Women's Autonomy in Late Anglo-Saxon England Based on the Place-Name Evidence

Norman B. Frost
Western Michigan University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/masters_theses

Part of the Medieval Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
Frost, Norman B., "Women's Autonomy in Late Anglo-Saxon England Based on the Place-Name Evidence" (1997). Master's Theses. 3822.
https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/masters_theses/3822

This Masters Thesis-Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate College at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.
WOMEN'S AUTONOMY IN LATE ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND
BASED ON THE PLACE-NAME EVIDENCE

by
Norman B. Frost

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
The Medieval Institute

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
June 1997
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are very few projects of any kind that are the product of only one person and this thesis is no exception. There are all those professors who gave me the background I needed, especially those in the History Department to whom I owe a very great debt of thanks. I have never failed to be impressed with them as scholars and as individuals. A special thanks goes out to Dr. Larry Syndergaard of the English Department, for teaching me so much that I was lacking in the subject literature and its interpretation.

A very great debt is owed to Timothy Graham, Dr. Carole A. Hough, and Dr. Deborah Deliyannis who gave more than anyone could reasonably be expected to give and then a bit more to help me get this thesis completed. I owe them all a debt that will be impossible to repay.

This thesis is dedicated to all those women of today who need to know their history and to all those who have faded into the past, never to have their stories told. This is only a small beginning towards those needs.

Norman B. Frost
My thesis discusses two related and highly significant points and then demonstrates the usefulness of a new methodology, in the form of place names. Firstly it elaborates the importance of presenting accurate women's history to both women and the historical profession as a whole and the necessity for making every attempt to explore any possible resource for accomplishing that goal.

Secondly it addresses the importance of language as an historical tool that can represent a very broad base of a past society in revealing the common cultural thoughts, morals, and ethics of the population within a specific area and time in the past.

Thirdly it shows what the place-name evidence from England can provide in a new interpretation of the status of women in Anglo-Saxon England.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .......................................................... ii

CHAPTER

I. THE PROBLEMS OF CONVENTIONAL HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION IN THE ASSESSMENT OF WOMEN’S HISTORY .................................................. 1

II. USING LINGUISTIC FACTORS IN THE INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY .................................................. 23

III. THE IMPLICATIONS OF PLACE-NAME DATA FOR THE AUTONOMY OF WOMEN IN LATE ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND .................................................. 34

IV. CONCLUSION ................................................................. 48

APPENDIX A. PLACE-NAME DATA ............................................. 51

BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................................. 53
CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEMS OF CONVENTIONAL HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION IN THE ASSESSMENT OF WOMEN'S HISTORY

In the closing decades of the twentieth century it has become more commonly recognized among those in the historical profession that when approaching women's history, and attempting to understand some of the realities of women's lives in the past, previous methodologies and approaches are inadequate in most cases, and in some others misleading. The necessity for the application of a new feminist mentality and methodological approach is abundantly clear. The importance of an accurate historical record to the whole of society, and to women in particular, is a generally recognized concept in the sociological and psychological sciences. The following is a small step in that direction in the historical profession.

First we need to know what is traditionally considered to be history. In that pursuit let us consider these excerpts from the definition of history in the Oxford Dictionary of The English Language which provide one of the

1. "Feminist" simply means attempting to provide an equal treatment of both men and women in any sphere of interest. Thus in history the feminist approach attempts to bring both men and women into the historical record equally, or at least to the fullest extent that the sources will allow, to write history that is unbiased, and to provide interpretations free from the preconceived notions of the importance of male activity.
basic cultural concepts. These definitions are thought to be the most common among the bulk of the population and so represent the basic concept of history:

History:
1. A relation of incidents (in early use, either true or imaginary: later only of those professedly true); a narrative, tale, story.
2. A written narrative constituting a continuous methodological record, in order of time, of important or public events, esp. those connected with a particular country, people, individual, etc.
3. That branch of knowledge which deals with past events, as those recorded in writings or otherwise ascertained; the formal record of the past, esp. of human affairs or actions: the study of the formation and growth of communities and nations.
4. a. A series of events (of which the story is or may be told).

These selections typify some of the major trends in the interpretation and writing of history. Among these are: Firstly, the division of history as a whole into smaller more manageable topics with which we are familiar such as political, legal, or economic history, or into fragments such as ages, or reigns which have sufficient surviving documentation to allow for a plausible interpretation. Secondly, there is the concentration of our efforts on the larger geographical areas and social institutions which once again represent topics with which we are intimately familiar. Thirdly, there is the presentation of history as the telling of a story, a narrative which is a form of the presentation of information to which we are accustomed from our early childhood.

3. Note the use of the word story twice in this definition of history.
These three aspects of historical interpretation are very familiar components of the historical process to both the historian and the general public alike. This is the way history is done, for the most part, and the way history has been done for a very long time. History, like most of the activities of human beings, can easily become canonized. The way history is to be done is very clearly expressed by the numerous books which address the history of the study and writing of history itself. Historical interpretation and writing is locked up in a very tight convenient package and it is not very likely to change easily. History is done the way it should be done, at any given point in time, and that is the end of that (even though theoretical change is developed and tested by historians on a regular basis).

One very important demonstration of this change process is the Marxist-Social historical concept later brought to fruition by the Annales school in France. Only with this concept of social history did the lower levels of societies in the past become valid topics for historical investigation. The Annales school broke with the tradition of conventional history and its division of history into small fragments and then the categorizing of those small fragments into identifiable sets of characteristics such as political or economic with which we are familiar in our own

---


\(^2\) Ibid.
daily lives. A new approach brought not only new topics and thinking but also a new perception of who we as a people, at all of the various levels of society, were in the past. We began to see the wide variety of human experience in the past just as we experience it today.

We also tend to look at history in terms of that which is important to us and then to assume that the same principles were important in the same ways to the inhabitants of the past. We subjectively interpret history and since most historians are college educated, with some very notable exceptions, our view of the past is somewhat biased by that fact alone. In addition the, in some cases lifelong, separation from the lower level of society closes off the largest part of any society from the consciousness of the historian. Historians need to be in tune with the whole of society, all of its variety and nuances even if they have had no direct experience with it. In the past, just as today, you catch more flies with honey than vinegar. The lords who had the most satisfied women and men under their control were the most likely to have better success.

