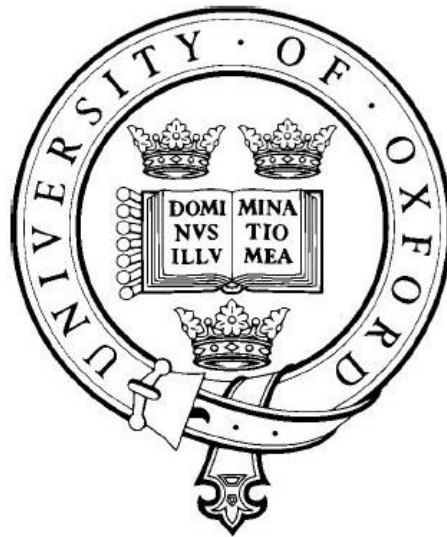


# Vernacular Literature in Eighth- and Ninth-Century Mercia



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## Abstract

This dissertation reads a group of Old English prose and verse texts that linguistic evidence suggests probably originated in Mercia, within the context of eighth- and ninth-century Mercian cultural and political history. This approach complements and supplements existing scholarship, offering evidence that the theory that a culture of vernacular translation and composition thrived in Mercia has fruitful explanatory powers. It articulates a theoretical narrative of the early period of Old English literature, and identifies two major trends that can be linked to the political and material culture of Mercia in the eighth and ninth centuries. The first is the proliferation of vernacular hagiography, both in prose and verse. In the first chapter, I offer an overview of Anglo-Saxon texts connected with the cult of Guthlac, a saint closely connected to the Mercian dynasty in the eighth and ninth centuries. This chapter offers an interpretation of Felix's *Vita sancti Guthlaci* as an iteration of Mercian identity, and highlights the way in which *Guthlac A* asserts and emphasizes the saint's Mercian identity. I then propose a revival of the cult of Guthlac linked to a crisis in the Mercian succession in the ninth century, to which the possibly Cynewulfian account of Guthlac's death in *Guthlac B*, the Old English prose translation of Felix's life, and the entries in the *Old English Martyrology*, may be connected. In Chapter 2, I offer a reading of the hagiographical poetry of Cynewulf, namely *Juliana* and *Elene*, in light of the remarkably – and arguably uniquely – powerful position of women in Mercia from the reign of Offa onwards. The early cult of *Juliana* appears to have a Mercian bias, and the empowered female saints in Cynewulf's works may also be connected to evidence for female literacy in the Tiberius-group manuscripts, all of which originate in eighth- and ninth-century Southumbria. In Chapter 3, I read the Old English translation of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*, a major though until recently little-studied prose work, in relation to other texts with a literal style of translation

and a hagiographical focus, and its apparent interest in Mercian conciliar culture. I also propose that the style of illumination of the earliest extant copies of the Old English *Historia ecclesiastica* may be influenced by Mercian, Tiberius style.

The second major trend which the material and literary culture of Mercia manifests in this period is an early Orientalism, imitating and appropriating Eastern models as signs of power and sophistication. Sculptures such as those at Breedon-on-the-Hill, Leicestershire, in which Mary is modelled on Byzantine sculpture, or the dinar of Caliph al-Mansur (773-4), reminted as coinage for Offa, demonstrate a deep engagement with Oriental culture prevalent in Mercia during this period. Several decorative elements in the eighth- and ninth-century Tiberius group manuscripts, which have stylistic affinities and are often associated with Mercia, also have Oriental origins. This same phenomenon is traceable in the literary record. For example, Cynewulf's works engage in various ways with different regions of the Orient, including the Mediterranean, Africa, Rome, Jerusalem and India. The *Old English Martyrology* combines Insular and continental saints with Eastern saints. The Oriental character of two of the prose texts of BL Cotton Vitellius A. xv., *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* and *The Wonders of the East*, both usually considered Mercian on linguistic grounds, has been long noted. Together with its manuscript neighbours, *Wonders* and *Beowulf*, I consider the *Letter*'s interest in the wider world, as well as its theorization of kingship, by which it might be considered a *speculum regum*.

This thesis reads these texts in the light of various forms of evidence for Mercian literary culture, including linguistic characteristics and preexisting scholarship. In so doing, it fleshes out a theoretical narrative of vernacular literature prior to the late ninth-century Alfredian renaissance.

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## Abbreviations

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ASE                | <i>Anglo-Saxon England</i>                                                                                                                                     |
| ASPR               | Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records                                                                                                                                     |
| CSASE              | Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England                                                                                                                       |
| DOE                | Toronto Dictionary of Old English                                                                                                                              |
| DOEC               | Toronto Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus                                                                                                                   |
| EEMF               | Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile                                                                                                                         |
| EHD                | D. Whitelock, <i>English Historical Documents, c. 500-1042</i> (London, 1996)                                                                                  |
| EKK                | B. A. E Yorke, <i>Early Kings and Kingdoms of Anglo-Saxon England</i> (London, 1990)                                                                           |
| ES                 | <i>English Studies</i>                                                                                                                                         |
| Fontes             | Fontes Anglo-Saxonici Database                                                                                                                                 |
| Gneuss and Lapidge | <i>Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: a Bibliographical Handlist of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100</i> (London, 2014)       |
| HE                 | Bede, <i>Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum</i> , ed. and trans. B. Colgrave and R.A.B Mynors (Oxford, 1991)                                               |
| HOEM               | R. D. Fulk, <i>A History of Old English Meter</i> (Philadelphia, 1992)                                                                                         |
| JEGP               | <i>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i>                                                                                                               |
| Ker                | N. R. Ker, <i>Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon</i> , reissued with supplement (Oxford, 1990)                                                    |
| MGH                | Monumenta Germaniae Historica                                                                                                                                  |
| N&Q                | <i>Notes and Queries</i>                                                                                                                                       |
| ODNB               | <i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>                                                                                                                 |
| OEB                | T. Miller, ed., <i>The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People</i> , 4 vols., EETS OS 95-96 and 110-111 (London: 1890-1898) |
| OEM                | C. Rauer, ed., <i>The Old English Martyrology: Edition, Translation and Commentary</i> , Anglo-Saxon Texts 10 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2013)                        |
| OEPG               | P. Gonser, ed., <i>Das angelsächsische Prosa-Leben des hl. Guthlac</i> , Anglist. Forsch. 27 (Heidelberg, 1909)                                                |
| PASE               | <i>Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England</i>                                                                                                                    |
| PMLA               | <i>Publications of the Modern Language Association</i>                                                                                                         |
| RES                | <i>Review of English Studies</i>                                                                                                                               |
| VsG                | Felix's <i>Vita sancti Guthlaci</i>                                                                                                                            |



## Introduction

Tracks of ancient occupation. Frail ironworks rusting in the thorn-thicket. Hearthstones;  
charred lullabies. A solitary axe-blow that is the echo of a lost sound. (XXVIII).<sup>1</sup>

This thesis is about the echoes of lost sounds, about a literary tradition articulated only in later copies, which is read here in the context of eighth- and ninth-century Mercian politics and culture, a period which has been little-studied in terms of its possible literary output. In this thesis, I read texts in the context of a cultural and historical narrative. The texts which have selected for analysis were chosen because of prior suggestions of Mercian origin, whether on the basis of linguistic evidence or subject matter. As examples of texts of significant length which might reflect the interests of a Mercian translator or author of the eighth or ninth century, I have chosen to focus on the early texts of the cult of St Guthlac (Felix's *Vita sancti Guthlaci*, the Old English poems *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B*, the Old English prose translation of the *VsG*, and the Old English *Martyrology*'s entries on figures associated with Guthlac's cult); Cynewulf's verse saints' lives *Elene* and *Juliana*, the Old English translation of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* (*OEB*) and the Old English translation of the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*.<sup>2</sup> In order to outline the position which this period occupies, both historically and in the history of English literature, I first offer an overview of the history of Mercia, followed by a brief history of English vernacular literature. I then contrast the style of translation often associated with Mercia, exemplified by Wærferth's translation of Gregory the Great's *Dialogi*, with later 'Alfredian' styles of translation, and survey scholarly arguments in favour of ascribing vernacular literature to Mercia in this period. Finally, I overview trends which run throughout the texts considered in this thesis,

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<sup>1</sup> G. Hill, *Mercian Hymns* (London, 1971).

<sup>2</sup> On *Andreas*, see below, p. 37.

which might gesture towards a common perspective that may have influenced the poets and translators responsible for these works.

Identifying the date and provenance of Old English texts is a notoriously contentious and even divisive issue.<sup>3</sup> It is impossible to prove that any of the texts considered here definitely originated in Mercia in the period in which I will read them. Indeed, individually considered, no single one of these cases constitutes ‘smoking-gun’ evidence for attributing any of these works to Mercia. Rather, the case is cumulative; each of these examples intersects with other examples.

However, as R. D. Fulk explains, complexity of evidence has no bearing on a theory’s accuracy:

Most science is of this sort, constructing and testing hypotheses, rendering probable (that is, *validating*) what cannot be proved. Validation almost never depends on a single, irrefutable piece of evidence: such usually carries less weight than a variety of probabilistic evidence. Theories, then, are evaluated not according to how easily they are validated, but how much they are capable of explaining.<sup>4</sup>

The strength of this approach is its ability to explain a large number of connections and correlations in relation to what is known about the history of English language and literature. It offers a plausible explanation for the apparent resurgence of the cult of Guthlac in the ninth century, and its accompanying production of vernacular materials of Guthlac’s cult. It identifies the unique ninth-century West Saxon removal of the office of queen as a reaction to the Mercian aggrandizement of queenship in the eighth and ninth centuries, caused by traditions of powerful royal and noble women and developments in the royal succession. It also helps to explain the remarkable survival of a number of Mercian royal princess’ saints’ cults. In examining the *OEB*, I interpret textual adaptations and omissions as a response to contemporary tastes for vernacular

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the ongoing debate about the origins of *Beowulf*, as reflected in L. Neidorf, ed., *The Dating of Beowulf: a Reassessment*, Anglo-Saxon Studies 24 (Cambridge, 2014) and reviews, i.e. C. Abram, ‘Review of Leonard Neidorf, ed., *The Dating of Beowulf: a Reassessment*’ in *Saga-Book* 39 (2015), 133-137; H. Magennis, ‘Review of Leonard Neidorf, ed., *The Dating of Beowulf: a Reassessment*’, *TOEBI Newsletter* 32 (2015), 3-6; G. Russom, ‘Review: Leonard Neidorf, (ed.). *The Dating of Beowulf: a Reassessment*’, *Anglia* 133 (2015), 397-402.

<sup>4</sup> *HOEM* §9; see also Neidorf, ‘Lexical Evidence for the Relative Chronology of Old English Poetry’, *SELIM* 20 (2013-14), 7-48 at 35.

hagiography, and developments in ecclesiastical and courtly culture. I then offer a hypothesis regarding the transmission of Mercian material, such as the *OEB*, into tenth-century Wessex, fostered by increasing connections between the rulers of Mercia and Wessex. This influx of Mercian scribes, scholars and manuscripts, I argue, may have influenced the development of early Winchester style, as well as early West Saxon orthographic practice, a position earlier suggested by Vleeskruyer.<sup>5</sup> In Chapter 4, I connect the translation of the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* to contemporary theorizations of kingship and succession. As a mirror for princes and model of overkingship, the *Letter* complements issues of succession explored in its manuscript companion-piece, *Beowulf*, a text which linguistic evidence suggests may also have originated in Mercia. In so doing, I propose that eighth- and ninth-century Mercia, a powerful and stable kingdom with connections to the Continent and other major cultural centres, should be considered alongside the Northumbrian Golden Age in the seventh and early eighth centuries, and the Carolingian and Alfredian ‘renaissances’ as a major source of literature and culture. Furthermore, this thesis aims to present a new narrative of the early history of English literature between the Migration and the Benedictine Reforms of the tenth century. In the section below I offer a brief history of the kingdom of Mercia in order to situate the literary discussion which follows.

### *Mercia: a Brief History*

The kingdom of Mercia was an Anglian<sup>6</sup> kingdom in the Midlands between its formation in the mid-to-late sixth century through to its absorption into the kingdom of Wessex under Edward the

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<sup>5</sup> Vleeskruyer, *Life of St Chad*, pp. 42-4.

<sup>6</sup> By Anglian, I refer to the traditional migration narrative as Bede recounts in *HE* I.15, that Northumbrians, Mercians and East Anglians descend from migrants from continental Angeln; for further discussion, see below, p. 180.

Elder (r. 899-924) and his son and heir, Æthelstan (r. 924-939). Originally concentrated in the region around Tamworth and the Trent River valley occupied by the Tomsæte tribe, early kings of this tribally-organized society united the region through a combination of strategic alliances and strong individual leadership.<sup>7</sup> Although the Mercian royal genealogies documented in eighth- and ninth-century sources include pre-migratory forbears of these kings, among the earliest recorded kings of Mercia is Cearl (d. 626).<sup>8</sup> The name, Mercia, from OE *mierce*, meaning ‘border’, likely refers to its border with Wales. In the seventh century, the kingdom expanded under the warrior king, Penda (d. 655), who incorporated the Middle Angles and placed his son, Peada (d. 656) over them. His sons and their line ruled Mercia through 716, when Æthelbald (r. 716-757), a descendant of Penda’s brother, Eowa, succeeded. By the middle of the eighth century, the king of Mercia ruled over all the former tribes of the Magonsæte around Hereford, the Wreconsæte around Worcester, the Hwicce, the Gyrwe, and the Middle Angles and had wrested control of Lindsey from the Northumbrians.<sup>9</sup> Attempts to control East Anglia and Kent in the eighth and ninth centuries were temporarily successful. During the reigns of Æthelbald, Offa (r. 757-96) and Cenwulf (r. 796-821), the Mercian king was the dominant power south of the Humber.

Sources for the study of Mercian history are few and complicated. No record survives of the works of any great Mercian historian, or set of annals comparable with the West-Saxon *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, if such ever existed, so the narrative of the kingdom’s rise and fall must be gleaned from the records of its enemies and conquerors, from letters, archaeology, charters

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<sup>7</sup> EKK, p. 102; N. Brooks, ‘The Formation of the Mercian Kingdom’, in *Mercian Studies*, ed. A. Dornier (Leicester, 1977), pp. 159-70, at 168-9.

<sup>8</sup> Cearl appears in Bede’s *HE*, though not in the Mercian royal genealogies. Bede likely demotes his reputation in order to glorify his contemporary Kentish king, Æthelberht (d. 616?), see N. J. Higham, *An English Empire: Bede and the early Anglo-Saxon Kings* (Manchester, 1995), pp. 48, 143-6.

<sup>9</sup> EKK, pp. 105-10.

and a degree of well-tempered speculation. Bede's bias against the Mercians, a consequence of his staunch support of his own Bernician dynasty, as well as his distance from and lack of good sources in Mercia, make his *HE* an invaluable but prejudiced account of early Mercian history. In the later period, Asser's *Vita Ælfredi* details the cultural, intellectual and political connections of the Mercians with the great king; in Chapter 2, I therefore examine Asser's account of the West Saxon queen, Eadburg, and how Mercian traditions of queenship sparked a reaction in Wessex. In 829, Ecgberht of Wessex briefly deposed the king of Mercia, Wiglaf, in what was the beginning of the end of the independent Mercian kingdom. Increasingly threatened by the growing strength of Wessex under Alfred's ancestors and harried by Viking attacks, in 874 the Danes appointed Ceolwulf (fl. 874-9) as king of Mercia, yet by 883, Ealdorman Æthelred was recognised as ruler of Mercia (in deference to Alfred of Wessex). Ealdorman Æthelred (d. 911) cooperated with Alfred in the defense of England against the Vikings, and at his death, so did his wife, Lady Æthelflæd (d. 918), Alfred's daughter and sister of Edward the Elder. It is possible that, on Æthelflæd's death, the Mercian nobility intended to place her daughter, Ælfwynn (fl. 903-18), on the throne of an independent Mercia: she had, like Mercian heirs before her, witnessed her parents' charters.<sup>10</sup> However, a series of unique annals in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* known as the Mercian Register, which emphasize the achievements of Æthelred and Æthelflæd, where other recensions of the Chronicle laud Edward's achievements, record that Edward placed his niece in a nunnery.<sup>11</sup> Edward's son, Æthelstan (893/4-939), succeeded as

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<sup>10</sup> 'Ælfwynn 2', PASE.

<sup>11</sup> P. Stafford, 'Political Women in Mercia Eighth to Early Tenth Centuries', in *Mercia: an Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, ed. M. P. Brown and C. A. Farr (London, 2001), pp. 35-49; G. Cubbin, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition Volume 6 MS D* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 41. These annals seem to reflect contemporary West Saxon practice, rather than any inherited Mercian tradition.

King of the English; fostered by his aunt, Æthelflæd at the Mercian court, he was likely an acceptable candidate to both the Mercian and West Saxon nobility.<sup>12</sup>

Written culture was introduced to the Anglo-Saxons by Christianity, and Mercia was among the last of the major kingdoms to convert. The relatively late conversion of the Mercians may, therefore, in part account for the kingdom's poor record in the sources. In 653, Peada requested to be baptized at the Northumbrian court as part of ongoing marriage negotiations for the sister of the powerful Northumbrian overking, Oswiu (*HE* III.21). Conversion was, however, a deeply political statement, and baptism at a foreign court implied a position of submission.<sup>13</sup> There are suggestions that British Christianity persisted throughout the Migration period, and Mercians may well have encountered it at the Welsh border.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the four priests sent to evangelize the Angles under Mercian lordship brought with them Irish influences.<sup>15</sup> One of their number, Chad, fifth bishop of the Mercians (d. 672?), established the seat of the Mercian bishopric at Lichfield.<sup>16</sup> During tensions with the Kentish Archbishop of Canterbury, Jænberht (d. 672), Offa arranged the elevation of Lichfield to an archbishopric in 787; it reverted to episcopal status in 803. Despite its late conversion, the Mercian royal dynasty quickly embraced Christianity as a means of spreading its own power and influence, as well as solidifying its hold on recently conquered territories. In 704, Æthelred of Mercia (r. 674-704) abdicated to become abbot of the monastery of Bardney in Lindsey, which he had annexed from Northumbria in 679.

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<sup>12</sup> S. Foot, 'Æthelstan (893/4-939)', *ODNB*; S. Foot, *Æthelstan: the First King of England* (London, 2011), pp. 34-7, 127-8.

<sup>13</sup> *EKK*, p. 160; *EH* III.21, 24; S. Kelly, 'Peada (d. 656)', *ODNB*.

<sup>14</sup> N. Brooks, 'From British to English Christianity: Deconstructing Bede's Interpretation of the Conversion', in *Conversion and Colonization in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. N. Howe and C. Karkov (Tempe, AZ), pp. 1-30; K. Cameron, 'Eccles in English Place-Names', in *Christianity in Britain 300-700*, ed. M. Barley and R. P. Hanson (Leicester, 1968), pp. 87-92; M. Gelling, *Signposts to the Past: Place-names and the History of England* (London, 1978).

<sup>15</sup> D. H. Farmer, 'Ceadda (d. 672?)', *ODNB*; Farmer, 'Cedd [St Cedd] (d. 664)', *ODNB*.

<sup>16</sup> W. Rodwell et. al., 'The Lichfield Angel', *Antiquaries Journal* 88 (2008), 48-108.

At the same time, Mercian kings and the royal family founded and patronised a number of ecclesiastical foundations, and a number of saints are linked to the Mercian royal family. Royal Mercian saints, including Æthelred and his sisters, Cyneburg and Cyneswith, Edith, Eadburg Rumwold, Wulflad and Rufinus were traditionally said to have descended from Penda; other dynastic lines produced the martyred prince saints Cynehelm and Wigstan. Yet further obscure female royal saints claimed royal Mercian descent, including Frideswide at Oxford.<sup>17</sup> Mercian royal women frequently became abbesses of royal minsters, especially in regions annexed to Mercia.<sup>18</sup> These abbesses promoted family saints, interceded on behalf of their family with prayer, and may have perpetuated traditional female Anglo-Saxon roles in safeguarding the sanctity of the royal family.<sup>19</sup> As I argue in Chapter 2, Mercian noble and royal women were particularly privileged and acted as powerful members of society. By contrast, the West Saxon royal dynasty in the same period demoted the role of royal women in keeping dynastic foundations.<sup>20</sup>

A number of Mercian ecclesiastical foundations actively participated in intellectual culture in this period. In the *Vita sancti Guthlaci* (VsG), Felix records that Guthlac learned his letters and psalms at Repton under Abbess Eadburg. Though Bede names only Aldhelm, Albinus, Tobias, and Oftfor, bishop of Worcester, the scholarly renaissance at Theodore's school at Canterbury certainly produced other luminaries. Indeed, in the eighth century, four Mercians succeeded to the Archbishopric of Canterbury: Tatwine (d. 734), Nothelm (d. 739), Cuthbert (d.

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<sup>17</sup> D. Rollason, *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1989), p. 119.

<sup>18</sup> *EKK*, pp. 109-10.

<sup>19</sup> B. A. E. Yorke, 'The Burial of Kings in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Kingship, Legislation and Power in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. G. R. Owen-Crocker and B. W. Schneider, Publications of the Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies 13 (Woodbridge, 2013), pp. 237-58, at 251.

<sup>20</sup> B. A. E. Yorke, *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses* (London, 2003), pp. 28-9, 75, 79.

760) and Æthelheard (d. 805). Bede describes Tatwine, who had been abbot of Breedon-on-the-Hill before his elevation, as *uir religione et prudentia insignis, sacris quoque litteris nobiliter instructus* (*HE*. V.23).<sup>21</sup> Two of Tatwine's works survive, a collection of *enigmata* and a grammatical treatise. Milred, bishop of Worcester (d. 774/5) corresponded with Lull, the Archbishop of Mainz (c. 710-786) and associate of Boniface, with elegant Vergilian echoes, and loaned books to the Mercian archbishop of Canterbury, Cuthbert.<sup>22</sup> A group of letter-writers documents the Mercian connection to the missionary bishop, Boniface.<sup>23</sup> In addition, a number of Latin manuscripts are thought to have been produced and used in Mercia in the eighth and ninth centuries, including those decorated in Tiberius style, which, as explored in Chapters 2 and 3, is typically associated by art-historians with the Mercian hegemony. Some of these texts show the influence of Irish sources and prayers, as well as Continental and patristic material, as would be expected in a region converted by Irish and Northumbrian missionaries, but also with connections to Canterbury, the Continent and further afield. Robert Gallagher's recent assessment of the extent of Latin literacy in the reigns of Alfred and Edward the Elder suggests that Mercian scribes continued to compose and copy Latin manuscripts into the tenth century, including charters, calendars, private devotional reading, poetry and medical texts.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, Christine Voth also recently suggested that an Anglian centre produced some of the exemplars from which London, British Library, Royal 12 D. xvii, including Bald's Leechbook, was

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<sup>21</sup> 'A man renowned for his devotion and wisdom and excellently instructed in Scriptures', *HE*, p. 559; M. Lapidge, 'Tatwine (d. 734)', *ODNB*.

<sup>22</sup> P. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, c. 600-800*, CSASE 3 (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 328-9; for further connections in this letter-writing circle, see pp. 328-59.

<sup>23</sup> Sims-Williams, *Religion*, pp. 211-42.

<sup>24</sup> R. Gallagher, 'Latin Literary Culture in the Age of Alfred the Great and Edward the Elder' (unpubl. PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2014).



copied.<sup>25</sup> Evidently, Mercian scribes and scholars possessed, in certain centres, sufficient Latinity to gloss, produce and translate texts in this period.

The Mercian political hegemony over Southumbria also significantly impacted ecclesiastical administration in the eighth and ninth centuries. Five of the twelve archbishops of Canterbury in these two centuries were Mercian, and Hygeberht (d. 803) was elevated as archbishop of Lichfield, having seniority over the Archbishop of Canterbury until his death. As I discuss in Chapter 3, church synods, as established by Archbishop Theodore (602-90), met regularly at *Clofesho*, a location as yet unidentified but certainly somewhere in Mercia, and the synods were frequently attended by Mercian kings. A number of Old English texts produced at Canterbury appear to exhibit Mercian dialect forms, sometimes mixed with native Kentish ones. Scholars such as Michelle Brown and Jennifer Morrish have theorized the existence of a Mercian *schriptprovinz*, or region in which a certain dialect or set of scribal habits prevailed as orthographic practice existed, of which Canterbury was a part.<sup>26</sup> Given the documented production of texts in Mercia in this period, the number of Mercian archbishops, regular contact between Mercian centres and the archbishopric may have fostered the dissemination of Mercian exemplars, scribal habits and scribes. Thus even centres outside of Mercia may have been influenced by Mercian literary culture, Latinate and vernacular.

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<sup>25</sup> C. Voth, 'An Analysis of the Anglo-Saxon Manuscript London, British Library, Royal 12. D. xvii, and its Context in the Re-emergence of Manuscript Culture in Tenth-Century England' (unpubl. PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2014).

<sup>26</sup> M. P. Brown, 'The "Tiberius Group" and its Historical Context', in Brown and Farr (2001), pp. 278-94; J. Morrish, 'King Alfred's Letter as a Source of Learning in Ninth-Century England', in Szarmach (1986), pp. 87-107.

### *A Brief History of Early Old English Literature*

English is among the first modern languages in Europe to develop a thriving vernacular literary culture. The Anglo-Saxon tribes who migrated to the former Roman colony of *Britannia* in the fifth and sixth centuries brought with them traditional Germanic alliterative poetry; as a culture in a state of ‘primary orality’, to borrow Ong’s term, they had yet to develop a prose tradition.<sup>27</sup>

The earliest records of Old English poetry, such as the whale-bone riddle on the early eighth-century Franks casket and *Widsið*, which recalls Continental tribes and heroes of the so-called Germanic ‘heroic age’, were probably written down in the seventh or early eighth century.<sup>28</sup> The introduction of writing with the conversion to Christianity created circumstances which produced the first nearly contemporary records of vernacular prose and poetry in the life and work of Bede (673/4-725) during the Golden Age of Northumbria. Bede’s story of the late seventh-century poet Cædmon, preserved in his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (henceforth, *HE*), hints at an existing culture of secular oral poetry, but also provides a mythic account of the origins of vernacular Christian poetry in terms of a miraculous gift to a man who had no such talent (*HE* IV.24).<sup>29</sup> Writing in Latin, Bede recorded *Cædmon’s Hymn* in the *HE*; yet scribes saw fit to include the text of the vernacular in early manuscripts of the *HE*:

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<sup>27</sup> On the episode of Cynewulf and Cyneheard in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* as an example of early English prose, see F. Leneghan, ‘Royal Wisdom and the Alfredian Context of *Cynewulf and Cyneheard*’, *ASE* 39 (2010), 71-104, at 71-3; C. L. Wrenn, ‘A Saga of the Anglo-Saxons’, *History* 25 (1940), 208-15; F. P. Magoun, Jr, ‘Cynewulf, Cyneheard and Osric’, *Anglia* 57 (1933), 361-77; R. W. McTurk, ‘Cynewulf and Cyneheard and the Icelandic Sagas’, *Leeds Studies in English* 12 (1980), 81-127; and R. H. Bremmer Jr, ‘The Germanic Context of Cynewulf and Cyneheard Revisited’, *Neophilologus* 81 (1997), 445-65.

<sup>28</sup> R. Abels, ‘What has Weland to do with Christ? The *Franks Casket* and the Acculturation of Christianity in Early Anglo-Saxon England’, *Speculum* 84 (2009), 549-81; R. W. Chambers, *Widsið: a Study in Old English Heroic Legend* (Cambridge, 1912); K. Malone, *Widsið*, revised edn. (Copenhagen, 1962), p. 115; L. Neidorf, ‘The Dating of *Widsið* and the Study of Germanic Antiquity’, *Neophilologus* 97 (2013), 165-83.

<sup>29</sup> On *Cædmon’s Hymn* as part of a greater and earlier tradition of Old English poetry, see A. Orchard, ‘The Word Made Flesh: Christianity and Oral Culture in Anglo-Saxon Verse’, *Oral Tradition* 24 (2009), 293-318.

Nu scylun hergan hefaenricaes uard  
 metudaes maecti end his modgidanc  
 uerc uuldurfadur, sue he uundra gihuaes  
 eci dryctin or astelidæ  
 He ærist scop aelda barnum  
 heben til hrofe, haleg scepen;  
 tha middungeard moncynnæs uard  
 firum foldu, frea allmectig.<sup>30</sup>

Nunc laudare debemus auctorem regni celestis, potentiam Creatoris et consilium illius, facta Patris glorie: quomodo ille, cum sit aeternus Deus, omnium miraculorum auctor extitit, qui primo filiis, hominum caelum pro culmine tecti, dehinc terram Custos humani generis omnipotens creauit. (*HE* IV.24)<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, as André Crépin has observed, the vernacular intersected with Christianity, with its foundations in Latin literary culture, in Bede's own life and works.<sup>32</sup> For example, Cuthbert's Letter on the Death of Bede recounts two instances of Bede using the vernacular meaningfully. First, the Letter records Bede's apparent favourite Old English verse, which he was said to have recited often:

In nostra quoque lingua, ut erat doctus in nostris carminibus, dicens de terribili exitu animarum e corpore:

Fore ðæm nedfere nænig wiorðe  
 ðonc snottora ðon him ðearf siae  
 to ymbhycgenne ær his hinionge  
 hwæt his gastæ godes oððe yfles  
 æfter deað dæge doemed wiorðe.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> 'Now shall we praise the Guardian of the heavenly kingdom, the might of the Creator, and his Thoughts, the Work of the Father of Glory, as He appointed every wonder at the beginning, Eternal Lord. He first created heaven as a roof for the children of men, Holy Creator, then Middle-earth, Guardian of Mankind, the earth for men, Lord Almighty.' E. V. K. Dobbie, *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ASPR VI (London, 1942), p. 105. This version taken from the Moore Bede, Cambridge UL MS Kk. v. 16. On the manuscript variants of *Cædmon's Hymn*, see K. O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Visible Song: Transitional Literacy in Old English Verse*, CSASE 4 (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 23-46. All translations from the Old English and Latin are my own throughout, unless otherwise attributed.

<sup>31</sup> 'Now we must praise the maker of the heavenly kingdom, the power of the Creator and his counsel, and how He since he is the eternal God, was the Author of all marvels and first created the heavens as a roof for the children of men, the almighty Guardian of the human race, created the earth.' *HE*, pp. 416-7. All translations refer to this edition. The *Hymn* occurs in seventeen manuscripts ranging from the eighth through fifteenth centuries, see Dobbie, *Minor Poems*, pp. xciv-c.

<sup>32</sup> A. Crépin, 'Bede and the Vernacular', in *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede*, ed. G. Bonner (London, 1975), pp. 170-92.

<sup>33</sup> 'And in our own language, – for he was familiar with English poetry – speaking of the soul's dread departure from the body, he would repeat: "Facing that enforced journey, no man can be / More prudent than he has good call

Second, Cuthbert recalls that Bede spent his final days in teaching and translating:

In istis autem diebus duo opusculum multum memoria digna, exceptis lectionibus quas cotidie accepimus ab eo et cantu Psalmorum, facere studuit, id est a capite euangelii sanctis Iohannis usque ad eum locum in quo dicitur ‘Sed haec quid sunt inter tantos?’ in nostram linguam ad utilitatem ecclesiae Dei conuertit, et de libris Rotarum Ysidori episcopi exceptiones quasdam, dicens ‘Nolo ut pueri mei mendacium legant, et in hoc post meum obitum sine fructu laborent.’<sup>34</sup>

Though Bede is better known as a scholar, exegete, theologian and historian than as a translator, translation was clearly an activity near and dear to his heart. In a Letter to Ecgbert, archbishop of York (d. 766), Bede advised the bishop that essential doctrine should be made available in English:

Et quidem omnes qui Latinam linguam lectionis usu didicerunt, etiam haec optime didicisse certissimum est: sed idiotas, hoc est, eos qui propriae tantum linguae notitiam habent, haec ipsa sua lingua discere, ac sedulo decantare facito. Quod non solum de laicis, id est, in populari adhuc vita constitutes, verum etiam de clericis sive monachis qui Latinae sunt linguae expertes fieri oportet.<sup>35</sup>

Translation was an inevitable part of the spread of Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England. In his *Vita Wilfridi*, Stephan of Ripon (fl. 670-730) writes that in 706 Beorhtfrith, a Northumbrian *dux*, requested a translation of papal documents:

‘Nos, qui interpretatione indigemus, quid apostolica auctoritas dicat, audire delectat.’ Et respondit ei archiepiscopus, dicens: ‘Iudicia apostolicae sedis longo circuitu et ambagibus verborum, unum tamen intellectum de eadem re utrique libri ostendentes, quorum in brevi sermone sensum tantum explicabo.’ (LX).<sup>36</sup>

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to be, / If he consider, before his going hence, / What for his spirit of good hap or of evil / After his day of death shall be determined.” *HE*, pp. 580-3.

<sup>34</sup> ‘During those days, there were two pieces of work worthy of record, besides the lessons which he gave us every day and his chanting of the Psalter, which he desired to finish: the gospel of St. John, which he was turning into our mother tongue, to the great profit of the Church, from the beginning as far as the words “But what are they among so many?”, and a selection from Bishop Isidore’s book, On the Wonders of Nature [*De natura rerum*]: for he said, ‘I cannot have my children learning what is not true, and losing their labour on this after I am gone.’ *HE*, pp. 582-3.

<sup>35</sup> ‘It is true that it is most sure that these things have become perfectly known to those who have been taught to read the Latin tongue; but do you cause them to be known and constantly repeated in their own tongue by those that are unlearned, that is, by them who have knowledge only of their proper tongue. And this should be done, not only as touching the laity, that is to say, them which are still established in the life of the world, but also as touching the clergy or monks which are ignorant of the Latin tongue.’ J. King, ed. and trans., *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation, Books IV-V, the Lives of the Abbots, Letter to Egbert*, Loeb Classic Library 248 (Cambridge, MA, 1930), pp. 454-5.

<sup>36</sup> “We who need a translation should be glad to hear what the Apostolic authority says.” The archbishop answered him, “The judgements of the Apostolic See are expressed in a roundabout and enigmatic language, but nevertheless

Interestingly, Wilfrid offers the synod an interpretation rather than a translation, preempting similar anxieties about the difficulties of translation which Ælfric gave voice to centuries later.<sup>37</sup> Beorhtfrith's request, ironically recorded in the very language of which he was ignorant, documents the difficulties of the emerging bilingual Anglo-Saxon Christian culture. Glossing and the creation of glossaries were a natural byproduct of the gap between Latinate culture, both at home and abroad, and the Germanic language of the Anglo-Saxons. The earliest surviving Old English glossaries, the Épinal and Erfurt glossaries, collections of *lemmata* arranged alphabetically with Old English translations or explanations, are copies of a compilation made at Malmesbury probably between 675 and 700.<sup>38</sup> A number of other glossaries followed, including the Corpus Glossary (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 144) in the ninth century and the Cotton Cleopatra Glossary (London, British Library, Cotton Cleopatra A. iii) in the middle of the tenth century, along with continuous interlinear glosses in Psalters and Bibles. The earliest extant translation of biblical material into Old English is the continuous gloss to the Vespasian Psalter (London, British Library, Cotton Vespasian A. i: Gneuss and Lapidge No. 381, Ker No. 203), a late eighth-century manuscript of the Roman Psalter, to which a continuous gloss in a Mercian dialect was added in the second quarter of the ninth century.<sup>39</sup> Alongside a robust and flourishing Latinate culture, which produced such luminaries as Bede, Boniface (fl. 672/5-754) and Alcuin (c. 740-804), a scholar recruited to Charlemagne's court school, this tradition of vernacular

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both documents show the same meaning in manner. I will explain the bare sense in brief." *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1927), pp. 130-1.

<sup>37</sup> 'Ælfric's Preface to Genesis', in *The Old English Version of the Heptateuch: Ælfric's Treatise on the Old and New Testament and his Preface to Genesis*, ed. S. J. Crawford, EETS 160 (Oxford, 1922), pp. 76-80. Other Anglo-Saxon authors generally lacked this anxiety (see Toswell, *Anglo-Saxon Psalter*, p. 319).

<sup>38</sup> J. D. Pheifer, 'Early Anglo-Saxon Glossaries and the School of Canterbury', *ASE* 16 (1987), 17-44, at 18; P. Lendinara, *Anglo-Saxon Glosses and Glossaries* (Aldershot, 1999).

