse Byock, *Feud in the Icelandic Saga* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

123. Hyams, *Rancor and Reconciliation*, 74.

124. Geoffrey Koziol, "Monks, Feuds, and the Making of Peace in Eleventh-Century Flanders," *The Peace of God: Social Violence and Religious Response in France around the year 1000,* edited by Thomas Head and Richard Landes, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 258.

125. Halsall, "Reflections," 7-29; Halsall, "Violence and Society: An Introductory Survey,"4-5.

126. Guy Halsall, *Warfare and Society in the Barbarian West, 450-900* (London: Routledge, 2003), 15, 33.

127. Barbara Rosenwein, ed., *Anger's Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 3-4; Hyams, *Rancor and Reconciliation*, 57.

128. Warren Brown, *Unjust Seizure: Conflict, Interest, and Authority in an Early Medieval Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001)*;* Patrick Geary, "Living with Conflicts in Stateless France," *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Mark D. Meyerson, Daniel Thierry, and Oren Falk, eds., *A Great Effusion of Blood?: Interpreting Medieval Violence* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

were always available, and that neither group responsibility nor self-help are indicative of primitive societies.[129] Anthropology has also proved useful in providing an intellectual framework for the study of feud. Anthropologists have not only described the use of feud to maintain peace, but have also placed feud in its social context and helped explain its role in cultural interaction.[130] One must, however, exercise great caution in the use of anthropology to extract information about practices described in medieval texts, as it is difficult to analyze processed data (i.e., information from written sources) with anthropological methods because the early medieval sources do not provide enough data with which to perform the types of statistical analyses upon which anthropologists rely.[131]

While a lack of documents make it difficult to construct the history of the early Anglo-Saxon period, archaeologists have in recent years begun to focus on that period, providing more information with which historians may flesh out its history. Through her study of grave goods, Helen Geake has constructed an analysis of the early Anglo-Saxon period for which contemporary documents are lacking. She outlines the development of kingship from chieftaincy in England through the emulation of Roman styles of dress and jewelry in a cultural revival which accompanied conversion.[132] She concludes that kings used Roman styles to impart an ideology of kingship to the people living in their lands and to convince them that they needed

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129. Simon Roberts, "Introduction." *Disputes and Settlements: Law and Human Relations in the West*, ed. John Bossy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 10; F.G. Snyder, "Anthropology, Dispute Processes, and Law: a Critical Introduction." *British Journal of Law and Society* 8 (1981), 155-7; Sally Falk Moore, "Legal Liability and Evolutionary Interpretation: Some Aspects of Strict Liability, Self-Help, and Collective Responsibility," *Law as Process: An Anthropological Approach* (London: Routledge, 1978), 83, 91.

130. Gluckman, "Peace in the Feud," 1-14; Bettina E. Schmidt and Ingo W. Schröder, *Anthropology of Violence and Conflict* (London: Routledge, 2001).

131. Philipe Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual: Between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 4.

132. Geake, *Use of Grave-Goods*, 133-6.

kings.[133] The large ritual monuments evident in the archaeological record, John Blair notes, were

first built by the Anglo-Saxons c.600. This suggests that a significant cultural change resulted

from the growth and consolidation of kingdoms.[134] Martin Carver has studied the Sutton Hoo

ship burial extensively, arguing, among other things, that the transition from pagan to Christian

England was by no means a smooth process and that some kings used rituals and monuments to

reject these new royal ideologies publicly.[135] Taken together, these archaeological investigations

provide evidence for a competition between sets of ideas that kings used to justify their rules.

This competition provides a framework that I use to explain royal attempts to gain control over

feud and violence in chapters 4 and 5.

In addition to these archaeological studies, several recent and classic books which

combined written and material evidence have helped scholars to trace the development of

political power from the migration period through the reign of Alfred. Recent interpretations of

archaeological material by historians, have, for example, enabled Robin Fleming to flesh out

further the history of the period by using material evidence to describe culture, daily life, and the

sources of economic change.[136] Other important works on the development of kingship include

Steven Bassett's collection of articles, *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, which presents

state formation prior to the eighth century as a "knock-out competition" lasting several centuries;

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133. Geake uses ideology here as a source of power, as a set of ideas that rulers use to establish their right to rule. Geake, *Use of Grave-Goods*, 133-6; Earle, *How Chiefs Came to Power,* 8-10.

134. John Blair, "Anglo-Saxon Pagan Shrines and their Prototypes," *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 8, edited by David Griffiths (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1995), 21.

135. Carver, "Boat Burial," 110-24.

136. Fleming, *Britain after Rome.*

unfortunately we know little about the earliest rounds of this contest.[137] David Kirby, in *the Earliest English Kings*, notes that the earliest royal leaders were not kings, but chieftains, with a non-centralized political and economic power base supported by the personal power of the ruler. They were unable to muster sufficient resources to create anything other than temporary personal power.[138] Barbara Yorke, in *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England*, agrees with this assessment; by the time we see evidence of polities in the historical record, they had already been in existence for generations.[139] She notes that around 600, royal leaders began to expand the purview of their rule beyond their own warbands and, borrowing strategies from the Romans and the Franks, incorporated new strategies of power,[140] among them the introduction of written law and the setting of compensation for injury.[141] Kirby concurs, noting that by the seventh century rulers had begun to use the minting of coinage and the creation of military and administrative centers, thereby marking "an intermediate stage in the process of change from chiefdom to state."[142] For Nicholas Higham, conversion to Christianity was another of these strategies of power which kings used to their administrative advantage to build authority and create a type of power more broadly based than personal rule.[143] Richard Abels notes that the construction of kingship and access to a greater variety of strategies of power did not mean that the kings

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137. Steven Bassett, ed., *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms* (London: Leicester University Press, 1989), 26-7.

138. D.P. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2000), 3.

139. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 1-19.

140. Strategies of power is not a term than Yorke employs, but one which I use to describe those actions that rulers take to enhance their power in the long term.

141. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 1-19.

142. Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, 3.

143. Higham, *Convert Kings*, 2.

abandoned warfare to enhance their power. He also notes that certain strategies, particularly the

issuing of royal laws, were used to present an image of kingship more than they were to create an

effective codification of law.[144] Other historians have focused on various aspects of the

development of kingship. Charlotte Behr examines archaeological evidence to ascertain the role

of women and the importance of connection with a divine ancestor to legitimize rule.[145] Damien

Tyler's studies of Mercia in the seventh century focus on the role of conversion to Christianity,

particularly the ways in which the elite lost some of their bases of power, their resistance to

conversion, and the changes in the nature of violence brought by changes to new styles of

kingship.[146]

Legal scholarship on the Anglo-Saxon period has been prolific in recent years, especially

following the publication of Patrick Wormald's *Making of English Law*, which sought to

reinvigorate the study of Anglo-Saxon law, and in which Wormald argued that English kings of

the later Anglo-Saxon and medieval periods built on a legal tradition dating back to Alfred (871-

899).[147] Most notable are Lisi Oliver's two books on early English law. Her 2002 book

Beginnings of English Law provides an edition of the seventh-century Kentish laws updated from

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144. Richard P. Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 1-7.

145. Charlotte Behr, "The Origins of Kingship in Early Medieval Kent," *Early Medieval Europe* 9 no. 1 (2000): 25-52.

146. Damien Tyler, "Reluctant Kings and Christian Conversion in Seventh-Century England," *History* 92 no. 306 (April 2007): 144-161; Damien Tyler, "An Early Mercian Hegemony: Penda and Overkingship in the Seventh Century," *Midland History* 30 (2005): 1-19; Damien Tyler, "Orchestrated Violence and the 'Supremacy of the Mercian Kings,'" *Æthelbald and Offa: Two Eighth Century Kings of Mercia*, ed. David Hill and Margaret Worthington, British Archaeological Reports, 383 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2005), 27-33.

147. Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century*, vol. I: *Legislation and its Limits* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), xiii.

the classic edition by Felix Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*.[148] She also provides a

substantial textual and historical commentary on these earliest of Anglo-Saxon legal collections,

which help illuminate the rate of social and political change in the wake of conversion.[149] Her

more recent 2011 work, *The Body Legal in Barbarian Law*, studies the injury tariffs found in a

number of Germanic legal compilations, including the West Saxon, Frankish, and Visigothic.

These injury tariffs are lists of standard compensations for injury, designed to prevent a conflict

from escalating to feud by settling it before one party killed another.[150] Other legal scholars work

more directly with feud. Stefan Jurasinski argues that in *Beowulf* vengeance was not necessarily a

familial duty, but was an acceptable form of behavior.[151] Although not a legal scholar, David Day

similarly examines feud in *Beowulf* and defines it as the type of violence that is both reciprocal

and continuing.[152] William Ian Miller, a lawyer who has written several books on feud,

particularly in Iceland, argues throughout his works that feud and violence were far more

complex than they are usually portrayed.[153] He discusses the role of balance and honor in feud,

and stresses that the cultures in which feud played a prominent role were not necessarily societies

without recourse to law.[154]

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148. Lisi Oliver, *The Beginnings of English Law* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); F. Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen,* vol. 1, *Text und Übersetzung* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1903).

149. Oliver, *Beginnings of English Law*, 180.

150. Lisi Oliver, *The Body Legal in Barbarian Law* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).

151. Stefan Jurasinski, "The Ecstasy of Vengeance: Legal History, Old English Scholarship, and the 'Feud' of Hengest," *The Review of English Studies* 55 no. 222 (2004): 641-661.

152. David Day, "*Hwanan sio fæhð aras*: Defining the Feud in *Beowulf*," *Philological Quarterly* 78 no. 1 (Winter 1999): 77-95.

153. William Ian Miller, *Eye for an Eye* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

154. Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*.

Still other historians, working directly on feud and violence, have similarly viewed it from a more nuanced perspective in recent years. Warren Brown's *Violence in Medieval Europe* reminds us that we should not look for instances of violence according to modern twenty-first century expectations or perspectives, when both our norms and experiences of violence are significantly different. Instead of viewing the medieval period as violent or not violent, he stresses that the early medieval era was "*differently* violent."[155] In fact, throughout the medieval period, people's perceptions of violence shifted, but were often still different than our own. In the Middle Ages, violence could legitimately be wielded by individuals, and those with political power did not possess a monopoly on its legal use.[156] That three collected volumes of articles on feud and vengeance have recently been published indicates the current interest in the field. While Jeppe Büchert Netterstrøm and Bjørn Poulsen's *Feud in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* focuses on feud after the period under consideration in this study, the book provides a theoretical foundation and wrestles extensively with the question of whether feud existed.[157] Another volume, edited by Belle S. Tuten and Tracey L. Billado, *Feud, Violence, and Practice* follows the work of Stephen White, and treats feud as both legal process and dispute resolution.[158] *Vengeance in the Middle Ages*, edited by Susanna A. Throop and Paul R. Hyams, focuses on the varieties of vengeance and the emotions associated with retaliation.[159] Of key historiographic importance to this study is the work of Thomas Lambert, who uses an approach similar to my own in studying the period after the reign of Alfred the Great. His dissertation, *Protection, Feud*

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155. Warren C. Brown, *Violence in Medieval Europe* (Harlow: Longman, 2011), 5. Emphasis his.

156. Brown, *Violence in Medieval Europe*, 290-5.

157. Netterstrøm and Poulsen, eds. *Feud in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*.

158. Tuten and Billado, eds., *Feud, Violence, and Practice.*

159. Throop and Hyams, eds., *Vengeance in the Middle Ages.*

and Royal Power, treats the transition away from feud and violent self-help to the introduction of royal protection as the primary means by which kings introduced notions of crime and punishment. In his terms, Lambert's work is about the transition from protective power, whereby kings gained the loyalty of followers by offering protection, to prohibitive power, whereby they introduced a concept of crime.[160] Whereas Lambert examines kings building royal authority in order to label certain types of violence as criminal and, therefore, as violations of royal protections, I focus on an earlier period and describe how kings created the authority which would later enable them to seek to control violence. In other words, my dissertation focuses on the introduction of protective power with which kings built authority, a recognized legitimacy.

The historiographical contribution of this dissertation is less about the examination of new sources than it is a re-examination of sources that other historians have used, but with new methodologies. By taking a law and literature approach, and by incorporating anthropological theories and archaeological evidence, I have been able to view the early Anglo-Saxon period in new ways using sources that have been poured over multiple times. For instance, while the laws have been used for a variety of studies including those on theft and feud, by examining laws in conjunction with literature, I have been able to further illuminate the meanings of feud within a social context. In addition, anthropological theories such as those of Timothy Earle, who wrote about power, have allowed me to more thoroughly analyze the growth of power in the early medieval period. Archaeology has allowed me to place scant historical information within a social context based on that material evidence.

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160. Thomas Lambert, "Protection, Feud, and Royal Power: Violence and its Regulation in English Law, c.850-c.1250" (PhD diss., Durham University, 2009).

Organization

My dissertation is divided into three parts. This first chapter and lays the theoretical

foundation for the remainder of the study. Chapter 2 is an examination of all the uses of the word

fæhð in Old English sources as a means to determine what the Anglo-Saxons meant by *fæhð* and

to demonstrate the existence of feud in the legal and literary sources. Chapters 3 through 6

discuss the use of and control over violence in the construction of power through various periods

of Anglo-Saxon England: the Migration Period; the Early and Later Conversion Periods; and

finally the eighth century. Through these periods, leaders shifted the basis of their power from the

legitimate use of violence within the social order to control over the use of violence, by

becoming mediators outside the social order. In so doing, these leaders accessed a greater number

of strategies of power than their competitors and appropriated authority to themselves, thereby

further cementing their power through legitimacy of rule and control over social ties. Control

over feud was one of these new strategies of power, and by deploying this strategy the kings were

able to build their authority.

As I will demonstrate in the chapters that follow, feud was such a pervasive phenomenon

in Anglo-Saxon society that the people naturally thought of many types of conflict as feud. For

example, the Anglo-Saxons considered disputes in terms of feud, which colored their

descriptions of such disputes.[161] Such pervasiveness indicates the importance of feud and its role

in society. Feud was not merely a way to seek vengeance, but was also an effective way to

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161. The same was true for Carolingian Francia as described in the *Royal Frankish Annals*; Janet L. Nelson, "Violence in the Carolingian World and the Ritualization of Ninth-Century Warfare," *Violence and Society in the Early Medieval West*, edited by Guy Halsall (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1998), 90.

control the social order. It forced Anglo-Saxons to consider the consequences of their actions and could force the peaceful settlement of dispute. State-oriented justice did not result from the growth of rationality or the emergence of new methods of proof, but as a consequence of the growing power of centralized kingship and new hierarchical options for enforced dispute resolution. The growth of elite or royal control over dispute resolution reflects a cultural shift, as Mediterranean Christian culture, imported to England via Francia, conflicted with the Germanic notions of bloodfeud.

Additionally, feud was central to the expansion of political authority by Anglo-Saxon kings and simultaneously part of a larger cultural change. As kings adopted Christianity in part to provide themselves with greater political power, the old methods of control and social organization became restricted. With power no longer based primarily on kin and social organization but rather on the ideology of kingship and royal authority, kings began to rein in the violence of their subjects in an effort to solidify their power further, as demonstrated in Chapters 3 through 6. The increased level of control over violence coincided with the growing power of kings, and kings increasingly became involved in dispute resolution. The Church was instrumental in this expansion of power, as it provided kings not only with authority, but with such new means for exercising that authority as written law. In all these ways, feud played a significant role in the social and political development of Anglo-Saxon England and merits close study.

CHAPTER II

FEUD IN ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

Determining the nature of feud has been a contentious issue among historians in recent years. This debate goes to the heart of one's conceptions of the early Middle Ages: whether the period was one of inherent violence and barbarism in comparison to earlier or later periods. Although this era has often been characterized as a violent one,[1] some recent historians dispute this view and dismiss it as pointless, and claim that the period should be studied on its own terms. One such scholar is Guy Halsall, who in an effort to breathe new life into early medieval studies, has gone so far as to state that early medieval retaliatory violence was not feud and that words such as *faida*, *faithu*, and *faehthe* refer not to true feud, at least in the anthropological sense, but simply to acts of vengeance. For Halsall, these terms refer only to the vengeance enacted after the commission of a hostile act, not to an ongoing relationship between parties. "In most early medieval vengeance killing, the violence is tactical, and, provided that it is conducted according to the accepted norms, it terminates the dispute."[2] True feud, according to Halsall, consists of continuous retaliatory acts of violence, with each retaliation legitimized by the previous act. This reciprocal violence creates an ongoing relationship of hostility, which Halsall states was not present in early medieval vengeance killing.[3] While I agree with his attempts to

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1. Medieval and modern historians of the early twentieth century often characterized the era as violent, including Johan Huizinga, Marc Bloch, and Georges Duby. Warren C. Brown, *Violence in Medieval Europe* (Harlow: Longman, 2011), 3.

2. Guy Halsall, "Reflections on Early Medieval Violence: The Example of the Blood Feud," *Memoria y Civilización: Annuario de Historia* 2 (1999): 12.

3. Halsall, "Reflections on Early Medieval Violence," 7-12.

discredit those who contemptuously dismiss the early Middle Ages as an era of barbarism, his statement that words such as *faehthe* (OE *fæhð* or *fæhþ*) do not refer to feud as a ongoing relationship of hostility between two parties is certainly worth investigation.

In order to determine whether *fæhð* refers to feud as defined in Chapter 1 or simply to acts of vengeance, one must look for the word *fæhð* in the documentary record.[4] In Chapter 1,[5] I laid out four criteria for determining whether the word *fæhð* refers to feud or vengeance. As discussed there, in order for these words to mean feud rather than vengeance, they must refer to all of the following:

1. Injury, often violent

2. Retaliation for this injury

3. Involvement of larger social groups

4. An ongoing hostile relationship between two parties, marked by reciprocal acts of retaliation

While other elements may be used to describe feud, these criteria should suffice to determine whether *fæhð* meant feud or vengeance. For an incident to be vengeance, only the first two criteria must be met, although the third may be present. Feud must consist of all four, however, to differentiate it from vengeance. It is, in fact, that last criterion – an ongoing hostile relationship between parties to a dispute – that characterizes *fæhð* as feud and that is the most difficult to find

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4. Old English dictionaries do not even agree on the term. Bosworth and Toller define *fæhð* as "feud, vengeance, enmity, hostility, deadly feud, that enmity which the relations of the deceased waged against the kindred of the murderer." Clark-Hall defines *fæhð* as "hostility, enmity, violence, revenge, vendetta." Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1921), 264, bosworthtoller.com; J.R. Clark-Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 4th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press , 1960; reprint Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 109.

5. Page 8.

in the sources. Vengeance is thus a single act of revenge, while a feud must consist of multiple acts committed in retaliation by opposing parties.

In order to find the word *fæhð* in the body of Old English writing, I conducted a search of the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus*, a database which allows the user to search for words and phrases in the entire body of Old English writing.[6] A simple search of the term *fæhð* returned 54 matches; 22 of them occurred in *Beowulf*; 16 occurred in legal texts; 4 entries were in the poetic version of *Genesis* in the Junius manuscript; and all 10 other sources in which the word *fæhð* appeared only contained 1 or 2 instances of the word. The search included both inflected forms and words which contained *fæhð*, such as *fæhðe*, *unfæhða*, *werfæhðe*, and *fæhðbote*.[7] A similar search of the alternate spelling, *fæhþ*, returned 13 matches: 3 found in the *Christ* poems; 3 in the laws of Edmund and Cnut; 2 in the Old English version of Orosius's *Historia Adversum Paganos Libri Septem*; and single instances in 5 other poems in the Exeter Book.[8] I also checked other potential variants, such as *fehð* and *fehþ*, but these searches did not return words related to *fæhð*.[9] With this data in mind, I decided to begin with those sources where the terms *fæhð* and *fæhþ* appeared most often, the legal compilations and *Beowulf*, in order to determine whether these

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6. "The Old English Corpus in Machine-Readable Form," *The Dictionary of Old English Corpus*, ed. Antonette di Paolo Healey, http://quod.lib.umich.edu.libproxy.library.wmich.edu/o/oec/moreoec.html (accessed June 17, 2008).

7. *The Dictionary of Old English Corpus*, ed. Antonette di Paolo Healey, s.v. "*fæhð*," http://quod.lib.umich.edu.libproxy.library.wmich.edu/cgi/o/oec/ (accessed June 17, 2008).*The Dictionary of Old English Corpus*, ed. Antonette di Paolo Healey, s.v. "*fæhþ*," http://quod.lib.umich.edu.libproxy.library.wmich.edu/cgi/o/oec/ (accessed June 17, 2008).

8. *The Dictionary of Old English Corpus*, ed. Antonette di Paolo Healey, s.v. "*fæhþ*," http://quod.lib.umich.edu.libproxy.library.wmich.edu/cgi/o/oec/ (accessed June 17, 2008).

9. *Fehð* is a conjugated form of the verb *gefon*, meaning to take, seize, or catch. *The Dictionary of Old English Corpus*, ed. Antonette di Paolo Healey, s.v. "*fehþ*," http://quod.lib.umich.edu.libproxy.library.wmich.edu/cgi/o/oec/ (accessed June 17, 2008); Bosworth and Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 393.

terms referred to feud or vengeance, and thereby determine whether the word *fæhð* met my

criteria for feud in the early medieval period.

Legal Texts

The first laws which used the term *fæhð* are those of Ine, king of the West Saxons from

688 to 726, who probably issued his compilation before 694.[10] Patrick Wormald describes the

law as "'feud-centered' law in that its primary concern is compensation of injured by injuring

party,"[11] and the legal compilation in fact directly addressed *fæhð* on several occasions. The term

or its variations occur in four laws in Ine's compilation, and concern such procedural matters as

limiting occasions when individuals could retaliate for a prior wrong. For example, §28 protects

captors of thieves from revenge at the hands of the thief's kin. *Se ðeof gefehð, ah X scillinga, ꝥ*

se cyning ðone ðeof; ꝥ þa mægas him swerian aðas unfæhða.[12] ("He who captures a thief, let him

get 10 shillings, and the king shall obtain the thief, and the kin shall swear oaths to abstain from

prosecuting the feud").[13] This law fulfills our first three criteria: an injury (in this case a theft),

retaliation for that injury (the possibility that the kin of the injured party may avenge the injury),

and the involvement of larger social groups (the kin). It does not necessarily meet the fourth

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10. *Ine* 28, 46.2, 54, 74.2; edited by F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen,* vol. 1, *Text und Übersetzung* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1903), 100, 110, 112, 122; James Campbell, ed. *The Anglo-Saxons* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 103; F. L. Attenborough, *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922; reprint Felinfach, Wales: Llanerch Publishers, 2000), 34.

11. Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 105.

12. *Ine*, 28; 100; Bosworth and Toller translate *unfæhð* as "absence of hostility," but also elaborate further: "the word refers to the abstention from the prosecuting of the feud, which under certain conditions it would be allowable for the kinsmen of a man to follow up." Bosworth and Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary,* 1103.

13. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

criterion. The word *unfaehð* could mean "peace"[14] or "absence of hostility"[15] in terms of

abstaining from feud, but does not indicate what the nature of *fæhð* might have been. That is,

while the law may prohibit a lasting hostility, it does not clarify whether a lasting hostile

relationship previously existed between two parties. The kinsman of the thief might simply have

been swearing oaths not to commit a single act of vengeance instead of swearing not to engage in

feud. The law does not specify, presumably because the parties to the dispute would have

understood what was meant.

    Other laws in Ine's compilation reveal similarly little about whether *fæhð* indicated an

ongoing animosity or simply a single act of vengeance. For example, a freeman whose kinsman

was a slave was not obligated to help pay the enslaved kinsman's compensation. *Ne þearf se*

frige mid þam þeowan mæg gieldan, buton he him wille fæhðe of aceapian, ne se þeowa mid þy

frigean.[16] ("The free kinsman need not pay for the slave, unless he wishes to buy him out of the

feud, nor the slave for the free.") Although this statement reveals some information about the

responsibilities of kinsmen in the *fæhð* – that members of a kinship group were normally

obligated to contribute to compensation payments of their free kin – it does little to elucidate

exactly whether *fæhð* described a lasting relationship of hostility or not.

    In addition to providing information on the role of kin in the feud, Ine's law also provided

ways to avoid participation. §46.2 allows a person to deny having slain another as part of a feud:

Ælc mon mot onsacan frymþe ꝺ werfæhðe, gif he mæg oððe dear.[17] ("Each man may dispute

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14. Clark-Hall, *Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 374.

15. Bosworth and Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary,* 1103.

16. *Ine* 74.2; 122.

17. *Ine* 46.2; 110.

harboring or slaying in pursuit of the feud if he may or dare.") In other words, it was possible for one accused of participating in a feud to deny his participation. The most noteworthy law in the collection, however, is §54, which further elaborates on the procedure for the accused to deny having participated in the feud by swearing an oath.

> *Se þe bið werfæhðe betogen ꝺ he onsacan wille þæs sleges mid aðe, þonne sceal bion on þære hyndenne an kyningæde be XXX hida, swa be gesiðcundum men swa be cierliscum, swa hwæþer swa hit sie.*[18]

> He who is accused of slaying as part of the feud and wishes to deny the slaying with an oath, then shall be in the community of one hundred men one man entitled to take an oath as a king's thegn at 30 hides, concerning men fit to rank as a thegn just as concerning peasants, whichever he may be.

In other words, the one accused of vengeance killing, whether thegn or ceorl, needed to have the support of a nobleman to deny culpability. The important term here is *werfæhð*, which appears to be a portmanteau of the words for 'feud' and 'compensation' (wergeld).[19] It might have meant "slaying in pursuit of the feud,"[20] "slaying in pursuit of vengeance,"[21] or simply "homicide."[22] The first two possibilities could imply an ongoing hostile relationship. That is, if a person killed another either as part of vengeance or as part of a feud, then he would be allowed to deny it to prevent further acts of revenge; this suggests that a lasting relationship of hostility could emerge from these killings. This interpretation is, however, rather tenuous, and depends on the translation of the single term *werfæhð*. In Ine's law, therefore, there seems to have been an effort to restrict the outbreak of feud by protecting captors of thieves from feud and by allowing those

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18. *Ine*, 54; 112-4.

19. Bosworth and Toller note that *wer* and *wergild* are "interchangeable." Bosworth and Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 1205.

20. Bosworth and Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 1206.

21. If we render *fæhð* as "vengeance."

22. Attenborough, *Laws of the Earliest English Kings,* 62.

accused of actions that could cause a feud to deny such actions. The term *fæhð* in the

compilation, however, could simply mean "vengeance," as there is no strong indication of an

ongoing hostile relationship between two parties. Ine's laws support three of our four criteria –

violent injury, retaliation, and the involvement of larger social groups – but does not conclusively

prove that *fæhð* referred to a relationship of hostility that lasted beyond the first retaliation.

The laws of Alfred, king of the West Saxons from 871 to 899, similarly attempted to limit

fæhð by placing stricter rules on the timing of retaliation. In fact, some historians have argued

that Alfred was the first king to show a serious interest in feud.[23] Alfred had no need to restate

the procedure for proclaiming an oath denying *werfæhð* or other actions related to feud, as Ine's

law remained in effect after the promulgation of Alfred's own later laws. In fact, Alfred

presented his own legal compilation as an elaboration of earlier West Saxon law. Both Ine's and

Alfred's laws were contained in the same manuscript, with the former as an appendix to the

latter.[24] Like Ine, Alfred included several laws on feud/vengeance, including a section entitled *Be*

fæhðum, concerning feud.[25] This law elaborates on certain procedures one is to carry out when

seeking vengeance. For example, if a vengeance seeker finds the person upon whom he wished to

exact revenge in his home, then the seeker had to demand justice before attacking.[26] If the seeker

had the ability to forcefully enter the home, he was obliged to wait seven days, and, if it was

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23. Thomas Lambert, "Protection, Feud, and Royal Power: Violence and its Regulation in English Law, c.850-c.1250" (PhD diss., Durham University, 2009), 118.

24. Attenborough, *Laws of the Earliest English Kings,* 35.

25. *Textus Roffensis*, 9v; Strood, Medway Archive and Local Studies Centre, MS DRc/R1 (Textus Roffensis), fos. 9r-24v, http://www.earlyenglishlaws.ac.uk/laws/manuscripts/h/?nb=100&tp=ob.

26. *Alfred*, 42; edited by F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen,* vol. 1, *Text und Übersetzung* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1903), 74.

offered, accept the submission of the man against whom he sought revenge.[27] If the seeker could not enter the house, he was obligated to seek the aid of the ealdorman.[28] Also, if the avenger happened upon his adversary outside his home, the avenger was required to give the man an opportunity to surrender.[29] In all these cases, if the adversary submitted and turned over his weapons, the avenger had a right to hold him for thirty days while demanding compensation from the captive's kin.[30] §42 furthermore states certain actions for which a man could not be held liable of vengeance, using the term *orwige*, meaning "not liable to a charge of homicide."[31] These actions included fighting for one's lord,[32] fighting for one's kin if that kinsman was unjustly attacked (unless required to fight against one's own lord),[33] and killing a man he caught in bed with his wife, daughter, or mother.[34] These laws not only protected the king's army and the man who found his wife, daughter, or mother in illicit sexual acts, but also those taking legitimate revenge. In these laws, we see only single acts of vengeance, not a lasting relationship of hostility. Alfred's laws, similar to those of Ine, do not provide sufficient proof that *fæhð* fulfills our four criteria for feud.

On the other hand, there is one clause in Alfred's law which implies a tit-for-tat relationship between two parties. §42, noted above, provided consequences when someone found

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27. *Alfred*, 42.1; 74.

28. *Alfred*, 42.3; 76.

29. *Alfred*, 42.4; 76.

30. *Alfred*, 42-42.7; 74-76.

31. Bosworth and Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 768.

32. *Alfred*, 42.4; 76.

33. *Alfred*, 42.5; 76.

34. *Alfred*, 42.6; 76.

an enemy in his own home by stating that the avenger must seek justice from the man in his

home before attacking him. §42.2 further states that the attacker may use violence against the

enemy in the home only if the enemy fails to surrender. It continues,

> *Gif he wille on hond gan ꝑ his wæpenu sellan, ꝑ hwa ofer ðæt on him feohte, gielde swa wer swa wunde swa he gewyrce, ꝑ wite ꝑ hæbbe his mæg forworht.*[35]

> If he will yield and surrender his weapons, and someone after that attacks him, let him pay for whatever he did, whether wergeld (if he killed him) or for wounds (if he wounded him), and pay a penalty, and he has forfeited his kin.

Should the attacker attempt violence on the enemy after the enemy had surrendered, not only was

the attacker liable for whatever injury he inflicted upon the enemy, but he also forfeits the

protection of his kin and is, therefore. outside the feud. If the attempted action on the part of the

attacker is vengeance for some earlier act which is not mentioned in the law, and if the retaliation

on the part of the attacker for that initial act terminated the dispute, according to Halsall's

argument, then the two parties would not be in a state of feud. In the clause concerning the kin,

however, the law implies that a lasting relationship of hostility could exist between these two

persons and their kinship groups because an avenger who did not follow the proper procedure

could forfeit the assistance of his kin. While the law could simply mean that the attacker could

not count on his kin to pay the wergeld or injury tariff that resulted from his attack, it could also

mean that the kin were not obligated to participate in a feud with the other's family because the

attacker had made an illegitimate attack.[36] This law thus clearly indicates the involvement of

larger social groups even as it seeks to limit the involvement of these groups. Furthermore, the

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35. *Alfred*, 42.4; 76.

36. Dorothy Whitelock, *The Beginnings of English Society* (Harmondsworth: Penguin books, 1952), 39-47.

law appears to be attempting to limit feud by allowing one party to a feud to surrender and bring

the feud to an end, thereby making continued attacks unlawful.

Alfred's laws provide further evidence of the existence of feud in Anglo-Saxon England.

Although §5 of his law collection does not specifically use the word *fæhð*, it does use the word

fahmon, meaning "object of a blood-feud"[37] or "man at feud"[38] and allows sanctuary for this

person. In the law, Alfred granted to every church *ðis frið: gif hie fahmon geirne oððe geærne,*

þæt hine seofan nihtum nan mon ut ne teo.[39] ("This security: if the man at feud gets to it [the

church] or reaches it by running or riding, that no man drag him out [of the church] for seven

nights.") Alfred §5 also states that the man involved in feud who sought sanctuary in a church

fell under the protection of the king so long as he remained there and did not come out to fight

for a week.[40] No one was allowed to give him food, and if he surrendered, his enemies could hold

him in custody for thirty days but had to notify his kin of his status.[41] This law worked in

conjunction with the provisions of §42, by which the captor could ransom the person who

surrendered as compensation for the initial injury.[42] In Alfred §42, *Be fæhðe*, after its discussion

of apprehending a man upon whom one wishes to exact vengeance, contains a clause that refers

to §5: *Gif he ðonne cirican geierne, sie ðonne be ðære cirican are, swa we ær bufan cwædon*.[43]

("If he then gets to a church, then the benefits of the church prevail, as stated above.") The man

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37. Clark-Hall, *Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 111.

38. Wormald, *Making of English* Law, 272.

39. *Alfred*, 5; 52.

40. *Alfred*, 5; 50.

41. *Alfred*, 5.2, 5.3; 52.

42. *Alfred*, 42.1; 74.

43. *Alfred*, 42.2; 76.

at feud may, therefore, enjoy the benefits of sanctuary when fleeing from those who would retaliate against him. The word *fahmon* itself has interesting implications, especially as this is the only occurrence of the word in Old English texts.[44] The main definition of "foeman" or "enemy"[45] in Bosworth and Toller's dictionary seems insufficient on the basis of this passage, but the supplement adds "exposed to the vengeance of a slain man's kin because of the murder," which is a good description of a man involved in a feud.[46] The word *fahmon* may also be related to *fah*, which has strong connotations of hostility between enemies, including the hostile relationship of parties at feud, but may also describe guilt, sin, or outlawry.[47] It thus becomes clear that *fahmon* specifically refers to a man at *fæhð*, not simply an enemy or a hostile foe. The law implied the involvement of larger social groups both through its prohibition on feeding the man in sanctuary and by its directive his kin be notified. The specific instructions – waiting a week, seeking ransom – further imply an ongoing relationship of hostility between two groups that could not be satisfied by a single act of revenge. Moreover, it seems more likely that a man involved in a feud would have a term attached to him than would a man merely fleeing vengeance, as there would be less reason to coin a specific term for a man fleeing revenge, a short-term status, than there would to coin a term for a person involved in feud.

Like Alfred's law, Edmund's second collection of laws, the entirety of which concerns feud and its limitations and prohibitions against it, elaborates on the procedure for carrying out

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44. The *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* has no listing for the term. Antonette di Paolo Healey, ed. *Dictionary of Old English Corpus*, 2004, http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doecorpus/, (4 April 2006), Search: *fahm*; Bosworth and Toller, 269; Clark-Hall, 111.

45. Bosworth and Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 269.

46. Bosworth and Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 269.

47. Bosworth and Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 269; Clark-Hall, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 111.

revenge.[48] In this text, however, Edmund (939-946) both exerted greater authority than his

predecessors and sought to prohibit feud.[49] In his preface, Edmund stated that he wished to

promote Christianity by maintaining peace and bringing an end to illegal violence.[50] §1, *Be*

manslihte[51] ("concerning manslaughter") is quite instructive on the feud/vengeance debate.

> *Gif hwa heonanforð ænigne man ofslea, þæt he wege sylf ða fæhðe, butan he hy mid freonda fylste binnan twelf monðum forgylde be fullan were, sy swa boren swa he sy .*[52]

> If henceforth anyone slay any man, let him bear the feud himself, unless with the aid of his friends he pays the full wergeld within twelve months, whatever his rank may be.

This law removes the responsibility of participation in the *fæhð* from the kinship group of the

killer, but not the responsibility for compensation. It suggests that an entire social group of

friends (*freonda*) would normally be involved in the vengeance undertaken by the victim's social

group. The law thus provides solid evidence of our third criterion. §1.1 corroborates this

conclusion.

> *Gyf hine ðonne seo mægð forlete ʒ him foregyldan nellen, ðonne wille ic þæt eal se mægð sy unfah, butan ðam hand[d]ædan, gif hy him syððan ne doð mete ne munde.*[53]

> If then the kin abandon him and refuse to pay for him (i.e., on his behalf), then I am willing that all the kin be exempt from hostility, except he who did it, if they give him neither food nor protection afterwards.

Although the kin may abandon a killer whom they do not wish to support, it is clear that the kin

is involved in *fæhð*. Concerning those kin who harbor the slayer after abandoning him,

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48. *II Edmund;* edited by F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen,* vol. 1, *Text und Übersetzung* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1903), 186-191.

49. Campbell, *Anglo-Saxons*, 168.

50. *II Edmund*, Prologue; 186.

51. *II Edmund*, 1; 186.

52. *II Edmund*, 1; 186.

53. *II Edmund*, 1.1; 186.

Gif ðonne syððan hwilc his maga hine feormie, ðonne beo he scylding ealles ðæs þe he age wið ðone cyning, ⁊ wege ða fæhðe wið ða mægðe, forðam hi hine forsocan ær.[54]

If then after a while his kin harbor him, then that kin will be liable for all he owns to the king, and bear the feud with the kin, because they forsook him earlier.

He who aids the slayer is thus responsible for the feud with the slayer and must forfeit all his property to the king as punishment.

Finally, the law concludes with an admonition to the kin of the slayer not to take vengeance upon those who have exempted themselves from the feud.

Gyf ðonne of ðære [oðre] mægðe hwa wrace do on ænigum oðrum men butan on ðam rihthanddædan, sy he gefah wið ðone cyning ⁊ wið ealle his frynd ⁊ ðolie ealles ðæs he age.[55]

If anyone from the other kin group take vengeance on any other man except the actual perpetrator, he shall be the enemy to the king and to all his friends and he shall forfeit all that he owns.

The first law in Edmund's compilation on feud, in stating that the kin of a slayer and the kin of the victim may become involved in acts of vengeance against each other, clearly fits the criteria of feud. A violent state of hostility exists between two groups, but there is no certainty regarding whether this state of hostility was an ongoing relationship or could be ended by a single act of vengeance.

Edmund's legal compilation includes a number of other laws which supported his directives against violent action. He reaffirmed that both the church and his court may provide sanctuary, and stated that no fine for fighting or wergeld will be cancelled.[56] Further, he states that no one who has failed to makes amends for a killing shall have access to the royal court, and

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54. *II Edmund*, 1.2; 186-8.

55. *II Edmund*, 1.3; 188.

56. *II Edmund*, 2-3; 188.

imposes a penalty of forfeiture of all property and possible death for violation of the king's

protection or for attacks on a man's house.[57] Finally, the last law in the compilation, *Be fæhðe*

(concerning feud) provides procedures for the paying of wergeld. It begins *Witan scylon fæhðe*

sectan[58] ("the witan[59] should settle feuds"), meaning individuals party to a feud were to hand over

the resolution of the dispute to official arbiters. This law became part of Edmund's larger

program by which he sought to increase his authority, in this case by gaining control over dispute

resolution.[60] The law then describes the procedure for wergeld payment, requiring an advocate to

transmit information between the slayer and the kin of the slain.[61]

> *Ðonne syððan gebyreð, þæt man sylle ðæs slagan forspecan on hand, þæt se slaga mote mid griðe nyr ꝺ sylf wæres weddian*.[62]
>
> After that it is incumbent upon the kin of the slain man to give security to the slayer's advocate, that he [the slayer] may approach under safe-conduct and pledge himself to pay the wergeld.[63]

Here the law prohibits the kin of the slain man from taking vengeance on the slayer. As we know,

however, a feud might begin with a single act of revenge for an initial hostile act, and lead to

further retaliation.[64] By preventing the first act of revenge, Edmund may have been attempting to

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57. *II Edmund*, 4, 6; 188.

58. *II Edmund*, 7; 188-90.

59. While the role of the witan has been controversial among historians, it was essentially a royal council. H.R. Loyn, *The Governance of Anglo-Saxon England, 500-1087* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), 96-106.

60. Wormald, *Making of English Law*, 310-2.

61. *II Edmund*, 7-7§3; 188-190.

62. *II Edmund*, 7.1; 190.

63. A.J. Robertson, *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925; reprint Felinfach, Wales: Llanerch Publishers, 2000), 11.

64. Paul Hyams, *Rancor and Reconciliation in Medieval England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 8-9.

prevent feud, thus allowing the witan to settle it with a less violent form of dispute resolution.

Moreover, Edmund's law provides the clearest evidence so far that *fæhð* consisted of an ongoing

hostile relationship, making it clear that kin groups were involved in exacting revenge.

Of Æthelred's laws, only the eighth compilation of ten, which concerns the legal matters

of clerics, uses the word *fæhðe*.[65] These laws were likely compiled in part by Archbishop

Wulfstan around 1014, near the end of Æthelred's reign.[66] The first instance of *fæhð* ensures that

the kin of a cleric will assist him in matters of feud.

> *And gif man gehadodne mid fæhðe belecge, ꝺ secge, þæt he wære dædbana oððe*
> *rædbana, ladige mid his magan, þe fæhðe moton mid beran oððe fore betan*.[67]

> And if someone charges an ordained man with feud, and declares that he was a murderer
> or accessory to murder, let him exculpate himself with his kin, who must bear the feud
> with him or compensate for it.

The next law in the compilation provides further evidence of kin involvement, stating that, if the

cleric has no kin, either his ecclesiastical brothers were to aid him or he was to undergo the

ordeal of consecrated wafer.[68] These laws must be viewed in conjunction with the others in the

same compilation that dealt with clergy and feud, this time with monks rather than the lay clergy.

> *And ne þearf ænig mynstermunuc ahwar mid rihte fæhðbote biddan ne fæhðbote betan:*
> *he gæð of his mæglage, þonne he gebihð to regollage* .[69]

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65. While Liebermann divided Æthelred's laws into ten separate codes, the relationships between legal compilations complicate the numbering. Since the law to which I am referring has traditionally been known as VIII Æthelred, I will follow convention for the sake of clarity. Wormald, *Making of English Law*, 320.

66. Wormald, *Making of English Law*, 336.

67. *VIII Æthelred*, 23; edited by F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen,* vol. 1, *Text und Übersetzung* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1903), 266.

68. *Corsnæd* was a type of ordeal in which the accused had to successfully swallow the Host or be found guilty. *VIII Æthelred*, 24; 266; Bosworth and Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 166.

69. *VIII Æthelred*, 25; 266.

> And any man living in a monastery anywhere need not require feud compensation nor pay feud compensation according to law: he goes from (being subject to) his kin-law when he turns to monastic law.

As noted previously, secular clergy were required to seek the aid of their kin or, lacking kin, their fellow ecclesiastics in cases where they were charged with *fæhð*. The larger social group that aids a man at *fæhð* need not necessarily be kin, but may include members of other groups as well.[70] Unlike the secular clergy, as noted in this law, monks were not permitted to participate in *fæhð*, as they were no longer subject to the law under which *fæhð* fell. Like Edmund's earlier laws, Æthelred's laws reaffirm the role of larger social groups in the prosecution of vengeance and feud, but they do not further clarify whether *fæhð* is an ongoing relationship between the two groups or merely an act of vengeance. The remaining instances of *fæhð* or *fæhþ* in the laws include an instance in Wulfstan's *Canons of Edgar* as part of a law that is essentially an earlier version of the above two laws.[71] Similarly, I Canute also includes the use of the word *fæhðe* in two instances, but these are simply copies of Æthelred's laws concerning clerics and vengeance.[72]

Therefore, in Anglo-Saxon laws, it is clear that the *fæhð* includes the involvement of kin or some other larger social group in acts of vengeance. The term refers to an act of vengeance which follows some violent injury and in which larger social groups are involved in retaliation. Thus, *fæhð* fits into our first three criteria with surety, and probably includes the fourth, the existence of an ongoing relationship. An argument based solely on the laws is somewhat weak,

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70. For more on the composition of these groups, see Hyams, *Rancor and Reconciliation*, 10, 21-33.

71. Wulfstan, *Canons of Edgar*, 68i; edited by Roger Fowler, *Wulfstan's Canons of Edgar* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 19.

72. *I Canute* 5.2b-5.2d; edited by F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen,* vol. 1, *Text und Übersetzung* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1903), 286.

however, as *fæhð* may simply refer to vengeance by social groups. Hence, we must look to other sources to determine whether all four criteria of feud may be found in the use of *fæhð/fæhþ*.

Beowulf

Beowulf contains substantial evidence for the existence of feud in Anglo-Saxon England, as it is the Old English source which includes the most instances of *fæhð/fæhþ*, and its main concern appears to be feud.[73] The poem shows less concern for the procedure involved in *fæhðe* than do the laws and instead focuses on the deeds of those involved in vengeance and feud. David Day, in his study of feud in *Beowulf*, notes that feuds play an important role in the poem, serving to both define relationships between groups and to portray the irony and tragedy of the characters.[74] In fact, there are numerous feuds in the poem, not only between Beowulf and the three creatures he fights, but also between individuals, such as the obscure reference to a feud in which Weohstan killed Onela's nephew, and feuds between peoples, such as that between the Geats and Swedes.[75] Although the poem is a work of fiction, it can provide evidence regarding how the Anglo-Saxons perceived the feud. As Stephen White notes, even historically unreliable stories about feuds in Merovingian Francia in the history of Gregory of Tours may provide insight into feud, because these stories were created in a cultural milieu that views feud in a particular way. Although the poem is a work of fiction, the culture in which the events take place reflects that of the author of *Beowulf*, and the poem is thus capable of revealing useful

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73. *The Dictionary of Old English Corpus*, ed. Antonette di Paolo Healey, s.v. "*fæhð*," http://quod.lib.umich.edu.libproxy.library.wmich.edu/cgi/o/oec/ (accessed June 17, 2008); *The Dictionary of Old English Corpus*, ed. Antonette di Paolo Healey, s.v. "*fæhþ*," http://quod.lib.umich.edu.libproxy.library.wmich.edu/cgi/o/oec/ (accessed June 17, 2008).

74. Day, "*Hwanan sio fæhð aras*," 77-95.

75. *Beowulf*, 2472-80, 2602-19; R.D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles,eds., *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 85, 89.

information about the culture in which it was composed.[76] It thus reflects the cultural mentalités

of the Anglo-Saxon society in which the poem was written.[77]

The word *fæhð* describes numerous conflicts in *Beowulf*, which fit our four criteria for

feud. The first use of *fæhð* in the poem is in the description of the conflict between God and the

kin of Cain, in which God avenged the murder of Abel by exiling Cain. God struggled with

Cain's offspring, including Grendel, continuously after the initial retaliation by which God

expelled Cain for the murder of his brother Abel. The poem introduces Grendel by establishing a

connection between him and Cain's kin.

> . . . .   *fifelcynnes eard*
> *wonsæli wer*   *weardode hwile,*
> *siþðan him scyppend*   *forscrifen hæfde*
> *in Caines cynne.*   *þone cwealm gewræc*
> *ece drihten,*   *þæs þe he Abel slog;*
> *ne gefeah he þære fæhðe,*   *ac he hine feor forwræc,*
> *metod for þy mane,*   *mancynne fram.*
> *þanon untydras*   *ealle onwocon,*
> *eotenas ond ylfe*   *ond orcneas,*
> *swylce gigantas,*   *þa wið gode wunnon*
> *lange þrage;*[78]

> . . . .   The monster race's dwelling
> the wretched creature   guarded a while
> after the Creator   had condemned him

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76. Stephen White, "Clotild's Revenge: Politics, Kinship, and Ideology in the Merovingian Blood Feud," *Portraits of Medieval and Renaissance Living*, ed. Samuel K. Cohn and Steven A. Epstein (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), 128.

77. While the date of *Beowulf* is not directly relevant to this study, it is worth noting that most scholars who chose to address the issue favor an early date of composition, from the middle of the seventh century to the early eighth century, which places the origins of the poem directly in the Conversion Period (c.597-c.730) discussed in subsequent chapters. While there is a lack of consensus about the dating of the poem, the possibility that its composition was contemporary to the Conversion Period, that it describes events that would have taken place during the Migration Period (c.400-c.597, see Chapter 3), and the fact that the poem is about feud suggest its direct relevance to this study of feud. Even if the poem were composed later than the Conversion Period, it suggests some sort of continuity of these mentalités regarding feud. For more in the dating of the poem, see Leonard Niedorf, "Introduction," *The Dating of Beowulf: A Reassessment*, edited by Leonard Niedorf (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2014), 1-18.

78. *Beowulf*, 104-114; 6-7.

among Cain's kin.	Eternal God
avenged the death	because he slew Abel;
he did not rejoice in the feud,	but God banished him
far from mankind	for the crime.
From him	all the evil brood arose,
ettins and elves	and evil monsters,
also giants,	who struggled against God
for a long time.	

This episode fulfills all four criteria required for feud as defined above:[79] violent injury (the murder of Abel); retaliation (the banishment of Cain); the involvement of larger social groups (the race of monsters); and an ongoing relationship (monsters struggling against God for a long time). Thus, according to the poem, all monsters descended from Cain are engaged in a feud with God, which began with Cain's murder of his brother Abel. In fact, when he fights against Grendel, Beowulf can be said to fall within God's larger social group, or kinship group, in this feud.[80] The description of this conflict thus provides evidence that, when using the word *fæhð*, the Anglo-Saxons were describing a type of relationship that fit the four criteria for feud outlined above.

Furthermore, the *Beowulf*-poet describes Grendel's attacks as feud, even before Beowulf begins to retaliate, implying that a state of feud could exist even before retaliation occurred. *Næs hit lengra fyrst, / ac ymb ane niht / eft gefremede / morðbeala mare / ond no mearn fore, / fæhðe ond fyrene.*[81] ("There was not a longer time, / but about one night / advanced after he performed / more of murder / and he did not mourn for it, / for feuds and wicked deeds.") In this instance, the *Beowulf* poem appears to conflict with our second criterion by referring to one-sided attacks as feud. One must remember, however, that these attacks were vengeance on the part of Grendel for

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79. See p. 41.