We must not, however, assume that all, or even a large portion, of the inhabitants of a given period in the past, from the top of the social ladder to the very bottom, all had the same interests, ideas, or beliefs. We must never ignore the fact that in our own time each individual has a different list of priorities, a different world view and lives in a different reality than ours, and that in the past there must have been a great deal of variety between
individuals even if it did not approximate the same specific diversity in our own time. There are numerous examples of this in the past from many cultures. It can be easy for us to see only what we want to see in the past and to believe that that is what the inhabitants of the past saw as well. We therefore must caution ourselves not to find, or create, the history we are looking for by using the common features of our own era as a guide and then finding only those elements in the past. A system such as this would be comfortable and easily understood. It is a very tempting path but must be avoided. The title of one of Norman Cantor’s books speaks for itself on this issue: *Inventing the Middle Ages.* ⁶ This is something we must try constantly to avoid, that is, inventing some part of the past. We must also realize that past scholarship has made us see through the glass darkly. ⁷ This applies to many historians as well as philosophers and writers in the past. We must also caution ourselves against simply stating that the current historical process works and thus it must be correct. Many methods are easy but they may not be correct. We must constantly strive to improve our methods along with our knowledge. We must never be content with the “Yellow Brick Road,” no matter how inviting it may be. We also must guard very carefully against the development of circular argument (we must not use surviving texts to form a theory

---

⁷ St. Paul.
and then use the texts themselves to prove the theory).

These features of historical interpretation, which can creep into the canon of the historical process, can greatly tend to marginalize the role of women in the past and to bias the correct interpretation of their position in society.

Numerous texts give us a limited view of our past which is partly the work of our passions and prejudices rather than solely the work of our intellect. We might select, for example, Living In The Tenth Century: Mentalities And Social Orders, truly a masterful and scholarly work and a brilliant explanation of medieval culture, or rather of one small portion of it. From reading this book it could be assumed that everyone living in the tenth century held the same world view, not that that is specifically stated in the book, but from the inference that living in the tenth century meant subscribing to the views of society described in the book. It could be assumed, for example, that the theological vision of the clergy found its way into the lives of the whole of the population in the same way. It could further be assumed that everyone living in the tenth century was willing to accept without question the guidance of a few individuals, the political and theological leaders, and to give themselves over totally to that guidance. This assumption in many, if not most, cases

---

is not documented by actual statements in surviving records but by the reasoning that the lack of relevant information to the contrary must prove the case.

There are numerous texts which deal with the history of the Middle Ages in the very same way. There is a view that the world of man in the Middle Ages was divided into two very distinct parts, the earthly world and the heavenly world and that the functions of man were divided into three very distinct activities, praying, fighting, and working. Hence we have created a view of the Middle Ages in which men and their activities are the only facets worthy of exploration, examination, and interpretation by the historian. We overlook women. We see only the surface of the river of history, as it were, and can become very unwilling to look any further.

Consider for a moment an alternative view of history:

To divide history into periods is misleading. The river of history flows fast, or slow, in different places, and always it is the surface that moves most swiftly. In the hills the turbulent waters of history either foam and spate, or run dry; where a river passes over lowland it becomes clogged and slow. In places, where the land curves, the current circles round and round upon itself, or where the current is held behind a boulder, in that deep pool the dead water stays, unstirred. There the slow slugs slide through the slime, and the blind fish sleep; there mud-dwellers move, in water so thick it does not even stir the trailing feelers of the tench floating above. Thus, in the backwater of history [wo]man may exist unmoved for centuries.

---

10 My addition.
This poignant description of history by Dorothy Har- tley truly represents a more desirable approach to history and addresses an alternative view that might improve the state of women's history in this closing decade of the twentieth century and on into the next.

Compared to the political or economic histories of the Middle Ages, which are well attested in the surviving records, the state of women seems pale and uneventful. This situation is not solely attributable to intentional disregard of the important role played by women, although this does occur, but rather to many reasons one of which is the severe lack of surviving records, or, as Meg Bogen put it: "In the jungle of information about the human race that now exists, the traces of medieval women are decidedly faint."

Even in the most remote historical periods the political and economic, as well as theological, events took precedence over the enterprises of the common people when it came to recording the efforts of humanity. This tendency speaks of the human trait to record only those events that are deemed most important by those who are society's leaders. Women, falling well outside these areas of concern, in most cases, are seldom present in the historical record. When they do appear they are normally from the upper classes and they do not represent the experience of the

---

mass of women in the lower levels of society. Thus for any period of history, preceding the current century, women have been severely under-represented in proportion to their actual physical presence.

Penelope Johnston in her *Equal In Monastic Profession* aptly quotes an excerpt from George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*:

Many Theresas have been born who found for themselves no epic life wherein there was a constant unfolding of far-resonant action; perhaps only a life of mistakes, the offspring of a certain spiritual grandeur ill-matched with the meanness of opportunity; perhaps a tragic failure which found no sacred poet and sank unwept into oblivion.

It is indeed unfortunate that any person should fade into the darkness of oblivion, never to have their story revealed, and to leave not even the slightest trace of their having lived at all. This is, however, the most common condition encountered by the historian, and to be able to reveal the accounts of the common people is a rare and privileged circumstance. In general historians have little choice but to continue to plod through the same materials again and again while applying the newest methodologies and to try to unveil any new circumstance that might come to light in doing so. Occasionally this reprobing produces some new enlightenment, such as the reinterpretation of the *frīwif locbora* in the Anglo-Saxon laws of Aethelberht by

---

13. See *An Annotated Index Of Medieval Women* and *Women Who Ruled* as examples of the extent to which notable women have survived. See also *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* for examples of women who have survived through their literary works.

Professor Christine Fell in her *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*. This phrase had been interpreted for a very long time as meaning "a young woman with long hair". Professor Fell reinterpreted the phrase as meaning the "bearer of the keys". This interpretation makes far better sense and also fits well into the numerous laws that specifically address women. This one small simple step threw a new light on the lives of many women in Anglo-Saxon England. The historical record and the profession benefited greatly from this one small change.

As to the law, this is one aspect of history that draws a great deal of attention, and not that it is not justified, as law is one of the most important resources to be handed down to us. From the Anglo-Saxons we have a small but useful corpus of law and some laws, as noted above, address women lives. From the laws of Alfred we have, "If anyone seizes by the breast a young woman belonging to the commons he shall pay her 5s compensation."\(^{15}\)

and, "If this [outrage] is done to a woman of higher birth, the compensation to be paid shall increase according to the wergeld."\(^{16}\)

Note that there is a very striking cultural similarity between the Anglo-Saxon culture and our own, even though we have not incorporated it into our law code. The higher the status of the woman the more offensive, and expensive, the


\(^{16}\) Ibid.
status of the woman the more offensive, and expensive, the seizing of a breast becomes. From the laws of Ine we have an interesting comparison between legitimate and illegitimate children not dissimilar in the basic sense to our modern laws.

For legitimate children:

If a husband has a child by his wife and the husband dies, the mother shall have her child and rear it, and [every year] 6 shillings shall be given for its maintenance—a cow in summer and an ox in winter: the relatives shall keep the family home until the child reaches maturity.\(^{17}\)

For illegitimate children (if disowned):

He who begets an illegitimate child and disowns it shall not have the wergeld at its death, but its lord and the king shall [have it].\(^{18}\)

These two laws show much of the same concern for children's welfare that we have in our laws today. Whether or not the laws were followed to the letter is a matter for debate. Many laws in the past can reveal some of the thoughts on women, at least as ideas, that were held commonly enough to be included in the law. We have to remember though that the inclusion of a law in a legal code does not constitute significant exposure of women’s lives. As Christiane Klapisch-Zuber comments:

Thus the history of women in the Middle Ages is above all characterized by its judicial formalism, the unrepresentative nature of the examples eternally cited and discussed and the unexplained acceptance of

\(^{17}\) Ibid. p.49.