<sup>39</sup> See M. J. Toswell, *The Anglo-Saxon Psalter*, *Medieval Church Studies* 10 (Turnhout, 2014), pp. 225-52.

glossing and glossaries bears witness to the remarkable – and arguably unique in this period – bilingualism of early Anglo-Saxon intellectual and ecclesiastical culture.

The historical record, however, largely obscures the record of vernacular literature or translation in the mid eighth through late ninth century. In 797, Alcuin complained:

Verba Dei legantur in sacerdotali convivio: ibi decet lectorem audiri, non citharistam sermones patrum, non carmina gentilium. Quid Hiniieldus cum Christo?<sup>40</sup>

Clearly, pagan songs were recited in the monastic refectory as well as the royal mead-hall. One might speculate that this was the sort of material contained in the book of poems which King Alfred of Wessex (c. 848/9-99) memorized, which he won from his mother, Osburg.<sup>41</sup> As king, Alfred famously complained about the decline of learning in England:

Ða ic ða ðis eall gemunde, ða wundrade ic swiðe swiðe ðara godena wiotona ðe giu wæron giond Angelcynn, 7 þa bec eallæ befullan geliornod hæfdon, ðæt hie hiora ða nænne dæl noldon on hiora ægen geðiode wendon. Ac ic ða sona eft me selfum andwyrde 7 cwæð: Hie ne wendon ðætt[e] æfre menn sceolden swæ rec[c]elease weorðan 7 sio lar swæ oðfeallan; for ðære wilnunga hie hit forleton, 7 woldon ðæt her ðy mara wisdom on londe wære ðy we ma geðeoda cuðon. (Preface, *Pastoral Care*).<sup>42</sup>

Alfred implies that Latin was in a state of decay in the 860s/870s, but also that no major works were available in English. Thus Alfred has been credited with the authorship of – or inspiration for – most early Old English translations and prose works, which have been typically been associated with his translation and education programmes.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> ‘Let God’s words be read at the episcopal dinner-table. It is right that a reader should be heard, not a harpist, patristic discourse, not pagan song. What has Hiniield [i.e., Ingeld] to do with Christ?’ *Epistola Karolini Aevi* II, ed. E. Dümmler, MGH, *Epistolae* 4 (Berlin, 1895), No. 124, p. 183; trans. D. Bullough, ‘What has Ingeld to do with Lindisfarne?’, *ASE* 22 (1993), 93-125.

<sup>41</sup> W. Stevenson, *Asser’s Life of Alfred* (Oxford, 1904), p. 20.

<sup>42</sup> ‘When I was mindful of this, then I began to wonder very greatly at the good advisors who previously were among the English people, and the books which they had learned fully, that they did not desire to translate a portion of them into their own language. But again, I soon answered myself, and said: they never expected that men would become so careless and learning so decayed, because they did not desire to forsake it, and desired that there would be greater wisdom and knowledge of languages here in this land.’ H. Sweet, *King Alfred’s West Saxon Version of Gregory’s Pastoral Care*, EETS OS 45 (1871), p. 5.

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, Godden and Irvine, *Boethius*, pp. 134-51; M. Bintley and R. North, *Andreas: an Edition* (Liverpool, 2015), pp. 109-115.

Anglo-Saxon authors and subsequent historians, both medieval and modern, built on Alfred's words and the attributions to him in prefaces added to early translations such as the prose and prosimetrical versions of the OE *Boethius*.<sup>44</sup> For example, in a homily on Gregory the Great, Ælfric of Eynsham (c. 950-c. 1010) attributed the Old English translation of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* to the great king:

Manega halige bec cyðað his drohtnunge and his halige lif. and eac historia anglorum ða ðe Ælfred cýning of ledene on englisc awende. (IX. 6-8).<sup>45</sup>

Following medieval tradition, the Old English *Boethius*, *Soliloquies*, *Prose Psalms* 1-50 and *Pastoral Care* were long thought to be Alfred's own work, and other works such as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Old English *Orosius*, the Preface to Alfred's Law Code, the Old English *Bede* (henceforth *OEB*) and *Dialogues* have been treated as works associated with (or inspired by) his educational project.<sup>46</sup> In the 1930s, for example, R. W. Chambers described Alfred as 'the father of English prose', noting that while 'we can never know how much King Alfred found to build on [...] what Alfred built we do know.'<sup>47</sup> Following recent developments in our understanding of the origins of early English prose, one of the major aims of this thesis is to explore what Alfred may have found, and to suggest that Mercia made a significant contribution to pre-Alfredian English letters. Asser records that his English Charlemagne recruited four Mercian luminaries to

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<sup>44</sup> N. Guenther Discenza, 'The Old English Bede and the Construction of Anglo-Saxon Authority', *ASE* 31 (2002), 69-80; G. Waite, 'Translation Style, Lexical Systems, Dialect Vocabulary, and the Manuscript Transmission of the Old English Bede', *Medium Ævum* 83 (2014), 1-48.

<sup>45</sup> 'Many holy books speak about his habits and his holy life, and also the "History of the English", which Alfred translated from Latin into English.' Ælfric, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: the Second Series*, ed. M. Godden, EETS SS 5 (London, 1979), p. 72.

<sup>46</sup> For a summary of these attributions, see F. Leneghan, 'Translatio Imperii: The Old English Orosius and the Rise of Wessex', *Anglia* 133 (2015), 656-704, at 659-660; M. R. Godden, 'Did King Alfred Write Anything?', *Medium Ævum* 76 (2007), 1-23; M. Godden, 'Alfredian Prose: Myth and Reality', *Filologia Germanica* 5 (2013), 131-58; N. G. Discenza and P. E. Szarmach, eds., *A Companion to Alfred the Great*, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition 58 (Leiden, 2015).

<sup>47</sup> R. W. Chambers, *On the Continuity of Old English Prose from Alfred to More and his School*, EETS OS 186 (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), p. lix. For an alternate view, see G. Krapp, *The Rise of English Literary Prose* (London, 1915).

his court school: Wærferth (d. 907x15), the bishop of Worcester and translator of *Dialogues*; Plegmund (d. 914), the future archbishop of Canterbury; and two priests from Mercia, about whom we know nothing more than their names, Werwulf and Æthelstan.<sup>48</sup> Why did Alfred recruit the majority of his scholarly circle, four of the seven recorded by Asser, from Mercia? Given the reappraisal of the Alfredian canon by Godden and recent work on the dating of *Beowulf* and other Old English verse, as shall be discussed below, the time is ripe for a wholesale reappraisal of the hitherto overlooked role of the kingdom of Mercia in the development of both Old English prose and verse.

This thesis explores the possibility that a thriving culture of vernacular literature existed in Mercia in the eighth and ninth centuries by reading the texts delineated above within a plausible cultural and historical narrative. Encompassing both prose and poetry, translations as well as original compositions, it may be that Mercian traditions and techniques provided the foundation on which Alfred built his late ninth-century renaissance. At the close of the twentieth century, scholars still considered the Old English *Prose Psalms 1-50*, *Boethius*, the *Soliloquies* and *Pastoral Care* to be genuine Alfredian works, and the *OEB*, *Orosius*, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and the *Dialogues* to be works associated with his court. In 1988, Janet Bately acknowledged the possibility of some scant pre-Alfredian prose, but asserted that Alfred's major achievement was to 'break free' from the constraints of that tradition and surpass it in execution.<sup>49</sup> However, in 2007, Malcolm Godden questioned the entire idea of an 'Alfredian' canon: though he accepted, with some skepticism, that perhaps the *Pastoral Care* might be 'Alfredian', he concluded: 'My personal view is that Alfred did not "write" anything'; Godden therefore encouraged scholars to

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<sup>48</sup> Asser, c. 77; M. Lapidge, 'Scholars at King Alfred's Court (act. 880-899)', *ODNB*.

<sup>49</sup> J. Bately, 'Old English Prose Before and During the Reign of Alfred', *ASE* 17 (1988), 93-138, at 138.



‘stop assuming that the king wrote them all, or even authorized them all.’<sup>50</sup> Indeed, the subtexts within Asser’s *Vita Alfredi* gestures towards a number of debts owed to Alfred’s Midlands neighbours. The only work listed as complete when Asser composed his *vita* in 893 was Wærferth’s translation, *Dialogues*, a work which in style and lexis closely resembles the *OEB*.

### *Wærferth’s Translation of Gregory’s Dialogues and the Alfredian School of Translation*

The work of the Mercian Bishop of Worcester has been criticised for its ‘occasional failure to grasp the meaning of the Latin’ and following ‘the Latin slavishly, so slavishly in fact, that the translation sometimes becomes little more than a gloss.’<sup>51</sup> Even working with Gregory’s Latin alongside, it can at times be difficult to make out Wærferth’s meaning. Nevertheless, the OE *Dialogues* exhibit a series of features, which, as shall be fleshed out in the chapters of this thesis, might reflect traditions of glossing active in Mercia from the early seventh century and be associated with literal, word-for-word translations. This approach differs from the style of translation associated with Alfred, as he describes in his Preface to the Pastoral Care, which allows for looser, sense-for-sense translations:

Ða ongan ic [...] ða boc wendan on Englisc ðe is nemned on Læden *Pastoralis*, 7 on Englisc *Hierdeboc*, hwilum word be worde, hwilum andgit of andgiete, swæ swa ic hie geliornode æt Plegmunde minum ærcesicepe, 7 æt Asser minum biscep 7 æt Grimbolde minum mæsseprioste 7 æt Iohanne minum mæssepreoste.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Godden, ‘Did King Alfred Write’, p. 18; see also Godden, ‘Alfredian Prose’, pp. 131-58.

<sup>51</sup> S. Potter, *On the Relation of the Old English Bede to Werferth’s Gregory and to Alfred’s Translations*, Mémoires de la Société Royale des Sciences de Bohême (Prague, 1931), p. 2; D. Johnson, ‘Alfredian Apocrypha: the *Dialogues* and the *Bede*’, in Discenza and Szarmach (2015), pp. 368-96.

<sup>52</sup> ‘Then I began [...] to translate the book into English which is named in Latin *Pastoral Care*, and in English *Shepherd Book*, sometimes word-for-word, sometimes sense-for-sense, just as I learned it from my archbishop, Plegmund, and from my bishop Asser, and from my priest Grimbold, and my priest John.’ Sweet, *King Alfred’s West Saxon Version*, p. 7.

The translation style of the *Pastoral Care* is indeed sometimes word-for-word, but also often sense-for-sense, an approach to translation advocated by Jerome and Gregory the Great.<sup>53</sup>

Indeed, the OE *Orosius*, *Boethius*, and *Soliloquies*, all considered Alfredian translations, paraphrase loosely, omitting sections and inserting large amounts of original material, unlike Wærferth's *Dialogues*.<sup>54</sup>

Wærferth's work is somewhat similar to early West Saxon translations (or, as some scholars prefer to call them, adaptations or paraphrases),<sup>55</sup> such as the *Pastoral Care*, which generally prefer close, word-for-word translation style, even to the point of obscurity at times. These differ significantly from later translations which depart considerably from their Latin sources, such as the *Boethius* and *Soliloquies*.<sup>56</sup> The *Pastoral Care*, then, may represent a collaboration between the king and the literal translation style of the Mercian scholars of his court school. For example, in an attempt to retain the syntax of the Latin, Wærferth describes the song of Bonifatius before a meal in much the same terms as another street entertainer in the same episode, a confusion which a later reviser attempts to correct.<sup>57</sup> Christine Thijs asserts that the translation was intended as an aid for learners of Latin, and to be read aloud.<sup>58</sup> As such,

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<sup>53</sup> Potter, p. 41; C. Thijs, 'Early Old English Translation: Practice Before Theory', *Neophilologus* 91 (2007), 149-73.

<sup>54</sup> Potter, p. 73.

<sup>55</sup> D. Whitelock, 'The Prose of Alfred's Reign', in *Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature*, ed. E. G. Stanley (London, 1966), pp. 67-103; J. Bately, *The Literary Prose of Alfred's Reign: Translation or Transformation?* (London, 1980), repr. in P. E. Szarmach, ed., *Old English Prose: Basic Readings* (New York, 2000), pp. 3-28.

<sup>56</sup> See M. R. Godden and S. Irvine, eds., *The Old English Boethius*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 2009), pp. 8, 135-9.

<sup>57</sup> This is 62/10; for a discussion of mistranslations see M. Godden, 'Wærferth and King Alfred: the Fate of the Old English *Dialogues*', in *Alfred the Wise: Studies in Honour of Janet Bately on the Occasion of her Sixty-fifth Birthday*, ed. J. Nelson and J. Roberts (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 35-51, at 47; P. Harting, 'The Text of the Old English Translation of Gregory's *Dialogues*', *Neophilologus* 22 (1937), 281-302.

<sup>58</sup> C. Thijs, 'Wærferth's Treatment of the Miraculous in his Old English Translation of Gregory's *Dialogi*', *N&Q* 3 (2006), 272-86, at 285-6; on the dative absolute, see N. van de Pol, 'Between Copy and Cognate: the Origin of Absolutes in Old and Middle English', in *Copies versus Cognates in Bound Morphology*, ed. J. Lars and M. Robbeets, Brill Studies in Language, Cognition and Culture 2 (Leiden, 2012), pp. 297-322. This might be further compared with the uses of the Mercian gloss to the Vespasian Psalter, see Toswell, p. 26.

Wærferth prefers literal translation and attempts to reflect the grammar of the Latin, including usage of the dative absolute, which, in the absence of an ablative case in Old English, substitutes a dative subordinate or pronoun with an agreeing dative participle to reflect the Latin ablative absolute construction.<sup>59</sup> Wærferth also simplified his source, at times arranging verbs into more sympathetic positions in the Old English, opting for paratactic constructions over hypotactic, active sentences over passive, short sentences over long, and implementing various other alterations designed to aid comprehension.<sup>60</sup>

The exact recension of Gregory's *Dialogi* from which Wærferth worked remains unidentified, and the existence of four manuscripts of the translation dating from the eleventh century in various states of completion, revision and West Saxonisation, complicates recovering his working methods.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, the following example demonstrates how Wærferth prefers to translate word-for-word:

Que quodam die ita grandine inruente uastata est, ut in ea in paucis uitibus uix parui rarique racemi remanerent. (I.9).<sup>62</sup>

7 se þa sume dæge wæs forslegen 7 forhergod mid onhreosendum hægle, swa þæt on þæm wingearde on feawum wintreowum uneaðe to lafe wunodon swyþe lytle 7 swyþe feawa geclystru þara winbyrgena. (I.9).<sup>63</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Thijs, 'Treatment', 277-8.

<sup>60</sup> Thijs, 'Treatment', 285-6; C. Thijs, 'Early Old English Translation: Practice Before Theory?', *Neophilologus* 91 (2007), 149-73, at 162.

<sup>61</sup> Thijs, 'Treatment', 273-4; C. Jeffery, 'The Latin Texts Underlying the Old English *Gregory's Dialogues* and *Pastoral Care*', *N&Q* 225 (1980), 483-8, at 483; D. Yerkes, *Syntax and Style in Old English: a Comparison of the Two Versions of Wærferth's Translation of Gregory's Dialogues* (Binghamton, 1982); D. Yerkes, 'The Translation of Gregory's *Dialogues* and its Revision', in *Studies in Earlier Old English Prose*, ed. P. E. Szarmach (Albany, 1986), pp. 335-43; on a second, independent anonymous Mercian translation, see P. E. Szarmach, 'Another Old English Translation of Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*?', *ES* 62 (1981), 97-109.

<sup>62</sup> '[The small vineyard], and even that was one day struck by a severe hailstorm. There remained only a few clusters of grapes here and there on the vines.' Gregory the Great, *Dialogi*. Composite text based on A. Vogüé, ed., *Dialogues*, Sources Chrétiennes 251 (Paris, 1978), p. 76; J. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Latina* 77 (Paris, 1862), col. 190A; U. Moricca, ed., *Gregorii Magni Dialogi*, Fonti per la storia d'Italia pubblicate dall'Istituto storico italiano 57 (Rome, 1924), p. 50; trans. O. J. Zimmerman, *Dialogues*, the Fathers of the Church 39 (Washington, D.C., 1959), p. 34.

<sup>63</sup> 'And then a certain day it was stricken and ravaged with violent hail, so that in the vineyard on the few remaining vines with difficulty remained so little and so few clusters of the wine-berries (grapes).' H. Hecht, ed., *Bischofs Wærferth von Worcester Übersetzung der Dialoge Gregors Des Grossen*. Bibliothek der Angelsächsischen Prosa 5 (Leipzig, 1900), p. 57.

The translation largely follows the Latin diction and syntax, and attempts to recreate its grammar. Wærferth renders the ablative phrase *grandine inruente* ('by violent hail') as *mid onhreosendum hægle*, using the dative masculine strong plural as a dative of means. Wærferth also translates *in paucis vitibus* ('on few grape vines') with the OE dative plural, *on feawum wintreowum*. However, Wærferth does make accommodations for the syntactical preferences of the Old English language. In the second clause, he positions the verb *wunodon* ('remained'), in a more sympathetic location, before the object, the *geclystræ* ('clusters'), where in the Latin, the verb, *remaneret* ('remains'), ends the sentence. He also introduces two doublet pairs to render a single Latin word in his source: *uastata est* ('was laid waste'), becomes *wæs forslagen 7 forhergod* ('was stricken and ravaged'); similarly, *parui* ('little, small'), he renders *swyþe lytle 7 swyþe feawa* ('so little and so few'). Wærferth also specifies that the remaining clusters are of *winbyrgena* ('grapes'), a detail not paralleled in editions of the surviving Latin manuscripts. Though the text was primarily intended as a collection of vernacular saints' lives, a genre which, as we shall see is predominantly attested in texts of Mercian provenance, as Thijs suggests, Wærferth's translation was intended as an aid to learning Latin.<sup>64</sup> Thijs has posited that a lack of available models, as well as the apostolic authority of Gregory's text, contributed to Wærferth's conservative translation style.<sup>65</sup> However, a number of features common to this translation and other works suggests that Wærferth was operating in a Mercian tradition of prose translation.

Wærferth's translation of Gregory's *Dialogi*, a book of dialogues between Gregory the Great and his disciple, Peter, about the many holy men and women in Italy, must have been complete by 893.<sup>66</sup> There are numerous similarities between the *Dialogues* and the *OEB*,

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<sup>64</sup> Thijs, 'Treatment', 276-7.

<sup>65</sup> Thijs, 'Treatment', 285.

<sup>66</sup> For further discussion of date and authorship, see Johnson, 'Alfredian Apocrypha'.

including the use of a literal, word-for-word translation style, use of the ablative absolute construction, and awkward syntax arising from literal translation.<sup>67</sup> As Potter observed, the quality of the Latin in Gregory's *Dialogi* and Bede's *Historia* is similar, perhaps influencing similar styles of Old English translation.<sup>68</sup> The translations also have a number of lexical similarities, in which the same Latin lemma is rendered by the same OE word.<sup>69</sup> Further word pairs appear in both translations.<sup>70</sup> Cumulatively, the lexical similarities between the *OEB* and *Dialogues* suggest that they may have similar origins or reflect similar traditions of translation. Revisions made to Hatton 76 (Gneuss and Lapidge No. 632, Ker No. 328), another manuscript of *Dialogues*, render the Latin more accurately, and simplify the text stylistically; compared to the more conservative text of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 322 (Gneuss and Lapidge No. 92, Ker No. 60), the revisions remove many of these word pairs.<sup>71</sup> Although Wærferth's *Dialogues* is the earliest known extant Old English prose translation, it clearly resembles other works probably undertaken in a similar period by other Mercian scholars, such as the *OEB* and *OEPG*.

#### *Alfredian Translation Style: Augustine's Soliloquies*

The treatment of the main Latin source in the Old English translation of Augustine's *Soliloquies* – a text traditionally associated with the Alfredian canon and featuring a colophon claiming Alfred as author – differs significantly from Wærferth's *Dialogues* and, as shall be seen, other

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<sup>67</sup> G. Waite, 'The Vocabulary of the Old English Version of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*' (unpubl. PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 1984), §1.6.

<sup>68</sup> Potter, pp. 4, 12.

<sup>69</sup> For a full list, see Potter, pp. 18-19. For a list of lexical items common to the *Life of St Chad* and the *OEB*, see R. Vleeskruyer, *The Life of St. Chad: an Old English Homily* (Amsterdam, 1953), p. 34.

<sup>70</sup> Full list available in Potter, pp. 25-6.

<sup>71</sup> See Yerkes, 'Gregory's *Dialogues* and its Revision'. On the relationship of Wærferth's translation to 'Alfredian' works, see Johnson, 'Alfredian Apocrypha', pp. 378-80.

Mercian translations such as the *OEB* and Old English translation of Felix's *Vita sancti Guthlaci* (*OEPG*). As its editor, Thomas Carnicelli notes, in syntax, phrasing, knowledge and the substance of its additions, the *Soliloquies* resembles the *Boethius*, *Orosius* and *Pastoral Care* more than it does the *Dialogues*.<sup>72</sup> Its preface explains that the work derives from a mixture of sources, including Augustine, Gregory and Jerome; it also draws on Boethius' *De consolazione philosophiae* and Augustine's *De videndo dei*.<sup>73</sup> The *Soliloquies* expand considerably on their main Latin source and translate in a sense-for-sense manner unparalleled in the Mercian translations discussed in this thesis.<sup>74</sup> For example, both the interlocutors, Augustine and Reason, expand on their Latin dialogues in Book I:

R: Quid? haec sensibusne percepisti an intellectu?

A: Immo sensus in hoc negotio quasi navim sum expertus. Nam cum ipsi med ad locum quo tendebam pervexerint, ubi eos dimisi et iam velut in solo positus coepi cogitatione ista volvere, diu mihi vestiga titubarunt. Quae citius mihi videtur in terra posse nauigare quam geometricam sensibus percipi, quamvis primo discentes aliquantum adiuvare videantur. (I. 9).<sup>75</sup>

R: Ða cwæð heo: hweðer geleornodest þu þe myd þam eagum, þe mid þam ingeþanc?

A: Ða cwæð ic: *mid ægðrum ic hyt geleornode: ærest myd ðam eagum, and syðþan myd þam ingeþance.* Ða eagan me gebrodtan on þam angytte. Ac syðþan ic hyt þa ongyten hæfde, *þa forlæt ic þa sceawunga mid þam eagum and þohte; forði me þuhte ic (h)is mæate micle mare geþencan ðonne ic (h)is mahte geseon, siððan þa eagan hyt ætfastnodon minum ingeþance.* swa swa scyp brinc man ofer sæ: *syððan he þonne to lande cymð, þonne forlæt he þæt scyp standan, forþam him þincð syððan þæt he mæge æð butan faran þonna mid.* Eaðre me þincð þeah my scipe on drigum lande ot farande þonne me þynce mid ðam eagum buta þara gesceadwisnesse ænigne cræft to geleornianne, þeah eagum þær-to hwilum fultmian scylan. (I).<sup>76</sup>

<sup>72</sup> T. Carnicelli, ed., *King Alfred's Version of St. Augustine's Soliloquies* (Cambridge, MA, 1969), pp. 38-9.

<sup>73</sup> Carnicelli, pp. 28-9.

<sup>74</sup> P. E. Szarmach, 'Augustine's *Soliloquia* in Old English', in Discenza and Szarmach (2015), pp. 227-55.

<sup>75</sup> 'Reason: Well, did you perceive these things by the senses or by the intellect? Augustine: I have used the senses in this business like a ship. For when they had carried me to the place which I was aiming for, and I had let them go and was placed, as it were, on dry land, I began to consider these things in my mind, and my steps were for a long time shaky. And so it seems to me that one could more quickly sail a boat over dry land than grasp geometry by the senses, although the senses do help learners at the beginning.' Saint Augustine, *Soliloquies and Immortality of the Soul*, ed. and trans. G. Watson (Warminster, 1990), pp. 36-7.

<sup>76</sup> 'Then she said: How did you learn this, either by the eyes, or by the inner-thought? Then I said: *with eyes I learned it: first with the eyes, and after with the mind's inner thought.* The eyes brought me to the sense. But after I had perceived it, *then I abandoned the vision of the eyes for thought: for it seemed to me that I could think much greater than I could see it,* after the eyes had committed it to my inner understanding. *Just as a ship brings a man over the sea: after he then arrives on land, when he abandons the ship to stand, because it seems to him after that he may go out further without it than with.* Easier it seems to me to go by ship on dry land than it seems to learn any

The Old English deviates from the Latin in rearranging the simile of the ship: where Augustine explains that he uses the senses *quasi navi* ('as a ship'), the Old English separates the ship into its own simile, expanding the literal sense of the Latin, of how the senses function before presenting the simile. Furthermore, immediately following this excerpt, the Old English expands the metaphor of the ship into an explanation, unprecedented in the Latin, of how the intellect must be tethered to God. The Mercian prose translations, as seen above, never take such liberties in rearranging narrative and the construction of similes. Furthermore, the sense-for-sense style of these early West Saxon translations engenders greater fluidity in the treatment of the source, creating space for the addition of interpolations, or, in the case of the *Soliloquies*, entirely original sections derived from a range of often unacknowledged sources.<sup>77</sup>

### *Present Scholarship*

While a number of scholars in the nineteenth century regarded the works under consideration here to be 'generally early', trends in scholarship at the close of the twentieth century regarding the composition of Old English prose and poetry increasingly diverged from the central hypothesis of this thesis, that a Mercian tradition of vernacular prose and poetry existed in the eighth and ninth centuries. Firstly, the old consensus that much extant Old English verse was produced in the early Anglo-Saxon period, before the Viking age, was largely abandoned as scholars began to focus on the (usually) late manuscript contexts of these works as the best guide

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craft with the eyes alone, though the eyes will help thereto for a time.' Carnicelli, p. 61. Italics indicating expansions mine.

<sup>77</sup> M. Godden, 'Text and Eschatology in Book III of the Old English *Soliloquies*', *Anglia* 121 (2007), 177-209.

to their reception and even origins.<sup>78</sup> Secondly, the enduring popularity of the idea of the Alfredian renaissance as marking the origin of Old English prose meant that pre-Alfredian prose was typically dismissed as essentially non-literary and lacking the robustness of the translations associated with Alfred's court. Earlier editors had noted Anglian characteristics in a number of supposedly Alfredian Old English prose and poetic works, and proposed two basic hypotheses to explain the dialectal admixture. One explanation hypothesized that the Anglian dialect forms were introduced into these texts by Mercian scholars at Alfred's court;<sup>79</sup> the alternative argument is that the survival of Anglian forms bears witness to the Anglian origin of these works, which were subsequently copied and updated by West Saxon scribes.<sup>80</sup> In both cases, it is assumed that the production of the majority of these texts remained within Alfred's influence. In 1890, for example, Thomas Miller dated the translation of the *OEB* to the era of Alfred, but argued that it was produced 'not in the royal court of Alfred, but in one of the Mercian monasteries.'<sup>81</sup> Simeon Potter concluded in the 1930s that Wærferth was responsible for the translation of both *Dialogues* and the *OEB*, dividing these from the OE translations *Orosius*, *Boethius* and the *Soliloquies*, concluding that the latter three texts 'are by one man. They are clearly the King's independent work, linked together by likeness in thought and expression, and sharing a steady

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<sup>78</sup> This was inaugurated during the 1980 'Dating of Beowulf Conference' in Toronto, see C. Chase, ed., *The Dating of Beowulf*, Toronto Old English Series 6 (Toronto, 1981). Other examples include K. Kiernan, *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript* (Ann Arbor, 1996), reprinted from 1981; P. Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter: A Tenth-Century Cultural History* (Woodbridge, 1993); H. Damico, *Beowulf and the Grendel-kin: Politics and Poetry in Eleventh-Century England* (West Virginia, 2014); S. Klein, *Ruling Women: Queenship and Gender in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, esp. pp. 6-8. For an opposing view, see M. Brown, 'Beowulf and the Origins of the Old English Written Vernacular', *SELIM* 20 (2013-14), 81-120, at 82.

<sup>79</sup> C. Rauer, ed., *The Old English Martyrology: Edition, Translation and Commentary*, Anglo-Saxon Texts 10 (Cambridge, 2013), p. 6; Waite, 'Translation Style', 1 fn 3; see also S. Kuhn, 'Synonyms in the *Old English Bede*', *JEGP* 46 (1947), 168-76. For alternative views, see D. Whitelock, 'The Old English Bede', Sir Israel Gollancz Memorial Lecture, 1962, in *British Academy Papers on Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. E. G. Stanley (Oxford, 1990), pp. 227-61.

<sup>80</sup> Waite, 'Translation Style', 1 fn 2.

<sup>81</sup> T. Miller, ed., *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, EETS OS 95 (London, 1890), p. lviii.



progress in Alfred's literary achievement.'<sup>82</sup> Rudolf Vleeskruyer was among the first scholars to make the case for substantial pre-Alfredian Mercian literary production, in his 1951 doctoral dissertation on *The Life of St. Chad*:<sup>83</sup>

The view, still usually accepted, that the history of English prose should be held to begin with the early West Saxon revival of learning needs urgently to be reconsidered. For all Alfred's great achievement as a scholar and educator, such a generalization as this cannot be sustained in the face of the accumulating evidence that a vigorous tradition of Mercian vernacular writing preceded his work and, to a large extent, rendered it possible.<sup>84</sup>

Vleeskruyer based his assertions on dialectal vocabulary, sound changes, early West Saxon orthography, as well as history and context. His theory was controversial: in a 1955 review of his subsequent edition of the *Life of St Chad*, Celia Sisam cautioned that that 'his arguments, both linguistic and palaeographical, are not conclusive', though she acknowledged that it was nonetheless 'an interesting and challenging book.'<sup>85</sup> Yet scholars continue to respond to the potency of Vleeskruyer's idea.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, Franz Wenisch's important work on dialect vocabulary proposes more frequent occurrences of Anglian words in southern works, as well as Anglian provenances for a number of prose and poetic texts.<sup>87</sup>

The challenge of Vleeskruyer's argument in the present climate of Anglo-Saxon studies has been given impetus by increasing scrutiny regarding the Alfredian narrative in the past half century. It has now become acceptable to question the canon as well as the extent of the king's

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<sup>82</sup> Potter, p. 73.

<sup>83</sup> R. Vleeskruyer, 'The Life of St Chad: An Old English Homily' (unpubl. dissertation, Oxford Univ., 1951); also ed., *The Life of St. Chad*, esp. pp. 38-71. This dissertation is much indebted to Vleeskruyer's work.

<sup>84</sup> Vleeskruyer, *Life of St Chad*, pp. 40-1.

<sup>85</sup> C. Sisam, 'Review: *The Life of St. Chad*, edited by Rudolf Vleeskruyer', *RES* 6 (1955), 302-3.

<sup>86</sup> See for example, C. Thijs, 'Early Old English Translation: Practice before Theory', *Neophilologus* 91 (2007), 149-73, at 151-2. Janet Bately dedicates nearly a third of an article to disproving Vleeskruyer's arguments: see Bately, 'Old English Prose'. For an alternate view, see J. J. Campbell, 'Reviewed Work: *The Life of St. Chad: An Old English Homily* by Rudolf Vleeskruyer', *JEGP* 54 (1955), 402-4.

<sup>87</sup> F. Wenisch, *Spezifisch Anglisches Wortgut in den Nordhumbrischen Interlinearglossierungen des Lukasevangeliums* (Heidelberg, 1979). A. C. Amos accepts lexical tests as one of the more reliable means of dating Old English literature: *Linguistic Means of Determining the Dates of Old English Literary Texts*, Medieval Academy Books 90 (Cambridge, MA 1980), pp. 169-70.

personal involvement in the translation programme. For example, it is now widely accepted that the *Orosius* was not authored by Alfred, and more recently Malcolm Godden widened its potential dating to 883-930, while the authorship of works such as the *Boethius*, *Soliloquies* and *Prose Psalms* remains contested.<sup>88</sup>

While the debate over the Alfredian canon continues, the case for a pre-Alfredian, Mercian literary tradition of prose and verse has been steadily growing in recent years. In their forthcoming edition of the *OEB*, Gregory Waite and Sharon Rowley accept and develop Miller's conclusions as to its Mercian origins.<sup>89</sup> Similarly, Christine Rauer identifies the intersection of Mercian and West Saxon cultures at the end of the ninth century as a probable context for the production of the *Old English Martyrology (OEM)*.<sup>90</sup> In her recent presentation at ISAS, Rauer highlighted the necessity of a reevaluation of the Mercian contribution to early English prose.<sup>91</sup> Though Jane Roberts's edition of the *OEPG* acknowledges that both recensions of the text have elements of Mercian dialect, 'the best argument in favour of the Mercian origin of this translation is non-linguistic', that is, contextual.<sup>92</sup> This dissertation seeks to establish the Mercian contribution to vernacular literature in the eighth and ninth centuries by a combination of contextual, intertextual, historical and stylistic evidence, underpinned by linguistic evidence.

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<sup>88</sup> E. Liggins, 'The Authorship of the Old English *Orosius*', *Anglia* 88 (1970), 239-322; E. Liggins, 'Syntax and Style in the Old English *Orosius*', in *Studies in Earlier Old English Prose*, ed. P. E. Szarmach (Albany, 1986), pp. 245-73; J. Bately, 'The Old English *Orosius*', in Discenza and Szarmach (2015), pp. 313-43; M. Godden, 'The Old English *Orosius* and its Sources', *Anglia* 129 (2011), 297-320. For an overview of the arguments surrounding the composition of the *Orosius* and other Alfredian texts, see Leneghan, 'Translatio Imperii'.

<sup>89</sup> G. Waite and S. Rowley, eds., *The Old English Bede* (forthcoming).

<sup>90</sup> Rauer, *OEM*, pp. 11-8.

<sup>91</sup> C. Rauer, 'Early Mercian Text Production: Authors, Dialects and Reputations', paper presented at ISAS, Glasgow, 6 August 2015.

<sup>92</sup> J. Roberts, 'Guthlac: an Edition of the Old English Prose Life together with the Poems of the Exeter Book' (unpubl. DPhil dissertation, Oxford Univ., 1967), p. 237.

### *Linguistic Evidence*

Attempts to identify Old English dialects are of necessity somewhat circular in argument and therefore problematic in their implementation as evidence. Old English has traditionally been divided into four dialects based on a necessarily approximate mixture of geography and politics. Most Old English texts survive in late West Saxon (IWS), a literary dialect promoted by Æthelwold, bishop of Winchester (d. 984) and adopted by writers across England, including the prolific Ælfric of Eynsham (c. 950-1010).<sup>93</sup> Late West Saxon is distinguished from early West Saxon (eWS), the dialect displayed in the supposed works of Alfred's court circle; early West Saxon shares many features in common with Anglian orthography.<sup>94</sup> Kentish, the dialect local to Canterbury, is poorly attested, mostly in charters, glosses and two poems, the *Kentish Psalm* and the *Kentish Hymn*, both of which themselves exhibit dialect mixture.<sup>95</sup> The final two dialects, Northumbrian and Mercian, are grouped together under the category of Anglian due to certain shared characteristics and the supposed pre-migratory shared origins in continental Anglia of both kingdoms' inhabitants.<sup>96</sup> The foremost of these linguistic features is 'Anglian smoothing', in which diphthongs, that is, gliding vowels composed of two adjacent vowels, were reduced to monophthongs, or pure vowel sounds, particularly under the influence of certain consonants, for example smoothing of *eo* as in *weorc*, 'work', to *werc*. A text is usually categorised as Mercian if it lacks certain features characteristic of the Northumbrian dialect, such as the development of *wer+* a consonant to *wor-*; in addition, there are a number of features considered representative of the Mercian dialect.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>93</sup> H. Gneuss, 'The Origin of Standard Old English and Æthelwold's School at Winchester' *ASE* 1 (1972), 63-83.

<sup>94</sup> A. Campbell, *Old English Grammar* (Oxford, 1959), §16.

<sup>95</sup> Campbell, *Grammar*, §14; *HOEM* §46.

<sup>96</sup> Campbell, *Grammar*, §8, 11, 222.