80. *Beowulf*, 710-90; 26-29.

81. *Beowulf*, 134-7; 7.

perceived slights committed by the inhabitants of Heorot. Further, if a state of feud represents a relationship of hostility, and does not merely describe acts of revenge, then one would expect the poet to use this term to describe the relationship between the two sides. The acts of revenge are a part of that relationship, which can exist even if one side is too weak to retaliate (which Hrothgar clearly is, which is why he relies upon Beowulf in the first place). The poem again describes the actions of Grendel in terms of feud, and also provides information about the conduct of feud.

. . . .	*Forðam secgum wearð,*
ylda bearnum,	*undyrne cuð,*
gyddum geomore,	*þætte Grendel wan*
hwile wið Hroþgar,	*heteniðas wæg,*
fyrene ond fæhðe	*fela missera,*
singale sæce,	*sibbe ne wolde*
wið manna hwone	*mægenes Deniga,*
feorhbealo feorran,	*fea þingian,*
ne þær nænig witena	*wenan þorfte*
beorhtre bote	*to banan folmum,*[82]

. . . .	Therefore it came to be among men
children of men,	in an unhidden well-known
sad song	that Grendel fought
a while with Hrothgar,	he carried on enmitites,
wicked deed and feud	many miseries,
continual strife	he did not want peace
with any of men	of the Danish kin,
to withdraw from deadly evil,	to settle with payment,
none of the councillors there	had any need to hope for
bright compensation	from the hands of the slayer.

Although the violent relationship between Grendel and Hrothgar and his men lacks reciprocity prior to the arrival of Beowulf and his men, it is still described as *fæhð*, albeit an unbalanced one because of Hrothgar's inability to retaliate satisfactorily. Again, the poem is describing a state of hostility between the two parties, not an act of revenge. In this case, *fæhð* probably cannot mean vengeance, as the only things Grendel has avenge are perhaps the noisiness and merriment of

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82. *Beowulf*, 149-58; 8.

Heorot, for which he opened the state of hostilities between the two parties.[83] Furthermore, while the poem implies that feuds could, under normal circumstances, be settled by compensation, the men of Hrothgar could not expect any form of wergeld from Grendel because he did not want to end the conflict, but only to satisfy his bloodlust. Historians of feud agree that it can be ended by settlement, but Grendel clearly did not desire peace.[84]

Further evidence from *Beowulf* implies that *fæhð* refers to feud as an ongoing relationship of reciprocal retaliation rather than a single vengeful act. According to Halsall, in true feud, acts of violence are used to bring attention to the feud and to marshal the support of one's kinship group. In claiming that early medieval vengeance killing did not constitute true feud, he alleges that retaliation settled disputes in this period, because once vengeance was taken, disputes came to an end.[85] The evidence from *Beowulf* does not support his case. The dispute between Hrothgar and Grendel does not end when the Danes exact their vengeance by killing Grendel. Rather, Grendel's mother continues the feud by exacting her own revenge on those who killed her son. *Heo þa fæhðe wræc þe þu gystran niht Grendel cwealdest*.[86] ("She avenged the feud on you who killed Grendel last night.") Hrothgar continues his speech, again referring to the relationship between Grendel's mother and his men as a feud.

> . . . .   *He æt wige gecrang*
> *ealdres scyldig,*   *ond nu oþer cwom*
> *mihtig manscaða,*   *wolde hyre mæg wrecan,*
> *ge feor hafað*   *fæhðe gestæled*.[87]

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83. *Beowulf*, 87-8; 6.

84. Hyams, *Rancor and Reconcilation*, 8-9; Wallace-Hadrill, "Bloodfeud of the Franks," 122-3.

85. Halsall, "Reflections on Early Medieval Violence," 11-2.

86. *Beowulf*, 1333-4; 46.

87. *Beowulf*, 1337-40; 46-7.

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. . . .                          He fell at battle,
having forfeited life,           and now another
mighty wicked ravager came,      she would avenge her kin
and has further                  carried on the feud.
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Grendel, for participating in the feud, became subject to Hrothgar's right to retaliate, thereby, according to Hrothgar, forfeiting his life. Grendel's mother sought to avenge the death of her son according to the same rights. Hrothgar then asked Beowulf to avenge the death of his follower Æschere in further retaliation for Grendel's mother's act of revenge. The king offered rewards to Beowulf for avenging his man, stating *Ic þe þa fæhðe feo leanige*[88] ("for the feud I would reward you with wealth"). This offer brought Beowulf into a relationship of reciprocal acts of violence committed for the sake of avenging a previous retaliation. The relationship is cemented when Beowulf, who *nalas for fæhðe mearn*[89] ("did not at all mourn for the feud"), finds Grendel's mother and kills her. The conflict between these two parties did not end with a single act of vengeance, but only with the complete destruction of one of the parties, which is a theme common throughout the poem. The feud between the Danes and Beowulf against Grendel and his mother thus fulfills all four of our criteria – violent injury, retaliation for the injury, the involvement of larger social groups, and a hostile relationship between the two groups marked by reciprocal acts of vengeance – making it clear that *fæhð* in these instances refers to feud, not vengeance.

Beowulf contains further evidence that *fæhð* consisted of lasting relationships of hostility between two groups marked by tit-for-tat retaliation for violent injuries. The poem treats the issue between the Geats and the dragon similarly to that between the Danes and Grendel. When

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88. *Beowulf*, 1380-2; 48.

89. *Beowulf*, 1537-40; 53.

Beowulf learned of the reason for the dragon's attack, the poem notes that *Hæfde þa gefrunen hwanan sio fæhð aras*,[90] ("he had heard then from whence the feud arose"). When Beowulf declared his intentions to retaliate against the dragon, he states, *ic wylle. . . fæhðe secan*[91] ("I wish to seek feud"). When Beowulf fought the dragon, the latter is also motivated by feud, and is *fæhða gemyndig* ("mindful of feud.").[92] Although the dragon killed Beowulf, ultimately *sio fæhð gewearð gewrecen wraðlice*[93] ("the feud was wrathfully avenged") when the dragon died at the hands of the great king. The second and third uses of the term *fæhð* described in this paragraph could simply refer to vengeance, in that Beowulf could have sought vengeance against the dragon and could have had vengeance in mind when he fought the beast. The first and last instances, however, imply a lasting relationship of reciprocal hostility between two parties. The theft of a cup, which caused the feud between the dragon and the Geats, would not cause a state of vengeance to arise, as vengeance is not really a state of existence, but simply an action. On the other hand, feud is a state of existence, defined by a hostile relationship between two parties. This state of existence only comes to an end once Beowulf retaliates against the retaliation of the dragon, concluding a lasting relationship of tit-for-tat vengeance.

Other feuds in *Beowulf* which involve people on both sides of the conflict rather than dragons or the race of monsters shed further light on the meaning of the word *fæhð*. For instance, in another of his speeches, Hrothgar describes a feud involving Beowulf's father, who caused the *fæhðe mæste*[94] ("greatest feud") by slaying Heatholaf of the Wilfings. Hrothgar later had to settle

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90. *Beowulf*, 2403; 82

91. *Beowulf*, 2512-3; 86.

92. *Beowulf*, 2689; 92.

93. *Beowulf*, 3061-2; 104.

94. *Beowulf*, 459; 18.

the feud, *þa fæhðe feo þingode*[95] ("I settled the feud with treasure"), with a payment to the

Wilfings. Hrothgar may simply be paying off the Wilfings to prevent vengeance, instead of

settling a feud, and this payment may thus simply be a matter of compensation. Unfortunately,

the poem does not mention reciprocal acts of vengeance between parties of people, only a state of

feud that Hrothgar ends through compensation.

Some of the incidents of *fæhð* in the poem can more rightly be described as wars, as they

take place between two societies, which David Day claims is the distinction between feud and

war.[96]

> *Þa wæs synn ond sacu*   *Sweona ond Geata*
> *ofer wid wæter*   *wroht gemæne,*
> *herenið hearda,*   *syððan Hreðel swealt,*
> *oððe him Ongenðeowes*   *eaferan wæran*
> *frome fyrdhwate,*   *freode ne woldon*
> *ofer heafo healdan;*   *ac ymb Hreosnabeorh*
> *eatolne inwitscear*   *oft gefremedon.*
> *Þæt mægwine*   *mine gewræcan,*
> *fæhdðe ond fyrene,*[97]

> Then was injury and strife   of Swedes and Geats
> over wide water   enmity held in common,
> violent warfare   after Hrethel died,
> and to him Ongentheow's   heirs were
> warlike and brave,   they did not wish friendship
> to hold over the sea;   but near Hreosnabeorh
> terrible murderous attack   they often performed.
> That friendly kinsmen   of mine avenged
> feud and wicked deed,

On the other hand, societies may fall into the category of a social group bound to exact

vengeance for an injury committed against one of its members. Although the poem may not

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95. *Beowulf*, 470; 18.

96. Day, "*Hwanan Sio Fæhð Aras*," 77-95.

97. *Beowulf*, 2472-80; 85.

clearly distinguish between feud and war, these conflicts described as feud fit our four criteria.[98]

This war is certainly an ongoing relationship, to be awakened upon the death of Beowulf.

> *Þæt ys sio fæhðo*   *ond se feondscipe,*
> *wælnið wera,*   *ðæs ðe ic (wen) hafo,*
> *þe us seceað to*   *Sweona leoda,*
> *syððan hie gefricgeað*   *frean userne*
> *ealdorleasne.*[99]

> That is the feud   and the enmity
> deadly hostility of men,   for which I have expectation,
> the Swedish men   will attack us,
> after they learn   our lord
> lies lifeless.

There is some ambiguity about the use of the term *fæhð* in *Beowulf* for those who like to distinguish between feud and war based on scale, so that conceptions of feud may extend beyond the proposed four criteria. The imagery of feud is so pervasive in the poem, however, that wars could be described as such.[100] It is clear that, for the *Beowulf*-poet, feud had a broad meaning. Other sections of *Beowulf* provide additional data about the Anglo-Saxon conception of feud. The possibility of settling feud through marriage is raised when Hrothgar agreed to let his daughter marry, Ingeld, a son of Froda of the Heathobards, but provides little information with which to differentiate feud from vengeance.[101] The poem does suggest, however, that the settlement was unlikely to last, as one of the Danes wore a treasure which once belonged to the Heathobards, reminding them of their loss.[102] While a feud could be settled through a marriage,

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98. Day, "*Hwanan Sio Fæhð Aras*," 77-95.

99. *Beowulf*, 2999-3003; 102.

100. Day, "*Hwanan Sio Fæhð Aras*," 77-95.

101. *Beowulf*, 2024-9; 69; R.M. Liuzza, trans., *Beowulf* (Toronto: Broadview Literary Texts, 2000), 114.

102. *Beowulf*, 2029-38; 69.

the latent anger of the disputing parties coudl bring an end to the settlement and rekindle an old feud.

On the whole, the uses of the word *fæhð* in *Beowulf* fulfill our four criteria of feud: violent injury, as in the case of Grendel's attacks; continuing retaliation for this injury, as in Beowulf's attack on Grendel; the involvement of a larger social group, such as the Geats and Swedes; and a relationship of tit-for-tat retaliation, as is the case with all feuds in the poem. Therefore, in *Beowulf*, the use of the term *fæhð* signifies the existence of true feud in which two parties are involved in an ongoing relationship of hostility; it does not simply involve a retaliation which brings an end to a dispute, as Halsall argues.

Other Sources

Although instances of the word *fæhð* or *fæhþ* appear most often in *Beowulf* (22 instances) and in the Anglo-Saxon laws (19 instances), *fæhð* is also used in various other sources 16 times, while *fæhþ* appears 8 time in the Exeter Book and 2 times in the Old English translation of Orosius's *Historiarum adversum Paganos*. Unfortunately, not all these instances provide enough evidence to allow us to know whether they describe an ongoing relationship of hostility between two parties or a single an act of vengeance. For instance, *The Wife's Lament* is a poem in the Exeter Book in which the narrator bemoans having lost her lord, who has been driven away by a feud.[103] Similarly, in *The Husband's Message*, the author of the message laments having been driven away from his homeland.[104] The two poems may be related, but they reveal little

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103. *The Wife's Lament*, 1-26; edited by George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, *The Exeter Book* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 210-1.

104. *The Husband's Message*, 1-25; edited by George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, *The Exeter Book* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 225-6.

information about the respective feuds.[105] While it seems more likely that the respective exiles in

the two poems were driven away because of an ongoing feud than a single act of vengeance,

neither poem provides enough information to be certain. Other sources in which the term

fæhð/fæhþ appears provide little insight on the conduct of feud in Anglo-Saxon England or

whether the words refer to ongoing relationships of hostiility between parties. In Ælfric's homily

entitled "Dominica Pascae," the homilist states that Samson brought feud to the Philistines, but

does not reveal the specifics of that feud or sufficient information to determine what he meant

when he used the word.[106] In *Precepts*, one of numerous examples of Anglo-Saxon wisdom

poetry, a wise father tells his son that the fool rarely knows sorrow *nefne he fæhðe wite*[107]

("unless he knows feud"), suggesting that feud could bring tragedy, if not providing information

about feud itself. Even the Old English translation of Orosius's history attributed to Alfred's

court provides little information about the conduct of feud.

> *Se Themestocles gemyndgade Ionas þære ealdan fæhþe þe Xersis him to geworht hæfde, hu he hie mid forhergiunge ꝗ mid heora mæga slihtum on his geweald geniedde*.[108]

> Themistocles was mindful of the old feud which Xerxes had made against the Ionians, how he forced his power on them with devastation and with the slaughter of their kin.

Interestingly, the original text by Orosius makes no mention of this feud.[109] Alfred's translator

may have interpolated a story of feud in order to explain why the Ionians abandoned Xerxes in

105. Silvia Geremia, The Husband's Message *and* The Wife's Lament: *An Interpretation and Comparison* (Como, Pavia: Ibis, 2014), 21.

106. Ælfric, "Dominica Pascae, " 158-60; edited by Peter Clemoes, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series* (London: Oxford University Press, 1997), 305.

107. *Precepts*, 56; edited by George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, *The Exeter Book* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 142.

108. Orosius, *Historiae adversus paganos*, II.5; edited by Janet Bately, *The Old English Orosius* (London: Oxford University Press, 1980), 47.

109. Orosius, *Historiae adversus paganos*, II.10; edited by Henry Sweet, *King Alfred's Orosius* (London: Early English Text Society, 1883), 83.

favor of Themistocles.[110] In these sources, the use of the term *fæhð/fæhþ* provides little information regarding the meaning of the word and whether it refers to feud or vengeance, and there is simply not enough context to make the distinction.

While the isolated incidents of the terms mentioned above prove unable to clarify whether the Anglo-Saxons engaged in feud, many instances of *fæhð/fæhþ* may be taken together to describe a conflict between the forces of good and evil known as the Great Feud. This feud appears in numerous Old English poems, from verse translations of Biblical stories and versified hagiography to gnomic and heroic poetry. By examining these sources, there emerges a feud between God and Satan with their respective followers which fulfills our four criteria for feud. In some of these stories, such as *Beowulf*, the Great Feud appears as part of the cosmological background of the plot in which the actors participate as part of the feud between God and the Devil and serves to connect the Christian values of the audience with the pagan culture of that audience's past.[111] Other stories, such as *Genesis*, reveal the origins of this feud in which people with whom the audience is familiar, such as St. Guthlac, have directly participated. In Old English stories of the Great Feud, the Anglo-Saxons couch Christian stories in terms familiar to the warrior leadership of early England in part to make these ancient conflicts more meaningful to the medieval audience. In addition, these stories found in the Christian past reveal what the Anglo-Saxon peoples thought of the origins of feud, a type of relationship that exerted a great influence on their culture.

The origins of both human feud and the Great Feud may be found in the Old English poetic translation of *Genesis*, which contains 4 instances of the word *fæhð*. Composed perhaps as

110. Orosius, *Historiae adversus paganos*, II.5; 47.

111. Marijane Osborn, "The Great Feud: Scriptural History and Strife in *Beowulf*," *PMLA* 93 no. 5 (Oct. 1978), 973-81.

early as the eighth century, it is found in the Junius Manuscript. One of the four manuscripts

which include the bulk of Old English poetry, the manuscript was compiled by four unknown

authors at the end of the tenth century or the beginning of the eleventh.[112] The first three works in

the manuscript, including *Genesis*, were written in a single hand, and the other three compilers

were responsible for the last poem in the manuscript, *Christ and Satan*.[113] Taken in conjunction

with other sources, the *Genesis* poem presents the Anglo-Saxon conception of the origins of

human feud, beginning with Cain's murder of his brother Abel. Additionally, the poem itself

provides information about participants in a feud and their relation to kin. After God accuses

Cain of murdering his brother, Cain replies:

> *"Ne þearf ic ænigre*   *are wenan*
> *on woruld rice,*   *ac ic forworht hæbbe,*
> *heofona heahcyning,*   *hyldo þine,*
> *lufan and freode;*   *forþon ic lastas sceal*
> *wean on wenum*   *wide lecgan,*
> *hwone me gemitte*   *manscyldigne,*
> *se me feor oððe neah*   *fæhðe gemonige,*
> *broðorcwealmes.*   *Ic his blod ageat,*
> *dreor on eorðan.*   *Þu to dæge þissum*
> *ademest me fram duguðe*   *and adrifest from*
> *earde minum.*   *Me to aldorbanan*
> *weorðeð wraða sum.*   *Ic awyrged sceal,*
> *þeoden, of gesyhðe*   *þinre hweorfan."*
> *Him þa selfa oncwæð*   *sigora drihten:*
> *"Ne þearft ðu þe ondrædan*   *deaðes brogan,*
> *feorhcwealm nu giet,*   *þeah þu from scyle*
> *freomagum feor*   **fah** *gewitan.*
> *Gif þe monna hwelc*   *mundum sinum*
> *aldre beneoteð,*   *hine on cymeð*
> *æfter þære synne*   *seofonfeald wracu,*
> *wite æfter weorce."*[114]

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112. The others would be Exeter Book, Vercelli Book, and the Beowulf Manuscript.

113. George Philip Krapp, ed. *The Junius Manuscript* (New York: Columbian University Press, 1931), x.

114. Emphasis on *fah* is mine, for reference later. Genesis, 1023-43; ed. George Philip Krapp, *The Junius Manuscript* (New York: Columbian University Press, 1931), 33-4.

"I need not expect any grace
in the kingdom of the world, but I have been banished
from your grace, love, and protection
 Heaven's High King; forthwith I shall go
far and wide in expectation of misery,
whenever one meets guilty me,
near or far he shall remind me of the feud,
of my fratricide. I shed his blood,
blood on the earth. You from this day
judge me away from men and drive me from
my land. Some evil one will become
a life-destroyer to me. I shall be cursed,
Lord, to depart from your sight."
Then the Lord of Victory said to him,
"You need not fear the terror of death,
nor slaughter as yet, though you shall
depart, outlawed, far from kinsmen.
If any of men deprive you of life
with his own hands, sevenfold vengeance
will come on him for that injury,
as punishment in consequence of the deed."

In this passage, it appears that *fæhð* could be translated as either 'feud' or 'vengeance.' Here the term *fah* in line 1039 presents a challenge of interpretation, as it may be translated in a number of ways. Bosworth and Toller render the definition as "guilty, criminal, proscribed, outlawed, inimical, hostile," or "guilty of [wicked] deeds,"[115] but Clark-Hall adds the possibilities of "'foe,' enemy,"[116] or, most significantly, "party to a bloodfeud."[117] Taken alone outside of the context of the rest of the poem or the body of Anglo-Saxon literature, in this passage it would appear that *fæhð* here refers to vengeance, in this case Cain taking vengeance upon his brother Abel for some perceived wrong involving sacrifices to God. God preferred Abel's sacrifice, and would not even

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115. Bosworth and Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 269.

116. Clark-Hall, *Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 111.

117. Clark-Hall, *Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 111.

consider Cain's offering, leading to Cain's anger and the murder of his brother.[118] When

examined within the greater context of Anglo-Saxon literature and culture, however, it becomes

apparent that *fæhð* here represents the beginning of a feud that lasted well beyond God's

banishment of Cain and into the Anglo-Saxon period, and became part of the Great Feud.

For the Anglo-Saxons, this incident was the origin of feud and all strife among mankind.

Such a view may be seen in the gnomic poem *Maxims I*, a collection of miscellaneous aphorisms

found in the *Exeter Book*.[119] *Maxims I* states:

Wearð fæhþo fyra cynne,	*siþþan furþum swealg*
eorðe Abeles blode.	*Næs þæt andæge nið,*
of þam wrohtdropan	*wide gesprungon,*
micel mon ældum,	*monegum þeodum*
bealoblonden nið.	*Slog his broðor swæsne*
Cain, þone cwealm nerede;	*cuþ wæs wide siþþan,*
þæt ece nið ældum scod[120]	

Feud came to the race of men	after the earth
swallowed Abel's blood.	That enmity was not for one day,
but burst forth widely	from the criminal bloodshed,
a great wickedness to men,	to many nations
a pernicious affliction.	Cain slew his own
beloved brother, liberated death,	widely was it known afterwards,
that everlasting enmity scathed men.	

Cain's murder of his brother not only unleashed feud and enmity upon the world, but, as noted in

Beowulf and as discussed above, Cain was also responsible for siring the entire race of monsters.

Among that race was the enemy of Beowulf and Hrothgar, the monster Grendel.[121] This passage

not only sheds some light on the origins of the race of monsters, but also further enlightens the

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118. *Genesis*, 965-1001; 32-3.

119. George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, eds., *The Exeter Book* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), xlv-xlvii.

120. *Mazims I*, 192-8;

121. *Beowulf*, 105-114; 6-7.

use of the term *fah* in line 1039 of *Genesis*, as discussed on the previous page. Cain, having been forced by God from his kindred for engaging in violence against a member of said kindred, must wander the wilderness alone. Away from the protection of both God and kin, Cain created a new group, which happened to consist of all the monsters. That group feuded with God's group, including the race of men, and the feud between the Grendelkin and Hrothgar was an extension of that feud which had begun with the slaying of Abel. Taken together, these passages describe a feud which fulfills all four criteria: injury (the slaying of Abel), retaliation (Cain's exile), the involvement of larger social groups (the races of men and of monsters), and an ongoing state of hostility between those groups (the monsters fought against God "for a long time.")[122]

The Old English *Genesis* also relates the origins of the Great Feud, but does not use the term *fæhð* to describe it. The feud began with Lucifer's rebellion against God followed by God's punishment of Lucifer and Lucifer's vow of revenge. The story is the main theme of *Genesis B*, lines 235 to 851, which is generally regarded as an interpolation into the remainder of the poem, *Genesis A*, and a translation of an Old Saxon poem.[123] It begins with God's creation of the angels, including one angel whom God created to be more glorious than the others, but who refused to serve God, though He adored him. This angel, however, realized that his own power was immense and believed that he was able to challenge God. Wishing no longer to serve the Lord, he gathered an army to create a kingdom greater than his Creator's. Once God heard of the plot,

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122. *Beowulf*, 114; 5.

123. A.N. Doane, "The Transmission of *Genesis B*," *Anglo-Saxon England and the Continent*, ed. Hans Sauer and Joanna Story (Tempe: ACMRS, 2011), 63; Daniel Anzelark, ed., *Old Testament Narratives* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), xxiii-xiv.

however,he condemned the angel, to be known as Satan, and his followers to live as devils in

Hell.[124]

> *Acwæð hine þa fram his hyldo*   *and hine on helle wearp,*
> *on þa deopan dala,*   *þær he to deofle wearð,*
> *se feond mid his geferum eallum.*[125]

> He banished him then from His favor and cast him down into Hell,
> into the deep division   where he became a devil,
> the fiend with all his comrades.

In Hell, Satan and his fiends suffered severe punishment for their rebellion.[126] There, he became

the new master of Hell, but was not able to retaliate against God Himself.

> *cwæð se hehsta*   *hatan sceolde*
> *Satan siððan,*   *he hine þære sweartan helle*
> *grundes gyman,*   *nalles wið god winnan.*[127]

> The Supreme Lord stated   that he should afterward
> be called Satan,   that he was to take charge of
> the black hell of the abyss,   not at all to struggle with God.

In a speech to his followers, the new master of the abyss states that Adam had taken his place at

God's side as the most beloved of his creatures.

> . . . .   *"Þæt me is sorga mæst,*
> *þæt Adam sceal,*   *þe wæs of eorðan geworht,*
> *minne stronglican*   *stol behealdan,*
> *wesan him on wynne,*   *and we þis wite þolien,*
> *hearm on þisse helle."*[128]

> . . . .   "That is to me the greatest sorrow,
> that Adam,   who was wrought of earth,
> shall hold   my strong seat,

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124. *Genesis*, 246-346; 9-13.

125. *Genesis*, 304-6; 12.

126. *Genesis*, 322-47; 13-4.

127. *Genesis*, 345-6; 13.

128. *Genesis*, 364-8; 14.

be with Him in joy,   and we should suffer this punishment,
affliction in this hell."

Later in the same speech, he vows revenge against God through Adam.

. . . .   *"Hafað us god sylfa*
forswapen on þas sweartan mistas;   swa he us ne mæg ænige synne gestælan,
þæt we him on þam lande lað gefremedon,   he hæfð us þeah þæs leohtes bescyrede,
beworpen on ealra wita mæste.   Ne magon we þæs wrace gefremman,
geleanian him mid laðes wihte   þæt he us hafað þæs leohtes bescyrede.
He hæfð nu gemearcod anne middangeard,   þær he hæfð mon geworhtne
æfter his onlicnesse.   Mid þam he wile eft gesettan
heofona rice mid hluttrum saulum.   We þæs sculon hycgan georne,
þæt we on Adame,   gif we æfre mægen,
and on his eafrum swa some,   andran gebetan,
onwendan him þær willan sines,   gif we hit mægen wihte aþencan.
Ne gelyfe ic me nu þæs leohtes furðor þæs þe he him þenceð lange niotan,
þæs eades mid his engla cræfte.   Ne magon we þæt on aldre gewinnan,
þæt we mihtiges godes onweæcen.   Uton oðwendan hit nu monna bearnum,
þæt heofonrice, nu we his habban ne moton, gedon þæt hie his hyldo forlæten,
þæt hie þæt onwendon þæt he mid his worde bebead. Þonne weorð he him
          wrað on mode,
ahwet hie from his hyldo.   Þonne sculon hie þas helle secan
and þas grimman grundas.   Þonne moton we hie us to giongrum habban,
fira bearn on þissum fæstum clomme. Onginnað nu ymb þa fyrde þencean!"[129]

"God himself has swept us into these dark mists; though he could not accuse us of any sin, that we carried out any harm in that land, he has nevertheless cut us off from the light, cast us into the greatest of all tortures. We cannot carry out revenge for this, repay him with any harm at all, because he has cut us off from the light. Now he has surveyed a middle world, where he has created a man after his likeness, with whom afterward he desires to settle the kingdom of the heavens with pure souls. We must eagerly consider how we can make amends through Adam for our anger, if we ever can, and through his heirs as well, to pervert his desire there, if we can devise it in any way. I do not hope for that light for me any more, which he intends to enjoy with them forever, a blessedness with the power of his angels. Across the ages we cannot achieve it, that we might weaken the purpose of the mighty God. Let us now turn it away from the children of men, the kingdom of heaven, now that we cannot have it, bring it about that they abandon his favor, that they turn their back on what he commanded by his word. Then he will become angry with them in his mind, cast them away from his favor. Then they will have to seek

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129. *Genesis*, 390-408; 15-6.

out this hell and these awful abysses. Then we can have them as our underlings, the children of mine in these stiff chains. Let us begin now to plan this expedition!"[130]

Satan has now vowed to take vengeance against God by attacking members of His social group, Adam and all his children. Through *Genesis B*, we can therefore see the beginnings of a feud between two parties. Satan and his social group injured God through their rebellion, and God retaliated by condemning them to Hell. God replaced the brightest of angels with Adam as a member of his social group, and the condemned angel vowed to exact vengeance upon Adam and his descendants because he knew he could not directly attack God. We thus have an ongoing relationship of hostility between two parties, which, as we will see, is marked by reciprocal acts of vengeance.

The author of *Genesis* uses the word *fæhð* to describe the involvement of humans in this feud between God and the Devil. Following his vow to seek revenge against God by attacking Adam, Satan offers a high seat in his kingdom of Hell to any who could convince Adam and Eve to repudiate God's edicts, forcing Him to punish the two people and banish them from the Kingdom of Heaven. One of Satan's followers takes him up on the offer, transforms into a snake, and convinces Eve to eat the forbidden fruit from the tree of death (*deaðes beam*).[131] After Eve shares the fruit with Adam, God finds them hiding their nakedness. God asks Adam if they ate fruit from the tree from which he had forbidden them to eat, and Adam replies that Eve had given the fruit to him.[132] When questioned by God regarding the fruit, Eve responds:

> *"Me nædre beswac*   *and me neodlice*
> *to forsceape scyhte*   *and to scyldfrece,*

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130. Daniel Anzelark, trans., *Genesis*, *Old Testament Narratives* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 31-3.

131. *Genesis*, 646; 23.

132. *Genesis*, 409-897; 16-30.

> *fah wyrm þurh fægir word,*   *oðþæt ic fracoðlice*
> *feondræs gefremede,*   *fæhðe geworhte,*
> *and þa reafode,*   *swa hit riht ne wæs,*
> *beam on bearwe*   *and ða blæda æt."*[133]

> "The serpent deceived me   and eagerly urged
> me to evil deed   and to wicked craving,
> the hostile[134] worm through fair words, until I shamefully
> committed fiendish violence,   wrought feud,
> and then plundered,   just as it was not right,
> the tree in the grove   and ate the fruit."

In this instance, *fæhð* can be taken as "feud" simply because Eve has no reason to take vengeance against either the tree or the serpent. Instead, she is referring to the Great Feud, that conflict between God and the Devil in which Adam and Eve are on the side of God while the serpent is an agent of Satan. Furthermore, since this incident takes place before Cain unleashes feud upon mankind, it can only be the Great Feud to which she refers.

The third instance of the word *fæhð* in *Genesis* refers to God's vengeance against men for their wickedness. These instances may be interpreted as feud or as vengeance, depending on how closely one sticks to the "rules" of feud. According to the story, God forbade the descendants of Seth, Cain's brother whom God favored, to marry the descendants of Cain, who were condemned by God. In other words, what we have here is two groups of people: the descendants of Seth, and the descendants of Cain. As mentioned earlier, the Anglo-Saxons viewed the descendants of Cain as wicked, and the progenitor of that line as the one who unleashed feud upon the world. It is in this context that God decides to punish Seth's people for breaking his prohibition on intermarrying with that of Cain.

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133. *Genesis*, 897-902; 30.

134. Similar to the use of *fahmon*, *fah* may be translated as "party to a bloodfeud;" Clark-Hall, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 111.

Siððan hundtwelfig	*geteled rime*
wintra on worulde	*wræce bisgodon*
fæge þeoda,	*hwonne frea wolde*
on wærlogan	*wite settan*
and on deað slean	*dædum scyldige*
gigantmæcgas,	*gode unleofe,*
micle mansceaðan,	*metode laðe.*[135]

After one hundred twenty	winters in the world
reckoned by number	the doomed people
were afflicted by vengeance,	when the Ruler wished
to ordain punishment	upon the faithless
and to strike down in death	the sinful by deeds
sons of giants,	hated by God,
many sinners,	loathsome to the Lord.

When God tells Noah of the flood with which He plans to destroy the earth, He uses the word

fæhð to describe this punishment.

"Feowertig daga	*fæhðe ic wille*
on weras stælan	*and mid wægþreate*
æhta and agend	*eall acwellan*
þa beutan beoð	*earce bordum*
þonne sweart racu	*stigan onginneð."*[136]

"Forty days	I will
carry on feud against men	and with a deluge
destroy all possessions	and their owners
who are outside of	the planks of the ark
when dark clouds	begin to spring up."

These combined passages provide further support for the argument that *fæhð* included the

involvement of larger social groups. By intermarrying with Cain's kin, the descendants of Seth

have betrayed God's social group, and the Flood was His way of enforcing group discipline, a

necessary part of group cohesion. Similarly, the *Genesis* translator uses a word derived from

fæhð, *manfæhðu*, to describe the victims of the Flood. In this section, God

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135. *Genesis*, 1263-9; 40.

136. *Genesis*, 1351-5; 42.

> . . . .   wreah and ðeahte
> *manfæhðu bearn*   *middangeardes*
> *wonnan wæge,*   *wera eðelland;*
> *hof hergode,*   *hygeteonan wræc*
> *metod on monnum.*[137]

> . . . .   spread over and covered
> those of middle-earth   who were drowned by the deluge
> with dark water,   native land of men;
> devastated the dwelling   deliberately meted out
> vengeance upon humanity.

Bosworth and Toller render *manfæhðu* as "those who were drowned by the deluge," which fits the immediate context of the poem.[138] Moreover, this reading fits with the context of the Flood being an act within a larger feud, God's vengeance for straying from His social group. It thus seems clear that all these instances of the term *fæhð* in *Genesis* refer to the Great Feud, and that actions such as the Flood were instances of vengeance within this feud.

The story of the Great Feud in Anglo-Saxon literature continues in *Christ and Satan*, another poem from Junius 11. The poem is not based on a single source, but is rather an amalgamation of various stories, including the Harrowing of Hell by Christ.[139] The relevant part of the story begins with a description of Satan's Fall, in which, due to his pride, he and his followers were condemned from Heaven and were doomed to reside in Hell. Christ traveled to Hell in order to lead the souls of the mortals who resided there to Heaven.[140]

> *Hwearf þa to helle*   *hæleða bearnum,*
> *meotod þurh mihte;*   *wolde manna rim,*
> *fela þusenda,*   *forð gelædan*

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137. *Genesis* 1377-81; 43.

138. Bosworth and Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 667.

139. R.D. Fulk and Christopher M. Cain, *A History of Old English Literature* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 117-8.

140. *Christ and Satan*, 365-403; edited by George Philip Krapp, *The Junius Manuscript* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), 148.

up to eðla.   *Þa com engla sweg,*
dyne on dægred;   *hæfde drihten seolf*
feond oferfohten.   *Wæs seo fæhðe þa gyt*
open on uhtan,   *þa se egsa becom.*
Let þa up faran   *eadige sawle,*
Adames cyn. . .[141]

Through his might the Lord   departed to Hell
to the sons of men;   he wished to lead forth
a number of men,   many thousands,
up to their ancestral home.   Then came a clamor of angels,
resounded at dawn;   the Lord Himself had
vanquished the fiend.   The feud was then yet
manifest at daybreak,   when that horrible thing happened.
He then let the blessed souls   proceed up,
Adam's kin.

Christ led the souls of those deemed worthy, i.e., the members of his social group, back to Heaven after he defeated Satan. He protected members of his social group, Adam's kin, and defeated the leader of the opposing group.

The second passage in which *fæhð* appears in this poem is part of the author's description of the last Judgment in which God welcomes the righteous into Heaven and condemns the wicked to Hell. After being condemned, the sinful are dragged into the abyss by devils:

hu hie him on edwit   *oft asettað*
swarte suslbonan,   *stæleð feondas*
 fæhðe and firne,   *þær ðe hie freodrihten,*
 ecne anwaldan,   *oft forgeaton,*
þone þe hie him to hihte   *habban sceoldon.*[142]

how they, dark devils   often heap
scorn upon them,   the fiends carry on
feud and sin   where they have
often forgotten the Lord and Master, Eternal Sovereign,
when they should have had Him   as their hope.

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141. *Christ and Satan*, 398-406; 148.

142. *Christ and Satan*, 637-41; 155-6

The devils thus continue to carry on feud against those residing there, cutting them off from God.

The Great Feud did not end with the harrowing of Hell, however, and continued well into the Christian era. One story in which Christians participate in the Great Feud is *Andreas*, a hagiographical poem found in the Vercelli manuscript. The Vercelli book was compiled in England by a single scribe in the tenth century, but ultimately came to reside in the cathedral at Vercelli, Italy.[143] *Andreas* is the story of St. Andrew's mission to rescue St. Matthew from the cannibalistic Mermedonians and the aftermath of that incident. This story presents the Apostles as members of God's social group, thegns fighting on behalf of their lord. The poem opens

Hwæt! We gefrunan	*on fyrndagum*
twelfe under tunglum	*tireadige hæleð,*
þeodnes þegnas.	*No hira þrym alæg*
camprædenne	*þonne cumbol hneotan,*
syððan hie gedældon,	*swa him dryhten sylf,*
heofona heahcyning,	*hlyt getæhte.*
þæt wæron mære	*men ofer eorðan,*
frome folctogan	*ond fyrdhwate,*
rofe rincas,	*þonne rond ond hand*
on herefelda	*helm ealgodon,*
on meotudwange.	

Listen! We have heard	in days of yore
of twelve famous warriors	under the stars,
thegns of the Lord.	Their glory did not abandon them
in war, when	battle-standards collided,
after they were separated,	as the Lord himself,
Heaven's High King,	assigned their lot.
They were famous men	over the earth,
bold chieftains and brave	for campaigning,
noble warriors,	when shield and hand
defended the helmet	on the battlefield,
on the plain where the decrees of fate are executed.[144]	

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143. George Philip Krapp, editor, *The Vercelli Book* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), xi-xvi.

144. *Andreas*, 1-11; edited by George Philip Krapp, *The Vercelli Book* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), 3.

In this passage, the poet describes the twelve Apostles not only as thegns in the Lord's war band, but as successful warriors in that band. One of the main characters in the story, Matthew, is described as a member of this group of thegns: *Wæs Matheus sum*, ("Matthew was one of them").[145] The poet also describes the hero of the poem, Andrew, in similar fashion. In a conversation with God, who is disguised as a crewman on a ship, Andrew refers to himself and his men as "*We his þegnas*" ("We His thegns"),[146] with He in this case being "*an ece god*" ("the one eternal God").[147] God, disguised as a sailor, responds to Andrew by stating "*Gif ge syndon þegnas þæs þe þrym ahof ofer middangeard, swa ge me secgaþ . . . þonne ic eow mid gefean ferian will ofer brimstreamas*" ("If you are the thegns of He who raised his majesty over the earth, as you say to me. . . then I will ferry you over the sea with joy").[148] A few lines later, the poet also refers to Andrew as "*þegn þeodenhold*" ("a thegn loyal to his lord"),[149] and the poem mentions no other lord for the holy man than God. As a thegn of God, Andrew is a *æðelum cempan. . . anræd ellenweorces. . . gearo, guðe fram, to godes campe* (noble warrior. . . resolute of heroic deed. . . ready for the fight, for God's battle).[150] As seen in these passages, Andrew was a member of the social group that would engage in feud on behalf of God. This social group also includes all the Apostles, as mentioned in the beginning of the poem and noted above. Andrew and the Apostles are thus warriors fighting on behalf of God as part of the Great Feud.

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145. *Andreas*, 11; 3.

146. *Andreas*, 323; 12.

147. *Andreas*, 326; 12.

148. *Andreas*, 344-8; 12.

149. *Andreas*, 384; 13.

150. *Andreas*, 230-4; 9.

God instructed Andrew to enter the city and face the Mermedonians in order to free Matthew, promising that his enemies would not be able to kill him.[151]

Ða wæs gemyndig modgeþyldig,
beorn beaduwe heard, edoe in burh hraðe,
anræd oretta, elne gefyrðred,
maga mode rof, meotude getreowe,
stop on stræte, (stig wisode),
swa him nænig gumena ongitan ne mihte
synfulra geseon. Hæfde sigora weard
on þam wangstede wære betolden
leofne leodfruman mid lofe sinum.
Hafde þa se æðeling in geþrungen,
Cristes cempa, carcerne neh.
Geseh he hæðenra hloð ætgædere,
fore hlindura hyrdasstandan,
seofone ætsomne. Ealle swylt fornam,
druron domlease. Deaðres forfeng
hæleð heorodreorige. Ða se halga gebæd
bilwytne fæder, breostgehygdum
herede on hehðo heofoncyninges þrym,
godes dryhtendom. Duru sona onarn
þurh handhrine haliges gastes,
on þær in eode, elnes gemyndig,
hæl hildedeor. Hæðene swæfon,
dreore druncne, deaðwang rudon.[152]

Then the battle-bold man was thoughtful, his mind patient; the resolute warrior quickly went into the city, sustained by his courage, the hero brave in his mind, faithful to his creator. He walked along the street – the path guided him – so that none of the sinful men could perceive or see him. The guardian of victories had surrounded the people's beloved leader with his protection, his favor in that place. Then the noble man, Christ's warrior, hurried on near the prison; he saw a band of heathens, the guards, seven in all, standing together in front of the grated door. Destruction carried them all off; the inglorious ones perished. Death's onslaught seized the blood-drenched men. Then the saint prayed to the merciful Father; in his innermost thoughts he praised to the skies the heavenly king's glory, God's majesty. The door gave way immediately at the touch of the holy visitor's hand and he went in there, mindful of courage, the hero brave in battle. The heathens slept, drunk with blood; they reddened the field of death.[153]

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151. *Andreas*, 950-77; 29-30.

152. *Andreas* 981-1003; 30.

153. Mary Clayton, ed. and trans., *Old English Poems of Christ and His Saints* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 249-51.

In this passage, God protects His follower Andrew by preventing the Mermedonians from killing him. This section may be an attempt by the author to describe God in terms that the Anglo-Saxon audience could understand, i.e., that of a secular lord. The relationship between man and lord/Lord in *Andreas* may be compared to that in other Old English poetry, such as the relationship between the men of Cynewulf to their king in *Cynewulf and Cyneheard*.[154] These people trusted their lords to protect them in return for loyal service, and in this poem, God is doing just that. As loyal followers of God, these thegns would be expected to participate in feud on His behalf.

The poem does not only portray the holy saints as participants in the Great Feud, but the agents of the Devil also participate in this conflict. While Andrew and the Apostles serve as members of God's social group, demons and evil people fight on behalf of the ruler of Hell. When Matthew, an Apostle and thus a soldier of God, is trapped in the city, the poem depicts the inhabitants of that area, who want to eat him, as having been inspired by the Devil.

> . . . .
> *hæðne hildfrecan,*
> *(guðsearo gullon,*
> *bolgenmode,*
> *Woldon cunnian*
> *þa þe on carcerne*
> *hleoleasan wic*
> *hwylcne hie to æte*
> *æfter fyrstmearce*
> *Hæfdon hie on rune*
> *wælgrædige,*
> *hwænne hie to mose*
> *on þære werþeode*
> *Cirmdon caldheorte,*
> *reðe ræsboran.*
>
> *Duguð samnade,*
> *heapum þrungon,*
> *garas hrysedon),*
> *under bordhreoðan.*
> *hwæðer cwice lifdon*
> *clommum fæste*
> *hwile wunedon,*
> *ærest mihton*
> *feores berædan.*
> *ond on rimcræfte awriten,*
> *wera endestæf,*
> *meteþearfendum*
> *weorðan sceoldon.*
> *(corðor oðrum getang),*
> *Rihtes ne gimdon,*

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154. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* E, a.755; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. Susan Irvine, vol. 7, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, ed. David Dumville and Simon Keynes (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 37-38.

meotudes mildse.　　　　　*Oft hira mod onwod*
under dimscuan　　　　　*deofles larum,*
þonne hie unlædra　　　　*eafeðum gelyfdon.*[155]

. . . .　　　　　　　　　The host assembled,
fierce heathen warriors,　the company crowded,
(armor clanged,　　　　spears rattled),
enraged,　　　　　　　under shield-covering.
They wished to discover　whether they remained alive,
those who in the prison　fast with fetters
remained in the dwelling　unprotected for a while,
whom they might　　　　first for food
after the appointed time　deprive of life.
They, greedy for slaughter,　had in secret
written in figures,　　　the appointed end of the men,
when they hungry　　　should become
food for the people.　　The cruel-hearted ones
assembled noisily,　　　(the host pressed upon another),
fierce leaders.　　　　　　They did not regard what was right,
the mercy of the Creator.　Often their mind turned
to the teaching of the Devil　under dark shadow,
since they believed in　the violence of the evil spirits.

These are the same people who, inspired by the Devil, wanted to kill Andrew after his rescue of

Matthew. The poet presents these agents of Satan, as well as the demons of Hell, as engaging in a

feud against God. After the Mermedonians capture Andrew, the Devil appears to lead the mob in

their torture of the holy man. The poem describes the Devil as the "*se ðe ða fæhðo iu wið god*

geara grimme gefremede ("he who once long ago made bitter feud against God).[156] The Devil

even instructs his followers to exact vengeance for the freeing of the prisoners. Referring to

Andrew, the master of Hell states:

. . . .　　　　　　　　　*He eow neon gesceod*
ða he aferede　　　　　*of fæstenne*
manncynnes ma　　　　*þonne gemet wære.*

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155. *Andreas*, 125-43; 6-7.

156. *Andreas*, 1386-7; 41.

Nu ge magon eaðe	*oncyðdæda*
wrecan on gewyrhtum.	*Lætað wæpnes spor*
iren ecgheard,	*ealdorgeard sceoran,*
fæges feorhhord.	*Gað fromlice*
þæt ge wiðerfeohtend	*wiges gehnægan.*[157]

. . . .	He harmed you from near at hand
when he led away	from the prison
more of mankind	than was fitting.
Now you may	easily avenge
harmful deeds on those who did them.	Let the mark of a weapon
edge hardened with iron	storm the seat of life,
treasure homes of life of those doomed to die.	Go boldly
that you may subdue	the adversary in battle.

The poem thus depicts two armed camps engaged in a feud. On God's side, the Lord rewards His noble warriors with protection, while on the opposite side, the Devil instructs his followers to exact vengeance on these noble warriors. As part of the Great Feud, these two groups in *Andreas* are engaged in an ongoing relationship of hostility marked by reciprocal acts of vengeance.

Christian participation in the Great Feud, however, was not limited to the Apostles and their contemporaries, and continued into the Anglo-Saxon period. One example of such a warrior fighting on the side of God was Guthlac. The story of Guthlac may be found in the Exeter Book, another collection of Old English poetry which contains a number of poems and riddles related to Christian faith and living. The hagiographical *Guthlac* poems, *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B*,[158] tell the story of an Anglo-Saxon saint who began life as a warrior. The poems are based in part on a Latin life of St. Guthlac by Felix, but *Guthlac B* relies more heavily on Felix's work than does *Guthlac A*.[159] Like *Andreas*, it is a vernacular verse hagiography, a poem in Old English based on

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157. *Andreas*, 1176-83; 35-6.

158. Because of manuscript evidence and the content of the poem, although it appears initially to be a single work, it has been divided into two parts, *Guthlac A* and *B*. George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, *The Exeter Book* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), xxx-xxxiii.

159. Krapp and Dobbie, *Exeter Book*, xxxii.

the life of a saint.[160] Such poetry was common to England, and because it was written for a larger audience than comparable Latin lives, was generally more didactic than those works intended for a monastic audience. Several versions of Guthlac's life can be found in the extant Old English corpus, suggesting that Guthlac loomed large in the Anglo-Saxon imagination.[161] *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B* relate the story of a Mercian named Guthlac who gives up his wealth to live in the wilderness and fight off the demons there, but loses his life in the process.

The story of Guthlac's mission into the wilderness, primarily related in *Guthlac A*, is told as part of a larger feud between the forces of good and evil, similar to the journey of Sts. Matthew and Andrew to the Mermedonians in *Andreas*. Unlike the titular character of the poem in the Vercelli book, however, Guthlac was an Anglo-Saxon saint, and the source materials from which the poems were written, including Felix's *Vita Guthlaci*, were written by people who lived in the saint's lifetime.[162] Guthlac, a member of the Mercian royal family, began life as a soldier, but later abandoned that life for one in the service of God as His warrior.[163] Having given up all his earthly possessions, he chose to live in the wilderness to battle the demons there. An angel brought him to the place, but a demon was simultaneously vying for his soul.[164] More demons joined the fray to attack Guthlac in the wilderness.

> . . .   *we þæs Guðlaces*
> *deorwyrðne dæl   dryhtne cennað.*
> *He him sige sealde   ond snyttrucræft,*

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160. Fulk and Cain, *History of Old English Literature*, 97.

161. Daniel Donoghue, *Old English Literature: A Short Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 61.

162. Krapp and Dobbie, *Exeter Book*, xxxii.

163. Donoghue, *Old English Literature*, 61.

164. *Guthlac*, 93-140; edited by George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, *The Exeter Book* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 52-3.

mundbyrd meahta,	*þonne mengu cwom*
feonda færscytum	*fæhðe ræran.*
Ne meahton hy æfeste	*anforlætan,*
ac to Guðlaces	*gæste gelæddun*
frasunga fela.	*Him wæs fultum neah,*
engel hine elne trymede,	*þonne hy him yrre hweopan,*
frecne fyres wylme.	*Stodan him on feðehwearfum,*
cwædon þæt he on þam beorge	*byrnan sceolde*
ond his lichoman	*lig forswelgan,*
þæt his earfeþu	*eal gelumpe*
modcearu mægum,	*gif he monna dream*
of þam orlege	*eft ne wolde*
sylfa gesecan,	*ond his sibbe ryht*
mid moncynne	*maran cræfte*
willum bewitigan,	*lætan wræce stille.*[165]

. . .	We assign Guthlac's
precious part	in this to God.
He delivered unto him	victory and wisdom,
the protection of might,	when a multitude of fiends
came with a sudden shot	to stir up the feud.
They might not	relinquish malice,
but to Guthlac's	spirit they brought
many temptations.	Help was near him,
an angel fortified him with strength,	when they, the depraved ones, threatened
him with perilous burning of fire.	They appeared to him in bands of footmen,
said that he would	burn on that hill
and fire devour	his body
so that his torment	would bring
sorrow to all his kin,	if he would not
turn himself	from that strife
to joy of men,	and attend rightly
to his kin with	mankind with
greater will,	to let the vengeance rest.