\(^{18}\) Ibid. p.45.
the traditional roles judged as natural.19

Conventional methods, topics, and subjective attitudes all contribute to history and can be a positive force but there are many new considerations that must be taken into account when dealing with women’s history.

All historians eventually find themselves studying a specific time and place based on their own interests, and they must do whatever they can to bring a new fullness to the record of that place and time with which they deal.

All historians must establish the limits of time, place, group or event, and purpose within which their investigation of a particular topic will be confined, and set the definitions and methodologies by which it will be guided. Thus when examining women’s activities in the past there must be a clear distinction between women’s history and feminist history, as well as between masculinity and femininity, and male and female. There is much confusion and disagreement about these terms, and while the differences are very difficult to establish and define it must be accomplished in order to place historical investigation into the proper context. It is imperative, therefore, that at the very beginning of this thesis, these terms be clearly defined, and once established that they be used correctly and consistently throughout the following discussion.

It is, however, not reasonable to impose one's own preferences upon all those in the field. The following distinctions are therefore my own and apply to this thesis and are not intended to be viewed as universally applicable, although I hope that they find favor among my fellow feminist historians. Male and female are biological terms used to distinguish the differences in function in the process of reproduction between men and women which are unchanging. Feminine and Masculine are terms of gender roles which are established by society and which are changeable at any time based upon the particular circumstances encountered within a specific culture.

As to the differences between women's history and feminist history, there are a variety of books in the category of women's history that should be considered only as the recorded activities of a group of women or one specific woman, and are produced with very specific limits on interpretations. One thing that these categories have in common is that they often only address a very few women and while they attempt to represent a number of women, they are too narrow in scope to accomplish that task. Many women's histories are very simply the editing of a diary, the value of which cannot be disputed, but they do not give any extensive interpretation of the contents. One example of this is the diary of the household accounts of Queen Elinor
of Castile, the wife of Edward I of England. The accounts are very interesting but most of the interpretation is left up to the individual reader. It would be far better for the author to express an in-depth considered opinion of the meanings of the entries so that others might begin to understand some part of the reality of Eleanor's life and perhaps the influences she exerted on others in her time. As an example there is one entry in which Eleanor advances one of her maids a sum of money so that she might go home to visit her mother who was ill. This simple act, when taken into account with the whole of the diary, might prove to be a valuable insight into Eleanor's personality. Women's history, then, in many cases does not give us a full interpretation and is often lacking in detailed interpretation. It does not stress an impression of the realities of the women which are being dealt with.

Feminist history, as described by Ann-Louise Shapiro in her book Feminists Revision History, gives us a slightly different perspective.

Feminist historians have been particularly concerned to tease out the conditions---cultural and disciplinary, conscious and unconscious, discursive and material---that have informed the construction of the historical narrative.

Each small fragment that can be extracted about a

---


woman's life in the past gives new fullness to the histori-
cal record as a whole and thus enriches our understanding.

Shapiro's is an assessment that attempts to reveal the
intricacies of approaching history from a feminist perspec-
tive which must deal not only with incorrect interpreta-
tions of the past, and attempt to correct them, but must
deal also with the development and application of new meth-
odologies that may not be acceptable to a wide audience at
their inception.

Feminist history, then, requires an acute awareness of
the secondary sources, their authors, and their personal
prejudices and preferences as well as the sociological fac-
tors at work among the people of the age in which we work.
It is necessary to sort out all of the subjective material
which erroneously presents the history of the period under
investigation by coloring it with androcentric mentalities
and replace it with a balanced and truthful representation
of the period, including all of the social factors that
shaped the popular interpretation.

Our view of the past is formed by a very few individ-
uals whose works have survived into our own age, and by
those who interpret them. The truth may be revealed from
within the surviving texts, or, as is more likely, a false-
hood appearing as the truth is found which corresponds to
the personal interests and beliefs of the interpreter. We
can find what we are looking for in the historical record
and so we must be very careful that what we seek is not
what we long to find but what must be a reasonable conclu-
sion. Even if we can translate another language into our own, do we really understand all of its various meanings, its innuendoes, and its idiosyncrasies? Do we ever really know what a particular text meant exactly to an individual living at the time it was written?

Working in women's history is not easy, nor should it be, but the accomplishment far outweighs the struggle.

Numerous authors have stated the problems and the joys of pursuing women's history. Daphne Patai in particular offers us some vivid accounts of the problems which can befall the feminist historians in their research and teaching.

When asked about the circumstances that led them to abandon Women's Studies programs, all three women said they had found it increasingly difficult to do intellectual work in a hostile and intolerant environment.22

These three instructors are typical of the problems associated with the teaching of Women's Studies and Women's History.

One result was that:

Confronting competing demands and pressures, Women's Studies adopted two self-defeating practices: academic separatism and a deference to political activism.23

Both of these actions caused a decline in those willing to pursue Women's Studies and Women's history and the number of courses offered to fall.

23. Ibid. p.5.
Others, however, convey the elation found in awakening women’s minds to their past. Gerda Lerner first notes that:

> We, who create Women’s History, as we seek to uncover the female past and interpret it, are often an embattled lot, struggling for the right to teach what we research and to win professional recognition not only for our work but for the field in which we work.\(^2\)

And that:

> Women’s History is indispensable and essential to the emancipation of women.... Women’s History changes their lives. Even short-term exposure to the past experience of women, such as two-week institutes and seminars, has the most profound psychological effect on women participants.\(^2\)

These statements can, and will no doubt, be argued about for a very long time but only an individual who has taught women’s history to women can really appreciate the reaction of the students. To have a student come to you after class and tell you that they have now found a new respect for themselves and for women as a whole is a revelation as to the importance of getting an accurate history to women. Women are truly amazed by the history that they have never heard, and once started on the path to a fuller presentation of women in the past they find it very hard to stop questing for more. Most women have had little but nonsense thrown at them since their first encounter with history. Elsie Boulding provides us with an excellent example by pointing out that: “We have created a myth called


the ‘Evolution of Mankind’ from our fragments. One of the many strange things about this myth is that it does not include women”, an example she notes is that “McNeill’s The Rise of the West (1963), contains two mentions of women in 1,000 pages.”

We can catch a few faint echoes of women’s lives in the past from which we may glean one more small portion of the reality for women in the past if we train our ears to hear them correctly. For example, in the collection of the works of thirteenth-century women poets in Occitania there occur the following lines by the poetess Isabella:

Elias Cairel, you’re a phoney
if I ever saw one
like a man who says he’s sick
when he hasn’t got the slightest pain.