<sup>97</sup> Campbell, *Grammar*, §147. Mercian lexical features include *eac swilce*, *endedæg*, *gelumpenlic*, *heah-* in compounds, *in-* in compounds, *medmicel*, *mitte* for *mid* + *þes*, *tylig*, and *þearfednis*; for discussion, see Vleeskruyer,

The imprecision of these dialectal definitions arises from the difficulty in establishing the origins of much of the Old English record. Most vernacular texts in this period are anonymous and exist solely in later copies in which the orthographic and dialect practices of any indeterminate number of scribes may have interfered with authorial forms. Even in the case of charters, which are often datable and can be localizable by archive location, we often cannot determine if the text was drawn up by a royal chancery or at the foundation receiving the grant recorded, and whether spelling practices within might reflect usage at the location of the land being granted, at the recipient foundation, or the king's court, in addition to the above factors.<sup>98</sup> Studies of scribal practice, such as Christine Wallis's work on the manuscripts of the *OEB*, have established certain copying practices and scribal habits, but if anything these studies reinforce that there is no one fixed response to copying or writing by which we might filter layers of scribal interference.<sup>99</sup>

The remaining evidence by which scholars attempt to establish the dialect origins of Old English texts is mostly contextual. A large majority of this evidence is drawn from charters; names in lists and Latin texts and glossaries also furnish early data.<sup>100</sup> The glosses added to the Lindisfarne Gospels by Aldred, provost of Chester-le-Street (fl. c. 970), are a confirmed source for Anglian dialect; likewise, Farmon's gloss to the Gospel of Matthew in the Rushworth Gospels (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Auctarium D. 2. 19; Gneuss and Lapidge No. 537, Ker No.

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*Life of St Chad*, pp. 27-33. For a list of Anglian dialect features, see R. D. Fulk, 'Anglian Dialect Features in Old English Anonymous Homiletic Literature: a Survey, with Preliminary Findings', in *Studies in the History of the English Language IV: Empirical and Analytical Advances in the Study of English Language Change*, ed. S. Fitzmaurice and D. Minkova (Berlin, 2008), pp. 81-100, at 86-8.

<sup>98</sup> *HOEM* §9; R. M. Hogg, *A Grammar of Old English I* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 2-8; T. Toon, 'Old English Dialects', in *The Cambridge History of the English Language I, The Beginnings to 1066*, The Cambridge History of the English Language, 6 vols, I, ed. R. M. Hogg (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 409-51, at 447-51.

<sup>99</sup> C. Wallis, 'The Old English Bede: Transmission and Textual History in Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts' (unpubl. PhD thesis, Sheffield Univ., 2013).

<sup>100</sup> Campbell, *Grammar*, §§ 8-16.

292) are taken as evidence of the Mercian dialect. Most words identified as dialect words are considered when attempting to identify the provenance of prose texts, but the issue of dialect in poetry is further complicated by the theory of a poetic *koine*.

### An Old English Poetic koine

A *koine* is a non-regional dialect intelligible to multiple dialects of the same language. Editors have long recognised a distinctly Anglian element in the majority of extant Old English poetry.<sup>101</sup> As Kenneth Sisam notes, Anglianisms are also a feature of poems known to have been written in late Wessex, such as *The Battle of Maldon*, composed after 991, which includes terms such as *mece*.<sup>102</sup> Modern students of Old English also distinguish between ‘poetic’ and ‘prosaic’ vocabulary. Yet even ‘poetic’ words appear in prose, and particularly in early Mercian works.<sup>103</sup>

There have been few explanations as to how this hypothesized poetic *koine* developed such an Anglian character.<sup>104</sup> The poems generally considered earliest, including *Widsith*, the *Franks Casket Riddle*, *Cædmon’s Hymn* and *Bede’s Death Song*, all have Anglian characteristics, and the latter two are known from Northumbrian contexts. In this thesis, I present evidence to support the view that a significant number of major Old English poetic works can be assigned to the age of the Mercian supremacy. In Chapter 1, I argue that the Guthlac poems are to be regarded as early Mercian productions, no later than 840, and in Chapter 2 that Cynewulf is a Mercian poet of the late eighth or early ninth century. Alongside these are poems such as

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<sup>101</sup> K. Sisam, ‘The Dialect Origins of the Earlier Old English Poetry’, in his *Studies in the History of Old English Literature* (Oxford, 1953), pp. 119-47; E. G. Stanley, ‘Old English Poetic Vocabulary: “The formal word precise but not pedantic”’, in *Essays on Old, Middle, Modern English and Old Icelandic in Honor of Raymond P. Tripp, Jr.*, ed. L. Gruber *et al.* (Lewiston, NY, 2000), pp. 177-200.

<sup>102</sup> Sisam, ‘Dialect Origins’, pp. 127-8.

<sup>103</sup> For example, *scopgereord*, ‘poetic speech’ (OEB), *leoðsong*, ‘poetic song’ (OEB); *frumsceaft*, ‘first creation’ (*Exodus*, *Andreas*, *Beowulf*, OEB, Ælfric’s homilies); see Waite, ‘Vocabulary’, §6.3, Appendix IV.

<sup>104</sup> Sisam, ‘Dialect Origins’, pp. 119, 138.

*Genesis A*, *Exodus* and *Daniel*, which are considered early – probably before 825 – and have Anglian characteristics.<sup>105</sup>

The issue most significantly impacting the evidence and relative chronology of the dating of Old English poetry is the dating of *Beowulf*. At the 1981 Toronto Conference, building on the recent palaeographic argument of Kevin Kiernan that *Beowulf* is contemporary with its late tenth- or early eleventh-century manuscript, many scholars advanced arguments for a ‘late’ date for the longest extant Old English epic.<sup>106</sup> For nearly thirty years and into the present day, the study of poetry within manuscript context, and consequently, late dating of poetry in general prevailed, with some notable exceptions.<sup>107</sup> The publication of the fourth edition of *Klaeber’s Beowulf* in 2008, followed by the 2011 Harvard Conference, *The Dating of Beowulf: a Reassessment*, saw a return to favour for the old view that the poem was probably ‘early’ (i.e. pre-Viking age) and Anglian, perhaps Mercian, though this again has not been without its dissenters.<sup>108</sup> As shall be explored briefly in Chapter 4, the content of *Beowulf* relates to issues found in Mercian politics and literature of the eighth and ninth centuries. *Beowulf* and the Mercian poems explored in this thesis may be among the earliest surviving descendants of an

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<sup>105</sup> *HOEM* §§ 376, 420-1.

<sup>106</sup> C. Chase, ed., *The Dating of Beowulf* (Toronto, 1981).

<sup>107</sup> Recent examples include Stacy Klein’s discussion of *Elene* in the context of the Vercelli Book in her *Ruling Women: Queenship and Gender in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Notre Dame, IN, 2006), and Damico, *Beowulf and the Grendelkin*.

<sup>108</sup> *Klaeber’s Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn, ed. R. D. Fulk, R. E. Bjork and J. D. Niles (Toronto, 2008), pp. clxv, clxvi, clxvii-clxxix; L. Neidorf, ‘Introduction’, in *The Dating of Beowulf: a Reassessment*, ed. L. Neidorf (Cambridge, 2014), pp. 1-18. See negative reviews by E. Weiskott, ‘Review: Leonard Neidorf, ed., *The Dating of Beowulf: a Reassessment*’, *RES* 67 (2016), 788-90; and C. Abram, ‘Review of Leonard Neidorf, ed., *The Dating of Beowulf: a Reassessment*’, *Saga-Book* 39 (2015), 133-7; and positive reviews by Magennis, ‘Review’, and Russom, ‘Review’.

Anglian poetic tradition, which may have contributed to the Anglian character of what is now considered a poetic *koine*.<sup>109</sup>

### Dialect in Prose

Dialect words in Old English prose, on the other hand, are generally considered more reliable indicators of the provenance of a given text. This is doubly so in texts of which more than one copy exists, as orthographical and lexical changes may indicate the updating and revision of the text by later scribes. Thus the origins of some anonymous prose, such as the lives of saints, homilies and translations, may be considered to have been composed in a particular dialect. Don Scragg, for example, proposed that Vercelli Homilies XV-XVIII derive from a Mercian homiliary, and that Vercelli Homily XXIII, an excerpt from the *OEPG*, and Cynewulf's verse are linguistically Mercian.<sup>110</sup> Fulk has surveyed Anglian features in a number of anonymous works of prose, including lives of saints and homilies.<sup>111</sup> Scragg has also suggested that certain of the Blickling Homilies are also later copies of Mercian originals.<sup>112</sup> Due to the relatively short length and generic content of these works, I have largely excluded homilies from the present study. However, the conclusions of this thesis recommend a fresh study of the possibility of such a pre-Alfredian, Mercian origin for these works.

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<sup>109</sup> Old English probably inherited a common Germanic poetic *koine*, but further words may have been fossilized into the Old English *koine* during the historical record, see D. Cronan, 'Poetic Meanings in the Old English Poetic Vocabulary', *ES* 84 (2003), 397-425 at 417; Cronan, 'Poetic Words, Conservatism and the Dating of Old English Poetry', *ASE* 33 (2004), 23-50, at 47.

<sup>110</sup> D. G. Scragg, 'The Compilation of the Vercelli Book', *ASE* 2 (1973), 189-207.

<sup>111</sup> Fulk, 'Anglian Dialect Features'.

<sup>112</sup> D. G. Scragg, 'The Homilies of the Blickling Manuscript', in *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. M. Lapidge and H. Gneuss (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 299-316.

### *Trends Observed in the Literature Under Consideration*

Two broad trends emerge in the texts read as Mercian during this period in this thesis, which are vernacular hagiography and orientalism. Prevalent across prose and verse, they also intersect with Latin, material and courtly culture in Mercia, suggesting that they might plausibly be considered as the products of a common culture.

#### Vernacular Hagiography

A remarkable amount of vernacular hagiography seems to have been produced in Mercia in this period. Early Anglo-Latin hagiographies, such as the anonymous Whitby Life of Gregory the Great, the anonymous *Vita Cuthberti*, Stephen of Ripon's *Vita Wilfridi*, Bede's prose and metrical *Vitae Cuthberti* and Felix's *Vita Guthlaci*, represent the adaptation of a traditional Latin genre and continental *vitae* to demonstrate the sanctity of an individual connected to Anglo-Saxon England, as well as to serve as examples of holy life to their audiences. Bede writes in his Preface to the *HE*:

satisque studium tuae sinceritatis amplector, quo non solum audiendis scripturae sanctae uerbis aurem sedulus accommodas uerum etiam noscendis priorum gestis siue dictis, et maxime nostrae gentis uirorum inlustrium, curam uigilanter inpendis. Siue enim historia de bonis bona referat, ad imitandum bonum auditor sollicitus insitgatur; seu mala commemoret de prauis, nihilominus religiosus ac pius auditor siue lector deuotando quod noxium est ac peruersum, ipse sollertius ad exsequenda ea quae bona ac Deo digna esse cognouerit, accenditur.<sup>113</sup>

Bede identifies the lives of the good and nefarious men of the English race as a means of instruction and improvement. Anglo-Latin hagiography also served to draw the faithful and holy of Anglo-Saxon England into communion with the universal church. *Vitae* from the continent

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<sup>113</sup> 'I gladly acknowledge the unfeigned enthusiasm with which, not content merely to lend an attentive ear to hear the words of Holy Scripture, you devote yourself to learn the sayings and doings of men of old, and more especially the famous men of our own race. Should history tell of good men and their good estate, the thoughtful listener is spurred on to imitate the good; should it record the evil ends of wicked men, no less effectually the devout and earnest listener or reader is kindled to eschew what is harmful and perverse, and himself with greater care pursue those things which he has learned to be good and pleasing in the sight of God.' *HE*, pp. 2-3.



also circulated and influenced these works, including the *Vita S. Antonii* and the *Vita S. Martini*. Yet vernacular hagiography followed quickly behind; as will be explored in Chapters 1-3, this may have been largely a Mercian innovation.<sup>114</sup> *Guthlac A*, usually considered among the earliest Old English poems, renders Guthlac's exploits as a hermit in Old English heroic epic, marrying the *valida prisinorum heroum facta* ('the valiant deeds of heroes of old') (VsG XVI) with the *priscorum monachorum solitariam vitam* ('the solitary life of monks of former days') (VsG XXIV).<sup>115</sup> Other vernacular verse lives were composed and known in Mercia. Notably, the signed works of the poet Cynewulf, long considered Mercian on linguistic grounds, include two verse lives of female saints, *Elene* and *Juliana*; the incomplete *Guthlac B* has also been considered Cynewulfian. These works are considered in Chapters 1 and 2. *Andreas*, which appears to reference *Beowulf* and the Cynewulfian poems, may also be Mercian, though it falls outside the scope of this thesis.<sup>116</sup> As Rosemary Woolf argues:

In Mercia, the verse lives, whether intended for a lay or ecclesiastical audience, were obviously primarily intended as edifying substitutes for heroic poetry, and were constructed to please and entertain as well as to give information and instruction.<sup>117</sup>

Such poems would suit the tastes of both the nobility, engaged in traditional roles of warfare, as well as the clergy, many of whom would have come from noble families and shared these values.

The prevalence of hagiographic material and 'Mercian' translation practices intersect in

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<sup>114</sup> 'The innovation of composing saints' lives in vernacular poetry seems to belong to Mercia towards the end of the eighth century.' R. Woolf, 'Saints Lives', in *Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature*, ed. E. G. Stanley (London, 1966), pp. 37-66, at 38.

<sup>115</sup> All translations of the VsG are taken from Colgrave, pp. 81, 87.

<sup>116</sup> As the purpose of this thesis was to establish evidence for a Mercian tradition of vernacular literature in the eighth and ninth centuries, I focused the study on texts with both excellent linguistic claims for Mercian origin and sufficient content with potential Mercian links. Scholars have noted potential borrowings in *Andreas* from *Beowulf* and the works of Cynewulf, suggesting that it relies on the works discussed here, rather than belonging directly to the same milieu, see A. Orchard, 'Both Style and Substance: The Case for Cynewulf', in *Anglo-Saxon Styles*, ed. C. E. Karkov and G. H. Brown (Binghamton, 2003), pp. 271-305. Fulk identifies *Andreas* as Mercian and dates it in his relative chronology to the same period as Cynewulf, *HOEM* §§ 380-93, 420. However, the recent editors of *Andreas* suggest that the poet was the Mercian priest Æthelstan during Alfred's reign, see Bintley and North, *Andreas*, pp. 97-115; see also K. R. Brooks, ed., *Andreas and Fates of the Apostles* (Oxford, 1961), pp. xviii-xxvii.

<sup>117</sup> Woolf, p. 39.

the translation of *vitae* into vernacular prose. Vleeskruyer's original hypothesis of a pre-Alfredian, Mercian school of translation emerged from his edition of the *Life of St Chad*, which survives uniquely as a homily in a twelfth-century manuscript, but may fit within the temporal confines of the narrative proposed here. As will be discussed in Chapter 1, the *OEPG*, preserved in a late eleventh-century manuscript, was also excerpted as a homily in Vercelli Homily XXIII. Two more Vercelli Homilies feature excerpted lives of saints: Homily XVII, a *Vita Martini*, and XVIII, regarding the purification of the Virgin Mary: as Scragg has shown, both are copied from a Mercian homiliary.<sup>118</sup> Given the rarity of legendaries from the pre-Reformation period, it may be significant that the two surviving from the eighth and ninth century are thought to be Mercian in origin.<sup>119</sup> Finally, the *OEB*, discussed in Chapter 3, retains nearly all of the hagiographic material of Bede's Latin narrative, while omitting and condensing large sections of other content. This suggests that its translator and/or intended audience may well have been especially interested in hagiography.

### Mercian Orientalism

The second major trend to emerge in the works examined here is Orientalism, that is, the appropriation and imitation of aspects of Eastern Culture. The *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* (henceforth, *Letter*) and *Wonders of the East* are both set beyond Babylon, in India and other unidentified lands, while the works of Cynewulf trace travels to India, Persia, Jerusalem, and other locations distant from, and to the East of, Anglo-Saxon England. As conceived in medieval maps, such as the 'T-O' map, the East was depicted as 'up' and Jerusalem at the centre of the world, whereas England in the west occupied the margins of the known world, as seen in Orosian geography and as depicted in the tenth-century Anglo-Saxon *mappa mundi* in Cotton Tiberius B.

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<sup>118</sup> Scragg, 'Vercelli'.

<sup>119</sup> Gallagher, 'Literary Culture', p. 102.

v. Where the *OEB* cuts continental material, *Beowulf*, like the Mercian royal genealogies, might be considered to draw the Mercian eye eastward, to the pagan Germanic past and to the traditions of the continental tribes to whom the Mercians traced their ancestry. The works under consideration here capture a fascination with the legendary riches and power of the East, but also potentially gesture to the way in which this Western-most Anglo-Saxon kingdom conceived of its position in the world. The Oriental models and influences which suffuse Mercian culture in this period range in geographic and cultural origin, but principally derive from the Abbasid Caliphate, the Copts and the Byzantine Empire, sometimes mediated through Italy and Francia. Kenneth Sisam first addressed the Orientalism of the Nowell Codex.<sup>120</sup> Since then, oriental models and settings have been identified for a number of contemporary Mercian cultural products, as I shall outline briefly. As a whole, they suggest that Mercian artists, authors and patrons sought to appropriate the perceived traditions and power of this exotic region as well as use them to theorize their own position in the world.

Much of the stone sculpture of the Mercian hegemony appears to have derived ultimately from Mediterranean and Byzantine sources. Richard Jewell identified a number of such inspirations for the sculptures at Breedon-on-the-Hill.<sup>121</sup> For example, among the references he identified for the Breedon Angel, he cites an ivory diptych from Constantinople, and an angel at Ravenna in northeastern Italy, and one Frankish product, certain illuminations in the Corbie Psalter (Bibliothèques d'Amiens Métropole, MS 18C). Jewell suggests that the model was probably a Syrian ivory, and that the Breedon Mary was based on an Italo-Byzantine icon.<sup>122</sup> He

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<sup>120</sup> K. Sisam, 'The *Beowulf* Manuscript', in his *Studies in the History of Old English Literature* (Oxford, 1953), pp. 61-4, at 63; 'The Compilation of the *Beowulf* Manuscript', in his *Studies*, pp. 65-94, at 94.

<sup>121</sup> R. Jewell, 'The Classicism of Southumbrian Sculpture', in *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, Studies in the Early History of Europe, ed. C. Farrar and M. Brown (Leicester, 2001), pp. 246-62.

<sup>122</sup> Jewell, pp. 256-9.

cautions that similar objects and styles inspired the products of the Carolingian renaissance, but that these Anglo-Saxon works drew on the Oriental models directly, rather than, as is usually supposed, on Carolingian intermediaries.<sup>123</sup> As J. M. Wallace-Hadrill observed, developments in eighth-century Anglo-Saxon kingship responded to political unrest similar to that which underlay the Carolingian rise to power.<sup>124</sup> Mercian Orientalism may have been inspired by Carolingian imperialism and Orientalism, but both cultures turned to the Orient for its traditional reputation of riches and power.

The majority of Anglo-Saxon coinage in this period relied heavily on Carolingian models and reforms. However, for special statements of power and prestige, moneyers adapted Oriental models. A gold coin made for Offa, potentially intended for trade in the Mediterranean, is modelled on a dinar of Caliph al-Mansur (r. 754-775), who founded Baghdad and ruled over the Orient in Offa's time. The direct Arabic loanword, *ealfara*, raises the possibility that there may have been contact or trade with the Caliphate.<sup>125</sup> Yet the Arabic on the coin is written backwards, testifying to the exoticism and foreignness of the artefact, which the Mercian mint has hybridized into a product instilled with both the power and authority of the Orient and the local ruler.<sup>126</sup> Similarly, the coinage of Offa's queen, Cynethryth, relies on Byzantine and Roman models. She is the first queen in Anglo-Saxon queen to have coins issued in her own name, a political move probably derived from Roman and Byzantine imperial practice.<sup>127</sup> Interestingly, the portraiture

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<sup>123</sup> Jewell, pp. 248, 262.

<sup>124</sup> J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent: The Ford Lectures delivered in the University of Oxford in Hilary Term 1970* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 109-10.

<sup>125</sup> A. Breeze, 'Old English *Ealfara*, "Pack-Horse": a Spanish-Arabic Loanword', *N&Q* 38 (1991), 15-17, suggests horse-trading may have occasioned the contact, p. 17.

<sup>126</sup> On the production of Offa's dinar, possibly as a special piece inspired by coinage introduced by Theophylact of Todi and George of Ostia, see K. Scarfe Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World*, CSASE 33 (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 58-9; on perceptions of the Islamic world in the *OEB* and *OEM*, respectively, see pp. 171, 18-1.

<sup>127</sup> G. Williams, 'Mercian Coinage and Authority', in Brown and Farr (2001), pp. 211-28, at 216.

on her coins resembles that of the Byzantine Empress Helena, commemorated in the Cynewulfian poem *Elene*, more than her immediate Byzantine contemporary, Irene.<sup>128</sup> Mercian coinage, though shaped by Carolingian standards and practices, also relied on Oriental and Roman precedents for special statements of identity and power.

Michelle Brown has advanced awareness of the use and adaptation of eastern and Byzantine techniques in Mercian illuminations and productions. For example, the illuminations of the Vespasian Psalter, a product of the hypothesized Mercian *schriftprovinz* at Canterbury and glossed in a contemporary Mercian dialect, are largely based on Italo-Byzantine, Coptic and Greek ivories, textiles and metalwork.<sup>129</sup> Other works of the Tiberius group, a group of manuscripts with similar script and illumination style which date from the eighth and ninth centuries and have been associated with the Mercian hegemony, betray an awareness of Oriental models, techniques and texts.<sup>130</sup> Similarly, masks in the Book of Cerne (Cambridge, University Library Ll. 1. 10: Gneuss and Lapidge No. 28) also betray Byzantine influences.<sup>131</sup> Finally, Brown's recent discovery of a 'palimpsest sandwich' at the monastery of St Catherine's on the Sinai peninsula, the work of two eighth-century Mercian scribes there, demonstrates that Mercians were in direct contact with the Orient.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> A. Gannon, *The Iconography of Early Anglo-Saxon Coinage: Sixth to Eighth Centuries* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 41-2; Williams, p. 216. On Irene, see below, p. 141.

<sup>129</sup> M. P. Brown, "'Tiberius Group'", pp. 279-82, 289; D. Wright, ed., *The Vespasian Psalter: British Museum, Cotton Vespasian A.1, EEMF 14* (Copenhagen, 1967), pp. 66-7; 75; Toswell, *Psalter*, pp. 225-52.

<sup>130</sup> Brown, 'The "Tiberius" Group', pp. 285, 289; Jewell, p. 262.

<sup>131</sup> D. Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Art: from the Seventh Century to the Norman Conquest* (London, 1984), p. 85. R. Cramp, 'Schools of Mercian Sculpture', in *Mercian Studies*, ed. A. Dornier (Leicester, 1977), pp. 191-233; L. Webster, 'Metalwork and the Mercian Supremacy', in Brown and Farr (Leicester, 2001), pp. 263-77.

<sup>132</sup> M. P. Brown, 'Imagining, Imaging and Experiencing the East in Insular and Anglo-Saxon Cultures: New Evidence for Contact', in *Anglo-Saxon England and the Visual Imagination*, ed. J. D. Niles, S. Klein and J. Wilcox, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon Studies* 6 (Tempe, AZ, 2014).

## Overview

This introduction has offered a brief summative background of the issues with which this thesis engages, beginning with a concise historical overview of the kingdom of Mercia and of Old English literature; of translation styles, present scholarship, and the difficulties involved in attempting to identify any literature as ‘Mercian’, including a simple explanation of dialect. Further historical and cultural details are offered in individual chapters as they relate to the literature under discussion. In Chapter 1, I examine the early texts of the cult of St Guthlac in light of Mercian political and cultural history, addressing the transition from Latin to vernacular hagiography, and suggest that the succession of Wiglaf (fl. 827- c. 840) occasioned a revival in the saint’s cult in the ninth century. In Chapter 2, I read Cynewulf’s verse lives of female saints, *Elene* and *Juliana*, as informed by the particularly high status of noble and royal women in Mercia in this period. The examination of the translation and transmission of the *OEB* in Chapter 3 reads the translation in light of eighth- and ninth-century Mercian ecclesiastical culture, and proposes that Tiberius style, a Mercian style of illumination, may have influenced the development of early Winchester style, in which the earliest copy of the *OEB* is illuminated. Finally, in Chapter 4, I offer an interpretation of the Old English translation of *Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle* (*Letter*) in the context of the other secular texts in its manuscript, Cotton Vitellius A. xv., *Beowulf* and *Wonders of the East* and alongside theories of kingship and overkingship in Mercia. Reading these texts within the narrative of contemporary conditions and developments in Mercia offers a potentially useful explanation of the context in which these texts originated, as well as robust narrative of cultural and political developments in eighth- and ninth-century Mercia.

## Chapter 1: Mercian Political Expansion and the Cult of Guthlac

### *Introduction*

Arguments about the nature of Guthlac's identity and the development of his cult have figured in a number of recent studies.<sup>1</sup> Important recent studies include Morn Capper's and Sarah Leaser's unpublished dissertations exploring the historical aspects of hagiography and Guthlac's identity and actions.<sup>2</sup> Sarah Downey's doctoral dissertation has looked at medieval Latin and vernacular texts of Guthlac's cult, and argues that structural features, especially repetition, and abbreviation feature prominently in these works and adaptations dating from the eighth through thirteenth centuries.<sup>3</sup> In *Medieval Identity Machines*, J. J. Cohen reads Guthlac through the lens of Foucault and Deleuze as a body capable of producing a religious and colonialist identity in the Fens, focusing on the body as a performer of identity.<sup>4</sup> This chapter reads the texts of the cult of Guthlac within the cultural and political history of Mercia in the eighth and ninth centuries, and offers a theoretical explanation both of contemporary issues facing the royal succession and also of the circumstances in which these texts may have been produced. Guthlac (674-715), a saint of Mercian heritage, appears in various sources from Anglo-Saxon England. The seminal text of his cult is Felix's eighth-century *Vita sancti Guthlaci*, which details his life from his royal ancestry to his posthumous miracles in the Fens.<sup>5</sup> Felix's text was translated into Old English and further excerpted in Homily XXIII in the Vercelli Book (Gneuss and Lapidge No. 941, Ker No. 394). The *OEM* also contains a brief entry on Guthlac. With the exception of St Cuthbert in the very late

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<sup>1</sup> For a flavour, see J. Roberts, 'Conference Report: Guthlac of Crowland: Celebrating 1300 Years', *Networks and Neighbours* 2 (2014), 431-40.

<sup>2</sup> M. Capper, 'Contested Loyalties: Regional and National Identities in the Midland Kingdoms of Anglo-Saxon England, c. 700-c. 900' (unpubl. PhD dissertation, University of Sheffield, 2008); S. Leaser, 'Eighth Century Lives of English Saints' (DPhil dissertation, in progress, University of Oxford 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Downey, 'Intertextuality'.

<sup>4</sup> J. J. Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, *Medieval Cultures* 35 (London, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Colgrave, p. 25.

poem, *Durham*, Guthlac is the only English saint commemorated in the corpus of surviving Old English poetry: two poems conventionally referred to as *Guthlac A* and *B*, of around thirteen-hundred lines in the tenth-century poetic miscellany, the Exeter Book (Gneuss and Lapidge, No. 257, Ker No. 116), meditate on his eremitical life and death. An eleventh-century English list of saints whose remains are in England records the resting place of his body in the fens of the Gyrwe tribe.<sup>6</sup>

Though his hermitage was situated in the Fens between East and Middle Anglia, the saint, the materials documenting him, and his cult are, as I will argue here, principally Mercian, and can therefore plausibly be read as reflecting the changing political and cultural dynamics of Mercia and its neighbours from the eighth through tenth centuries. The *OEM* is thought to be a ninth-century Mercian text, and includes entries on Guthlac, his sister Pega, and his saintly intercessor, Bartholomew.<sup>7</sup> In addition, scholars consider the Old English prose translation of Felix's *vita* (*OEPG*) likely to be the work of a Mercian translator.<sup>8</sup> *Guthlac B* has been considered to be the work of Cynewulf, also thought to be a ninth-century Mercian poet.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, two charters from Worcester purportedly dating to the

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<sup>6</sup> J. Roberts, 'Hagiography and Literature: the Case of Guthlac of Crowland', in Brown and Farr (London, 2001), p. 85. VsG, p. 25; F. Liebermann, *Die Heiligen Englands: Angelsächsische und Lateinisch* (Hannover, 1889); D. Rollason, 'Lists of Saints' Resting Places in Anglo-Saxon England', *ASE* 7 (1978), 61-93 at 62-4.

<sup>7</sup> M. P. Brown, *The Book and the Transformation of Britain c. 550-1050* (London, 2011), p. 118; J. Roberts, *Guthlac of Crowland: A Saint for Middle England* (Norwich, 2009), p. 27; Roberts, 'Hagiography and Literature', p. 77; D. Whitelock, 'The Prose of Alfred's reign', pp. 67-103; Bately, 'Old English Prose'; Rauer, *Martyrology*, pp. 4-18.

<sup>8</sup> Roberts, 'Hagiography and Literature', p. 80; J. Roberts, 'The Old English Prose Translation of Felix's *Vita sancti Guthlaci*', in *Studies in Earlier Old English Prose*, ed. P. E. Szarmach (Albany, NY, 1986), pp. 363-79. Roberts considers the translation Mercian on the basis of its subject matter but suggests it might be tenth-century. Roberts' conclusions were made before Godden's article, 'Did King Alfred Write Anything?', proposing pre-Alfredian works of literature; Godden's skepticism therefore informs this reading of the *OEPG* in the ninth century.

<sup>9</sup> K. Sisam, 'Cynewulf and his Poetry', The Sir Israel Gollancz Memorial Lecture, 8 March 1933, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 18 (1933), reprinted in his *Studies* pp. 1-28, at 6; R. D. Fulk, 'Cynewulf: Canon, Dialect, and Date', in *The Cynewulf Reader*, ed. R. E. Bjork, Basic Readings in Anglo-Saxon England 4 (London, 2001), pp. 3-22; *HOEM*, §§379-421. Chapter 2 considers the case for dating and localizing Cynewulf and his poetry.



years of Guthlac's military exploits in the West include his name as a witness.<sup>10</sup> It is difficult to determine the authenticity of these charters, surviving now only in eleventh- and seventeenth-century copies, but which nonetheless reflect a traditional connection between the region and the saint. Besides these charters and the name of the saint himself, the name Guthlac appears among the prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England only twice more, and in both occasions only in association with the Midlands: first on an undated boundary stone in Lincolnshire, probably associated with the monastery at Crowland, and second, the 1066 Domesday Book records a 'Gotlac' as holding half a hide in Wimbolds Trafford, Cheshire.<sup>11</sup> A number of manuscripts survive containing material of Guthlac's cult, including thirteen manuscripts of Felix's *vita*, three of which have unrelated Old English glosses, and three offices and two masses for the saint.<sup>12</sup> His cult flourished in Mercia and the territories into which it expanded through the later Middle Ages. Pre-reformation churches dedicated to Guthlac are confined to Mercia and the fenland regions, in modern-day Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Herefordshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and Suffolk.<sup>13</sup> The cult of Guthlac therefore appears to have been centred in and around Mercia and the regions it sought to absorb in the eighth and ninth centuries.

As we have seen in the Introduction, scholars are increasingly coming to recognise the importance of vernacular hagiography in pre-Alfredian Mercia. In this chapter, therefore, I engage with the materials of Guthlac's cult, reading them in the political and cultural context of eighth- and ninth-century Mercia. Beginning with a discussion of Mercian identity, I outline the dynamics of Mercian expansionism, before addressing potential underlying

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<sup>10</sup> J. Roberts, *The Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book* (Oxford, 1979), p. 4; J. Roberts, 'An Inventory of Early Guthlac Materials', *Medieval Studies* 32 (1970), 193-233, at 219. The charters in question are S 76 and S 77; on the authenticity of these charters, see 'S 76', eSawyer, <http://www.esawyer.org.uk/charter/76.html>; and 'S 77', eSawyer, <http://www.esawyer.org.uk/charter/77.html>.

<sup>11</sup> 'Guthlac 3', 'Guthlac 4', *PASE*.

<sup>12</sup> VsG, pp. 26-54; There are nine additional lost medieval manuscripts. See also S. Downey, 'Intertextuality in the Lives of St. Guthlac' (unpubl. PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2004), pp. 148-63; 178-85.

<sup>13</sup> A. Thacker, 'Kings, Saints and Monasteries in Pre-Viking Mercia', *Midland History* 10 (1985), 1-25, at 6-7. See further J. Roberts and A. Thacker, eds, *Guthlac of Crowland: Celebrating 1300 Years* (forthcoming).

reasons for the apparent flourishing of Guthlac's cult in ninth-century Mercia. I argue that Felix's Latin *vita*, though composed for an East Anglian king, reflects Mercian perspectives during its developing hegemony. Similarly, I propose that *Guthlac A* engages with the saint as a potential patron saint for greater Mercia, and reflects contemporary interests in its accounts of visions. Although connections between *Guthlac A* and Mercian culture are not explicit, I will suggest that the author's broad approach to the saint reflects the widening political influence of Mercia in the later eighth century. I then evaluate *Guthlac B*, the *OEPG*, and the entries in the *OEM* in the context of the revival of Guthlac's cult in the context of dynastic crises affecting the Mercian succession in the mid-ninth-century.

### *The Makings of a Mercian Text*

In this section, I argue that just as the Mercian kingdom expanded by incorporating extant polities, the earliest manifestations of Mercian identity adapted an existing, popular genre in Anglo-Saxon England, the Latin saint's *vita*. Territorial expansion and the association of diverse ethnicities characterize the kingdom of Mercia from its origins in the sixth century to its eventual assumption into Wessex in the early tenth century. As discussed in the Introduction, the term 'Mercian' itself is used by linguists to refer to all Anglian dialects except Northumbrian, reflecting the complex origins and expansionist nature of the kingdom.<sup>14</sup>

'First Mercia' consisted of the various tribes who projected an Anglian identity in the Midlands and came to accept and identify with the supremacy of the Mercian kings.<sup>15</sup>

Though there is a significant territorial difference between this 'first Mercia', which centred

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<sup>14</sup> Campbell, *Grammar*, §7-8; T. Hoad, 'Preliminaries: Before English', in *The Oxford History of English*, ed. L. Mugglestone (Oxford, 2006), pp. 7-37. For a fuller discussion of dialect, see above, p. 31.

<sup>15</sup> B. A. E. Yorke, 'The Origins of Mercia', in Brown and Farr (2001), pp. 13-22, at 20.

around the area identified as the homeland of the Tomsæte, and the region with which central Mercia later came to be associated,<sup>16</sup> the methods which Mercian leaders used to expand their hegemony did not differ extensively from the factors they used to unite ‘first Mercia.’ Under its early leaders, Mercia expanded by incorporating its neighbouring independent tribes, including both British communities and other Anglo-Saxon tribes, under administrative and religious superstructures.<sup>17</sup> The methods of promoting such unification varied according to the personal leadership of the current king, his agenda, and the polity in question, but usually consisted of a combination of military success, leadership and dynastic promotion. David Dumville has commented that there is a crucial difference between expanding a kingdom, which has an underlying organic unity composed of several unifying elements, and overkingship:

An overkingship may be created and held by an individual ruler, but it is difficult to transmit to a successor, since it has no natural unity; only a long, continuous period of enforcement, and the vigorous reduction of factors tending to emphasize the separate identity of the constituent parts, could hope to create a kingdom from an overlordship.<sup>18</sup>

This effect is difficult to perceive in the areas incorporated into ‘first Mercia’, but becomes more prominent in the kingdom’s seventh-century expansion, during which it both extended its own territory and set up various ‘client’ or ‘satellite’ states. These territories were ruled either by members of the Mercian royal family, loyal ealdormen, or reduced or subordinate kings.<sup>19</sup> Signs of such subordination include securing the overlord’s permission for land grants, and presumably requirements of military service, taxes, or precursors to bridge- and *burh*-obligations as later documented in the eighth century. In many cases, the independent

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<sup>16</sup> *EKK*, p. 102; Brooks, ‘Formation’, p. 161.

<sup>17</sup> F. M. Stenton, ‘The Supremacy of the Mercian Kings’, *English Historical Review* 33 (1918), 433-52, at 433; D. Dumville, ‘Essex, Middle Anglia, and the Expansion of Mercia in the South-East Midlands’, in *The Origins of the Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, ed. S. Bassett, Studies in the Early History of Britain (London, 1989), pp. 123-40, at p. 132; *EKK*, p. 102; Brooks, ‘Formation’, p. 167; K. Pretty, ‘Defining the Magonsæte’, in *Mercian Studies*, ed. A. Dornier (Leicester, 1977), pp. 171-83; Yorke, ‘Origins’, p. 20.

<sup>18</sup> Dumville, ‘Expansion’, p. 139.