In this passage, it is clear that Guthlac has become involved in the Great Feud between God and

the Devil. Demons arrived on his hill to bring the feud, while an angel of God stood by his side.

As part of a threat to the hero, the demons state that his kin will become involved in this feud, in

that the flames with which they will afflict him will also affect his kin, who form a large part of

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165. *Guthlac*, 182-99; 54-5.

his feuding group. God Himself enters the fray, and prevents the demons from harming Guthlac; they are only allowed to harass him, not attack him physically.[166] Two social groups engaged in feud emerge from this passage. The first is that of Guthlac, of which God, the angels, and the saint's kin are members, while the second consists of the demons attacking Guthlac. The story thus relates a feud in which two parties commit reciprocal acts of violence against one another.

Along with the Great Feud, there also seems to be a perception among Anglo-Saxon authors that those individuals who do not follow God are thus engaged in feud with Him. Evidence for such a feud may be found in the poem *Christ*, which is preserved in the Exeter Book. Because of manuscript and contextual evidence, modern editors have divided the poem into three parts, designated *Christ I*, *Christ II*, and *Christ III*, each of which contains an instance of the word *fæhþ*.[167] In *Christ I*, a penitent beseeches Christ for forgiveness for his sins, suggesting that, in seeking sin, mankind has waged a feud against God.

> *Hreowcearigum help,*   *þæt þin hidercyme*
> *afrefre feasceafte,*   *þeah we fæhþo wið þec*
> *þurh firena lust*   *gefremed hæbben.*[168]
>
> Aid us for the troubles,   so that Your advent
> consoles the miserable,   though we have made feud
> with You   through lust of sins.

Because the penitent has been sinful, he believes that he has been engaged in a feud with Christ and God. The passage from *Christ II* which includes the word *fæhþ* further enlightens the

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166. *Guthlac* 226-40; 56.

167. Krapp and Dobbie, eds., *Exeter Book*, xxv-xxvii.

168. *Christ* 367-9; edited by George Philip Krapp and Elliot van Kirk Dobbie, *The Exeter Book* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 13.

meaning of this statement. In this section, the narrator lists those things for which people should

be grateful to the Lord.[169]

> . . .   *Þæs we ealles sculon*
> *secgan þonc ond lof*   *þeodne ussum,*
> *ond huru þære hælo*   *þe he us to hyhte forgeaf,*
> *ða he þa yrmþðu*   *eft oncyrde*
> *æt his upstige*   *þe we ær drugon,*
> *ond geþingade*   *þeodbuendum*
> *wið fæder swæsne*   *fæhþa mæste,*
> *cyning anboren.*[170]

> . . .   For this we should all
> say thanks and love   to our Prince,
> and especially for the salvation   which He gave to us as comfort,
> when He,   at His ascension,
> turned aside the misery   which we suffered before,
> and interceded   with the dear Father
> on behalf of the earth-dwellers   for the greatest of feuds,
> the only-begotten King.

According to the poem, because of the original sin of Adam and Eve, all men were doomed to an

eternal punishment. Because of Christ's sacrifice, however, people were no longer destined to

such a fate.[171] In other words, humans had been engaged in feud with God since the time of

Adam and Eve, and their sins were as attacks upon God, for which He retaliated with eternal

punishment. Christ, however, made amends for those sins, and brought an end to the feud

between God and man. The section from Christ III in which the author uses the term *fæhþ*

contains a description of Christ's sacrifice. In this section, Christ recalls his torment as He hung

from the Cross while his enemies inflicted numerous tortures on Him.[172]

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169. *Christ*, 600-85; 19-22.

170. *Christ*, 611-8; 20.

171. *Christ* 618-26; 20.

172. *Christ*, 1428-39; 42-3.

> *Ðonne ic fore folce onfeng*   *feonda geniðlan,*
> *fylgdon me mid firenum,*   *fæhþe ne rohtun,*
> *ond mid sweopum slogun.*[173]

> Then for the sake of the people   I undertook the enmity of the enemy,
> they persecuted me with violence,   did not offer feud,
> and struck me with whips.

This passage implies that the attacks on Christ during his crucifixion were not part of a feud, and were thus illegitimate, thus amplifying his sacrifice. A homily entitled *In Sabbato Sancto* provides further evidence of this concept of the sinful being in a state of feud with God.

> *ꞇ buton þæs weddes onfangennysse, næfre ænig man Godes rice gestigeð. Forðan æghwylc þæra manna se ðe þam rihtlice onfehð ælc þæra onfehð eces lifes wed; ꞇ æghwylc þæra þe him unmedum to gedyrstigað, þonne onfehð se strængre Godes fæhðu and ecere forwyrde wræce.*[174]

> And without acceptance of the covenant never may any man ascend to God's kingdom, because each of men who accepts it rightly, each of them accepts the covenant of perpetual life, and of each of them who dares to be unfit to him, then he takes the stricter feud of God and ruin of every persecution.

According to these sources, man exists in a state of feud with God as long as he is sinful, but, because of Christ's sacrifice, man may accept a covenant to end his feud with God. As outlined above, this feud fits our working definition: injury (Original Sin of Adam and Eve), retaliation (the misery that man suffered before Christ), the existence of larger social groups (those who have accepted God's covenant and sinners), and a relationship of hostility, if one takes sins as attacks upon God and persecution as his retaliation for those attacks. In this feud, there is an ongoing relationship of hostility between God and sinners which ends not with a single retaliation, but with the acceptance on the part of a sinner of God's settlement. While this relationship may not be feud in the traditional sense, it does indicate pervasiveness of feud as a

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173. *Christ*, 1439-41; 43.

174. *In Sabbato Sancto*, 310-14; edited by Kenneth G. Schaefer, *An Edition of Five Old English Homilies for Palm Sunday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday* (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1972), 112-3.

concept among the Anglo-Saxons. As we have seen, notions of feud influenced their perceptions of all types of conflict, and informed their descriptions of these disputes.

Conclusions

While this discussion of feud has, as yet, not focused on chronology (which it will in later chapters), it is important to note that most of the Old English sources in which *fæhð/fæhþ* appears derive from the later Anglo-Saxon period. This factor is largely due to the educational program of Alfred the Great (871-899), in which he sought to make Old English a language of scholarship. While the earliest source in which *fæhð/fæhþ* appears is the Law of Ine, most sources discussed above were written in their current form in the tenth century, including the Exeter Book, Vercelli Book, and Junius 11, all of which were compiled in the tenth century or later, as noted above. As such, the conception of feud in the Old English sources is heavily skewed toward the later centuries of Anglo-Saxon history. That is not to suggest that feud did not exist in the earlier period, or that it is not evident in the sources. Sources such as the laws of Æthelberht, probably completed in 603, describe the payment of wergeld as compensation to end a feud. Similarly, other sources written down before the tenth century, such as the story of *Cynewulf and Cyneheard*, describe feuds in action without using the word *fæhð* or its variants. Through an examination of the conduct and perception of Anglo-Saxon feuds in progress as described by other sources, with or without the use of the term *fæhð/fæhþ*, we can determine that, while attitudes toward feud may have changed during the entire Anglo-Saxon period, some notion of feud did exist throughout the period.

According to most of the sources in which the term appears, therefore, the word *fæhð/fæhþ* refers to an ongoing relationship of retaliatory vengeance, commonly known as feud,

and does not merely refer to acts of vengeance. The criteria I formulated to make the distinction were as follows: injury, retaliation for this injury, the involvement of larger social groups, and an ongoing hostile relationship between the two parties, marked by reciprocal acts of vengeance. Vengeance involves the first two, and possibly the third, but the distinction between feud and vengeance lies in the fourth, which is required for feud. The Anglo-Saxon laws provide evidence that *fæhð* included the first three criteria, and may imply the existence of the fourth, which those issuing the law may have sought to curtail. *Beowulf* provides evidence of the fourth, and most crucial criterion, an ongoing relationship of reciprocal acts of vengeance. Other sources provide further evidence of such ongoing relationships, including those in which the Great Feud plays a part. In addition, these other sources make clear the pervasiveness of the concept of feud in the Anglo-Saxon imagination, as it informed their perceptions of numerous types of conflict. Although not all sources in which *fæhð/fæhþ* appears provide sufficient evidence to make the distinction, it is clear that, through an examination of the use of this term, it refers to true feud, and not only to vengeance. Therefore, although there has been some debate concerning the nature of feud as well as the meaning of *fæhð* in the past, historians should not be wary of seeing feud in the sources.

CHAPTER III

THE EMERGENCE OF CHIEFDOMS IN THE MIGRATION PERIOD

While the legal and literary sources containing the term *fæhð/fæhþ* indicate the theoretical

existence of feud in early medieval England, an examination of the historical use of feud and

violence provides further evidence that the Anglo-Saxons practiced feud. Because the subjects of

written sources are almost exclusively elites,[1] for the earliest period of Anglo-Saxon history, the

feuds about which anything is known primarily involve royal leaders such as chieftains, kings, or

other powerful non-royal elites. The earliest period from which any sources about feud exist is

the Early Conversion Period (c.597 to c.664), when royal leaders began to expand their authority

to create kingship.[2] Before examining the changes that took place in the Early Conversion Period,

however, one must step back to determine the nature of leadership in the preceding era, the

Migration Period, which lasted from about 400 to about 600. In the pre-Christian era, that is,

prior to the arrival of Augustine's mission in 597, Anglo-Saxon elites used violence as a primary

source of social power. The power of early Anglo-Saxon leaders, more properly called chieftains

than kings, was based largely on their capacity both to inflict and control violence and extended

only as far as the personal presence of these individual leaders could enforce it. Their ability to

remain in power often depended on the exercise of violence against those who sought to usurp

their positions. Unfortunately, there is little written evidence with which to examine the power

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1. Even during the Migration Period, there was some social stratification, as those who enjoyed a higher social rank were able to convince or coerce others to follow their commands. Elites in this period, however, may not have been able to divert an entire community's resources to their own uses. Robin Fleming, *Britain after Rome: The Fall and Rise, 400 to 1070* (London: Penquin Books, 2011), 64-6.

2. As discussed in Chapter 4.

relationships of the Anglo-Saxon peoples in the Migration Period, but some inferences can be made from what scant written evidence does survive, archaeological records, and the evidence from contemporary Continental Germanic kingship. While there may be significant problems with each of these sources, taken together they provide an outline of the events in Britain during this period.

Chieftains and Kings

Early Anglo-Saxon leaders, to whom I will refer as chieftains, held and acquired power, which may be defined as "the capacity of individuals or institutions to achieve goals even if opposed by others."[3] This capacity is not the same as authority. In addition, the power of these chieftains was fleeting, being based on the personal ability of the individual who held power to achieve his goals. As the chieftains of the Early Conversion Period began to expand their power, they sought to extend the permanence of that power by the creation of authority, which may be defined as "the capacity of an individual or institution to secure compliance from others based on the possession of a recognized right to legitimately claim obedience."[4] With the assertion of authority by adding legitimacy to their power, these chieftains created kingship. In other words, chieftains had power because they were able to achieve their goals. Opposition to those goals caused power struggles, which often resulted in violence. On the other hand, because kings possessed an authority recognized within the social order, there was not necessarily a need to use force in order to demonstrate their power. Kings, therefore, used more diverse strategies of

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3. While a large number of writers have defined power in a equally large number of ways, this definition is both succinct and one upon which many will, I think, agree. *Online Dictionary of the Social Sciences*, ed. Robert Drislane and Gary Parkinson, s.v. "power," http://bitbucket.icaap.org/dict.pl (accessed June 15, 2009).

4. *Online Dictionary of the Social Sciences*, ed. Robert Drislane and Gary Parkinson, s.v. "authority," http://bitbucket.icaap.org/dict.pl (accessed June 15, 2009).

power, including issuing law, erecting monuments, and staging elaborate rituals, which served to

highlight their legitimacy and to create an authority that lasted beyond their reigns.[5]

Another significant difference between a chieftain and a king was in the composition of

the leader's group of followers. In his study of the composition of the Anglo-Saxon *fyrd*, Richard

Abels describes the royal army as composed of three groups: the king, his followers, and their

followers.[6] This description helps to illustrate the difference between the two types of leader. A

chieftain was an individual with personal followers who do not, in turn, have their own body of

retainers. This type of leader only had to see to the interests of his own personal followers, and

did not need to worry about the followers of his followers. A king, however, had to ensure that

all the followers of his own retainers cooperated with one another, a task which required a great

deal more negotiation.[7] These mid-level leaders or their followers might come into conflict with

one another, and it was necessary to have a leader who ranked above these groups in order to

settle disputes. The king must have, therefore, enjoyed a rank above these men in order to

mediate disputes between them. In other words, while a chieftain is the leader of a warband, a

king is the leader of several warbands, each of which has its own leader. A king is, therefore, an

individual with the authority to mediate between members of different groups, while a chieftain

has no such authority.[8] In the Migration Period, when polities consisted primarily of a warrior

leader and his personal followers (along with the native British population, who did not

necessarily participate in war), there was no such authority. A king and his authority were

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5. Discussed in Chapter 4.

6. Richard P. Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 36.

7. Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation*, 36.

8. Alex Woolf, "Community, Identity, and Kingship in Early England," *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain*, edited by William O. Frazer and Andrew Tyrrell (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), 91-109.

required, however, when not all followers were directly loyal to a single chieftain, and when a more complex social hierarchy began to develop around the year 600.

The use of the two distinct terms 'chieftain' and 'king' not only demonstrates the changes in the nature of power and authority of early Anglo-Saxon England, but also allows us to illustrate the expansion of power by the first kings by demonstrating the differences between the two as they moved from one to the other. The differences are, in fact, key to following this line of argument. First, a chief did not have the authority to enforce his decisions, even if he was able to do so.[9] In other words, a king had legitimate means to ensure that his proclamations were followed, such as law and a mechanism with which to enforce it, while a chief's commands relied solely on his personal ability to convince or coerce others to follow them. Second, a king was separated from the social bonds of kinship, while a chief was intimately connected to kinship groups through such bonds. In a chiefdom, kinship provided the basis for social control, while in a stratified society like a kingdom, divisions along social and economic lines were more pronounced.[10] Third, and most importantly, power in the two types of rule rested on different foundations – the power of chieftains had to be backed by force to be effective, while that of kings rested firmly on an accepted royal authority.

The construction of polities in the Anglo-Saxon period thus appears to have occurred in the following manner. During the Migration Period, the earliest migrants in Britain arrived seeking farmland and built agricultural communities. As migration continued, social stratification

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9. Henri J.M. Claessen, "Chiefs and Kings in Polynesia," *The Character of Kingship*, edited by Declan Quigley (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 234.

10. Declan Quigley, "Introduction: The Character of Kingship," *The Character of Kingship*, edited by Declan Quigley (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 4; Kristian Kristiansen, "Chiefdoms, States, and Systems of Social Evolution," *Chiefdoms: Power, Economy, and Ideology*, edited by Timothy Earle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 18-21.

became more pronounced with the effect that some families had greater access to resources than others. These families may have had more resources for a number of reasons, including having been there longer, maintaining closer ties to the home country, or simply through luck. As elites emerged, they began to exert control over their neighbors. These elites may have deployed warbands comprised of their personal followers to establish control over their neighbors, as demonstrated by weapon burials.[11] The Anglo-Saxon sources frequently celebrate their warbands, particularly their leaders such as Hengest and Horsa. According to Bede, they were the brothers who led the first Anglo-Saxon warband that arrived in Britain.[12] Cerdic founded the West Saxon dynasty according to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which itself originated in that kingdom.[13] These warbands may have been composed of larger familial or kinship groups, and some of the warriors within each band may have been related to one another. For example, Hengest traveled with his brother Horsa and ruled with his son Æsc,[14] while Cerdic fought and ruled alongside his son Cynric.[15] Some warbands settled in Britain as small groups living either alongside or under existing British political leadership, possible as *laeti* or *feoderati*.[16] Examples include the Stoppingas – a small group possibly founded by a leader named Stoppa – and other similar

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11. Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 40-71.

12. Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gens Anglorum*, I.15; *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People,* ed. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1963); 50. Hereinafter cited as Bede, HE.

13. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* E, a.495, a.508, a.519; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. Susan Irvine, vol. 7, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, ed. David Dumville and Simon Keynes (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 18-19. This edition hereinafter cited as ASC.

14. ASC a.455; 16.

15. ASC a.495, a.519; 18-19.

16. *Laeti* were a subject people in the Roman empire who were allowed to work the land while under the authority of the military. *Feoderati* were peoples who provided military service to the empire, and could reside within or outside imperial borders. Herwig Wolfram, *The Roman Empire and its Germanic Peoples*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 56-7.

groups, which formed their own political units, later to be subsumed under larger territorial units like the Hwicce, as the Stopppingas were.[17] Some of these groups were named for their leaders, such as the *Hæstingas*, followers of Hæsten.[18] As elites began to emerge and exert control over their neighbors, they formed political units which were small, numerous, and local in nature.[19]

Ethnogenesis – the formation of an ethnic group – appears to have occurred in conjunction with the formation of political units. This concept makes sense if one accepts ethnicity as a political construct, as the thinkers of the Vienna School posit.[20] It also provides a useful model for the transition from warrior band to chiefdom to kingdom to, eventually, a kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons. According to Robin Fleming, there is no material evidence for the existence of Anglo-Saxon ethnic groups before the migration, as they had yet to form. That is not to say that the migrants did not belong to ethnic groups before migration, but that new ones emerged after their arrival in Britain.[21] In fact, not only did ethnogenesis and kingdom formation take place at the same time in England, but both phenomena were accomplished simultaneously as leaders used the creation of ethnic groups to build their political power.

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17. The Stoppingas may have also been named after a geographical feature. D.P. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings*, revised edition (New York: Routledge, 2000), 8-9; Steven Bassett, "In Search of the Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms," *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, edited by Steven Bassett (London, Leicester University Press, 1989), 18.

18. Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 102-3.

19. Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 61-85.

20. The ethnogenesis theory supported by historians of the Vienna School argues for the political formation of peoples, specifically those Germanic peoples who would ultimately conquer portions of the old Western Roman Empire. These peoples, known in the sources as *gens* (pl. *gentes*), form by gathering around a kernel of tradition carried by an aristocratic elite and become part of the group through identification with the elite and its traditions. In other words, ethnicity is not a matter of birth or descent, but of political affiliation with a powerful group. H. Wolfram, "Gothic History and Historical Ethnography," *Journal of Medieval History* 7 (1981), 309-19.

21. Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 49.

In this new territory, elites were able to create new social relationships. Warriors attracted

followers with their prowess and the promises of success along with the accompanying glory and

plunder associated with victory. Identities were primarily local and centered on an individual

leader, such as the aforementioned *Hæstingas*.[22] Once formed, these war bands began to acquire

territory in Britain through conquest and/or negotiation. As the warbands settled and the leaders

became political leaders, local non-elites began to identify with them for both protection and

political advantage. Evidence of political advantage lies in the higher socio-political status of

those who identified with the ruling group as opposed to those who did not. That is, Anglo-

Saxons had a higher wergeld than Britons.[23] We also know that the incoming Anglo-Saxons

neither eliminated nor drove out the existing populations, but instead mixed with them while

taking over local leadership.[24] Local political units display a remarkable diversity: it appears that

both political units and markers of ethnic identification were based on one's locality rather than

one's birth. As a result, there were many small local political units, and in these units the cultures

of the natives and immigrants mixed.[25] Furthermore, material remains indicate that people did

not identify with large regional political units, but rather with local leaders.[26] Whether or not

there was a sense of a larger Anglianness or Saxonness among these disparate groups, no ruler

was able to utilize anything more broadly based than local identities or to center these identities

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22. Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 102-3.

23. *Æthelberht* 27; Lisi Oliver, ed., *The Beginnings of English Law* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 68. See her commentary on pages 91-93, in which she outlines the possible meanings of the term *læt*. There is, however, other evidence of a lower wergeld for Britons, including *Ine* 32; edited by F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen,* vol. 1, *Text und Übersetzung* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1903), 102. Similarly, Frankish law assigns a wergeld to Romans half that of Franks. *Pactus Legis Salicae*, 15; ed. Karl August Eckhardt, *MGH, Legem Nationum Germanicarum* IV, pars I (Hanover, 1962), 70-1.

24. Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 39-85.

25. Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 50-54.

26. Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 50-62.

on his own dynasty during this time.[27] In other words, the ethnic groups that Bede identified in

his history had yet to form, and would not do so until the sixth century.[28] Rather, peoples living

in Britain during this period identified with local leaders with whom they had personal contact,

and their loyalty did not automatically transmit to the heirs of these leaders. Evidence from

charters demonstrates that Anglo-Saxon England was home to a large number of small political

units in the Migration Period, such as that of the Wixan or the various -*ingas* groups.[29] Groups

such as the *Hæstingas* had their own identities, and in their case they retained that identity until

the Conquest.[30] In fact, the territorial extent of such political groups was probably between 100

and 300 hides, smaller than those groups recognized in the Tribal Hidage[31] as independent or

formerly independent political entities.[32] Later, as tribal leaders became successful in absorbing

their neighbors, more people began to identify themselves with the successful groups. In this

way, political bodies and ethnicities were formed at the same time, and political divisions were

tied to ethnic identities that coalesced about the same time as the polities.[33] During the Migration

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27. Barbara Yorke, "Anglo-Saxon *Gentes* and *Regna*," *Regna and Gentes: The Relationship Between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World*, edited by Hans-Werner Goetz, Jörg Jarnut, and Walter Pohl (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 381-407; Woolf, "Community, Identity, and Kingship," 91-109.

28. Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 50-62.

29. Keith Bailey, "The Middle Saxons," *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, edited by Steven Bassett (London: Leicester University Press, 1989), 114-5.

30. Martin Welch, "The Kingdom of the South Saxons: The Origins," *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, edited by (London,:Leicester University Press, 1989), 78.

31. Generally considered to be a Mercian tribute list originally dating from the seventh century , the *Tribal Hidage* lists the size of about thirty different political units according to the number of hides in each territory. Barbara Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England* (London: Routledge, 1990), 9-11.

32. Bailey, "Middle Saxons," 121.

33. Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 62-80.

Period, while the larger states of the post-Roman period were replaced by numerous smaller

ones, so were personal identities.

The leaders of these small Anglo-Saxon polities were chieftains whose power lay in their

ability to exert force which they used to acquire plunder. They then distributed this plunder to

their followers in order to ensure the loyalty of these retainers. This type of relationship between

a leader and his followers is well documented among early medieval Germanic warrior bands of

the type migrating to Britain, and also among the Anglo-Saxons.[34] For instance, most historians

describe these leaders' success to their leadership in war.[35] Because of a dearth of written source

material from Migration Period Britain, however, historians must rely on anthropological

evidence for the political organization of chiefdoms as well as on written evidence from

Continental contemporaries in order to provide a general outline of the power relationships in

early Anglo-Saxon polities. Anthropologist Timothy Earle studies the construction of power in

chiefdoms, and has identified four major sources of political power in this type of society: social

relationships (i.e., kinship), military might, economic power, and ideology.[36] Although these

bases of power could be shared by both chieftains and kings, the fundamental difference between

the two was authority, legitimated leadership that does not require physical force to be

effective.[37] Chieftains won and held their territories by force, and maintained power in the ways

outlined above. Had their power bases collapsed, they could be easily supplanted by a rival for

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34. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 16.

35. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 17; Fleming, *Britain after Rome*.

36. Timothy Earle, *How Chiefs Came to Power: The Political Economy in Prehistory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 4-10.

37. Earle, *How Chiefs Came to Power*, 3.

power. Compared to chiefdoms, kingdoms had greater political and economic centralization,

forming a power base for the leader outside of his own personal ability, i.e., authority.[38]

The first of four sources of political power identified by Earle, social relationships,

centered around the control of kinship groups. These relationships formed a basis of power in

that early Germanic leaders were the embodiment of the kin group because they represented the

kin and they interceded with the gods on behalf of the entire kin.[39] In other words, these

relationships comprised the nucleus of the kernel of tradition that gave a people or a kin its

specific identity.[40] Furthermore, in chiefdoms such as the polities of early Anglo-Saxon England,

politics and the economy were organized along lines of kinship, and kin relationships provided

the impetus for control.[41] These kinship groups may have been defined broadly, and did not

necessarily include only those members of familial networks, but larger numbers of people. Such

a group would have needed a consistent effort to ensure the retention of its members.[42] Even after

the Conversion Period, once kings had begun to exert power over kinship groups rather than

through kinship groups, such social relationships retained their importance in the exercise of

power. In his law, Æthelberht attempted to move away from kin responsibility and attempted to

absolve the kin of some of the responsibility for the actions of its members.

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38. D.P. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2000), 3.

39. Henry A. Myers, *Medieval Kingship* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1982), 2-3.

40. Walter Pohl, "Ethnic Names and Identities in the British Isles: A Comparative Perspective," *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the Eighth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, edited by John Hines (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1997), 7-10.

41. Kristiansen, "Chiefdoms, States, and Systems," 21.

42. Paul Hyams, *Rancor and Reconciliation in Medieval England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 21-32.

Gif man mannan ofslea, agene scætte ⁊ unfacne feo gehwilce gelde.[43]

> If one man slays another, let him pay with his own money or property, whichever, without deceit.

That is, a slayer would have had personal responsibility for his actions, and the compensation would not be supplied by his kin. With this law, the king attempted to diminish the role of the kin in dispute resolution. At the same time, by attempting to establish new norms for the settlement of disputes, Æthelberht has claimed some power over dispute resolution, thus enhancing his control in an effort to build authority by inserting himself into the dispute resolution process. Kin responsibility, however, continued to be a fundamental feature of Anglo-Saxon law after the Kentish hegemony. In Ine's law, a man must pay compensation for thievery, but if his family is aware of the deed, they must all be sent into slavery.[44] Kin thus continued to share in the responsibility for its members, even after royal law compilations attempted to move away from shared compensation.

Royal power was derived not only from social relationships, but also from a chief's role in military leadership.[45] Rulers of the earliest Anglo-Saxon polities were probably war leaders who had acquired territory following the departure of Roman authority and the onset of the *adventus Saxonum*.[46] Some may have been leaders of Anglo-Saxon communities living in Britain who wrested control of their territories from the Britons, likely through armed conflict.[47] Their

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43. *Law of Æthelberht* 30; edited by F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen,* vol. 1, *Text und Übersetzung* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1903), 5.

44. *Law of Ine* 7; edited F. L. Attenborough, *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922; reprint Felinfach, Wales: Llanerch Publishers, 2000), 38.

45. Myers, *Medieval Kingship*, 4-6; Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 15-6.

46. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 157.

47. Don Henson, *The Origins of the Anglo-Saxons* (Frithgarth, UK: Anglo-Saxon books, 2006), 147-8.

importance in war continued beyond conversion, as the most powerful rulers were also the best military leaders.[48] As argued in Chapters 4 and 5, the importance of military might as a source of power remained paramount for several decades after the Conversion Period.

Additionally, a chief's economic role supported his military and social leadership in a number of ways, specifically by the acquisition of loyalty through the distribution of plunder, and through his ability to secure good fortune for his people.[49] More practically, elites who were emerging as politically dominant during the Migration Period had greater access to goods from the Continent, giving them both social and economic advantage over others. Ideology was a related factor in the construction of power during this period, and mostly had to do with identifying with elite status. For instance, elites created identities, visible in the material culture, which associated themselves with a created Scandinavian origin to grant them legitimacy of rule. They used objects such as those Continental trade goods to distinguish themselves and reify their elite identity.[50] In addition to creating social distinctions for themselves, elites also identified themselves with powerful locations. They occupied ancient sites associated with power and made them their own. For example, Yeavering, the site of Æthelfrith's royal hall, was built on an old Roman Iron Age hill fort.[51]

Of these sources of power, military might is most visible in the sources, and most visible in parallel examples that help to flesh out the story. Even with all the source problems, it is useful to return to the working model of kingdom formation prior to the Conversion Period based on the

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48. York, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 16.

49. York, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 17; Earle, *Chiefs Came to Power*, 6; Myers, *Medieval Kingship*, 2-4.

50. Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 97-9.

51. Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 101-2.

work of historians who focus on the earlier centuries. This model serves as a useful starting

point for an examination of the role of feud and violence in kingdom formation. Barbara Yorke

has stated that "Anglo-Saxon kingship had its origins in warleadership."[52] While Robin Fleming

argues that the first Anglo-Saxon migrants to Britain were farmers rather than warriors, these war

leaders emerged after the migration.[53] Other evidence may be marshaled to support this claim to

demonstrate that the most successful early Anglo-Saxon leaders were those best able to wield

force and exert violence against the opposition. For instance, in his study of Anglo-Saxon

ethnicity, Don Henson sees the continuity of Romano-British life after the departure of the

empire as evidence that groups of Angles and Saxons arrived in Britain as *laeti* and *feoderati* of

the Britons, possibly to aid in the defense of the island.[54] This interpretation is supported by other

historians and archaeologists who see continuity.[55] Additionally, Gildas's *De Excidio Brittaniae*,

the only written insular source from the Migration Period, states that the Britons invited the first

group of Saxons to Britain to aid in defense against raiding Picts and Scots.[56] What historians

dispute, however, is in the details of the creation of kingdoms. For instance, Steven Bassett

portrays the earliest kingdoms as small entities fighting one another for dominance, and the more

successful kingdoms absorbing those who lost the "knock-out competition."[57] According to his

description, there were numerous polities which settled in particular territories during the

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52. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 157.

53. Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 39-40, 64-5.

54. Henson, *Origins*, 64, 75-6.

55. Henson, *Origins*, 75-6; Kenneth Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom: British Continuity 300-800* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993).

56. Gildas, *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*, 23; edited by Theodore Mommsen, *MGH Scriptores, Auctores Antiquissimi, Chronicc minora saec. IV. V. VI. VII.*, vol. III (Berlin: Weidmannos, 1898), 38.

57. Bassett, "In Search of the Origins, 3-27.

Migration Period and which ultimately coalesced into a few larger kingdoms. At the same time, many Anglo-Saxon kingdoms may have been formed through the wholesale conquest of British polities.[58] On the other hand, Alex Woolf sees greater cooperation, with the smaller polities coming together in times of need to elect leaders of the greater *gens*, a model mirrored among the Lombards of the sixth century who were politically active near Gregory the Great, the pope who sent the English mission. His explanation also accounts for the *bretwaldas* of Bede, those kings who wielded *imperium* over their neighbors. While individual polities had their own leaders, such as the Lombard *duces*, only those who held power over a number of these units could be called *rex*.[59] One might wonder what sort of crises would require a people to elect such a leader. According to Woolf, the Lombards elected their *reges* to lead them in war, such as in their invasion of Italy.[60] In the interpretations of both Bassett and Woolf, it is clear that there is an element of violence as the basis of royal power, whether kings attain that royal power through conquest or by being elected by the *gens* to lead a conquest. Also in both scenarios, political leadership begins as an enterprise on a small scale but gradually grows to encompass larger numbers of people and more land.

Clovis

In addition to anthropological descriptions of kingship, comparative history of Germanic kings provides some insight. Continental kings provide useful parallels to Anglo-Saxon rulers, whose primary role by the seventh century was in war leadership.[61] Examples for the power of

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58. Bassett, "Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms," 3-27.

59. Woolf, "Community, Identity, and Kingship," 91-109.

60. Woolf, "Community, Identity, and Kingship," 97.

61. Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation* , 11.

Germanic kingship as based on violence certainly exist, including among those Germanic

peoples located outside Britain. First, other Germanic peoples such as the Goths distinguished

between the king who presided over dispute resolution, *thiudans*, and the king who led the

people in war, *reiks*, indicating that there was some military function to kingship.[62] While the

shift in terminology may be a result of Latinization and Christianization,[63] there is other evidence

of leadership in war transferring to political power. For Herwig Wolfram, during the migration

era, Germanic peoples began to rely on a new type of leadership, the *reiks* or *cyning*, as the old

tribal kingship of the *thiudans* was no longer appropriate to rule a people on the move.[64] These

types of kings became the leaders of migrating armies, and it was those leaders who ultimately

became kings after settlement.

Continental kings provide useful parallels when searching for the origins of Anglo-Saxon

kingdoms and the role of violence in those kingdoms. Indicative of the usefulness of such

comparisons are numerous elements of Anglo-Saxon life that demonstrate connections with the

Continent. For instance, in his work on the creation of Anglo-Saxon ethnicity, Don Henson

describes the Anglo-Saxons as being "an intimate part of a northern Germanic cultural entity that

spanned the North Sea."[65] The Anglo-Saxon evidence, such as the connections between Kent and

Francia found in archaeology, the Continental grave goods found in Sutton Hoo, myths and

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62. Even Tacitus acknowledges a difference in leadership among the early Germanic peoples. Herwig Wolfram, "The Shaping of the Early Medieval Kingdom," *Viator* I (1970): 1-20; Edward James, "The Origins of Barbarian Kingdoms: The Continental Evidence," *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, edited by Steven Bassett (London, Leicester University Press, 1989), 43; Henson, *Origins of the Anglo-Saxons*, 147; James, "Origins of Barbarian Kingdoms," 42.

63. Herwig Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, trans. Thomas J. Dunlap (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 146-7.

64. Wolfram*, Roman Empire and its Germanic Peoples*, 15-8.

65. Henson, *Origins*, 70.

legends common to the Germanic peoples such as those surrounding Attila or Sigemund, and the use of Scandinavian heroes in Old English heroic poetry, point to such a North Sea cultural interaction zone.[66] As such, it behooves the historian of Anglo-Saxon England to explore some of the wider cultural implications of insular events, and also allows said historian to use Continental evidence to fill in the English gaps. The Merovingian Franks provide a useful example for a number of reasons: geographical proximity, relations between the Merovingians and the Kentish kings, the possibility that groups of Franks or their neighbors comprised some of the migrants to Britain in the Migration Period,[67] and the evidence that the Merovingians exerted some sort of influence, even perhaps a brief dominance, over parts of Britain.[68] One need only to look to Clovis for a viable comparison, as he was a king who built his kingdom through conquest prior to creating a lasting authority, in part via conversion. Gregory of Tours describes the king as one of the greatest warriors of the day in *Libri Historiarum X*,[69] the quintessential history of early Merovingian Francia.

Clovis certainly provides the best example of the early Merovingian use of violence, as he was the king who expanded his realm to include most of Gaul and established Merovingian predominance over the other Frankish tribes. Clovis began the military conquests of his reign

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66. The connections between Kent and the Continent include the adoption by elite Kentish women of fashions from the Frankish elite. Scandinavian heroes include Beowulf, who was a Geatish warrior helping the Danes. Other heroes may be found in the literature of both England and Scandinavia, such as Hedin/Heðin, found in the Old English *Deor* and multiple Old Norse sources, including *Ragnarsdrápa.* Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 76-7, 100, 117; Henson*, Origins*, 95-102; *Deor*, 36; edited by George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, *The Exeter Book* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 179.

67. Bede, HE V.9; 475; Henson*, Origins*, 58.

68. Ian Wood, "Frankish Hegemony in England," *The Age of Sutton Hoo: The Seventh Century in Northwestern Europe*, ed. Martin Carver (Rochester: The Boydell Press, 1992), 235-41.

69. Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum X*, II.9-34; edited by B. Krusch, *MGH SRM* I pars I (Hanover, 1937) 52-94.

against the kingdom of Syagrius in 486. After Clovis defeated Syagrius, one of the last Roman

commanders in Gaul, Syagrius fled to the Visigothic kingdom of Alaric II in southern Gaul.

Alaric, king of the Visigoths, returned the fugitive to Clovis after the Frankish king threatened

him with invasion. Clovis then had Syagrius secretly killed, probably to establish firmer control

over the territory around Soissons where Syagrius's power was based and to prevent the Roman

commander from regaining his kingdom.[70] In this series of incidents, Clovis used force or the

threat thereof to expand his kingdom, prevent an alliance between potential enemies, and

eliminate a potential rival. In other instances, he also used the threat of force in the form of

renewed warfare to extract tribute from those enemies he had previously defeated, such as the

Thuringians and the Alamans. Rather than face Clovis's army once again, these peoples

capitulated.[71]

Despite his propensity to use force and violence to augment his power, Clovis was no

simple barbarian who only knew to beat his enemies into submission. When Clovis gathered the

Frankish armies against the Visigoth Alaric II late in his reign, he forbade his troops from

plundering the countryside, in normal circumstances a common activity for soldiers on the move.

Although Gregory asserts that the king gave this order to appease St. Martin, it is more likely that

Clovis wanted to retain the support of the area around Tours.[72] With the support of Tours, Clovis

could conquer Alaric's territories in Gaul and thereby gain a greater amount of treasure.

Similarly, personal and official correspondence written during the reign of Clovis portrays a

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70. Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum X*, II.27; 71-2.

71. *Liber Historiae Francorum*, 15; edited by B. Krusch, *MGH SRM* II (Hanover: Impensis Bibliopoli Hahniani, 1888), 261-4.

72. Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum X*, II.37;151-2. Clovis killed a man who disobeyed this order.

picture of a king interested in more than the acquisition of treasure and land.[73] Unfortunately,

only one letter that Clovis wrote himself has survived. In this letter written to the bishops of

Aquitaine during the Frankish war with the Visigoths, Clovis instructs the clergy to ensure the

protection of those unable to defend themselves and their property. Clovis made an attempt to

keep the peace in the area by having the clergy work together with the warriors to ensure

protection of people and their property.[74] Another letter, from the bishops of the Council of

Orleans to Clovis, reveals the interest of Clovis in Church matters. According to the letter, the

king personally ordered the council and gave it instructions and an agenda in order to deal with

Church-related issues.[75] Clovis sought to end conflict within the Church through peaceful means,

a characteristic of a cunning political leader, not a plundering barbarian. This Frankish king who,

to some, appears to merely be a conqueror seems to have had the promulgation of law as well as

Church affairs on his agenda. To portray Clovis as a king whose power was solely based on

violence is to ignore contemporary sources, but violence was certainly a key element of his

power. A similar characterization likely holds true for those early rulers of the Anglo-Saxon

kingdoms.

Because Gregory the Great presents Clovis as the hero of his history, the bishop may have

altered the chronology of the king's reign in order to fit his purposes.[76] Gregory presents Clovis

as bringing the various Frankish tribes together into one political group. Most historians agree

that the Franks originated as a confederation of tribes, even if they disagree on the sense of

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73. William M. Daly, "Clovis: How Barbaric, How Pagan?" *Speculum* 69 (July 1994): 619-64.

74. "Clodowici regis ad episcopos epistola;" edited by A. Boretius, *MGH Legem Sectio II*, *Capitularia Regum Francorum* I (Hanover, 1960), 1-2.

75. *Concilium Aurelianense*; edited by F. Maassen, *MGH Legem Sectio III Concilia I* (Hanover, 1893), 1-9.

76. J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, 'The Work of Gregory of Tours in the Light of Modern Research', *The Long-Haired Kings* (New York, 1962), 61-6.

unified Frankishness of those tribes. These tribes began as groups centered around individual

warlords, among which the Salians ultimately became the most powerful during the reign of

Clovis, giving their name to the entire group.[77] This ethnogenesis probably occurred around a

Salian Frankish *Traditionskern*, around which other people and groups coalesced based on the

success of this kernel of tradition.[78] In the pagan period, the core group of the Franks eventually

became the Merovingians, whose connection to Odin encouraged other families to connect with

the core group. For David Harry Miller, then, during the migration into Gaul, identification with

the Merovingians was synonymous with being a Frank.[79] The evidence from Gregory suggests

that this was, at least in part, still the case during the reign of Clovis. In the *Libri Historiarum X*,

peoples follow kings, and are identified by their kings. Therefore, for Gregory of Tours, identity

is in part a matter of identification with a particular group centered around a core group or

individual, who for the Franks would be the Merovingians.

One of the greatest examples of the use of violence on the part of Clovis is in the story of

the Vase of Soissons. As the Franks conquered various kingdoms in Gaul, they also plundered

many churches, including the one at which the bishop of Soissons resided. Among the plunder

was a certain sacred vase that the bishop wanted returned, so he sent emissaries to Clovis seeking

the return of the vessel. Clovis bade the messengers to follow him to Soissons, where he stated

that he would return the vessel should it be part of his share of the booty. After asking his

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77. D.H. Miller, "Ethnogenesis and Religious Revitalization beyond the Roman Frontier: The Case of Frankish Origins," *Journal of World History* 4 no. 2 (1993): 277; Hans J. Hummer, "Franks and Alamanni: A Discontinuous Ethnogenesis," *Franks and Alamanni in the Merovingian Period: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. Ian Wood (San Marino: Boydell, 1998), 11-12; Patrick Geary, *Before France and Germany: The Creation and Transformation of the Merovingian World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 78; I. Wood. *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450-751* (London: Routledge, 1994), 38.

78. Walter Pohl, "Ethnic Names and Identities," 7-10.

79. Miller, "Ethnogenesis and Religious Revitalization," 277-85.

followers to grant him the vase beyond what was normally allotted to the leader of the comitatus

in the distribution of spoils, the followers agreed so that he might return the vase. One soldier,

however, refused to allow Clovis to have more than his fair share and smashed the vase with his

axe. Clovis could not immediately punish the soldier, as the follower was enforcing the custom

of equal distribution of plunder. Clovis was angry, but did not immediately react, instead

choosing to bide his time. Later that year, the king was inspecting his soldiers and their gear.

Upon inspecting the unnamed smasher of the vase, Clovis chided him for the deplorable

condition of his equipment, throwing the soldier's axe to the ground. As the soldier bent to pick

it up, Clovis buried his own axe in the man's skull, much as the soldier had done to the vase. Not

only did Clovis gain a measure of revenge against one who had forced him to break his word, but

he also ensured that the remaining soldiers would fear his wrath and not cross him.[80] Clovis's

action was more than simply revenge; other considerations were at hand.

This incident indeed provides a number of useful insights into the nature of Clovis's

kingship. The distribution of plunder and gifts was the primary means of securing loyalty among

one's followers and gaining the loyalty of one's enemies. Conversely, some leaders lost the

loyalty of their followers for not being generous enough in the distribution of spoils.[81] Clovis

plundered churches to increase his stores of treasures, which he distributed to increase the loyalty

of his followers. On the other hand. he also wanted to maintain a degree of support from the

churches, some of Gaul's most powerful landholders, by returning the one item the Church

leadership had requested.[82] The soldier who destroyed the object humiliated the king who had

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80. Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum X*, II.27; 71-3.

81. Geary, *Before France and Germany*, 112.

82. Herbert Schutz, *The Germanic Realms in Pre-Carolingian Central Europe, 400-750* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2000), 148-52.

given his word and could not, as a matter of honor, let the issue stand. By killing the soldier,

Clovis also instilled a sense of fear in his warriors and gave them another reason to be loyal.[83]

Many historians have remarked that Gregory used Clovis as an example for the kings of

his own day. These scholars have interpreted Gregory's presentation of Clovis in a number of

ways. To Claude Carozzi, Gregory presents the king as having elements of both Christ and

Constantine in that he was both a renovator of the Roman Empire and the first Catholic Christian

king.[84] Similarly, Phillip Wynn notes that the bishop's characterization of Clovis is not a simple

one, but that he is viewed as both a Constantine and an Old Testament king of Israel like David

who used cunning instead of merely brute force, as in the story of the Vase of Soissons where he

sought to return the vase in order to establish a political connection with the bishop of Soissons.[85]

Although Ian Wood disagrees that Gregory created this image, J.M. Wallace-Hadrill argues that

Gregory portrays Clovis as a new Constantine who instilled a new virility into the blood of the

Franks.[86] Wallace-Hadrill also notes that Gregory held Clovis up as an example, glorifying his

virility and contrasting it with the cowardice of the Visigoths and the incessant civil wars

conducted by the Merovingians of his own day in the latter decades of the sixth century.[87]

Clovis's reign also provides further insights into the changing nature of kingship based on the

vase incident. That the smasher became angry when Clovis attempted to claim the vase above his

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83. Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum X*, II.27; 71-3.

84. Claude Carozzi, "Le Clovis de Grégoire de Tours," *Le Moyen Age: Revue d'Histoire et de Philologie* 98 no. 2 (1992): 169-85.

85. Phillip Wynn, "Wars and Warriors in Gregory of Tours' *Histories* I-VI," *Francia: Forschungen zur Westeuropäischen Geschichte* 28 no. 1 (2001): 1-35.

86. Ian Wood, "Gregory of Tours and Clovis," *Debating the Middle Ages: Issues and Readings*, L.K. Little and B.H. Rosenwein, eds. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1998), 73-91; J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, "The Work of Gregory of Tours in the Light of Modern Research," *The Long-Haired Kings* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 61-6.

87. Wallace-Hadrill, "Work of Gregory of Tours," 61-6.

share implies that the leader would have been expected to receive an equal share of the spoils of victory. In other words, the leaders prior to Clovis's expansion of power lacked the authority to make such a claim. Thus, they were little different from the rest of the warriors, and lacked a superior social status. Knowing that the smasher is correct, Clovis waits to enact his retribution. When he does, he takes a step outside the social order, and one step closer to kingship. In this sense, Clovis is innovating a new role for the leader of the warband – not an equal warrior, but one who stands outside the social order that governs the remaining members of the band.

Clovis provides a useful example which some Anglo-Saxon leaders may have sought to emulate. Gregory of Tours completed his history not long before he died in 594, about the same time that Æthelberht first received missionaries from the Continent in 597.[88] Gregory also certainly presented him as an example for other kings to emulate.[89] It is also essential to remember that Kent and Francia maintained strong trading ties, making the possibility of the transmission of Gregory's presentation of Clovis an even greater possibility. In addition, Clovis employed several strategies of power during his reign that the first Christian Anglo-Saxon kings would also use. Clovis was not only the first Christian Frankish king, but like Æthelberht for the Anglo-Saxons, was the first to compile a set of written laws for his people.[90] Seen in the light of the Frankish king who first converted to Catholic Christianity, brought disparate groups together, promulgated the first written law for his people, and sought to exert his hegemony over his neighbors, Æthelberht begins to appear a king similar to Clovis. The major difference, however, was each leader's military ability. While Æthelberht's hegemony proved fleeting due to the rise

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88. Edward James, *The Franks* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 16.

89. Wallace-Hadrill, "Work of Gregory of Tours," 63-4.

90. James, *The Franks*, 12-3.

of rival kings able to wield force better than he or his successors, Clovis's kingdom remained within his own dynasty until the eighth century.

The Earliest Anglo-Saxon Rulers

One of the earliest Anglo-Saxon kings about whom we know anything is Ælle, who the *Chronicle* notes is the first to be known as the "*Brytenwealda*."[91] According to Bede, he held *imperium* over all the southern kingdoms.[92] This position of bretwalda likely involved some sort of overlordship over other kings, and may have entailed military leadership among several polities.[93] The *Chronicle* records this leader's arrival in Britain in 477 along with several victorious battles against the Britons.[94] Notably, at one of these battles which took place in 491, he left none of the British opposition alive.

> *Her Ælla Ꟈ Cissa ymbsæton Andredesceaster Ꟈ ofslogon ealle þa ðe þærinne eardedon; ne wearð þær forþen an Brit to lafe.*[95]

> Here Ælle and Cissa beseiged Anderitum, and killed all who lived in there; there was not even one Briton left there.[96]

Thus Ælle was not only better at exerting force to achieve his ends, but he did so to an extent that was noteworthy to the chronicler. Although we do not know how far Ælle's influence went, he held some sway over much of the southern English kingdoms at the end of the fifth century.[97]

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91. Ælle was later claimed by the South Saxons as their ancestor. His role as the progenitor of the South Saxon line may have been an invention by said dynasty. Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, 19; ASC a.827; 45.

92. HE II.5; 148.

93. Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, 17.

94. ASC a. 477, 485, 491; 17-8.

95. ASC a.491; 18

96. Michael Swanton, trans. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 15.

97. Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, 45-6.

Unfortunately, little else is known about him.[98] That his rule was based on using force more successfully than his contemporaries may be due to the sources focusing only on those parts of his power. Such an image fits, however, with what we know about the exercise of power at the time. Ælle gained power through force of arms, at times killing all his opposition, and exercised dominion over his neighbors through military leadership.

Gildas similarly presents a portrait of leadership in Migration Period Britain in which violence was the key to power. Gildas was a British monk writing during the Migration Period, and is our only narrative insular source for the *adventus Saxonum*. His purpose was to point out the sins of his contemporaries which he perceived had caused all the calamities that the British faced in order that they might abandon their immoral actions.[99] After the departure of the Romans, he describes a Britain alternately beset by foreign invaders and the vices of its people when not under attack. During the times when the Picts or Saxons were not invading, leaders acted cruelly toward their people, and were periodically overthrown. When the Britons invited the Saxons to defend them, a series of wars ensued between them until the newcomers had taken a large portion of the island by force.[100] Amidst a series of condemnations for a variety of sins, Gildas describes several rulers, whom he deems tyrants, as using various forms of violence to ensure their rule. Among these are not only warfare, but also murder and mutilation.[101] Violence was clearly an important strategy of power among the Britons with whom the Anglo-Saxon migrants were coming into contact. One must, however, not take these sources of wars and

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98. "Ælle 1," *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, http://www.pase.ac.uk/pase/apps/persons/index.html (accessed 9 July 2015).

99. N.J. Higham, *The English Conquest: Gildas and Britain in the Fifth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 10-11.