There is little left to the imagination in this brief poem. We find ourselves bound to a woman in the past with what we would assume to be a full understanding of her opinion of this man, and we are in full sympathy.

In another selection the poetess the Countess of Dia laments:

Of things I’d rather keep in silence I must sing:
so bitter do I feel toward him
whom I love more than anything...

It is of course very dangerous to assume that the mind and thus the reality of a person in the past would be com-

---

28. Ibid.
pletely in tune with our own minds some centuries later, but there are in some cases, as seen above, almost unmis-takable similarities between these voices from the past and those of today.

In the description of the differences between female and male sexuality paraphrased in Duby's *History Of Women* he notes that Hildegard of Bingen stated: "...in men that pleasure tended to be sudden and violent, whereas in women it was more like the sun, which gently and steadily sheds its heat upon the earth, that it may bear fruit." Sheri Hite gives a more modern version of the same idea: "Have men missed the boat because of the total focus our society teaches them to have on intercourse, on an always aggres-sive, domineering, goal-oriented definition of their sexu-ality?" These two women writing eight hundred years apart both see the same problem, although in slightly different ways. Feminist historians must search out these meager threads that run through history and then apply them to a vision of the reality of women in the past.

Just as assuredly as Virginia Woolf was waved off the "Turf" of the "Fellows and Scholars" by the "Beadle" of a typical English college, many modern feminist historians are waved off by conventional methodology and canonical

---

thinking. We must, however, even in the face of adversity plod on treading off the path onto the "Turf" when and where ever we can.

There is, of course, much more at stake than the accurate presentation of women's history. The very nature of women's lives can be drastically improved upon or devastated according to the way in which women's history is interpreted and by whom. Most sociologists and some psychologists agree that as a nation America is truly wasting nearly half of its human resources by teaching our women inferiority and subordination. Accurate women's history can change that, change women, change men, and change society.

We have seen, the conventional approaches to history are not always appropriate to the pursuit of women's history. Feminist historians have striven to answer the question "What is the reality of women's lives in the period under study?" In doing so they have had not only to reexamine past interpretations but also to adopt new approaches. We know in our own age that women do not think in the same way as men. Women do not learn in the same way as men. Women do not see the world in the same way as men. In general women do not exist in the world created by the male mind and so their own world must be sought out and put into print if they are to understand the past in terms of the reality of women's lives. Once again it is of course a very shaky business trying to impress our views on the inhabitants of the past but there are some very definite clues that tell us that some things were the same in the
past as they are now and also there are some realities that haven’t changed. The facts of menstruation and nine-month pregnancies are not easily debatable, it is a fact of the female. If the very knowledge that women have gone on unchanged in some ways for a very long time can be found it is even more clearly brought home to us that some facets of women’s lives are shared by women across time. Women need to know that, just as assuredly as men need to know their continuing role in society to be able to define themselves.

Even though such evidence is rare we can turn to texts such as *The Medieval Women's Guide To Health* written by the 11th century Italian female physician Trotula from Salerno in Italy. In this text Trotula describes numerous details of both the female and the feminine that can be easily recognized by women today. Things that range from breach births and the treatment of genital diseases to the quelling of the passions of a too sexually demanding mate, things that still plague women in our own age. If Trotula were suddenly to find herself in the office of a modern female/feminist gynecologist, and they could both speak a mutual language, she would immediately find a correspondence between them professionally even though they were separated by nine hundred years in time.

Feminist historians have a particular responsibility

"There is an ongoing debate among scholars as to whether Trotula was a man or a woman. I, after having read the text, I am convinced that Trotula was a woman, for, her insight into the diseases, problems, and concerns of women is far too extensive to have been common knowledge for men, even medical men."
to women, themselves, the historical profession, and society as a whole to be both accurate and thorough in their endeavors. There is no other single element in the development of self in the sociological/psychological sense that has a greater influence on an individual than their history. By providing women with their true history we offer them the opportunity to see their whole self in relation to human history, without which they possess only a portion of their place in society and that portion is predominantly male oriented. It is also of the utmost importance to get accurate women's history to men so we can begin to reverse the cultural concepts of woman's inferiority and subordination that have plagued women over many centuries in the West.

The search for a more accurate women's history has to lead us to areas outside those normally used in the historical profession. We cannot simply rely on the surviving texts nor the sparse archaeological finds to tell us what it was like to be a woman in the past. The search may lead us into unfamiliar territory but every avenue must be explored none the less. History is an adventure and so the adventurous will do well.
CHAPTER II

USING LINGUISTIC FACTORS IN THE INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY

Language is one aspect of human culture that can reveal some of the most deeply embedded beliefs and sympathies that have developed within a specific culture over the course of numerous generations and that find no representation in any other surviving aspect of that culture. Linguistic features can be divided into those portions that are a natural development from within a culture by the people themselves, as an expression of their collective cultural experience, and those portions that are impressed upon a culture by outside sources of influence such as religious or political ideals.

From those portions of language that are an intrinsic part of a culture we can extract information not readily available from the surviving written records. A book in and of itself cannot reveal the mind of a large group of people simply by the fact that they were not included in its composition. A book is the effort of a single author, no matter how many individuals may have offered an opinion to the author or contributed to the author's training and socialization. A book only tells us the impression, of what life was like, of one person living in the past at a particular place and in a particular time. We see only one viewpoint.
A second feature of a single book is that it will also contain the public face of the author, or that face that the author wishes us to see. Each human being has several faces that he or she presents to various portions of society. Just as we present one face to the individual for whom we work, so we present a different face to a tavern companion. We know which face we are presenting and what is true and what is false about it, but we can never know the same things about the employer or companion, no matter how well we believe we know them. In the same sense we in no way can really know the inner thoughts and feelings of an author from reading a text produced by that author.

A text can, of course, be very valuable in that it will give us a good deal of insight into the personality of an individual, and in the case of a very important or influential individual that insight can be crucial to the interpretation of their actions. In reference, however, to the general population we are at a disadvantage when we rely only on surviving texts.

We have to dig much deeper into language if we are to find a reliable source for historical interpretation.

Linguistics is one of those areas that can reveal much to us if we know what sort of information to seek out and how to use the information once found. We must however begin at the foundations of language, and thus linguistic study, with the very acquisition of language itself. The acquisition process begins with the child and so we must begin there as well.
A newborn child does not use language, in the sense that an adult understands it, for its reference to the world. For example, the newborn does not conceive mother or father through the use of words but through the sensations that the child receives from both parents, as well as other individuals. These sensations act as a communication system for the newborn. When the child senses its mother picking it up and caressing it, it senses the caring and loving nature of the mother and these sensations can be perceived and attached to the recognizable features of the mother. A source of comfort and nourishment is understood even though no name, or word, is attached to those feelings. The name, or perhaps label, "mother" is added at a later stage of development. The newborn can sense cold, hot, dry, and moist but has no words for these, they simply remain sensory data and the newborn learns appropriate responses to the sensations it receives. When cold or hot the newborn will likely react with crying, which is one of the responses that the newborn uses to indicate its discomfort or dissatisfaction with a situation. Crying brings relief and so the cry is one of the first outward expressions that the newborn uses. These sensations will stay with the newborn throughout its life even though the perception of "mother" may change as language is acquired and opinion is formed.