<sup>19</sup> Peada and the Middle Angles, or Merewalh and the Magonsætan (cf. Pretty, ‘Magonsæte’, p. 177); subordinate kings may have ruled in Lindsey, and, later, Essex and Kent.

dynasties sank in status over time, until the administration of their region was turned over to an ealdorman, whether the current title of the former ruler, or a foreign Mercian appointment.<sup>20</sup> This tactic of inducing the acceptance of an overlord, then reducing the status of its local dynasty, in this period was neither solely Mercian, nor was it a Mercian invention, though it appears to have been more fully developed and extensive in this region than others.<sup>21</sup> As Yorke observes:

Parallels for many of these activities can be found in other kingdoms, but the thoroughness of Mercian statecraft is impressive and can be seen extending these policies to small provinces beyond its immediate borders before the end of the seventh century.<sup>22</sup>

In fact, so effective was this aspect of Mercian statecraft that several of these kingdoms became part of Mercia itself by the eighth century: for example, in the territory of the Magonsætan, the charters record its kings donating land in their own name in the seventh century, but by the ninth century the land is donated by Mercian kings and witnessed by descendants of the Magonsætan kings, now *ealdormen*; eighth-century Mercian kings granted land in the territory of the Hwicce; the East Saxons ceded control of London and other territories; and the Middle Angles merged seamlessly into Greater Mercia.<sup>23</sup>

This systematic reduction of the status and privileges of local leaders is one of the more important ways in which the kings of Mercia transformed their over kingship in the seventh century into an expanded, unified kingdom in the eighth. The identity, continuity and prominence of the ruling house was one of the major unifying factors of an Anglo-Saxon kingdom. The leadership of the descendants of the mythical dynastic founder, Icel, is likely to have been a major factor in the unification of Mercia from tribal affiliation to kingdom, to

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<sup>20</sup> C. Hart, 'The Kingdom of Mercia', in *Mercian Studies*, ed. A. Dornier (Leicester, 1977), pp. 43-61, at 46.

<sup>21</sup> The Mercians inherited the work of Cadwalla of Wessex in the Isle of Wight, who began the process of reducing the local ruler before the Mercians. See C. Arnold, *An Archaeology of the Early Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London, 1996), p. 215.

<sup>22</sup> *EKK*, p. 111.

<sup>23</sup> *EKK*, p. 113.

such an extent that later rulers descended from a junior branch took especial care to legitimize their right to rule: Guthlac's prominence as a saint likely stemmed in part from his relation to the royal dynasty via the legendary dynastic ancestor, Icel, which Felix notes in his *vita*. This offered some validation to the reign of Æthelbald (r. 716-57), and later, potentially Wiglaf.<sup>24</sup> Unlike his predecessors, who claimed descent from Penda, Æthelbald descended from Penda's brother, Eowa, and needed to claim shared dynastic lineage as a point of unity with his predecessors and as legitimacy for his own rule.

The role of the dynasty as a focus of ethnic cohesion is especially apparent in regions in which the Mercians were unable to demote local rulers who therefore retained some sovereignty throughout the period. Guthlac's hermitage was located between East Anglia and Mercian Middle Anglia, and the relationship between these two kingdoms illustrates the crucial role which the dynasty played in maintaining the identity of a kingdom.<sup>25</sup> The natural barrier of the Fens impeded expansion both into and out of East Anglia,<sup>26</sup> and so it is difficult to discern whether the Mercian failure to remove the East Anglian dynasty from power is a symptom of the Mercians never having gained full control over the East Anglians, or whether the continuity of the East Anglian dynasty constituted the primary obstacle to such control, and bringing the territory into Greater Mercia fully. Consequently, literature associated with Guthlac may reflect contemporary political concerns, especially attempts to extend Mercian identity beyond the physical barrier of the Fens.

East Anglia was itself a powerful kingdom in the sixth and seventh centuries, and clashed frequently with Mercia, as both kingdoms sought to expand control over the lesser-

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<sup>24</sup> Roberts, *Exeter*, p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> The other classic example of attempting but failing to demote the local authority is the contemporaneous Mercian interference in Kent.

<sup>26</sup> *EKK*, p. 65; H. Darby, 'The Fenland Frontier in Anglo-Saxon England', *Antiquity* 8 (1934), 185-201.

organized East Midlands.<sup>27</sup> However, through a combination of alliances and conquest over time, Mercia eventually brought East Anglia beneath its overlordship. The East Anglian dynasty never fully recovered from the death of Anna (d. 654?) at the hands of Penda, but continued to rule one of the four Anglo-Saxon kingdoms extant in 865.<sup>28</sup> After Anna's death, Penda seized control and shaped the tribes in the formerly contested region into a kingdom under Mercian control. He also compelled Anna's brother and successor, Æthelhere, to fight in his Northumbrian campaigns, including the battle at *Winwæd* (655), at which both perished (*HE* III.24). Relations between the two kingdoms seem to have been relatively peaceful during the reign of Æthelbald, to whom the East Angles may have been subject and paid tribute.<sup>29</sup> The same dynasty continued to reign in East Anglia, and though King Æthelberht of East Anglia was murdered at the court of King Offa of Mercia in 794, the East Anglian kingdom appears to have maintained a degree of independence: East Anglian mints in the late eighth century struck coinage for both the local rulers and the Mercian overlord.<sup>30</sup> Following the deaths of both Offa and Ecgfrith (796) and the ensuing dynastic chaos, the East Anglians regained some independence and Mercian kings Beornwulf (r. 823-26) and Ludeca (r. 826-7) were killed in attempts to reconquer the rebellious territory.<sup>31</sup> Vikings martyred the last East Anglian king, Edmund, in 869, and East Anglia became part of the Danelaw. The existence of a ruling dynasty through the Viking raids provided a point of unity indicating the ultimate failure of Mercian expansion into the kingdom.

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<sup>27</sup> Bede lists Rædwald as the fourth king to 'hold sway over all the provinces south of the river Humber' (*HE* ii.5). See also *EKK*, p. 62.

<sup>28</sup> *EKK*, p. 58, Dumville, 'Expansion', p. 132.

<sup>29</sup> S. Kelly, 'Æthelbald (d. 757)', *ODNB*; see also N. Higham, 'East Anglia, Kingdom of', in *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. M. Lapidge et al., 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Chichester, 2014), pp. 158-60.

<sup>30</sup> S. Kelly, 'Offa (d., 796)', *ODNB*.

<sup>31</sup> Higham, 'East Anglia', p. 155.

Mercia further extended its own identity by appropriating existing political and ecclesiastical structures, thereby converting pillars of separate identity into outlets to convey a Mercian identity and agenda. In creating the kingdom of the Middle Angles, for example, Penda simply placed his son Peada over existing local kingships without further suppressing them, effectively grafting the existing administrative structure and power dynamics unaltered onto a Greater Mercian stem.<sup>32</sup> In the west, the Mercians may have adopted the existing church network, probably Celtic in origin, to organize and control their new satellites and proto-Mercian holdings.<sup>33</sup>

The spread of Christianity in the early Anglo-Saxon period mirrored political hierarchies. Monasteries founded for the offspring of the Mercian royal family supplemented and appropriated existing ecclesiastical structures, and could instill a Mercian-oriented identity in areas outside Mercia. These political developments are reflected in Felix's *VsG*, where we see Ecgburh, abbess of the Mercian royal monastic foundation at Repton, a kinswoman of the kings of East Anglia, sending a messenger to Guthlac in the East Anglian fens to inquire who will inherit his hermitage.<sup>34</sup> As Guthlac trained at Repton, Ecgburh implicitly asserts authority over the hermit's cell as a daughter foundation of its Mercian mother.<sup>35</sup> Guthlac's consecration by the bishop of Lichfield seems to confirm that Guthlac's East Anglian cell was a local outpost of Mercian culture and identity.<sup>36</sup> The Mercian royal family spread piety, as well as their political ambitions, through the patronage they gave religious communities in areas subject to Mercian influence.

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<sup>32</sup> Dumville, 'Expansion', p. 132.

<sup>33</sup> Pretty, 'Magonsæte', pp. 180-2. Surviving Latin charters among the Hwicce seem to be drafted by local ecclesiastics, implying again the use of existing resources and structures, Brooks, 'Formation', p. 159. The same phenomenon is absent in the case of the Middle Angles because the region was converted during Peada's reign.

<sup>34</sup> *VsG*, p. 47.

<sup>35</sup> *VsG*, p. 201; Roberts, *Exeter*, p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> *VsG*, pp. 46-7.

Charter evidence confirms that ecclesiastical institutions outside Mercia received a significant amount of patronage from Mercian kings; in the seventh century, such institutions seem to have been used as outposts of Mercian identity.<sup>37</sup> Accepting missionaries from another kingdom implied political subordination.<sup>38</sup> Thus the foundation of new monastic houses under the authority of existing, Mercian-affiliated parents in areas outside ‘first Mercia’ established subordination to the new overlords. But as the Mercians were among the latest of the Germanic peoples to convert in Anglo-Saxon England, they invested far more effort in ‘converting’ existing religious foundations and organizations to their own identity. By using existing religious structures and patronizing established religious houses, the Mercian kings not only appeased powerful local families, an important source of support in establishing rule, they also forged an association between their hegemony, and specifically, their dynasty, and the local community.<sup>39</sup> Patronizing a monastery founded, and therefore ‘claimed’ or ‘owned’, by a local royal dynasty sent a message of dominance in a manner similar to forcing the reception of hostile relics, like those of Oswald at Bardney, forced on the community there by his niece, Osthryth (*HE* III.11). Religious patronage indeed may have operated similarly to the exchange of treasure between a lord and his retainer, with the burden of the original gift on the *hlaford* in return for expected future service.<sup>40</sup> Consequently, Abingdon, Bath, Gloucester and Malmesbury were founded by the ruling dynasties of regions beyond ‘first Mercia’, but may have assimilated a Mercian identity by receiving royal patronage.<sup>41</sup> Likewise, as Barbara Yorke observes, when Æthelred (d. 704) decided to

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<sup>37</sup> *EKK*, pp. 109–10.

<sup>38</sup> *EKK*, p. 160; *EH* III.21, 24; Kelly, ‘Peada (d. 656)’, *ODNB*.

<sup>39</sup> *EKK*, pp. 98, 100.

<sup>40</sup> A. Thacker, ‘The Social and Continental Background to Early Anglo-Saxon Hagiography’ (unpubl. DPhil dissertation, Oxford Univ., 1977), p. 10.

<sup>41</sup> *EKK*, p. 115. This Mercian phenomenon may be similar with, and perhaps modelled on, the contemporary Carolingian policy of ‘amicitia’ of bequeathing donations, privileges and relics. See A. G. Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past: Monastic Foundation Legends in Medieval Southern France* (London, 1995), pp. 148–50.



abdicate the throne for monastic life, he ‘chose to enter not a Mercian monastery, but the monastery of Bardney in Lindsey, the province which he had detached from Northumbrian control by his victory at the battle of the Trent in 679.’<sup>42</sup> This effectively also ‘claimed’ the monastery as a Mercian institution.<sup>43</sup> The appointment of Mercians to head local houses, or the commissioning of manuscripts to be produced from such centres, constituted similar claims. Several kinswomen of Penda were abbesses of houses on the fringes of Greater Mercia, and proclaimed a Mercian identity at these centres by promoting the cults of royal Mercian saints.<sup>44</sup> Æthelred was later venerated at Bardney as a saint, along with his wife.<sup>45</sup> The promotion of Mercian royal saints’ cults therefore probably constituted a policy to extend a Mercian identity through the expanding kingdom of Greater Mercia.<sup>46</sup>

The effect of these policies of reducing local identities in favour of a Mercian one was, with varying degrees of success, to weld together a single kingdom from multiple regions and tribes. As Yorke observes, ‘By the end of Offa’s reign Mercia had moved from being a confederation of peoples under Mercian overlordship to a vast kingdom comprising most of the English areas between the Humber.’<sup>47</sup> Texts produced outside Mercia may yet reflect the influence and agenda of Mercian rulers. Notions of identity, details of ecclesiastical expansion, and hints of justifying Mercian political legitimacy in Felix’s *VsG* confirm trends noticeable elsewhere about the political aspirations of the Mercians during this period.

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<sup>42</sup> *EKK*, p. 110.

<sup>43</sup> Thacker, ‘Kings, Saints and Monasteries’, pp. 2-4.

<sup>44</sup> For example, Mildeburgh at Much Wenlock, and Cyneburgh and Cyneswith whose cult was at Castor near Peterborough; *EKK*, p. 110.

<sup>45</sup> *HE* V.24; *EKK*, p. 109; A. Williams ‘Æthelred (d. after 704)’, *ODNB*.

<sup>46</sup> *EKK*, p. 110; Thacker, ‘Kings, Saints and Monasteries’.

<sup>47</sup> *EKK*, p. 114.

Adopting Existing Power Structures: a Mercian Text in Latin

The earliest source for Guthlac is Felix's *VsG*, composed c. 730-740, though the earliest surviving manuscripts date from the late eighth or early ninth century.<sup>48</sup> We know little more about the author than his name, and the fact that he describes himself as 'catholicae congregationis vernaculus', a phrase borrowed from Aldhelm.<sup>49</sup> Based on the work's dedication to the East Anglian king Ælfwald, his knowledge of the East Anglian dynasty, and the connection between his name and Saint Felix, the Frankish bishop of the East Angles in the early to mid-seventh century, scholars tend to consider him East Anglian.<sup>50</sup>

The *vita* was, of course, primarily intended to promote the cult of Guthlac, but also perhaps to extend the claims and prestige of Repton into East Anglia.<sup>51</sup> For example, the *Vita Wilfridi* emphasizes the political connections of Wilfrid and records many of the promises made to his monasteries during the controversies of his episcopacy, thereby protecting the claims of his foundations; similarly, the anonymous life of Gregory the Great composed at Whitby may have been intended to promote that foundation's Roman connections in the aftermath of the Synod of Whitby.<sup>52</sup> The *VsG* documents a connection between Repton and East Anglia during Guthlac's life, but not beyond it. Though Repton's abbess at the time of Guthlac's death was Ecgburh, daughter of King Aldwulf of East Anglia, its foundress, Ælfthryth, was likely a member of the Mercian royal family, and the foundation's loyalties

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<sup>48</sup> The *Vita* speaks in the present of Æthelbald's reign, c. 716-57, but must predate 749, the death of Ælfwald of East Anglia to whom it is dedicated, *VsG*, p. 29. For discussion of this manuscript's production, see below, p. 80.

<sup>49</sup> *VsG*, pp. 15-18.

<sup>50</sup> *VsG*, p. 15; Roberts, *Exeter*, p. 9. For a discussion of Felix's intellectual background, see Thacker, 'Early Anglo-Saxon Hagiography', pp. 279-93; Roberts, 'Conference', 432, 437.

<sup>51</sup> T. Hill, 'Imago Dei: Genre, Symbolism, and Anglo-Saxon Hagiography', in *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints' Lives and their Contexts*, ed. P. E. Szarmach (Albany, 1996), pp. 36-7; D. Rollason, 'Hagiography and Politics in Early Northumbria', in *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints' Lives and their Contexts*, ed. P. E. Szarmach, SUNY Series in Medieval Studies (Albany, 1996), pp. 95-114. Colgrave posits that Ælfwald may have commissioned the piece to claim Guthlac for East Anglia (*VsG*, p. 15); Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, pp. 118-9, suggests that the text has a primarily Mercian audience in mind.

<sup>52</sup> Rollason, 'Hagiography and Politics'.

remained to the kings of Mercia.<sup>53</sup> Felix may even have written the *vita* at Repton to commemorate its most famous son.<sup>54</sup> Certainly, the *VsG* reflects a connection between East Anglia and Mercian political and ecclesiastical expansionism in the eighth century regardless of its provenance.

The *vita* is a major source for attitudes and information concerning education, ecclesiastical hierarchy, politics, and views of region and ethnicity in eighth-century Anglo-Saxon England. Felix does not identify his institutional affiliation, yet he documents a flourishing literate community in the English Midlands. In his preface, he writes that there were *dum alii plurimi Anglorum librarii coram* ('many other English scholars in our midst'), and apologizes against potentially offending 'aures eruditi lectoris' ('the ears of a learned reader'), implying a literate and well-read, mostly ecclesiastical, audience for his work.<sup>55</sup> Presumably he refers here to such figures as Bede and Aldhelm, both of whom he imitates in style, as well as Theodore of Tarsus (d. 690), Hadrian of Canterbury (d. 710), Tatwine (d. 734), and Wilfrid (d. 709).<sup>56</sup> He may also refer to a number of nearly contemporary Latin saints' lives being composed in Northumbria, possibly in response to political pressures, such as those of Gregory the Great, Wilfrid, Ceolfrith and the anonymous life of Cuthbert in addition to the two Lives of Cuthbert composed by Bede.<sup>57</sup> Felix's conventional humility clearly acknowledges an active Latinate community in the eighth century.

Felix's introduction suggests that Guthlac's cult had been established to a certain degree by the time of the *vita*'s composition:

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<sup>53</sup> Roberts, *Exeter*, p. 5; 'Ælfthryth 1' PASE; 'Ælfthryth 2', PASE; *VsG* p. 47; Roberts, *Middle*, p.5.

<sup>54</sup> Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, p. 118; Roberts, *Middle*, p. 6.

<sup>55</sup> *VsG* I, pp. 60-1.

<sup>56</sup> *VsG*, pp. 17-18; Thacker, 'Early Anglo-Saxon Hagiography', pp. 279-28.

<sup>57</sup> Rollason, 'Hagiography', pp. 95-7.

[A]d huius utilitatis commodum hunc codicellum fieri ratus, ut illis qui sciunt ad memoriam tanti viri, nota revocandi fiat, his vero, qui ignorant, velut late pansae viae indicum notescat. (Prologue).<sup>58</sup>

His first aim is to recall the life of the saint, and secondly to inform those who may not know him, confirming that the primary audiences for most early Anglo-Latin saints' lives were communities already familiar with them.<sup>59</sup> In the case of Guthlac, though the work was dedicated to Ælfrwald, the cult was predominantly Mercian, and so too, we might therefore infer, was the *vita*'s implied audience.<sup>60</sup>

The text also indicates in several places that both the saint and his *vita* actively represent Mercian interests and perspectives in the liminal fenland space. Firstly, characterizations of ethnicity and region may reflect Mercian expansionist activity. Felix carefully identifies both the regional and ethnic origin of his saint, avoiding ambiguity between a people, a nation and a land, in the terminology of his discussion of Guthlac's ancestry, which he traces to royalty:<sup>61</sup>

Fuit itaque in diebus Æthelredi inlustris Anglorum regis quidam vir de egregia Merciorum stirpe cognomine Penwalh, cuius mansio in Mediterraneorum Anglorum partibus diversarum rerum fluxu praedita constabat. (Ch.I).<sup>62</sup>

Æthelred's title refers to the Anglian identity which served as a potential point of unity among the Mercian peoples. Felix captures both the historical specifics of Guthlac's ancestry and contemporary views on ethnic and regional identity. It seems unlikely that Æthelred of

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<sup>58</sup> 'I considered that this little book should be composed for this useful purpose that, for those who know it, it may serve as a sign to call them back to the remembrance of so great a man, and for those who do not know may be an indication to direct them on a wide open way.' VsG, pp. 64-5.

<sup>59</sup> Rollason, 'Hagiography', pp. 96-7; Thacker, 'Early Anglo-Saxon Hagiography'.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Rollason, 'Hagiography', p. 96; Thacker, 'Kings, Saints and Monasteries', 20; Thacker, 'Early Anglo-Saxon Hagiography', p. 13. The preface also implies that Guthlac's cult was not obscure at this time; see Roberts, *Exeter*, pp. 6-7; Thacker, 'Kings, Saints and Monasteries', pp. 5-6.

<sup>61</sup> R. Davies, 'Presidential Address: The Peoples of Britain and Ireland 1100-1400. I. Identities', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, 4 (1994), pp. 4-5, 13-14; Thacker, 'Early Anglo-Saxon Hagiography', pp. ii-iii. On the use of people for a region, see F. Klaeber, *A Commentary on the Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. V. Pakis, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 482, Old English Publications: Studies and Criticism 2 (Tempe, AZ, 2015), pp. 19-20.

<sup>62</sup> 'Now there was in the days of Æthelred, the illustrious king of the English, a certain man of distinguished Mercian stock named Penwalh, whose dwelling, furnished with an abundance of goods of various kinds, was in the district of the Middle Angles.' VsG, pp. 72-3.

Mercia was ever overlord of East Anglia, as its king, Aldwulf (r. 664-713) was considered as the primate of all England by Pope Sergius I and was himself able to protect Æthelbald as an exile from the persecutions of Ceolred; furthermore, the majority of Æthelred's attentions would have been focused on Northumbrian relations in the period.<sup>63</sup> Yet the title *regis Anglorum* suggests that such a kingship might be extended, perhaps into a *bretwalda*-ship, over further Anglian regions. The contrast between the saint's ancestry and his regional origin highlights that identity is tied to both ethnicity and region, and that the identity of a region and that of its inhabitants were not necessarily the same thing. Felix's care in preserving this distinction outlines the mutable and complex question of national, regional, and ethnic identity in early Anglo-Saxon England.

Felix's VsG also captures the political interests and precarious situation of the Mercians on the eve of their great hegemony. Descent from the royal dynasty served a key role in royal succession in Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>64</sup> This source of unity was of great importance in the heterogeneous make-up of the Mercian kingdom. Guthlac therefore represented an opportunity to legitimize Æthelbald's rule through traditional power structures. As an Iceling, Guthlac may have even been considered a candidate for the throne in his early years.<sup>65</sup> Guthlac's prophetic endorsement of Æthelbald may therefore record the assent of that dynasty to his right to rule, perhaps against rivals who shared royal descent.

Guthlac's status as a highly-regarded, well-known saint was essential to Æthelbald's construction of legitimacy. Many of the existing saints' cults then venerated in Mercia were connected with the dynasty directly descended from Penda, and the other popular saints' cults

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<sup>63</sup> S. Kelly, 'Wulfhere (d. 675)', *ODNB*; Williams, 'Æthelred'; 'Eadwulf 3', *PASE*; William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, 2 vols, ed. M. Winterbottom and R. Thomson, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, 2007), I, 34.

<sup>64</sup> On the role of ancestry and genealogy in succession, see below, p. 252.

<sup>65</sup> VsG, p. 34; Roberts, *Exeter*, p. 4; D. Dumville, 'The Ætheling: a Study in Anglo-Saxon Constitutional History', *ASE* 8 (1979), 1-33.

were outsiders connected problematically to hostile predecessors.<sup>66</sup> As Thacker notes, royal saints and dynastic cults could provide ‘extra power and status which stemmed from sanctity’ to support the associated ruler.<sup>67</sup> Guthlac’s identity, prophecies and sainthood justified Æthelbald’s succession along very traditional and powerful means of support, by claiming the support of the royal lineage at the expense of other dynastic rivals, and, more importantly, by divine will.

The *vita* documents ecclesiastical and dynastic connections between Mercia and East Anglia, which, as I shall argue below, identifies it as a text which reflects Mercian concerns. Firstly, it specifically describes its saint as Mercian, and after Guthlac, its most prominent figure, Æthelbald, was the Mercian overlord of all Southumbria during its composition.<sup>68</sup> Guthlac shows obedience only to Mercian ecclesiastics, receiving ordination from Headda, bishop of Lichfield and Leicester, and answering questions of succession from the abbot of Repton.<sup>69</sup> Headda indeed begs to consecrate Guthlac, a sign of his saintly superiority:

Ergo praedictus episcopus, postquam colloquiis illius potitus est et melle dulciora praecepta sapientiae ipsius gustavit, ecce repente in medio sermone submissa cervice supplex adiurare coepit illum, ut sacerdotale officium per eum suscipere. Guthlac vero, petitionibus episcopi nolens resistere, ocius se solo prosternens, voluntiae illius se oboediturum esse promittit. (ch. XLVII).<sup>70</sup>

Though Guthlac’s saintliness motivates Headda’s request, Guthlac carefully obeys the bishop. Moreover, the narrative is organised chronologically in terms of Mercian regnal years.<sup>71</sup> Cohen has suggested, therefore, that Ælfwald may have commissioned the work to please his Mercian overlord; the relative peace between the two kingdoms during this time,

<sup>66</sup> Thacker, ‘Early Anglo-Saxon Hagiography’, p. 326; Leiser, ‘Eighth Century Saints Lives’.

<sup>67</sup> Thacker, ‘Kings, Saints and Monasteries’, p. 14.

<sup>68</sup> *HE* v.23; Roberts, *Middle*, p. 6.

<sup>69</sup> *VsG*, chs XXXXVII, XXXXVIII.

<sup>70</sup> ‘So the said bishop [Headda], after he had had converse with him and had tasted of the teachings of his wisdom more sweet than honey, suddenly in the midst of his talk bowed his head, and began to beg and adjure Guthlac to receive priest’s orders at his hand. Guthlac, indeed, was unwilling to refuse the bishop’s petitions, and at once prostrated himself upon the ground and promised to be obedient to his wishes.’ *VsG*, pp. 144-5.

<sup>71</sup> Thacker, ‘Early Anglo-Saxon Hagiography’, p. 325.

the connections between their respective nobility and religious houses, and the practice of sharing monastic personnel among affiliated institutions support such a possibility.<sup>72</sup>

The location of Guthlac's hermitage on the fens between Mercia and East Anglia reflects the political and social reality of the age, but also has important ramifications on the nature of that space in the narrative. The Fens were an inaccessible space noteworthy for hiding exiles, but they were also a border space, described by Lindy Brady as a 'space just beyond the utmost control of a society that marked the difference between "us" and "them"'.<sup>73</sup> As a kingdom lacking clear natural boundaries and with strong incentives to expand, borders became spaces of conflict to limit Mercian identity. As Cohen comments:

[C]onsolidating and globalizing impulses within the Guthlac materials are congruent with the colonialist ambitions of the eighth century as the kingdom of Mercia strove to overcome its inner fragmentation to become a larger collective entity within which other peoples, territories, kingdoms could find their place.<sup>74</sup>

Border spaces are naturally ambivalent; in the Guthlac legends, the Fens are neither Mercian nor inherently adverse. Guthlac's intrusion into the Fens, which offends the local demonic population in *Guthlac A* (ll. 189b-99), extended Mercian identity into a politically undefined space. The landscape itself never resists or offers hostility to the saint, remaining open to both sanctification and the expansion of Mercian identity. Even the birds are ambivalent in Felix's *VsG*: the jackdaws work bits of mischief, but the sparrows and other birds obey Guthlac.<sup>75</sup> In contrast, in *Guthlac A*, a springtime earthly paradise replaces the dismal fen upon the saint's victory over the local demons (ll. 742-51).<sup>76</sup> In Felix, the continued ambivalence of the landscape identifies the border as neither hostile nor friendly, and therefore a potential space

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<sup>72</sup> Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, pp. 118-9; M. P. Brown, *The Book of Cerne: Prayer, Patronage and Power in Ninth-Century England*, British Library Studies in Medieval Culture 1 (London, 1996), p. 165.

<sup>73</sup> L. Brady, 'Echoes of Britons on a Fenland Frontier in the Old English *Andreas*', *RES* 61 (2010), 669-89, at 673; see also K. M. Wickham-Crowley, 'Living on the *Ecg*: the Mutable Boundaries of Land and Water in Anglo-Saxon Contexts', in *A Place to Believe In: Locating Medieval Landscapes*, ed. C. Lees and G. Overing (University Park, PA, 2006), pp. 85-110.

<sup>74</sup> Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, p. 121.

<sup>75</sup> *VsG* XXXVII-XL. See B. Brooks, 'The Restoration of Creation in the Early Anglo-Saxon *Vitae* of Cuthbert and Guthlac' (unpubl. DPhil dissertation, Oxford Univ., 2016).

<sup>76</sup> For an alternative view on the significance of the landscape in *Guthlac A*, see Brooks, 'Restoration'.

for Mercian expansion. In contrast, the paradisiacal transformation of the fens in *Guthlac A* suggests the assimilation of that space and the unity granted by the acceptance of that Mercian identity. This suggests that *Guthlac A* is a product of a more established cult of Guthlac than Felix's *vita*.

A significant link between Felix's narrative and the material culture of Mercia came to light in 2005 with the discovery of the Staffordshire Hoard. Notably, an inscription on a gold strip in the hoard, unearthed near the Mercian ecclesiastical and administrative centres at Lichfield and Tamworth, contains a line of scripture from Numbers X.35: 'surge d[omi]ne [et] disepentur [for 'dissipentur'] inimici tui et fugent [for 'fugiant'] qui oderunt te a facie tua',<sup>77</sup> which may be translated as "Rise up, O lord, and may thy enemies be dispersed and those who hate thee be driven from thy face."<sup>78</sup> As Michelle Brown observes: 'Appropriately, this is the prayer for spiritual protection invoked against the torment of demons by the desert father St Anthony, and employed by the Mercian warrior-turned-hermit, St Guthlac.'<sup>79</sup> Guthlac expels the 'British' demons with a similar line of scripture, and quotes it in his prophecy to Æthelbald.<sup>80</sup> Archaeologists date the military finds in the Staffordshire Hoard to the end of the Migration period in the seventh century, but the script on the gold strip resembles eighth-century inscriptions.<sup>81</sup> The inscribed gold strip may, then, represent a direct material link between the narrative as told by Felix and contemporary Mercian culture.

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<sup>77</sup> Toswell, *Psalter*, p. 150.

<sup>78</sup> Brown, *Transformation*, p. 81. No other extant Anglo-Saxon work cites this line until Ælfric, which may suggest that the line was in fact associated with the Mercian royal family. *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici*, Source Details: C.B.8.1.4.132.

<sup>79</sup> Brown, *Transformation*, p. 81.

<sup>80</sup> VsG, pp. 34, 49.

<sup>81</sup> K. Høilund-Nielson, 'Style II and All That: the Potential of the Hoard for the Statistical Study of Chronology and Geographical Distributions', *Papers from the Staffordshire Hoard Symposium* (2010), [finds.org.uk/staffshoardsymposium/karenhoilundnielson](https://finds.org.uk/staffshoardsymposium/karenhoilundnielson); M. P. Brown, 'The Manuscript Context for the Inscription', *Papers from the Staffordshire Hoard Symposium* (2010), [finds.org.uk/staffshoardsymposium/michellebrown](https://finds.org.uk/staffshoardsymposium/michellebrown); D. Ganz, 'The Text of the Inscription', *Papers from the Staffordshire Hoard Symposium* (2010), [finds.org.uk/staffshoardsymposium/davidganz](https://finds.org.uk/staffshoardsymposium/davidganz); E. Okasha, 'The Staffordshire Hoard Inscription', *Papers from the Staffordshire Hoard Symposium* (2010), [finds.org.uk/staffshoardsymposium/elizabethokasha](https://finds.org.uk/staffshoardsymposium/elizabethokasha); Toswell, *Psalter*, pp. 150-3.



While Felix's *VsG* mirrors Mercian-East Anglian relations in the life of their shared royal saint, it also presents and interprets the events from an overtly Mercian perspective. Guthlac's incursion into the Fens, maintained contact with his mother house at Repton, and association with Æthelbald make him not only a *miles Christi*, an anchorite seeking out the desert spaces of England in imitation of the Christian heroes of old, but also an active force in the ongoing promotion of Mercian identity beyond its traditional borders. East Anglia remained largely politically sovereign, and the largely Mercian focus of Felix's text, though dedicated to an East Anglian king, acknowledges the prominence of Æthelbald as contemporary overking or *bretwalda*. Though little East Anglian documentary evidence has survived the Viking incursions, it appears to be one of the provinces in which Mercian interference was limited and concentrated in the form of religious patronage.<sup>82</sup> This patronage and influence spilled over into some of the literature produced in or about East Anglia, reflecting Mercian attempts to solidify their hegemony from a more tenuous overlordship into a unified, expanded kingdom of Greater Mercia.

### Guthlac A

Like Christianity itself, which appropriated existing beliefs and structures to spread its influence in Anglo-Saxon England, the first efforts to extend Mercian identity through literature took the form of traditional genres and in the accepted universal language, Latin.<sup>83</sup> Yet vernacular literacy, shaped by both Germanic and Latin models, followed quickly in Anglo-Saxon England and in Mercia. Hence, for example, *Guthlac A* makes extensive use of the techniques of Germanic heroic poetry, including alliteration, variation, martial imagery, compound diction and kennings. The dating of Old English poetry is, of course, a highly contentious issue, though as we will see below there is a case for assigning two of the best-

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<sup>82</sup> D. Whitelock, 'The Pre-Viking Age Church in East Anglia', *ASE* 1 (1970), 1-22.

<sup>83</sup> *HE* I.30; Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, p. 130.

known examples of vernacular heroic poetry, *Beowulf* and the works of the poet Cynewulf, to eighth- or ninth-century Mercia.<sup>84</sup> In Felix's narrative, Guthlac serves as a symbol of Mercian political expansion into the rival East Anglian kingdom; even by just a generation later, the Mercian hegemony had developed further, and Guthlac could represent stand in for the royal identity which stood at the heart of the Mercian sphere of influence. As a vernacular verse hagiography, a genre which appears to have enjoyed great popularity in Mercia, *Guthlac A* may be read as a vernacular expression of the enlarged Mercian identity in the later eighth century, as its hero is intimately connected to the Mercian royal dynasty. As we shall see, the poet emphasizes Guthlac as a hero for all of Britain. In so doing, the poet makes Mercian identity capable of extension in a way similar to the geographic expansion of the Mercian hegemony.

*Guthlac A* survives in one copy, along with its companion piece, *Guthlac B*, on f. 32v through f. 44r of the Exeter Book, with breaks in the text at l. 368, where a leaf has been lost, and again at l. 541.<sup>85</sup> The three *Christ* and two *Guthlac* poems occur in the beginning of the Exeter Book, a late tenth-century poetic miscellany thought to have been written in the west of England, based on an earlier miscellany of unknown origin, which exemplifies the Christian life with a focus on salvation.<sup>86</sup> Together, the Guthlac-poems offer a model of

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<sup>84</sup> While the dating of Cynewulf varies between the eighth century and the tenth century, the dating of *Beowulf* is hugely contentious and varies over half a millenium. The dating of Cynewulf will be discussed below, see p.101; on the dating of *Beowulf*, see above, p. 3434.

<sup>85</sup> For discussion of the ending of its predecessor in the manuscript, the *Christ* poems, and its beginning, see *The Exeter Book*, ed. G. P. Krapp and E. Dobbie, ASPR III (London, 1936), pp. xxx–xxxi; A. Philip, 'The Exeter Scribe and the Unity of the *Crist*', *PMLA* 55 (1940), 903-9; R. M. Liuzza, 'The Old English *Christ* and *Guthlac* Texts, Manuscripts, and Critics', *RES* 41 (1990), 1-11; J. Pope, 'Palaeography and Poetry: Some Solved and Unsolved Problems of the Exeter Book', in *Medieval Scribes, Manuscripts & Libraries: Essays Presented to N. R. Ker*, ed. M. B. Parkes, A. G. Watson and J. Gibbs (London, 1978), pp. 25-68, esp. pp. 27, 35. Conner's theory on the booklets has, however, been questioned: see, R. Gameson, 'The Origin of the Exeter Book of Old English Poetry', *ASE* 25 (1996), 135-85.

<sup>86</sup> B. Muir, ed., *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry: an Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. rev, I (Exeter, 2000), p. 115; E. Dobbie, ed., *The Exeter Book*, ASPR III xxiii–xxiv; R. Gameson, 'The Origin of the Exeter Book of Old English Poetry', *ASE* 25 (1996), 135-85; K. Sisam, 'The Exeter Book', in his *Studies in the History of Old English Literature* (Oxford, 1953), pp. 97-108, at 97, 102, 108. On *Guthlac B*, see below, p. 90. Two other Cynewulfian poems, *Christ II* and *Juliana* also appear alongside *Azarias*. On *Azarias*

Christian life in a specifically English context: for example, the poet explicitly states that Guthlac became an example to many in Britain (*Guthlac A*, ll. 174-5). That the saint chosen is undeniably closely linked with the Mercian royal dynasty offers further support that these poems represent Mercia as the normative English identity. The language of both Guthlac-poems indicates an advanced state of transmission, suggesting that these texts considerably antedate their manuscript.<sup>87</sup>

The language and style of *Guthlac A* could allow for a Mercian origin in the eighth or ninth century. As its editor, Roberts, observes, the linguistic features of *Guthlac A* are, like most Old English poetry, prevailingly late West Saxon, ‘with a sprinkling of Anglian and Kentish forms which may result from successive stages of copying or from the presence of such forms in West Saxon poetic manuscripts.’<sup>88</sup> Roberts also notes that *Guthlac A* contains forms usually regarded as Anglian in prose but regarded as part of the poetic *koine*, such as *gen* and *nemne*, while Wenisch’s work confirms that there is a concentrated occurrence of Anglian dialect words in the *Guthlac* poems.<sup>89</sup> Though not exclusive to Anglian texts, Anglian features in these poems include evidence of second fronting, restoration of i-mutation of *a* before *l*+consonant, and the absence of glide vowels between *sc* and back vowels.<sup>90</sup> Mercian forms such as *þeara* (l. 398),<sup>91</sup> *cwið* (l. 4)<sup>92</sup> and *nemne* (l. 367) are especially noteworthy.<sup>93</sup> Given the preponderance of West Saxon forms in the Exeter Book, these Anglian forms are unlikely to have been introduced by its scribes; we may therefore plausibly read them as vestiges from the exemplar or original dialect of the poem.