100. Gildas, *De Excidio*, 20-26;, 36-41.

101. Gildas, *De Excidio*, 27-37; 41-48.

violence at face value. According to Robin Fleming and other historians of this period, there was some degree of peaceful settlement. As she notes, the numbers of Anglo-Saxons migrating to Britain during the Migration Period would have been insufficient for conquest. Rather than seeking territory to conquer, the earliest migrants were looking for land to farm.[102]

For the period immediately prior to the Conversion, there is more evidence for powerful leaders than there is for Ælle. As such we can look back to one of Æthelberht's earlier contemporaries, Ceawlin, to find one of the earliest historical Anglo-Saxon leaders attempting to expand his dominion through force. Ceawlin, the second of Bede's wielders of *imperium*, was the ruler of the Gewissae in the late sixth century.[103] While the dates of his rule are obscure, his reign appears to have ended in 591 at the hands of his nephew Ceol, a member of a rival branch of the same dynasty.[104] The information we have about Ceawlin points to his building of power based on his ability to exert force against his neighbors. For example, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records for the year 577,

> *Her Cuðwine ⁊ Ceawlin gefuhton wið Bryttas, ⁊ hi .iii. ciningas ofslogon, Coinmagil ⁊ Candidan ⁊ Farinmagil, in þære stowe þe is gecweden Deorham, ⁊ genamon .iii. ceastra Gleawcestre ⁊ Cirenceaster ⁊ Baþanceaster.*[105]

> In this year Cuthwine and Ceawlin fought against the Britons and they slew three kings, Conmail, Condidan, and Farinmail, at the place which is called Derham; and they took three of their cities, Gloucester, Cirencester, and Bath.

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102. Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 40.

103. The Gewissae were later known as the West Saxons. HE II.5; 148; Barbara Yorke, "The Jutes of Hampshire and Wight and the Origins of Wessex," *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, edited by Steven Bassett (London, Leicester University Press, 1989), 96.

104. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 132-5.

105. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* E, a.577; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. Susan Irvine, vol. 7, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, ed. David Dumville and Simon Keynes (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 21. This edition hereinafter cited as ASC.

Most *Chronicle* entries in which Ceawlin appears record his success on the battlefield, such as

his encounter with Æthelberht of Kent in 568,

> *Her Ceawlin ꝺ Cuþa gefuhton wið Æthelbriht ꝺ hine on Cent geflemdon ꝺ .ii. ældormen*
> *on Wibbanduna ofslogon, Oslac ꝺ Cnebban.*[106]

> In this year Ceawlin and Cutha fought against Æthelbert, and put him to flight into Kent,
> and killed two ealdormen, Oslaf and Cnebba, at Wibbandun.

Unfortunately, the *Chronicle* provides no further information about the king other than his

victories, not even details of his death. This lack of information is perhaps due to the fact that he

was the ancestor of Alfred, the king responsible for the creation of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, as

the document highlights his victories, but little else.[107] It may also be a matter of having too little

source material from which the Alfredian chronicler could draw. Furthermore, other written

references to Ceawlin provide no further information other than genealogy.[108] The same may be

said for the first of Bede's bretwaldas, Ælle, whose status as a wielder of *imperium* may be

seriously called into question because of its early date, as noted above.

Archaeology does help to some degree to provide further information about new

strategies of power being utilized in the later Migration Period. By that point, larger regional

identities had begun to coalesce around powerful leaders, who were using high status objects and

dress to distinguish themselves visually from non-elites. Evidence for the use of these objects

comes from the burials of these individuals with elite status. In addition to these overt displays of

elite status, they exerted control over ritual sites, often co-opting former Roman sites to their own

advantage. They also developed ideologies of rule which either tied them to an imagined

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106. ASC a.568; 21.

107. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 135.

108. "Ceawlin 2," *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*,
http://www.pase.ac.uk/pase/apps/persons/index.html (accessed 30 June 2009).

Scandinavian past or to the Franks or the Romans. These identities which the ideologies supported were regional in scope, and brought together multiple local identities into larger regional ones. In other words, the ethnicities were beginning to form around powerful leaders who had access to a greater variety of strategies of power. Although violence was a key strategy of power, it was not the only one in use as these chieftains began to expand their polities.[109]

Conclusions

By the middle of the sixth century, many chieftains such as Ceawlin of the Gewissae had begun to expand by conquering neighboring chiefdoms. In order to secure their expanding power, these leaders began to utilize new strategies of power to ensure the loyalty of their followers, such as the creation of ethnic groups centered around the family of the chieftain. One of the most successful kings in the utilization of new modes of authority was Æthelberht of Kent, who used new strategies of power offered by conversion to Christianity.[110] His ability to exert force on his contemporaries, however, was lacking in relation to other leaders of the period, and the hegemony which allowed him to incorporate new strategies of power fell to his competitors. The Conversion period is key to Anglo-Saxon state formation not only due to the first appearance of Anglo-Saxon written sources, but also due to the battle for power and the creation of authority during this period, of which religion was a part.

Feud and violence played a key role in the creation and maintenance of power in the Migration Period. With the unlikely exception of those areas where Anglo-Saxon leaders took over from the local British dynasties and their political structures, including Kent and Lindsey,

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109. Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 61-85.

110. See Chapter 4.

the earliest Anglo-Saxon polities lacked the administrative and social power structures necessary to support lasting authority.[111] The leaders held power based on their ability to exert force, but they did not necessarily have a monopoly on the use of such force. Those rulers who were best able to use force were those who wielded power in this period.[112] Many had gained their power through force of arms after their arrival in Britain, and the most powerful leaders such as Ceawlin extended their *imperium* by conquest. It is also difficult to find examples of a chieftain mediating between kin groups, and in fact the body of core followers around which the polity revolved was likely composed of a single extended kin/social group. Feud was the predominant method of dispute resolution between these social groups. It was only when chieftains began to expand their polities to include other groups that they found the need to mediate between such groups. As such, leaders had to separate themselves from and elevate themselves above the normal bonds of society in order to legitimately mediate such disputes. In part, the leaders attempted to monopolize legitimate violence by providing alternate means of dispute resolution, such as wergelds, injury tariffs, and other forms of compensation. At the same time, they used royal and noble protection (*mund*) to enforce the social hierarchy needed to resolve disputes. Disputants would be wary of arriving at a court at which they might be attacked, so kings and other leaders offered protection at these places in order to peacefully settle disputes.[113] In addition, leaders had to create a royal authority in order to further elevate themselves within the social order, ensure the lasting loyalty of their followers, and provide for a more permanent power base. They did so not only by intervening in disputes, but by creating and utilizing ethnicities, locations,

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111. Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, 14-5.

112. Steven Bassett, "In Search of the Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms," *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, edited by Steven Bassett (London, Leicester University Press, 1989), 26-7.

113. *Æthelberht* 2; 3.

monuments, and religions centered around themselves and their dynasties, further enhancing

their authority and ability to intervene in disputes. In thus separating themselves from society,

they created both kingship and a political apparatus to support it, giving birth to the kingdoms of

Anglo-Saxon England during the early Conversion period.

CHAPTER IV

CONSOLIDATION OF POWER IN THE CONVERSION PERIOD

Aedilberct rex Cantuariorim post regnum temporale, quod L et sex annis gloriosissime tenuerat, aeterna caelestis regni gaudia subiit. Qui tertius quidem in regibus gentis Anglorum cunctis australibus eorum prouinciis, quae Humbrae fluuio et contiguis ei terminis sequestrantur a borealibus, imperauit; sed primus omnium caeli regna conscendit. Nam primus imperium huiusmodi Aelli res Australium Saxonum; secundus Caelin rex Occidentalium Saxonum, qui lingua ipsorum Ceaulin uocabatur; tertius, ut diximus, Aedilberct rex Cantuariorum; quartus Reduald rex Orientalium Anglorum, qui etiam uiuente Aedilbercto eidem suae genti ducatum praebebat, obtenuit; quintus Aeduini rex Nordanhymbrorum, id est eius quae ad borealem Humbrae fluminis plagam inhabitat.[1]

King Æthelberht of Kent, after ruling his temporal kingdom gloriously for fifty-six years, entered upon the eternal joys of the heavenly kingdom. He was the third English king to rule over all the southern kingdoms, which are divided from the north by the river Humber and the surrounding territory; but he was the first to enter the kingdom of heaven. The first king to hold the like sovereignty was Ælle, king of the South Saxons; the second was Cælin, king of the West Saxons, known in their language as Ceawlin; the third, as we have said, was Æthelberht, king of Kent; the fourth was Rædwald, king of the East Angles, who even during the lifetime of Æthelberht was gaining the leadership for his own race; the fifth was Edwin, king of the Northumbrians, the nation inhabiting the district north of the Humber.[2]

In this passage, written to record the death of Æthelberht, the first Christian English king, Bede

counts him among those rulers who wielded *imperium* over the other southern kingdoms. It is

worth noting that among these kings, with the exception of Ælle, they were all near

contemporaries of each other, but none of them succeeded the other. Rather, this overlordship

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1. Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gens Anglorum*, II.5; *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People,* ed. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1963), 146. This edition hereinafter cited as HE.

2. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors, trans., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People,* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1963), II.5;147.

passed between kingdoms, revealing a great deal about the fleeting nature of rule in this period.

Furthermore, evidence indicates that these leaders were often in conflict with one another, as in

the battle between Æthelberht and Ceawlin.[3] That hegemony passed between kingdoms in the

decades surrounding 600 indicates rule was build on foundations that were easily challenged. As

noted in the previous chapter, some kings including Ceawlin had begun to expand their territories

through conquest during the sixth century, but failed to create power that lasted beyond their

personal reigns. The most important foundation of power during the Migration Period was

violence, and those rulers who could wield it best often found themselves able to exert their

power over others.

In the historical sources, the most conspicuous examples of Anglo-Saxons participating in

feuds lies in the actions of their leaders. During the early Conversion Period, from the arrival of

St. Augustine in 597 through the first half of the seventh century, Anglo-Saxon leaders, whether

one defines them as chieftains or kings, used feud and violence not only to avenge wrongs

committed against them, but in order to build their power. They uses these strategies to build

power in two ways: to compete with other leaders, and to control violence in order to separate

themselves from the bonds of society. Violence was key to the maintenance of social bonds (i.e.,

kinship) in that the groups came together in order to protect their members from violence. By

elevating themselves above these social groups, kings could protect members of multiple groups,

thereby expanding their personal power. That is not to say that violence was the only method of

gaining and maintaining power in this period. In fact, Anglo-Saxon chieftains and kings used a

variety of strategies of power depending on those available to them. The exercise and control of

3. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* E, a.568; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. Susan Irvine, vol. 7, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, ed. David Dumville and Simon Keynes (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 21. This edition hereinafter cited as ASC with the date of the entry designated by the letter a (i.e. a.568). Other versions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* will be cited differently.

violence was one of these strategies, and successful leaders of the early Anglo-Saxon period were those that wielded violence or force most effectively. The early centuries of Anglo-Saxon rule, however, witnessed the introduction of new sources of power and authority with the introduction of Christianity. Thus Anglo-Saxon England during the Conversion Period experienced fundamental changes in the nature of power and its relation to violence. Specifically, the leaders of this period sought to build their authority by removing themselves from existing kinship bonds, thereby elevating themselves from chieftains to kings. The careers of the four most successful kings of this period – Æthelberht, Æthelfrith, Rædwald, and Edwin – demonstrate both the changes that had taken place in the nature of kingship as well as in the traditional form of building power, i.e., through violence/force.

The earliest period about which we can gain any direct knowledge about feud is the Early Conversion Period, which lasted from about 597 and the arrival of Augustine to the Synod of Whitby in 664.[4] During this era, those individuals about whom we know anything were involved either in conversion or consolidation of power. Interestingly, feud was key to both these movements, as royal leaders sought to create authority at the expense of violent self-help associated with the feud. At the same time, with the Christian prohibition on feud and the Church's desire for some measure of political stability to aid in the process of conversion, clerics became partners of those building power through the creation of authority, while conversion gave

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4. The end of what I call the Early Conversion Period is marked by two events, one found in the historical evidence, the other in the archaeological. The Synod of Whitby of 664 saw the acceptance of the Roman form of Christianity in Northumbria, ensuring the Anglo-Saxon connection with Rome and bringing the English under one form of Christian worship. Around the same time, high status burials demonstrate a more widespread acceptance of this Roman form of Christianity, indicating the political importance of the Church beginning around 650, about the same time that the new religion became widespread among Anglo-Saxon rulers. Henry Mayr-Harding, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 112-3; Helen Geake, *The Use of Grave-Goods in Conversion-Period England, c.600-c.850* (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1997), 132.

royal leaders new strategies of power with which they could create authority. When examining

the historical feuds and use of violence in such a context, certain patterns begin to emerge which

point to greater social and political (not to mention religious) changes taking place during the

Conversion Period. Taken together, events of these years indicate a sea change in Anglo-Saxon

society as chieftains enhanced their power with authority and became kings.

In the Conversion period, the historical and archaeological evidence points to a change in

the basis of royal power, indicating a shift from chieftaincy to kingship. The shift can be seen in

the fundamental differences between the two types of rule, notably in the creation of authority.

Most important in the creation of this authority was the change that took place in the ideology

that supported rulership in early Anglo-Saxon England, which coincided with the conversion to

Christianity. Much of this change can be seen in the archaeological record, as noted by Helen

Geake, who argues that kingship developed in England largely as a result of the influence of the

Church. Geake's research indicates that evidence found in grave goods from the early

Conversion Period marks an attempt on the parts of newly emerging kings to connect the Anglo-

Saxons with Britain's Roman past in order to convince their people that they needed kings.[5] At

the same time, they began to abandon cultural displays associated with an imagined Germanic

past, especially in grave goods, in favor of those inspired by Roman connections. Some goods

continued to be buried during the course of the sixth and seventh centuries, such as swords,

spears, and amulets, as they had in years prior to Augustine's mission. On the other hand, other

goods which appeared Germanic, such as certain types of brooches and long strings of amber

beads, were abandoned after c.600 in favor of goods which could be identified with the Roman

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5. Geake, *The Use of Grave-Goods*, 133-6.

world, such as whorls and finger rings.[6] The abandonment of Germanic cultural items in grave

goods points to a time in which the Germanic past became an origin myth, while kings

emphasized their *Romanitas* to convince people that they were Roman, and that, like Romans,

they needed rulers. Grave goods show an increased investment on the part of elites in Continental

culture as transmitted to England through the Church immediately following conversion. Much

of the material culture from the early Conversion period, in fact, was inspired by models from the

Byzantine Empire, the seventh-century source of perceived Roman culture.[7] As material culture

is indicative of ideology, and grave goods were demonstrations of specific cultural identities,

such a dramatic change indicates that a significant cultural shift in which kings incorporated an

imagined Roman past into their kernels of tradition occurred at the same time that kingship

emerged in England.[8] Further evidence for a cultural discontinuity found in grave goods lies in

one of the most noteworthy reactions against that change, the Sutton Hoo ship burial, which was

intended to revive connections to the supposed Germanic past rather than the Roman present.[9] It

is no coincidence that conversion to a new religion and a shift to a new type of rule occurred

simultaneously.

In addition to archaeological sources, written documents provide further evidence of this

change in the nature of rule. Examining both archaeological and historical data, Nicholas Higham

argues that Anglo-Saxon rulers adopted Christianity in order to utilize the tools offered by the

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6. Geake, *Use of Grave Goods*, 120.

7. Geake, *Use of Grave Goods*, 133-6.

8. Martin Carver, "Introduction: Northern Europeans Negotiate their Future," *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300*, edited by Martin Carver (York: York Medieval Press, 2003), 7; Geake, *Use of Grave-Goods*, 3-4.

9. Martin Carver, "Boat-Burial in Britain: Ancient Custom or Political Signal," *The Ship as Symbol in Prehistoric and Medieval Scandinavia*, edited by Ole Crumlin-Pedersen and Birgitte Munch Thye (Copenhagen: Nationalmuseet, 1995), 110-24; Geake, *Use of Grave-Goods*, 122.

adherents to the religion. These were new strategies of power, which paganism could not provide, enabling them to bolster their power and to create authority.[10] First, the religion viewed a single dynasty, that of God the Father and His Son Jesus, as the exclusive holders of legitimate authority, and rulers saw such a relationship as easily adaptable to worldly politics, providing a model for rule by an individual and his heirs.[11] Written sources throughout the Anglo-Saxon period indicate that a king derived his power from divine sources just as an ealdorman's power originated with the king.[12] Second, the adoption of the new religion allowed rulers to orient ceremony and ritual sites around the person of the king, who controlled the rituals, founded the sites, and protected the clergy who performed the rituals, thus enhancing the status of the king by placing him at the center of ritual performance and enhancing his presence among the participants in these rituals.[13] Third, the Church offered new modes of organization and authority that remained the same throughout the kingdom and at the center of which were both king and clergy, thus providing a single structure of power dominated by the king and his clergy.[14] As we examine the case studies below, we will see how rulers of the Early Conversion Period used these tools to centralize their power and create authority based on models inherited from Rome.

The change in ideology to which Higham and Geake refer indicates a change in the nature of rulership which may be found in other studies of the early Anglo-Saxon period. The creation of larger ethnic identities tied to the newly emerging kings is another element of this ideological

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10. N.J. Higham, *The Convert Kings: Power and Religious Affiliation in Early Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 2.

11. Higham, *Convert Kings*, 40-1.

12. Richard P. Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988)., 48.

13. Higham, *Convert Kings*, 40-1.

14. Higham, *Convert Kings*, 40-1.

shift as it pertains to rulership, and is connected to ethnogenesis as discussed in Chapter 3. While

these kings used Roman influences to create ideologies of kingship, they also began to create

Germanic ethnicities to tie potential members of a *gens* to their own kernels of tradition. While

Geake argues that the Anglo-Saxon elites abandoned many Germanic cultural items in their

burials in favor of Roman goods, one should not take that to mean that the migrants adopted the

culture of the sub-Roman Britons or that they completely forswore Germanic identity. Rather,

they abandoned the smaller scale Germanic identities of the Migration Period, such as those of

the *Stoppingas* and *Hastingas*, in favor of new larger scale identities, such as Kentish or Saxon,

in which both Germanic and Roman elements played a part. John Moreland and other historians

of Anglo-Saxon ethnicity contend that Anglian, Saxon, and Jutish identities emerged during the

period of kingdom formation, which occurred beginning in the late sixth century.[15] Prior to this

period, during the migration era, identities were primarily local and based around an individual

leader.[16] While there may have been a sense of a larger Anglianness or Saxonness among these

disparate groups, no ruler was able to utilize greater identities or center them on his own

dynasty.[17] Anglo-Saxon polities of the Migration Period, such as that of the Wixan or the various

-ingas groups found in the charters, were both numerous and small.[18] Groups such as the

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15. John Moreland, "Ethnicity, Power, and the English," *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain*, edited by William O. Frazer and Andrew Tyrrell (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), 23-51.

16. Martin Welch, "The Kingdom of the South Saxons: The Origins," *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, edited by (London, Leicester University Press, 1989), 78.

17. Barbara Yorke, "Anglo-Saxon *Gentes* and *Regna*," *Regna and Gentes: The Relationship Between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World*, edited by Hans-Werner Goetz, Jörg Jarnut, and Walter Pohl (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 381-407; Alex Woolf, "Community, Identity, and Kingship in Early England," *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain*, edited by William O. Frazer and Andrew Tyrrell (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), 91-109.

18. Keith Bailey, "The Middle Saxons," *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, edited by (London, Leicester University Press, 1989), 114-5.

Hæstingas had their own identities, and in their case they retained that identity until the

Conquest.[19] In fact, the territorial extent of such polities was probably between 100 and 300

hides, smaller than those groups recognized in the Tribal Hidage as independent or formerly

independent political entities.[20] Tied to these political divisions were the ethnic identities that

coalesced about the same time as the polities. Lacking other forms of unifying identities, such as

loyalty to the empire or a centralized religion, military leaders began to create new ethnic

identities centered around themselves by expanding their jurisdiction, converting to religions

which could be centralized at their own courts, centering ethnic identities around their own

kernels of tradition, replacing smaller-scale kinship with larger-scale ethnic identities, and

creating new centers of royal power. Most importantly, successful kings of the Conversion period

were able to replace local identities, such as those tied to kin, with royal identities through the

above methods, thereby using ethnicity to create authority.

For the period before the arrival of Augustine's mission, there is little written evidence

for the building of power bases by Anglo-Saxon leaders. Archaeological evidence points,

however, to the emergence of social distinctions in the sixth century. Namely, at that point,

groups of elites had been able to demand payments in the form of renders from their neighbors.[21]

As these elite groups formed, they began to adopt customs including burial rites and dress that

would serve to distinguish them from their social inferiors. Proximity allowed those who were

tied to the elites to begin to emulate these customs, thus forming locally-based ethnic groups. By

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19. Welch, "Kingdom of the South Saxons," 78.

20. Bailey, "Middle Saxons," 121.

21. Renders were obligations in the form of labor or goods, especially food, that people of lower social status owed to elites. Robin Fleming, *Britain after Rome: The Fall and Rise, 400 to 1070* (London: Penguin Books, 2011), 74.

the seventh century, these elites received enough food and other goods in the form of renders so that they no longer needed to perform labor themselves, and began to tie their elite status to a warrior status. At the same time, they began to create a past in order to legitimize the demands they made on those who owed them goods and services by connecting themselves to a tradition in which their ancestors had won the rights to these services in battle. That is, they invented a history in order to create authority.[22] Although there was certainly some violence involved in the creation of these polities, as we know that warbands were involved in the settlement, and later leaders such as Penda based their power primarily on military prowess, the creation of these groupings did not solely rely on force.[23] Rather, elites utilized other strategies of power such as burying their dead near ancient Roman monuments in order to associate their families with the authority bound with those sites.[24] Acculturation of Britons into Anglo-Saxon culture likely took place as well, but is difficult to quantify.[25] By the later sixth century, the more successful elite groups had begun to cobble together an amalgam of different smaller units into larger territories, or *regiones*. While some of these combinations emerged from competition with other elites, it should also be noted that the process provided advantage to non-elites through access to a greater number of resources, and they may have also been instrumental in the process. Kings such as the Mercian rulers used a distinctive set of cultural rituals and fashions that had emerged in central Britain to create a common past and a sense of unity for the people under their rule. These kings also tied themselves to a perceived Roman past, via Frankish customs, in order to link

22. Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 68-93.

23. Heinrich Härke, "Anglo-Saxon Immigration and Ethnogenesis," *Medieval Archaeology* 55 no. 1 (2011): 1-28; Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 105.

24. Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 93.

25. Härke, "Immigration and Ethnogenesis," 1-28.

themselves with the authority that Rome provided.[26] Sophisticated combinations of violence and

social strategies, including manipulation of monuments and their attendant ideology as well as

the construction of unique ethnic identities formed around a kernel of tradition held by a royal

family, formed a significant part of the strategies of social power pursued by elite rulers of newly

emerging kingdoms in pre-conversion Anglo-Saxon England. The monuments and artifacts of

the fifth and sixth century illustrate the efforts of the Anglo-Saxon ruling elite to connect

themselves to an imagined or remembered Roman past of Britain and enhance their authority by

associating themselves with this past.[27]

In the Conversion Period, therefore, kings had new means with which to build authority

and power, such as the Church and the ideologies associated with it. With the arrival of

Christianity, Anglo-Saxon kings had another set of ideological tools which they could access to

further reinforce their hegemony. We know that in Kent the arrival of Christianity provided

Æthelberht with access to technologies such as literacy and administrative structures. These,

combined with traditional elements of Germanic kingship, helped support royal control over

ritual sites, written law and charters, and served to bolster kingship.[28] Archaeological records

again support these assertions, demonstrating that, by the eighth century, Anglo-Saxon elites

were investing heavily in the new Christian ideology. Investment in ecclesiastical institutions,

manuscripts, metalwork, and sculpture signal both political and religious ideas. This change in

ideology served to establish the institution of kingship in England.[29] All of these coincident

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26. Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 93-150.

27. Geake, *Use of Grave Goods*, 133.

28. Higham, *Convert Kings*, 2, 40, 87-8.

29. Geake, *Use of Grave-Goods*, 128-36.

changes were part of the new strategies of power being employed by kings in the Early

Conversion Period.

As kings found new sources of power in the form of ideology, their use of violence

changed. The kin group, the crucial element of the old order, was key to the conduct of feud, and

feud helped to reinforce the social hierarchy in pre-conversion Anglo-Saxon society.[30] Herein lies

the difference between the chiefdom and the kingdom, which has to do with state formation, and

the latter perhaps closer to modern definitions of a state.[31] While there are numerous definitions

of "the state," two in particular prove useful in examining the developments at hand, and these

two should provide sufficient common ground for most. The first definition is, of course, Max

Weber's, wherein the "state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of

the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory."[32] While Weber provides a modern

definition, as he clearly states in the essay,[33] Alex Woolf provides one more relevant to early

medieval Britain in his article on kingship. He "suggest(s) that the primary, though not sole,

function of a polity and its magistrates, of whom the king is the principal, in the kind of societies

that interest us here, is to mediate *between* (emphasis in original) kin groups."[34] In order for a

king to mediate in such a way, he must rank socially above such groups. It is this separation from

society which marks the distinction between chieftancy and kingship and which allows the kings

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30. Paul Hyams, *Rancor and Reconciliation in Medieval England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 9-10.

31. I am sure to receive much criticism from early modernists about my use of the word "state" for this period. The use of such terminology, however, is crucial for the development of this line of argument.

32. Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, edited and translated by H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 78.

33. Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 78.

34. Woolf, "Community, Identity, and Kingship," 93.

to intervene in feud, that most visible of disputes between kin groups. Kings united kin through

ethnicities that they controlled and that were larger than the kin groups of which the ethnicity was

a confederation. Violence in the form of feud and social relationships in the form of kin were

both supplemented by new power sources, but neither disappeared. Before the development of

kingship, leadership was local, and was based on smaller ethnic units. The transition from

chieftaincy to kingship and the concomitant shift in the use of violence as a basis of power were

elements of greater changes occurring in England beginning in the later decades of the sixth

century. This background brings us to the first of the kings whom we

know tried to create such a level of authority, the king who is the subject of our first case study in

violence and kingship.

The description of Anglo-Saxon leaders expanding their power from that of chieftains to

that of kings reflects their desire to augment their power with authority. The Anglo-Saxons

themselves did not necessarily distinguish between the two types of leadership. For example, the

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle uses the Old English word *cyning*, or king, to refer to rulers. These

include Vortigern, the British leader who invited the Anglo-Saxons to Britain;[35] Æsc, son of

Hengest and king of Kent in the late fifth century;[36] Ælle, the first of Bede's kings to exercise

hegemony over the southern kingdoms;[37] Æthelberht,[38] who used religion to build authority;[39]

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35. ASC a.449; 16.

36. ASC a.456, a.488; 16, 18.

37. ASC a.588; 21; Bede, HE, II.5; 148.

38. ASC a.565, a.616; 20, 23.

39. As discussed in the Æthelberht section on the following page.

and later kings such as Alfred[40] and Æthelred II.[41] Similarly, Bede refers to Vortigern,[42] Æthelberht,[43] Æthelfrith,[44] Ælle,[45] and others by the Latin title *rex*. As we will see below for several of these examples, these kings exercised different levels of both power and authority, but the sources do not make such distinctions. There are two types of kingship among the Germanic traditions, however, from which Anglo-Saxon leaders may have drawn their ideologies of leadership, judicial and military.[46] The distinction that the sources do make is territorial, in that leaders without territory are not called kings.

Æthelberht, Authority, and Kentish Ethnogenesis

Æthelberht, king of Kent and the first Christian Anglo-Saxon ruler, was perhaps the most powerful ruler in southern England at the turn of the seventh century, even if Kentish hegemony did not last until his death.[47] Bede recounts the king's accomplishments upon recording his death in the excerpt which began this chapter, noting that he was the third king to exert a sort of *imperium* over his neighbors. Unfortunately, evidence for Æthelberht's rise to power is somewhat lacking, seeing as his reign began prior to the use of writing among the Anglo-

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40. ASC a.871; 49.

41. ASC a.979; 60.

42. Bede, HE I.15; 50.

43. Bede, HE I.25; 74.

44. Bede, HE I.34; 116.

45. Bede, HE II.5; 148.

46. Don Henson, *The Origins of the Anglo-Saxons* (Frithgarth, England: Anglo-Saxon Books, 2006), 147.

47. Some form of overlordship did last, however, as the eastern Saxons did revert to paganism with Eadbald when he succeeded Æthelberht. D.P. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings* (London: Routledge, 2000), 30.

Saxons.[48] We do know, however, that he was likely born around 560 and succeeded his father

Eorcenberht in the 580s or early 590s. Most historians agree that he did not reign fifty-six years,

as Bede notes, but that he lived that long, until about 616. He probably attained an overlordship

over his neighbors after the death of Ceawlin, the previous hegemon, about 593.[49] He knew,

however, that power was fleeting. Hegemony in England did not last, as proven by those

hegemons who preceded him, such as Ælle and Ceawlin, neither of whom was able to pass the

overlordship on to his heirs, and whose hegemony may not have lasted throughout their entire

reigns.[50] Rather than merely relying on force to ensure his lasting power, Æthelberht sought new

strategies of power to expand his control over southern England. As overlord, Æthelberht utilized

a diverse set of strategies of power to build his power and create authority. These strategies

included military prowess, control over ritual and trade sites, political ties, and ethnicity.

Conversion to Christianity provided him with access to many other strategies such as law, a

hierarchical institutional framework, and new political connections. In incorporating these new

strategies, Æthelberht brought kingship to Kent by separating himself from the social ties based

on kin that bound society together, offering instead a judge who could negotiate disputes between

parties as an authority figure.

While we do not know to what extent Ælle and Ceawlin used other strategies of power,

all the evidence has pointed to their use of force to establish and maintain their rules. One later

pagan Anglo-Saxon ruler of Mercia, Penda, relied on sources of power other than military

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48. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 28.

49. Nicholas Brooks, "The Creation and Early Structure of the Kingdom of Kent," Steven Bassett, ed., *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms* (London: Leicester University Press, 1989), 67.

50. Ceawlin's may have ended in 592 after a battle at Woden's Barrow. *ASC* a.592; 21. See Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 28.

prowess, but it was the use of force on which his overlordship rested.[51] Similarly, Æthelberht

used military might, the most important strategy of power at the turn of the seventh century, to

some effect. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* notes a battle between Æthelberht and Ceawlin in 568

in which the latter was victorious.[52] While Æthelberht's participation in a battle at that time is

questionable,[53] it does provide evidence of military leadership as an ideal. He may have been

involved in other battles, but evidence is lacking for these encounters. If the earliest political

leaders were military commanders who took control over Roman-British political entities in the

fifth and sixth centuries, then it follows that hegemons would be those best able to exert this

military prowess.[54] It is also likely that the position of *brytenwealda*, as the overlord or hegemon

was known, included some sort of military leadership over subordinate leaders. As Kirby argues,

the fact that Redwald was allowed to command his own forces and that Bede makes mention of

this military leadership implies that the overlord had typically been the military commander of a

confederation of forces. Redwald being allowed to command his own forces was thus a

noteworthy exception to the typical command structure associated with the overlordship.

Typically, the overlord, in this case Æthelberht, would have commanded all forces and

competing rulers would have held a subordinate status in the military command structure.[55]

While Redwald's retention of the command of his own forces may imply his superior military

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51. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 105.

52. ASC a.568; 21.

53. If we accept Kirby's and Brooks's interpretation of Æthelbehrt's birth in 560, he would have been about eight. If there was a battle between the kingdoms of Ceawlin and Æthelberht, it would have likely happened in a different year, or it was Æthelberht's father Eorcenberht that led Kentish forces, whether Æthelberht was present or not. Brooks, "Creation of Kent," 67; Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, 27.

54. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 16; Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, 15-18.

55. Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, 17.

ability when compared to Æthelberht, what is clear is that there was some sort of military

leadership associated with the overlordship. Furthermore, the previous overlord Ceawlin lost

both his overlordship and his kingdom as the result of a battle at Woden's Barrow, further

demonstrating the military dimensions of both the overlordship and royal rule itself.[56] All these

point to the importance of military might in the construction of power in England during the time

of Æthelberht's reign.

Æthelberht's contemporaries who did not wield an overlordship provide further evidence

of the efficacy of violence and force as a strategy of power in the late sixth century. Ceolwulf was

a king of Wessex not long after the death of the *brytenwealda* Ceawlin and was a descendant of

Cerdic, the founder of the dynasty according to the West Saxon tradition.[57] According to the

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, *symble he feaht ꝺ wan, oððe wið Angelcynn oþþe wið Walas oððe wið*

Pythas oððe wið Scottas[58] ("he continually fought and strove either against the Angle race, or

against the Welsh, or against the Picts, or against the Scots").[59] The same king also fought against

the South Saxons during his reign.[60] Ceolwulf, a descendant of Ceawlin and an ancestor of

Alfred, clearly used force against his neighbors to build his power, a fact that was celebrated by

his descendants.[61] Another pair of West Saxon kings, Cynegils and Cwichelm, earned victory in a

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56. ASC a.592; 22.

57. The A (Winchester or Parker) manuscript of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* includes a genealogy of Alfred's ancestors back to Cerdic, who according to tradition was the leader of the group that migrated to Britain and founded the dynasty. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle A*, Preface; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle According to Several Original Authorities*, ed. Benjamin Thorpe, Vol. I: Original Texts (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1861), 1-2.

58. ASC a.597; 22.

59. Michael Swanton, trans., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, (New York: Routledge, 1998), 21.

60. ASC a.607; 23.

61. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* A, Preface; 1-2.

battle against the Welsh.[62] The most noteworthy wielders of force at this time, however, were those who might have challenged Æthelbert for the *imperium*. Æthelfrith, for instance, as king of Northumbria defeated a Scottish army led by Aedan in 603 so thoroughly that, as Bede notes, no Scottish king attempted to attack an Anglo-Saxon kingdom since.[63] While Æthelfrith's power will be discussed below, it is worth noting here that powerful kings at the turn of the seventh century were required to wield military might.

Among the sources of his power, Æthelberht also tapped into a variety of economic sources. Because of its proximity to the Continent, Kent was uniquely positioned to engage in trade with the Frankish kingdoms. Æthelberht both encouraged and profited from this trade by protecting merchants and levying tolls to pay for this protection. This source of power and income had previously been in the hands of the nobility, but during the sixth century the Kentish kings had gained control over this source of power and income. Additionally, these kings were able to claim a monopoly on certain goods within Britain, such as wheel-thrown pottery and certain gems, so that they were the main source of such goods on the island. This monopoly gave them an advantage in gift exchange – since others could not match their gifts, Æthelberht and the other Kentish kings were able to demonstrate their superiority.[64] This royal control over trade contributed not only to the growth of commerce and the expansion of the king's protection, but also to the emergence of trading centers under the protection of the king by the seventh century. At the same time, certainly by the reign of Æthelberht, the Kentish kings were minting coins in the Frankish style, pointing not only to the growing importance of trade but the king's role in this

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62. ASC a. 614; 23.

63. Bede, HE, I.34; 116.

64. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 40-3.

trade. Kings not only profited from protection of trade, but used their international connections to

facilitate commerce across the English Channel.[65] That Ætherlberht was married to a Christian

Frankish princess further demonstrates these Kentish connections with the Continent, and likely

strengthened existing trading ties.[66] This economic growth was directly connected to the

expansion of royal power, and provides further evidence of the emergence of kingship. In the

Migration Period, wealth was based on access to portable goods that could be obtained through

plunder. Chieftains used this plunder to ensure the loyalty of their followers.[67] This element of

migration era rule fits well with the notion that violence was the primary strategy of power at the

time, as the chiefs had to acquire the plunder by taking it from others. As kings sought new

strategies of power during the later sixth century, however, they and their nobles sought more

reliable sources of wealth. Kings were itinerant at this time, traveling between the homes of their

followers to exact tribute in the form of hospitality. Having conquered territory, the rulers could

share that territory with their followers, and the followers could support their king financially. At

the same time, the local population paid the nobles in food renders and contributed to the

maintenance of roads and high status sites.[68] Evidence for Æthelberht's use of this source of

income lies in his law, which provides a monetary value for this obligation, *fedesl*, of twenty

shillings.[69] According to Lisi Oliver, this twenty shillings was an amount paid by certain nobles

in the form of food renders for the feeding of the king.[70] As the royal court was itinerant, nobles

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65. Higham, "Chieftains to Kings," 144-5.

66. Bede, HE, I.25; 72-4.

67. Higham, "Chieftains to Kings," 144.

68. Higham, "Chieftains to Kings," 144.

69. *Æthelberht* 17; 64.

70. Lisi Oliver, "Æthelberht's *Fedesl* Revisited," *Notes and Queries* 55 no. 2 (2008): 125-6.

subject to the king's power were required to feed the king and his household, whether as hosts, through the form of renders, or by this payment.[71] Æthelberht had thus augmented his power with a number of economic sources, including control over trade and *fedesl*. These sources of power also indicate a major change in the style of rule away from the warrior chieftain looking to acquire plunder to ensure the loyalty of his followers to the king using land as a major source of wealth. These social, economic, and political changes certainly contributed to the changing perception of violence and feud, as demonstrated in Æthelberht's law.

In addition to economic sources of power, Æthelberht utilized control over certain sites to enhance his prestige. For instance, the site of his most important city, Canterbury, had been occupied since the Iron Age and into the Roman period, although it may have been abandoned during the fifth century. After conversion, the king gave the missionary leader Augustine an old Roman building, which may have previously been a church, to serve as his new cathedral.[72] While there may have been practical reasons for occupying ancient sites, it also helped to transmit some of the authority associated with these sites. Just as other places could give a king a semblance of authority if he were to associate himself with them, so Augustine's occupation of the old Roman church thus transferred some of the authority of the Roman church to the English.[73] Æthelberht himself tapped into this source of power by ordering that he and his successors be buried at that location. This church was originally dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul, the former being the progenitor of the papal line.[74] By locating his tomb on the site

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71. Lisi Oliver, *The Beginnings of English Law* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 86.

72. Bede, HE I.33; 114.

73. David Rollason, "Forests, Parks, Palaces, and the Power of Place in Early Medieval Kingship," *Early Medieval Europe* 20 no.4 (2012): 428-449.

74. Brooks, "Creation and Structure of Kent," 65.

associated with Rome and its first bishop, Æthelberht associated his own power with Rome and the pope. In a similar way, barrow burials were often located near Roman monuments during the sixth century and later. These burials may have been part of an effort to associate the dead, and hence the survivors who inherited their authority, with Roman rule. In addition, by the seventh century newly established churches and religious sites were located near old Roman sites.[75] Taken together with the use of sites by Æthelberht's contemporaries (below), all this points to the importance of associating with other forms of authority as a strategy of power during this period.

In addition to these strategies of power, Æthelberht also established connections with other powerful kingdoms. It is clear from the archaeological and historical record that eastern Kent had political and cultural ties with the Merovingian kingdoms of northern Francia. As mentioned previously, Æthelberht married a princess of one of these families, Bertha, the daughter of Charibert, as part of a network of alliances set up by the Frankish kings.[76] Conversion may have been a part of this marriage contract, even if Æthelberht did not later wish to be converted by a Frankish mission so as to avoid further subordinating himself to the Merovingian hegemony.[77] This connection between the Kentish and Frankish kingdoms predates Æthelberht's reign. Identifiers which marked individuals as having connections with the Franks can be found from the middle of the sixth century. Higham interprets the shift from cremation to furnished inhumation at that time as an effort to identify with the Franks or Romans via the Franks. In addition, high status burials were accompanied by Frankish or Eastern Roman goods, and indigenous peoples likewise were buried with goods similar to those of the new elites so as to

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75. Higham, "Chieftains to Kings," 128.

76. Higham, *Convert Kings*, 82-7.

77. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 28-9; Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, 29.

mark themselves as members of these ethnic groups. The bearers of these ethnic markers likely

wore them for political reasons, to enhance their own socio-political prestige with Continental

connections.[78] Æthelberht may, in fact, have co-opted some of the Franks' strategies of power

and incorporated them into his own style of rule. The clearest example is in the form of written

law, which parallels Frankish law in a number of ways.[79] There are those who might argue that

the Merovingians helped to stimulate the growth of kingship in Britain, and that kingship

developed first in Kent because of the Frankish connection.[80] That identification with the

Frankish rulers and their affectations of political power was a matter of local politics helps

explain the pagan reactions against conversion, such as that of the East Saxons, which some have

interpreted as having political rather than religious motivations.[81]

Æthelberht also made careful use of ethnicity in his efforts to build authority in southern

Britain. It has already been demonstrated that he attempted to connect himself to Rome in order

to associate his rule with Roman authority. It is also clear that there was a Kentish connection

with the Frankish rulers, as evidenced by his marriage to the Frankish princess Bertha and the

trade ties between the two kingdoms.[82] At the same time, Æthelberht was careful not to make

himself seem subordinate to the Franks. While some may argue that there was an attempt at

Frankish hegemony over Kent, Æthelbert played the political game by preferring Roman to

78. Higham, "Chieftains to Kings," 128.

79. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 41.

80. Higham, "Chieftains to Kings," 143.

81. Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, 31-4.

82. Higham, *Convert Kings*, 86-7.

Frankish missionaries in his conversion.[83] He could have made use of the Frankish bishop at his court, Liudhard, but instead chose conversion from Rome instead.[84] Æthelberht made use of ethnicity in other ways, and likely participated in the construction of a Kentish identity as the other rulers of his era were doing. In addition, there is the problematic nature of the *læt* found in his law. This group holds a different wergeld, and hence a different social status, from others within the kingdom. It has been postulated that this group consisted of a remnant of the British population living within the kingdom who had yet to adopt Kentish ethnicity. It may also refer to a group of people being gradually released from slavery over several generations. As the term *læt* appears nowhere else in the Old English documents, however, historians have been unable to clarify its meaning.[85]

When Augustine's mission arrived in 597, Æthelberht found a new source of power in the authority provided by the Roman church. Conversion provided access to new strategies of power, and allowed Æthelberht to use existing strategies in new ways. As part of his newfound authority, Æthelberht was the first Anglo-Saxon king who we know issued a collection of laws. Not only do these laws provide evidence of a greater diversity of strategies of power used by Æthelberht compared to his contemporaries, they also show the process of state formation as the king attempted to separate himself from the rest of society and mediate between kin groups. Such a desire for separation can be seen in his offering protection to those at his court, seen in his second law.

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83. Ian Wood, "Frankish Hegemony in England," *The Age of Sutton Hoo: The Seventh Century in Northwestern Europe*, ed. Martin Carver (Rochester: The Boydell Press, 1992), 235-41.

84. Nicholas J. Higham and Martin J. Ryan, *The Anglo-Saxon World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 154.

85. Oliver, *Beginnings of English Law*, 91-3.

Gif cyning his leode to him gehateþ, ꝺ heom mon þær yfel gedo, II bote ꝺ cyninge L scillinga.[86]

If the king calls his men to him, and anyone do evil to them there, let him compensate double and pay fifty shillings to the king.

Other laws offer similar protection at the king's court, as well as protection for the new elite in Kent, the leaders of the Church.[87] In offering such protection, the king created an opportunity for his followers to become dependent on him and to rely on his use of force to protect them rather than their own.

In addition to offering protection at his court, Æthelberht appears to be offering an alternative to dispute resolution between kin groups in his legal compilation.

21. Gif man mannan ofslæhð, medume leodgeld C scillinga gebete.
22. Gif man mannan ofslæhð, æt openum græfe XX scillinga forgelde, ꝺ in XL nihta ealne leod forgelde.
23. Gif bana of lande gewiteþ, ða magas healfne leod forgelden.[88]

21. If one man slays another, let him compensate with the average wergeld of 100 shillings.
22. If one man slays another, at the open grave let him pay twenty shillings, and in forty nights let him pay all the wergeld.
23. If the slayer departs from the land, let the kin pay half the wergeld.

While law 23 retains the concept of kin responsibility for the actions of members of the kin, it is clear that Æthelberht is imposing himself in new ways into dispute resolution. Not only does he provide an alternative to the feud, but he also presents the procedure for pursuing that alternative, beginning with the initial payment at the grave. There may have been modifiers to this 100 wergeld, as implied in the first law in the collection, which modifies the compensation for theft

86. *Law of Æthelberht* 2; edited by F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen,* vol. 1, *Text und Übersetzung* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1903), 3.

87. *Æthelberht* 1, 5-8; 3.

88. *Æthelberht* 21-3; 4.

based on the socio-political status of the victim, i.e., a bishop's property should be compensated elevenfold, while that of a cleric only threefold.[89] Other laws in the compilation provide further procedure for the payment of wergeld. As noted in Chapter 3, Æthelberht 26 states that a slayer must compensate the family of his victim with his own property.[90] The only other wergelds given in the law are those of the aforementioned *læt*,[91] who may have been Britons living in an English kingdom or former slaves with a socially inferior status and who possessed a somewhat lower wergeld as a result.[92] In other words, Æthelberht's treatment of compensation for killing in lieu of feud is relatively comprehensive in that it includes a base wergeld, modifiers for those of a different status, and procedure for payment.

Along with conversion to Christianity, therefore, came a process to which I will refer as the conversion of violence. Conversion to the new religion entailed not just a change in the gods that were worshiped, or the place where worship happened. Instead, the new religion saw violence in a way different from that of the pagan culture. At the same time, the enhanced political power of the king required the conversion of violence as well. By extricating himself from the bonds of the feud-practicing society centered around the kin group, he also removed himself from feud. In removing himself from the violence that helped to maintain some of the social order, he was able to control it socially, replacing in a sense the threat of feud, which kept violence in check, with the threat of other consequences, such as fines and compensations. Only a powerful leader such as Æthelberht could make such a change, as it required one whose threats

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89. *Æthelberht* 1; 3.

90. *Æthelberht* 30; 5.

91. *Æthelberht* 26; 6.

92. Oliver, *Beginnings of English Law,* 91-3.

had some weight behind them. One should not imagine this going too far, that Æthelberht

fundamentally changed the nature of violence. Rather, it was a process that took place over many

centuries, and it was Æthelberht who began that process. The conversion of violence had begun.

Later Anglo-Saxon laws neither reveal the amounts of wergelds for individuals nor do

they provide basic procedure. Rather, the laws of Hlothere (673/4-85) and Eadric (685-7) of Kent

take Æthelberht's as established custom, and expand upon what had already been promulgated,

as noted in the prologue.[93] For example, the laws provide several procedures in the case of

servants killing free or noble men, which is simply procedural clarification for special

circumstances.[94] While the later laws do not set any wergelds, they do provide evidence that there

are multiple wergelds not found in Æthelberht's law, such as that of a noble at 300 shillings.

> *Gif mannes esne eorlcunde mannan ofslæhð þane ðe sio þreom hundum scll. gylde, se agend þone banan agefe ⁊ do þær þrio manwyð to.*[95]

> If a person's servant kills a man of noble birth, who should be compensated for with three hundred shillings, the owner should give up that killer and add three man-worths.[96]

Whereas Æthelberht's law sets the average wergeld at 100 shillings, Hlothere and Eadric modify

that standard for certain elites by providing them with a wergeld three times that of a non-elite

free man. This adjustment could reflect an elevation in the status of the nobility after the death of

Æthelberht. Importantly, however, it seems as if the 100 wergeld standard set by the previous

king remained in place. Similarly, the law of Wihtred of Kent (690/1-725)[97] provides no further

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93. *Law of Hlothere and Eadric*, Prologue; edited by F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen,* vol. 1, *Text und Übersetzung* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1903), 9; Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 33; Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 93.

94. *Hlothere and Eadric*, 1-5; 9-10.

95. *Hlothere and Eadric*, 1; 9.

96. Oliver, *Beginnings of English Law*, 127.

97. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 33.

definition of wergeld, only stating that a thief caught in the act will not be compensated, and uses

the customs established by its predecessors.[98] Like later West Saxon laws, these legal

compilations expand upon the laws set down by their predecessors and make changes to existing

law, but do not replace them entirely.[99] Furthermore, with the creation of each of these legal

collections, the crown appears to insert itself more and more into the resolution of disputes. For

instance, while Æthelberht's law simply covers the procedure for compensation, later laws

provide models for servants killing free men, and even procedures for proper accusations.[100] It is

clear then that Æthelberht was building the foundations of a legal system in which the king had

the authority to intervene in relations between individuals, thus creating a lasting authority, rather

than relying on force for power. Most important, he built his power by offering protection and by

distinguishing himself from the social bonds that governed those beneath him in social rank.

It appears that Æthelberht was, if not introducing, at least formalizing the concept of

compensation for killing among the Anglo-Saxons. Other Germanic peoples certainly utilized

compensation earlier than the Anglo-Saxons, including the Merovingians with whom the Kentish

kings had such strong ties. The Law of the Salian Franks, promulgated by Clovis at the beginning

of the sixth century,[101] includes a detailed schedule of compensations based on social status, sex,

age (for women), and ethnicity.[102] While it is unknown if forms of compensation in lieu of

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98. *Laws of Wihtred*, 25; edited by F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen,* vol. 1, *Text und Übersetzung* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1903), 14.

99. See the introduction to Alfred's laws. *Laws of Alfred*, Introduction 49§9; edited by F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen,* vol. 1, *Text und Übersetzung* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1903), 46.

100. *Hlothere and Eadric*, 2-5; 9-10; *Wihtred*, 16-28; 13-14.

101. Katherine Fischer Drew, Introduction, *The Laws of the Salian Franks* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 8; Ian Wood. *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450-751* (London: Longman, 1994), 108-13.

102. *Pactus Legis Salicae*, 41; edited by Karl August Eckhardt, *MGH, Legem Nationum Germanicarum* IV, pars I (Hanover, 1962), 154-61.

retaliation were used prior to the creation of this legal collection, Æthelberht's laws are the earliest evidence of Anglo-Saxon wergelds. In addition to inserting himself into disputes to prevent killing as part of a feud, the Kentish ruler does the same with other violent acts in order to prevent such acts from escalating to killing. A series of laws in his collection known as injury tariffs lists the compensations due for various injuries, ranging from the breaking of another man's skull to taking off his toenail.[103] The level of detail found in these laws on slaying and maiming others implies that the concept of compensation was not used regularly among the Kentish people or had yet to be formalized. Later laws from the same kingdom do not include such injury tariffs, nor do West Saxon laws after that of Alfred.[104] Once set, these judgments remained part of the law for succeeding generations, but it was Æthelberht's legal compilation which established a lasting ruling for compensation for injury.