The newborn, then, acquires a set of identifiable ideas that later become tagged with words which represent those ideas.
As we grow older, we add to the basic concepts we have learned as we acquire more and more information. As we find out about reproduction and the actual experience of childbirth we add this information to that which we began with, and our concept of mother increases and changes as we mature and learn. We also begin to hear the opinions of others and add these to our growing collection of information. We also move from tangible to intangible concepts of experience as we mature.

Tangible elements of human experience are very easily understood even if there is no language to connect them.

If we were to stand in a group of people from various countries who all spoke different languages and each person held out one of his or her hands, pointed to it with the other, and gave the word for it from their own languages it would be quickly and clearly understood by all that the anatomical feature at the end of the arm was indicated. We could all understand hand and arm and any other anatomical feature very easily even though we had no idea what the word spoken meant without the accompanying gesture.

Intangible elements of human experience are a very different matter. If a group of children were to stand with their mothers and then alternately point to themselves and to their mothers, the action of pointing might be connected with the concept of mother. However, if all the members of the group were adults, even though the group still consisted of mothers and children, and the children again pointed to themselves and to their mothers, it might
not be as easily understood that mother was indicated. Much is hidden without a spoken language.

So it is with the real feelings concerning women. The superficial view that we find in the surviving literature may not have anything to do with the actual view of the people. The actual feelings of the people may be very different from those encountered in the literature. The whole of any population may have some common threads of perception woven into their cultural fabric, but certainly these would very likely be few in number. However, discovering even a few would be of immense help to the historian as they would give a broader base from which to work. We have to ask ourselves if there is a part of language that might reveal some of the internalized, yet unexpressed, as far as the surviving literature is concerned, feelings of the people that are generally recognized throughout the whole of the culture.

Certainly the warrior leaders of Anglo-Saxon society might have had some serious difficulty in allowing the name of a woman to be attached to a stronghold if there were a general feeling of the subordinate status of women within the society.

This is a role that place-names can play in the interpretation of historical data in relation to women. Place-names are an area of cultural expression among the Anglo-Saxons in which the full spectrum of society is represented. Numerous people in Anglo-Saxon society at any point in their history could have changed, modified, or re-
placed the Anglo-Saxon place-names that have survived into our own age in England, but in general they did not. It is especially true of feminine place-names. If there was a general feeling that women were inferior within Anglo-Saxon culture, numerous individuals from the king on down could have replaced the feminine names with masculine names at any time they wished, or feminine names might not have been allowed to be applied at all. For feminine names to have survived for so long a period, from their inception to our own time, there must have been a general feeling of near equality between men and women at least in some aspects of Anglo-Saxon society.

For example, for the names of farmsteads to have survived with the name of the woman for which they were originally named, e.g. Alberwic (Northumbria), the farmstead of a woman named Aluburh or Alhburh, surviving as Abberwick in modern times, indicates that an elevated position of women in Anglo-Saxon society could have been supported by many more people than the few who tolerated the original naming in their midst. The local people living around the original farm of Aluburh (or Alhburh) had to have seen a woman as having the legal right to have her name attached to a parcel of land and the generations that followed had to have supported the concept as well. Indeed, the surviving laws of the Anglo-Saxons support this assumption. For example, many laws in the surviving law codes of several of the Anglo-Saxon kings fully support the inheritance rights of women.
These laws alone, however, give no real credence to the assumption that women in Anglo-Saxon England enjoyed an autonomy approaching that of men. As with any historical period, laws may very well indicate an ideal rather than a fact. In our own present time we have numerous laws designed to prevent discrimination against women yet women are still discriminated against, in the work place, in education, in the political arena, and in the economic structure. Laws cannot be relied upon to give an accurate view of the status of women in any period of history. Historians traditionally have used the law because some of the law survives from almost every period of history from ancient Egypt forward, and in some cases it is all that is available for the interpretation of women’s lives. Numerous books can be found with titles like Women in Athenian Law and Life or Women in Roman Law and Society. Both of these books use the laws of ancient Greece and Rome as one portion of the basis for their interpretation. The other portion is the surviving literature. Neither of these books really gives any sense of the reality of women’s lives in ancient Greece or Rome; rather, they merely state what the law says about women in these periods.

Place-names, however, are a very different matter.

For a farm to have been named for a woman means that several things had to have taken place. Firstly that she

had to have come into the property in some manner that was appropriate in Anglo-Saxon law. She would have had to inherit it or perhaps have it given as a morgengifu or bride gift. The first stage of coming into the property was perhaps the least complicated in the whole process. Secondly it seems reasonable to assume that the woman would have had to have been in good standing with the other folk who lived in the neighborhood of her property for them all to accept the use of a woman’s name for a piece of land, and as a landmark for direction. In most cases the name of a farm, or other feature, would have been for the purposes of identifying the locale to others. Thus the name of a specific piece of land, or topographical feature, would have been for the purpose of locating a point on the landscape much as we do today. The farm of Aluburh or a fording of cattle upon a particular stream would be recognized by all for the purpose of direction. It could even be used for the direction of strangers who had but to ask the name of a farm to assure themselves they were on the right track.

This acceptance had to have been almost universal among the population for a name to have stuck. Not only the local folk but the thegns and earls as well had to have accepted the system for a name to have been applied and to have remained. Even the king may have had to have been in agreement with the fact that a stronghold was named after a woman, e.g. Alderbury, Wiltshire, originally Aethelwere byrig c. 972AD.

The Germanic peoples did have some very strict naming
rules when it came to personal names as is documented in the names of rulers, and their families, of the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.\(^{35}\) The naming took place in three very distinct forms: alliteration, variation, and repetition and is found to be fairly consistent throughout the Anglo-Saxon period.

Alliteration is the use of the same sound at the beginning of two different words or names, such as Aelfred and Eadweard.\(^{36}\) Variation can take several forms e.g.: Aelfred and Aethelred; Eadgar and Eadmund; Gode and Godifu, and Beorhtwulf and Wulfbeorht.\(^{37}\) Repetition simply repeats the name. Thus "Alliteration repeats the initial sound of a name; variation repeats a name-theme; repetition is the use of identically the same name for different persons."\(^{38}\)

We know from the genealogies of the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms that these personal naming practices were very rigidly followed throughout the period of the fifth to the ninth centuries and well into the eleventh century in Wessex as far as the royal families were concerned. The same practices were also followed in the families of the non-royals for which records exist.\(^{39}\) We can therefore assume that the common folk would have also used these same practices in the naming of family members, mimicking the exam-
ple of those of higher status. For these practices to have survived for so long a period would indicate that they were part of a deep cultural tradition that was accepted by the population as a whole and represented a general feeling of community among Anglo-Saxon families. Such cultural patterns as name giving show us one of the things around which a people might rally and that give that sense of belonging that humans so very much desire.