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and connections with Lincolnshire, see J. Hines, ‘The Benedicite Canticle in Old English Verse: An Early Runic Witness from Southern Lincolnshire’, *Anglia* 133 (2015), 257-77.

<sup>87</sup> Roberts, *Exeter*, p. 71. Roberts’s discussion on the language of the texts is invaluable, see pp. 63-71.

<sup>88</sup> Roberts, *Exeter*, p. 68.

<sup>89</sup> F. Wenisch, *Anglisches Wortgut*, p. 328.

<sup>90</sup> Roberts, *Exeter*, p. 67.

<sup>91</sup> There are thirty-one instances of this form, (*þeara* and *ðeara*) in the corpus; 4 occur in charters of the ninth century associated with Wulfred (S1188, S1268, S1436 and S1482), 3 in the *OEB* and 15 in the Vespasian Psalter glosses, which are acknowledged as Mercian. See DOEC.

<sup>92</sup> *HOEM*, Appendix A, pp. 399-402.

<sup>93</sup> Campbell, *Grammar*, §§11-12.

Stylistic criteria also suggest considering *Guthlac A* among the earlier examples of extant Old English poems. Although stylistic similarities may not necessarily reflect a chronological development but merely the preferences of two stylistic schools, which may or may not be contemporary, Roberts's metrical analysis conclusively demonstrates the separate authorship of the *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B*, and indicates that *Guthlac A* stylistically resembles other poems usually considered 'early', such as *Genesis A*, *Daniel* and *Azarias*.<sup>94</sup> The style of *Guthlac A* has been interpreted in many ways, but a combination of various forms of evidence outlined above (linguistic, metrical, stylistic, cultural) invite us to read the poem within the context of eighth-century Mercian culture, and it is to this task that I shall now turn.<sup>95</sup>

Reading *Guthlac A* within the context of eighth-century Mercia offers a plausible and attractive explanation for many features of the text. In the eighth century, the kingdom of Mercia became the dominant political power, and its king, Æthelbald, assumed the mantle of *bretwalda* from the Northumbrian kings. Indeed, though Bede omitted Æthelbald from his famous list of *bretwaldas*, he nonetheless acknowledged the political and cultural prominence of the Mercian hegemony in his 'present' day: *Et hae omnes prouinciae ceraeque australes ad confinium usque Humrae fluminis cum suis quaeque regibus Merciorum regi Aedilbaldo subiectae sunt* (HE V.23).<sup>96</sup> As discussed above, the unity of provinces over which Æthelbald was overlord – or even *bretwalda* – depended upon his individual rule, unless measures to

<sup>94</sup> Roberts, *Exeter*, p. 70; J. Roberts, 'A Metrical Analysis of the Poems "Guthlac A" and "Guthlac B"', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature* 71 (1971), 91-137, at 116, 119; HOEM § 400; Amos, *Linguistic Means*, p. 76.

<sup>95</sup> For example, Roberts upholds the 'relative simplicity so pleasing [...] in *Beowulf*, perhaps in *Judith* and *Guthlac A*', *Exeter*, p. 56; Schaar finds stylistic similarities and perhaps even borrowings of *Guthlac A* in Andreas, C. Schaar, *Critical Studies in the Cynewulf Group*, Lund Studies in English 17 (Lund, 1949), pp. 291-5; C. Schaar, 'On a New Theory of Old English Poetic Diction', *Neophilologus* 40 (1956), 301-5, at 304; E. Palumbo, *The Literary Use of Formulas in Guthlac II and their Relation to Felix's Vita Sancti Guthlaci* (The Hague: Mouton, 1977), suggests that *Guthlac A* uses oral sources and that the poet himself was illiterate, based also on the less extensive use of formulae of his style.

<sup>96</sup> 'All these kingdoms and the other southern kingdoms which reach right up to the Humber, together with their various kings, are subject to Æthelbald, king of Mercia.' HE, pp. 558-9.

merge the independent polities were successful. In *Guthlac A*, then, we may see the promotion of a dynastic saint with regional appeal being cast as a universal saint for Anglo-Saxon England. Indeed, *Guthlac A* presents Guthlac as a model of sanctity for all of Britain, writing that he *meaclond gesæt þær he mongum wearð / bysen on Brytene* (ll. 174-75a).<sup>97</sup> Consequently, by focusing on the generic and universal qualities of the saint's life, the poet does present Guthlac as a saint for all of Britain. The universal appeal of the saint may gesture towards both the political expansionist aims of the kingdom under Æthelbald and the evangelizing purposes of the poem. Thus the universalising approach of *Guthlac A* in presenting Guthlac as a saint with broad appeal in Anglo-Saxon England can also be identified with eighth-century Mercian expansionism.

Certain aspects of the poem draw the saint into the lived experience of the poem's audience, such as the omission of exclusive or specific limiting details, the presentation of the landscape, the timeline of the narrative, and the emphasis on Guthlac's popularity. By removing any specific historical details from the account, *Guthlac A* allows contemporary audiences to encounter the saint as a recent and local hero. Furthermore, its record of the vision of the lax monastery (ll. 404- 529), unique in the Guthlac canon, raises the possibility that its poet had access to legends unknown to Felix, while its interpretation of Felix's chapter XXXI suggests that its poet may have been steeped in a literate, Latinate culture in which visions circulated as well. These all combine to cast Guthlac with wide appeal in Anglo-Saxon England, much as the king of Mercia was becoming a ruler over much of the same territory.

While Felix's narrative speaks to the concerns of the Mercian succession and eighth-century expansion into East Anglia, *Guthlac A* presents its saint largely stripped of the

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<sup>97</sup> '[He] settled in the wasteland, where he became an example to many in Britain'. All quotations taken from Roberts, *Exeter*.

particular details of his historical experience, allowing him to function as a general, heroic and aristocratic Anglo-Saxon saint. All but one of the names of the cast of characters in Guthlac's life are removed: it mentions by name only its hero and his guardian, Bartholomew. Guthlac's acknowledged earthly helpers – *ac me dogra gehwam dryhten sendeð / þurh monnes hond mine þearf* (ll. 321-2) ('But each day, the Lord sends me my needs by means of the hand of man') – remain unnamed. While Felix provides specific details, here Guthlac's past as a warrior is merely alluded to:

þæt se halga wer  
in þa ærestan ældu gelufade  
frecnessa fela (ll. 108b-10a).<sup>98</sup>

The poet offers an admission to the specifics of Guthlac's life, while also casting him as a sinner, a man who loved *frecnessa fela* ('many dangers'), especially since *frecnes* has a particular connotation as spiritual peril. Similarly, unlike Felix's account, the poetic narrative features no historical events that must be contextually anchored: his arrival in the Fens (ll. 170-80a), thereby triumphing over his previous sins, is unrelated to his monastic life. Guthlac's only visitors are demonic or angelic: the demons attempt to reclaim their *beorg* and Guthlac's soul, while Bartholomew and angels support the resolute Christian warrior. The poem draws Guthlac into the lived experience of its audience by insisting that Guthlac was a hero *in gemyndigra monna tidum* (l. 154) ('in the memories of men's times), of *ussum tidum* (l. 401) ('our times') and *þara þe ylðran ussa gemunde, / oþþe we selfe siþþan cuðen* (ll. 750-1) ('which the elders of us remember, or we ourselves since know.' The litany of mortal visitors of Felix's narrative (Ch. XLI-L) does not factor in this timeless saint's narrative, set generally in *Brytene* (l. 175). As Jane Roberts notes, 'the poet does not present a simply-ordered and straightforward series of encounters, but mixes narrative with lengthy discursive reflection.'<sup>99</sup> This allows an audience familiar with Guthlac's story to supply known details,

<sup>98</sup> 'That the holy man formerly in youth had loved many dangers'.

<sup>99</sup> Roberts, *Exeter*, pp. 29-30.

but also creates an ambiguous narrative in which discursive reflection carries the import, making Guthlac a vehicle for a discussion of Christian faith and action.

Rather, the poet presents the aim of his poetry first: reunion in Heaven, using Guthlac as an example. The opening lines, sometimes considered instead a part of *Christ III*, which precedes the Guthlac poems in the Exeter book, depict the soul's arrival in heaven, and the poem then progresses to describe one soul's way of attaining that end.<sup>100</sup> This unity is key in *Guthlac A*, and one could imagine that other unions may have been prominent in the time in which it was written: it could reflect the earthly, political union of greater Mercia or the Mercian alliance with the see of Canterbury developing during the eighth century. The poet explicitly states that Guthlac models one approach to this universal Christian theme:

Monge sindon   geond middangeard  
hadas under heofonum   þa þe in haligra  
rim arisað. (ll. 30-2a).<sup>101</sup>

The poem focuses on men who keep the heavenly reward foremost in their minds.<sup>102</sup> This concentration saves Guthlac from the despair which the demons attempt to inflict upon him by psychological suffering. Yet contained within that universality is a glimmer of Mercian political ambitions, reaching out to unify its disparate regions by answering a call to enact such an identity: in the case of Guthlac, that is saintliness; for subjects of the sub-kingdoms under the Mercian hegemony, it is adopting Mercian identity, thereby becoming, perhaps permanently, truly Mercian. *Guthlac A* is, then, a poem about one man's answering of God's call to a particular, ascetic, way of life, but in the form of (edifying) entertainment.<sup>103</sup> As with

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<sup>100</sup> Roberts, *Exeter*, p. 30, fn. 3.

<sup>101</sup> 'There are many ranks under heaven who shall rise to the number of the holy.' On the significance of the term *had* in *Guthlac A*, see J. Damon, *Soldier Saints and Holy Warriors: Warfare and Sanctity in the Literature of Early England* (Aldershot, 2003), p. 139. On the repetition of line 30 as the opening of *The Panther*, see Liuzza, 'Christ and Guthlac Texts', 8.

<sup>102</sup> Among the first details we are told about the saint is *hu Guðlac his in Godes willan/ mod gerehte, mán eall forseah/ eorðlice æpelu, úpp gemunde/ ham in heofonum* (ll. 95-8), 'how Guthlac directed his mind to the will of God, forsook all sin and earthly excellencies, kept aloft in mind the home in the heavens.'

<sup>103</sup> Woolf, p. 39.

other poems Patrick Conner judges ‘early’ in the Exeter Book, it offers a blend of monastic and secular values reflective of heroic poetry and a royal court, as well as an exhortation to Christian living.<sup>104</sup> Elements of the life are strange and otherworldly, but, as Rosemary Woolf comments, ‘[l]ike the medieval romance, the saint’s life as a genre can please by a deliberate and skilful exploration of the strange and is designed to arouse a romantic sense of wonder.’<sup>105</sup> Indeed, the strange attacks of the demons and Guthlac’s resolution against despair makes of him a *miles Christi*, a lone warrior in Christ’s *dugub*, to whose aid Bartholomew comes. By focusing on Guthlac’s heroic, Christian qualities, *Guthlac A* offers an Anglo-Saxon audience a hero in the model of a traditional Germanic warrior, whose wide appeal could attract followers and devotees from around England in any period or place, and perhaps create a unity in faith and culture.

The poet’s stated aim also governs the treatment of the landscape in *Guthlac A*, though his own geographical knowledge might nonetheless have been influential. The description of the landscape carefully avoids referencing anything specific or local to Crowland, as Roberts notes:

In the ‘desert’ of *Guthlac A* the waste spaces are dotted with green hills, and the saint’s demon persecutors lament for the ‘grene beorgas’ (l. 232) they have had to quit because of Guthlac’s constancy. Crowland goes unnamed, there is no River Granta: no place-names that might serve to key the audience into a remembered locality.<sup>106</sup>

It seems unlikely that a fenland poet would emphasize the hills of the landscape. Though Guthlac’s barrow, and the many green surrounding hills, form a major structural motif throughout the poem,<sup>107</sup> the poet does not describe the landscape in significant detail. The repugnance of Felix’s landscape (a dismal fen of marshes, bogs, and black water), which

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<sup>104</sup> P. Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter: A Tenth-Century Cultural History*, Studies in Anglo-Saxon History 4 (Woodbridge, 1993), p. 149.

<sup>105</sup> Woolf, p. 43.

<sup>106</sup> Roberts, *Middle*, p. 27.

<sup>107</sup> L. Shook, ‘The Burial Mound in *Guthlac A*’, *Modern Philology* 58 (1960), 1-10, at 2; on the landscape in *Guthlac A*, see Brooks, ‘Reorientation’.



reflects the saint's asceticism, is transformed into a blissful springtime green field (l. 746), as a reflection of the saint's holy power.<sup>108</sup> Elsewhere it is described as a barrow in a grove (l. 148). There are several possible explanations for the poem's treatment of the landscape: one is that territorial battle for the barrow represents the battle for possession of Guthlac's soul.<sup>109</sup> Another is that the poet's didactic purpose overrules all other concerns in the text.<sup>110</sup> The poet might even subconsciously have substituted a version of his local wilderness in representing the saint's isolation: indeed, the description matches the territory of the Magonsætan, which in the seventh and eighth centuries exhibited settlement patterns in which the hilltops between Brittonic and Anglo-Saxon communities constituted a wilderness like that of the *beorg* in *Guthlac A*.<sup>111</sup> The adaptation of the setting from the stylised and classically influenced fens of East Anglia to a seemingly local context may be seen to parallel the progression of the first poems compiled in the Exeter Book, exemplifying the Christian life, and then presenting it within an explicitly English context, making Guthlac an English Anthony.

The landscape of *Guthlac A*, like the chronology of the narrative, appears to advance thematic concerns ahead of historical fact. *Beowulf*, another Old English poem often considered 'early', employs similar approaches to landscape: for example, Wardale asserts that the *Beowulf*-poet describes the journey to Grendel's mere to evoke 'some bit of country which [every reader] knows and which with a little imagination could be taken as the original.'<sup>112</sup> Moreover, Dorothy Whitelock noted similarities between the account of the Fens in Felix's *Vita* and the description of Grendel's mere in *Beowulf*, and Sam Newton has

<sup>108</sup> VsG, p. 87; see Brooks, 'Reorientation'.

<sup>109</sup> P. Reichardt, 'Guthlac A and the Landscape of Spiritual Perfection', *Neophilologus* 58 (1974), 331-8.

<sup>110</sup> Shook, 'Burial Mound', 3; J. Neville, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry*, CSASE 27 (Cambridge, 1999), p. 128.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Pretty, 'Magonsætan', pp. 180-1.

<sup>112</sup> E. E. Wardale, *Chapters on Old English Literature* (London, 1935), p. 102.

subsequently argued for close connections between the landscape and genealogies of East Anglia, and *Beowulf*.<sup>113</sup> Similarities in style and in certain descriptions of the landscape between *Guthlac A* and *Beowulf* may be potentially explained by reading both as Mercian works.<sup>114</sup> The treatment of the landscape functions as part of the poem's purpose: by setting the narrative in an unspecific, yet evocative landscape, the *Guthlac A* poet emphasizes the focus on Guthlac as a model virtuous soul, whom anyone might emulate regardless of geographic origins. Jennifer Neville asserts that the landscape of *Guthlac A* serves to differentiate Guthlac as a saint and hero, and is part of the poem's didactic purpose.<sup>115</sup>

The exclusion of any reference to the reality of the Fens or any detail related thereto, combined with the importance of the barrow and the surrounding hills in the struggles between Guthlac and the demons, suggests that perhaps the poem was not intended for a specifically East Anglian audience. Rather, it may be more fruitful to read *Guthlac A* as a poem which presents Guthlac as a universally suitable saint and within a generation of Felix. As J. J. Cohen argues, in *Guthlac A*, Guthlac could become an ideological 'suturing point at which the dispersed identity of the contemporary island could imagine itself a unity, projecting into the future a Mercian hegemony characterized by solidity, racial integration, and a divinely mandated colonialist destiny.'<sup>116</sup> There was at this time no single patron saint of the English, and during the Mercian hegemony, especially in the first half of the eighth century, Guthlac appears to have been promoted to occupy that role.<sup>117</sup> *Guthlac A* thus serves as a saint for all Britain.

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<sup>113</sup> D. Whitelock, *The Audience of Beowulf* (Oxford, 1964), pp. 81-2; S. Newton, *The Origins of Beowulf and the Pre-Viking Kingdom of East Anglia* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 62-3, 132-45.

<sup>114</sup> The provenance of *Beowulf* is extremely contentious, though its most recent editors suggest it may be Mercian. See Klaeber's *Beowulf*, pp. clxv, clxvi, clxvii-clxxix; for a discussion of the genealogy in *Beowulf*, see F. Leneghan, 'The Poetic Purpose of the Offa-Digression in *Beowulf*', *RES* 60 (2009), 538-60, at 547-53. On the Mercian origins of *Beowulf*, see below, p. 268.

<sup>115</sup> Neville, *Representations*, pp. 44, 125-8.

<sup>116</sup> Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, p. xxvi.

<sup>117</sup> Roberts, *Middle*, p. 3.

The visions which the poet relates encourage reading *Guthlac A* alongside contemporary Latin literature. It is generally acknowledged that the poem uses roughly the same narrative that Felix provides, though it may also employ other, unknown sources.<sup>118</sup> For example, Guthlac's transportation to the gates of hell (ll. 554-721) is a loose interpretation of Felix's chapter XXXI, 'How the evil spirits carried him bodily to the gates of hell'. On the other hand, the unique vision of the lax monastery (ll. 412-512) does not appear in Felix, and has fuelled suspicions that the *Guthlac A* poet used other sources, perhaps even oral traditions.<sup>119</sup> However, the nearest parallels are with near contemporary Latinate works; for example, Bede's *HE* IV.25 provides a description of Coldingham in which Adamnan, like Guthlac, a man atoning for previous sins with fasting, prayer and penance in monastic life, confesses what he has seen to its abbess, Æbbe:

Siquidem modo totum hoc monasterium ex ordine perlustrans, singulorum casas ac lectos inspexi, et neminem ex omnibus praeter te erga sanitatem animae suae occupatum repperi; sed omnes prorsus, et uiri et feminae, aut somno torpent inertes aut ad peccata uigilant. Nam et domunculae, quae ad orandum uel legendum factae erant, nunc in comesationem, potationum, fabulationum et ceterarum sunt inlecebrarum cubilia conuersae; uirgines quoque Deo dicatae, contemta reuerentia suae professionis, quotiescumque uacant, texendis subtilioribus indumentis operam dant, quibus aut se ipsas at uicem sponsarum in periculum sui status adornent, aut externorum sibi uirorum amicitiam conparent. (*HE* IV.25)<sup>120</sup>

Adamnan describes this in the context of a vision of Coldingham being consumed in flames in retribution for its sins. In *Guthlac A*, demons give powers similar to Adamnan's, and reveal to Guthlac the sins of all those living *under haligra hyrda gewealdum / in mysterum monna gebæru* (ll. 415-6, 'under the power of the holy guardian, the behaviour of men in the minster'):

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<sup>118</sup> Robets, *Exeter*, pp. 19-24.

<sup>119</sup> Roberts, *Exeter*, p. 19.

<sup>120</sup> 'I have just visited every part of this monastery in turn: I have examined all the cells and their beds, and I have found no one except you concerned with his soul's welfare; but all of them, men and women alike, are sunk in slothful slumbers or else they remain awake for the purposes of sin. And the cells that were built for praying and for reading have become haunts of feasting, drinking, gossip and other delights; even the virgins who are dedicated to God put aside all respect for their profession and, whenever they have leisure, spend their time weaving elaborate garments with which to adorn themselves as if they were brides, so imperilling their virginity, or else to make friends with strange men.' *HE*, pp. 425-7.

þara þe hyra lifes þurh lust brucan  
 idlum æhtum 7 oferwlencum,  
 girelum gielplicum: swa bið geoguðe þeaw  
 þær þæs ealdres egsa ne styreð. (ll. 417-20).<sup>121</sup>

The specific sins he is shown correlate loosely to the sins Adamnan observes at Coldingham: improper dress, possessions, and passing their time in delight rather than in prayer and fasting. This offers Guthlac an opportunity to articulate the Christian message of forgiveness in his defense of these sinners to the demons:

Ic eow soð wiþ þon secgan wille:  
 God scop geoguðe 7 gumena dream;  
 ne magun þa æfteryld in þam ærestan  
 blæde geberan ac hy blissiað  
 worulde wynnum oððæt wintra rim  
 gegæð in þa geoguðe þæt se gæst lufað  
 onsyn 7 ætwist ylðran hades  
 ðe gemete monige geond middangeard  
 þeowiað in þeawum; þeodum ywaþ  
 wisdom weras, wlencu forleosað  
 siððan geoguðe geað gæst aflihð. (ll. 494-504).<sup>122</sup>

The saint articulates a timeless message of hope, reform and forgiveness to all men, by which he might be adopted as a saint with wide appeal beyond Mercia. Yet these visions also participate in an active culture of visions which was quite popular in eighth-century Anglo-Saxon literature.

Visions served a number of functions in early medieval culture. As Sharon Rowley has explored in her study of the *OEB*, the visions in Book V are located specifically both temporally and geographically, and serve to ‘make the Otherworld a part of the history of

<sup>121</sup> ‘There through desires they enjoyed their lives in idle possessions, overweening pride and ostentatious clothing: such is the custom of youth, when fear of the abbot does not stir them.’ On the translation of *ealdor*, see Roberts, *Exeter*, p. 145.

<sup>122</sup> ‘I will speak the truth against you: God created youth and the joys of men; in the first age they may not bear the bloom of elder age, but they rejoice in the joys of the world, until the measure of years overtakes youth, so that the spirit loves the look and form of the elder age, which is meted out to many throughout middle-earth who devote themselves to this custom; men reveal their wisdom to peoples, forsake pride, after the soul flees from the fickleness of youth.’ On similarities of the *hapax legomenon æfteryld* to vocabulary in the *OEB*, see Roberts, *Exeter*, pp. 147-8. Thomas Hill has suggested this response is influenced by the seventh-century Irish text, *De duodecim abusivis saeculi*, see T. Hill, ‘The Age of Man and the World in the Old English *Guthlac A*’, *JEGP* 80 (1981), 13-21, at 16-17.

early Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>123</sup> In chapter XXXI of Felix's *vita*, Guthlac experiences a *visio* or voyage – the distinction is often unclear in medieval visions of heaven and hell<sup>124</sup> – a menagerie of demons kidnap the saint at his evening prayers in an attempt to force him to quit the Fens. Eventually, they drag him for his sins, before Bartholomew comes to his aid (XXXII). *Guthlac A* offers a version of this episode in fitts seven and eight (ll. 530-721).

While the poem presents a fairly straightforward heroic versification of the demons' argument and their classically-inspired vision of hell, it vastly expands Guthlac's reply from twenty-six words, to a thirty-four line heroic defense of faith against the demonic accusations (ll. 478-512). As a whole, the episode is best described as a demonic attempt to claim for hell a soul over which they have no right; a heavenly intercessor prevents them. Similar visions occur in a number of continental and other Insular texts from antiquity through to the eighth century.<sup>125</sup> Visions of hell were indeed not uncommon before the ninth century and can also be found in the *Voyages of St Brendan*, probably based on eighth-century legends, and of Charles the Fat, Maximus, Sunniulf and an unknown woman recounted in one of Lull's letters.<sup>126</sup> Several of the most popular of these visions originate in an Anglo-Saxon context, including a series of visions in the final book of the *HE*. Two visions stand out as particularly noteworthy in relation to eighth-century Mercian politics: namely, the unrepentant thane of Bede's V.13, and the vision of the monk of Much Wenlock related by Boniface to the abbess

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<sup>123</sup> Rowley, *Old English Version*, p. 135.

<sup>124</sup> E. Gardiner, *Medieval Visions of Heaven and Hell: a Sourcebook*, Garland Medieval Bibliographies 11 (London, 1993), pp. xxii-xxiv.

<sup>125</sup> These include the seventh-century *Visio baronti monachi longorentensis*, in which the monk's soul was seized at death by devils but rescued by the archangel Raphael; the vision of Drythelm in the *HE* (V.12), where devils attack Drythelm during his vision of the otherworld; Fursey's third vision (*HE* III.19), in which he is accused by demons during a battle, but angels intercede and mitigate his punishment; a number of visions in the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great (IV. 37), including one sinner who is about to be cast into punishment before an angel saves him; of an Irish abbot Laisrén (d. 638) who, before a host of angels, was accosted by an army of devils seeking to claim his soul, though the angels defend him; and an episode in the vision of the monk of Much Wenlock, in which demons attempt to seize the soul of a righteous abbot, but are repelled by angels. See Gardiner, *Visions*, pp. 43, 124-5, 143-5; E. Kylie, *The English Correspondence of Saint Boniface*, Kings Classics (London, 1911), pp. 78-89.

<sup>126</sup> Gardiner, *Visions*, pp. 51-94, 131, 202 and 232.

Eadburga of Thanet.<sup>127</sup> In both these visions, the genre of the vision of heaven and hell intersects with Mercian politics as well as salvation history in a similar way to *Guthlac A*.

Much Wenlock was founded in the eighth century by Mildburg, a royal princess saint of the Mercian line, a grand-daughter of Penda and cousin of kings Coenred and Ceolred. The monk's vision after an apparent earthly death describes his sins as well as Judgement, hell and paradise and some of the details of those he encountered there, including Ceolred, whom he sees being attacked by devils but defended by angels, until the devils reveal his numerous wicked sins, which force the angels to withdraw their protection from him; then the demons tear Ceolred to pieces.<sup>128</sup> Ceolred (d. 716) was the king whom Æthelbald fled in exile, the son of king Æthelred, and indeed, in one letter, Boniface dates an increase in sacrilegious attacks to his reign, and relates the scandalous means of his death in letters to Æthelbald.<sup>129</sup>

Boniface's letter relating the vision of the monk of Much Wenlock clearly indicates that Ceolred had died: casting Ceolred as a wicked king may have been historically accurate, but also complemented the narrative of Æthelbald's rise to the throne. The letter's vision of the otherworld probably spurred an Old English translation of this letter.<sup>130</sup>

Nestled among a series of visions designed to emphasize the reality of God's intervention and the uncertainty of salvation, Bede's account of the unrepentant thane (V. 13) also engages with the kings of Mercia.<sup>131</sup> However, in this vision, the Mercian king, Coenred, is a force for good, who advises his thane to repent in his illness. The thane relates that he has had a vision of angels and demons who have recorded his righteous and wicked deeds in two books, and the devils claim the thane's soul. Bede interprets the vision as for the good of all rather than for the damned soul, relating it to Gregory the Great's interpretation in his

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<sup>127</sup> See *PASE*, 'Eadburg 4'.

<sup>128</sup> Boniface, *Die Briefe*, ed. Tangl, No. 10, p. 14, trans. Kylie, *English*, No. 14, pp. 78-90.

<sup>129</sup> Boniface, *Die Briefe*, ed. Tangl, No. 73; trans. Kylie, No. 40, pp. 160-73.

<sup>130</sup> Sisam, 'Wynfrith', pp. 205-6. Sisam suggests the translation was made in Mercia; it omits the paragraph on Ceolred.

<sup>131</sup> cf. Rowley, *Old English Version*, pp. 135-6.

*Dialogues*. In the *OEB*, many details of the episode (*OEB* V.14) are summarized, including Coenred's fondness for this particular thane, and the reference to the *Dialogues*. Yet both versions stress the piety of Coenred, who later abdicated to become a monk in Rome, leaving the throne to his impious cousin, Ceolred.

In two popular visions of the eighth century recorded in Latin and later translated into Old English, Mercian politics intersect with the genre of the vision, especially those of the otherworld. Along with contemporary continental and influential classical visions, they form part of a tradition of Latinate culture in which both Felix's *VsG* and *Guthlac A* participate. *Guthlac A* may, then, contain one of the earliest visions of hell in the vernacular.<sup>132</sup>

Considering *Guthlac A* in relation to these eighth-century texts provides useful contexts for ascertaining its particular concerns and influences. Given its suitability for both monastic and court audiences, *Guthlac A* is ultimately concerned with Everyman, and the narrative structure, lack of geographic and personal details, and setting reflect this. Individually, none of the features here offers a particularly compelling reason for reading *Guthlac A* as a Mercian work; however, as a cumulative whole, such a reading has the ability to explain a number of its features, whilst also slotting into what is known of the rise of the Mercian hegemony in the eighth century.

### *The Ninth-Century Revival of Guthlac's Cult*

The texts of the early Guthlac cult discussed above, Felix's *Vita* and *Guthlac A*, may respond to the saint's status as well as the cultural concerns of the period. Felix claims to be writing to recall the memory of the saint, but he also had to be aware that casting his account of Guthlac in conventional terms of the genre, alongside sufficient patronage, would be key to

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<sup>132</sup> Another possibility is the vision of hell of St Paul in Blickling Homily 17, which is difficult to date. See C. Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature*, CSASE 6 (Cambridge, 1993).

establishing a lasting saint's cult. *Guthlac A*'s insistence on its proximity to the saint both situates its poet temporally, but also keeps the saint alive and present to its audience. Yet as the Mercian hegemony was expanding in the eighth century, the cult of Guthlac spread; his cult-sites on the borders of the Mercian kingdom and his connection to Æthelbald would make this cult a powerful articulation of greater Mercian identity.

Most scholars look to date the later Anglo-Saxon materials of Guthlac's cult in the ninth century, at the earliest, including the *OEPG*, *Guthlac B*, and the *OEM*. Though these texts continued to be transmitted through the thirteenth century, the political dimension of Guthlac's cult means that it was unlikely to have received the patronage of the dynasty of Ecgberht of Wessex, while the irregular aspects of Guthlac's asceticism hardly recommend him as a model of Benedictine monasticism, a status confirmed by Ælfric's omission of Guthlac in his *Lives of Saints*.<sup>133</sup> The emergence of several new texts and translations outlined below which appear to have been composed before the mid-tenth century Benedictine Reform bears witness to the changes in textual culture and the precarious line of succession to the Mercian throne, especially during the two reigns of Wiglaf (r. 827-9; 830-9). The saint whom the *Guthlac A* poet had so carefully crafted as an example to all had not entirely shed his Mercian royal identity, which enabled him again to intercede for and legitimize a struggling candidate for the throne, as shall be seen. During this time of dynastic strife, Wiglaf turned to the cult of the only saint to prophecy about the Mercian succession and actively promoted connections with him in order to bolster his own claim to the throne.

Anglo-Saxon textual culture had changed significantly between the composition of Felix's *vita* in the mid-eighth century and the mid-ninth century. In particular, ecclesiastical

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<sup>133</sup> On Ælfric's view of Guthlac, see M. Clayton, 'Hermits and the Contemplative Life in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints' Lives and Their Contexts*, ed. P. E. Szarmach (Albany, 1996), pp. 147-75, at 162-67. For arguments which attempt to connect the Guthlac poems to the tenth-century English Benedictine reform, see Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter*; C. Jones, 'Envisioning the Cenobium in the Old English *Guthlac A*', *Medieval Studies* 57 (1995), 59-91; and S. Downey *et al.*, "'Books Tell Us'".



councils in the mid-to-late eighth century increasingly tolerated and encouraged the use of the vernacular, which may have directly impacted the production of (especially religious) vernacular literature in this period. In 747, perhaps adopting Boniface's recommendations, the council of Clofesho, presided over by the Mercian-appointed archbishop of Canterbury, Cuthbert (d. 760), and the Mercian King Æthelbald, decreed that priests who ministered to the laity be required to know and understand the Creed and the Lord's Prayer in the vernacular, if ignorant of Latin, and the meaning of the services of the mass in baptism.<sup>134</sup> Whether or not these canons, especially canon 10, 'Ut Presbyteri quoque Symbolum et Missarum Verba in sua lingua discant scire', reflect actual practice or rather a need for a change in practice due to declining standards of Latinity, they nonetheless provide official sanction for the use of the vernacular in ecclesiastic settings. Adoption of the vernacular in official settings continued, with the papal legates expounding and reading aloud the Legatine Canons of 786 both in the Latin and the vernacular, in the presence of Offa and the Mercian court. On the continent, Charlemagne's *Admonitio Generalis* of 789 reiterated many concerns raised in earlier Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical councils; canon 70 articulated that priests *et dominicam orationem ipsi intellegant et omnibus praedicent intellegendam, ut quisque sciat, quid petat a deo*.<sup>135</sup> The vernacular was becoming a regular part of Mercian ecclesiastical and court culture in the late eighth century, as it was in Charlemagne's court. This encourages the

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<sup>134</sup> C. Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils, c. 650-c. 850* (London, 1995), p. 100; A. W. Haddan and W. Stubbs, eds., *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, 3 vols, III (Oxford, 1878), p. 366.

<sup>135</sup> 'And that they both understand the Lord's Prayer and teach its meaning to others, so that every man may know what he is asking of God.' H. Mordek, K. Zechiel-Eckes and M. Glatthaar, *Die Admonitio Generalis Karls des Grossen*, MGH, Fontes Iuris Germanici Antiqui 16 (Hannover, 2012), p. 220. Trans. E. Duckett, *Alcuin, Friend of Charlemagne* (New York, 1951), p. 122. Duckett identifies this as 'new' material, composed by Charlemagne and Alcuin; however, as we can see this was preempted by over thirty years at the Councils of Clofesho in 747. Significantly, Alcuin, the Northumbrian cleric, was present at the witnessing of the Legatine Canons both in Northumbria and again later in Southumbria, and a scholar at Charlemagne's court; see Cubitt, *Councils*, pp. 160-5.

view that that certain Old English translations and perhaps other vernacular works considered below were products of this milieu.

In the following discussion I will read several of the texts of the second phase of the cult of Guthlac as products of the ninth-century revival of his cult occasioned by instability in the Mercian succession. Guthlac's identity as a Mercian ætheling, a descendant of Icel and a successful military leader, made him the closest figure to a prince or king saint outside of the direct descendants of Penda, until the death of Wigstan in 849.<sup>136</sup> Furthermore, Guthlac's status as a prophet who successfully foretold Æthelbald's radical rise to power from exile associated him with succession to the throne. Just as Æthelbald promoted the cult of Guthlac for pious reasons, as well as political expediency, similar circumstances recommended Guthlac as an intercessor to Wiglaf in the mid-ninth century. In order to provide a context for this discussion it is necessary first to outline the complex circumstances surrounding the frequently contested Mercian succession in this period.

#### Mercian Succession after Ecgfrith

The Mercian succession in the mid-ninth century passed between several distant branches of the royal line. Cenwulf (d. 821), who took the throne after the deaths of Offa and Ecgfrith in 796, ruled in the final days of the Mercian supremacy. His son, Cynehelm (supp. fl. 803x811), may have been killed before his majority; Cenwulf was succeeded by his brother, Ceolwulf, who was himself later deposed in 823. Beornwulf, who also had tenuous claims to the throne, succeeded Ceolwulf but was killed in 826 in East Anglia, as was his successor, Ludeca, the following year.<sup>137</sup> After the long reigns of Æthelbald (41 years), Offa (39 years), and Cenwulf (25 years), Mercia witnessed the rule of four different kings inside the span of one decade. Still likely affected by Offa's supposed dynastic purges, the genuine line of Icel

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<sup>136</sup> I exclude Cynehelm from this list principally because of the controversy surrounding his historical existence; see D. Rollason, 'Cynehelm (supp. fl. 803x11)', *ODNB*.