Æthelberht also extracted himself from the predominant social bonds by elevating himself above the social hierarchy. He did so by elevating the status of the king, offering his protection, and extending that protection beyond his person. If, in a chiefdom like the polities of Migration Period England, one's social and political status are based on kin relationships,[105] then Æthelberht's power was limited as long as he remained part of that kinship system. That is, he could never exert control over other kin groups without placing himself outside and above those groups. One way in which he does so is by providing protection. In his law, if someone violates the king's protection by causing harm to another person at a meeting called by the king, the

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103. *Æthelberht* 36, 72; 5, 7.

104. *Alfred* 44-77; 78-88.

105. Timothy Earle, *How Chiefs Came to Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 5.

perpetrator must both compensate the victim double and compensate the king fifty shillings.[106]

Outside of such meetings, the king offers his protection to anyone at his home, and one who kills

another there must compensate the king fifty shillings as well.[107] This protection follows the

person of the king, and anyone who violates royal protection while the king is drinking at the

home of another must pay double compensation.[108] This protection even goes beyond the person

of the king to his followers, and anyone who kills one of the king's men must compensate the

king fifty shillings.[109] These compensations to the king would be in addition to the

compensations due to the victims and their families to avoid feud. In fact, one clause simply

states that the king's protection is worth fifty shillings, *"Cyninges mundbyrd, L scillinga."*[110]

Æthelberht offered specific protection to certain of his officials, but the amount he dictated is

unclear due to damage to the single extant manuscript.[111] All these laws indicate that Æthelberht

was trying to distance himself from the rest of society by providing a protection which others

could not, and by setting up a different set of rules for the king. Compare, for instance, the

compensation for violation of protection for a noble or freeman, which are 12 and 6 shillings,

respectively.[112]

     Æthelberht's laws reveal perhaps the most about the political and social changes taking

place during his reign that were part of the introduction of these new strategies of power. As

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106. *Æthelberht* 2; 3.

107. *Æthelberht* 5; 3.

108. *Æthelberht* 3; 3.

109. *Æthelberht* 6; 3.

110. *Æthelberht* 8; 3.

111. Textus Roffensis 1r.

112. *Æthelberht* 13, 15; 4.

Bede notes, *uolens scilicet tuitionem eis, quos et quorum doctrinam susceperat, praestare*[113]

(these laws were designed to give protection to those whose coming and whose teaching he had

welcomed).[114] For instance, the first laws in his compilation introduce a new elite into the

kingdom, the clergy.

> *Godes feoh ꝺ ciricean XIIgylde. Biscopes feoh XIgylde.*[115]

> 1. God's property and the church's [is to be compensated] with 12[-fold] compensation.
> 2. A bishop's property [is to be compensated] with 11 [-fold] compensation.[116]

The following laws continue in the vein of the second, with multipliers reduced as one travels

down the social scale of Church officials.[117] In addition to protection offered for members of the

Church, Æthelberht also provided protection for the church itself, and equated church peace with

assembly peace.

> *Ciricfriþ IIgylde. M[æthl]friþ[118] IIgylde.*[119]

> 6. [Violation of] church peace [is to be compensated] with 2[-fold] compensation.
> 7. [Violation of] assembly peace [is to be compensated] with 2[-fold] compensation.[120]

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113. Bede, HE II:5; 150.

114. Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, II.5; 151.

115. *Æthelberht*, 1-2; 3.

116. I have used Liebermann's Old English version of these laws for the sake of consistency, and Oliver's translation for the sake of clarity. Although she used a different numbering system than Liebermann, Oliver's translation was both the most elegant and the most clear version of this law. Oliver, *Beginnings of English Law*, 61.

117. *Æthelberht*, 1; 3.

118. Manuscript damage. Textus Roffensis 1r. Lisi Oliver's correction based on a sixteenth century transcription. See note 116 for the differences between the Old English and the translation. Oliver, *Beginnings of English Law,* 60.

119. *Æthelberht*, 1; 3.

120. Oliver, *Beginnings of English Law,* 61.

These laws demonstrate the introduction of a new social elite to Æthelberht's realm along with royal support for their elevated social status. The members of this new social group could similarly become essential to bolstering the king's power as elites who depended upon his favor.

Further evidence of Æthelberht's attempt to not only expand his power to greater foundations other than violence, but to extract himself from the rest of society, lies in his relations with other kings. After the Kentish king's conversion, Bede notes that Redwald of East Anglia had been converted as well, but that he ultimately reverted to idolatry after the death of his overlord.[121] Higham interprets this conversion as an overking imposing his religion on an inferior ruler in that the move held greater political implications than religious ones. Redwald's prior acceptance of baptism had similarly been an acceptance of Æthelberht's overlordship, and was more relevant to the political landscape of early England than to the religious one.[122] The Kentish king was attempting to exert his hegemony both through diplomacy and political coercion rather than by force. Not only did he coerce Redwald to convert, but Æthelberht also brought an Italian missionary, Paulinus, to the East Anglian court, to strengthen the Roman connection.[123] As we will see below, these exertions of hegemony were unique for the period, as the relations between the other potential hegemons of the early seventh century were, on the whole, less peaceful, even if they did use other strategies of exerting their power. Such nonviolent expressions of overlordship were, however, ultimately doomed to failure in the landscape of early seventh century Britain. Redwald did not completely abandon his pagan gods,

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121. Bede, HE II.15; 188-90.

122. Higham, *Convert Kings*, 102-3

123. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 28.

and ultimately rejected Kentish overlordship after Æthelberht's death.[124] On the other hand, in his relations with other leaders, Æthelberht found himself more successful. In the East Saxon kingdom, he may have helped bring the family of Sledd to power, and he solidified his political connection with these rulers by marrying his sister to Sledd. Further evidence of Æthelberht's overlordship is the fact that he was credited with founding St. Paul's in London, which was technically under the rule of Sledd.[125] Æthelberht thus used a variety of strategies to impose his will upon his neighbors through non-violent means.

While the conversion of Redwald proved a temporary success for Æthelberht, other strategies that the Kentish king used to set himself up as an overking among both the Anglo-Saxons and the Britons were less successful.[126] An example is the meeting at the place known as Augustine's Oak.

> *Augustinus adiutorio usus Aedilbercti regis conuocauit ad suum colloquium episcopos siue doctores proximae Brettonum prouinciae in loco ubi usque hodie lingua Anglorum Augustinaes Ac, id est Robur Augustini, in confinio Huicciorum et Oceidentalium Saxonum appellatur, coepitque eis fraterna admonitione suadere, ut pace catholica secum habita communem euangelizandi gentibus pro Domino laborem susciperent.*[127]

> Augustine, making use of the help of King Æthelherht, summoned the bishops and teachers of the neighbouring British kingdom to a conference at a place which is still called in English *Augustinæs Ác,* that is Augustine's oak, on the borders of the Hwicce and the West Saxons. He proceeded to urge them with brotherly admonitions, that they should preserve catholic peace with him and undertake the joint labour of evangelizing the heathen for the Lord's sake.[128]

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124. Martin Carver, "Boat burial in Britain: ancient custom or political signal?," in O. Crumlin-Pedersen (ed), *The Ship as Symbol in Prehistoric and Medieval Scandinavia* (Copenhagen: National Museum of Denmark, 1995), 111-24.

125. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 28.

126. Higham, *Convert Kings*, 113.

127. Bede, HE II.2; 134.

128. Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, II.2; 135.

Augustine intended to use the Britons to augment his efforts to convert the Anglo-Saxons, but they refused to join his efforts. This refusal may, in part, have been due to their recognition that acceptance of Augustine's leadership amounted to acceptance of Æthelberht's hegemony as that king attempted to expand his authority over the British kingdoms. Notably, Æthelberht did not convert the kings of the West Saxons or Hwicce, who already recognized his overlordship, nor did he send his bishop to hold meetings intended to win the submission of the clergy in these regions where his command already held sway.[129] These events demonstrate the limits of Æthelberht's *imperium* and the efficacy of non-violent strategies of power which relied upon the Church in the earliest years after conversion. While this means of expansion failed, it certainly demonstrates the variety of strategies of power employed by Æthelberht in his efforts to expand his overkingship. It demonstrates that the Kentish king was willing to use varying methods in order to place himself above society and to build his authority. Rather than attending himself, he sent his agent so that he could further extricate himself from the affairs of men over whom he wished to rule in order that he might serve as judge over them.

Ultimately, Æthelberht's expansion of power was not to last, as a rival king in the north, Æthelfrith, had proven more successful at military conquest, and, therefore, more successful in the political landscape of Conversion-period England.[130] While the Roman Church was able to provide a number of new strategies of power to the king, it lacked the political capital in Germanic Britain necessary to overcome the value of force as a successful power strategy. At the same time, Æthelberht may simply have been unable to successfully execute such a monumental change in the nature of power in early England, particularly in the face of adversaries so skilled

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129. Higham, *Convert Kings*, 109-12.

130. Higham, *Convert Kings*, 114-9.

in the art of war as Æthelfrith and Redwald. Even before his death, Æthelberht seems to have abandoned his quest for overkingship – unable to secure his bishop as the preeminent Church leader in Britain with the failure at Augustine's Oak, to expand his overlordship, and with stronger rivals active to the north.[131]

Æthelfrith

While Æthelberht's reign is well-documented due to his being the first Christian Anglo-Saxon king, with the result that Bede recorded many details about the years after his conversion, those of his contemporaries received much less attention from the Northumbrian monk. What we do know about other overkings of the period, however, indicates a great number of parallels between them and Æthelberht in terms of the tools they used in the interests of political power. Although the Kentish ruler used a significant number of strategies of power newly available to him due to the Roman mission, other rulers used similar strategies, though often to a different extent and with different results. Æthelberht's contemporary northern ruler with claims to overkingship was Æthelfrith, who brought several territories in the north of England under his sway. Having inherited Bernicia, Æthelfrith became the first king of a united Northumbria when he won the Deiran throne in 604. In addition, he expanded his rule over multiple northern polities during his reign. He established his dominion over these territories largely through a combination of force and the threat of force, so that some regions accepted tributary status under his rule. In so doing, he supplanted the elites who could claim tribute with men loyal to his own person.[132]

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131. Higham, *Convert Kings*, 113-4.

132. Higham, *Kingdom of Northumbria*, 110-11.

For Bede, Æthelfrith's power lay in his ability in war, as seen at the end of Book I of

Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*.

> *His temporibus regno Nordanhymbrorum praefuit rex fortissimus et gloriae cupidissimus Aedilfrid, qui plus omnibus Anglorum primatibus gentem uastauit Brettonum, ita ut Sauli quondam regi Israheliticae gentis conparandus uideretur, excepto dumtaxat hoc, quod diuinae erat religionis ignarus. Nemo enim in tribunis, nemo in regibus plures eorum terras, exterminatis uel subiugatis indigenis, aut tributarias genti Anglorum aut habitabiles fecit.*[133]

> At this time Æthelfrith, a very brave king and most eager for glory, was ruling over the kingdom of Northumbria. He ravaged the Britons more extensively than any other English ruler. He might indeed be compared with Saul who was once king of Israel, but with this exception, that Æthelfrith was ignorant of the divine religion. For no ruler or king had subjected more land to the English race or settled it, having first either exterminated or conquered the natives.[134]

Bede presents Æthelfrith as the consummate warrior, comparable to the Biblical Saul, even if his

paganism was a flaw for Bede.[135] The monk brings Book I to a close with details of the king's

exploits, emphasizing his ability in war yet again.

> *Aedan rex Scottorum, qui Brittaniam inhabitant, uenit contra eum cum inmenso et forti exercitu; sed cum paucis uictus aufugit. Siquidem in loco celeberrimo, qui dicitur Degsastan, id est Degsa lapis, omnis pene eius est caesus exercitus. In qua etiam pugna Theodbald frater Aedilfridi cum omni illo, quem ipse ducebat, exercitu peremtus est. Quod uidelicet bellum Aedilfrid anno ab incarnatione Domini DCIII, regni autem / sui, quod xx et IIII annis tenuit, anno XI perfecit, porro anno Focatis, qui tum Romani regni apicem tenebat, primo. Neque ex eo tempore quisquam regum Scottorum in Brittania aduersus gentem Anglorum usque ad hanc diem in proelium uenire audebat.*[136]

> Aedan, king of the Irish living in Britain, aroused by his (Æthelfrith's) successes, marched against him with an immensely strong army, but he was defeated and fled with few survivors. Indeed, almost all his army was cut to pieces in a very famous place called *Degsastan*, that is the stone of Degsa. In this fight Theobald, Æthelfrith's brother, was

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133. Bede, HE I.34; 116.

134. Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, I.34; 117.

135. N.J. Higham, *(Re-)Reading Bede: The* Ecclesiastical History *in Context* (London: Routledge, 2006),
135.

136. Bede, HE I.34; 116.

killed together with all his army. Æthelfrith brought this war to an end in the year of our Lord 603, and the eleventh year of his reign, which lasted for twenty-four years. It was also the first year of the reign of Phocas who was then Roman emperor. From that time no Irish (Scottish?) king in Britain has dared to make war on the English race to this day.[137]

In other words, for Bede, Æthelfrith was so successful that even in the eighth century his reputation was enough to keep England safe from Celtic attack. While this description is clearly hyperbole on the part of Bede, it does reveal the high esteem which Bede and his contemporaries held for the Northumbrian overking and his ability to use force to attain his political ends.

Æthelfrith's other major battle took place at Chester against a group of Britons c.615, where he *maximum gentis perfidae stragem dedit* ("made a great slaughter of that nation of heretics").[138] He not only defeated the British[139] warriors there, but killed many of the clerics who accompanied them. Interestingly, Bede presents Æthelfrith's victory here as divine vengeance against the Britons who refused to work with their fellow Christians following Anglo-Saxon conversion, a divine vengeance that Augustine purportedly predicted.[140] Bede's purpose in reporting the battle of Chester in this way was probably twofold: to demonstrate the prophetic powers of the apostle to the English and to further condemn the British for failing to either missionize the Anglo-Saxons or to collaborate with them after conversion. Use of divine causation is not unknown for Bede, so it makes sense that he connected Æthelfrith's defeat of the Britons with their refusal to work with Augustine. Remaining historical records only provide

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137. Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, I.34; 117.

138. Bede, HE II.2; 140; Higham, *Kingdom of Northumbria*, 113; Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, II.2; 141.

139. Here 'British' refers to the Britons.

140. Bede, HE II.2; 136-42.

evidence of Æthelfrith's participation in one other battle, the battle in which he lost his life

fighting against Redwald.[141]

That is not to say, however, that the entirety of Æthelfrith's power was based in violence.

Like his contemporary in Kent, Æthelberht, Æthelfrith himself used ideological sources of

power, as seen in his construction of Yeavering. Built around the same time that Æthelred built

his Christian site at Canterbury, Yeavering both centered ceremonies around the person of the

king and made a proclamation of his adherence to pagan Germanic rather than Mediterranean

Christian culture.[142] This political use of monument architecture was not unknown at the time; as

Æthelfrith's contemporary and rival Redwald, the East Anglian king, built the Sutton Hoo

complex in order to declare his independence of Æthelberht's hegemony by demonstrating his

opposition to the Roman Christian ideology that the Kentish king had forced upon him with a

display of adherence to a competing set of values. As Æthelberht converted to Christianity and

built Canterbury to demonstrate his allegiance to Roman methods of rule and thereby gain access

to Roman strategies of power, so Redwald built Sutton Hoo in opposition to Romanness and

Christianity.[143] Like Redwald's construction at Sutton Hoo, Yeavering may indeed have been a

grand declaration of adherence to a set of ideologies which deliberately contrasted with those of

Æthelfrith's political rivals. For instance, the complex on this "Hill of Goats" seems to have

included a site at which oxen were slaughtered for ritual sacrifice, and may have been a pagan

temple.[144] While Redwald build his symbol after he was no longer under the thumb of his

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141. "Æthelfrith 2," *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, http://www.pase.ac.uk/pase/apps/persons/index.html (accessed 17 June 2016).

142. Higham*, Convert Kings*, 146-8.

143. Carver, "Boat Burial in Britain," 110-24.

144. Higham and Ryan, *Anglo-Saxon World*, 136.

overlord – that is, after the deaths of both Æthelberht and Æthelfrith and his own ascension to the overlordship of the south – Yeavering would have been built around the same time as the construction of Canterbury, and would thus serve as a more direct form of opposition.

Other strategies of power are evident from this time period, some of which cannot be linked to Æthelfrith directly. For instance, the lack of places with British names (with the notable exception of Wal-names, indicating an Anglo-Saxon designation for a predominantly British location) suggests the conversion of place to the new rulers, that is the eradication of old names in favor of new ones associated with the newly emerging elite.[145] Place was important in other ways as well, as Yeavering was built on the site of an old Iron Age hill fort, allowing the ruler who controlled it to connect himself with the power of this ancient site.[146] The large size of the site further implies that it must have been built by one with access to a great deal of resources, such as a king.[147] Its size would, therefore, have signaled the economic power of the ruler who built it to the local population. In a world of elites competing for access to resources through renders, it is apparent that Æthelfrith was remarkably successful in this respect. Æthelfrith had been able to gain access to these resources through the threat or use of force, redirecting renders to his court, as mentioned above. He thus used force, or the threat thereof, to gain access to economic power by defeating other elites in battle, such as at Degsastan, and redirected the resources that were being sent to those elites to his own person and that of his followers, which could increase the size of his following and his ability to project his power through site construction. Military power provided economic power, which yielded political power. One can,

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145. Higham, *Kingdom of Northumbria*, 99-101.

146. Higham and Ryan, *Anglo-Saxon World*, 136.

147. Higham and Ryan, *Anglo-Saxon World*, 136.

therefore, see in the career of Æthelfrith the complex interaction of different types of power. For the Northumbrian overlord, violence was the basis of his power because it provided other types of power.

Æthelfrith's violence also entailed a feud with the royal house of Deira. Upon his acquisition of the Deiran kingdom, parts of the Deiran house were driven into exile, including Edwin and Hereric.[148] It was while in East Anglia that Edwin was the subject of an assassination attempt by Æthelfrith. Bede tells us that Æthelfrith both attempted to bribe Redwald to hand over his guest and threatened him with war if he chose not to do so.

> *Cum persequente illum Aedilfrido, qui ante eum regnauit, per diuersa occultus loca uel regna multo annorum tempore profugus uagaretur, tandem uenit ad Redualdum, obsecrans ut uitam suam a tanti persecutoris insidiis tutando seruaret. Qui libenter eum excipiens promisit se quae petebatur esse facturum. At postquam Aedilfrid in hac eum prouincia apparuisse et apud regem illius familiariter cum sociis habitare cognouit, misit nuntios qui Redualdo pecuniam multam pro nece eius offerent; neque aliquid profecit. Misit secundo, misit tertio, et copiosiora argenti dona offerens et bellum insuper illi, si contemneretur, indicens. Qui uel minis fractus uel corruptus muneribus cessit deprecanti, et siue occidere se Eduinum seu legarariis tradere promisit.*[149]

> When he (Edwin) was being persecuted by his predecessor Æthelfrith, he wandered secretly as a fugitive for many years through many places and kingdoms, until at last he came to Redwald and asked him for protection against the plots of his powerful persecutor. Redwald received him gladly, promising to do what he asked. But when Æthelfrith learned that he had been seen in that kingdom and was living on intimate terms with the king among his retainers, he sent messengers offering Redwald large sums of money to put Edwin to death. But it had no effect. He sent a second and a third time, offering even larger gifts of silver and further threatening to make war on him if Redwald despised his offer. The king, being either weakened by his threats or corrupted by his bribes, yielded to his request and promised either to slay Edwin or to give him up to the messengers.[150]

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148. T. Charles-Edwards, "Anglo-Saxon Kinship Revisited," *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the Eighth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. John Hines (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1997), 186.

149. Bede, HE, II.12; 176.

150. Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, II.12; 177.

Ulimately, Redwald reneged on his promise to give up Edwin and instead fought Æthelfrith on

his behalf. It is worth noting here, however, that this feud continued after the death of Æthelfrith

in his battle with Redwald and beyond. Edwin forced the sons of Æthelfrith into exile after he

claimed both Deira and Bernicia. Following Edwin's death, Northumbria was again divided, but

the rivalry between the two families continued. Exile was an alternative to death for those

æthelings on the losing side of a political dispute, though some likely faced death while in

exile.[151] The feud between the houses of Bernicia and Deira also extended into other kingdoms.

While the Deiran court was out of power and in exile, Edwin's nephew Hereric spent his time in

Elmet at the court of Ceretic, but was killed by poison there. Kirby speculates that the poisoning

may have been instigated by Æthelfrith. Following Edwin's exile and return to kingship, he

exacted vengeance on the Elmet ruler and drove him from power.[152] This feud served the interest

of power, as eliminating feud rivals also meant eliminating political rivals, whether the method

of elimination was exile or death.

Like that of Æthelberht, Æthelfrith's hegemony collapsed shortly after his death, even

though the two were built on somewhat different foundations. Fortunately, we have more

evidence for the end of his reign than for that of his Kentish contemporary. Unlike that of the

previous hegemon, Æthelfrith's loss of his power was a result of his death at the hands of a rival

king, in this case Redwald, fighting on behalf of Edwin, a contender for the Northumbrian throne

with whom Æthelfrith had been feuding. As Bede records, Redwald refused to bow to

Æthelfrith's demand to turn Edwin over to him, and instead met him at battle. Since Redwald

was able to gather his army more quickly than his northern rival, he emerged victorious at a

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151. Michelle Ziegler, "The Politics of Exile in Early Northumbria," *Heroic Age* no. 2 (Autumn/Winter 1999): http://www.heroicage.org/issues/2/ha2pen.htm.

152. Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, 60.

battle near Mercia, killing Æthelfrith, and Edwin claimed the Northumbrian throne.[153] The interaction of these three powerful hegemons at a crucial moment in the history of the Early Conversion Period in England demonstrates the importance of violence in the creation of power at the time. Æthelfrith used force or the threat thereof to tap into other sources of power, such as economic, but fell when his use of force failed in the face of a superior (even if temporarily) rival. Power based on force was so much connected to the person of the leader that it was thus fleeting, which may have been a reason that Æthelfrith and his contemporaries looked to create other sources. At the same time, violence key to gaining power, and was a necessary prerequisite prior to deploying other power sources. Just as the foundation of Æthelfrith's power was in the conduct of war and the use of violence, other kings of this period similarly found that violence was a more effective power strategy than ideology. History suggests, with hindsight, that they may have been wrong.

Redwald and Edwin

Into the power vacuum created by the deaths of both Æthelberht and Æthelfrith, Redwald and Edwin emerged as southern overlord and Northumbrian king, respectively. Redwald's power was largely based on the exercise of violence, as indicated by his elevation in status due to victory in battle. Like certain other kings of his era, however, he also used ideological strategies of power. First, he converted to Christianity at the behest of Æthelberht while the Kentish king was the dominant power in the southern half of the island. Similarly, at some undetermined point, perhaps after Æthelberht's power had already waned, Redwald apostatized and again

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153. Bede, HE II.12; 180.

began to follow the pagan religion of his ancestors.[154] With the Sutton Hoo ship burial, however,

Redwald made his most lasting display of his adherence to the old pagan, Germanic, North Sea

customs in opposition to the Christian, Roman, and Mediterranean customs introduced by

Augustine's mission.[155] Like the construction of Yeavering, the Sutton Hoo Burial was a visual

declaration of opposition to the Roman stylings adopted by Æthelberht's court. It therefore

appears as if there were some sort of ideological battle taking place between the major leaders of

early seventh-century England. What may seem a grand ideological struggle between pagan

North Sea and Christian Mediterranean traditions may have indeed been more complex than that.

The previous century has innumerable examples of political leaders claiming adherence to an

ideology for the sake of power, often in order to gain allies who followed the same ideology.

Witness the Cold War, during which leaders of developing nations periodically claimed to be

communist or anti-communist in order to gain access to aid provided by one of the superpowers

and for a multitude of other reasons.[156] While international aid may not have been at stake in

southern Britain near the turn of the seventh century, allegiance to a set of ideologies brought

access to a certain set of strategies of power, such as Æthelberht had with conversion, as well as

alliances with other rulers. In what we would today call a "rally around the flag" effect,

adherence to paganism could likely unite Æthelberht's opposition in a common cause to oppose

his imposition of hegemony. In other words, one should not place too much emphasis on the

pagan/Christian, Germanic/Roman, or other dichotomies. What we have going on in Early

Conversion Period Britain is a political battle between political leaders who are utilizing a

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154. Bede, HE II.15; 190.

155. Carver, "Boat Burial," 110-24.

156. John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 152-88.

multitude of strategies of power, including adherence to a particular set of ideologies which could not only provide new strategies of power but which could also serve to gather allies with similar ideological beliefs, thereby further enhancing power.

Despite the utility of ideology in theorizing social power at the beginning of the seventh century, like his other contemporaries Edwin's rise to power supports the assertion that while ideological authority may have been useful in promoting and maintaining the long-term power of kings, violence was the key to gaining power. King of Northumbria from 616 to 633, Edwin's accession to the throne was facilitated by the death in battle of a rival king, Æthelfrith.[157] Edwin's predecessor, Æthelfrith, had established his overkingship largely through force, as noted above. As a result of these conquests, his Deiran rival Edwin was forced into exile, first into Mercia under Ceorl and later at the East Anglian court of Redwald.[158] Although Redwald initially agreed to hand over Edwin to his rival, he ultimately changed his mind, choosing instead to honor the obligations made to his guest and not bend to the will of his northern rival. A friend of Edwin informs him that Redwald has decided not to hand him over to Æthelfrith.

> "Quia mutatum est cor regis, nec tibi aliquid mali facere, sed fidem potius pllicitam seruare disponsit. Postquam enim cogitationem suam, de qua tibi ante dixi, reginae in secreto reuelauit, reuocauit eum illa ab intentione, ammonens quia numma ratione conueniat tanto regi amicum suum optimum in necessitate positum auro uendere, immo fidem suam, quae omnibus ornamentis pretiosior est, amore pecuniae perdere." Quid plura? Fecit rex ut dictum est; nec solum exulem nuntiis hostilibus non tradidit, sed etiam eum ut in regnum perueniret adiuuit. Nam mox redeuntibus domum nuntiis, exercitum ad debellandum Aedilfridum colligit copiosum eumque sibi occurrentem cum exercitu multum inpari.[159]

> "The king has changed his mind and intends to do you no wrong but to keep faith with you. When he secretly revealed to the queen the plan I told you of, she dissuaded him

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157. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 77.

158. Bede, HE II.14; 186.

159. Bede, HE II.12; 180.

from it, warning him that it was in no way fitting for so great a king to sell his best friend for gold when he was in such trouble, still less to sacrifice his own honour, which is more precious than any ornament, for the love of money." To be brief, the king did as he had said and not only did he not betray the exile to the enemy messengers but he even assisted Edwin to gain the throne. As soon as the messengers had returned home, he raised a large army to overthrow Æthelfrith.[160]

The *Chronicle* entry for 617 shows the result of the battle that ensued between the armies of

Redwald and Æthelfrith.

> *Her wærð Æðelfrið Norðhymbra cining ofslagen fram Reodwalde Eastengla cininge, ꝺ Eadwine Ælling feng to rice ꝺ geyde eall Brytene buton Cantware anre ꝺ adrefde ut þa eðelingas, Æðelfriðes suna.*[161]

> Here Æthelfrith, king of the Northumbrians, was killed by Rædwald, king of the East Anglians, and Edwin, Ælle's offspring, succeeded to the kingdom, and conquered all Britain except for the inhabitants of Kent alone, and drove out the princes, the sons of Æthelfrith.[162]

In this entry, we see that Edwin's rise to power was part of a dynastic dispute between the houses

of Deira and Bernicia, a rivalry that continued for several generations after his death, and one that

involved a number of other kingdoms.[163] Edwin's return to the throne depended upon the death of

his predecessor in battle, and his expansion of power was the result of conquest and the

subsequent exile of the remaining members of the rival dynasty. Similarly, Edwin's reign came

to an end much as it had begun, as a result of a royal killing, this time at the hand of expansionist

Mercian forces in 633.[164]

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160. Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, II.12; 181.

161. ASC a.617; 23.

162. Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 24.

163. York, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 78-80.

164. York, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 104.

Her wearð Eadwine cining ofslagan fram Cadwallan ⁊ Pendan on Heðfelda on .ii. idus Octobris, ⁊ he rixade .vii.[165] *gear, ⁊ eac man sloh his sunu Osfrið mid him; ⁊ þa syððan foran Ceadwala ⁊ Penda ⁊ fordydan eall Norðhymbra land.*[166]

Here King Edwin was killed by Cadwallon[167] and Penda at Hatfield on 14 October, and he ruled 17 years. And his son Osfrith also was killed with him. And then afterwards Cadwallon and Penda went and did[168] for the whole land of Northumbria.[169]

Higham notes that Penda's family came to power in Mercia as a result of Æthelfrith's defeat of Ceorl, the previous Mercian overking, at Chester c.615.[170] We know that Edwin had spent part of his exile at Ceorl's court, and had left Mercia for East Anglia after the Battle of Chester.[171] Edwin's alliance with the family of Ceorl would have been solidified when he married the Mercian king's daughter, Cwoenburh.[172] That Edwin was killed in battle at the hands of an enemy of a former ally may mean that Penda was another rival for Edwin. Perhaps a state of feud existed between the families and allies of Edwin/Ceorl and Penda/Cadwallon. While too little information remains extant to compare the conflict between these parties to our criteria previously laid out for feud, what we do have certainly points in that direction. Other royal rivalries at this time also appear to have been conducted as feuds, but again we have too little

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165. As Whitelock notes, this is an error for seventeen. Dorothy Whitelock, David C. Douglas, and Susie I. Tucker, eds., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1961), 18.

166. ASC a.633; 24-5.

167. Cadwallon and Cædwalla are easily confused. Cadwallon was a king of Gwynedd who died in 634 and was responsible for Edwin's death. Cædwalla was a king of Wessex who died in 688 and who will be discussed in Chapter 5. "Cadwallon 1," *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, http://www.pase.ac.uk, accessed 10 June 2014; "Cædwalla 1," *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, http://www.pase.ac.uk, accessed 10 June 2014.

168. Translation choice by Swanton.

169. Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 25.

170. Higham, *Kingdom of Northumbria*, 113.

171. Higham, *Kingdom of Northumbria*, 113.

172. Bede, HE II.14; 186.

information to determine the feuding status of these rivals with any certainty. What is most evident, however, is that the political landscape of the early Conversion Period included intense rivalries for political power, that these rivalries often resulted in violence, and that opposing parties might trade injuries in a tit-for-tat manner.

Since feud requires the two parties at conflict to be of roughly equal social status, kings could only really feud with other kings. During Edwin's reign, the king became involved in another feud between royal houses battling for the supremacy of Britain. While Edwin had clearly established his dominance over the kingdoms of northern England by the 620s, the West Saxons briefly emerged as the dominant power in the south.[173] Competition between the two kingdoms ultimately lead to the attempted assassination of Edwin by an agent of the king of Wessex in 626.

> *Her com Eomer fram Cwichelme Westseaxne cininge; þohte þet he wolde ofstingan Eadwine cininge, ac he ofstang Lillan his ðegn Ꝑ Forðhere Ꝑ ðone cining gewundode. . . . Þa gehet se cining Pauline þet he wolde his dohtor gesyllan Gode gif he wolde abiddan æt Gode þet he moste his feond afyllan, þe þone scaðan þider ær sende. Ꝑ he þa for on Westseaxum mid fyrde Ꝑ afylde þær .v. ciningas Ꝑ þæs folces mycel ofsloh.*[174]

> Here Eomer came from Cwichelm, king of the West Saxons – he wanted to stab King Edwin, but he stabbed Lilla, his thegn, and Forthere, and wounded the king. . .Then the king promised Paulinus that he would give his daughter to God, if by his prayers he should obtain from God that he might fell his enemy who had earlier sent the assassin there. And then he went into Wessex with an army and felled 5 kings there and killed a great number of the people.[175]

Edwin's vengeance upon the king of the West Saxons both terminated the feud between kings by killing off the rival party and enhanced his power considerably through an expansion of his hegemony. The Northumbrian king's survival of the assassination attempt demonstrated the

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173. Higham, *Convert Kings*, 141-3.

174. ASC a. 626; 24

175. Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 25.

power of his new deity to those subject to him and enhanced his status as king. The subsequent conquest of Wessex enhanced his status as warrior-king while expanding the reach of the Northumbrian hegemony beyond that of his predecessor.[176] Violence and feud, as seen in this sequence of events, formed part of an effective social power strategy, even as kings had begun to employ new strategies. Although both Edwin and Æthelfrith used ideology to expand their authority, violence remained the fundamental source of power during Edwin's reign. His contemporaries show similar tendencies, and further examples from the reigns of Æthelberht, Redwald, Æthelfrith, and others would likely lead to the same conclusions.

Edwin's reign ended much as it began, with the death of the Northumbrian king, this time as a result of another rival. Following Edwin's death, the Northumbrian kingdom again became divided, as a cousin of Edwin took Deira while Æthelfrith's son ruled Bernicia. Both kings fell into apostasy, and were killed at the hands of Cadwallon in the following year.[177] The case of Edwin shows that, in the early seventh century, dynasties rose and fell in battle, and the success of a king was largely a factor of his ability to use violence effectively. While the most successful kings used a diversity of strategies of power, those unable to wield force effectively found that their power was fleeting.

Conclusions

As seen in the cases of the four rulers described above, while the most powerful rulers of the period tapped into a variety of strategies of power, violence and/or force was the most effective source of power, and could lead to the use of other sources. One of the more important

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176. Higham, *Convert Kings*, 168-9.

177. Bede, HE III.1; 212-4.

sources of power during this period was ethnicity, which was used in a complex variety of ways during the Early Conversion Period. Powerful leaders utilized a combination of elements from an imagined Roman/Christian or Germanic/pagan past in order to gain access to particular strategies, to elevate their own status, and to control social relationships. That is not to say that the elements they chose in order to make these connections were historically affiliated with the Romans or the Germanic peoples. Rather, the imagined Germanic past was an idealized vision of cultural elements that the Anglo-Saxon peoples associated with their pre-migration past. Similarly, the so-called Roman connection was a set of cultural affectations which connected those who identified with it with powerful leaders from the Continent, many of whom were tied to Rome through the Church. Perhaps it is better to speak of *Romanitas* or *Germanitas* rather than Roman or Germanic elements. Although the terms may not reflect historical realities to any great degree, they do illustrate a distinction that the Anglo-Saxon peoples saw themselves, distinctions marked by affiliation with the imagined pre-migration past or with powerful contemporary political leaders. Thus, while for some it may have been about connecting to an ideal, for many leaders it was about power. Redwald did not create an elaborate ship burial to appease Woden, but to demonstrate both his power and his opposition to this new political party that had arrived from the Roman/Frankish world. Moreover, Æthelberht converted, at least in part, as part of a contract to marry into the Frankish royal family in order to gain access to powerful political allies and the strategies of power they used. He received conversion from Rome rather than the Merovingians themselves so that he would not be utterly beholden to his in-laws. Also, the Church provided him with tools with which to expand his rule by creating authority through the promulgation of law, which enabled him to elevate his social status. By placing himself outside the social bonds which existed in part for the conduct of feud, he

established himself as a superior political entity that could mediate between multiple kinship groups. With no royal wergeld, Æthelberht stood outside the system of feud to which his people were subject.[178] The Church also provided other means of more effective rule such as providing an administrative framework and a literate clergy. Æthelberht's contemporaries in East Anglia and Northumbria also utilized some of these new strategies of power, even if they rejected the ideology attached to the Roman party.

Even with access to all these new strategies of power, however, force remained the most effective means of gaining and maintaining power during this period. Æthelberht's hegemony was fleeting, and the previous hegemon had lost his overlordship as a result of battle. Contemporary kings often died in battle, or were themselves subject to feud, as in the cases of Æthelfrith and Edwin. Even if there were no royal wergeld, that did not mean that kings and chieftains did not feud with one another, and in fact Edwin was involved in more than one. During the Early Conversion Period the rivalry between competing overkings in Kent, Mercia, and Northumbria takes on the character of feud between different royal houses. Each of these overkings built alliances and responded to attacks with attacks of their own. While much of the information we would like is lacking, these are the best-documented feuds of the period. The incidents do not provide a great deal of information on the nature of feud during this period, except that even the most powerful individuals engaged in it, but they do demonstrate the efficacy of violence as a strategy of power at a time when new strategies were being introduced. These new strategies seem to have simply bolstered the effectiveness of violence, which

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178. Although the people of Kent paid a wergeld for Mul later in the seventh century, the laws of Æthelberht and other Kentish kings make no mention of a royal wergeld, nor is there any other mention of royal wergelds prior to the Viking Age. Furthermore, at 30,000 pounds, it was an extraordinary amount compared to other wergelds of the period, and appears to be an exceptional case during which the people of Kent were seeking to end a feud between themselves and Wessex. *ASC* a. 694; 34; *Æthelberht* 22-6; 4.

remained the primary strategy of power in the Early Conversion Period. As we shall see, even as kings incorporated more of these strategies of power in the Later Conversion Period, the efficacy of violence and force remained.

CHAPTER V

THE TRANSFORMATION OF VIOLENCE IN THE LATER CONVERSION PERIOD

In the years following the initial conversion of the first Anglo-Saxon kings, and especially into the Later Conversion Period (c.650-730), it becomes apparent that the new ideologies and strategies of power introduced by the Roman party[1] were accompanied by a conversion of violence. As discussed in Chapter 4, violence remained the most effective strategy of power in the Early Conversion Period, even as kings had begun to introduce new strategies. Violence and force shifted from the primary means of gaining and maintaining power to one of several strategies of power to be deployed as needed during the Later Conversion Period. Those who proved the most adept at the use of violence, such as Penda, continued to rely upon it as the primary means of acquiring land and resources to enhance personal power. These leaders relied on the older strategies which involved the use of force and negotiation between (rather than control of) these kinship groups. Penda's contemporaries and successors, however, realized that such a power base could not last because it relied on the ruler's personal ability to wield force and to negotiate between competing power groups. These rulers of the Later Conversion Period, like Æthelberht and the other kings of the initial conversion, utilized a greater diversity of strategies to build authority by issuing laws, controlling towns and ritual sites, and refocusing the center of social relationships around the king rather than the kin. Law was one of the more important tools they deployed to enhance their own power in an effort to create an authority that could last regardless of their own fortunes in battle. The most successful leaders of this period

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1. That is, those who brought *Romanitas*, as discussed at the end of Chapter 4, to Britain.

incorporated the older strategies with the newer, but in the process adapted them to better fit with the newer techniques. They did not reject the use of violence or kinship groups in their quest for power, but exerted greater control over both by delegitimizing violent self-help and making the power of kinship groups more reliant on the king. In a sense, they converted violence by adapting it to the new strategies of power offered by conversion to Christianity. Meanwhile, religious authors at the time did their part in the conversion of violence by attempting to alter cultural attitudes about violence and feud through the lives of saints such as Guthlac and Wilfrid. Both lay and ecclesiastical powers used holy men such as Guthlac, who rejected the life of the warrior to turn his violence against the enemies of God, to exemplify these new attitudes toward violence. This chapter will examine this adaptation of violence to the creation of authority in the Later Conversion Period to demonstrate the effectiveness of the variety of strategies of power in use at that time.

Like the Early Conversion Period in the previous chapter, the boundaries of the Later Conversion Period may be marked by historical and archaeological evidence. By the middle of the sixth century, conversion was already well under way, with most of the rulers having accepted conversion, and the Synod of Whitby of 664 had largely settled the controversy between Roman and Irish modes of worship and practice in favor of the former. Around the same time, grave goods indicate an increased investment in goods associated with the Church and with Rome (via the Byzantine Empire). Helen Geake interprets this change in burial goods as the elite tying themselves ideologically to some concept of *Romanitas* rather than to an Anglian or Saxon identity. Although leaders had stressed their cultural connections with *Germanitas* during the Migration Period, after conversion rulers adopted elements of political culture associated with *Romanitas* in part to convince their subjects that they needed more powerful rulers: kings, not

simply chieftains.[2] These changes in the content of burial goods lend further credence to the idea that there was a competition between ideologies during the seventh century.[3] Further complicating matters, however, is the sudden disappearance of grave goods throughout Anglo-Saxon Britain c.720/30, which may indicate the final stage in the transition to kingship, as the people no longer needed to be convinced of the value of kingship.[4] At the same time, by the early eighth century, towns had begun to reemerge as trading centers and were quickly growing larger. The Mercian kings beginning with Æthelbald (716-57) began to utilize towns as tribute collection centers and gained access to greater wealth through such power strategies as control over tolls.[5]

Law and the Growing Distinction between King and Kin

As argued in the previous chapter, Æthelberht was the first Anglo-Saxon ruler to move away from violence as his primary strategy of power and to use a greater diversity of power sources. These sources were based on the creation of authority through the conversion to Christianity and the adoption of Roman methods of rule with which Æthelberht could create a legal basis for his reign. Æthelberht converted to Christianity in part to take advantage of the new strategies of power that affiliation with the Romans could offer, including dynastic legitimacy, written law, and a divine model of authority. His major contemporaries, Edwin, Æthelfrith, and

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2. Helen Geake, *The Use of Grave-Goods in Conversion-Period England, c.600-c.850* (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1997), 126-36.

3. Henry Mayr-Harding, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 112-3.

4. Geake, *Use of Grave Goods*, 126-36.

5. Robin Fleming, *Britain after Rome: The Fall and Rise, 400 to 1070* (London: Penquin Books, 2011), 194-212.

Redwald adopted similar strategies of power, such as control over ritual sites, conversion to and from Christianity (or refusal to convert), and making overt displays of adherence to a specific kernel of tradition. Those rulers who used violence most effectively, however, proved more successful at the beginning of the seventh century, during the early Conversion period.

On the other hand, at the beginning of the later Conversion Period, which lasted approximately from 650 to 730, Kent was unique among the southern kingdoms in a number of ways. At this time, various kings and chieftains throughout southern England were attempting to expand their power through conquest, especially the Mercians. Kent, although at times the victim of such expansionist designs, remained relatively free of outside influence. Furthermore, the Kentish royal family sought to extend its influence through means other than the use of force. Members of the royal family founded monasteries, for instance, while Theodore, Archbishop of Canterbury, used diplomacy to maintain peace. For a few years, there was even sufficient peace for the archbishop to engage in a measure of Church reform. Additionally, the Kentish economy remained strong in this period because of its Continental connections, especially those with Gaul and Rome, to the extent that the Kentish people began to use silver coinage. Not all was peaceful in Kent during the later Conversion Period, however, as dynastic issues would erupt in the kingdom at the same time that a western Saxon, Cædwalla,[6] began to consolidate the chiefdoms in the south.[7]

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6. It is useful here to again distinguish two kings with similar names. Cædwalla, mentioned here, was a king of Wessex who ruled from 685 to 688. He preceded Ine, in whose favor he abdicated, and was contemporary with Wilfrid, both of whom are mentioned in this chapter. Cadwallon ruled the Welsh kingdom of Gwynedd and died some time around 634. He allied with Penda of Mercia against Edwin of Northumbria, and was killed in battle against Oswald. "Cadwallon 1," *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, http://www.pase.ac.uk, accessed 10 June 2014; "Cædwalla 1," *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, http://www.pase.ac.uk, accessed 10 June 2014.

7. D.P. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings*, revised edition (New York: Routledge, 2000), 81-99.

In about the year 685, Hlothere ruled the kingdom of Kent, but represented one of two

lines of the ruling family. A member of the other line, Eadric, fearing he would be excluded from

the succession, allied himself with the southern Saxons to assert his power through force.[8] At

some point, a legal collection was compiled in the names of the two kings. Although attributed to

both, due to the circumstances of Eadric's succession it is difficult to believe that the collection

was a joint issue. More likely is that it was either issued in both their names separately or both

kings were simply adding their own judgments to existing law.[9] In this collection, it is evident

that one of the primary ways kings sought to expand their authority was through offering their

protection to those both within and outside their households.

> 12. *Gif man oþrum steop asette ðær mæn drincen, buton scylde, an eald riht scll agelde þam þe þæt flet age, ⁊ VI scll þam þe man þone steap aset, ⁊ cynge XII scll.*
> 13. *Gif man wæpn abregde þær mæn drincen ⁊ ðær man nan yfel ne deþ, scilling þan þe þæt flet age, ⁊ cyninges XII scll.*
> 14. *Gif þæt flet geblondgag wyrðe, forgylde þem mæn his mundbyrd ⁊ cyninge L scill.*[10]

> 12. If one takes away the cup of another without offense where men are drinking, by ancient right let him pay to the owner of the house 1 shilling, and to him whose cup he took 6 shillings, and 12 shillings to the king.
> 13. If one draws a weapon where men are drinking and does no evil there, let him pay 1 shilling to the owner of the house, and 12 shillings to the king
> 14. If the house were made bloody, let him pay the protection to the owner and 50 shillings to the king.

One need not imagine that the scenario outlined, "where men are drinking," was the commonest

location for the outbreak of violence – instances of the confluence of violence and drinking

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8. Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gens Anglorum*, IV.26; *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People,* ed. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1963), 426-31. This edition hereinafter cited as HE.

9. Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 101-2.

10. *Hlothere and Eadric* 12-14; edited by F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen,* vol. 1, *Text und Übersetzung* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1903), 11. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

appear throughout the Anglo-Saxon and later periods.[11] The laws continue to outline the

escalation of the dispute to the point that one disputant draws a weapon and beyond. To draw

blood meant compensating the homeowner, the individual responsible for protecting those in his

own home, according to his *mundbyrd*, the price paid in compensation for violation of one's

protection. The violator also compensated the king, the individual responsible for protecting

those in his kingdom, according to the royal *mundbyrd*, which was fifty shillings.[12] Æthelberht's

early seventh-century law had similarly included compensation to the owner of a household

where an attack took place for a violation of the peace of the household, including the king's.[13] It

did not, however, extend the king's *mundbyrd* outside his own household. What we have here is,

therefore, not a fine in the sense of a punishment for a breach of the public peace, but

compensation for breaching the king's peace, which was beginning to encompass the realm by

the end of the seventh century. A fine implies that a crime, a violation of the public peace, has

taken place. As discussed by Thomas Lambert, crime involves a vertical relationship of power

with an authority on top that can punish the perpetrator, whereas feud involves horizontal

relationships between equals. As such, the early Anglo-Saxons did not think of offenses in terms

of crime, a concept which would emerge over the course of centuries.[14] Rather, what we have

here is a violation of the king's, not the public's, peace, which the king was extending outside his

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11. Lisi Oliver, *The Beginnings of English Law* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 136-7.

12. See *Æthelberht* 5, edited by F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen,* vol. 1, *Text und Übersetzung* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1903), 3; *Wihtred* 2, edited by F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen,* vol. 1, *Text und Übersetzung* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1903), 12.

13. *Æthelberht* 3, 5, 8, 13, 15; 3-4.

14. T. B. Lambert, *Protection, Feud, and Royal Power: Violence and its Regulation in English Law, c. 850 - c.1250* (Doctoral Thesis, Durham University, 2009)*,* 1-4.

own household as a means of extending his power by taking on for himself the authority to intervene.

In addition to household protection, kings sought to place themselves at the center of dispute resolution. Hlothere and Eadric's laws provide several instances in which one can see the rulers attempting to create a concept of royal justice wherein parties to a dispute seek the counsel of the king in order to settle an issue. Several laws, for example, outline the procedure for settling a dispute through royal intervention.

> 8. *Gif man oþerne sace tihte ⁊ he þane mannan mote an medle oþþe an þinge, symble se man þam oðrum byrigean geselle ⁊ þam riht awyrce þe to him Cantwara deman gescrifen.*
> 9. *Gif he ðonne byrigan forwærne, XII scillingas agylde þam cyninge, ⁊ sio seo sacy swa open swa hio ær wes.*
> 10. *Gif man oþerne tihte, siððan he him byrigan gesealdne hæbbe, ðonne ymb III niht gesecan hiom sæmend, buton þam ufor leofre sio þe þa tihtlan age. Siþþan sio sace gesemd sio; an seofan nihtum se man þam oþrum riht gedo, gecwime an feo oððe an aþe, swa hwæder swa him leofre sio. Gif he þonne þæt nille, gelde þonne C buton aðe, siþþan ane neaht ofer þæt gesem bie.*[15]

> 8. If one brings a charge against another, and he then meet the other at a meeting or assembly, the accused must always give a surety to the other and carry out the judgment that the Kentish people ordained.
> 9. If he then repudiates the surety, let him pay 12 shillings to the king, and let the dispute be open as it was before.
> 10. If one charge another, after he has given him surety, then after 3 nights let them seek an arbitrator, unless a later time is more agreeable to the accuser. After the dispute is settled, in 7 nights let the accused do right by the other, let him satisfy the accuser with property or an oath, whichever is more agreeable to the accuser. If he then will not do that, then let the accused pay 100 shillings without an oath within 1 night after the arbitration.