This very formalized practice in dealing with personal names would also indicate that the Anglo-Saxons would have had similar thoughts when it came to place-names even though no specific information remains except for the place-names themselves. Place-names too give a sense of community and belonging to a people and do not usually result from the influence of outside sources. In the United States and in Canada there are numerous cities, towns, and villages that are the names of those that were left when families immigrated to America. A modern Canadian map reads almost like a similar map of modern England. The same is true of much of the eastern United States and even some areas deep into the west.

It is comforting to have the immediate and nearby habitation sites named for those that had become so familiar in one’s homeland. The senses of identity and belonging are two human needs that are very hard to shake off and place-names are one way in which these basic needs can be met.

The naming of places after well known persons, ob-
jects, and ideas is not new at all and we find this prac-
tice dating back to the beginnings of recorded history in
such places as Egypt and Mesopotamia as well as the Levant
and most of the other ancient Mediterranean countries.
Projecting this idea into the Anglo-Saxon period of England
we see the Anglo-Saxons simply practising a common human
trait, and what that might reveal about women can be a sig-
nificant indicator of women’s status in Anglo-Saxon cul-
ture.

Place-names can show us some of what the Anglo-Saxons
treasured culturally. We can find out what the population
as a whole may have held dear. We can see some of the as-
pects of Anglo-Saxon culture that had been so deeply embed-
ded into their world view that they had become an intrinsic
part of their lives. We can catch a glimpse of what an An-
glo-Saxon man might have felt about an Anglo-Saxon woman in
his subconscious even though there is no evidence for it in
the surviving literature. Place-names give us a unique in-
sight into the minds of a people who lived more than a
thousand years ago in a way that cannot be achieved by any
other method.

To tap this rich resource we must simply find a method
to transform the information into a usable form.
CHAPTER III

THE IMPLICATIONS OF PLACE-NAME DATA FOR THE AUTONOMY OF WOMEN IN LATE ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

The title of the book Signposts to the Past by Margaret Gelling gives only a small indication of the possibilities that place-name interpretation offers to the historian of Anglo-Saxon England. Anywhere one travels in England it takes only a glance at the signposts that stand at virtually every intersection of roads across the whole of the country to acquire immediately an insight into the history of the locale. It takes only the brief reading of any number of texts directed to the amateur historian to start reading the past. The memorization of only a few word endings such as "-tun", "-wic", "-thorp", and "-ham" is all that is needed to begin to understand the Anglo-Saxon landscape. Soon one begins to understand some of the more subtle variations in the signs such as the difference between the use of "-ing" as a last or next to last element in a place name e.g. Hastings (the settlement of the family or followers of a man named Haesta) as opposed to Yedingham (the homestead of the family of a man named Eada). Bit by bit the world of farms, villages, enclosures, hills, valleys, fords, and woodland clearings begins to take shape. Any road map book can be used as a study guide to the past landscape. A day outing on a Sunday can turn into an exploration of some past rural district with perhaps its
manor and the surrounding features. There are countless hours of enjoyment for those, so inclined, who pursue the general study of place names. It is a wonderfully rewarding hobby.

On a more academic level place names can give rise to many interesting questions and then help to supply the answers.

When one begins to look a bit more closely at the information that place names contain many possibilities present themselves. As with the differentiation between those farmsteads (or villages) that were held in women's names as opposed to men's names. The questions present themselves "Why would there be a place name of a village that contains the name of a woman in the midst of what appears to be, according to the surviving literature, a male oriented and dominated social system?" and "How could such a name survive unchanged for so long a period of time?" when so many men have owned the property since its original naming after a woman.

The answers to such questions, while very difficult to explore, can have a tremendous impact on the interpretation of the history of the Anglo-Saxon age.

When we consider the sum literary legacy, poetry and prose, left to us from the Anglo-Saxon age we find ourselves having very little indeed. The entire corpus could be carried about with only some difficulty. From that body of surviving texts we can gain only a very limited perspective of life in Anglo-Saxon England. We only have the
opinions of a very few people who actually lived during that time and we must suspect that their impressions of the world around them would be biased and colored just as ours are today, as Michael Stanford says:

The central problems of historical knowledge have been put into a nutshell by the historian of Germany Hajo Holborn, who said that they 'hinge upon the fact that an objective knowledge of the past can only be obtained through the subjective experience of the scholar.\(40\)

The single largest source of English place names is the Domesday Book of King William the First "The Conqueror" which is a catalog of all the property in the whole of England and was compiled in 1086AD. The entries in Domesday Book are the basis for most of the volumes of the English Place-Name Society. The entries in Domesday Book do not themselves however give any indication of the gender of the person for whom the farmsteads and other habitative sites were originally named. E.g. for Abberton ('The Farmstead or Village of a woman called Eadburh')\(41\) the three entries in Domesday Book read:

Ralph of Marcy holds Abberton which Siward, a free man, held before 1066 as one manor, for 11/2 hides and 1 virgate. Always 1 plough in lordship. Then 1/2 men's plough, now same. Then 4 small holders, now 3; then 1 slave, now none. Woodland, 40 pigs; meadow 4 acres 4 cattle, 100 sheep, Value 60s.\(42\)

Ranulf holds Abberton in lordship, which 1 free man

---

held before 1066 as a manor, for 1 1/2 hides and 1 virgate. Always 1 plough in lordship; 1/2 men's plough. 4 smallholders; 1 slave. Woodland, 60 pigs; meadow, 4 acres. Value then 60s; now [50].

As can be seen these names do not give any but the current information at the time of the compilation of the Domesday Book and so there is no indication at all that the property was ever held by and named after a woman except for the place name itself the meaning of which the Normans may or may not have been aware of.

There lies hidden then a vast store of information in English place names and the concealment of women in them is only one small portion of the knowledge they contain. Place names then because they contain some of the deep cultural features of the Anglo-Saxons offer a unique insight into the mind of the Anglo-Saxon. The information to be gained is valuable but the historian is well advised to be cautious in the pursuit of place names and ensure the method of inquiry is set at the beginning of the study.

In approaching place-name studies, then, great care must be taken to define clearly the purpose and the scope of the study at hand within specific parameters. For the purpose of this thesis only masculine and feminine names that were attached to farmsteads and villages (the direct descendants of farmsteads) were examined, although some of the examples of the feminine names attached to fortified places are addressed as well. The reason for this is to find one category of place names and then look for any in-

37

Ibid.
dications of female social autonomy which can then be used for the basis of a further and more comprehensive study. Therefore only those names that contain the indication of farmstead or village are used.