<sup>137</sup> R. North, *The Origins of Beowulf: from Vergil to Wiglaf* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 301-2.

may have been extinct, and Wiglaf, likely a dynastic outsider, succeeded in 827. Not much is known of Wiglaf or his family, who may have been based in a region near Breedon and Repton, with a distant line resettled in Wessex; abbot Wigmund of Breedon may have been a relative, and the priest Wigfrith, a member of the retinue of Bishop Headda who visited Guthlac at Crowland (Lat. ch. 46 and 47; OE ch. 17), may have been a distant ancestor.<sup>138</sup> Later accounts of Wiglaf hint that he may have been a lower-ranking ealdorman or *dux* before his elevation, since comments relate the royal blood of his wife, Cynethryth, probably related to the C-dynasty (Cenwulf, Ceolwulf, Coenred, and Cynethryth, Offa's queen), and his daughter-in-law (mother of Wigstan), Ælflæd, a relation of Cenwalh, but no recorded pedigree survives for him. As shall be seen in Chapter 2, Offa's prestigious marriage provided him with support on the throne: Wiglaf's marriage may have allied him with the same powerful family, but he lacked the clout of Offa's impressive, though probably largely fictional, genealogy. Instead, I argue, Wiglaf turned to a generic – and potentially familial – relationship with Æthelbald and promoted the cult of Guthlac in order to legitimize his reign. Reading the texts of Guthlac's cult previously associated with the ninth and tenth centuries, such as *Guthlac B*, the *OEPG* and the *OEM*, in the context of Wiglaf's reign provides a coherent explanation for the proliferation of vernacular Guthlac texts before the Alfredian renaissance and Benedictine reforms.

#### Æthelbald, Wiglaf and Guthlac

Though the familial association between Æthelbald and Wiglaf is not proven by historians, there appear to be a number of instances of Wiglaf patronizing the cult of Guthlac. As mentioned above, Wiglaf's own ancestry may or may not have been royal. He is absent from charters before his succession, so his position under Beorhtwulf and Cenwulf is unknown.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> North, *Origins*, pp. 150-52.

<sup>139</sup> It is possible that Wiglaf's family was suppressed under these kings; See North, *Origins*, pp. 307-8.

There have been suggestions that Wiglaf was related to Æthelbald, though with no evidence as to the identities of any of Æthelbald's possible illegitimate offspring, the matter remains obscure.<sup>140</sup> Renovations to the royal mausoleum at Repton during Wiglaf's reign, and his eventual interment there, make it likely that he intended the site to be converted into a royal family mausoleum, and the works undertaken during his reign include the serpentine columns which characterise the crypt today. A stone portrait of what is suspected to be Æthelbald on the remains of a stone cross found at Repton, dated to the eighth century on stylistic grounds, is thought to have been erected by his successor, Offa.<sup>141</sup> However, the dating of stone sculpture from this period remains problematic, and considering its 'barbaric' style and archaic *seax*, Jane Hawkes has argued that this stone cross may in fact be an archaically-styled artefact, which could date the stone to Wiglaf's reign and promote his associations with Æthelbald.<sup>142</sup> Later Crowland tradition recorded in the *Croyland Chronicle* states that Wiglaf had been a 'dux Merciorum', and a forged charter dated 833 records that as king Wiglaf confirmed and granted land to Siward, abbot of Crowland (S 189).<sup>143</sup> Though these documents date from the fourteenth century or later, they suggest that the community at Crowland remembered Wiglaf as a patron of Guthlac's cult.

Similarities between Wiglaf's life and Æthelbald's may have also drawn the ninth-century king to Guthlac's cult. Richard North has argued that the *Wig*-named family to which Wiglaf belonged were suppressed during the reigns of Cenwulf and Beornwulf, so Wiglaf may therefore have identified with Æthelbald's reversal of fortune.<sup>144</sup> Furthermore, Wiglaf was deposed in 829 when Ecgberht of Wessex conquered Mercia; he was later restored,

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<sup>140</sup> This is mostly based on their shared patronage of the cult of Guthlac and burial in the same mausoleum at Repton. See North, *Origins*, p. 150; D. P. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings* (London, 2000), p. 157.

<sup>141</sup> M. Biddle and B. Kjølbye-Biddle, 'The Repton Stone', *ASE* 14 (1985), 233-292, at 282-3, 290.

<sup>142</sup> J. Hawkes, 'Constructing Iconographies: Questions of Identity in Mercian Sculpture', in Brown and Farr (2001), pp. 230-45; Jewell, pp. 236-62.

<sup>143</sup> North, *Origins*, p. 302; eSawyer, <http://www.esawyer.org.uk/charter/189.html>, [accessed 21 March 2016].

<sup>144</sup> North, *Origins*, p. 144.

presumably with Ecghberht's assent, and in Wiglaf's second reign, the relationship with Wessex was, according to S. E. Kelly, one of 'a growing accommodation which matured into occasional alliances against the growing viking threat.'<sup>145</sup> It is possible Wiglaf was temporarily exiled in this period. This relationship of cooperation may explain the origins of the earliest extant fragment of Felix's *Vita sancti Guthlaci*, British Library MS Royal 4 A xiv, which Ker has suggested was written at Winchester in the late eighth or early ninth century.<sup>146</sup> Winchester has no obvious connection to Guthlac, and as the royal saint of a rival, if declining, kingdom, a hermit of the Fens would have little immediate appeal to the West Saxon royal line. Royal 4 A xiv (Gneuss and Lapidge No. 456, Ker No. 250) may have been produced, then, for Ecghberht's ally, or copied from a gift from Wiglaf as a sign of friendship between the two Southumbrian rulers. This manuscript appears to have remained at Winchester, where a later tenth-century psalter was added to it; by the twelfth century the composite manuscript was at Worcester, the provenance of a number of texts connected with Guthlac. It seems likely, therefore, that any number of the ninth-century vernacular texts of Guthlac's cult may have been inspired by Wiglaf's renewed patronage of Repton and its saintly son. In the following section, I will read the *OEPG*, extant in MS Cotton Vespasian D xxi (Gneuss and Lapidge No. 657, Ker No. 344), and excerpted in Vercelli Homily XXIII, the Cynewulfian *Guthlac B*, and the *OEM* as produced in these circumstances.

### *The Ninth-Century Texts of the Cult of Guthlac*

#### The *OEPG*

The *OEPG* survives in two later recensions, excerpted as a homily in the late tenth-century Vercelli Book (Vercelli, Cathedral Library MS CXVII), and as a redacted and West

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<sup>145</sup> S. Kelly, 'Wiglaf (fl. 827-.840)', *ODNB*.

<sup>146</sup> N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon, Reiss. with Supplement* (Oxford, 1990), p. 320.

Saxonised translation in London, Cotton Vespasian MS D xxi, a late eleventh-century manuscript containing anonymous homilies and homilies for specified occasions, of unknown provenance.<sup>147</sup> Though both iterations have undergone independent revisions to content, vocabulary and orthography, they both descend from the same Anglian exemplar.<sup>148</sup> With only two attestations, it is impossible to identify concretely the features of the original translation, though there are a number of likelihoods which suggest an early Anglian translation.<sup>149</sup>

A comparison of lexical difference between the Vercelli and Vespasian versions confirms that both have undergone independent revisions which mostly update the text to better conform to the late West Saxon orthography, lexis and style which predominate in the text as it survives. For example, the Vespasian version removes a number of doublets which appear in the Vercelli Homily, for example *hus 7 eardungstowe* (ll. 4-5, *hus* in Vespasian c. 4, l.14) and *idele 7 unnyt* (l. 81, *ydele* in Vespasian c. 5 l. 83), while retaining numerous others. In other cases, one version of the text replaces one element of the doublet, for example *ongite 7 gepence* (l. 77) in the Vercelli Homily becomes *ongite 7 oncnawe* (c. 5, ll. 76-7), replacing the Anglian dialect word *geþencan* with the more common *oncnawan*.<sup>150</sup> Other lexical swaps are more straightforward: for example in the Vespasian MS *todæleð* replaces the rarer word *geonstregde*, which appears only 4 times in the Old English corpus.<sup>151</sup> Similar replacements include the rarer term *fyrena* (200 occurrences, 80 of which are poetic) with *synna* (over 1000 instances), and *wolberendan* (12 instances, including in the *Cura Pastoralis*, *Dialogues*, *OEB* and *Letter of Alexander*) with the infinitely more common

<sup>147</sup> D. G. Scragg, *The Vercelli Homilies*, EETS 300 (Oxford, 1992), p. 381; Roberts, 'Edition', p. 11; VsG, p. 19.

<sup>148</sup> Roberts 'Edition' p. 363, Downey, p. 107; C. Goodwin, *The Anglo-Saxon Version of the Life of St. Guthlac* (London, 1848); P. Gonser, *Das angelsächsische Prosa-Leben des hl. Guthlac* (Heidelberg, 1909), p. 47.

<sup>149</sup> Roberts, 'Edition', pp. 365-7.

<sup>150</sup> Wenisch, *Anglisches Wortgut*, p. 128.

<sup>151</sup> Its component, *stregdan*, however appears exclusively in prose twenty-three times, including in the *Dialogues*, the *OEB*, among others.

*tweogendan* (over 1600 instances). The author of the Vespasian recension seems to have partially objected to the word *ondrysenlic*, which is replaced in every instance with a variety of alternatives, including *ful* ('foul, loathsome', c. 5, l. 119), *ongristlice* (probably 'horrible, dreadful', c. 5, l. 123), *ongryrlican* ('horrible, ugly', c. 5, l. 170), and in the final instance *ondrysenlican fiðeru*, which appears to be a garbling of the Latin that the Vespasian life simply omits.<sup>152</sup> The form *ondrysenlic* appears in the Old English corpus only eleven times, six times in the Vercelli Homilies, once in the *Dialogues*; its nominal form appears an additional fifty-five times: five times in poetry, and in prose, in the *Dialogues*, the *OEB* and the *OEM*, which may be Mercian, and in a number of early West Saxon translations such as the *Cura Pastoralis* and the *Orosius*. Aside from early West Saxon translations, which may have been influenced by existing Mercian traditions of translation, by and large this word clusters in texts of likely Anglian origin, especially prose translations and homilies; as a whole, the replacement of this word in the Vespasian Life too suggests it was an archaic or unfamiliar or perhaps dialectal word to an eleventh-century audience.

Yet the Vespasian life does preserve some readings that may be original to the exemplar: for example, it retains *reðelice* ('cruel, deadly', l. 118) where Vercelli opts for *egeslice* ('terribly, dreadfully', l. 118); while *egeslice* and its nominative form, *egesa*, occur 4 times in the Vespasian life and 4 times in the Vercelli homily, though they are not the same instances; in the whole corpus they appear some 580 times, of which 82 are poetic; by contrast, *reðe* ('fierce, cruel, savage') and its compound, adjectival and adverbial forms appear in the corpus 316 times, 36 of which are poetic, suggesting that *egeslic* was a more common and more acceptable term in late West Saxon.

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<sup>152</sup> Scragg, *Vercelli*, p. 394. The Latin, *Innumerbiles enim immundorum spirituum alas in obviam illis dehinc venire cenere*, ('For there could be seen coming thence to meet them, innumerable squadrons of foul spirits') has no mention of feathers. Colgrave, pp. 104-5.

As a whole, the surviving texts of the *OEPG* reflect the interventions of scribes working within the influence of late West Saxon; nonetheless, there are clear indications that an Anglian original underlies them both, with possible indications of lexical affinities with other works under consideration here as Mercian, including the *Dialogues*, *OEB* as well as certain glosses. Features such as *semninga* ('suddenly'), *nemne* ('except, unless'), and the use of *leornunge* for Latin *legere* ('to read') have elsewhere been identified as possibly Mercian.<sup>153</sup> While the linguistic and lexical features of the *OEPG* reflect its transmission history, its subject matter, as Roberts observes, suggests that the text is a Mercian translation.<sup>154</sup> As demonstrated in the introduction, the translation's style and means of adapting its source material has clear parallels with other Mercian translations, for example the *Life of St Chad*, the *OEB* and *Dialogues*.

As with the dialect, the evidence for the dating of the text is compromised by the unidentifiable interferences of any numbers of scribes between the original translation and the recensions we have today. They are clearly both at some remove from the original, and Roberts suggests:

the original prose Guthlac was a non-West-Saxon translation made at a time not late in the tenth century. Moreover, when the inflectional evidence is remembered, it becomes likely that the original translation is to be aligned with the *Dialogues* and the Bede translations rather than with Alfredian West-Saxon prose.<sup>155</sup>

Roberts made these arguments before Godden's influential essay, 'Did King Alfred Write Anything?' which questioned the traditional claims concerning the attribution of several texts of this period to King Alfred and called for investigations into the contributions of Mercian and other unknown authors.<sup>156</sup> This thesis responds to this suggestion by reading works such as the *OEB*, *Dialogues* and *OEPG* as the works of ninth-century Mercian translators.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Klaeber, *Commentary*, pp. 4, 95-6. These identifications are not without issues; see Roberts, 'Prose translation', pp. 365-9, Roberts, 'Edition', pp. 235-7.

<sup>154</sup> Roberts, 'Edition', p. 237.

<sup>155</sup> Roberts, 'Prose Translation', p. 368.

<sup>156</sup> Godden, 'Did King Alfred Write Anything?'.

<sup>157</sup> Roberts, 'Prose Translation', p. 369.



A number of stylistic similarities also link these translations, as well as the treatment of the content. These include the frequent use of doublets, that is, the translation of a single Latin word with two slightly varied synonyms, which are notable features of the *Dialogues* and *OEB*, and the preference for word-for-word translation style.<sup>158</sup> The prevalence of this feature both in Vercelli Homily XXIII and the *OEPG*, suggests that doublets were a feature of the original translation. The *OEPG* also constructs its authorial identity very similarly to the *OEB*, in which the translator presents the text with no major interference or attention to its status as translation. Its preface employs word choices consistent with the body of the translation and so, unlike the *OEB* and *Dialogues*, appears to be the work of the original translator. The Cotton Vitellius version's preface's discreet adaptation and simplification is suggestive of the text's original intended purpose, that its audience perceive and understand the life of the saint:

[L]ibellum quem de uita patris beatae memoriae Guthlaci conponi praecepisti, simplici verborum vimine textum non absque proactitatis inprudencia institui.<sup>159</sup>

[Ð]a boc ic gesette, þe þu ahstest be life þære awurðan gemynde Guðlaces, hluttrum wordum and tacnum.<sup>160</sup>

The translator simplifies Felix's florid prose, omitting the Latin text's reference to weaving, itself borrowed from the *Vita S. Martini*, and replacing it with a simple assessment of what the OE prose presents: clear words and signs. The Old English translation also omits a number of biblical and classical allusions. For example, in chapters eight through twenty of Felix's Latin, the baptism of Guthlac to his tonsuring at Repton, Felix paraphrases three times (twice from scripture and once from the *Aeneid*), and quotes scripture once.<sup>161</sup> The translation retains the scriptural quotation because it explains and praises Guthlac's transformation from

<sup>158</sup> Potter, pp. 4-5, 20.

<sup>159</sup> '[I have drawn up] the book which you bade me compose concerning the life of our father Guthlac of blessed memory, weaving the text in a simple pattern.' VsG, Preface, pp. 60-1.

<sup>160</sup> 'I wrote the book, which you commanded, about the life of the worthy Guthlac of memory, with clear words and signs.' Gonser, pp. 100-1.

<sup>161</sup> VsG, pp. 76-85.

secular warlord to anchoritic *miles Christi* and glosses Guthlac's name, rather than out of any fidelity to quotations.<sup>162</sup> The translator eliminates literary flourishes without significant impact on the narrative. The *OEPG* is interested in a clear account of Guthlac's life and deeds, unadorned with *flores rhetoricæ* (OE *fægerum stafum*) that do not clarify or add to the narrative.<sup>163</sup>

Downey's study of the style and structure of the *OEPG* identifies techniques which show the 'work of a consistent and careful translator or redactor(s).'<sup>164</sup> Among these are tendencies to echo Felix's Latin, at times supplementing the text to strengthen the relation, especially in question-and-answer, event-and-report, and instruction-and-action pairs.<sup>165</sup> In some cases these not only echo Felix, but they also clarify and reinforce the narrative of the saint's life. For example, verbal similarities brought into the OE version call attention to Guthlac as a model of good monastic life:

Cum enim litteris edoctus psalmorum canticum discere maluisset, tunc frugifera supra memorati viri praecordia roscidis roris caelestis imbribus divina gratia ubertim inrigabat. Summis autem providentibus magistris, auxiliante gratia divina, sacris litteris et monasticis disciplinis erudiebatur. Igitur canticis, psalmis, hymnis, orationibus oribusque ecclesiasticis per biennium inbutus, proprias singulorum secum cohabitantium virtutes imitari studebat. Igitur canticis, psalmis, hymnis, orationibus moribusque ecclesiasticis per biennium inbutus.<sup>166</sup>

Mid þy he þa wæs in stafas and on leornunge getogen, þa girnde he his sealmas to leornianne; þa wæron þa wæstmberendan breost þæs eadigan weres mid godes gife gefyllede and mid þam lareowdome þæs hean magistres godes, þæt he wæs on godcundlican þeodscipe getyd and gelæred. Mid þam þe he wæs twa gear on þære leornunge, ða hæfde he his sealmas geleornod, and canticas and ymnas, and gebeda, æfter cyrclicre endebyrðnysse.<sup>167</sup>

<sup>162</sup> VsG, pp. 106-7.

<sup>163</sup> VsG, p. 62; Gonser, p. 101.

<sup>164</sup> Downey, p. 145.

<sup>165</sup> Downey, pp. 114-7.

<sup>166</sup> 'When indeed, after having been taught his letters, he set his mind to learn the chanting of the Psalms, then the divine grace sprinkled this same man's fertile heart copiously with the moist showers of heavenly dew. Cared for moreover by the best teachers and aided by the heavenly grace, he was instructed in the Holy Scriptures and in the monastic discipline. So for two years he was initiated in canticles, psalms, hymns, prayers, and church routine.' VsG, pp. 84-7.

<sup>167</sup> 'When he was educated in letters and reading, then he was eager to learn his psalms; then the fruit-bearing breast of the blessed man was filled with the gift of God, and with the teaching of the best teachers of God, that he was taught and educated in the religious instruction. When he had been two years in that learning, then he

The repetition clarifies what good monks need to learn, namely, the Psalms. The simplification of the narrative, with moments of repetition for clarity, instruction and effect, gestures to a non-Latinate audience, interested in Guthlac and the example of his life, rather than establishing his credentials as a genuine saint.<sup>168</sup>

Other details also gesture towards the cult's association with Æthelbald and Mercia. The chapter heading for Guthlac's ordination reads: 'Be þam halgan biscope Sce Hæddan', where the Latin reads 'XLVII. Quomodo ab episcopo Headda officium sacerdotale acceperit.'<sup>169</sup> The Old English is clearly drawn from the content, rather than the heading, of the Latin chapter, in addition to giving Hædda the title of 'holy' rather than merely 'bishop.'<sup>170</sup> The detail of Hædda's holiness, while not striking on its own, invites an association with his episcopacy, where his holy reputation or even purported miracles may have been remembered and recorded. This wording may suggest a link with the see at Lichfield.

The OE narrative's treatment of the relationship between Æthelbald and Guthlac also suggests its ninth-century Mercian origins. Small adjustments to Felix's Latin point to its production in a climate relatively favourable to Æthelbald, possibly the court of Wiglaf. For example, the title and introduction of the first interaction between the saint and Æthelbald highlight a substantial shift in focus:

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had learned his psalms, and canticles, and hymns, and prayers, according to the churchly order.' Gonser, pp. 111-2. On the use of *leornunge* for 'reading', see above, p. 81.

<sup>168</sup> On the idea of 'primary' and 'secondary' hagiographies, see Hill, '*Imago Dei*'.

<sup>169</sup> Gonser, p. 154; *VsG*, p. 144.

<sup>170</sup> In some of the charters Hædda is meant to have witnessed (S81, a blatant forgery, and S1800) his name is incorrectly given 'Ceadda', the saint bishop of Lichfield; several Latin manuscripts have no chapter headings in them, i.e. Royal 13 A xv (Gneuss and Lapidge No. 484, Ker No. 266), Arras MS 812 (1029) (Gneuss and Lapidge No. 781); later Crowland tradition mistook Hædda for the bishop of Winchester. See *VsG*, pp. 28-9, 32-3, 34, 190.

XLIX. Qualiter exulem ad se venientem consolatus est et regnum sibi mox futurum fore  
praedixit  
Non me quoque supramemorati viri Guthlaci vaticino pectore quoddam spiritale praesagium  
narrare piget.<sup>171</sup>

Be Aðelbalde þam kyninge.  
Swylce nys eac mid idelnysse to forlætanne þæt wundor, þe þes halga wer Guthlac foresæde  
and mannum cydde.<sup>172</sup>

The heading in Felix does not provide the name of the future king, identifying him only as an ‘exile’.<sup>173</sup> The focus in the Latin scribal heading and opening sentence is on Guthlac’s prophetic capabilities, a sign of his sanctity. The *OEPG*, on the other hand, identifies Æthelbald directly as *þam kyninge* (‘the king’) and does not add of which people he is king. In the ninth century, there was another Æthelbald, king of Wessex from about 855 until his death in 860, so we might expect that a tenth-century translation may have distinguished between these two figures.

Further alterations in content and structure demonstrate the translation’s distance from both the present manuscript attestations and Felix’s Latin. In both cases, the close of the chapter gestures to the present political situation:

Nec vana spes illum fefellit, nam eodem modo ordine positioneque omnia, quae de illo vir Dei praedixerat, et non aliter, contigerunt, sicut praesentis rei praesens effectus conprobat. (XLIX).<sup>174</sup>

[A]nd he getrywode and gelyfde ealle þa þing, þe se halga wer forsæde, þæt ricu beoð onwende and ofanumene, and hit a to þam efesteð; and se rica and se heana, gelæreda and se ungelærda, and geong and eald, ealle hi gelice se stranga deað foregripeð and nymð. (XIX).<sup>175</sup>

<sup>171</sup> ‘49. How he consoled the exile when he came to him and foretold that the kingdom would soon be his. It is no labour for me to relate a certain example of spiritual foresight on the part of the said man Guthlac, the result of his prophetic powers.’ *VsG*, pp. 148-9.

<sup>172</sup> ‘About the king Æthelbald. It is also no vanity to relate the miracle, which the holy man Guthlac prophesied and told to men.’ *Gonser*, p. 159.

<sup>173</sup> Only one MS, Douai, Public Library 852, inserts ‘Ethelbaldum’; the manuscript is twelfth century and comes from Crowland.

<sup>174</sup> ‘Nor did an idle hope deceive him; for all those things which the man of God had prophesied about him happened in this very way, in this very order and setting, and not otherwise, as the actual outcome of events proves.’ *VsG* pp. 150-1.

<sup>175</sup> ‘And he trusted and believed all the things, which the holy man prophesied, that the rule would change and be received from above, and always hastens to that end; and the rulers and the lowly, the learned and unlearned, and young and old, mighty death takes and seizes them all alike.’ *Gonser*, p. 160.

The Old English version states that events quickly came to pass, but does not follow the Latin in expecting its audience to know the outcome itself. Furthermore, the translation ends the chapter with the beginning of the next chapter in the Latin, recounting Guthlac's final illness and death. This restructuring constitutes an important shift in the case of Æthelbald, especially in consideration of the content of the second encounter with him in the *Vita*. As Downey observes, the second episode is significantly shortened, with most of its scriptural citations omitted, but still constitutes its own chapter, also entitled 'Be Aþelbalde kyningce.'<sup>176</sup> The narrative remains essentially the same, though the content is heavily condensed. The narrative retains, nonetheless, Guthlac's posthumous prophecy to Æthelbald regarding his career and life: 'And nalæs þæt an þæt he him þæt rice towerd sæde, ac eac þa lengce his lifes he him eall gerehte.' (21).<sup>177</sup> Æthelbald was in fact murdered by his own bodyguard at Seckington, and contemporary records reference his polygamy and violent behaviour.<sup>178</sup> In retrospect, such a prophecy could compromise Guthlac's sanctity on two counts. For one, it implies that Guthlac had foreknowledge of Æthelbald's future abuses of power and his shameful death, which were stains on his status as 'Domino carissimo et in Christi amore ceteris regibus preferendo.'<sup>179</sup> On the other hand, if Guthlac did not know of Æthelbald's future, it limits his prophetic powers. Finally, Æthelbald's notorious death and reputation as a fornicator associate Guthlac with a political leader known for corruption and injustice, casting a shadow on Guthlac's own reputation and cult.

This apparent dissonance between the overwhelmingly positive depiction of Æthelbald in the *vita* and *OEPG* and other reports of his scandalous death can, however, be resolved by the manner in which the translator of the *OEPG* exemplar structures the close of

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<sup>176</sup> Downey, pp. 101-3, 139-40, 126-7.

<sup>177</sup> 'And he did not tell him only about his coming rule, but he also recounted all the length of his life.' Gonser, p. 172.

<sup>178</sup> Kelly, 'Æthelbald'. On Æthelbald's fornication with nuns, see below, p. 116. Æthelbald could be compared to Alexander the Great, on whom see below, p. 244.

<sup>179</sup> Haddan and Stubbs, *Councils III*, p. 350.

the first meeting between Guthlac and Æthelbald alluded to above. The restructuring of chapters in the *OEPG* places a statement on the universality of death immediately after indicating that Guthlac's prophecies were fulfilled; doing so offered ninth-century audiences an interpretation of Æthelbald's shameful death as simply inevitable fate. The translation of Lat. 'dominus' as OE 'rica', an echo of the 'ricu' promised to Æthelbald in the preceding sentence, further encourages such a reading.

The *OEPG*'s engagement with the character and reputation of Æthelbald keeps Guthlac's holy reputation intact, softening the difficulty of Æthelbald's murder, while engaging with other Mercian figures and the Mercian connections of the saint. The simplification of the translation to represent the narrative faithfully, and its word-for-word style, aligns the work with other early Mercian prose translations. Furthermore, its subject matter is appropriate in a culture of translation and political instability such as that which characterized mid-ninth-century Mercia.

Aside from Crowland, Worcester may have been one of the principal cult centres of Guthlac, and had a number of connections with him. Linguistic forms in the *OEPG* may be compared with texts from the area, though this alone is not reason enough to assign its original translation there.<sup>180</sup> Britton Brooks has recently noticed that descriptions of the fenland landscape in the *OEPG* contain terms only paralleled in Mercian charters, and several of these come from Worcester.<sup>181</sup> Two copies of Felix's *vita* from the tenth and eleventh century were at Worcester, including one to which an Old English gloss was added in the first half of the eleventh century.<sup>182</sup> This is in addition to an office for the Feast of St Guthlac contained in an eleventh century manuscript that was in Worcester by the thirteenth century,

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<sup>180</sup> Roberts, 'Edition', pp. 236-7.

<sup>181</sup> Brooks, 'Restoration'.

<sup>182</sup> Downey, pp. 150-2.

and the later work of John of Worcester.<sup>183</sup> Finally, two charters which claim to date to Guthlac's years as a warlord on the Welsh border contain a 'Guthlac' as a witness.<sup>184</sup> We can conclude, then, that the *OEPPG* may have been produced in what is now Worcestershire.

### Guthlac B

The second Old English poem in the Exeter Book on Guthlac, lines 819-1379, is an incomplete poetic retelling (lacking its final folio) of Felix's *Vita sancti Guthlaci*, chapter 50.<sup>185</sup> Substantial differences in style, metre and diction, as well as manuscript presentation mark *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B* as two distinct works.<sup>186</sup> *Guthlac B* has attracted considerable scholarly interest, though little attention has been paid to its date or dialect.<sup>187</sup> Scholars have, however, noted its similarities in style and content to the poems of Cynewulf, and the most recent edition of Cynewulf's works by Robert E. Bjork includes the text of *Guthlac B*.<sup>188</sup>

However, the ending of *Guthlac B*, where a Cynewulfian runic signature may have once appeared, has been lost, so its place within the Cynewulfian canon is unverifiable. Regardless of its relationship to Cynewulf's signed poems, the poem itself presents strong internal evidence for Mercian origins. As I shall argue below, Cynewulf's female saints' lives may reflect the unusual degree of political power enjoyed by women in Mercia.<sup>189</sup> Following this proposal, suggestions that *Guthlac B* is a companion piece to *Guthlac A* invite us to

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<sup>183</sup> Downey, pp. 166, 180.

<sup>184</sup> S 76 and S 77; *PASE*, 'Guthlac 1'.

<sup>185</sup> Lines 814-32a recount details from elsewhere in the *Vita*, Roberts, *Exeter*, p. 36; On the missing folio, see Roberts, *Exeter*, p. 13.

<sup>186</sup> Roberts, *Exeter*, pp. 13-14; Roberts, 'Metrical Examination'; Fulk, 'Canon, Dialect and Date', p. 5; M. C. Drout, *Tradition and Influence in Anglo-Saxon Literature: an Evolutionary, Cognitivist Approach* (Basingstoke, 2013), pp. 65-78, esp. 70; Muir, *Exeter*, vol. I, p. 137.

<sup>187</sup> For example, M. E. Bridges, *Generic Contrast in Old English Hagiographical Poetry*, *Anglistica* 22 (Copenhagen, 1984); Liuzza, 'Manuscripts, and Critics'; F. Biggs, 'Unities in the Old English *Guthlac B*', *JEGP* 89 (1990), 155-65; S. Bhattacharji, 'Guthlac A and Guthlac B: Changing Metaphors', in *Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs: Intersections of Gender and Enclosure in the Middle Ages*, Religion and Culture in the Middle Ages, ed. L. McAvoy and M. Hughes-Edwards (Cardiff, 2005), pp. 41-54.

<sup>188</sup> Roberts, *Exeter*, p. 70; R. E. Bjork, *The Old English Poems of Cynewulf*, *Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library* 23 (London, 2013), pp. xi, xiii; Sisam, 'Cynewulf', p. 13; Sisam, 'The Dialect Origins', p. 134; Drout, *Tradition*, pp. 65-78; Fulk, 'Cynewulf', p. 5; A. Orchard, 'Both Style and Substance: The Case for Cynewulf', in *Anglo-Saxon Styles*, ed. C. Karkov, *SUNY Medieval Studies* (Albany, 2003), pp. 294-6.

<sup>189</sup> See below, p. 125.

compare it with the Cynewulfian *Christ II*, which, as Andy Orchard suggests, may have been composed to link together *Christ I* and *Christ II*.<sup>190</sup> Like *Christ II*, then, *Guthlac B* may have been composed to complete a narrative sequence, a technique Cynewulf may also have adopted for the composition of *Fates of the Apostles*, often considered a companion piece for *Andreas* in the Vercelli Book.<sup>191</sup> As with the *OEPG*, and indeed most of these early Guthlac texts, the evidence which is most suggestive of *Guthlac B*'s Mercian origin is its subject matter. What is more, a number of non-West-Saxon elements in the manuscript and poem may point to non-West-Saxon origins for *Guthlac B*.<sup>192</sup> For example, Mussetter proposes that *Guthlac B* may have been composed during the years of Boniface's eighth-century missions on the Continent.<sup>193</sup> Fulk, on the other hand, cautiously observes that its Anglian forms could be either Northumbrian or Mercian, arguing that '*Guthlac B* is not likely to have been composed before the second half of the eighth century, and may be considerably later.'<sup>194</sup> The styles of these two poems, *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B*, and their similarities to other poetry have fuelled a number of suppositions regarding their relationship to each other and within the wider corpus of Old English poetry. Stylistically, *Guthlac A* has been compared to 'Cædmonian' poetry, such as *Genesis A* and *Exodus*, which is considered chronologically earlier than the 'Cynewulfian' poetry, namely, the works of Cynewulf and *Andreas*, to which *Guthlac B* has been likened. The two Guthlac poems share a transmission history and have

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<sup>190</sup> C. Chase, 'God's Presence through Grace as the Theme of Cynewulf's *Christ II* and the Relationship of this Theme to *Christ I* and *Christ II*', *ASE* 3 (1974), 87-101; Orchard, 'Style and Substance', pp. 294-6; Roberts, 'Prose Translation', p. 376; Roberts, *Exeter*, pp. 41, 53, 70; Drout, p. 70.

<sup>191</sup> Scragg, 'Compilation', 322, 326; G. P. Krapp, *The Vercelli Book*, *ASPR* II (London, 1932), pp. xxxvi-xxxvii. An alternative explanation is that *Fates* was not composed as a companion-piece for *Andreas*, but rather that it was anthologized as such by later compilers, such as those responsible for the Vercelli Book.

<sup>192</sup> Roberts, *Exeter*, pp. 64-5.

<sup>193</sup> S. Mussetter, 'Type as Prophet in the Old English *Guthlac B*', *Viator* 14 (1983), 41-58, at 56-7. See also B. D. Weber, 'A Harmony of Contrasts: The Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book', *JEGP* 114 (2015), 201-18, which focuses on the reception context of both poems during the Benedictine reform.

<sup>194</sup> Fulk, *HOEM*, p. 402



some forms indicative of an Anglian origin, though some of these are considered part of a poetic *koine*.<sup>195</sup>

As discussed above in relation to *Guthlac A*, West Saxon features characterize the majority of the text, and certain Anglian forms may be regarded as poetic rather than as dialect indicators. Like its companion piece, *Guthlac B* has a number of non-West Saxon features, some of which are lexical items considered (in prose) as reliable markers of Anglian origin, such as *gena* (l. 1270), *wærc* (1028) and *wló* (l. 1154), though the presence of such features is considered less reliable as evidence for the provenance of poetry.<sup>196</sup> Other elements of vocabulary support the identification of *Guthlac B* with either Cynewulf, whom I will read in a Mercian context in chapter 2, or with a school of poetry influenced by Cynewulf's works and style. Michael Drout's dendrogrammatic analysis suggests a close affiliation between Cynewulf's works and *Guthlac B*.<sup>197</sup> Fulk has noted that the phrase *ageaf andsware* ('gave a reply'), a violation of Kuhn's law appears only in the signed works of Cynewulf, *Guthlac B* and *Andreas*.<sup>198</sup> Andy Orchard has identified parallels in formulae and phrasing that suggest Cynewulf indeed authored the signed poems in addition to *Guthlac B*, and that the poet of *Andreas* also knew Cynewulf's works. The linguistic features of *Guthlac B* are, in common with most of the other items in the Exeter Book, largely West Saxon, but its lexical and stylistic affinities suggest an earlier, possibly Anglian, exemplar with similarities to Cynewulfian poetry.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Roberts, *Exeter*, p. 71; *HOEM*, §§ 401-2.

<sup>196</sup> Roberts, *Exeter*, pp. 68-9.

<sup>197</sup> Drout, *Tradition*, p. 69.

<sup>198</sup> Fulk, 'Canon, Dialect and Date', p. 6.

<sup>199</sup> Other texts also have linguistic features which suggest an Anglian original, see, for example, Neidorf, 'Dating of Widsith'.

The focus of the narrative of *Guthlac B* on the saint's death and the reactions of his servant, Beccel, does not, by itself, suggest the perspective of a distinctively Mercian poet.<sup>200</sup> As Bjork comments, the attention given to Beccel, unnamed in *Guthlac B*, 'serves as a painful reflection of our own mutable selves,' thereby highlighting the audience's relationship with the saint.<sup>201</sup> As such, *Guthlac B* serves as a meditation on death, particularly relevant to any community attached to Guthlac. Beccel indeed may stand in for the community at Repton, where Guthlac was educated and tonsured, who regarded Guthlac as a 'fæder' (l. 1211), and lord and friend (cf. ll. 1357-8). In such a case, the nameless servant stands as a universal model of human grief as well as a figure of the religious community.

Though no single piece of evidence can prove that *Guthlac B* was a Mercian composition, reading it as such within the context of a renewed interest in Guthlac in the ninth century may provide the most coherent frame into which the various pieces may be assembled, like a puzzle without its exemplary photograph. The subject matter, Guthlac, is linked intimately with the Mercian royal dynasty, and linguistic features suggest an Anglian original beneath the West Saxon veneer of the manuscript in which it survives. It may be worth noting that there are no known medieval foundations dedicated to Guthlac north of the Humber, nor any manuscript of the *vita* surviving with a Northumbrian provenance; nor does Guthlac's name appear among other famous anchorites recorded in the Durham Liber Vitae (London, British Library Cotton MS Domitian A. vii, fol. 18r). In addition to these regional factors, the poem's content, which may provide a *passio* to supplement the life recalled in *Guthlac A*, and its stylistic features associate it with Cynewulf's poetry, which suggest viewing it as a ninth-century work.

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<sup>200</sup> R. E. Bjork, *The Old English Verse Saints' Lives: a Study in Direct Discourse and the Iconography of Style*, McMaster OE Studies and Texts 4 (London, 1985), pp. 101-5, 126.