In other words, if someone accuses another, the accused cannot simply attack the accuser, but must follow the outlined procedure in resolving the dispute. If he refuses to follow the procedure, he must compensate the king for a violation of the protection offered by bringing the issue before

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15. *Hlothere and Eadric* 8-10; 10.

the royal court. Dispute resolution is a primary avenue through which rulers can create authority and begin to move toward kingship by offering protection during the course of settlement. By interposing themselves into disputes, kings personalized violations of which they were not a part by extending their protection, thus enhancing their power by controlling the use of force and giving themselves a reason to intervene – violation of the king's peace. More importantly, the laws impose compensation to the king, which is not the same as a fine, for a violation of his judgment or his protection. Here, not only have the kings enhanced royal power by interposing themselves, but have outlined a procedure to follow and extended their protection beyond the decision itself, thereby directing dispute resolution to the royal court. Similarly, in the seventh law of this compilation, the kings place themselves into issues concerning theft.

> 7. *Gif man oþrum mæn feoh forstele, ꝺ se agend his eft ætfo, geteme to cynges sele, gif he mæge, ꝺ þone ætgebrenge þe him sealde; gif he þæt ne mæge, læte an, ꝺ fo se agend to.*[16]

> 7. If one steals the property of another, and the owner afterwards possesses it, call the seller to witness in the king's hall, if he may, and then bring he who sold it to him; if he is not able to do that, let him relinquish it, and the owner take possession.

As in the other laws, the kings have placed themselves at the center of dispute resolution. In addition, it is worth noting that none of the issues in these early laws refer to crimes and fines, even in the case of theft. Crime refers to an action committed in violation of the social order, not in violation of an individual or his ability to protect those for whom he is responsible. Rather what we have here is a personal issue between two parties. In order to consider something a crime, a disinterested party must be available to judge the issue.[17] Here, kings were certainly

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16. *Hlothere and Eadric* 7; 10.

17. Lambert, *Protection, Feud, and Royal Power*, 2-3.

interested in extending their power by offering protection and placing their persons into the dispute.

Following the reigns of Hlothere and Eadric in Kent, Wihtred came to the throne around 691 with the support of the Church, bringing an end to some dynastic squabbling between his predecessors' families. Church support and a fairly uneventful reign allowed for a measure of political consolidation in the kingdom during his reign, including his issue of a collection of law.[18] Just a brief glance at Wihtred's legal collection indicates that it is concerned with protecting the church, as it extends the king's protection to the Church by making the Church's *mundbyrd* the same as that of the king, and the oath of a bishop equal to that of a king.[19] The law's concern for enforcing behavior in accordance with the Church demonstrates that, by the turn of the eighth century, conversion remained incomplete. In addition to supporting the growing power of the Church by enhancing its protective power, Wihtred's law demonstrates the king's concern with theft in his kingdom by stripping thieves of kin protection.

> 25. *Gif man leud ofslea an þeofðe, licge buton wyrgelde.*
> 26. *Gif man frigne man at hæbbendre handa gefo, þanne wealde se cyning ðreora anes; oððe hine man cwelle oþþe ofer sæ selle oþþe hine his wergelde alese.*
> > §1. *Se þe hine gefo ⁊ gegange, healfne hine age; gif hine man cwelle, geselle heom man LXX scll.[20]*

> 25. If one slays a freeman in the act of thieving, let him lie dead without wergeld.
> 26. If anyone catches a free man in the act of thieving, then the king should decide which of these three courses: either the man shall be put to death, or sold over the sea, or held to ransom for his wergeld.
> > §1. He who catches and secures him, owns half his value; pay him 70 shillings if the thief is put to death.

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18. Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, 104-5.

19. It is also worth noting that each kingdom in this early period had its own bishop. *Wihtred* 2, 16; 12-13.

20. *Wihtred* 25-6; 14.

According to Wihtred's laws, those caught in the act of thievery – in other words, proven thieves – are removed from the social system of protection. This method of protection revolved around kin and guided social interactions prior to this period, and members of a kinship group sought to enhance the group's ability to protect its members. Generally, the kin or social group would have been responsible for protection, payment of compensation, and group discipline. For all other violations, from breaking someone else's fingernail, to killing, or violating the king's protection, there was a compensation for the injured party, for which the offender's social group would have been responsible.[21] Here, however, Wihtred removes the possibility of protection by the social group, and in fact removes the individual from the social group entirely. In doing so he has placed himself in a position in the social order above the social group, so that his judgment is superior. As noted above, Æthelberht made the transition from chieftain, with power based on the use of force, to king, with authority, in part due to control of social groups. Here we see Wihtred taking a further step in the direction of enhancing his own authority. His predecessors had placed the king at the center of disputes, which were previously the realm of kin. Wihtred removed the kin from the picture completely in the case of theft, marking an attempt to shift the center of the social order to the royal court, thereby enhancing his own authority.

Other than the rulers of Kent, the only other Conversion Period Anglo-Saxon kings who issued laws that have come down to us are those of the West Saxons. After the abdication of Cædwalla, who consolidated many of the western Saxon tribes into one polity, Ine became the West Saxon ruler around 688.[22] His collection of laws may in actuality be a series of case laws,

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21. *Æthelberht* 22, 55; 4, 6. Hyams, *Rancor and Reconciliation in Medieval England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 9.

22. Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, 103-4; "Ine 1," *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, http://www.pase.ac.uk, accessed 29 June 2016.

and this king may not have been responsible for every clause.[23] In either case, like the Kentish laws, the expansion of the concept of royal justice can be seen clearly in this law, indicating a growth in the authority of West Saxon rulers as they built the institution of kingship. Like his Kentish predecessors and contemporaries, Ine extended the protection of the king's household, a fundamental element in royal authority tied to the control of violence. For a king to offer protection to those subject to vengeance, he must, at the least, be able to protect those in his presence. In these interests, those who fought in the king's household were subject to the loss of all their property, and might even suffer death as a result.[24] For violations of other households, the law prescribes compensation.[25] He also extends his protection throughout the kingdom, even if the compensation is not the same outside the royal household.

> 10. *Gif hwa binnan þam gemærum ures rices reaflac Ᵹ niednnæme do, agife he ðone reaflac Ᵹ geselle LX scille to wite.*[26]

> 10. If someone commit robbery within the borders of our kingdom or seize anything by violence, let him return the plunder and surrender 60 shillings as punishment.

Like the Kentish kings, this clause attempts to separate the king from the rest of society so that he may serve as protector for all and extend his personal protection throughout the entire kingdom. In addition, the law offers royal judgment to those living in his kingdom.

> 8. *Gif hwa him ryhtes bidde beforan hwelcum sciremen oððe oðrum deman Ᵹ him ryht abiddan ne mæge, Ᵹ him wedd sellan nelle, gebette xxx scill. Ᵹ binnan vii nihton gedo hine ryhtes wierðne.*

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23. Wormald, *Making of English Law*, 104-5.

24. *Ine* 6; edited by F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen,* vol. 1, *Text und Übersetzung* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1903), 90.

25. *Ine* 6§2-6§33; 90-2.

26. *Ine* 10; 94.

9. *Gif hwa wrace do, ærðon he him ryhtes bidde, ðæt he him onnime agife ꝥ forgilde ond gebete mid xxx scill.*[27]

8. If anyone asks for a judgment in the presence of a shire man or any other judge, and he is not able to obtain it, and the accused will not give him a surety, let the accused compensate with 30 shillings, and within 7 nights give him judgment according to his value.
9. If anyone exacts redress before he asks for a judgment, he is to relinquish that which he took, and pay its value again, and compensate with 30 shillings.

In these laws, Ine punishes those who seek violent self-help without the assistance of the king or his officers. Also like the Kentish kings, Ine sought to foster a desire for those at dispute to seek redress through the king or his officers in several ways in order to enhance his authority. He increases the amount of compensation owed for those who refused to pay a judgment, and adds additional compensation for those who seek redress for an injury without first seeking to acquire a resolution of the dispute from a royal agent. His law provides a procedure for royal intervention in a dispute, and protection for either party who wishes to abide by the arbitration. Again, these sections should not be interpreted as a violation of the public peace or anything of the sort. To do so would be anachronistic – interpreting early medieval evidence through a modern lens – when the people of seventh and eighth century England had no concept of crime.[28] Instead, the acts of violence mentioned in this law are considered violations of the king's protection over the kingdom at the moment that he was attempting to expand that protection throughout his realm.

Among the laws attributed to kings of the later Conversion Period, most of which may be described as "feud-centered,"[29] that of Ine goes farthest in attempting to limit the conduct of feud, thereby controlling both the recourse to violence as well as the social relationships necessary for

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27. *Ine* 8-9; 92-4.

28. Lambert, *Feud, Protection, and Royal Power*, 1-4.

29. Wormald, *Making of English Law*, 39.

feud to work. One issue that could easily spark a feud was theft, which was among the most serious offenses in Anglo-Saxon law. Even some of the earliest laws prescribed death as a punishment for theft.[30] Ine's law, in seeking to curb theft, does not go quite so far.

> 28. *Se ðeof gefehð, ah X scillinga, ꞇ se cyning ðone ðeof; ꞇ þa mægas him swerian aðas unfæhða.*[31]

> 28. He who captures a thief gets 10 shillings, and the king gets the thief, and the kin shall swear oaths to him to abstain from prosecuting the feud.

Once again, like his contemporary Wihtred, Ine removes a captured thief from the social bonds typically used for protection and replaces them with royal intervention. In addition, Ine's law provides other ways for one to avoid the feud. For example,

> 46§2. *Ælc mon mot onsacan frymþe ꞇ werfæhðe,*[32] *gif he mæg oððe dear.*[33]

> 46§2. Each man may dispute harboring or slaying in pursuit of the feud if he may or dare.

> 54. *Se þe bið werfæhðe betogen ꞇ he onsacan wille þæs sleges mid aðe, þonne sceal bion on þære hyndenne an kyningæde be XXX hida, swa be gesiðcundum men swa be cierliscum, swa hwæþer swa hit sie.*[34]

> 54. He who is accused of slaying as part of the feud and wishes to deny the slaying with an oath, there shall be in the community of one hundred men one man entitled to take an

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30. T. B. Lambert, "Theft, Homicide, and Crime in Late Anglo-Saxon Laws," *Past and Present* 214 (February 2012): 3-43.

31. *Ine*, 28; 100. Bosworth and Toller translate *unfæhð* as "absence of hostility," but also elaborate further: "the word refers to the abstention from the prosecuting of the feud, which under certain conditions it would be allowable for the kinsmen of a man to follow up." Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1921), 1103.

32. Attenborough translates *werfæhð* in this passage as "homicide," while J.R. Clark Hall translates the word as "feud by which '*wer*' is incurred, breach of the peace." Bosworth and Toller provide a better definition, which is a combination of the two: "Slaying, in pursuing the feud, under circumstances that call for the payment of *wer*." F.L. Attenborough, *Laws of the Earliest English Kings,* (Reprint, Felinfach: Llanerch Publishers, 2000), 62; J.R. Clark-Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 4th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press , 1960; reprint Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 405; Bosworth and Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary,* 1206.

33. *Ine* 46.2; 110.

34. *Ine*, 54; 112-4.

oath as a king's thegn, a man able to swear as a thegn or as a commoner, whichever he may be.

Those who might be subject to feud, the key element of social order based on the kin, rather than king, were therefore given a legal recourse should they want to avoid feud and resort to royal judgment. Here Ine is shifting the nucleus of social relationships to his court, which serves to both enhance his authority and reduce reliance on relationships that he did not control.

During the later Conversion Period, therefore, kings of both Kent and Wessex issued collections of laws in order to utilize a greater diversity of strategies of power, thereby attempting to create a lasting authority. Kings during this period continued to use violence and force to build their power, but were beginning to use a greater variety of means to do so. Æthelberht was the first Anglo-Saxon king to rely primarily on strategies of power other than force, including the issuing of law in an attempt to center social relationships on the royal person. In so doing, he created the institution of kingship in England. Hlothere, Eadric, Wihtred, and Ine followed along this trajectory, and used law to delegitimize violent self-help, to offer royal protection outside their own households, and to center dispute resolution on the royal court. In other words, they were moving the center of the social order away from kin toward the king, thereby enhancing their own power by reorganizing social relationships.

Royal Rivalries, Royal Feuds

In the later Conversion period, however, even with the new strategies of power introduced by the first Christian kings, violence remained a viable means of acquiring and maintaining power for rulers in the major kingdoms north of Kent and Wessex. The following case studies demonstrate that, although there were a greater diversity of strategies of power

available to rulers following conversion, many continued to rely on the use of force. At the same time that kings of Wessex and Kent were using law to extend their authority, their counterparts in Northumbria and Mercia relied to a great extent on violence to build their power. Royal rivals from the lines of Deira and Bernicia feuded over the throne of Northumbria, and the most powerful ruler at the beginning of the era, Penda, was a pagan who built his power primarily through conquest.

After the death of Edwin, the feud over the Northumbrian throne discussed in Chapter 4 continued between the lines of Deira, the southern polity represented by Edwin, and Bernicia, the more northerly kingdom from which Æthelfrith rose. Remember, Edwin's reign came to an end at the hands of the allied rulers of Gwynedd and Mercia, Cadwallon and Penda. After Edwin's death, Deira went to his cousin, Osric, while Bernicia passed to Æthelfrith's son Eanfrith, who had been in exile during Edwin's reign but whose return was enabled by the death of *rege inimico*,[35] the hostile king, or "their enemy."[36] As a result, the rivalry between these two competing northern royal lines continued. The presentation of these rivalries by Bede points to the ways he viewed violence and the place of vengeance. Within a year after the division of Northumbria following the death of Edwin, the Deiran Osric and the Bernician Eanfrith both apostatized. As Bede puts it:

> *Qui uterque rex, ut terreni regni infulas sortitus est, sacramenta regni caelestis, quibus initiatus erat, anathematizando prodidit, ac se priscis idolatriae sordibus polluendum perdendumque restituit. Nec mora, utrumque rex Brettonum Caedualla impia manu sed iusta ultione peremit.*[37]

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35. Bede, HE III.1; 212.

36. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors, trans., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People,* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1963), III.1; 213.

37. Bede, HE III.1; 212.

But no sooner had these two kings gained the scepters of their earthly kingdom than they abjured and betrayed the mysteries of the heavenly kingdom to which they had been admitted and reverted to the filth of their former idolatry, thereby to be polluted and destroyed. Very soon afterwards, Cadwallon,[38] the king of the Britons, killed them both, executing a just vengeance upon them, though with unrighteous violence.[39]

For Bede, Cadwallon was divine punishment for those rulers who had abandoned the faith. As a tool of divine retribution, Cadwallon's exacting of vengeance (*ultione*) was just (*iusta*), because God was working through him to exact His own revenge, possibly as part of the Great Feud. In other words, Cadwallon was a divine instrument in the Great Feud, who was exacting God's vengeance upon the apostates Osric and Eanfrith. On the other hand, because he despoiled Northumbria and ruled as a violent or ferocious tyrant (*tyrannus saeuiens*),[40] the British king soon fell at the hands of the holy king Oswald of Northumbria, one of Bede's most beloved rulers.[41]

Following the death of the apostates, Oswald, a son of Æthelfrith, took possession of Northumbria. Bede reveals the use of a number of strategies of power by Oswald, most importantly (to Bede at least) the conversion of the people of his kingdom, which as we know other kings used as a power strategy to great effect.[42] In addition, he served as godfather to

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38. Bede renders the name as Caedualla, and Colgrave and Mynors as Cædwalla. In order to avoid confusion with the West Saxon ruler Cædwalla, I have adopted the spellings used by the *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England* for the British king Cadwallon and the West Saxon king Cædwalla. "Cadwallon 1," *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, http://www.pase.ac.uk, accessed 10 June 2014; "Cædwalla 1," *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, http://www.pase.ac.uk, accessed 10 June 2014.

39. Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 213.

40. Bede, HE III.1; 212.

41. For instance, the monk refers to him as *pauperibus et peregrinis semper humilis benignus et largus fuit*, "always wonderfully humble, kind, and generous to the poor and to strangers. Bede, HE3.1, 3.6; 21, 214, 230; Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 231.

42. Bede, HE III.3; 218-20.

Cynegils, king of the Gewisse, thus bringing the West Saxon kingdom into the Christian fold.[43]

By serving as godfather to another king, not only did Oswald create an alliance between the two

royal families, but he demonstrated his superiority over Cynegils by sponsoring his conversion.

Furthermore, Oswald was noted during his reign for being a warrior of Christ, a saint, and for

reuniting the Northumbrian kingdom.[44] He was also instrumental in ending the feud between the

Northumbrian and West Saxon royal houses. As discussed in the previous chapter, the West

Saxon king Cwichelm had sent an agent to kill Edwin, who retaliated by sending an army south.

Edwin's vengeance was successful, and he killed five members of the West Saxon royal family.

After this incident, the feud seemed to die out, as evidenced in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.[45]

Bede, however, provides information that indicates the feud was ended as a result of a settlement

that resulted in a marriage between the two ruling families. Although Bede does not actually

mention any settlement per se, he does reveal its results: Cynegils converted to Christianity,

Oswald served as his godfather, and Oswald married Cynegils's daughter.[46] As feuds often

require something akin to peace treaties to end them, it is evident that this royal rivalry could be

considered a feud as well, and fits the criteria laid out previously.[47] It is likely that Oswald and

Cynegils were in some way united against Edwin's kin group and that, by emerging victorious in

Northumbria, both the Deira/Bernicia feud and the Northumbria/Wessex feud came to an end.

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43. Bede, HE III.7; 232-6.

44. Bede, HE IV.14; 376-80; John Corbett, "Two Early Anglo-Saxon Holy Men: Oswald and Cuthbert," *The Anglo-Saxons: Synthesis and Achievement*, edited by J. Douglas Woods and David D. Pelteret (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1985), 68; Catherine Cubitt, "Sites and Sanctity: Revisiting the Cult of Murdered and Martyred Anglo-Saxon Royal Saints," *Early Medieval Europe* 9 (2000): 53-83.

45. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* E, a.626; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. Susan Irvine, vol. 7, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, ed. David Dumville and Simon Keynes (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 24. This edition hereinafter cited as ASC with the date of the entry designated by the letter a (i.e. a.626).

46. Bede, HEIII.7; 232-6.

47. Hyams, *Rancor and Reconciliation*, 11-14.

What modern observers would consider war between two states over resources was treated by contemporaries as feud, with all of the personal involvement of the parties at conflict. Oswald was clearly the dominant figure in his relationship with Cynegils, but expanded his kin group through a marriage alliance with the Gewisse. Although Oswald utilized a number of strategies of power, he ultimately succumbed to another king who was more adept at the use of violence, Penda.[48]

Like the feud between the families of Edwin and Cynegils, another royal feud came to an end as a result of a treaty during this period. Hostilities between Ecgfrith of Northumbria and Æthelred of Mercia culminated in a battle near the Trent River around 679.[49] During the battle, Ecgfrith's brother Ælfwine was killed, along with many others. Following the battle, however, Archbishop Theodore negotiated a peace settlement between the two parties. Part of this settlement was the payment of a wergeld for the death of Ælfwine.

> *adeo ut, pacatis alterutrum regibus ac populis, mullius anima hominis pro interfecto greis fratre sed debita solummodo multa pecuniae regi ultori daretur.*[50]

> As a result, peace was restored between the two kings and between their peoples and no further lives were demanded for the death of the king's brother, but only the usual money compensation which was paid to the king to whom the duty of vengeance belonged.[51]

It is evident from this passage that, even during a war, vengeance for the death of one's kin would be expected, and that the payment of a wergeld could negate the need for exacting revenge by restoring peace between the two parties. The kings of Northumbria and Mercia were still participants in the culture of feud, and were expected to participate in its rituals. Bede relates

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48. Bede, HE III.9; 242.

49. ASC a.679; 33.

50. Bede, HE IV.21; 400.

51. Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 401.

another incident from this battle that sheds further light on those who were expected to participate in the exchange of blood. A retainer of King Ælfwine, Imma, was captured after the battle by a *gesith*[52] of Æthelred. In order to avoid being killed by his opponents, Imma posed as a peasant who was bringing food to the army. The *gesith* held him captive for some time and, after promising not to harm him, the captor got Imma to reveal his true identity. The captor then told Imma that he should have killed him because of all the captor's kinsmen who had died in the battle, but does not because he has given his word.[53] The *gesith* was clearly thinking of the feud here, and believed he should exact vengeance.

One conflict between the West Saxon royal house and the people of Kent can be considered a feud because of its resolution. In 686, Cædwalla, the king of the West Saxons, along with his brother Mul attacked Kent and the Isle of Wight.[54] The following year, the people of Kent burned Mul and twelve others to death, which caused Cædwalla to retaliate with a second attack.[55] Several years later, the Kentish people made a settlement with Ine of Wessex for the burning of Mul in the amount of 30,000.[56] The reason for this burning is unclear, but Mul may have been placed in charge of Kent by Cædwalla, and the people of Kent were simply overthrowing him and his councillors. The evidence for his royal status is sparse, but does exist. One charter, which is likely based on a seventh-century original, records him as a king.[57]

52. A retainer or follower of a king or chieftain. Bede's Latin equivalent is *comes*. Joseph Bosworth, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*, Ge-síþ, March 21, 2010. Accessed June 30, 2016. http://www.bosworthtoller.com/016033; Bede, HE IV.22; 402.

53. Bede, HE IV.22; 402.

54. *ASC* E a. 686; 33.

55. *ASC* E a. 687; 33.

56. *ASC* a. 694; 34. The E manuscript does not give a designation, but others have it as pounds. Michael Swanton, trans., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, (New York: Routledge, 1998), 40.

57. "S 10," *The Electronic Sawyer*, http://www.esawyer.org.uk/charter/10.html#, accessed 13 July 2014.

Furthermore, later laws from both Mercia and Northumbria record the wergeld of a king as

30,000 sceattas.[58] The Northumbrian law also provides the wergeld of an *ætheling*[59] – 15,000

sceattas.[60] If Mul were an *ætheling*, as his status would have been had he not been given Kent by

Cædwalla, he likely would have the lesser of the two wergelds. Although the evidence is slim, it

does provide some indication that he was ruling over a conquered territory, an expected result of

a war between two peoples. On the other hand, the fact that the people of Kent paid a wergeld for

Mul indicates that, like a feud, this was a dispute that could be settled with a payment for a slain

man. In fact, this war has numerous characteristics of a feud: An injury against one party

(invasion), retaliation for that injury (the burning), the involvement of larger groups (the

respective armies, including Mul and the other twelve), and an ongoing relationship of hostility

marked by reciprocal acts of vengeance (Cædwalla's second attack). Perhaps Anglo-Saxons of

the seventh century did not think to view feud and war separately as we do. Either way, payment

of the wergeld indicates that wars could be settled in the same ways as feuds, and that other types

of conflict might be seen as feuds.

Perhaps the most powerful ruler of the middle seventh-century, whose reign straddles the

earlier and later parts of the Conversion Periods, Penda, is one about whom Bede has rather little

good to say, even neglecting to list him among the rulers who wielded *imperium*. This is likely

due to Bede's disdain for Penda, a pagan leader whose success often came at the expense of

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58. *Norðleoda Laga* 1; edited by F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen,* vol. 1, *Text und Übersetzung* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1903), 458; *Be Mircna Laga*, edited by F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen,* vol. 1, *Text und Übersetzung* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1903), 462.

59. A male member of the royal house; generally refers to one able to inherit the royal title. Sean Miller, "Ætheling," *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, edited by Michael Lapidge et. al. (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 15.

60. *Norðleoda Laga* 2; 460.

Christian rulers.[61] By examining the evidence with this in mind, however, there emerges a picture

of a king who lacked a diversity of strategies of power simply because he had no need to employ

them. Even a cursory glance at the written sources of Penda's reign provides evidence of a king

whose reign was remarkably violent and who used violence to gain and maintain power. His

reign began in 626, and one of the first events noted by Bede is Penda's and Cadwallon's defeat

of the Northumbrian king Edwin at Hatfield Chase in 633.[62] During that battle, both Edwin and

his son Osfrith died and their army was destroyed.[63] Edwin's son Eadfrith had sided with Penda

at Hatfield, but the Mercian king later murdered this potential rival.[64] Other battles included a

628 battle at Cirencester against West Saxon rulers Cynegils and Cwichelm,[65] as well as a battle

against the East Anglians in which their king, his predecessor (who had given up the throne to

join a monastery, and was dragged from the cloister onto the field), and another ruler were

killed.[66] In addition to these battles, Penda burned the town of Bamburg while creating

devastation throughout Northumbria, and burned the church at Ely.[67] What we can clearly see is a

king who used violence to expand his rule through conquest by simply being better at war than

his contemporaries. That alone does not necessarily set Penda apart, as others had done the same.

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61. N.J. Higham, *(Re)-Reading Bede: The Ecclesiastical History in Context* (London: Routledge, 2006), 91-2.

62. *ASC* a.626; 24.

63. Bede, HE II.20; 202.

64. Bede, HE, II.20; 202.

65. ASC a.628; 24; "Cynegils 1," *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, http://www.pase.ac.uk, accessed 6 March 2012; "Cwichelm 1," *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, http://www.pase.ac.uk, accessed 6 March 2012.

66. Bede, HE, III.18; 268.

67. Bede, HE, III.16; 262; ASC a.633; 25; *Liber Eliensis* I.15; *Liber Eliensis: Ad Fidem Codicum Variorum*, vol. I, ed. D. J. Stewart (London: Impensis Societatis, 1848), 48.

Rather, his conquests combined with other actions, such as vengeance, make for a king who used violence with aplomb. At a time when other rulers were attempting to control the use of violent self-help by others, Penda escalated his own use of violence and exacted vengeance upon his enemies. He deposed the West Saxon king Cenwealh for repudiating his sister, resulting in Cenwealh's exile at the East Anglian court.[68] While other rulers had begun to deploy new strategies of power at this time, Penda was simply the best at using force.

Penda's rule, more so than that of any of his contemporaries, was one built on violence, which he used to acquire *imperium* over numerous peoples and territories neighboring Mercia. He exacted tribute and war service from these peoples, and they at times fought at his side, such as in his final battle at Winwæd. Penda did, however, innovate in one significant way regarding the creation of power. Toward the end of his reign, he attempted to create new kingdoms by cobbling together different peoples, and then placed men loyal to himself, such as his sons, as kings of these new polities. These new rulers would be his eyes to watch the local elites, and in this way Penda extended his power at the local level. In so doing, he was able to have some measure of control over the personal relationships so crucial to his type of rule.[69] For this very reason, however, it is clear that Penda's rule was limited. Because he needed representatives personally loyal to him in order to exert his influence on the local level, he failed to create the type of authority that kings of Kent and Wessex were beginning to build.[70] Furthermore, as this type of rule was only as strong as the personal ability of the hegemon to maintain his power, it was by its very nature short-lived, as seen previously with Æthelfrith. For Penda's successors, the

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68. Bede, HE, III.7; 234; "Cenwealh 2," *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, http://www.pase.ac.uk, accessed 6 March 2012; ASC a.645; 26.

69. Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 206.

70. Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 206.

reliance on violence and control of social relationships was insufficient to the maintenance of their rule. While that may speak to the force of Penda's personality, it also reveals the effectiveness of the new strategies of power that accompanied conversion. Later Mercian rulers such as Wulfhere, Æthelred, and Æthelbald continued to use violence as part of their power, but supplemented it with other strategies. They collected tolls from the newly emerging towns, which they soon discovered could generate more income than conquest and plunder, issued charters, called councils, and otherwise expanded their ideological power base to build authority.[71]

Damien Tyler interprets Penda's use of violence as an overt rejection of the new strategies of power associated with Christianity. Penda had no need to adopt strategies that he associated with the newly Christian, because he attained victory without conversion, and because he regularly defeated his Christian opponents. In fact, while other rulers converted to enhance their authority, he relied more and more heavily on violence to build his power.[72] This argument has some merit, especially in light of other overt displays of paganism in opposition to conversion such as the Sutton Hoo ship burial and the construction of Yeavering.[73] A simpler explanation, however, could be that Penda relied primarily on violence because that was what he knew best, and that it served him well until the end of his reign (which, interestingly, came at the hands of a rival with more diverse strategies of power). Æthelberht, the first Christian Anglo-Saxon king and the first to adopt these new strategies of power associated with the Roman

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71. Fleming, *Britain After Rome*, 208-12; "S 67," *The Electronic Sawyer*, http://www.esawyer.org.uk/charter/67.html, accessed 13 July 2014; ASC a.675; 31.

72. Damian Tyler, "An Early Mercian Hegemony: Penda and Overkingship in the Seventh Century," *Midland History* 30 (2005): 1-19.

73. See Chapter 4. Martin Carver, "Boat burial in Britain: ancient custom or political signal?," in O. Crumlin-Pedersen (ed), *The Ship as Symbol in Prehistoric and Medieval Scandinavia* (Copenhagen: National Museum of Denmark, 1995), 111-24.

religion, seems to have converted at a time when his expansion was beginning to slow.[74] As

rulers of the southern kingdoms of Kent and Wessex such as Hlothere and Ine attempted to create

authority by stepping outside of social relationships, Penda was simply best at controlling

existing social relationships. In other words, he was the last great ruler to rely primarily on pre-

Conversion strategies of power. That is not to say that he did not incorporate innovative methods

of rule. Rather, he set up subordinates who were personally loyal to him and whom he could

control so that they could manage these personal relationships in his absence. In other words, as

Robin Fleming puts it, he did not integrate all the peoples subject to him into a single polity, but

he wielded "*imperium* over dozens of kings and peoples."[75] By controlling kin groups, his

contemporaries incorporated them into a single *gens* which they led, while Penda continued to

negotiate between disparate kinship groups.

A comparison with another king who chose a greater diversity of strategies of power may

provide insight into Penda's rule. Oswiu provides a good example not only because he was the

one responsible for Penda of Mercia's death, but this contemporary was his major rival who

utilized many different strategies. For instance, while Oswiu also used violence – he did defeat

and kill Penda at the battle of Winwæd – he was also responsible for the conversion of Sigeberht

of the East Saxons.[76] Also, after +Oswiu defeated Penda, the Mercian king's son Peada sought to

marry Oswiu's daughter, but Oswiu would only allow the union if Peada would convert, which

he did.[77] Conversions were often used to create or demonstrate superiority over a contemporary,

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74. Nicholas Higham, *The Convert Kings: Power and Religious Affiliation in Early Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 101-2.

75. Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 206.

76. Bede, HE, III.22; 280-5.

77. Bede, HE, III.21; 278.

as was the case with Æthelberht and Redwald, and these conversions were likely a confirmation

of Oswiu's *imperium*.[78] Furthermore, Oswiu was responsible for calling the Synod of Whitby,

which not only allowed him to intervene in a dispute, but also resulted in his siding with the

politically more powerful Roman faction.[79] Similarly, there is evidence that he corresponded with

Pope Vitalian and sent a potential archbishop to Rome for consecration, built a minster at

Medeshamstede, granted land to monasteries, and even sent his daughter to one.[80] Oswiu

therefore enhanced his authority by aligning himself closely with the newly emerging religious

elite and with their source of power in Rome. Furthermore, he enhanced his authority in other

ways, such as in his deposition of Wilfrid, a political move done to place an ally, Chad, in the see

of York.[81] Even when using violence, Oswiu's adoption of new strategies of power are clear. For

instance, he granted land at Gilling to Trumhere, a relative of King Oswine, whom Oswiu

murdered, as a wergeld.[82] By compensating for the killing of Oswine, Oswui behaved as if he

were attempting to prevent a feud through wergeld payment. This action provides another piece

of evidence that numerous types of dispute were treated as feud, thus further substantiating the

argument regarding the pervasiveness of feud in early Anglo-Saxon culture. In addition, it

becomes apparent that Oswiu engaged in alternate forms of dispute resolution, which many kings

of this period used to build authority by delegitimizing violent self-help. These are a few

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78. Higham, *Convert Kings*, 102-3; Bede, HE, II.5; 150.

79. Bede, HE III.25; 294-308.

80. Bede, HE, III.24, III.29, IV.1; 290-2, 318-22, 328-32; ASC a.654; 26..

81. Stephen, *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi*, 14; *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus*, ed. Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 30.

82. Bede, HE, III.24; 292; J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's* Ecclesiastical History of the English People*: A Historical Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 123.

examples of how kings used strategies of power other than violence to build authority beginning

in the seventh century, and provide an insightful contrast to the reign of Penda.

Other rulers of this period utilized a combination of strategies of power, including feud

and alliances with the Roman party. The aforementioned Cædwalla, for instance, was involved in

a feud between his kingdom of the Gewisse (Wessex) and Kent in which his brother Mul was

burned by the people of Kent, who afterwards paid a wergeld for this injury. He was involved in

other feuds as well, including one with the South Saxons. Like Oswald, he spent part of his

political career in exile, likely as a result of being on the wrong side of a political dispute.[83]

While in exile, before he became king, he attacked Sussex with his army, killing the king

Æthelwalh in the process. The ealdormen Beorhtun and Andhun, however, retaliated and drove

Cædwalla out. Years later, after he had become king, Cædwalla returned and laid waste to

Sussex, killing the ealdormen, subjugating the people, and adding the territory to his personal

domain.[84] He had similarly come to power using force, returning from exile to conquer the

kingdom, replacing the multiple *æthelings* who were ruling in 685.[85] His capture of the Isle of

Wight in the first year of his reign is curious because, while he planned to slaughter all the

inhabitants of the island, the nominally pagan king besought the aid of the Christian God,

promising a quarter of the land in return for victory. It is noteworthy, however, that Cædwalla

gave this land to the aforementioned Wilfrid, who had become an important political ally at the

time.[86] That he made an alliance with an ecclesiastical leader so closely connected with Rome

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83. Stephen, *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi*, 42; 84.

84. Bede, HE IV.15; 380.

85. Bede, HE IV.12; 368.

86. Bede, HE IV.16; 382.

provides evidence of a multifaceted use of power strategies on the part of the king. Although he did not officially convert until he abdicated the throne to make a pilgrimage to Rome, during his reign he made several donations to churches and monastic foundations. Whether the charters that provide evidence of such donations are spurious or not,[87] evidence from both Bede and the *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi* confirms donations to Wilfrid, lending further evidence to a political alliance between the two.[88] In addition, Cædwalla continued these Roman connections after abdication, with the pope serving as his godfather at his baptism in Rome, and taking the name Peter upon conversion.[89] The charter evidence indicates that, while Cædwalla was king, he granted privileges to church lands, and he issued or witnessed several charters of this type.[90] During a three-year reign, Cædwalla was certainly active in the politics of southern Britain during the Later Conversion Period, and made use of a variety of tools to acquire and maintain power and to make connections with the powerful.

Taken together, these examples allow us to flesh out some of the political culture of the Later Conversion Period. Although some kings such as Penda wielded violence as a strategy of power with great success, others gained access to a greater diversity of strategies, most importantly allying with the powerful elite associated with the Roman church. Regardless of how much they attempted to gain control over the dispute resolution of others by intervening in feuds,

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87. S232 is likely spurious, others may be as well. S. E. Kelly, *The Charters of Selsey*, Anglo-Saxon Charters 6 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 5-10; "S232," *The Electronic Sawyer*, http://www.esawyer.org.uk/charter/232.html, accessed 1 July 2016; "S235," *The Electronic Sawyer*, http://www.esawyer.org.uk/charter/235.html, accessed 13 July 2016; "S1603," *The Electronic Sawyer*, http://www.esawyer.org.uk/charter/1603.html, accessed 13 July 2016.

88. Bede, HE IV.1; 382; Stephen, *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi*, 42; 84.

89. Bede, HE V.7; 470.

90. "S257," *The Electronic Sawyer*, http://www.esawyer.org.uk/charter/257.html, accessed 1 July 2016; "Cædwalla 1," *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, http://www.pase.ac.uk, accessed 1 July 2016.

it did not stop them from conducting feud themselves. However Bede portrayed the use of

violence by Anglo-Saxon kings and *æthelings*, from their actions it is clear that they treated

rivalries between kingdoms as feud. Not only do the conflicts between kings fit the four criteria

of feud as outlined previously – injury, retaliation, group involvement, and an ongoing hostile

relationship – but kings paid wergelds or otherwise negotiated treaties to end these conflicts. This

conception runs so deep as to make the distinction between war and feud even less clear than it

otherwise has been. While this lack of distinction does not tell us what the difference between

war and feud was, it does tell us that the difference is more relevant to us than it was to those

engaged in it at the time.

The Church and Violence

While kings attempted to intervene in interpersonal violence and committed their own

acts of feud, the Church provided examples of appropriate violence through saints, most notably

Guthlac. Guthlac was important because he was one of the first native Anglo-Saxon saints, and a

cult quickly grew around him following his death in 716.[91] While saints' cults were often

instruments of popular devotion divorced from official worship, a life composed shortly after his

death may have allowed the Church to co-opt part of the Guthlac legend for its own purposes.

Composed by Felix in the 730s or 740s, it was also one of the first saints' lives written in

England.[92] In the piece, it is evident that Guthlac not only turns away from the violence of a

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91. John R. Black, "Tradition and Transformation in the Cult of St. Guthlac in Early Medieval England," *Heroic Age* 10 (May 2007) http://www.heroicage.org/issues/10/black.html (Accessed 1 July 2016); "Guthlac 2," *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, http://www.pase.ac.uk, accessed 6 March 2012.

92. Alaric Hall, "Constructing Anglo-Saxon Sanctity: Tradition, Innovation and Saint Guthlac," *Images of Sanctity: Essays in Honour of Gary Dickson*, edited by Debra Higgs Strickland, Visualising the Middle Ages, 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 207–35.

previous life, but interpersonal violence in general. He began life as a Middle Anglian warrior, and successfully led a warband for nine years, during which time he defeated his enemies so thoroughly that they begged for peace.[93] Having accomplished much as a warrior, he abandoned that life and spent two years in a monastery. Afterward, he decided to emulate the first Christian monks by seeking isolation in "a most dismal fen"[94] that others had previously been unable to inhabit on account of the terrors there. In that place, according to Felix, he faced constant threat of evil as the demons there tempted him, beat him, and even attempted to drag him off to Hell.[95] Notably, at no point does Guthlac attempt to fight back against these foes. Instead, St. Bartholomew intervenes and rescues him both from the despair brought on by the Devil and from being dragged into Hell by two demons. What we see here is an interesting concept of protection – Guthlac does nothing to protect himself other than beseech the assistance of his protector, St. Bartholomew, who intervenes on his behalf. Much as kings were seeking to convince the populace to abandon violent self-help for royal intervention, Guthlac, although perhaps by necessity, has done the same. In fact, the *Vita Sancti Guthlaci* continues with Bartholomew, after rescuing Guthlac, ensuring that the two devils who attacked him can never do so again. In this instance, complete safety from one's enemies can be seen as a ringing endorsement for the value of protection. Even the holiest saints had their struggles for godliness couched in the terms of feud, as they battled the forces of evil in the wilderness.

In addition, the terminology that Felix uses to describe Guthlac evokes militant images, but those images have been converted to more closely reflect new Christian ideals. For instance,

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93. Felix, *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, 18; *Felix's Life of Guthlac*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 81-2.

94. Felix, *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, 24; 86.

95. Felix, *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, 31; 100-6.

while his mother Tette was suffering the pains of childbirth, God sent an angel to reassure her

that he remembered *militis sui*, his soldier.[96] Similarly, the child was named Guthlac, meaning

"the reward of war," after the name of his tribe, the Guthlacingas, followers of an earlier Guthlac.

While the original meaning was likely purely militant, Felix converts the meaning to a Christian

one, stating that "by warring against vices he was to receive the reward of eternal bliss."[97] In

addition, an extended passage describes Guthlac's arrival in the fen, Crowland.

> *Deinde praecinctus spiritalibus armis adversus teterrimi hostis insidias scutum fidei, loricam spei, galeam castatis, arcum patientiae, sagittas psalmodiae, sese in aciem firmans, arripuit. Tantae enim fiduciae erat, ut inter torridas tartari turmas sese contempto hoste iniecerit.*[98]

> Then, girding himself with the spiritual arms against the wiles of the foul foe, he took the shield of faith, the breastplate of hope, the helmet of chastity, the bow of patience, the arrows of psalmody, making himself strong for the fight. So great was his confidence that, despising the foe, he hurled himself against the torrid troops of Tartarus.[99]

The conversion of violence here takes on the imagery of the conversion of weapons to spiritual,

rather than martial, victory. It is important to note that Guthlac does not actually engage in

violence against the demons, but that Felix uses martial imagery as a metaphor for Guthlac's

struggles in the swamp. The presentation of Christian glory in such a manner was likely designed

to appeal to an Anglo-Saxon elite which glorified war, in the same way that modern advertising

attempts to pander to audiences. Other examples of converted militant imagery abound

throughout the life, including a description of Egyptian monks who "*humanae infirmitatis vitia*

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96. Felix, *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, 4; 74-5.

97. Felix, *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, 10; 76-9

98. Felix, *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, 27; 90.

99. Bertram Colgrave, ed. and trans., *Felix's Life of Guthlac* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 91.

abstinentiae framea interimebant,[100] "destroyed the vices of human weakness with the sword of abstinence."[101] Instead of plunder, the reward of war has become Heaven, war has been redirected against sin and the agents of Hell, and the tools of war have become the Christian ideals of faith, hope, chastity, and so on. It seems as if Felix were trying to convince the Anglo-Saxon warriors to turn their instruments of war not against each other, but against sin and vice. This interpretation is best evident in the statement of Guthlac's rewards for his glorious deeds, "*famosa venerantia*" and "*perennis gloriae*,"[102] "fame and veneration" and "perennial glory."[103] Both rewards were certainly those for which a warrior may strive, but here they refer to the promises of Heavenly, rather than a militant, life. Furthermore, not only does Guthlac's Lord protect him from attack, but also from hunger and anxiety. As a holy man, he no longer needs his social group, which he abandoned by living in the wilderness, to protect him. Moreover, his voluntary exile placed him outside the society for which feud was one of the primary means of protection. His only remaining recourse was to depend on God, the Lord of the social group of Christians. Guthlac thus serves as an example for other warriors to do the same and place the Christian social group above their more worldly ties, of which feud and vengeance were key social binders.

Additionally, Felix relays a similar message to the rulers of the day. Æthelbald, who was contending for the kingdom of the Mercians with the existing ruler Ceolred, visited Guthlac so

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100. Felix, *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, 30; 98.

101. Colgrave, *Felix's Life of Guthlac*, 99.

102. Felix, *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, 27; 92.

103. Colgrave, *Felix's Life of Guthlac*, 93.

that he "might seek divine counsel." Guthlac beseeched God on Æthelbald's behalf, and told him

that

> *Rogavi Dominum, ut subveniret tibi in miseratione sua, et exaudivit me et tribuit tibi dominationem gentis tuae et posuit te principem populorum, et cervices inimicorum turoeum subtus calcaneum tuum rediget, et possessiones eroum pissidebis, et fugient a facie tua qui te oderunt, et terga eorum videbis, et gladius tuus vincet adversarios tuos. . . . Non in praeda nec in rapina regnum tibi dabitur, sed de manu Domini obtinebis.*[104]

> I have asked the Lord to help you in His pitifulness; and He has heard me, and has granted you to rule over your race and has made you chief over the peoples; and He will bow the necks of your enemies beneath your heel and you shall own their possessions; those who hate you shall flee from your face and you shall see their backs; and your sword shall overcome your foes. . . . Not as booty nor as spoil shall the kingdom be granted you, but you shall obtain it from the hand of God.[105]

Felix continues that Guthlac's prophesy was fulfilled to the letter (what else would one expect). What we see here is not only the saint appealing to the warrior spirit of Æthelbald by promising to crush his enemies and see them driven before him, but an attempt to convert the political culture of the Anglo-Saxons to include a divine element. The life makes numerous references to the exile of Æthelbald, who appears perfectly incapable of taking the kingdom on his own.[106] With God's help (via Guthlac), however, he could achieve his political goals. Furthermore, with the inclusion of this divine element, we see a type of rule far different from that of Penda, who relied on his own abilities, such as his skill in war as well as manipulating social relationships. Æthelbald, unlike his predecessor, wields holy authority, and does not rely primarily on his personal power but instead accepts the aid of his Lord. He is not the king simply because he has defeated his rivals (though that helped), but he has added new strategies of power. For instance, he issued charters, more than thirty of which still exist, and paid a wergeld to Gloucester Abbey

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104. Felix, *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, 49; 148-50.

105. Colgrave, *Felix's Life of Guthlac*, 149-51.

106. Felix, *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, 49; 148.

for having struck the son of one of his kinsmen.[107] Written during Æthelbald's reign, Felix's *Life*

may in fact have been another one of these strategies, as a way to broadcast the king's divine

sanction to build his authority. We know that monasteries were frequently built within the view

of royal power centers.[108] Æthelbald may have used this influence to co-opt a popular saint to

augment his power with divine authority. In so doing, he was using a popular saint to build his

authority by association with God and the Church, which sought to convert violence by using it

against sin, rather than man.

      The Guthlac legends were not only useful to the political power of Northumbrian rulers,

but both demonstrate the pervasiveness of feud in the mindset of the Anglo-Saxons and show the

Church's influence in attempting to change that attitude. Another religious leader contemporary

with Guthlac, who became the subject of his own *Vita*, was Bishop Wilfrid, an interesting

character who borrows elements of the cultural ideals associated with both *Germanitas* and

Romanitas. Probably of aristocratic Northumbrian lineage, early in his life he traveled to Rome in

order to access the nucleus of the Christian world.[109] On the one hand, he behaved as a Germanic

lord, marching at the head of his own army, distributing wealth and land in order to ensure the

loyalty of his followers who took personal vows to him, and even using his army to bolster the

power of himself and his allies. On the other hand, Wilfrid utilized law as a remedy for his

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107. Æthelbald's wergeld payment to the abbey rather than to the man he struck or his immediate kin seems strange. With no other information available, one can only speculate that either his payment was a form of penance for sin, or, since the incident involved members of the same family, it was considered a dispute that could not be resolved through feud or compensation. "S1782," *The Electronic Sawyer*, http://www.esawyer.org.uk/charter/1782.html, accessed 13 July 2014; *"Æthelbald 4," Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, http://www.pase.ac.uk, accessed 4 March 2012.

108. David Petts, "Coastal Landscapes and early Christianity in Early Anglo-Saxon Northumbria," *Estonian Journal of Archaeology* 13 no. 2 (2009): 79-95.

109. Henry Mayr-Harding, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 107.

injuries by beseeching the aid of his lord in Rome, the pope, used his Roman connections to

bolster his authority, and used a significant number of strategies of power to enhance his own

personal status. By accessing both Germanic and Roman models of leadership, Wilfrid left

himself open to a variety of strategies of power, which he used to create his personal and

religious power in various Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.

As is common for the late seventh century, the sources concerning the life and career of

Wilfrid are problematic not only because they are few in number but also because the authors of

these sources had their own political motivations. For instance, Stephen, author of the *Vita Sancti

Wilfrithi*, was a member of Bishop Wilfrid's inner circle toward the end of his life, and as such,

had his own political motivations in writing. Because Wilfrid had been quite active in politics

during his career, and because the life was written shortly after his death, Stephen used his

biography to shower praise on the accomplishments of the bishop while at the same time

avoiding resurrecting old political disputes to which Wilfrid was a party.[110] In addition, Stephen

may have incorrectly attributed the conversion of the Frisians to Wilfrid in order to bolster the

status of his former master.[111] At the same time, Bede, who includes much of the career of

Wilfrid as part of his *Ecclesiastical History*, both used Stephen as a source for his own writings,

and utilized material originating in Hexham (rather than Ripon, which was associated with

Wilfrid and had a vested interest in his legacy) as sources for his sections on Wilfrid.[112] Even the

charters regarding Wilfrid are problematic, with more than one being later creations (perhaps

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110. D.P. Kirby, "Bede, Eddius Stephanus, and the 'Life of Wilfrid,'" *The English Historical Review* 98 no. 386 (Jan. 1983): 106.

111. Michelle Zeigler, "The Ripon Connection? Willbrord, Wilfrid, and the Mission to Frisia," *The Heroic Age* 6 (Spring 2003), Accessed September 1, 2011, http://www.mun.ca/mst/heroicage/issues/6/ziegler.html.

112. Kirby, "Bede, Eddius Stephanus, and the 'Life of Wilfrid,'" 111-2; Zeigler, "The Ripon Connection?"

based on earlier documents) in order to act as something of foundation charters,[113] and others

being pure fabrications in order to connect a monastery to Wilfrid.[114] Some of this charter

evidence, however, appears to be based in part on narrative sources,[115] and one may be based on

contemporary documentation, though the authenticity of the grant to Wilfrid is questionable at

best.[116] With all the sources having political motivations, it is at times difficult to determine the

course of events in Wilfrid's life. For instance, while we know he was exiled from Northumbria

on several occasions, the exact cause of his exile is never revealed. We can, however, deduce

potential causes from the political disputes in which the bishop was engaged. In so doing, not

only do we gain a clearer picture of Wilfrid's career, but the variety of strategies of power at play

during the Later Conversion Period.

For one, Wilfrid was involved in the introduction of Roman political culture begun by the

conversion of Æthelberht. While the Synod of Whitby may lead one to believe that there were

two Christian traditions active in Northumbria in the seventh century, the Roman and the Irish,

after the synod a third emerged which lay somewhere between the two, supported by a Hiberno-

Roman party.[117] It tried to follow Roman patterns of worship and organization while adhering to

Irish traditions as much as possible. Notably, most Anglo-Saxon church leaders did not attempt

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113. S 230 and S 232. Cotton Augustus II.86; *Charters of Selsey*. Edited by S.E. Kelly. *Anglo-Saxon Charters* VI. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, xliv, 5-10, 102.

114. S 47; S. E. Kelly, *The Charters of Selsey*, Anglo-Saxon Charters 6 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 40.

115. In the spurious charter identified as S 232, Cædwalla grants 87 hides of land to Wilfrid in Selsey and neighboring lands, an event also described by Bede. "S 232," *The Electronic Sawyer* <http://www.esawyer.org.uk/charter/232.html> accessed 24 June 2014; Kelly, *Charters of Selsey*, 5-10; Bede, *HE*, IV.13; 370-7.