It should be noted that in general it appears to be the case that names derived from natural or topographical features are the most common. Names such as hill, valley, fording, or even particular types of trees and birds and animals, are very common in Anglo-Saxon place names. In the later stages of the Anglo-Saxon period the influence of Christianity can be seen in those names that are applied to the various religious properties. All of these variations must be more closely examined at some time in the future in order to make a total estimate of the influences of the feminine on place-names in general.

Place-names although they have been part of the English historical heritage for a very long time are only in this century becoming a very important source of information for historians.

Earlier historians recognized the value of place names to historical research but did not fully appreciate their full potential as a tool in such research. The early researchers also did not completely understand the methods needed to extract the sum of the information contained in place-names. Over the first half of the present century place name research has been greatly refined and has become a widely recognized, if not completely understood, historical research tool by many historians. Approaching any his-
The historical topic from the perspective of place names requires some basic understanding of the Germanic principles of personal naming for they are a considerable origin of the place-names themselves. Personal naming among the Germanic peoples has been the topic of a variety of research projects over the course of the current century and understanding has improved steadily during that time. Anthroponymy, the study of personal names, generates a good deal of the material needed for place-name research and historical application.

Many place names contain a personal name in combination with some other descriptive element that then distinguishes a particular topographic site. Examples such as "Abberton Essex Edburgetuna 1086 (DB). 'Farmstead or estate of a woman called Eadburh'. OE pers. name + -tun" or "Tetbury Glos. Tettanbyrg c.900, 'Fortified place of a woman called Tette'. OE pers. name + burh (dative byrig)" are the most common forms combining the personal name with the topographical feature.

The origin of Germanic personal names lies in the tradition that "Early Germanic (custom) required that each

44. The two most common varieties of place names are: those which contain features that are derived from nature (e.g. hill, brook, ford, valley, or even tree) and those that combine a personal name with a topographical feature.
46. This name could also be the masculine Tetta.
47. Mills p. 323.
individual should have a single distinctive name. As described by Clark the distinctions of "forename" or "first-name" or especially "Christian name" are meaningless in the context of early Germanic naming practices. Therefore the term "personal Name" better suits the meaning that the Germanic peoples themselves would have understood in the application of personal names.

These personal names were formed in two basic varieties: the "uncompounded" that is those containing only a single element e.g. Tetta and Hengist, and the "compounded" that is those containing two (or more) elements e.g. Aelf-stan and Aelf-ric. Woolf noted that there were three basic types of formation of Anglo-Saxon personal names at least in the royal and noble genealogies. These types were alliteration, variation, and repetition. The Germanic people thus developed a vast store of personal names, many of which survive until today, and there are a vast number of Anglo-Saxon personal names that have survived and so not a small amount of research material is available.

49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid.
55. See p. 28 above.
Early on Searle provided a basic volume of Anglo-Saxon personal names in his *Onomasticon Anglo-Saxonicum* which still provides a very good basic guide especially to the beginner, but more modern authors have found some flaws in the work. Among these flaws are the fact that Searle tried to use all of the available documents containing any Anglo-Saxon names from the time of Bede to King John. The principal fault in this work then, according to modern authors, lies in the fact that Searle did not make any attempt to categorize the names regionally, socially, or chronologically which would have been much more helpful to modern historians.\(^5^7\) Despite this Veronica Smart says of the *Onomasticon* that "...though it can be faulted on detail (it) is only likely to be replaced by a multi-author computer project such as the *Datenbank mittelalterlicher Personennamenbelege*."\(^5^8\) Still for a basic catalog of Anglo-Saxon personal names the *Onomasticon* is the largest single source until the databases are completed. Thus armed with some basic personal name tools the best source is the volumes of the English Place-Name Survey at the University of Nottingham. These volumes are currently the most complete collection of English place-names and the basis for much


place-name research. On a much smaller scale is the concise *A Dictionary of English Place Names* by A. D. Mills.\(^5^9\) This is the book which I chose for this study because of the smaller size. A larger study using the corpus of the English Place-Name Survey might well take a few years and would thus be designed to be more comprehensive, indeed an all inclusive study of the feminine and masculine in English place names.

The data was gathered by reading all of the entries in the Mills book and then noting those which indicated that the original property was either a farmstead or a village (usually derived from a farmstead) named for a woman or a man. The organization of the counties was based on the post-1972 apportionment and so has no real meaning for the original Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Thus the study was designed to cover the entire country and not to single out individual locales. There was also no attempt to include those names of Scandinavian origin even if one element might be of Anglo-Saxon origin. I do not believe that the inclusion of the Scandinavian names would make an appreciable difference in the overall percentages, however it will be interesting to include these names in a future study. I have also not included any place-names which are either possible or probable. These two words mean two very different things and even though probable place names might well be included I chose to leave out any place names for which

there appears to be some doubt. Once again I do not believe that the exclusion of names of less than the highest certainty would change the percentages to any significant degree. The data then should reflect the distribution of Anglo-Saxon masculine and feminine place-names, over the whole of England, which originated with the naming of a particular farm or village for its holder at the time of its naming.

There are, however, some problems that might well have an adverse effect on the data used in this study. Firstly is the problem with the genitive in the weak noun declension. Since there is no differentiation between the feminine and masculine in this declension we have no way of knowing, in some cases, which is the correct gender if we have no other evidence for the name other than in the place name. This means that some names will not be included because a positive determination of gender could not be established. How many names are thus affected would be difficult to estimate. There does not appear to be enough evidence to apply standard statistical methods to determine the possibilities of masculine or feminine for any specific name that falls into the weak noun declension. It is therefore not plausible to estimate the possible variables for these names as such an estimate would be only speculation and probably biased by the evaluator’s preferences.

A second problem is that we have no way of knowing how many names might have been lost over time. It is possible that farmsteads and villages changed names as they changed
hands at some time in the past. Any particular farm or village may well have been named for a particularly respected individual, female or male. This could mean that a place-name was subject to change if the original owner was replaced by an individual of higher status in their own eyes and in the eyes of the others in the immediate locale. There is no hard evidence for this during the Anglo-Saxon period but it must be considered in the overall estimate of the collected data.

One more recent study looked into the matter of names radiating from a central location.60 This study looked at English surnames that are the same as place-names. There is some evidence from this study that some surnames derive from and remain in the territory surrounding the place-name from which they come. This incidence is very small and it would appear that much further work must be done to make this information a useful tool in place-name studies.

This is a point, however, for identity of individuals with a specific location, and thus there could also be a connection with an individual and that could be the reason for the survival of women’s names in Anglo-Saxon place names. If a particular woman was much respected in her community she might well have been honored by the attachment of her name to the property she held and her reputation having spread and been handed down maintained the pla-

ce-name over the immediate years and having established it firmly it passed on into modern times.