<sup>201</sup> Bjork, *Verse Saints' Lives*, p. 126.

### The Guthlac entries of the *OEM*

The *OEM* is a collection of entries for feasts, especially saints' passions, surviving in six manuscript fragments, the earliest of which dates to c. 900.<sup>202</sup> Drawn from a number of Insular and Continental sources either directly or indirectly, the latest of which were compiled by the early ninth century, the *OEM* can be dated between c. 800 and c. 900; both Cross and Rauer balance traditional ascriptions to the 'Alfredian' half of the century with arguments in favour of the earlier half.<sup>203</sup> Like the *OEB*, discussed below, the surviving manuscripts range in date from between the late ninth century and the late eleventh centuries, and exhibit evidence of scribes updating the spelling, lexis and syntax to conform to contemporary practice and removing clumsy constructions.<sup>204</sup>

The content of the *OEM* must be described as encyclopedic and inclusive, and is therefore of limited use in determining where or when it was compiled.<sup>205</sup> In addition to entries on Continental, African, Indian, Irish and English saints' lives and deaths, it includes astronomical, cosmological, and seasonal entries.<sup>206</sup> The English saints included, however, with few exceptions, are remembered in the works of Bede, even if their entries are drawn from other sources, such as Wilfrid, Æthelthryth and Fursa. The only two Anglo-Saxon saints commemorated who do not appear in Bede's works are Guthlac and his sister, Pega. These two entries are brief, though no more so than others, and are both drawn from Felix's *VsG*.<sup>207</sup> On one level, this tells us that the compiler of either the *OEM*, or its hypothetical Latin exemplar, had the works of Bede and Felix, but not the *OEPG*, available to him or her.

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<sup>202</sup> Rauer, *OEM*, pp. 2, 18.

<sup>203</sup> Rauer, *OEM*, pp. 2-4; J. Cross, 'Mary Magdalen in the *Old English Martyrology*: the Earliest Extant "Narrat Josephus" Variant of her Legend', *Speculum* 53 (1978), 16-25, at 20; J. Cross, 'The Apostles in the *Old English Martyrology*', *Mediaevalia* 5 (1979), 1-59, at 42-3.

<sup>204</sup> Rauer, *OEM*, pp. 19-25.

<sup>205</sup> Rauer, *OEM*, p. 1.

<sup>206</sup> Rauer, *OEM*, p. 16.

<sup>207</sup> Rauer, *OEM*, p. 252. The *OEM* entry on Guthlac very obviously does not use the *OEPG*, which explains the Latin calque of Guthlac's name in different terms.

Though Rauer cautions against arguing origins from omissions, I would suggest that the presence of these entries might help to rule out certain potential places of production.<sup>208</sup> In particular, the material of the *OEM* is unlikely to have been produced at Canterbury and has limited connections with its communities. The *OEM* omits both Theodore and Hadrian; indeed, apart from Augustine, no archbishops of Canterbury feature in the *OEM*. Theodore died on 19 September 690, a date recorded in later Anglo-Saxon calendars which also commemorate Hadrian's passing on 9 January.<sup>209</sup> Two manuscripts of the *OEM* cover September, and one also covers 9 January, which indicates that two of Canterbury's most famous leaders do not appear in the *OEM*. Michael Lapidge demonstrated that the *OEB* derives from a Latin exemplar of the *HE* corrected at Canterbury to rectify information in the copy received from Wearmouth-Jarrow, including the death date of Berhtwald.<sup>210</sup> This suggests that the *OEM*, which would have required a substantial library to produce, does not reflect textual practices or traditions at Canterbury.<sup>211</sup>

As Rauer comments, the phonology, morphology, vocabulary and syntax indicate that the original text of the *OEM* was 'predominantly Anglian, although a West Saxon component even in the language of the original cannot be ruled out.'<sup>212</sup> The *OEM* is known for having a large quantity of rare vocabulary, and Waite notes links between the *OEM*, *OEB*, certain Vercelli and Blickling Homilies, and other hagiographical works such as the Old English *Mary of Egypt*, which Hugh Magennis surmises may be the heir of an Anglian tradition of

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<sup>208</sup> Rauer, *OEM*, p. 1.

<sup>209</sup> M. Lapidge, 'Hadrian (630x37–709)', *ODNB*; Lapidge, 'Theodore of Tarsus [St Theodore of Tarsus] (602–690)', *ODNB*.

<sup>210</sup> M. Lapidge, 'The Latin Exemplar of the Old English *Bede*', in *un tuo serto di diori in man recando: Scritti in Onore di Maria Amalia D'Aronco*, 2, ed. P. Lendinara (Udine, 2008), pp. 235–46, at p. 239.

<sup>211</sup> The only period in which I could admit the *OEM* being a Canterbury production with these gaps is just after 796–8, when Æthelheard abandoned the see during the revolts of Eadberht Præn and a number of documents, including potentially the calendars used to correct the mistakes in the *HE*, were destroyed. See below, p. 226.

<sup>212</sup> Rauer, *OEM*, p. 5; G. Kotzor, ed., *Das altenglische Martyrologium*, Abhandlungen der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, phil-hist. Kl. ns 88.1–2, 2 vols (Munich, 1981); G. Kotzor, 'The Latin Tradition of Martyrologies and the Old English Martyrology', in *Studies in Earlier Old English Prose*, ed. P. E. Szarmach (New York, 1986), pp. 301–33.

hagiographic translation.<sup>213</sup> Of some interest is the lexical item *gewitenes* ('departure') and its derivative *onweggewitennes* ('going forth, departure'), which appear in the *OEM* and *OEB* in addition to a series of tenth-century charters benefitting Winchester, among other instances.<sup>214</sup> Perhaps the most interesting lexical item in the *OEM* with respect to this thesis is *elreord* ('of speech, language: foreign; foreign, barbarous'), which appears exclusively in the *Dialogues*, *OEB*, *Letter*, *Wonders*, *Andreas*, *Vespasian Psalter Gloss* (which certainly has Mercian linguistic forms) along with the closely related *Junius Psalter Gloss*, and the poetic section of the *Paris Psalter*.<sup>215</sup> The verse in the *Paris Psalter* reads:

Ða ut eode Israheles cynn  
and of Ægyptum ealle foran  
Iacobes hus of grammum folce,  
þa elreordige ealle wæron. (Ps. 113.1, ll. 1-4).<sup>216</sup>

The presence of this word might be a sign of Anglian origins, as Sievers suggested,<sup>217</sup> or the influence of psalter glosses such as the *Vespasian Psalter gloss*, which reads for the same verse (113.1):

in utgonge israela of aegptū hus of folce  
IN EXITU ISTRAHEL EX AEGYPTO / DOMUS IACOB DE POPULO  
elreordum  
BARBARO.<sup>218</sup>

In either case, Anglian, and potentially Mercian origins may be associated with this word.

Wenisch treats the related term *elpeodian* as exclusively Anglian throughout the Anglo-

<sup>213</sup> Rauer, *OEM*, pp. 7-8; Waite, 'Vocabulary'; H. Magennis, *The Old English Life of St Mary of Egypt: an Edition of the Old English Text with Modern English Parallel-Text Translation* (Exeter, 2002), pp. 40-2.

<sup>214</sup> See *DOEC*, 'witenes'; the charters in question are S 1418, S 1419, S 1509 and S 1515.

<sup>215</sup> 'elreord', *Toronto Dictionary of Old English A-G*. On the *Vespasian Psalter gloss*, see above, p. 17.

<sup>216</sup> 'Then Israel's people went forth, and all departed from Egypt, Jacob's house from the hostile people, they were all barbarous.' G. P. Krapp, ed. *The Paris Psalter and the Meters of Boethius*, *ASPR* 5 (London, 1932), p. 97.

<sup>217</sup> Krapp, *Paris*, p. xvii.

<sup>218</sup> S. Kuhn, ed., *The Vespasian Psalter* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1965), p. 112; Toswell, *Anglo-Saxon Psalter*, p. 26; on the influence of psalms on Old English poetry, see Toswell, *Anglo-Saxon Psalter*, pp. 358-63; A. Orchard 'Poetic Inspiration and Prosaic Translation: The Making of Cædmon's Hymn' in *Studies in English Language and Literature: 'Doubt Wisely.'* *Papers in Honour of E. G. Stanley*, ed. M. J. Toswell and E. M. Tyler (London, 1996), pp. 404-22, at pp. 414-15

Saxon period, but does not discuss *elreord*.<sup>219</sup> Its clustering in the works discussed here may offer some indication that *elreord* is a sign of Mercian origins.<sup>220</sup>

Given the features outlined above, what, then, of the possibility that the *OEM* is a Northumbrian production? Certainly its Anglian linguistic features, alongside its heavy reliance on Bedan sources and inclusion of the Northumbrian martyr and king saint, Oswald (146), could suggest Northumbrian origin. However, as Rauer points out, the manuscript transmission is restricted to Southumbria, and Celia Sisam observes that the *OEM* constructs the North as distant and unfamiliar.<sup>221</sup> The work also lacks any specifically Northumbrian forms.<sup>222</sup>

Ninth-century Mercia, then, presents an alternative case for the composition of the *OEM*. The text includes no Kentish saints other than Æthelburh (No. 204), to whom the foundation of Barking is attributed with a slight twist to the narrative in the *HE*. The only Anglo-Saxon additions from outside the works of Bede are Guthlac and Pega. There may be two explanations for their inclusion. One is that the compiler knew of Felix's *vita* and that the information about English saints needed supplements to Bede's accounts. Such circumstances would explain the minimalist details in their entries, of Pega working a miracle using salt blessed by Guthlac (No. 15), and of the miracle at Guthlac's birth and attendance by ap.33gels at his cell in Crowland (No. 63). Most of the specifics of his life, his illness and death (the focus of Felix's chapter 50 and *Guthlac B*); his connection to Æthelbald, the demons who persecute him in *Guthlac A*, his connection to Repton, and the name of his angelic intercessor, Bartholomew (who is included independently in the *OEM*), are

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<sup>219</sup> Wenisch, *Anglisches Wortgut*, p. 326.

<sup>220</sup> The Junius Psalter and Paris Psalter are both unquestionably West Saxon in origin. However, if their selection of this word derives from the appearance of the word in an earlier psalter gloss, such as the archetype which underlies the Vespasian Psalter, which is largely regarded as Mercian, this word may appear to reflect an earlier, Mercian tradition.

<sup>221</sup> Rauer, *OEM*, p. 214; C. Sisam, 'An Early Fragment of the *Old English Martyrology*', *RES* 4 (1953), 209-20.

<sup>222</sup> Rauer, *OEM*, p. 5.

completely absent. In short, the *OEM* omits most of the details which later authors found unique about Guthlac.<sup>223</sup> Downey suggests that the compiler may have been inspired by the readings for Matins for the saint's feast.<sup>224</sup> Another possibility, however, is that the compiler was working from a calendar or other inclusive source, in which Guthlac and Pega featured, and used Felix's *vita* to provide an entry from his model. In both scenarios, the compiler would have had access, direct or indirect, to Felix's text. Since the *terminus ad quem* of the *OEM* must be c. 900, the entries in the *OEM* may reflect the revival of Guthlac's cult in the reign of Wiglaf (c. 827-39), as proposed above. If the cult of Guthlac was experiencing a revival in this period, and the compiler of the *OEM* was Mercian, Guthlac's inclusion would be natural. Further, the potential admixture of a West Saxon element in a predominantly Anglian work may be as easily explained by the passing of texts, scholars and scribes, as may have been fostered by the relationship of cooperation between Wiglaf and Ecgberht.

Following Fulk's dictum that the simplest solution is to be preferred,<sup>225</sup> these three Guthlac texts, then, appear to reflect the transitional literary culture of ninth-century Mercia, in which the vernacular was being used more frequently alongside and in the place of Latin, as well as the unique political circumstances which heralded a revival of Guthlac's cult before the foundation of Crowland abbey in the tenth century.

### *Conclusion: the Afterlife of Guthlac*

The Anglo-Saxon texts of the cult of St Guthlac document an ongoing engagement between Mercian audiences and this royal saint. Guthlac was connected to, and culted by, the Mercian royal family in the eighth and ninth centuries to bolster the legitimacy of their claims to the

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<sup>223</sup> Downey, pp. 176-8, 189.

<sup>224</sup> Downey, p. 185. However, the manuscripts for these offices date considerably later than the *OEM*.

<sup>225</sup> R. D. Fulk, 'Language and History', pp. 19-36, at p. 23.

throne. Centres of his cult remained exclusively in Mercian territory, at the border of Middle and East Anglia at Crowland, in Middle Anglia, likely near his ancestral homelands, at Repton, and at Worcester.<sup>226</sup> This chapter has argued that, in the ‘early’ texts, Felix and the anonymous poet of *Guthlac A* looked to establish Guthlac’s cult and reinforce his reputation for sanctity. In a period of Mercian expansion, Guthlac represented Mercian identity, personally embodying several of its key hallmarks: shared Anglian racial descent, geographical origin in a Mercian region, and affiliation with the Mercian royal family. In the early years, efforts to justify Æthelbald’s reign motivated the promotion of his cult, as well as his ability to serve as a point of unity for the entire Anglo-Saxon kingdom.

However, as the textual and geographic record indicate, Guthlac did not become the universal saint that his early biographers intended, possibly due to the decline in Mercian influence in the ninth and tenth centuries.<sup>227</sup> Several texts document Guthlac’s cult with distinctive Mercian dialectical colourings and stylistic similarities with other Anglian, and probably Mercian works, namely the *OEPE*, *Guthlac B*, and *OEM*. The linguistic evidence suggest associating these works with Mercian authors, while the content may point to a flourishing of Guthlac’s cult in the ninth century, prompted by Wiglaf as a means of promoting his own claim to the Mercian throne in a time of dynastic instability. This suggests that Guthlac’s saintly identity never entirely shed its political implications. Wiglaf likely settled on appropriating Guthlac as his own intercessor in the succession due to his connections to Æthelbald, the king who first promoted Guthlac’s cult. Wiglaf’s patronage of Repton, where Guthlac was tonsured and Æthelbald was buried, funded the renovations of the crypt there, and perhaps also the construction of the Repton stone, which is thought to

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<sup>226</sup> K. A. Kilpatrick, ‘The Place-Names in Felix’s *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*’, *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 58 (2014), 1-56; G. Jones, ‘Ghostly Mentor, Teacher of Mysteries: Bartholomew, Guthlac and the Apostle’s Cult in Early Medieval England’, in *Medieval Monastic Education*, ed. G. Ferzoco and C. Muessig (London, 2000), pp. 136-52.

<sup>227</sup> Thacker, ‘Early Anglo-Saxon Hagiography’, pp. 326-28.



depict Æthelbald. Of these ninth-century texts, the alterations in the *OEPG* most clearly reveal the translator's interest in the Mercian succession and the problematic reputation of Æthelbald after his murder. The scanty entry in the *OEM*, supplementing a list of English saints drawn almost exclusively from the works of Bede, communicates a general awareness of the saint, drawn potentially from a calendar alongside Felix's *vita*.<sup>228</sup> *Guthlac B* provides a poetic *passio*, which had received minimal attention in both *Guthlac A* and the *OEM* entry, and may be a Cynewulfian composition. The decline in Guthlac's reputation can probably be linked to the dwindling political fortunes of the Mercian kingdom in the late ninth century. As this thesis argues, cultural and political factors shaped vernacular literature in eighth- and ninth-century Mercia. Changes to the status of vernacular literature, which will be elaborated below, as well as the interests of the nobles and royals in whom ecclesiastical and secular power was gathered, dictated the content and style of these texts.

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<sup>228</sup> *VsG*, pp. 9-10.

## Chapter 2. Noble Women: Cynewulf's Female Saints and Audience in a Mercian Context

### Introduction

Cynewulf appears to have composed his works in an Anglian dialect, that is, the grouping of dialects common to the Mercians and Northumbrians, probably between the mid-eighth and mid-ninth century. As has been noted by various scholars, in addition to certain Anglian dialectal forms, several rhymes in his poems must be corrected to Anglian spellings to restore the rhyme throughout the passage.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the different spellings of his name, CYNEWULF and CYNWULF, in the runic signatures attached to his poems also suggest that he was Mercian, as the name would probably have been spelled \*CYNIWULF at an earlier date or in a Northumbrian province, where sound changes occurred later.<sup>2</sup> In general, linguists consider the absence of specifically Northumbrian forms in an Anglian dialect a good indication of Mercian linguistic origins. Though the name *Cynewulf* itself is not geographically or temporally restricted in Anglo-Saxon England, its spelling combined with the rhymes in his poetry makes it most likely that Cynewulf was a Mercian.<sup>3</sup> There is evidence to suggest that the Cynewulfian canon, traditionally limited to the four poems containing his runic signatures (*Juliana*, *Fates of the Apostles*, *Elene* and *Christ II*) may also include *Guthlac B*.<sup>4</sup> Though, like most Old English poetry, Cynewulf's works survive in a poetic dialect with mostly late West Saxon features, his works are strewn with

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<sup>1</sup> R. D. Fulk, 'Canon, Dialect, and Date', in R. E. Bjork, ed., *The Cynewulf Reader*, Basic Readings in Anglo-Saxon England 4 (London, 2001), pp. 3-23, at 10-15; P. Gradon, *Cynewulf's Elene*, Exeter Medieval English Texts and Studies, revised edn (Exeter, 1996), pp. 12-15; *HOEM*, § 13, 15, 47, 75, 341, 372; Schaar, *Critical Studies*, pp. 9, 323-6.

<sup>2</sup> Gradon, pp. 22-3; Sisam, 'Cynewulf', pp. 4-8; *HOEM*, §383.

<sup>3</sup> R. Anderson, 'Saints' Legends', in R. D. Fulk and C. Cain, *A History of Old English Literature*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Chichester, 2013), pp. 133-56, at 145-7; C. Kennedy, *The Poems of Cynewulf* (New York, 1949), pp. 12-18; A. Cook, *The Christ of Cynewulf*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Boston, 1909), pp. lxxviii-lxxvi. PASE "Cynewulf"; *HOEM* §§ 379-92; Gradon, *Elene*, pp. 22-3; Sisam, 'Cynewulf'; R. Woolf, ed. *Juliana* (London, 1955). For an argument for a late date, see P. Conner, 'On Dating Cynewulf', in Bjork, ed., *The Cynewulf Reader*, pp. 23-56.

<sup>4</sup> On *Guthlac B*, see above, p. 90. All quotations of Cynewulf's work taken from Bjork, *The Old English Poems of Cynewulf*.

Anglian, and in certain cases, Mercian dialect forms. This chapter offers a new reading of Cynewulf's verse saints' lives in the context of eighth and ninth Mercia. In particular, I suggest that *Elene* and *Juliana*, two Cynewulfian poems which focus on powerful and authoritative women, might reflect the unusually high status afforded to women in the clerical and lay spheres in Mercia during this period.

Nearly half of Cynewulf's extant canon is comprised of two vernacular verse lives of female saints, *Elene* and *Juliana*. Although Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* includes several female saints, including virgin martyrs who reject wealthy suitors Agnes, Agatha and Lucy, it does not mention Juliana; nor does the Byzantine Empress Helena appear beside the Anglo-Saxon queen Æthelthryth in his collection.<sup>5</sup> Women in early Anglo-Saxon England are generally thought to have been held in higher regard than their later Anglo-Saxon or Norman counterparts, especially in the early conversion period, in which they played a key role.<sup>6</sup> Early minsters featured the involvement of many noble women, and Aldhelm praised the nuns of Barking Abbey in his treatise written for and dedicated to them, *De Virginitate*.<sup>7</sup> Many arguments, such as those outlined above, place Cynewulf based on the linguistic features of his works;<sup>8</sup> here I hope to offer a reading of Cynewulf as a Mercian based on political and cultural links with contemporary culture. In particular, I will elaborate on the noted trend of women in Mercia occupying unusual prominence in comparison to their Northumbrian and West Saxon peers. I then read *Elene* in light of developments in Mercian queenship, which culminated in the highly unusual situation of

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<sup>5</sup> C. Lees and G. Overing, *Double Agents: Women and Clerical Culture in Anglo-Saxon England*, Middle Ages (Philadelphia, PA, 2001), pp. 128-9.

<sup>6</sup> S. Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church: Sharing a Common Fate* (Woodbridge, 1992); C. Fell et al., *Women in Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1984).

<sup>7</sup> Hollis, *Women and the Church*, pp. 35-45, 218-20; Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, pp. 40-3; Yorke, *Nunneries*, pp. 17-36.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Sisam, 'Cynewulf', pp. 2-7; Fulk, *HOEM* §§76, 273.

a woman ruling the kingdom alone in the tenth century. Complementing this, I read Cynewulf's *Juliana* as a reflection of the remarkably high number of princess saints and abbesses of the royal family in Mercia. Together, I argue these two poems offer models of empowerment and sanctity for noblewomen which might have resonated with contemporary culture: *Elene* demonstrates how noblewomen with secular power may use it to holy effect, while *Juliana*'s holiness empowers her to overcome the worldly power of her tormentors. Of course, the depiction of women as well as the didactic content and entertainment value of these poems may have appealed to many different Anglo-Saxon audiences at different times and in different places — and there is evidence to suggest that Cynewulf's works were of considerable interest to tenth century readers<sup>9</sup> — but eighth- and ninth-century Mercia provides the most plausible compositional context for the choice of subject, treatment and linguistic details of these poems.

I will begin by offering an overview of eighth- and ninth-century culture in relation to women, manuscripts and literary production, both in Anglo-Saxon England more generally and Mercia specifically. I then examine the case for women in Mercia being uncommonly privileged, and explore the reasons for this phenomenon, comparing them to Northumbrian and West Saxon contemporaries. In light of this evidence, I offer readings of *Elene* and *Juliana* as complementary models of sanctity for a female audience.

In particular, I argue that Cynewulf's approach to the women in these two vernacular saints' lives reflects the position of women, secular and monastic, in a Mercian context. The choice and presentation of *Elene* and *Juliana* as models of female sanctity and power suggests the intended audience (and perhaps patrons) of these texts may have included powerful and

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<sup>9</sup> See S. Klein, *Ruling Women: Queenship and Gender in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Notre Dame, 2006); Conner, 'Dating'. This is in addition to the recopying of his poems in two separate poetic codices from the tenth century, in the Exeter and Vercelli Books.

autonomous women: of the few remaining manuscripts of known eighth- and ninth-century Mercian provenance, a large proportion indicate female production, ownership or association.<sup>10</sup> In the discussion that follows, I argue that in *Elene*, Cynewulf articulates a view of queenship which aligns best with that in Mercia, perhaps reflecting developments which took place during Offa's reign and the ensuing dynastic struggles of the ninth century. I then propose that Cynewulf's *Juliana* serves as an alternative model of female power, presenting faith – and perhaps also monastic life – as a means for women to overcome the powers of the secular world. Viewed in this way, both poems might have spoken to the privileged position of women in Mercia in the eighth and ninth centuries.

#### Manuscript Culture: a Female Audience

Female literacy was, of course, neither new nor exclusive to Mercia. One obvious example is abbess Hild of Whitby (614-680), who was noted as a teacher of priests and monks, and educated the noble virgin, Ælfflæd (654-714), her successor.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, as the poet Cædmon was trained at Whitby, its community likely produced both Latin lives, such as the anonymous *Life of Gregory* as well as vernacular poetry.<sup>12</sup> Guthlac learned his letters, psalms and canticles at Repton under abbess Ælfthryth.<sup>13</sup> Boniface's kinswoman and correspondent, Leoba, was

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<sup>10</sup> M. P. Brown, 'Female Book-Ownership and Production in Anglo-Saxon England: the Evidence of the Ninth-Century Prayerbooks', in *Lexis and Texts in Early English: Studies Presented to Jane Roberts*, ed. C. J. Kay and L. M. Sylvester (Amsterdam, 2001), pp. 45-67.

<sup>11</sup> Hollis, *Women and the Church*, pp. 250, 257, 261-2; A. Thacker, 'Hild (614-680)', *ODNB*; Thacker, 'Ælfflæd (654-714)', *ODNB*.

<sup>12</sup> Bede, *HE* IV.24; Hollis, *Women and the Church*, p. 266; B. Colgrave, ed., *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1968).

<sup>13</sup> VsG, pp. 84-5; Gonser, pp. 111-2. The earliest records of the name 'Ælfthryth' are this abbess and the queen of Cenwulf, suggesting that this is a noble Mercian family name, see PASE, 'Ælfthryth 1', 'Ælfthryth 2', 'Ælfthryth 3'.

educated by Eadburg at Wimbourne in Wessex, and Boniface himself educated monks and nuns before embarking to the continent.<sup>14</sup>

Female manuscript production is also occasionally attested throughout Anglo-Saxon England, but a number of the best candidates for female manuscript production seem to have originated in eighth- and ninth-century Mercia. In the early eighth century, Boniface wrote to abbess Eadburh (d.751) at Minster-in-Thamet, requesting that she add the epistles of St Peter in gold to the works he had already commissioned.<sup>15</sup> This eighth-century Kentish centre of female manuscript production became linked to Mercia in the ninth century, when abbess Cwenthryth, daughter of the Mercian king, Cenwulf, ruled over Minster-in-Thamet as well as Reculver and the family monastery at Winchcombe.<sup>16</sup> These manuscripts belong to the so-called Tiberius group, a group of Southumbrian manuscripts of the eighth and ninth centuries sharing distinctive script and a developed style of Insular illumination. Michelle Brown has described the script in these books as ‘mannered minuscule’, relating it to script used in charters dating to King Offa’s reign.<sup>17</sup> Though the exact geographical provenances of these manuscripts occasioned fierce scholarly debate in the mid-twentieth century between Sherman Kuhn and Kenneth Sisam, most would agree with Brown’s assertion that their production reflects the political and cultural impact of the Mercian hegemony and resulting *schriftprovinz*.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> B. A. E. Yorke, ‘Leoba (d. 782)’, *ODNB*, 2004; Hollis, *Women and the Church*, pp. 130-3, 268. The name ‘Eadburg’ also appears to be a name connected with the Mercian royal family: individuals with the name include an abbess of Repton and friend of Guthlac (‘Eadburg 3’), the daughter of Offa (‘Eadburg 5’), the mother of Alfred’s Mercian bride, Ealhswith (‘Eadburg 6’), and the sister of king Æthelstan of Wessex, who was fostered at his aunt Æthelflæd’s court (‘Eadburg 8’). There are three other attestations, PASE ‘Eadburg’. An Eadburg was also a kinswoman of the Hwiccan royal family and abbess at Gloucester; see Yorke, *Nunneries*, p. 33.

<sup>15</sup> Boniface, *Die Briefe*, No. 35, p. 60, trans. Whitelock, *EHD*, No. 172, p. 864.

<sup>16</sup> Brown, ‘The “Tiberius Group”’, p. 287; Morrish, ‘Evaluation’, pp. 14, 21, 137; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, pp. 165-6.

<sup>17</sup> Brown, ‘The “Tiberius Group”’, pp. 284-5.

<sup>18</sup> Brown, ‘Paris’, 134; S. Kuhn, ‘From Canterbury to Lichfield’, *Speculum* 23 (1948), 591-629 at 619-27; Kuhn, ‘Some Early Mercian Mss’, *RES* 8 (1957), 355-70, at 368-9; K. Sisam, ‘Canterbury, Lichfield, and the *Vespasian Psalter*’ *RES* 7 (1956), 1-10, at 9-10 and *RES* 8 (1957), 372-3.

Importantly for this discussion, a subgroup of Tiberius group devotional prayerbooks have evidence linking them to both Mercia and to a female audience. As Michelle Brown has noted, ‘the depleted body of evidence for book production in Mercia includes the best candidates as books made by and/or owned by women.’<sup>19</sup> These are the Harleian Prayerbook (Harley 7653: Gneuss and Lapidge No. 443, Ker No. 245), the Book of Nunnaminster (London, BL, Harley 2965: Gneuss and Lapidge No. 432, Ker No. 237) and the Royal Prayer Book (Royal 2 A xx: Gneuss and Lapidge No. 450, Ker No. 248).<sup>20</sup> The Royal Prayer Book is thought to be Mercian in origin, and of the first quarter of the ninth century; feminine forms in some of the prayers and in the text’s thematic devotional arrangement, focusing on spiritual and physical health, suggest it may have been used by a physician, possibly a nun.<sup>21</sup> The cycle of prayers in the Royal Prayer Book is related to those in the Book of Nunnaminster, which is also thought to be Mercian, from the West Midlands or Worcester in the first quarter of the ninth century.<sup>22</sup> A donation inscription records that the Book of Nunnaminster was given to Nunnaminster, Winchester, by Ealhswith in the late ninth century. Ealhswith, the daughter of an important Mercian ealdorman and a Mercian princess, and wife of Alfred the Great, is most likely to have been its donor, especially in consideration of negative contemporary West Saxon attitudes towards queenship and patterns of patronage to female religious institutions, which will be discussed below.

The script in the manuscripts of the Tiberius group are suggestive of cultural ties between Canterbury and Mercia in this period, which may provide a context for Cynewulf. In 785, Offa

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<sup>19</sup> Brown, ‘The “Tiberius” Group’; on female book production see also Hollis, *Women and the Church*, pp. 78, 131.

<sup>20</sup> The fourth major manuscript of the group, the Book of Cerne, does not seem to have any female connections.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Detailed Record for Royal 2 A xx’, British Library Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts, [<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=8821&CollID=16&NStart=20120>], accessed 2 February 2014.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Detailed Record for Harley 2965’, British Library Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts, [<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=8827>], accessed 19 August 2015.

became the direct ruler of Kent; the archbishops of Canterbury had been Mercians or likely Mercian appointments in the reigns of Tatwine (d. 734), Nothelm (d. 739), Cuthbert (d. 760) and, later, Æthelheard (d. 805) and possibly Wulfred (d. 832), himself an active scribe.<sup>23</sup> The appointment of the Kentish cleric Jænberht (c. 765-92) was a source of serious antagonism for Mercian expansion in Kent which occasioned serious squabbles over land, foundations and privileges that produced large amounts of documentary evidence in which very similar scripts were utilised. These consist of ostentatious calligraphic devices and unusual letter forms, which Michelle Brown believes may have been imported into Canterbury production by links with Mercian ecclesiastics in this period.<sup>24</sup> One manuscript which offers potential links between Canterbury, Cynewulf and the Tiberius group is Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, lat. 10861, a ninth-century passionnal which Michelle Brown attributes to the Christ Church, Canterbury scriptorium. It has seven female saint's lives among the eighteen in the passionnal, including a *passio S. Iuliana* which differs only slightly from that of Cynewulf's source.<sup>25</sup> Michelle Brown and Jennifer Morrish have discussed these links in terms of the Mercian *schriftprovinz*, or the area in which Mercian political influence impacted literary and script production. It is therefore plausible to read Cynewulf in the context of Mercian and Kentish connections, and potentially female audiences, in this period.

### Women in Power in Anglo-Saxon England: Princess Saints and Abbesses

Anglo-Saxon history records the actions of a number of powerful women, who usually achieved this status primarily as a result of their familial relations as queens or abbesses. The picture is

<sup>23</sup> A. Williams, 'Æthelheard (d. 805)', *ODNB*, 2004; N. Brooks, 'Wulfred (d. 832)', *ODNB*, 2004.

<sup>24</sup> M. P. Brown, 'Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, lat. 10861 and the Scriptorium of Christ Church, Canterbury', *ASE* 15 (1986), 119-37, at 134.

<sup>25</sup> Brown comments on the 'marked female' content and remarks on the unusual grouping of Afra of Augsburg with later connections to Edith and Helena (M. P. Brown, 'Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, lat. 10861 and the Scriptorium of Christ Church, Canterbury', *ASE* 15 (1986), 119-37, at 122, 127). See also M. Lapidge, 'Passio S. Iulianae', p. 155. All quotations of the Latin source in this chapter are taken from Lapidge's transcription of the Paris manuscript.



however distorted by the disproportionate number of admirable and infamous women whose actions were either praised or condemned by the predominantly male authors recording history. For example, the conflict between Cwenthryth (*fl.* 811- c. 827), heir of the Mercian king Cenwulf and abbess of Winchcombe and Minster-on-Thamet, and Wulfred, features in a number of ninth-century documents, particularly in conciliar records favouring the rights of Canterbury. According to Bede's *HE*, Ælfflæd (654-714), abbess of Whitby and daughter of Northumbrian king Oswiu, advised kings and taught bishops. We know of Leoba (*d.* 782), abbess of Tauberbischofsheim, from Ruldoph of Fulda's *Life*, but also her correspondence with her kinsman, Boniface.<sup>26</sup>

Anglo-Saxon noblewomen exercised power and influence as abbesses, mostly of royal minsters. Historians however have remarked on the remarkably high incidence of princess saints and abbesses descended from the Mercian line.<sup>27</sup> As Barbara Yorke remarks, 'the number of Penda's daughters appears to be legion [...] their cumulative effect is to suggest that the promotion of cults of members of the royal house was part of the Mercian policy for strengthening control of the satellite provinces.'<sup>28</sup> Mercians pursued this policy of installing female abbesses through the ninth century, which may suggest that the Mercian aristocracy was in a stable position both politically and financially to support these women and their foundations. Often appointed to a family foundation to preside over the line's cultic status, royal abbesses were praised for their exemplary lives, wisdom and influence.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Barbara Yorke notes that

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<sup>26</sup> Hollis, *Women and the Church*, pp. 271-300.

<sup>27</sup> Sims-Williams, *Religion and Learning*, pp. 48-53; Yorke, *Nunneries*, pp. 20-2, 53-8.

<sup>28</sup> *EKK*, p. 100.

<sup>29</sup> Hollis, *Women and the Church*, pp. 261-7.

major Mercian kings in the eighth and ninth centuries (Æthelbald, Offa and Cenwulf) all chose to be buried in royal nunneries, while kings in Northumbria and Wessex in this period did not.<sup>30</sup>

Similarly, Mercia differs from both Northumbria and Wessex in its devotion to royal female saints. While the early Mercian princess saints, mostly dating from the seventh and early eighth centuries, such as Cyneburg and Cyneswith, Frideswide, Ælfthryth of Repton, Æthelburg of Fladbury, Cuthswith, Mildburg, Mildrith and Wærburg, are often indirectly and poorly documented in later and possibly corrupt sources, we have several direct sources for Northumbria in Bede's *HE*. In his narrative, we learn of Hild, related to the Deiran royal dynasty; Ælfflæd, princess of both Bernician and Deiran heritage who succeeded Hild at Whitby; and of the virgin queen and saint Æthelthryth of Ely. Using the Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England database (PASE), I have identified a further six abbesses of likely royal Northumbrian descent in the eighth and ninth centuries: an Anonymous 332, Æbbe 1, Æbbe 2, Æthelhild, Ricthryth and Verca. In contrast, for Mercia in the eighth and ninth centuries, in addition to those listed above, I have identified a further ten, for nineteen total.<sup>31</sup> Given the lack of a narrative historical source for or unbiased towards Mercia in this period, these numbers are striking. The lack of prestige accorded to Northumbrian royal women as abbesses is also evident in Bede's treatment of Hild of Whitby. Bede's presentation of Hild as no more than a holy woman made worthy by her piety and devotion does not fully conceal the power she wielded as an abbess,

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<sup>30</sup> B. Yorke, 'The Burial of Kings in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Kingship, Legislation and Power in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. G. Owen Crocker and B. W. Schneider, Publications of the Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies 13 (Woodbridge, 2013), pp. 237-58, at 248-50.

<sup>31</sup> These are Æthelburg 8, a relation of Offa; Æthelgifu 4, daughter of Alfred the Great and Ealhswith of Mercia; Ceolburg of Berkeley, of the Hwiccan line; Cwenburg, abbess of a Kentish house in the ninth century; Cwenthryth, daughter of Cenwulf and abbess of Winchcombe; Cynethryth 1, an abbess in the eighth century who may have been a daughter of Penda; Cynethryth 2, Offa's queen; Eadburg 5, Offa's daughter; Eafe, who may have been a queen of the Hwicce; and Eanburg, a kinswoman of Offa.

teacher and political advisor.<sup>32</sup> As discussed below in relation to the kings of Northumbria, dynastic struggles between factions of the royal line and the lack of financial resources caused by the decline of the Northumbrian hegemony likely reduced the ability of the Northumbrian royal houses to patronize and establish royal houses in which to place their female family members; they may also have been too valuable as potential peace-weavers in dynastic conflict, to sacrifice as keepers of dynastic cults.