116. S 45; S. E. Kelly, *The Charters of Selsey*, Anglo-Saxon Charters 6 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), xliv.

117. Bede, HE III.25; 294.

to completely abandon Irish practices – it was only Wilfrid's party that did so. Bishop Wilfrid did not simply view the Hiberno-Romans as doctrinally wrong, but as "heretics and schismatics."[118] This factor may have caused him no end of political problems, but at the same time he relied on Roman political culture on numerous occasions, such as his many legal appeals to the pope to restore him to a status lost in a political dispute as well as his adoption of the Roman tonsure and Benedictine Rule.[119] That he relied on law and appealed to the pope to settle disputes provides a clear connection between this bishop and the law-giving kings of the conversion period. Like Æthelberht, Wilfrid saw an opportunity to increase, or, in the bishop's case, restore, his power and authority through law. On the other hand, Wilfrid opposed the division of kingdoms and tribes into multiple dioceses as introduced by Archbishop Theodore, which would have created an episcopal structure more akin to Gallo-Roman organization models.[120] This opposition, however, may have had less to do with adherence to a particular ideal than to practical power: if Northumbria were divided into multiple dioceses, then Wilfrid would have lost a substantial portion of his power base. When he did finally agree to the splitting of his see, it was on the condition that the new bishops be from his diocese. This measure was probably to ensure that the new bishops were his men and were loyal to him. In ensuring control over the other Northumbrian bishops, Wilfrid was acting as an archbishop, even if he had no formal recognition thereof.[121]

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118. Zeigler, "The Ripon Connection?"

119. Stephen, *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi*, 6, 47, 50; 12-5, 98-9, 102-5; David Pelteret, "Saint Wilfrid: Tribal Bishop, Civic Bishop, or Germanic Lord," *The Community, the Family, and the Saint: Patterns of Power in Early Medieval Europe*, edited by Joyce M. Hill and Mary Swan (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), 162.

120. Mayr-Harding, *Coming of Christianity*, 130-135.

121. Pelteret, "Saint Wilfrid," 176-7.

While Bishop Wilfrid certainly deployed certain strategies of power adapted from the Romans, he also made use of strategies that would traditionally be associated with *Germanitas*. That is, Germanic tribal chieftains and kings, emulating an imagined Germanic past, most commonly employed these strategies at the time that Wilfrid was politically active. For instance, he had his own army of warrior followers whom he could both use and let his allies borrow and who accompanied him on his many journeys. Also, he regularly participated in feasts with this warband, trained the sons of elites, and bestowed lavish gifts upon his followers and allies.[122] He frequently acquired land with which he could support his retinue of soldiers, much as a leader of a warband, though he generally obtained these lands as gifts from kings rather than through conquest.[123] That is not to suggest, however, that Romans or those following Roman methods of rule would not have utilized these modes of rule. What is most important to note here is not that he was following a specifically Roman or Germanic set of strategies of power. Rather, he utilized those tools which would provide the greatest results to him in order to build his power. As David Pelteret notes, Wilfrid had access to several models of episcopal and tribal leadership from the institutions and practices with which he was in contact, not only the monastery and papacy, but the tribe as well as law and international diplomacy.[124] He combined these influences into his own style of leadership which might seem odd for a bishop. What that makes Wilfrid, more than anything else in this regard, is a politician willing to tap into those sources of power which seemed most useful at the time, whether the strategies for accessing power fit with a particular ideology or not. That is not to say that Wilfrid did not follow certain ideals, or that those ideals

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122. Pelteret, "Saint Wilfrid," 174-5.

123. Stephen, *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi* 17; 36.

124. Pelteret, "Saint Wilfrid," 165.

did not at times clash with his ability to access power. As mentioned above, he was a devout

follower of Roman practices, which at times hurt him politically. In those cases, however, he saw

the Roman methods as being the most viable to enhance his political position – law, charter, and

appeal to authority (the pope) were more effective to Wilfrid than violence, though he used that

too. Being from an elite Anglo-Saxon family, he was certainly used to tribal "Germanic" modes

of rule which relied primarily on violence and force. But, like the most successful rulers of his

day, he utilized a diversity of strategies of power in order to create an authority that could last

beyond his personal fortunes in battle. Like many of those rulers, however, his power was based

largely on his personal ability and did not last beyond his lifetime.

Also important is that what we see in the depiction of Bishop Wilfrid is the conversion of

violence. According to Stephen, Wilfrid had to go to Gaul to be consecrated because there was

no archbishop (Deusdedit having died) and the bishops residing in Britain were schismatic

Quartodecimans.[125] While he was gone, King Oswiu gave his see to one Chad, himself a

Quartodeciman. When Wilfrid returned to Britain, he did not try to regain his see, and instead

returned to Ripon as abbot. When a new archbishop, Theodore, arrived, he removed Chad from

the see of York and reinstalled Wilfrid, using canon law as a justification – one cannot claim

another's see. Stephen makes a particular note that Wilfrid did not seek revenge upon the cleric

who had occupied his position illegally, but instead "returned good for evil, not evil for evil."[126]

Instead of punishing Chad or exacting vengeance, Wilfrid used his friendship with the Mercian

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125. Those who celebrated Easter on Nisan 14 of the Jewish calendar with no consideration as to whether it were a Sunday. This belief was condemned as heresy by the 325 Council of Nicaea. Mayr-Harding, *Coming of Christianity*, 103.

126. Stephen, *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi*, 33; 66-8.

king Wulfhere to set Chad up with his own see in Lichfield.[127] That is, Stephen emphatically

points to the way Wilfrid treated the situation as an example of how to treat one's opponents –

with rewards rather than with violence. In other ways, it is clear that Stephen is attempting to

portray Wilfrid as one who would not resort to violence or vengeance. For example, after being

consecrated in Gaul, Wilfrid and his party returned to Britain, but on the way were blown off

course by a storm and landed in the South Saxon kingdom. There, a group of pagans attempted to

seize the ships and treasure of Wilfrid's party, threatening death to any who resisted. Wilfrid's

men of course resisted, while the bishop and other clerics prayed. Even though they were horribly

outnumbered, Wilfrid's men beat back the South Saxons three times, only losing five men in the

process. On their fourth charge, Wilfrid's prayers resulted in a miracle, so that the tide came in

early, allowing Wilfrid's ship to escape.[128] Here Stephen portrays Wilfrid's prayers as being

stronger than the violence threatened by the South Saxon horde. That is not to say, however, that

Wilfrid never resorted to violence. We know that he traveled with an army, and that he used it in

Sussex, and he let Dagobert borrow it.[129] Like Felix's *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, however, Stephen's

work represents an effort to promote nonviolent strategies of power by demonstrating the greater

efficacy of non-violent means of dispute resolution. For instance, the most successful strategy of

power and form of dispute resolution as put forth by Stephen must certainly be law. Not only

does Wilfrid regain his see after traveling to Gaul because Theodore arrived and was able to

enforce canon law, but his position favoring the Roman traditions rather than the Irish at the

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127. Stephen, *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi*, XIV-XV; 30-33.

128. Stephen, *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi*, XIII; 26-9.

129. Stephen, *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi* 13, 28; 26-8, 54-6.

Synod of Whitby was, at least according to Stephen of Ripon, largely based on law.[130] In addition, Wilfrid was able to regain his position in the 680s because he made a legal appeal to the pope in Rome.[131] His successful use of law in settling disputes in his favor may have been related to the creation of legal compilations in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, as two of these compilations, those by Hlothere and Eadric of Kent and Ine of Wessex, were created around the time of his 680s disputes, and Wilfrid was a witness to a charter of Ine's.[132] Wilfrid certainly makes an interesting case not only as a bishop active in Anglo-Saxon politics, but also as an important figure in the political culture of early England.

Important religious figures of the Later Conversion Period were, therefore, clearly involved in politics, even if they chose a life of exile to avoid that very involvement. Both the Church and the king exploited the Guthlac legend for their own political ends, whether that was to promote a Christian take on violence or to associate oneself with a popular legend. The Church attempted to convert violence to its own ends, and promoted securing the protection of one's lord in lieu of violent self-help. Wilfrid, on the other hand, combined the power strategies associated with both bishops and warriors in order to secure his political fortunes. He deployed whichever strategies were politically advantageous to the maintenance or increase of his personal power. While the sources for both Guthlac and Wilfrid demonstrate the political involvement of these key religious figures, they also provide evidence for the pervasiveness of feud, which provided the intellectual basis for thinking about all types of conflict.

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130. Stephen, *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi* 10, 15; 20-2, 32.

131. Stephen, *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi* 31; 64.

132. Oliver, *Beginnings of English Law*, 119-20; Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century*, vol. I: Legislation and its Limits (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 103; "S 252," *The Electronic Sawyer*, http://www.esawyer.org.uk/charter/252.html, accessed October 16, 2016; Wilfrid 2," *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, http://www.pase.ac.uk, accessed October 16, 2016.

Conclusions

Conversion, therefore, brought with it a great number of new strategies of power which Anglo-Saxon rulers used to build power by creating an authority that lasted beyond their reigns. In Anglo-Saxon England during the Later Conversion Period – approximately 650 to 730 according to archaeological and historical evidence – elites made an effort to convert violence in order to enhance their power. Kings of Kent and Wessex did this by issuing laws which placed them above kinship groups so that they could properly adjudicate disputes. They offered protection first to those in their presence and later to all who lived within their territory in order to expand their power. These rulers also made themselves the center of dispute resolution by extracting themselves from the social bonds which tied kinship groups together and by delegitimizing dispute resolution that did not use royal agents. Others such as Cædwalla allied themselves with powerful Church leaders such as Wilfrid to enhance their power. Those kings who adopted these strategies of power were able to build authority in their kingdoms that lasted beyond their reigns. Not all kings during this period made use of these strategies, however, and many continued to rely on traditional sources of power, including violence; Penda is the most noteworthy example. Eschewing these new tools, Penda was successfully able to wield force better than his contemporaries and continued to rely on violence and the manipulation of social relationship for his power. In other words, he had no apparent need of these new strategies. The power he built through force, however, did not last long beyond his death. Meanwhile, other kings also engaged in feuds, including a feud between the royal houses of Wessex and Kent during which the Kentish people paid a wergeld for burning Mul, providing evidence that the Anglo-Saxons viewed disputes between kingdoms as feuds.

At the same time, the Church provided examples for the legitimate use of violence against the enemies of God, using saints to convince warriors to eschew violent self-help and to leave violence and dispute resolution to their lords (or Lord). Perhaps the best example was Guthlac, who abandoned life as a warrior to live in the wilderness, where he refused to retaliate against the attacks of demons. What we see in these competing strategies – violent self-help vs. reliance on the power of a lord – is the delegitimization of violent self-help as kings built power through the creation of authority, a necessary element of rule by the end of the seventh century. The delegitimization of violent self-help was a powerful tool for kings, and gave them an ideological justification for claiming greater rights over dispute resolution. One of the most powerful Church leaders of this period, Wilfrid, used a combination of strategies of power in order to enhance his own ability to command others. Wilfrid seems to have not been ideologically tied to a particular set of power strategies, but to have adopted whatever strategy worked best at the time.

While kings did begin to advocate for royal intervention in disputes, they also engaged in feuds, and feud remained the conceptual framework for the ways that the Anglo-Saxons thought about all types of violence and conflict. While the Church advocated turning away from violence, martial imagery was associated with important religious figures such as Guthlac, and Church leaders such as Wilfrid employed violence when it suited his political needs. Although some kings created law to gain a measure of control over dispute resolution, others continued to engage in conflicts that take on the characteristics of feud. The conflicts between royal rulers such as those between Cædwalla and the Kentish kingdom fulfill the criteria of feud laid out previously – injury, retaliation for that injury, the involvement of larger social groups, and an ongoing relationship of hostility between these groups. Even with access to new power strategies, both

political and religious leaders both demonstrate the pervasiveness of feud in the Anglo-Saxon

mindset.

CHAPTER VI

ROYAL RIVALRIES AFTER THE CONVERSION PERIOD

Unlike those kings of the Conversion Period who were able to rely primarily on violence in the creation and maintenance of power, kings of the middle and later eighth century (after about 730) for whom violence was the main strategy often found themselves replaced by members of rival dynasties as a result of feuding between elite groups. In both Northumbria and Wessex, dynastic feuds not only prevented kings from establishing stable rule by a single dynasty, but also prevented factions from cooperating in order to successfully contend against the rise of a rival power, Mercia. Kings of Wessex including Cynewulf and Cyneheard and a multitude of kings of Northumbria engaged in destructive feuds which sapped their ability to construct legitimate authority. These conflicts, combined with major changes in the nature of land tenure (the introduction of bookland), resulted in the kings of these two kingdoms being unable to establish their dominance over their neighbors because they were no longer able to gather armies sufficient to maintain their power over an extended period of time. Historical evidence indicates that feud may have served as a pretense for usurpation in those kingdoms where royal power was weakest. At times unable to delegitimize the power of rival leaders, potential kings instead legitimized their successful overthrow of these leaders through the mechanism of feud. Thrones passed between rival factions in kingdoms such as Northumbria, with rival dynastic groups and non-royal elites both dethroning kings. Those kings who failed to utilize the new sources of power that their Mercian contemporaries deployed found themselves needing to resort to violence to attempt to maintain power. Rather than utilize a diversity of

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strategies, they relied primarily on violence as a basis of power, likely due to necessity. We cannot simply state that these kings of Wessex and Northumbria resorted to violence because they were barbaric. There were plenty of other rulers who utilized a greater diversity of power strategies who also resorted to violence on occasion, sometimes even horrific violence. We can also not suggest that they were completely ignorant of other power strategies, as these were evident all around them, and some may have even tried to use them. Instead, so much of their time was concerned with potential violent overthrow that they had little time to build their power in other ways. Furthermore, although the written sources do not provide evidence that Northumbrian kings used these new power strategies, there is no evidence to suggest that they deliberately eschewed the new political tools. What we do know is that their reigns usually began and ended because of some act of violent overthrow, and that they likely did not reign long enough to deploy strategies that enabled kings like Æthelbald and Offa to extend their reigns.

Evidence for kings who did use a greater diversity of strategies of power during this period centers on the kings of Mercia, which emerged as the dominant kingdom during the eighth century. Mercian kings such as Æthelbald and Offa deployed new strategies of power and, as a result, became dominant in the eighth century. Their new strategies included gaining control over economic activity and exploiting new land arrangements to their advantage through the use of common burdens.[1] An examination of the sources makes it clear that the non-violent strategies of power that kings of the early seventh century had employed with varying degrees of success had become of greater importance by the eighth century. This phenomenon was due to the continued

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1. The introduction of bookland in the seventh century brought with it certain immunities that were granted by the charter, or *landboc*. The holders of booked land were not responsible for the typical renders and other obligations associated with other types of land. Most charters did not exempt land from three "common burdens," which generally included bridge work, fortress work, and military service. Richard P. Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 52-3.

development of kingship following trends that emerged in the Conversion Period.[2] Eighth-century kings sought to expand their authority by further separating themselves from the rest of society and inserting themselves into disputes. During this period of Mercian hegemony, force was no longer the exclusive or primary means of creating and maintaining power. On the other hand, the legitimate exercise of force, that exclusive prerogative of the state in complex societies, remained a crucial element of power. In other words, kings could not gain and maintain power through force alone, but needed to be able to wield it in order to survive.

The 730s provide a good transition point for a new historical period as both archaeological and historical evidence indicate major changes in political and social relationships. The archaeological record shows a sudden halt in the use of grave goods at the beginning of this decade, which Geake has interpreted as the end of the transition from chieftaincy to kingship; the Anglo-Saxon elites no longer had to be convinced they needed kings.[3] In the same decade, our most complete historical record of the preceding period, Bede's *Historia Eccleasistica*, was completed, in 731.[4] The Anglo-Saxonist must therefore examine other sources completed after 731 in order to understand the role of violence and its relation to power and authority after the Conversion Period. Fortunately, the number and variety of written sources other than Bede's history increases in the eighth century. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* provides information which does not rely on the Northumbrian monk, and helps to elucidate the factional strife between competing royal rulers in Northumbria. In addition to the *Chronicle*,

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2. As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

3. Helen Geake, *The Use of Grave-Goods in Conversion-Period England, c.600-c.850* (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1997), 126-36.

4. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People,* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1963), xvii.

numerous charters, letters (such as those by Alcuin), and saints' lives (including that of Guthlac) as well as coinage and archaeological records help to flesh out the history of the period, enabling the historian to elaborate on the nature of power during this period. Taken together, these sources indicate that while successful Mercian kings utilized a number of strategies of power during the eighth century, kings in Wessex and Northumbria were unable to do so because of the threat of feud.

Northumbrian Royal Rivalries: Death by Violence in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records the violent deaths of numerous kings in the second half of the eighth century, along with several ealdormen and reeves.[5] In fact, between 746 and 798 the *Chronicle* records the death, capture, or exile of fourteen Anglo-Saxon kings and *æthelings*,[6] six of whom were Northumbrian, along with the death, exile, and dismemberment of several ealdormen and reeves.[7] In many of these instances, the *Chronicle* clearly present the depositions and deaths of these kings as a direct result of families feuding over the kingdom. Such feuding was particularly pronounced in Northumbria, where several families vied for the throne.[8] While dynastic rivalries were not limited to the northern kingdom – one of the most famous instances of royal feud took place in Wessex, as discussed below – the number of violent depositions was greatest in Northumbria. In addition to information from the *Anglo-Saxon*

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5. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* E, a.757-794; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. Susan Irvine, vol. 7, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, ed. David Dumville and Simon Keynes (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 37-42. This edition hereinafter cited as ASC.

6. The Northumbrian king Osred was both driven out of the kingdom and later killed. ASC a.790, 792; 41-2.

7. ASC a. 746-98; 37-43.

8. Barbara Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England* (London: Routledge, 1990), 88-9.

Chronicle about these feuds, further details may be found in Symeon of Durham's *Historia Regum*, a chronicle intended to be a continuation of Bede's history with a focus on the north. Although writing after the Norman Conquest, Symeon hewed closely to his sources, one of which was a no longer extant Northumbrian chronicle that Cyril Hart argues was written by Byrthferth of Ramsey. Symeon's work thus contains a great deal of information about Northumbria from 731 to 957 that is not found elsewhere, and thus further supplements the information available from other sources.[9]

Northumbria was fortunate to have a relatively strong king in the person of Eadberht prior to his voluntary abdication in 758. Eadberht had found success on the battlefield,[10] defended his kingdom against Mercian invasion, and even reformed the currency.[11] By virtue of having held the kingdom for more than twenty years, he stands out among eighth-century Northumbrian kings.[12] Even more so, he expanded the bounds of his territory and made an alliance with the Picts.[13] Although he was successful, his reign began amid the type of controversy that would plague his successors. His predecessor, Ceolwulf, was temporarily overthrown, tonsured, and placed in the Lindisfarne monastery. Although his supporters were able to restore him to the throne, after several years his political opponents forced his abdication in favor of his cousin

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9. Thomas Arnold, ed., Introduction to *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia*, vol. I (London: Longman, 1885), ix; Cyril Hart, "Byrhtferth's Northumbrian Chronicle," *The English Historical Review* 97 no. 384 (July 1982): 558-582.

10. This information is from a series of annals which supplement the Moore manuscript of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, known as the *Continuations* of Bede. *Continuations*, a.750; *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People,* ed. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1963), 574.

11. *Continuations* a.740; 572-4; Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 88-9.

12. "Eadberht 11," *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, <http://eagle.cch.kcl.ac.uk:8080/pase/persons/index.htm> accessed 27 July 2016.

13. N.J. Higham, *The Kingdom of Northumbria A.D. 350-1100*, (Dover: Alan Sutton Publishing, Inc., 1993), 141.

Eadberht, and Ceolwulf returned to the monastery.[14] In other words, Ceolwulf seems to have been on the losing end of a dynastic dispute between rival elements among the Northumbrian elite. Similarly, when Eadberht surrendered the throne to his son Oswulf in 758, he too left the political scene to enter a monastery.[15] The similarity of these circumstances causes one to question just how voluntary Eadberht's abdication may have been. Although there is no evidence of his being forced off the throne, it may be possible that it was not entirely his choice. Considering the rampant political disputes that plagued the kingdom in the years following his rule, it seems likely that he was forced off the throne by his rivals. Taking in the larger picture, however, it become evident that Eadbert's reign was a brief respite in a series of dynastic disputes beginning in 716 with the killing of the twenty-year-old King Osred, further lending credence to the theory that Eadberht did not volutarily abdicate. Osred was briefly succeeded by Coenred, who was then succeeded by Osric, who may have been related to Osred. Importantly, after Osric's death in 729 no single family was able to hold on to the kingdom for more than two generations due to either killing or rebellion.[16]

Several factors contributed to the inability of a single family to maintain control over the Northumbrian kingdom. In addition to the inability of these Northumbrian kings to prevent their usurpation by rivals, changes in land tenure further limited their ability to muster followers and further extend their power in non-violent ways. The most important factor may be the creation of bookland, land granted to the Church beginning in the seventh century that was necessarily outside the normal inheritance system so that the land could remain with the Church. In addition,

14. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 88.

15. *Continuations* a.758; 574.

16. Higham, *Kingdom of Northumbria*, 145.

and importantly for the Northumbrian kings, bookland was generally free of the obligations associated with land that had not been booked to the Church, including, in eighth century Northumbria, military service.[17] This alienation of both land from the royal possessions and of obligations that a secular landlord owed stripped the Northumbrian kings of a large portion of their power bases. Such alienation had begun with Oswiu and his sons, likely to curry favor with the newly established Church and to demonstrate their power and ties to such a powerful entity. Because the kings could not adequately reward their followers with land, elites sought patronage elsewhere, and at times allied with other elites who had access to a number of resources similar to those of the kings.[18] In other words, to look back at the Migration Period, Northumbrian kings had been able to establish themselves as dominant in the north of Anglo-Saxon England through the acquisition of competing territories, which gave them access to resources with which to reward those followers who helped to ensure their success. Once that was done, during the Conversion period these kings allied with the Church to gain access to new strategies of power and to build authority. Because of this need to build authority and connections with the Church, however, a consequence of this building of authority was the alienation of large portions of land, which damaged their ability to further build their power base. When other elites had access to similar resources, they were able to challenge the kings and to set themselves up as kings. Lacking greater resources than those they usurped, these usurpers were also periodically overthrown, beginning a cycle of instability which lasted into the Viking Age. Consequently, when the Vikings did show up, they were eventually able to set themselves up as kings in the North, only to be challenged after Wessex was able to consolidate the southern territories.

17. Ann Williams, "Land Tenure," *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Michael Lapidge et. al. (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 282-3.

18. Higham, *Kingdom of Northumbria*, 147.

After the abdication of Eadbert, in 758, Northumbrian kings were often killed or exiled

as a result of these royal families apparently feuding over the throne. In that year,[19] the *Chronicle*

records

> *Her Eadberht Norðhymbra cining feng to scære, ⁊ Osulf his sunu feng to þam rice ⁊ rixade .i.gear, ⁊ hine ofslogan his hiwan on .ix kalendas Augusti.*[20]

> Here Eadberht, king of Northumbria, received the tonsure, and Oswulf, his son, succeeded to the kingdom and ruled 1 year; and his household men killed him on 24 July.[21]

Although we do not know why the Oswulf's followers killed him, the act was not just that of one

individual. The continuation of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* notes that *Osuulf a suis ministris

facinore occisus est*,[22] "Oswulf was treacherously killed by his thegns."[23] No further information

about Oswulf remains, other than he had a son, Ælfwald, who later also became king in

Northumbria, though he did not immediately succeed his father.[24] One can only imagine the

gravity of the slight a king would have to commit for him to be killed by his personal followers,

but it is possible that this incident was part of the larger competition over the Northumbrian

throne, as this incident seems to have been the catalyst to further dynastic instability. If not the

catalyst itself, it was certainly the first of a series of slayings that resulted in the throne being

passed to a rival group in the battle over Northumbria.

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19. Although the entry is under 757, these events occurred in 758. Dorothy Whitelock, David C. Douglas, and Susie I. Tucker, eds., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1961), 32.

20. ASC a.757; 39.

21. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. and trans. Michael Swanton (New York: Routledge, 1998), 51.

22. *Continuations* a.759; 574.

23. Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 575.

24. ""Oswulf 2," *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, accessed 27 July 2016, http://pase.ac.uk/jsp/DisplayPerson.jsp?personKey=3750; Ælfwald 7," *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, accessed 27 July 2016, http://pase.ac.uk/jsp/DisplayPerson.jsp?personKey=7250.

After the deposition and killing of Oswulf by his own men, the Northumbrians elected

Æthelwald, also known as Moll, who ultimately lost the kingdom himself.[25]

> ⁊ *Moll Æthelwold feng to rice on Norðhymbrum ⁊ rixade .vi. winter ⁊ hit þa forlet.*[26]

And Æthelwald[27] Moll succeeded to the kingdom in Northumbria, and ruled 6 years, and
then abandoned it.[28]

The Northern Annals, a copy of an eighth-century chronicle preserved only in Symeon of

Durham's *Historia Regum*, record the only other information known about Æthelwald.[29] He was

involved in a battle against a certain Oswine who is otherwise unknown, and he married

Æthelhida, but the source does not make it clear why he lost the kingdom.[30] Details about other

kings, however, allow some conclusions to be drawn. Following Moll's loss of the kingdom, he

was succeeded by Alhred in 765, who was himself deposed in favor of his rival, the son of

Moll.[31] For 774, the *Chronicle* notes

> *Her Norðhymbra fordrifon heora cining Alhred of Eoferwic on Eastertid ⁊ genamon
> Æðelred Molles sunu heom to hlaforde.*[32]

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25. ASC a.759; 39; *Continuation*, a.759; 574; "Æthelwald 14," *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*,
accessed 5 April 2008, http://pase.ac.uk/jsp/DisplayPerson.jsp?personKey=3752.

26. ASC a.759; 39.

27. Names throughout have been regularized to conform with the entries in *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon
England*.

28. Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 51.

29. Although the only copy of these annals is several centuries removed from the time it covers, these
annals included in the *Historia Regum* are generally considered to be a mostly faithful reproduction of an eighth-
century source. P. Hunter Blair, "Some Obervations on the *Historia Regum* Attributed to Symeon of Durham," *Celt
and Saxon: Studies in the Early British Border*, edited by Nora K. Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambeidge University
Press, 1964), 86-99.

30. Symeonis, *Historia Regum*, 43, 45; *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omonia* vol. II: *Historia Regum*, ed.
Thomas Arnold, *Rerum Britannicarum Medii Ævi Sciptores* (London: Longmans & Co., 1885), 41-3; "Æthelwald
14."

31. ASC a.765; 39.

32. ASC a.774; 39-40.

Here the Northumbrians drove out their king Alhred from York at Eastertide, and took Æthelred, son of Moll, as their lord.[33]

Æthelwald Moll thus appears to have lost the kingdom as a result of this ongoing dynastic rivalry, as indicated by his son's succession following the deposition of Alhred. It seems as if the Northumbrians themselves were participating in some of this shuffling of the throne. After a reign of nine years in which he exhibited some success in establishing his power, including issuing coinage, sending missionaries to the Continent, and sending ambassadors to the Carolingian court, Alhred was deposed by the Northumbrians, who drove him from York during Easter.[34] The Northern Annals present the deposers as the royal household, much as it had done with the deposition of Oswulf and Moll, though Alhred went into exile among the Picts to the north.[35] Whoever may have been a member of this group, responsible for a string of depositions, is unknown. It is evident, however, that larger social groups were involved in this process, making it seem more like a feud between competing factions of a larger royal family, or between competing families. While we would like to know more, the nature of early medieval sources and the paucity of information found within leaves the historian to draw what few conclusions are possible from scattered crumbs of information. These crumbs led this historian at first to see a royal feud, though the reality was a bit more complex, and the details severely lacking.

Four years after the accession of Æthelred, Alhred's family returned to the throne through violence.

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33. Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 51.

34. 22 of his coins are extant. "Northumbria: Alhred (765-774)," *Sylloge of Coins of the British Isles, Early Medieval Corpus of Coin Finds,* accessed 21 July 2016, http://www-cm.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/emc/emc_search_reply.php; "Alhred 1," *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, accessed 20 July 2016, http://pase.ac.uk/jsp/DisplayPerson.jsp?personKey=1997; ASC a. 774; 39-40.

35. Symeonis, *Historia Regum*, 48; 45-6.

⁊ þa feng Alfwold to rice ⁊ Æðelred bedraf on lande, ⁊ he rixade .x. winter[36]

and then Ælfwald succeeded to the kingdom and drove Æthelred into the country; and he ruled for ten years.[37]

This Ælfwald was the previously mentioned son of Oswulf, who drove Æthelred into exile following his own conquest of the kingdom.[38] Ælfwald died as a result of a conspiracy led by one of his royal nobles named Sicga, about whom nothing else is known except that he died in 793.[39] This time, the throne seems to have remained in the same family.

Her Alfwold Norðanhymbra cining wæs ofslagan fram Sigan on .ix. kalendas Octobris, ⁊ heofonlic leoht wæs gelome seogen ðær þer he ofslagen wæs. . . . ⁊ Osred Alchredes sunu feng to rice æfter him, se wæs his nefa.[40]

Here on 23 September Ælfwald, king of Northumbria, was killed by Sicga, and a heavenly light was frequently seen where he was killed. . . . And Osred, Alhred's son, succeeded to the kingdom after him – he was his nephew.[41]

Although the details for these events are sparse, the entry for the following years sheds further light on the subject, revealing that at least two families were feuding over the succession:

⁊ Osred Norðanhymbra cining wæs beswicen ⁊ of rice adrefed, ⁊ Æðelred Æðelwaldes sunu eft feng to rice[42]

And Osred, king of Northumbria, was betrayed and driven from the kingdom; and Æthelred, Æthelwald's son, again succeeded to the kingdom.[43]

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36. ASC a.778; 40.

37. Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 53.

38. Symeonis, *Historia Regum*, 49; 46-7.

39. Symeonis, *Historia Regum*, 54; 52; "Sicga 1," *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, accessed 5 April 2008, http://pase.ac.uk/jsp/DisplayPerson.jsp?personKey=7264; ASC a.793; 42.

40. ASC a.789; 41.

41. Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 55.

42. ASC a.790; 42.

43. Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 55.

The Æthelred who had been driven into exile by Osred's uncle Ælfwald thus returned to the kingdom, restoring his line to the throne. The feud did not end there, as both kings met their deaths within the next four years. In 792, the *Chronicle* records

> *Osred þe wæs Norþanhymbra cining æfter wræcsiðe ham cumenum gelæht wæs and ofslagen on .xviii. kalendas Octobris, his lic ligð æt Tinanmuþe*[44]

> Osred, who had been king of Northumbria, after coming home from a period of exile was seized and killed on 14 September, and his body lies at Tynemouth.[45]

Although the *Chronicle* does not give the name of Osred's killer, the Northern Annals suggest that is was a conspiracy of the nobles who were supposed to have been loyal to Osred. Æthelred captured him as a result of this conspiracy, and later had him killed, thus exacting his vengeance for previous slights.[46] His vengeance did not stop there, however, as he had Ælfwald's followers, Oelf and Oelfwin, executed as well.[47] The *Chronicle* provides more information for the death of Æthelred than for Osred: ⁊ *Æthelred Norðanhymbra cining wæs ofslagan fram his agenre þeode*[48] ("And Æthelred, king of Northumbria, was killed by his own people"). It thus seems as if the Northumbrian elite were also responsible for Æthelred's death in an incident in which the nobles were again deciding who should be king, likely based on the candidate's ability to reward followers. Other sources provide no further information about this death, but a letter from Alcuin

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44. ASC a.792; 42.

45. Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 55.

46. Symeonis, *Historia Regum*, 55; 52-4.

47. Symeonis, *Historia Regum*, 55; 52-4.

48. ASC a.794; 42.

records that Æthelred was later avenged by one of his men, Torhtmund, who killed an otherwise unknown Ealdred for having killed his lord.[49]

In this lengthy feud between the families of Alhred and Æthelwold Moll, neither was able to emerge dominant, so that neither was able to create a strong kingship in northern England. It is clear from the *Chronicle* entries discussed above in addition to other sources that help to flesh out the details that these incidents are an example of two families feuding over the throne of Northumbria. Dynastic rivalries in the early part of the eighth century had caused similar problems until the emergence of a strong king, Eadbert, but continued following his supposedly voluntary abdication.[50] The *Chronicle*, however, does not present the full story of the feuds between these families, and may present them is such a way as they appear to be feud. I use the word "appear" here to suggest that it is not that these political groups were not feuding, but there was more at stake than the honor of the individual families. I see here three possibilities related to the presentation of this dynastic rivalry as feud. It may have been a feud between competing families, and the power associated with being king was simply a bonus for whoever could emerge victorious. Or, the sources present the conflict in terms of feud to legitimize it so that it does not seem simply like killing for the sake of power. Killing as part of the feud was legitimate, whereas killing in order to gain political power may not have been. Finally, it is entirely possible that feud permeated the thinking of those engaging in and/or recording these events to such an extent that they thought of all conflict in terms of feud. In other words, these rivalries are presented as feud because the sources knew of no other way to present them.

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49. Alcuin Letter 231; edited by Ernst Dümmler, *MGH*, *Epistolarum Tomus IV, Epistolae Karolini Ævi* vol. II (Berlin: Weidmannos, 1895), 376; Symeonis, *Historia Regum*, 61; 62.

50. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms,* 88.

Violence was not only limited to kings fighting over the succession in Northumbria; others such as ealdormen were involved in such violence as well, in addition to the likely multitude of incidents of violence which have gone unrecorded. A few further examples of non-royal violence may help to further illuminate the use of violence and its relation to both feud and power. The parties to these incidents, invariably tied to royal families in one way or another, suggest that these incidents may have also been part of the royal feuding. While the examples provide little in the way of information, they do help to further illuminate the nature of these royal feuds. One example is Beorn, who suffered death at the hands of the Northumbrian high reeves.[51] According to the Northern Annals, Beorn, who was connected in some way to the aforementioned King Ælfwald, was burnt by the ealdormen Osbald and Æthelheard.[52] That Æthelheard later became a cleric and Osbald later became a king, along with Beorn's ties to Ælfwald, implies that this killing was part of the larger political disputes between royal rivals active in Northumbria at the time.[53] What is clear then is that much of the violence recorded in the *Chronicle* revolves around the kings and disputes over the throne, suggesting that not only did instances of non-royal violence go largely unrecorded, but that the royal feuds extended to members of the kings' social groups. A further example of a similar incidence of violence came at the direction of a king at the expense of another member of the nobility. In 791 the previously discussed Æthelred ordered the killing of three ealdormen – Ealdwulf, Cynewulf, and Ecga – by two others, Æthelbald and Heardberht.[54] Again, the larger social groups of the kings are

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51. ASC a.779; 40.

52. Symeonis, *Historia Regum*, 50; 47.

53. Symeonis, *Historia Regum*,, 57-8; 56-9.

54. Symeonis, *Historia Regum*, 49; 46-7.

embroiled in the larger disputes, this time on the ruler's orders. What these incidents seem to indicate, therefore, is that the feuds over the kingship of Northumbria extended to the nobility and that those tied to competitors for the throne could be subject to death at the hand of the rival party. Although we know little about non-royal violence, these incidents further demonstrate that political rivalries in Anglo-Saxon England were conducted as feud. All the key elements are there: violence, retaliation, the involvement of larger social groups (which included Beorn and the other ealdormen) and an ongoing relationship of hostility between the parties, as indicated by the continual shifting of possession of the kingship between the two parties as a result of violence. All the evidence points to these kings being involved in feud. Whether they used feud to justify their political ambitions or not, these kings and their social groups conducted feud against one another.

As is evident from the episodes described above, Northumbrian kings in the later eighth century engaged in royal rivalries over the throne. These rivalries prevented any one branch of the royal families from being able to emerge as dominant, as they were constantly facing usurpation by their rivals. Such rivalries present all the fundamental characteristics of feud: injury, retaliation, involvement of larger social groups, and an ongoing relationship of hostility between the parties. While feud may have been a characterization to legitimize the political ambitions of the elite, what remains is that these conflicts were viewed in terms of feud because feud so permeated the Anglo-Saxon mentality and that the relationships between the competing groups was conducted as feud. Also as a consequence of this dynastic instability was the need on the part of kings and potential kings to increase their ability to wield force in order to prevent usurpation, pre-empting their ability to develop other methods of expanding power. The success of a Northumbrian king at this time could be measured by his ability to remain in power by

fighting off potential rivals. In other words, the leader of the group best at conducting feud

earned the reward of the kingship. This reward had consequences, however, leaving the king

subject to similar depradations as those that brought him to the throne. They were forced to spend

so much time shoring up their social relationships to protect them from others that they had little

time to focus on other strategies of power. To compare them to the seventh-century kings who

were building authority, as discussed in previous chapters, those kings were building authority by

stepping outside of existing social relationships in order to extract themselves from society.

Eighth-century Northumbrian kings could not do that, and were primarily concerned with being

the best at building the social relationships required for the conduct of feud. As a result, the

power of the Northumbrian kings was diminished as compared to their seventh-century

counterparts, leaving the door open for a southern neighbor to not only increase its power, but to

exercise the sort of hegemony that Æthelfrith and Edwin once held. While similar rivalries

existed in other kingdoms, they were not as numerous as those in Northumbria. Fortunately, we

have more information about one of these rivalries, which may help to illuminate the effects of

royal feuding in the northern kingdom.

Cynewulf and Cyneheard: Royal Rivalry in Wessex

The *Cynewulf and Cyneheard* episode in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* demonstrates that

such royal feuds were not limited to Northumbria, but took place in Wessex as well. It may be

the best known story of a feud from the pre-Alfredian period, and took place in 757.[55] These

incidents involved two rival claimants to the throne, Cynewulf and Cyneheard, who may have

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55. Although the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* lists the year for this entry as 755 (*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 37), modern historians have corrected the dating of these events, which took place in 757. Stephen D. White, "Kinship and Lordship in Early Medieval England: The Story of Sigeberht, Cynewulf and Cyneheard," *The Yale Companion to Old English Literature: Critical Essays,* edited by Roy Liuzza (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 157.

been members of the same extended family,[56] but who were clearly from opposing lines, as their

feud indicates.[57] In 757, Cynewulf, with the approval of the West Saxon elite, took the kingdom

from Sigeberht but allowed him to keep Hampshire. Sigeberht had apparently violated some

rules with *unrihtum dædum*, for which he was expelled. While at Hampshire, he killed one of his

ealdorman named Cumbra, an action which was later avenged by a herdsman. After several years

of victorious conquests, Cynewulf then decided to eliminate Sigeberht's brother, Cyneheard,

probably because he posed a threat to his rule. The *ætheling* Cyneheard found an opportunity to

attack first, however, while Cynewulf was otherwise occupied with a woman at Merton.[58]

Cyneheard's forces surrounded the building, and the king initially defended himself well, until he

saw the *ætheling* and rushed toward him, ostensibly consumed with sufficient rage to attack his

enemy rather than defend himself. Although he was initially able to fend off the attack, he

ultimately died as a result of his rage-induced attack on Cyneheard. When the king's men heard

the screams of the woman upon the king's death, they rushed to meet the *ætheling*'s forces, but

were defeated. A second group of the king's men who were farther away heard of the king's

death and rushed to meet Cyneheard. As with the previous group, the *ætheling* offered the king's

men land and wealth if they would switch to his side, but they refused. Unlike the first band of

thegns, however, this group successfully defeated Cyneheard's men, bringing a halt to his

attempted usurpation.[59] This episode thus tells the story of two rival families and their extended

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56. In the D and E recensions of the *Chronicle*, the chronicler notes that Cynewulf was a kinsman of Sigeberht, and thus related to Cyneheard. Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 30.

57. ASC a.755; 37-8.

58. The status of this woman and her relation to Cynewulf is unknown, but has been speculated upon at length. Nina Rulon-Miller, "'Cynewulf and Cyneheard': A Woman Screams," *Phlilogical Quarterly* 76 no. 2 (Spring 1997): 113-132.

59. ASC a.755; 37-8.

social groups vying for the throne, with one group leader offering members of the other group rewards for switching to his side. As such, it carries all the hallmark characteristics of feud, and historians have periodically used this incident to glean information about Anglo-Saxon feud.[60]

The circumstances surrounding the dissemination of the *Cynewulf and Cyneheard* episode indicate that it was not merely a retelling of events from the seventh century. The reader of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* may be struck, for instance, by how this story stands out amongst all the other entries for the eighth century for its length.[61] Not only is it longer than other entries, but stylistically it is more complex than the simple language of the annalistic entries of the eighth century and before, a set of features which have caused no small amount of attention to be paid to the episode.[62] Furthermore, in addition to information about feud, historians have focused on the details of the story in an attempt to extract evidence about eighth-century Anglo-Saxon society. One of the primary foci here is the king's men being offered money and land. Cyneheard not only made this offer to the king's thegns, but attempted to further entice them by informing them that some of their own relatives had joined the ætheling's side. The king's thegns responded with

> *ꞇ þa cweðon hig þet heom nænig mæg leofra nære þone heora hlaford ꞇ his banan folgian noldon.*[63]

> And then they said that no kin was dearer to them than their lord, and they would never follow his killer.

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60. F.J. Álvarez López, "The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, 755: An Annotated Bibliography of the Cynewulf and Cyneheard Episode from Plummer to Bremmer," *Selim* 13 (2005-2006): 95-113.

61. The only entries of comparable length prior to 800 are in the Peterborough recension and are particular to Peterborough Abbey, such as a copy of a charter from Pope Agatho granting immunities. ASC a.656, 675; 27-9, 31-2.

62. Ignacio Murillo López, "Cynewulf and Cyneheard: A Different Style for a Different Story," *Selim* 13 (2005-2006): 87-98.

63. ASC a.755; 37-8.

Historians have seen in this statement and others like it a transition from the primacy of kinship

to the primacy of lordship. That is, the followers of Cynewulf rejected their kinship ties

associated with the members of Cyneheard's group and placed a premium on their ties to their

lord instead. What these historians suggest is that, by the eighth century, the warrior elites had

established ties to their lord that were stronger than their ties to kin, which had been dominant in

the Migration Period.[64] On the other hand, Harald Kleinschmidt rejects this conclusion regarding

eighth-century society, and instead views the episode from the context of the ninth century,

seeing it as a criticism of all three members of the royal family. The entry presents Sigeberht as

having committed *unrihtum dædum*, Cyneheard as a usurper, and Cynewulf as being too

distracted or incompetent to properly defend himself. Kleinschmidt concludes that the reason for

these criticisms was to delegitimize a rival branch of the West Saxon royal family. At the same

time, argues Kleinschimdt, it is impossible to observe Anglo-Saxon elite social norms in

operation in the way that previous historians have, as the followers of the individual leaders were

placed into extraordinary circumstances and their responses to those events would necessarily

have been abnormal. The ninth-century West Saxon King Alfred was responsible for the creation

of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in which the episode appears. He and his brothers and father traced

their lineage back to Ingeld, whereas the competitors in this episode were connected to Ingeld's

brother Ine and were part of a separate line in the dynasty. In other words, the episode must be

read in the context of the dynastic politics of the ninth century, even though it concerns events of

the eighth.[65] Although Kleinschmidt tempers the events of the episode with the politics of later

eras, some have even gone so far as to discount the events of the episode beyond the barest facts

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64. White, "Kinship and Lordship," 5.

65. Harald Kleinschmidt, "The Old English Annal for 757 and West Saxon Dynastic Strife," *Journal of Medieval History* 22 no. 3 (1996): 209-224.

of Cynewulf taking the kingdom from Sigeberht, Cyneheard killing Cynewulf in battle, and the king's men slaying Cyneheard. While such arguments from a perspective on contemporary theory fall flat in their lack of textual evidence, it remains that we do not have other sources to corroborate details, much as is the case with most of the early medieval period.[66] Barbara Yorke would agree that the scribe who committed the 757 annals to posterity must have had a great deal of input into the content of the story. That being stated, the chronicler likely did not create the story completely, but based it on some sort of pre-existing material or traditions.[67] It is not necessary, however, to nitpick too extensively over the details in order to glean information about the nature of violence and power in the eighth century.

While the presentation of events found in this entry of the *Chronicle* may have more to do with ninth-century politics than with eighth-century royal feuds, the events themselves do provide insight into the relationship between violence and power in the middle of the 700s. There are other versions of the *Chronicle* in which the episode does not appear, but these recensions of the document do corroborate the bare details in their typical annalistic form – that Sigeberht inherited the kingdom, Cynewulf took it from him, and that Cyneheard killed Cynewulf for killing his brother.[68] It is clear that a kingdom could be won or lost in battle, and that kings and their rivals practiced feud. In fact, the episode fulfills all the criteria for feud previously established: injury, retaliation, larger social groups, and an ongoing relationship of hostility.

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66. Juan Camilo Conde Silvestre, "The Limits of History and Fiction in the 755 Entry of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle," *Voices on the Past: Studies in Old and Middle English Literature*, edited by Alicia Rodriguez Alvarez and Francisco Alonso Almeida (A Coruña, Spain: Netbiblio, 2004), 165-172.

67. Barbara Yorke, "The Representation of Early West Saxon History in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle," *Reading the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: Languge, Literature, and History*, edited by A. Jorgens (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 141-60.

68. ASC F a.755; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, edited and translated by Michael Swanton (New York: Routledge, 1998), 46.

Other details of the episode provide further evidence of its interpretation as feud. For instance, a swineherd retaliated against Sigeberht for killing ealdorman Cumbra, killing the former king. Also, whether Cyneheard was launching a pre-emptive strike against Cynewulf or not, his connection to Sigeberht certainly fueled his actions, much as Cynewulf's anger induced him to drop his defenses and directly attack his rival.

In the case of royal families, feuds could take place within kinship groups, whereas that might not be possible at other social levels. One characteristic of feud previously discussed is that there has to be a measure of some rough equivalence in social status. Competing branches of a royal family could engage in feud with one another simply because they were socially equal, whereas a member of a non-royal family, being socially inferior, could not legitimately do so. Some seventh-century kings had attempted to place themselves outside and above this social order in which feud could operate. These examples from both Northumbria and Wessex demonstrate that their efforts were only marginally successful, and that they were unable to fully extract themselves from the all-important bonds of society.

As seen in these eighth-century examples, violence was insufficient to the maintenance of power. Kings often violently gained or lost the throne, but violence alone appears to have been insufficient for them to retain it within their families. These variegated roles of violence in the creation and maintenance of power is perhaps due to the changing economic fortunes of the Northumbrian kings in the eighth century. Not only had they suffered a loss of tribute due to the loss of northern territories, but the introduction of bookland, which allowed for the permanent alienation of land from the crown, further reduced their resources. Most of this permanently alienated land went to the Church, which had provided ideological tools for the creation of kingship in previous generations, as discussed above. Furthermore, nobles began demanding

similar land grants, reducing the economic resources of the kings even further. After the decline

of the house of Æthelfrith, no Northumbrian king was able to dominate the politics of the

kingdom as had Æthelfrith, Oswald, Oswiu, or even their rival Edwin.[69] Feuds between

competing royal families prevented any one from establishing dominance, but violence was still a

key tool in early Anglo-Saxon politics. In Wessex, similar rivalries took place, although the

ruling dynasties there were able to maintain a stronger grip on their power. In both kingdoms, the

existence of competing royal families with sufficient resources to build a loyal following

prevented the kings from being able to fully extract themselves from the bonds of society and

build a lasting authority that could be passed between generations.

These kings provide an interesting contrast to Mercia in two important ways. First, the

Mercian kings of the eighth century were able to mobilize resources in ways that their neighbors

were not, which helps to account for their relative success. Second, although the Mercian kings

were subject to usurpation, for various reasons some Mercian kings were able to fend off such

threats to create lasting power, at least for themselves. In all three kingdoms, however, royal

families were engaged in feud, and periodically lost their kingdoms as a result. The difference is

that the Mercian kings did not succumb to feud as frequently, largely because they were better

able to extract themselves from existing social bonds by distinguishing themselves from other

groups.

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69. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 88-92.

The Mercian Hegemony

While Northumbria and to a lesser extent Wessex faced dynastic instability during the eighth century, Mercia emerged as the dominant power south of the Humber. Whether the concept of the "Mercian supremacy" may have been an artificial construct, the extant evidence demonstrates that the Mercian kings of the eighth century did exert a form of hegemony over their neighbors. They accomplished this dominance through both deploying a variety of strategies of power and having two long-lived and powerful rulers.[70] For these reasons, Mercian kings largely, though not completely, avoided succumbing to feud because potential rivals did not have access to levels of power and thus numbers of followers which would enable them to topple existing rulers. At the same time, Mercia was able to dominate its neighbors, not only coercing their rulers into actions favorable to Mercia but getting involved in dynastic politics. This hegemony occurred largely during the reigns of two of Mercia's most important kings, Æthelbald and Offa. Both expanded the power not only of their kingdoms, but their own personal power as well. In addition, unlike the Northumbrian rulers, royal violence at the hands of Mercian kings in this period was primarily directed against kings of other peoples. It is not that the Mercian royal families did not experience dynastic strife as in other kingdoms. They did, but Æthelbald and Offa wielded sufficient power during their reigns that they did not succumb to such squabbling, even if those types of disputes actually brought them to the throne.[71] Additionally, both kings enjoyed relatively long reigns, holding Mercia from 716 to 757 and

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70. Simon Keynes, "The Kingdom of the Mercians in the Eighth Century," *Æthelbald and Offa: Two Eighth Century Kings of Mercia*, edited by David Hill and Margaret Worthington (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2005), 7.

71. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 111-4.

from 757 to 796, respectively.[72] In other words, Mercia had the fortune to have strong leaders

emerge from royal feuds who were able to prevent such feuds from continuing indefinitely

(though not completely) during their reigns. Such a difference between Mercia and Northumbria,

along with other factors, may account for the differing fortunes of the two kingdoms during this

period in which the northern kingdom was on the decline relative to its previous level of

influence while the middle kingdom approached its zenith. Rather than fighting over the throne,

Mercian rulers attempted to expand their domains at the expense of other kingdoms, much like

Æthelfrith and other kings of the Conversion period. Although the extent of this hegemony may

be at dispute, both Æthelbald and Offa were able to both expand their territories and to exert their

dominance in the other southern Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.[73]

Both Æthelbald and Offa came to the Mercian throne following dynastic disputes from

which they emerged victorious. Æthelbald lived in exile while Ceolred was king, and sought the

counsel of Guthlac during his exile. At their meeting, Guthlac referred to Ceolred as the exile's

enemy, described Ceolred's continual harassment of Æthelbald's retinue, and suggested in a

prophecy that Æthelbald would ultimately take all his possessions.[74] These descriptions indicate a

hostile relationship between the two parties, likely in the form of a dynastic dispute. Further

evidence of their competition for the kingdom is that Æthelbald did indeed take over upon

Ceolred's death, though there is no indication that Æthelbald was responsible for his death.[75] We

do know, however, that Æthelbald ultimately lost the throne when he was killed by his own men.

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72. Keynes, "Kingdom of the Mercians," 1.

73. Keynes, "Kingdom of Mercians," 10-14.

74. Felix, *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, 49; *Felix's Life of Guthlac*, ed. Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 148-50.

75. ASC a. 716; 35.

The Moore manuscript of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* includes a series of annals up to the year

766 known as the Continuation of Bede,[76] and reports on this incident. Although no reason is

given for the killing, it seems as if they killed him in his sleep, as the continuator implies some

sort of deceit (*fraudulenta*) and that he was killed at night.[77] Following this incident, Beornred

took over the kingdom, but his rule was short-lived; he succumbed to Offa in battle. As the

continuator reports

> *Beornred regnare coepit. . . . Eodem etiam anno Offa, fugato Beornredo, Merciorum regnum sanguinolento quaesiuit gladio.*[78]

> Beornred came to the throne. . . . In the same year Offa put Beornred to flight and attempted to conquer the Mercian kingdom with sword and bloodshed.[79]

This report seems to indicate that Beornred was insecure in his possession of the kingdom, and

that the dispute over the succession lasted during his entire short reign. The reigns of Æthelbald

and Beornred thus both began and ended in violent disputes over the throne.

As a result of these violent disputes over the kingship, while king, Offa took specific

measures to ensure that his son and chosen heir would inherit the throne, specifically what Simon

Keynes describes as a complex set of political maneuvers to ensure Ecgfrith's succession. Offa

was looking to establish the longevity of his dynasty, and wanted to follow the Carolingians who

used anointing in order to legitimize their reign in opposition to the Merovingians. For the

Carolingians, the anointing of a king bestowed a sacred power much in the same way that the

Merovingians' long hair indicated their sacred power. Offa wished to co-opt this visual element

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76. *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People,* ed. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1963), 572.

77. *Continuation* a.757; 574.

78. *Continuation* a.757; 574.

79. Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 575.

in the construction of his heir's authority in order to transfer his legitimacy to his son. Certain

prior actions of his in Kent, however, had not engendered the loyalty of the archbishop of

Canterbury, who was needed to perform the anointing. After re-establishing his control over

Kent, Offa then decided that a shuffling of ecclesiastical authority was in order in which Mercia

would have its own archbishop rather than having to rely on one he was less able to coerce

directly. Jænberht, the Canterbury archbishop, then likely concocted a rumor about Offa's desire

to overthrow the pope in order to convince the pope to deny his approval for creating a new

archdiocese. Not believing these stories, the pope sent an envoy to Offa to discuss the creation of

the new archbishopric. After a heated synod at Chelsea, the see of Lichfield was created with

papal approval, and Ecgfrith was anointed.[80] While there are other readings of the evidence, we

know that Offa anointed his son during his own lifetime soon after the creation of the Lichfield

archbishopric.[81] He was in contact with the pope in so doing, and he borrowed the idea of

anointing from the Carolingians. Alcuin's letters clearly demonstrate his support for an orderly

succession, even providing advice to Ecgfrith.[82] Offa thus engaged in a series of political

maneuvers designed to ensure the succession of his son so that Ecgfrith could avoid the dynastic

disputes which had brought Offa himself to the throne.

Rather than the in-fighting which plagued other Anglo-Saxon rulers of the eighth century,

the violence of the Mercian kings during what Sir Frank Stenton termed the Mercian Supremacy

tended to be directed outward rather than against other Mercian elites. For instance, Æthelbald

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80. Keynes, "Kingdom of Mercia," 15-6.

81. ASC a. 785; 41.

82. Keynes, "Kingdom of Mercians," 16; Alcuin Letters 61, 62, and 101; edited by Ernst Dümmler, *MGH, Epistolarum Tomus IV, Epistolae Karolini Ævi* vol. II (Berlin: Apud Weidmannos, 1895) 103-105, 146-8.

fought against the West Saxons under Cuthred in the 740s,[83] and later allied with the same

Cuthred against the Welsh.[84] Any alliance between the two must have been short-lived, as they

fought again in 752, with Cuthred emerging victorious.[85] Earlier in his reign, Æthelbald

conducted raids in Northumbria, probably not an uncommon occurrence at the time.[86] Some of

this violence was of a more personal nature, as he paid a wergeld to Gloucester Abbey as

compensation for striking Æthelmund, the son of a kinsman named Orwald.[87] Likewise, Offa

certainly committed acts of violence in his expansion of kingship, in that he defeated many of his

rivals in battle, including Cynewulf of Wessex in 777.[88] That was not the end of his involvement

in Wessex, as he apparently drove Ecgberht from that kingdom into exile in Francia.[89] The most

extreme example of Offa's use of violence, again against another king, was his order for the

assassination of another ruler, Æthelberht of East Anglia. For the year 792, the *Chronicle*

records, *Her Offa Myrcena cining het Æðelbrihte ðet heafod ofslean[90]* ("In this year Offa King of

the Mercians commanded that the head of Æthelberht be cut off"). No contemporary accounts

reveal a reason for this killing, or much else about Æthelberht's reign. Moreover, extant records

only include Offa's use of violence in battle or against other kings, which may be a factor of their

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83. ASC a.740; 36.

84. ASC a.743; 37.

85. ASC a.752; 37.

86. ASC a.737; 36.

87. The charter which describes this payment, cataloged by Sawyer number S1782, is only available in its original manuscript form, and was not accessible to the author for verification. Information on this charter comes from the *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*. "Source: 1782," *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England* <http://pase.ac.uk/jsp/Sources/DisplaySource.jsp?sourceKey=2506> accessed 1August 2016.

88. ASC a.777; 40.

89. ASC a.836; 45-6.

90. ASC a.792; 42.

remarkability for those recording these incidents. Æthelberht may have been a rival to Offa's

expansion of power, but one can only imagine the slight that would cause such a grim execution.

These examples demonstrate that both Æthelbald and Offa made judicious use of violence,

including against rival kings. That they also used a number of other strategies of power should

not blind us to their use of force to expand their personal power.

Both Æthelbald and Offa also deployed a number of non-violent strategies of power

during their reigns. Marriage was one tactic the two kings used differently due to differing

circumstances. Æthelbald did not marry, which is likely the source of Boniface's complaint about

his trysts with nuns and other women. As argued by Higham and Ryan, his avoidance of marriage

was likely a political move in order to better navigate the difficult social arrangements among the

elite of Mercia during his reign.[91] That his sexual relationships did not have official Church

sanction simply means that he did not make his partners queens.[92] On the other hand, Offa did

marry Cynethryth, whose name indicates that she may have been related to the line of the former

Mercian king Penda, to which Offa was not directly connected. As queen, Cynethryth wielded

remarkable power – not only witnessing charters, but having coins struck in her name, unique for

a woman in the early medieval period. Cynethryth's connection to Penda and her personal power

were also strategies of power for Offa's family, as they served to enhance the legitimacy of his

line. By elevating Cynethryth to almost imperial status (Pauline Stafford likens her to Helena,

mother of Constantine), Offa further strengthened the status of his heirs.[93] In addition to

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91. Nicholas J. Higham and Martin J. Ryan, *The Anglo-Saxon World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 186.

92. Pauline Stafford, "Political Women in Mercia, Eighth to Early Tenth Centuries," *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, edited by Michelle P. Brown and Carol A. Farr (London: Continuum, 2001), 35-6.

93. Stafford, "Political Women," 38.

marriage, the use of bookland was an important strategy of power for both. Bookland, as mentioned previously, refers to land that has been "booked" to the Church, i.e., permanent alienation of possession and certain obligations from a lord to the Church using the instrument of a charter, or *landboc*. Previous practices regarding land tenure and alienation are difficult to glean from the few sources which refer to it, as the introduction of bookland occurred as a part of Christianization to fulfill the Church's need for access to landed wealth that would remain with the institution rather than with an individual.[94] Whether the obligations which remained with booked land – fortress work, bridge work, service in the host – originated with Æthelbald and Offa, it is during their reigns that evidence for these exemptions to the immunities of booked land first appear. There was some dispute over the exact obligations owed on booked land, specifically that regarding work on bridges and fortresses, but Æthelbald successfully asserted his retention of these common burdens from land chartered to the Church.[95] The obligations tied to bookland had serious implications for military service in Mercia, but also point to changes in power relationships. When military service was an obligation of a follower to his lord which would be rewarded with wealth, landed or otherwise, such obligations were easily ignored by both parties and could result in frequent shifting of allegiances. On the other hand, the booked land carried with it formal obligations on both parties which could be more easily enforced. At a time when a single warband could overthrow and replace a king, as Cyneheard attempted and both Æthelbald and Offa succeeded in doing, kings needed a way to be able to coerce their followers to defend land away from their own homes. For Gareth Williams, Æthelbald and Offa asserted these rights for defensive purposes, building their authority in ways that kings such as

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94. Williams, "Land tenure," 282-3.

95. Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation*, 52-3.

Penda did not.[96] If true, then this phenomenon has serious implications for the growth of authority of both Æthelbald and Offa. Their contemporaries in Wessex, Northumbria, and elsewhere were still subject to overthrow by a war leader with a sufficient following. As mentioned above, bookland seriously damaged the Northumbrian kings' ability to muster resources, and was a crucial factor in the diminution of their power. On the other hand, as the Mercian kings expanded their power, they enforced obligation on their landholders so that they would be forced to defend the kingdom from exactly that type of threat. Because they retained certain obligations due from booked land, bookland was not a drain on their resources as it had been in the northern kingdom. Bookland and its associated obligations may therefore have been the crucial element which allowed Æthelbald and Offa to create authority so that they could develop a greater diversity of strategies of power and not have to rely primarily on violence/force.

While both Æthelbald and Offa used similar strategies in order to build their power, Offa is generally regarded as the more powerful of the two, and his use of a greater number of strategies may have something to do with that assessment. As argued by Higham and Ryan, he treated his kingdom more as a single edifice than as a conglomeration as previous hegemons had done, ending the independence of previous kings or subkings of Kent, Sussex, and the Hwicce by reducing their status to that of ealdormen or replacing them entirely with Mercian leaders. He better tapped in to the ideological advantages associated with the Church and adopted elements of the Carolingian connection between sacred and royal authority. Anointing is the best example of his adoption of Carolingian ritual, but others may include physical and visual parallels such as

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96. Gareth Williams, "Military Obligations and the Mercian Supremacy," *Æthelbald and Offa: Two Eighth Century Kings of Mercia*, edited by David Hill and Margaret Worthington (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2005), 103-10.

coins and hair styles, the latter of which was designed to connect the king with King David. All

these measures utilized the authority of the Church and the Biblical kings to transfer that

authority to the Carolingian or Mercian kings in order to enhance their legitimacy. Other

Carolingian connections include diplomacy, which caused some dispute between the two

kingdoms as Offa attempted to elevate his own status to an equal of Charlemagne through

negotiation of marriages.[97] In addition to these strategies of power, Offa made better use of the

economy than his predecessor, using coinage to his advantage in order to project his image

throughout his kingdom.[98] Unlike Æthelbald, Offa included his own name and sometimes his

face on his coinage, and began using coins that were more similar to those of the Franks to

further stimulate their use in trade, and built his wealth largely on towns and trade.[99]

Further evidence of the availability of resources and his command over the productivity

of the kingdom lies in the construction of Offa's Dyke. Little is known about this defensive

perimeter set up against potential attack by the Welsh, and the attribution of Offa to its

construction comes from the Asser's *Vita Alfredi*, written almost a century after Offa's death.[100]

Primarily a defense against Powys, estimates for the number of laborers needed to construct this

fortification range from 5000 to 125,000, depending on the length of time taken for construction.

Even using the smaller figure, the dyke represents the deployment of a vast store of resources, as

the king would have had to not only purchase both supplies and labor, but also provision the

workers and potentially protect them from attack. Such an undertaking points not only to access

97. Higham and Ryan, *Anglo-Saxon World*, 187-91.

98. Keynes, "Kingdom of Mercia," 13.

99. Robin Fleming, *Britain after Rome: The Fall and Rise, 400 to 1070* (London: Penquin Books, 2011), 211-12.

100. Asser, *De Rebus Gestis Alfredi*, 14; ed. William Henry Stevenson, *Asser's Life of King Alfred* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), 12.

to a vast amount of resources, but also to an administrative ability previously unseen in Britain since the Roman period.[101] That Offa was able to construct this dyke indicates that he was able to tap into the greatly increased economic activity of the eighth century. This economic evidence is key in determining the differences between the Mercian kings and their Northumbrian and West Saxon neighbors. While all these royal leaders were styled as kings, it brings up the distinction between chieftains and kings discussed in a previous chapter. Chieftains were leaders who were best able to negotiate the social bonds in order to create their power. Kings, on the other hand, extracted themselves from the rest of society so that they could wield authority, for instance as judges and lawgivers. Æthelbald and Offa, with access to vastly superior resources due to control over London and the associated wealth, were able to distinguish themselves from the rest of society because of said access. Like the emerging rulers of the seventh century, they could display their status in ways that other elites could not, thus demonstrating that they indeed had no peers and stood outside the social status of potential rivals. Northumbrian kings, who were losing access to resources due to bookland, could not so distinguish themselves, which serves to further explain their inability to hold on to power and to establish sufficient legitimacy to stave off feud.

For Robin Fleming, the key element in transforming the Mercian kings from warriors with a "gift for violence"[102] into administrators concerned with economic development was the growth of the towns which had begun in earnest in the seventh century. In fact, it was Mercian control of London in the eighth and ninth centuries which was the key factor here. Mercian and other Anglo-Saxon kings had long used towns as tribute collection sites, and Æthelbald and Offa were no exception. Most of this tribute, however, came in the form of objects of which an

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101. Higham and Ryan, *Anglo-Saxon World*, 187-8.

102. Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 205-6.

agricultural society could produce a surplus – food and livestock. As the kingdoms expanded, the amount of tribute necessarily increased, but the kings' need for such items did not, in a phenomenon likely resembling a law of diminishing returns. Towns enabled the Mercian kings to transform this tribute into status-enhancing items including goods and coin through trade at newly available markets. London was especially important, as its international ties connected the rulers to various Continental markets and helped to make the Mercians the richest kings in Britain. They were also able to collect tolls associated with the protection of these market sites and became wealthier from this source than they did from conquest. Æthelbald and Offa learned to control coinage as a result so that they could better regulate the trade that took place at sites under their control. According to Fleming, the towns "domesticated England's warrior kings"[103] by teaching them the value of economic control in comparison to military control or the use of force. Economic power was thus key to the Mercians of the eighth century and beyond, and accounts to a large degree for their success.[104] With access to a greater supply of resources, the Mercian kings enjoyed greater stability than their neighbors. They were able to deploy a greater diversity of strategies of power because they did not have to constantly worry about being usurped by rival members of the royal dynasty.

None of this evidence should be taken to support a teleological view of history as the inevitable march of progress. Offa was not Stenton's "visionary statesman" but Keynes's powerful ruler who built his power through "intrigue, ruthlessness, and brute force."[105] As Barbara Yorke argues, Offa cultivated a relationship with the Church in order to gain access to

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103. Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 212.

104. Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 205-12.

105. Keynes, "Kingdom of Mercia," 14.

the advantages it granted. Not only did he use political maneuvering as discussed above to ensure the anointing of his son, he built monasteries in the name of St. Peter and received papal privileges so that they could remain with his family. For Offa, the Church was "an adjunct of his power and that of his family."[106] In other words, he was the consummate politician who exploited opportunities in order to build his power and that of his family.

That the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms became fewer in number in the years prior to the Viking Age was not a matter of progress toward the creation of a single Anglo-Saxon state. To view it in that way is not only to assume the Whig view, but to assume the superiority of larger polities over smaller. Steven Basset's description of the consolidation of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms as a knock-out competition is more apt, as successful competitors defeated their opposition, knocking them out of contention.[107] The prize, however, should not be viewed as anything as grand as the unification of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms or anything like that. In fact, even though he made great efforts to expand the size of his kingdom, Offa only ever aspired to be King of the Mercians, as evidenced by his titles which never went beyond exactly that.[108] Rather, the goal that the Anglo-Saxon kings sought was power. Individual kings may be said to have had other objectives, from revenge to salvation. To treat their competition for power as anything other than a power struggle, however, is to ascribe characteristics to them based on reading a handful of documents at face value. The key word here is not progress, but success, as consolidation occurred not because it was inevitable, but because successful leaders gained greater access to

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106. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 116.

107. Stephen Basset, "In Search of the Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms," *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, ed. Stephen Basset (London: Leicester University Press, 1989), 26-7.

108. Higham and Ryan, *Anglo-Saxon World*, 187.

resources, which allowed them and their descendants to achieve further success in accumulating

more territory, and therefore greater access to resources.

Offa's death roughly coincides with the opening of the Viking Age in Britain,

traditionally dated to 793 with an attack on the monastery of Lindisfarne.[109] Although it was not

until several decades into the ninth century that the Viking attacks began to pose a sustained

threat, the Viking Age marks a significant change in the nature of violence in Anglo-Saxon

England. This shift may be partially due to the nature of the sources, which focus more on the

battles between Anglo-Saxons and Viking than on dynastic disputes. For example, the *Anglo-*

Saxon Chronicle records the death by violence of numerous elites in the seventh and eighth

centuries, and these deaths occurred for a variety of reasons such as assassinations, feuds, battles,

and dynastic disputes.[110] That is not to say that dynastic disputes came to a halt after 800, or that

other forms of violence not involving Vikings ceased. For example, a certain Æthelwold, whose

father was Alfred's older brother Æthelred, the king who reigned before Alfred, had been passed

over for the kingship when Æthelred died, likely because he was too young. After Alfred's death,

he made a bid for the throne and gathered armies against Edward, Alfred's son.[111] His claim

apparently had some validity, as he was able to gather a sizable force to harass Edward for

several years.[112] Although his bid for the throne was not successful, it does indicate the

continuation of dynastic rivalry well into the Viking Age. After 793, however, the *Chronicle* and

other sources focus primarily on the depradations of the Viking invaders, and most of the

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109. ASC a. 793; 42.

110. ASC a.603-796; 22-42.

111. ASC A a. 899.

112. Higham and Ryan, *Anglo-Saxon World*, 296-7.

violence that occurs takes place because of them. All deaths of elites after 796 for which reason is given were due to a Viking attack or a battle with Vikings.[113] For instance, when the East Anglian king Edmund was beheaded around 870, it was the Vikings under Ivar who were responsible, rather than another Anglo-Saxon king.[114] At the same time, the nature of power was changing, as the invaders gradually took control over the various Anglo-Saxon kingdoms until just one remained outside of their control. Violence during the Viking Age thus took on a different character, which makes c.793 a good stopping point for this study.

Conclusions

A comparison between the relative stability of Mercian overlordship under Æthelbald and Offa and the bloody conflicts over the Northumbrian throne demonstrates the importance of personal power in the eighth century. As in previous centuries, kings who relied primarily on force or violence could not ensure the stability of their own reigns, much less that of their successors. Those who deployed a variety of strategies of power had a better chance of doing so, but these strategies needed to be combined with a personal ability unique to leaders such as Offa and Æthelbald. These two Mercian kings deployed a variety of strategies with which to build authority, including economic control and a more complete incorporation of conquered peoples into their kingdoms. Perhaps most important, however, was the enforcement of defensive obligations tied to bookland, which not only aided the two kings in preventing overthrow by a single warband, but began a process of depersonalization of rule in which obligations were not based on ties between two individuals, but could potentially last in perpetuity. Not to draw the

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113. ASC a. 796-892; 42-53.

114. Ælfric, *Passio Sancti Eadmundi Regis*, 98-125; *Alfric's Lives of the Saints*, vol. II, ed. Walter Skeat (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, and Co., Ltd., 1900), 321-3.

conclusion too far, but the creation of lasting authority, rather than simply power, was a phenomenon dating back to Æthelberht. The first Christian king of Kent converted in order to gain access to strategies of power so that he did not have to primarily rely on force for power. By creating authority, a form of depersonalized power, he began a process continued here in eighth-century Mercia. That is not to say that this was all part of some sort of grand plan, or the inevitable march of progress. On the contrary, these were political moves deployed to build personal and dynastic power during several centuries in which both could be eradicated by the actions of a small group. Offa and Æthelbald, unlike their contemporaries, wielded sufficient personal power to have time to deploy these strategies before dying/being killed. Perhaps others may have done so, perhaps not, but they likely did not have time to do so during their reigns. The reigns of eighth-century kings outside Mercia, especially those in Northumbria, were wracked with feud, so they likely had little time to think of longer lasting power. Compare the survival mode of modern people living in generational poverty – they are so concerned with survival that they are unable to consider their long-term interests, and are far less likely to pursue educational or career advancement while they look for their next payday.[115] Æthelbald and Offa were able to escape this cycle of power poverty and to emerge into the middle class of royal rulership.

It is worth noting here the Christian biases of a majority of written sources with which we have been dealing, and the specific position of the Church on feud and revenge. As with all studies of the early medieval period that rely to some extent on written sources, an issue arises that anyone literate enough to write at the time was also a monk or priest, and as such carries an agenda in writing that supports the Church and its positions. According to Scripture, Christians

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115. Ruby K. Payne, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, 4th ed. (Highlands, Tx: aha! Process, Inc., 2005).

were supposed to leave vengeance to God, and the evidence from Anglo-Saxon Church authors

confirm this prohibition.[116] Writers such as Bede and Ælfric, for instance, attempted to ignore the

role that feud played in Oswald's battles with both Cadwallon and Penda.[117] Ælfric, in his

translation of *Maccabees*, describes feud, or wars between relatives, as the worst of his four types

of war, clearly demonstrating this anti-feud bias.[118] Not only was the Church opposed to feud, as

seen in the discussion of the sources in this and previous chapters, but also the writings coming

from the Church provide alternative approaches to feud and violence. As mentioned previously,

Guthlac served as an example for others to turn away from violence against each other to a

defense against sin. Ælfric again provides another example, suggesting that Christians combat

their foes with spiritual, rather than physical, weapons in much the same way that Felix's Guthlac

had done.[119] It may be no coincidence that the first Christian Anglo-Saxon king, Æthelberht, was

also the first who, so far as we know, tried to rein in feud, but there is insufficient evidence to

make a definitive statement. What we do know is that the Church's position on feud colored the

way Anglo-Saxons wrote about feud, which modern historians must understand when reading

these sources.

A question remains: is there more than feud going on here? With all the violence and

killing, on the surface it seems as if these leaders are engaged in a never-ending cycle of feud

against one another. And that is certainly the conclusion to which the sources point. But a

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116. *Romans* 12:17-21; Daniel Lord Smail and Kelly Gibson, *Vengeance in the Middle Ages: A Reader* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 28.

117. Kent Hare, "Heroes, Saints, and Martyrs: Holy Kingship from Bede to Ælfric," *The Heroic Age* 9 (Oct. 2006), accessed October 16, 2016, http://www.heroicage.org/issues/9/hare.html, §17.

118. Ælfric, *Passio Machabeorum*, 706-714; *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, vol. II, edited by Wlater Skeat (London: Early English Text Society, 1881), 112-4; Allen J. Frantzen, *Anglo-Saxon Keywords* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 208.

119. Ælfric, *Passio Machabeorum*, 684-704; 112.

possibility remains that there is more going on here, and that the conduct of feud is a pretense for grabbing power. It is certainly true, as seen above, that there were those against whom Offa and the Mercian kings committed offenses which might warrant retaliation. And many likely did try to retaliate in their own ways. The Mercian kings, however, wielded sufficient strength that they did not have to face such threats. On the other hand, the Northumbrian rulers periodically fell victim to this sort of violence, and the difference may have to do with the margin of success. In feud, as discussed in previous chapters, the parties at feud must be roughly equal in social standing. So, for instance, one would not find a group led by an ealdorman feuding with a thegn's social group. Offa did not face such difficulties because there were none who were equal to him. Did others not challenge him because they would not dare offend the social norms governing feud, or because they could not muster the resources to successfully do so? While both are possible, it may have been that the social norms could provide ample justification for not challenging a powerful ruler when potential challengers lacked the resources to do so. We have seen several instances when potential claimants have broken social norms in the interests of power. Cyneheard, for example, attempted to overthrow a legitimate king. Was the feud between the two parties in which he was retaliating for the usurpation of his brother, then, a pretense to seize power? While we may never know, it is certainly a possibility, and not one that can be discarded easily. Similarly, Northumbrian kings were periodically killed either by their own people or by the other elites in the kingdom, at times after a reign of only a single year. We can only imagine what sort of slight these leaders committed in order to meet such a fate, but again these are violations of social norms. What seems to be going on here is that these rivalries created an environment in which the smallest pretense was necessary for a rival to challenge the power of the ruler and, because none of the rulers had sufficient power to eliminate such rivals,

Northumbria faced a fate similar to Rome during the Crisis of the Third Century, when emperors

faced almost constant usuarpation. Feud and the social norms related to it were thus themselves

strategies of power, deployed in order to secure said power at the expense of a rival unable to

fend off such threats.

Clovis again provides a useful example here, as there were multiple instances in which he

used the pretense of social norms in order to enhance his power. He bribed the followers of a

rival king, Ragnachar, with gilded treasures to rebel against their lord whom they despised. When

Clovis's forces met Ragnachar's in battle, the bribed men seized their king and brought him and

his brother to Clovis. Clovis then cleaved the skull of his rival, suggesting that it was because he

had allowed himself to be captured rather than dying in battle. He similarly killed the brother for

failing to support his brother to prevent his capture. Afterwards, the traitors discovered they had

been deceived. When the followers of the Ragnachar complained that the treasure they received

was gilded, not gold, Clovis stated that those who betrayed their lords deserved no better, and

that they were lucky not to suffer a similar fate.[120] In other words, Clovis used the pretense of

tenets of the so-called Germanic warrior ethos, falling in battle rather than being captured,

supporting family members, not betraying one's lord, in order to augment his power by

manipulating others. A similar scenario occurred when Clovis suggested to Chloderic that his

father Sigibert the Lame was old and that he would inherit the kingdom. Chloderic took this as a

suggestion, and murdered his father. When Chloderic then offered his allegiance to Clovis, he

himself was killed by one of Clovis's men in another skull-splitting. Clovis then went to the

people of that kingdom to report these events, taking no responsibility for them, but offering to

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120. Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum X*, II.42; edited by B. Krusch, *MGH SRM* I pars I (Hanover, 1937) 92-3.

be their new king. They accepted.[121] Again we see Clovis using the pretense of social norms in

order to extend his power into other realms. Other contemporary Anglo-Saxon examples exist.

Bishop Wilfrid, that most astute of early medieval politicians, took advantage of social norms to

augment his power, though not in as violent a manner as Clovis. He used his considerable

largesse to ordain numerous priests and deacons and give gifts to both clergy and laity to ensure

their loyalty, in much the same way as the leader of a warband might.[122] He also spent a great

deal adorning the Ripon church, at the consecration of which he had a list read of lands granted

to him.[123] In other words, he used the social norms of giving gifts to his followers to ensure

loyalty and the public declaration of land transfers to ensure the community was aware of his

possessions. Similarly, Wilfrid's political opponents would often mention his vast wealth in

verbal attacks against him, suggesting that it violated the social norms associated with clergy.[124]

At the same time, powerful leaders such as Æthelberht of Kent attempted to change social norms

by spending some of their political capital in order to entice their followers to abandon old

practices in favor of those which further supported the rising power of these kings. Æthelberht's

imposition of law would be the most important example here, as he was trying to get the people

of Kent to look to him to settle disputes, rather than violent self-help. The construction of Sutton

Hoo and Yeavering may be seen as strategies of power designed to stand in opposition to the

prevailing hegemon in Kent. Æthelberht's rivals, Æthelfrith and Redwald, opposed his desire to

alter the social norms upon which others had built their power, so they displayed an adherence to

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121. Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum X*, II.40; 89-91.

122. Stephen, *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi*, 21; *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus*, ed. Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 42-4.

123. Stephen, *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi*, 17; 34-6.

124. Stephen, *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi*, 24; 48-50.

older prevailing social norms which Æthelberht was attempting to abandon. All this feuding and violence thus emerges as another set of strategies of power which rulers deployed tactically in order to gain political advantage.

That is not to say that feud was not a socially regulated set of norms often deployed during this period to settle disputes. On the contrary, those who wielded power could exploit those norms and use them to their own political advantage, similar to how modern politicians use rules of procedure to pass or halt legislation without an electoral majority, or how they use media to manipulate public opinion. They are technically within the rules, even if there is something nefarious going on as well. Those who held power in early Anglo-Saxon England similarly exploited the rules to their own advantage. At times, that meant using feud as a pretense to attack a rival, while at other times kings used law as a means to limit the violence of others and increase the latter's reliance on the most powerful individual. The dominant theme that emerges, therefore, is not one of feud between competing dynasties, but rather a political competition in which feud was utilized in order to gain power. Rival kings did not kill for the sake of feud, or honor, or some other ideal associated with the supposed warrior ethic, but for the sake of their own personal power.

<center>**CHAPTER VII**</center>

<center>**CONCLUSIONS**</center>

In the course of completing this project, I found myself working for a non-profit organization, teaching sexual violence prevention to teenagers in Florida. These adolescents were in either short- or long-term detention facilities, and those in the long-term centers came from all parts of the state. Many were incarcerated for drug and/or violent offenses, and most were associated with gang activity. By working with them, I was able to see some of the attitudes associated with urban youth gang culture, and was struck by the striking similarities between that and the honor cultures that practiced feud, such as the Anglo-Saxons. In fact, many of the criteria for feud may be seen in the conflicts between rivals in the inner city. There is certainly the large social group, the gang, which provides support for its members in conflicts and other ways, and members of the group treat each other as members of a family. When injuries to members occur at the hands of those outside the group, the gang must retaliate, "get theirs back," in order to uphold their honor and to protect the group from perceived weakness which would encourage further attacks. A single injury can cause long-term conflicts between groups bent on mutual retaliation in the name of honor. Perhaps contrary to notions of modern popular culture, there is even an expectation that retaliation be roughly equivalent to the previous attack: within the facilities at least, minor slights result in brief fist fights, possibly to avoid consequences imposed by the administrators. My observations are certainly not the first comparison between contemporary American urban culture and the honor culture of the early Germanic peoples. Irina Dumitrescu noticed such similarities years ago, comparing the flyting, or verbal dueling, in

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literature such as *Beowulf* and Old English and Old Norse heroic literature with the insults of rap

music, another form of verbal dueling.[1] Other writers have made similar comparisons regarding

the rap battle and the flyting,[2] but notions of direct influence not only stretch the evidence beyond

its verifiable limits but also mask the possibility of larger conclusions about group cultures in

which honor plays a large role.[3] Among cultures which practice feud, there are certain, usually

unwritten, rules governing it, and feud can serve to maintain rather than disrupt the social order.

That is, the threat of feud maintains the peace because to engage in feud might result in having to

kill or be killed, in the same way that Mutually Assured Destruction prevented the superpowers

from using nuclear weapons during the Cold War.[4] One need only look at Max Gluckman's

seminal 1955 article, "The Peace in the Feud," to see evidence of the benefits of feud to social

cohesion and the prevention of violence.[5] That is not to say that the urban landscape of the

United States is peaceful because of rules associated with feuding. The experiences of 2016 alone

would seem to indicate otherwise.[6] The rules of feud, however, prevent wanton retaliation that

would result in massive bloodshed, because these rules constrain the actors who are concerned

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1. Irina A. Dumitrescu, "Verbal Dueling," *Dragons in the Sky: English Speaking Communities at the Close of the Millenia*, ed. Patrick W. Conner and Stuart D. Lee, accessed 9 July 2016, http://users.ox.ac.uk/~stuart/dits/content_verbal.html.

2. Alta Cools Halama, "Flytes of Fancy: Boasting and Boasters from *Beowulf* to Gangsta Rap," *Essays in Medieval Studies* 13 (1996), accessed 9 July 2016, http://www.illinoismedieval.org/ems/VOL13/halama.html.

3. Simon Johnson, "Rap Music Originated in Medieval Scottish Pubs, Claims American Professor," *The Telegraph* (28 December 2008), accessed 9 July 2016, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/3998862/Rap-music-originated-in-medieval-Scottish-pubs-claims-American-professor.html.

4. John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 80.

5. Max Gluckman, "The Peace in the Feud," *Past and Present* 8 (Nov. 1955): 1-14.

6. While 2016 saw greater attention placed on urban violence, overall crime rates may have declined while murder rates rose. Josh Sanburn, "Murders Up in U.S. Cities, but Crime Rate Still Near Record Lows," *Time.com*, (20 December 2016), accessed 14 March 2017, http://time.com/4607059/murder-rate-increase-us-cities-2016/.

with honor. In fact, notions of honor serve to not only promote, but also to limit, feud. For the Anglo-Saxon and for the American gang member, there are limits to retaliation; a minor slight does not directly result in death. Severe instances of violence, up to and including death, generally occur after escalating acts of retaliation. The comparison is apt simply because both exist in cultures in which honor is paramount and in which no single authoritative entity has imposed sufficient authority to limit these acts of retaliation, or when said authority has been rejected for whatever reason.

This study of feud in the Anglo-Saxon period was stimulated in part by arguments questioning its existence and suggesting that it was merely vengeance, and that a single act of revenge could settle a dispute. Guy Halsall further asserted that words such as *fæhð* referred to a single act of vengeance and not an ongoing relationship of hostility.[7] In Chapter 2 I demonstrated that the word *fæhð* did indeed refer to an ongoing relationship of hostility between opposing groups marked by reciprocal retaliation for an initial injury. I searched for the word *fæhð* (or *fæhþ*) in sources written in Old English, finding 54 instances of the terms, most of which appeared in either *Beowulf* or the laws. While legal sources, specifically royal law compilations, alone proved unable to demonstrate the existence of feud, when combined with literary and historical sources they showed that the Anglo-Saxons practiced feud and that these feuds involved ongoing relationships of reciprocal retaliation. It was possible that the laws about feud referred to ongoing hostile relationships, but it was not clearly certain. *Beowulf* and other literary sources in which the term appears do, however, indicate the presence of this lasting relationship of hostility between groups. While these sources may not provide contemporary evidence for the

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7. Guy Halsall, "Reflections on Early Medieval Violence: The Example of the Blood Feud," *Memoria y Civilización: Annuario de Historia* 2 (1999): 11-2.

existence of feud in the early Anglo-Saxon period, they do, however, indicate the prevalence of feud in the Anglo-Saxon way of viewing the world, as the literary sources refer to all sorts of conflicts as feud, clearly demonstrating *fæhð* refers to ongoing feuds, and not single acts of vengeance.

Historical sources from the early Anglo-Saxon period, on the other hand, describe events which could be deemed feud despite the absence of the word *fæhð*. In Chapter 6, I demonstrated that kings of eighth-century Northumbria were engaged in a feud between competing royal families that lasted for generations and resulted in a great deal of political instability. *Cynewulf and Cyneheard*, also discussed in Chapter 6, is a famous example of a royal feud for the Kingdom of Wessex that also does not use the term *fæhð*, and was written as part of a separate dispute between the descendants of the actors in the episode and another competing royal family. Taken together, all this evidence points to two conclusions about feud in Anglo-Saxon England. Searching only for the word *fæhð* provided a limited view of the nature of *fæhð*, and revealed thatAnglo-Saxon authors did not necessarily refer to relationships which met all four criteria and were clearly feud using the term *fæhð*. Additionally, using the criteria laid out previously, it is clear that the early Anglo-Saxons practiced feud, and that single acts of retaliation did not necessarily end the hostility between groups, which often continued beyond a single act of revenge.[8]

This study of feud has also revealed a great deal about the nature of power in early Anglo-Saxon England. Legal, historical, archaeological, and anthropological evidence indicate the deployment of new strategies of power during the Conversion Period, as discussed in Chapters 3 through 5. Whereas chieftains of the Migration Period relied primarily on violence or force to

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8. As demonstrated throughout Chapters 2 through 6.

achieve their political aims, beginning with the introduction of Roman political culture during the reign of Æthelberht of Kent, kings began to offer, among other things, protective power to those living in their territories. Laws allowed the kings to interpose themselves into social relationships, particularly those created to defend the individual from violence, so that individuals found it advantageous to turn to royal dispute resolution rather than rely on violence self-help, i.e., feud. In so doing, these kings placed themselves in ranks above local elites and began to dominate society through control of ritual sites, creation of law, exaction of tribute, and other means. At the same time, these rulers began to exert greater control over their societies by delegitimizing violent self-help, inserting themselves into the dispute resolution process, and providing royal protection. They also began to demand greater exactions from their subordinates in the form of tribute and warriors, thus enhancing their power through the acquisition of resources. At the same time, they enhanced their authority by justifying these exactions by further separating themselves from society through control of monuments, ritual sites, and centers of trade.

Rival overkings continued to feud with each other, however, and violence remained a frequent method of gaining or maintaining power. Æthelfrith and Redwald's rejection of conversion, on the other hand, was as much a rejection of Æthelberht and his expansion of power as it was a rejection of the new religion or the abandonment of the old gods and their modes of worship. During the later Conversion Period (c.650-c.730), rulers and elites made use of violence in order to enhance their power, but power was still highly personal in nature. Some kings such as Penda of Mercia did not exploit new strategies of power because they had no need do so, but were simply successful at using force. The Church also provided examples for when violence should be used in the form of saints' lives, trying to convince its followers to leave force to the

lord/Lord, providing an ideological justification for the kings to take over dispute resolution. The lines between the warlord in the *Germanitas* tradition and the bishop in the *Romanitas* tradition were blurred in the person of Bishop Wilfrid, who seems to have acted as both simultaneously. Wilfrid followed whichever tradition was best suited to his quest for power, and was less bound to ideology that it may initially seem. The same was true for the kings of the period – Penda had no need for alternate strategies, while his contemporaries who were not as successful militarily used them to enhance their power. For both Penda and Wilfrid, power was their primary concern, and governed their political actions.

By the eighth century, several changes in the nature of rule left a few very powerful kings in Mercia who were able to take advantage of economic changes that affected their reigns, as discussed in Chapter 6. Having gained control over the trade passing through London, Æthelbald and Offa gained access to a vast amount of resources, which helped them to expand the bounds of their kingdom and to establish hegemony over their neighbors. While the introduction of bookland hurt many kings by depriving them of resources from the land booked to the Church, the Mercian kings successfully held on to dues owed from these lands in the form of road/bridge work and military service so that booked land was not such a drain on their ability to wield power. On the other hand, rulers in Northumbria were unable to create sustainable power and could not fend off potential rivals, and as a result were often subject to feud between rival royal families. Unlike Mercia, bookland severely hampered the northern kings' access to resources, preventing them from building a cohort of loyal followers sufficient to prevent usurpation. Even here, power was still highly personal in nature, as in Northumbria the most successful leaders were those able to gather large followings.

The royal rivalries in all the kingdoms for which we have sufficient information – Northumbria, Wessex, and Mercia – provide evidence of royal families engaging in feud. As earlier kings had attempted to extract themselves from the social bonds that governed relations between non-royal families, those eighth-century kings who were able to extract themselves, such as the long-lived Mercians, were the most successful because they had no equals, socially or economically. The Northumbrians and West Saxons, on the other hand, participated in feuds between roughly equivalent rival clans, suggesting some level of equality between these groups. By the ninth century, the Viking incursions had disrupted kings' ability to offer protection to those living in their territories. It was during the reigns of Alfred (871-899) and his successors that Anglo-Saxon kings began to wield prohibitive power, whereby kings prohibited certain actions, in addition to the protective power introduced during the Early Conversion Period, as discussed by Thomas Lambert.[9]

Feud in early England was, therefore, not only a method that the Anglo-Saxons used to understand and settle conflict, but was a tool used by kings to enhance their power. While some kings, such as Æthelberht and Ine, used law to gain control over feud and to center dispute resolution at the royal court, others, such as the eighth-century Northumbrian royal rivals, used feud to usurp each other and take power for themselves. During the Migration Period, control of kin groups was the key to power, and successful chieftains built their power by negotiating social relations among these groups. The Conversion Period brought new strategies of power, enabling kings to rise above the kinship groups that regulated social interactions so that they could impose new norms. As kings adopted new power strategies associated with the Romans, rivals

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9. Thomas Lambert, "Protection, Feud, and Royal Power: Violence and its Regulation in English Law, c.850-c.1250" (PhD diss., Durham University, 2009).

competing for power rejected these new strategies in favor of those associated with *Germanitas*, as we see at Sutton Hoo and Yeavering. New ethnic groups also emerged, some of which held imagined conceptions of a Germanic past, others notions of Roman rule. Economic power and control over ethnic groups brought political power, but further deemphasized the role of kin and feud which was so important in a society in which feud had long been a valid form of dispute resolution. Feud, a fundamental element in early Anglo-Saxon social relations, did not disappear when new forms of organization began to compete with the importance of kinship groups, but persisted even as kings attempted to gain control over it.

These same relationships between power and violence may apply broadly, outside the chronological or geographical confines of early Anglo-Saxon England. Those who lack legitimate power are the most likely to resort to violence. To return to the modern American inner city: young people who perceive themselves as lacking social, economic, and political power commit acts of violence to bring attention to this lack of power or to gain access to power. The race riots of the late 1960s came at the hands of those who lacked power and saw no avenue for change other than forceful demonstration.[10] Similarly, in cases ranging from domestic violence to terrorism, violence is committed by those who believe that they lack power or see their power begin to collapse.[11] Hannah Arendt argues this point most succinctly in her essay *On Violence*: "Power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent."[12] Her conclusions about the relationship between violence and power in modern politics

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10. Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (Stellar Classics, 1969), 59-64.

11. Julia C. Babcock, et. al. "Power and Violence: The Relation between Communication Patterns, Power Discrepancies, and Domestic Violence," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 61 no. 1 (1993): 40-50; Richard A. Couto, "The Politics of Terrorism: Power, Legitimacy, and Violence," *Integral Review* 6 no. 1 (March 2010): 63-81.

12. Arendt, *On Violence*, 56.

have some application to the conclusions drawn here about early medieval political culture, with one major caveat. I have used the word "authority" where she would use "power" to refer to the ability to enforce one's will without the need to threaten the use of force. The terminology may be different, but the idea is the same – those who lack authority may resort to violence to gain power. Seen in this way, feud as a retaliatory form of violence is a way for the victim of a single act of violence to assert power through the use of force; it is an assertion of the victim's possession of an equivalent level of power. This idea fits in well with the norm that feud must occur between parties of roughly equal social standings. Retaliation helps the victim of an initial act of violence to retain social status; failure to retaliate would render the victim inferior to the initial aggressor. Viewed from the other perspective, the winner of a feud always increases in both relative power and social standing. Again, this aspect of feud fits in with the previously discussed role of kings in the process of building authority. If feuds remained outside the control of the royal family, the resultant changes in social status could not be determined by the king, resulting in kings being unable to determine the relative strength of elite families, and thus unable effectively to reward their allies for support. By gaining some measure of control over violence, kings gained a type of power – authority – and did not need to resort primarily to the use of force to achieve their ends.

The key to this entire change in the political culture of Anglo-Saxon England thus seems to have centered around power. Just as a modern politician will make bold statements in order to gain power through the electoral process (2016 provides myriad examples), kings in early medieval Britain used whatever tools they had available to create social, economic, and legal ties to enhance their power. These rulers were not necessarily ideologues (though some may have been), but were interested in the accumulation of power for themselves and their descendants.

While kings may have sincerely believed in the ideas they expressed, whether associated with

Germanitas or *Romanitas*, we do know that adherence to these sets of ideas often provided

political benefits. Kings essentially usurped the role of feud for themselves by providing

protection while at the same time expanding the size of the group to whom they offered

protection. It did not hurt that the new teachings of the Church attempted to delegitimize the

taking of revenge.[13] It helped, in fact, to justify this means of accumulating power. Even a

cursory examination of laws of the later Anglo-Saxon kings reveals that this trend continued,

especially after the reign of Alfred.[14] Whatever the stated goals, the effects of the legal reforms,

which were parts of reform programs for the entire political culture, included increasing the

power of the king at the expense of kin and other elites. Anglo-Saxon England was not unique in

the sense that the underlying motivation for many of its leaders' political actions revolved around

the accumulation of power. In fact, power as a motivation resonated across time and space, while

violence became a recourse for those who lacked power.

 None of these statements about power should be taken to indicate something more than

what was happening among the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Kings deployed newly learned strategies

in order to enhance their power or that of their families. Readings of the evidence which take the

written sources at face value may make sense because of the paucity of sources, but a figure like

Bishop Wilfrid is much more comprehensible if his actions are viewed as part of a search for

power and not the result of some sense of ecclesiastical propriety or notions of salvation. That is,

what little evidence we have about the nature of violence and power fits together with the other

pieces of evidence if we treat those people about whom we have any detailed evidence not as

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13. Felix, *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, 18; *Felix's Life of Guthlac*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 81-2.

14. Lambert, "Protection, Feud, and Royal Power," 104-10.

heroes or visionaries, but simply as people. For whatever reason – economic, social, religious, personal – people tend to crave power over others or control over their own lives, and the examples we have from early Anglo-Saxon England fit well with that generalization. I have also suggested in Chapter 6 that some kings used feud in order to legitimize usurpation in royal rivalries. If we view the eighth-century royal feuds in this way, it indicates two important things about violence, power, and feud in the Anglo-Saxon period. The acquisition, increase, and maintenance of power was the key to rulers' deployment of the various strategies, as evidence from Æthelberht to Offa demonstrates. At the same time, however, feud was a longstanding tradition among the Anglo-Saxon peoples, as it personalized conflicts between competing social groups. The prevalence of feud in the Anglo-Saxon mindset meant not only that these people thought of all conflict in terms of feud, but that they could use feud as a pretense for seizing power. These possibilities fit with the scarce available evidence, and should certainly be considered when thinking about feud, violence, and power in the early Anglo-Saxon period.

One cannot ignore the importance of economic factors in the creation of power during this period. Warband leaders during and after the Migration Period gained and held followers through the distribution of plunder. The earliest political leaders who established chiefdoms in the Migration Period dominated the regions they controlled through the collection of tribute at ritual sites, and also maintained the loyalty of their followers through the distribution of land and wealth.[15] During the Conversion Period, Æthelberht was able to establish his overkingship in part because of Kentish ties and trade with the Continent, specifically Francia. Trade connections led to political imitation, as the people of Kent learned several strategies of power from the Franks. In fact, Æthelberht likely accepted baptism from the Romans rather than the Frankish

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15. See Chapter 3.

chaplain at his court in order to avoid the possibility of Frankish dominance, as discussed in

Chapter 4. Similarly, Offa's control over London gave him access to resources his rivals did not

have, as discussed in Chapter 6. His Northumbrian contemporaries lacked a similar economic

power, and suffered further diminution of their resources because of the introduction of

bookland, and were thus unable either to compete with Offa or to stave off feud from royal rivals.

The power Bishop Wilfrid wielded was due in part to the distribution of lands he acquired

throughout his political career, which enabled him to acquire more, despite his political setbacks.

Examples may be multiplied, but certainly economics and power were closely tied together.

Those rulers and elites with greater access to resources proved to be more successful than others

because they were able to deploy those resources to increase their loyal following and to gain

access to new resources through expansion.

Through an examination of the word *fæhð* in the historical documents, synthesized with a

variety of other historical, literary, archaeological, and anthropological sources, I have been able

to demonstrate the importance of feud in early Anglo-Saxon England. The written evidence

indicates that, not only did the Anglo-Saxons practice feud, but that notions of feud colored the

ways that the peoples of early England viewed conflict such so that they thought about other

conflicts, including wars and religious struggles, in terms of feud. Feud so permeated the Anglo-

Saxon imagination that writers perceived themselves to be part of some cosmic struggle between

good and evil known as the Great Feud. In addition to feud looming large in the Anglo-Saxon

cultural imagination, early leaders also used feud to both construct their power bases to and

create authority in their realms. The written and physical evidence further demonstrate that rulers

of the Conversion Period began to interject themselves into feud. By so doing, they removed

themselves from the previously dominant social bonds of kinship to create a more-inclusive form

of ethnic identity centered around the king, which included multiple kinship groups, offering their protection in return for adherence to the royal cultural traditions. While they did not reject violence as a strategy of power, in these ways, kings created authority for themselves in order to wield greater control. If feud so permeated the Anglo-Saxon imagination that the entire world around them was thus embroiled in a grand struggle between good and evil, it is no wonder that chieftains and kings from the Migration Period to the end of the eighth century saw the violence in feud as a viable strategy of power.

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