Many women of the ordinary class might have been singled out for honor as a healer or sage. The Germanic people in general held women in high regard for their abilities to connect with the spiritual world, divine the future, and provide healing. This general tendency was universal and the women in Germanic culture, much like the Celts, were cognisant of the abilities of women.

Much stronger evidence would be needed however before any conclusions could be conclusively drawn.

Now to examine the data that is directly relevant to the consideration of women in Anglo-Saxon England.

Thus we have a total of 33 place-names for farmsteads or villages which are based on the names of women and 383 which are based on the names of men.

The data shows some very interesting things but also generates some further questions. In general the data shows some consistencies and correlations but also some variations. The data was collected from the whole of England rather than from a specific geographic location and there was no attempt, in this study, to form any sort of chronological correlations. In this sense I might be criticized as was Searle, however I do not think that there is any reason thus far to assume that it would even be possible to divide the data into chronological periods as most of the place names are from the Domesday Book.

61 See 59 Above.
Only a very few of the place names can be verified from an earlier period. I think that the significance lies in the fact that the names of women were used so widely and were so significantly present. The geographical patterns of the female place-name distribution is at present puzzling. The ratio of feminine to masculine names is 1 in 11.6 or approximately 8.6% across the whole of the country. This I find is significant in the fact that these names were applied in this quantity to farmsteads in the first place and then they survived for so long a period. The female place name pattern seems to be 1 or 2 in each of the counties in which they appear, indeed 23 out of 46 counties (post 1972) have no feminine place-names. Exactly 50%. Only one county, Cambridgeshire, has three feminine place-names. The remaining 22 counties have either the 1 or 2. By count 14 have only 1 feminine place-name and 8 have 2 feminine place names. The two count is just over 50% of the one count.

The masculine shows a very much greater variation in place-name distribution. All but three counties, Oxfordshire, Tyne/Wear, and West Yorkshire have masculine place-names. The range in number is from 1 (three counties: Cornwall, South Yorkshire, and the Isle of Wight) to 51 (Norfolk). The remainder of the counties have a range spreading from more numerous on the low side to much more sparse on the high side. Those counties with the highest numbers in the masculine after Norfolk are Suffolk, 43; North Yorkshire, 20; then we have 10 counties in the teens from a high of 19 to a low of 10. So, of 46 counties only
3 or 6.52% have numbers of 20 or above. Ten counties or
21.74% have numbers ranging between 10 and 19. Finally we
have 33 counties or 71.74% that have numbers ranging bet-
ween 0 and 9. It is interesting that the two highest coun-
ties, Norfolk and Suffolk, are neighbors. There are a few
other comparisons to consider. The smallest difference
between masculine and feminine is in Greater Manchester in
which there are 2 of each. From there the range becomes
greater. Most ranges favor the lower side, falling into
the 1 in 3 to the 1 in 10 range. Overall the masculine
range is not surprising in that there is a very wide range
of numbers. The fact that there is almost a consistent
distribution of feminine names is surprising.

One thing that is apparent is that there was a corre-
lation between the number of surviving Anglo-Saxon feminine
place-names and the Danelaw. In most of those counties
where Danelaw existed there are no Anglo-Saxon feminine
place-names. However since I did not include those names
which had one Scandinavian element and one Anglo-Saxon ele-
ment the result is not conclusive. There are also no An-
glo-Saxon feminine place-names in Cornwall. This again is
not surprising as Cornwall was a Celtic area as was Wales.
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

I believe that a ratio of 1:11, feminine to masculine place names in the category of farmsteads and villages, is a significant factor in demonstrating the degree of autonomy held by women in late Anglo-Saxon England, but I also believe that much further study is justified, indeed demanded, by this beginning. When the remainder of the evidence; those female names associated with ecclesiastical properties, female names associated with topographical features, female field names, and the other names that contain the names of women are examined, a much clearer picture of women’s autonomy will be available.

From this study I believe that certain conclusions can be drawn with a moderate degree of confidence for the present.

As the Anglo-Saxon people moved across the face of England establishing themselves as the new owners of the land they carried with them some of their deep cultural values. Among those values was a high regard for women. As the Anglo-Saxons carved out a new home for themselves they had to identify not only their own personal space but the space surrounding them. This they did, as they had done in their original home territories, with the use of place-names. The place name for any given specific locale
was derived from the cultural tendencies of the Germanic peoples. The regard for nature is evident in the use of bird, and animal, and plant life names in the formation of place-names. The regard for women is evident in the number of place names containing their personal names. The importance that the Germanic people attached to personal names would indicate that they did not simply improvise, from a flight of whimsy, in the ascribing of place names. Careful consideration was used in the selection of place names and the Anglo-Saxons took care to maintain the place names that were originally ascribed through the generations. In the Anglo-Saxon territories that fell under the control of Danelaw it is shown that the Danes had the tendency to change the first element of the existing place names to personal names of their own. This would also demonstrate the importance of personal names within the Germanic culture.

Evidence for this importance, for the whole of society, of personal and place names, and the status of women, is not found in any other surviving records from the Anglo-Saxons. We do not find women significantly autonomous, if at all, in “Beowulf” or in the “Battle of Maldon”. We also have no indication for women’s autonomy in “The Wife’s Lament”. In fact in none of the surviving literature do we find women in positions other than generally subservient and this is the general impression of women in the Anglo-Saxon age. The only area of study giving evidence for the degree of autonomy of women are the surviving place names.

From this point place names must be explored for any
further information applicable to women's history in the Anglo-Saxon age. Following the possession, and advances and declines, of the autonomy of women from the beginnings of Anglo-Saxon migration into England to the early stages of the Norman occupation will allow historians to fill in some of the missing parts of the historical record. The other half of the human species, mostly missing, must be included if an accurate history is to be produced. I believe this study shows that place names in England can offer a small advance in that area.
Appendix A

Place Name Data
## THE PLACE-NAME DATA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTY</th>
<th>FEM</th>
<th>MAS</th>
<th>COUNTY</th>
<th>FEM</th>
<th>MAS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AVON</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>LANCs.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEDS.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>LEICS.</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BERKS.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>LINCS.</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUCKS.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>GTR. LONDON</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAMBS.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>MERSEY</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHES.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>NORFOLK</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLEVELAND</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>N. YORKS.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CORNWALL</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>NORTHANTS.</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUMBRIA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>NORTHUM.</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DERBS.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>NOTTS.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEVON</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>OXON.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DORSET</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>SHROPS.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DURHAM</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>SOMERSET</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. SUSSEX</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>S. YORKS.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESSEX</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>STAFFS.</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLOS.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>SUFFOLK</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GTR. MANCH.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>SURREY</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HANTS.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>TYNEWEAR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEREF. WORCS.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>WARWICKS.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HERTS.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>W. MIDS.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUMBER</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>W. SUSSEX.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. OF WIGHT</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>W. YORKS.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KENT</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>WILTS.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>383</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BIBLIOGRAPHY