As in Northumbria, there was also a decline in the promotion of royal women in Wessex to positions of ecclesiastical power in the eighth and ninth centuries. Of the four known houses headed by women before the ninth century (already a number less than half of either Mercia or Northumbria), the names of only two survive, Wimbourne and Wareham; all four ceased to exist in the late Anglo-Saxon period.<sup>33</sup> In addition, there are no princess or female dynastic saints from the eighth or ninth century, though the cults of earlier West Saxon princess saints survived such as that of Cuthburh (*fl.* c. 700-718), abbess of Wimbourne. There are a number of female West Saxon royal saints in the tenth and eleventh centuries, such as Eadburh (d. 951x3), daughter of Edward the Elder; Edith (d. 984x7), daughter of king Edgar; and her mother, Wulfthryth (d. c. 1000). The dynasty of Ecgberht (d. 839) founded no new female foundations until the foundation of the Nunnaminster in Winchester in 899, which was founded by the Mercian wife of Alfred the Great, Ealhswith (d. 902), likely after Alfred's death, and may have reflected her Mercian background or continental practice.<sup>34</sup> Nor did this dynasty establish female members of the royal house as the heads of foundations in Kent when they took over after the end of the Mercian

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<sup>32</sup> As abbess, Hild presided nominally over the Synod of Whitby, and Bede recalls that she gave advice to princes and kings. *HE* III.5, IV.23; Hollis, *Women and the Church*, pp. 254, 264; Thacker, 'Hild', p. 264.

<sup>33</sup> S. Foot, *Veiled Women: The Disappearance of Nuns from Anglo-Saxon England*, 2 vols, Studies in Early Medieval Britain (Aldershot, 2000), I, p. 77; Yorke, *Nunneries*, p. 75.

<sup>34</sup> M. Costambeys, 'Ealhswith (d. 902)', *ODNB*.

hegemony, a direct contrast to Mercian practices there. In short, unlike Mercia West Saxon policy did not promote female members of the royal family as abbesses either within Wessex or beyond, and its dynasty produced no female saints with surviving cults until the mid-tenth century.<sup>35</sup> It may be that Wessex was plagued by similar political and financial problems as Northumbria in the eighth and ninth centuries. As I shall argue below, holiness is depicted in *Juliana* as a means to overcome and surpass worldly power, whether for women or Christians in general, a theme which accords well with the treatment of women in Mercia in the eighth and ninth centuries.

#### Women in Power in Anglo-Saxon England: Queens and Kings' Wives

Queenship, the most powerful secular position a woman could hold in Anglo-Saxon England, evolved alongside the concept of marriage, secular and ecclesiastical relations, and issues of legitimate succession. The *Regularis Concordia*, produced in 973, made the West Saxon queen the protector of nunneries, just as the king was of monasteries, and the anointing ceremony in this document made queenship a divinely ordained position which could not be retired at will.<sup>36</sup> In the eighth and ninth centuries, however, the practice of queenship diverged radically between the kingdoms of Mercia, Northumbria and Wessex, as will be outlined below.

In early medieval Europe, and especially in Anglo-Saxon England, queenship was not as formally defined or theorized as some other secular offices.<sup>37</sup> As Pauline Stafford has argued, the definition of an early medieval queen might be summarized as the designated woman, sometimes

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<sup>35</sup> Yorke, 'Burial', pp. 249-51.

<sup>36</sup> P. Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers: the King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages*, Women, Power and Politics (London, 1998), pp. 121-34 and 145-7; Yorke, *Nunneries*, p. 169; S. Klein, *Ruling Women*, pp. 173-4; J. Nelson, 'Early Medieval Rites of Queen-Making and the Shaping of Medieval Queenship', in *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe*, ed. A. Duggan (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 301-16.

<sup>37</sup> S. Klein, 'Reading Queenship in Cynewulf's *Elene*', *Journal of Medieval and Modern Studies* 33 (2003), 47-89, at 51.

anointed, whom a king married.<sup>38</sup> Queenship developed in Anglo-Saxon England alongside notions of marriage influenced by Christianity and the need to legitimize and support the claims of an individual and his family to rule a kingdom, as demonstrated by laws and ecclesiastical documents such as the Legatine Canons of 786. These new ideas concerning queenship culminated in two very different tenth-century developments: firstly, the concept of an anointed queenship in the West Saxon *Regularis Concordia* made the queen a divinely ordained and anointed title-holder like her husband, the king; secondly, the rule of Lady Æthelflæd of Mercia (d. 918) reflected the newfound ability of a Mercian noblewoman to act as a lord, including taking responsibility for military leadership.<sup>39</sup> Æthelflæd, whom Stafford sees as the heir of favourable family connections and a special tradition of Mercian queenship, ruled independently during the Viking invasions of the tenth century after the death of her husband, Ealdorman Æthelred.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, Æthelflæd's daughter, Ælfwynn, seems to have been the presumed and locally-preferred heir to her rule on Æthelflæd's death; however, her succession was thwarted by a coup by Edward the Elder, the king of Wessex and Ælfwynn's own uncle.

A queen's power, especially before *Regularis Concordia* and the Benedictine Reform, was predominantly familial.<sup>41</sup> Kings may have selected a bride to ally themselves with another powerful family or dynasty, supporting their claim to rule.<sup>42</sup> Marriages could also be brokered as peace agreements between feuding families, as depicted in the famous and tragic literary tales of

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<sup>38</sup> Stafford, *Queens*.

<sup>39</sup> *Regularis Concordia* makes the queen an equal protector and patron of nunneries in several sections. See T. Symons, trans. and ed., *The Monastic Agreement of the Monks and Nuns of the English Nation* (London, 1953), pp. 2, 7, 14.

<sup>40</sup> Stafford, *Queens*, pp. 140-1; Stafford, 'Political Women', pp. 44-9.

<sup>41</sup> Stafford, *Queens*, pp. 191-7; Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, p. 78; Hollis, *Women and the Church*, pp. 48-9, esp. 62-5.

<sup>42</sup> For example, Edwin's request for Æthelberg, the princess daughter of Kentish king Æthelberht and his Frankish bride, Bertha, whose connections bolstered his status in Northumbria against Bernician rivals.

Hildeburh (ll. 1071-124) and Freawaru (ll. 2020-69a) in *Beowulf*, or historically with the marriages of Osthryth of Northumbria to Æthelred of Mercia, or Eanflæd of Deira to Oswiu of Bernicia in Northumbria.<sup>43</sup> Unsurprisingly, peace-weaving marriages were not always successful. Anglo-Saxon queens could be expected to share in the lordship of their husbands, and as wealthy, influential and well-connected women, could even have their own retinue of warriors.<sup>44</sup> However, dynastic situations in Mercia, Northumbria and Wessex inspired radically different conceptions, powers and traditions of queenship, as I shall outline below. This will lead into a discussion of *Elene* within the context Mercian queenship in the eighth and early ninth century.<sup>45</sup>

The contrasting conception and practice of queenship in Northumbria, Wessex and Mercia likely reflects responses to individual political developments and necessities facing their respective ruling families. As I shall outline below in a fresh examination of queenship in the eighth and ninth centuries, these pressures caused Mercia to elevate the office of queen, whereas in Northumbria the importance of queens diminished, perhaps due to the chaotic regnal succession; in Wessex, the office was weakened during the turbulent eighth century and, in response to Mercian interference in its succession in the ninth century, was abandoned almost entirely. A reading of *Elene* and *Juliana*, therefore, in light of the unusually elevated position of noblewomen and queens in Mercia has the potential to illuminate how Cynewulf – himself probably a Mercian poet – may have selected and adapted his Christian heroines for an Anglo-Saxon audience.

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<sup>43</sup> S. E. Kelly, 'Osthryth (d. 697)', *ODNB*.

<sup>44</sup> Like that of Eanflæd, to which Wilfrid aspired in his youth. See *Wilfrid*, pp. 6-7, Hollis, *Women and the Church*, pp. 152-7, 168.

<sup>45</sup> No attempts have been made to locate Cynewulf in East Anglia or Kent, and so I have excluded them from the present discussion. Though Northumbrian queens possessed considerable power, linguistic evidence suggests that Cynewulf, if Northumbrian, must have written after ca. 850, but the Northumbrian monarchy was largely dismantled by 867.

The picture of queenship in Northumbria differs radically from the early period, in which queens were agents of social change, conversion and potential political unity, and the eighth and ninth centuries after the end of the Northumbrian hegemony. While Bede records the names of a number of Northumbrian queens as they relate to his narrative of conversion in the *HE*, he also omits the names of some queens and demonizes others whose actions oppose the progression of Christianity and the holy men and women. From the mid-eighth century, however, the position of Northumbrian queen altered significantly. Firstly, the historical record fails to preserve the names of many queens from Northumbria: between the mid-seventh century and the late ninth century, I have identified the existence of only thirteen queens or wives of kings, and the names of eleven for twenty-eight kings of Northumbria.<sup>46</sup> Only two of these queens are recorded as witnessing charters, and neither of them do so as queens of Northumbria: Iurminburg witnesses as a widowed abbess in her homeland of Kent in S 20, and Ælflæd, wife of Æthelred I witnesses S 59 before her marriage, as daughter of both of her signing parents, *Offa Dei dono rex Merciorum* and *Cynethryth regina Merciorum*. Documents from Northumbria do not survive as well as those of Mercia, which were often copied in Canterbury or later West Saxon archives, but nonetheless the record of noble and royal women in Northumbria clearly does not reflect the same degree of advancement, respect or power as their contemporaries in Mercia. Cynewulf's poetry might well have appealed to Northumbrian noblewomen, but their own lives and careers are unlikely to have specifically inspired his selection and adaptation of *Elene* and *Juliana*.

Conversely, in Mercia, political developments in the dynastic situation caused an elevation in the status of the queen which may well have inspired Cynewulf, and certainly caused

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<sup>46</sup> These were found in PASE and the ODNB; the ratio is skewed by the records of the names of all three of Oswiu's wives and two of Ecgrith's; the true ratio is that we know the names of the queens of about eight of the twenty-eight Northumbrian kings from 642 to the Danish takeover of 867.

a reactionary restriction on the office of queenship in Wessex. These developments possibly began as early as the reign of Penda (d. 655), who may have come to power from a dynasty opposed to the previous king, Cearl.<sup>47</sup> Penda perhaps had multiple wives, one of whom was Cynewise, as genealogies state that he had seven sons and daughters, who reigned as kings until 704. After the collapse of the Pending dynasty in 716, Æthelbald legitimized his rule, as I have argued in the previous chapter, both by his descent from Penda's brother Eowa, but also by invoking the prophecy of his distant cousin and saint, Guthlac.<sup>48</sup> Æthelbald never took a wife and no offspring are known; after his murder, the succession was uncertain.<sup>49</sup> As the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records, Beornred succeeded temporarily, but was shortly ousted by another descendant of Eowa, Offa. Offa's success may have been due in part to his marriage to Cynethryth, who was probably from a Mercian noble family descended from Penda.<sup>50</sup> Queens could be selected to bring familial support through an alliance, to bring high status, and to raise a legitimate heir. Theoretically, then, this marriage allied Offa with a relatively powerful family and the established line of Penda. Presumably, Cynethryth had male relatives with good claims to the Mercian throne; in marrying Offa, she may have secured their support for her husband, herself and their heir. In addition, contemporary developments both in England and on the continent provided further impetus for enhancing the status of the queen in Mercia. The visit of papal legates in 786 resulted in a series of canons which renewed interest in reform for both the clergy and the laity (especially the monarchy).<sup>51</sup> One of the canons addressed to the laity, which

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<sup>47</sup> A. Williams, A. Smyth, and D. P. Kirby, *A Biographical Dictionary of Dark Age Britain* (London: 1991), p. 74; M. Ziegler, 'The Politics of Exile in Early Northumbria', *The Heroic Age* 2 (1999), 1-11.

<sup>48</sup> *Colgrave*, XLIX; see above, p. 87.

<sup>49</sup> Hollis, *Women and the Church*, pp. 37-41, 139-40; Boniface, *Die Briefe des Heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*, ed. M. Tangl, MGH, *Epistola Selectae* I (Berlin, 1955), pp. 146-55. For more on Boniface's letter, see below, p. 203.

<sup>50</sup> Stafford, 'Political Women', p. 36. This is based largely on the identification of an earlier abbess Cynethryth as a daughter of Penda, see the suggestion on PASE.

<sup>51</sup> Cubitt, *Councils*, p. 158.



generally stress the importance for secular leaders to govern rightly and to obey the church, condemns illegal marriages and unions, especially those of consecrated women, and prevents the children of such unions from inheriting.<sup>52</sup> The motivation behind such a proscription in Anglo-Saxon England originated in the days of Augustine, when the church began to promote marriage as the dominant social relationship as a metaphor for the mystical union of Christ and the Church, rather than simply kinship or comradeship.<sup>53</sup> Due to the importance and significance of this union as a metaphor, early penitentials and canons particularly promote respect for and rules of marriage. Though a Northumbrian context is most often assumed for these canons, the reassertion of the sanctity of marriage in 786 may have also served to debar any offspring of Æthelbald's dalliances with consecrated women from claiming the Mercian throne.<sup>54</sup> Scholarship also links the Legatine visit with Offa's efforts to secure the elevation of Lichfield to an archbishopric and the anointing of his son, Ecgrith, as his heir.<sup>55</sup> Catherine Cubitt has explored how these canons might have been intended to address the unstable situation in Northumbria, where degeneracy and faithlessness had led to the deposition and murder of recent kings.<sup>56</sup> But these canons, which sought to bolster the value of faith with one's lord and the divine institution of kingship, may also have served a fledgling Mercian dynasty seeking to maintain its hold on the throne by all means possible.<sup>57</sup>

The provision of the office of king as 'anointed' in the 786 council's report required that kings must descend from legitimate unions.<sup>58</sup> As *mater regis*, the official profile of the queen

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<sup>52</sup> Cubitt, *Councils*, p. 159.

<sup>53</sup> Hollis, *Women and the Church*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>54</sup> Cubitt, *Councils*, p. 160; Stafford, 'Political Women', pp. 37-8. Cynewulf of Wessex's unmarried death in 786 is recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.

<sup>55</sup> Cubitt, *Councils*, p. 154.

<sup>56</sup> Cubitt, *Councils*, pp. 183-7. See also below, p. 253.

<sup>57</sup> Cubitt, *Councils*, p. 167.

<sup>58</sup> Dümmler, *Epistolae Karolini Aevi* II, pp. 23-4; Cubitt, *Councils*, p. 167.

therefore increased considerably. Ecclesiastical authority now sanctioned the office of king, and could play a role in officially legitimizing heirs. Raising the status of the queen, not only as the lawfully-wedded wife of the king, but as a powerful, Christian woman in her own right, doubly increased the stature of an heir of such a union. This is precisely what we see with Cynethryth, Offa's queen and mother of his heir, Ecgrith.<sup>59</sup> Cynethryth's charter titles included *regina* ('queen'), *regina Merciorum* ('queen of the Mercians'), and, preempting the legatine sanctioning of the office of king, *Dei gratia regina Merciorum* ('queen of the Mercians by the grace of God').<sup>60</sup> Cynethryth is the only Anglo-Saxon queen in whose name coinage was issued, on which she was titled *regina M*, 'queen of the Mercians'.<sup>61</sup>

Mercian royal women witnessed charters with an unusual frequency in Anglo-Saxon England: starting with Cynethryth, no fewer than six Mercian queens are known to have attested charters, in addition to Æthelflæd, Lady of the Mercians.<sup>62</sup> These are Cynethryth, Offa's queen, who attests twenty-five charters (some as abbess, some as mother of the king); Cynegyth, queen of Cenwulf;<sup>63</sup> Cynethryth, queen of Wiglaf, who witnesses two charters, and Sæthryth, queen of Beorhtwulf (r. 840-852).<sup>64</sup> As I shall discuss below, these numbers far surpass those for Northumbrian and West Saxon queens. Furthermore, several daughters of these Mercian queens and kings also appeared as witnesses to charters in this period.<sup>65</sup> The power of these princesses

<sup>59</sup> Stafford, 'Political Women', pp. 38-9.

<sup>60</sup> Cynethryth witnesses most often simply as *regina*, see for example S 104, S 111, S 1184, S 123, S 140; she witnesses as *reginae Merciorum* in the authentic charter S 59 (c. 770), and as *Dei gratia regina Merciorum* in S 117 and S 118 (c. 780).

<sup>61</sup> Stafford, 'Political Women', p. 39; S. E. Kelly, 'Cynethryth (fl. c. 770-798)', *ODNB*.

<sup>62</sup> Hollis, *Women and the Church*, p. 212-3. Queens elsewhere witnessed charters earlier than those in Mercia, particularly those of Ine of Wessex (d. 726), and Wihtred of Kent (d. 725). The prevalence of Cynethryth's witnessing may be a hypercorrection to the absence of a queen in Æthelbald's reign (r. 716-57).

<sup>63</sup> Charter S156 is issued jointly in the name of Cynegyth and Cenwulf, though she does not witness it.

<sup>64</sup> PASE, 'Office: Queen'. This list is compiled by selecting 'Office: Queen' and 'Source: Charters' in the PASE database, then narrowed to queens in the eighth and ninth centuries.

<sup>65</sup> Ælfflæd, Eadburg and Æthelburg, daughters of Offa and Cynethryth, and later Cwenthryth, daughter and heir of her father, Cenwulf witness charters. Later, Ælfwynn, daughter of Lady Æthelflæd and Lord Æthelred witnesses

hints that royal women in Mercia were developing their own avenues of claiming authority akin to that of their male kin.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, in the late *passio* of St Cynehelm, Cwenthryth's own ambitions for the Mercian throne motivated her to murder her brother, Cynehelm.<sup>67</sup>

Mercian queens, then, were powerful, politically active women in their own rights in the eighth and ninth centuries, when Cynewulf was likely to have been active. As queens, they were close advisors to the king; they were also the mistress of the royal household.<sup>68</sup> In fact, there is reason to suspect that the first anointing of an English queen may have taken place in Mercia in this period. Stephanie Hollis summarizes,

Recent scholarship [...] points to the existence of seemingly indigenous queen-making rituals in mid 9<sup>th</sup> century Mercia, which conceivably have been already current when Eadburg of Mercia married Brihtric of Wessex in 789, and the attitudes of Asser and the Wessex court may well, in their different ways, have been shaped by their awareness of Mercian practices that enhanced the status of queens by endowing them with charismatic prestige.<sup>69</sup>

As shall be discussed below, this elevation of queenship appears to have caused a conscious reactionary suspension of queenship in Wessex, which may reflect such a ritual anointing, and simply has no equivalent in Northumbria. Therefore, reading *Elene* as a Mercian text may help explain not only Cynewulf's choice of subject, but also certain aspects of his presentation of this imperious queen.

Unlike in Northumbria, where the poor survival of records and dynastic chaos seem to have been the prime factors in the relegation of queenship, in Wessex this degradation appears to have been a conscious decision to emphasize political independence from Mercia. Initially,

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charter S 367, on which see below, p. 206; Hollis, *Women and the Church*, p. 217; Stafford, 'Political Women', p. 28, 41-2.

<sup>66</sup> Besides the ideal *ides* in the *Maxims*, the other prominent queens in Old English poetry occur in *Beowulf*: Wealhtheow, Hygd, Freawaro, and Modthryth(o). For the case for Mercian origins of *Beowulf*, see below, p. 268-270, and above, p. 34.

<sup>67</sup> Kelly, 'Cwenthryth', *ODNB*; Hollis, *Women and the Church*, p. 217.

<sup>68</sup> Stafford, 'Political Women', p. 39.

<sup>69</sup> Hollis, *Women and the Church*, pp. 215-6.

Wessex seems to have had queens like the majority of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, and circumstances of succession in the eleventh century saw a return the traditional office of queen.<sup>70</sup> However, Asser recounts that in ninth-century Wessex, the wife of a king was neither called *regina*, nor, as customary in other kingdoms and recorded in the Old English *Maxims*, was she allowed to sit on the throne beside the king.<sup>71</sup> This temporary suspension of the office of queenship was a reaction against a particularly imperious and wicked queen, a Mercian princess married to the West Saxon king Beorhtric, an ally of Offa, who had driven Alfred's grandfather, Ecgberht, into exile, as Asser relates:<sup>72</sup>

Quae confestim accepta regis amicitia et totius pene regni potestate, more paterno tyrannice vivere incepit, et omnem hominem execrari, quem Beorhtric diligeret, et omnia odibilia Deo et hominibus facere, et omnes, quos posset, ad regem accusare, et ita aut vita aut potestate per insidias previare. Et si a rege illud impetrare non posset, veneno eos necabat; sicut de adolescente quodam regi dilectissimo hoc factum competrum habetur, quem cum ad regem accusare non posset, veneno eum necavit.<sup>73</sup>

Eadburh was the crafty daughter of a crafty king, offering her husband advice which likely favoured her and her family in Mercia, as well as any of Beorhtric's potential heirs. Presumably, Eadburh imitated the elevated queenship of her mother in Mercia.<sup>74</sup> Like many tales of wicked

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<sup>70</sup> Keynes and Lapidge, p. 235, n. 28; Hollis, *Women and the Church*, pp. 209, 213. Asser notes the paternal and maternal ancestries of Alfred (chapters 1-2), indicating that the practice of the West Saxon court to dishonour and ignore the queen was unusual.

<sup>71</sup> Stevenson, pp. 9-14; S. Keynes and M. Lapidge, eds. and trans., *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and other Contemporary Sources* (Harmondsworth, 1983), pp. 70-2. All translations of Asser are taken from this edition.

<sup>72</sup> Keynes and Lapidge, p. 236, n.30.

<sup>73</sup> Stevenson, pp. 12-13. Trans. Keynes and Lapidge, pp. 71-2: 'As soon as she had won the king's friendship, and power throughout almost the entire kingdom, she began to behave like a tyrant after the manner of her father – to loathe every man whom Beorhtric liked, to do all things hateful to God and man, to denounce all those whom she could before the king, and thus by trickery to deprive them of either life or power, and if she could not achieve that end with the king's compliance, she killed them with a poison.'

<sup>74</sup> Eadburh also seems to be following traditional Anglo-Saxon queenship in Wessex: West Saxon queens Frithugyth (fl. 747), and Æthelburh, queen of Ine (fl. 688-726), both attested charters. However, between them, no queen attests charters for Sigeberht, relative of Cyneheard of the famous Anglo-Saxon Chronicle entry, nor for their rival Cynewulf. The comment that Cyneheard's raid occurred when Cynewulf was *lytle werode on wifcybbe on Merantune*, 'with a little band at Merton visiting a woman', may attest the latter's lack of a queen. Alfred's mother, Osburh, is also absent from the charter record. See S 253, S 1274 and S 326; F. Leneghan, 'Royal Wisdom and the Alfredian Context of Cynewulf and Cyneheard', *ASE* 39 (2011), 71-104.

queens, Eadburh's story hints at the dangers of having a powerful and influential foreigner as one of the king's closest advisors, especially one who refuses to assimilate to the local court and customs.<sup>75</sup> The tale also fits with patterns of defamation used to attack the legitimacy of a line or heir.<sup>76</sup>

The successors of Ecgberht responded to the presence of this assertive, Mercian princess on the West Saxon throne by abandoning traditional queenship to differentiate their dynasty from the weak, female- and Mercian-dominated Beorhtric.<sup>77</sup> As reflected in Asser's tale, Beorhtric appears to have ruled only with the support of the Mercians. The relationship between the descendants of Æthelwulf and their wives is complicated, and analogues to Asser's tale reveal a troubling relationship between the kings of Wessex and the women who would normally be called queens. Æthelwulf's second wife, Judith, a Carolingian princess, was anointed as *regina* when they wed on the Continent as a condition of the marriage. At Æthelwulf's death, his son Æthelbald married his step-mother, the same Judith, who for the first time attests charters as *regina* in his reign; but Æthelbald died two years later than his father.<sup>78</sup> His brother and successor, Æthelberht, is not known to have taken a wife in his five years' reign. However,

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<sup>75</sup> Hollis, *Women and the Church*, p. 157-8, 217; Stafford, *Queens*, pp. 96-8. The tale of the imperious queen Modthryth (the recent editors of *Klaeber's Beowulf* give her name as *Fremu*), in *Beowulf* has also been taken as a sign of the epic's association with or origin in Mercia: for a review of the evidence, see Leneghan, 'Poetic Purpose', 538-60; *Klaeber's Beowulf*, p. clxxii and ll. 1222-6.

<sup>76</sup> Stafford, *Queens*, pp. 18, 162.

<sup>77</sup> In fact, the West Saxon dynasty had a complex relationship with its queens between Eadburh and Ælfthryth. Judith, second wife of Æthelwulf and also of his son, Æthelbald, witnessed charters as *regina* (S 363), but only in her second marriage; Æthelred's queen, Wulfthryth witnessed a charter as *Wulfðryd Regina* (S 340). Alfred's Mercian wife, Ealhswith, witnessed only as *mater regis* in the reign of her son, Edward the Elder (see S 363). Of Edward's three wives, Ecgwynn, Ælflæd and Eadgifu, Ælflæd witnesses as *conjux regis* (S 363), and Eadgifu only as the mother of Edmund, *eusdem regis mater* (S 514); of Edmund's queens, Ælfifu witnesses as *concubine regis* (S 514), and Æthelflæd of Damerham does not witness. If Wulfthryth is an anomaly, this suggests that the concept of queenship in Wessex was complicated by the prevalence of fraternal succession – Æthelstan, for example, did not take a wife, perhaps to allow his half-brothers to inherit. Otherwise, Alfred's demotion of Ealhswith looks like a reaction against Mercian articulations of queenship.

<sup>78</sup> See S1274, dated, in which she witnesses as *regina*, and S326, which she witnesses rather as *regis filius*, giving her a title external to her marital status.

Æthelred (r. 865-71) did take a queen: she attests S 340 as *Wulfthryth regina*; her origins are unknown.<sup>79</sup> The West Saxon reluctance to recognise the office of queenship continued under Alfred: his wife, Ealhswith, does not appear in the charter record until after her husband's death, when she begins to witness as *regis mater* under Edward the Elder; her successors too witness as queens and consorts, using *regis mater*, *concupina regis* and other titles denoting their relationship to the king, but not *regina*. The lessons of Eadburg and Judith were not easily forgotten: no queen besides Wulfthryth attests a charter as queen, rather than mother of the king, for two centuries after Eadburh, except Judith. As Barbara Yorke observes, 'in ninth-century Wessex traditional ways of enhancing the royal line through promotion of royal women as queens and abbesses were abandoned temporarily.'<sup>80</sup> On this evidence, it would seem unlikely that *Elene*, a poem whose main character is called a *geatolic guðcwen* ('stately war-queen', l. 331) would have been written in or for the women of Wessex in the eighth through late ninth centuries.

Despite this evidence, scholars have more frequently read Cynewulf's works in West Saxon contexts. For example, Patrick Conner has suggested that Cynewulf's poetry is a product of renewed Carolingian contact with Wessex which took place at the earliest in the tenth century.<sup>81</sup> Yet between Beorhtric's queen, Eadburh (fl. 789-802), and Ælfthryth (d. 999x1001) the wife of the West Saxon king did not share the throne, nor was she referred to as a 'queen'. Similarly Stacy Klein reads Cynewulf's *Elene* in a tenth-century context as 'an exemplar to naturalize and perpetuate a very traditional and highly conservative social hierarchy, figured as

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<sup>79</sup> Unlike Judith, who was Frankish and Alfred's wife, Ealhswith, who was Mercian, it may be that Wulfthryth was West Saxon, and therefore not subject to the same suspicion when she witnessed as *regina*. The name Wulfthryth appears in all 6 instances to be of West Saxon origin, see PASE, 'Wulfthryth'.

<sup>80</sup> Yorke, *Nunneries*, p. 74.

<sup>81</sup> Conner, 'Dating Cynewulf'.

coextensive with righteous belief and as critical to the production of communal harmony and personal happiness.<sup>82</sup> She suggests that Cynewulf's frequent use of titles, such as *cwen* and *hlæfdige*, transforms Elene into a model of queenship that invites typological readings of her character, and that these terms reflect cultural usage re-emerging in tenth-century Wessex.<sup>83</sup> Klein's reading may well help to explain the poem's survival in the late tenth-century Vercelli Book, though others have argued that this may have more to do with its concern with themes of preaching and conversion.<sup>84</sup> However, as discussed above, the transmission state and dialect of Cynewulf's poetry and the spelling of his name do not point to West Saxon origins. The heroines of two of Cynewulf's poems were unlikely to have found a ready audience in ninth- or tenth-century Wessex: in short, neither royal women, nor female religious seem to have been particularly well regarded in Wessex after Ecgberht.

Moreover, in addition to these cultural and political factors, the manuscript context of *Elene* may hint at the origins of the poem in eighth- or ninth- century Mercia: *Elene* occurs in the third booklet of the Vercelli Book, followed by Homily XXIII, derived from the *OEPG*, and both texts may share an exemplar.<sup>85</sup> As well as much Kentish material, the manuscript also includes material compiled from a Mercian homiliary and the signed Cynewulfian poem, *Fates of the Apostles*.<sup>86</sup> Thus in selecting a stately queen for his protagonist in *Elene*, Cynewulf appears to be reflecting practices in eighth- and ninth-century Mercia.

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<sup>82</sup> Klein, *Ruling Women*, pp. 57-8.

<sup>83</sup> Klein, *Ruling Women*, p. 63.

<sup>84</sup> See F. Leneghan, 'Teaching the Teachers: The Vercelli Book and the Mixed Life', *ES* 94 (2013), 627-58, at 646-48. Cf. C. Regan, 'Evangelism as the Informing Principle of Cynewulf's *Elene*', *Traditio* 29 (1973), 27-52.

<sup>85</sup> Krapp, *Vercelli Book*, p. cc; Scragg, *Vercelli*, p. 205. On Vercelli Homily XXIII, see above, p. 81.

<sup>86</sup> Scragg, *Vercelli*, pp. 198, 202-6.

### Models of Sanctity: Juliana and Elene

In light of the above discussion of the contrasting status of women in Mercia, Northumbria and Wessex in the eighth and ninth centuries, I offer below a reading of Cynewulf's two female saints as complementary models of sanctity in the context of eighth- and ninth-century Mercia. As we have seen above, Juliana is depicted as a well-educated, graceful, intelligent and faithful woman in both Cynewulf's rendition and his source text, the *Passio S. Iulianae*.<sup>87</sup> In *Elene*, Cynewulf largely follows the narrative of the *Inventio sanctio crucae*, but grants his empress greater autonomy in her search for the Cross. Though the original intended audience and purpose of Cynewulf's female verse *vitae* must remain hypothetical, the importance of teaching and right belief, the high status of these two women in Cynewulf's poems, and the unusually high status of women in Mercia, combined with linguistic evidence outlined above, invites us to consider the possibility that his original audience was either a Mercian nunnery or double-monastery which had royal connections, or perhaps even the Mercian royal court itself.<sup>88</sup> Together, Elene and Juliana offer two alternative depictions of the interplay between sanctity and power: whereas Elene uses her secular power to do holy work, Juliana's faith triumphs over the secular power of her persecutors, making her a complimentary model of female sanctity.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> On the source text, see M. Lapidge, 'Cynewulf and the *Passio S. Iulianae*', in M. Amadio, M. Irving and K. O'Brien O'Keeffe, eds, *Unlocking the Wordhoard: Anglo-Saxon Studies in Memory of Edward B. Irving, Jr.* (Toronto, 2003), pp. 147-71. For an English translation of what was previously thought to be the source text, the Bollandists' *Acta Sanctorum*, see D. G. Calder and M. J. B. Allen, *Sources and Analogues of Old English Poetry: the Major Latin Texts in Translation* (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 122-3.

<sup>88</sup> On entertainment of visitors in monasteries, see S. Foot, *Monastic Life in Anglo-Saxon England, c. 600-900* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 239-42; on royal visits, see p. 326.

<sup>89</sup> K. Tanner, 'Radical Saints and conservative churches: Cynewulf's *Juliana* in its cultural context' (unpubl. MA dissertation, Iowa State Univ., 2010), discusses *Juliana* in light of other virgin martyr passions and ninth century ecclesiastical practice.



These poems have often been criticized for following their supposed sources very closely.<sup>90</sup> This direct method of translation and adaptation however recalls prose translation and glossing techniques, as discussed in the introduction, mixed with selective poetic expansions. In addition, just as the subject of Guthlac is thought to indicate a Mercian audience or author,<sup>91</sup> Cynewulf's choice of two female saints empowered by faith might suggest an audience of powerful women, such as that which, as has been argued above, pertained in eighth- and ninth-century Mercia.<sup>92</sup> Above all, the selection of two empowered female saints suggests Cynewulf may have operated in a milieu in which real women were powerful secular leaders as queens and abbesses, as well as models of strong faith.

Together with *Juliana*, Cynewulf's two verse lives of female saints offer a complete model of female sanctity such as might have appealed to women occupying positions of authority: *Elene* models how women with secular and worldly power may attain sanctity by doing the good work of the Church, teaching and converting the people; *Juliana* offers a complementary model of how commitment to Christian faith and virtue may empower a lowly maiden with a sanctity which prevails over the greatest of secular powers and even the devil himself. Juliana's belief and ultimate commitment to her faith allow her to triumph over the worldly power of her tormenters: her father, Africanus, her suitor, Heleusius, and a demon from hell. She thus offers a model of how any woman might surpass worldly power with her own

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<sup>90</sup> Salvador-Bello, 'Cynewulf: *Christ II*', *The Literary Encyclopedia*; Sisam, 'Cynewulf', p. 12. Cynewulf's expansions are easily identified in Holthausen's edition of *Elene*, which includes a version of the Latin source text at the foot of the page. Easily identified passages of major expansion are ll. 225-70, 956-1017, and his signature from l. 1237 to the end. Similarly, Lapidge's transcription of the *Passio S. Iulianae* highlights in bold the text which Cynewulf has translated. In this version, it is very apparent that, like the *OEB*, Cynewulf has significantly abbreviated or omitted much of the Latin text.

<sup>91</sup> See above, p. 83.

<sup>92</sup> Sisam, 'Cynewulf', pp. 12-15.

heroic faith. The two female lives function together, the queen harnessing her secular position and power to advance the Christian faith, and the friendless and powerless maiden ennobled and empowered as a virgin saint and martyr beyond the power of the world. In his eighth-century work, *De Virginitate*, Aldhelm proposed three categories of chastity: *virginitas* ('virginity'), *castitas* ('chastity') and *iugalitas* ('marriage').<sup>93</sup> Rather than categories of chastity, Cynewulf offers two examples of holiness: one based on secular, the other eternal, relationships. As shall be explored below, the cult of Juliana and manuscript production in Mercia in the ninth century further supports the case for reading Cynewulf's *Juliana* as a Mercian text from this period.

### *Elene and Mercian Queenship*

In this next section I propose that Mercian queenship provides the most suitable background for the composition of *Elene*. There are a number of telling parallels between Mercian queens and the historical figure of St Helena. Constantine's mother was celebrated as a model of Christian queenship.<sup>94</sup> In her mission to Jerusalem, Helena acts as one of the great Christian emperor's most-trusted advisors and subjects, almost like a regent. Like Helena, Offa's queen Cynethryth probably helped Ecgrith as regent during the few months of his rule.<sup>95</sup> A connection between these two women is further suggested by the semblance of Cynethryth's coinage to that of the Empress Helena in the fourth century.<sup>96</sup> Below I offer a reading of Cynewulf's *Elene* in which the circumstances of the invention of the Cross as retold by Cynewulf mirror the queenly situation in eighth- and ninth-century Mercia. This section focuses on how the queen is

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<sup>93</sup> Lapidge and Herren, ed. and trans., *Aldhelm: the Prose Works*, ch. XIX, p. 75.

<sup>94</sup> Klein, *Ruling Women*, pp. 53-5.

<sup>95</sup> She attests two charters with him in 796, S 150 and S 151.

<sup>96</sup> Stafford, 'Political Women', p. 40; Gannon, *Iconography*, p. 40.

presented, how she acts, and how her interactions are most appropriate and suited to the ears of a Mercian, and perhaps noble, and royal, audience.

As Stacy Klein and others have noted, Cynewulf refers to Elene more often by titles than by her Christian name.<sup>97</sup> This invites a partially typological reading of her character, which the Jews fail to recognize.<sup>98</sup> The story of Helena, including her lowly background, was of course very well-known throughout the medieval period. Early medieval Latin sources depict her as a servant at an inn or stable rather than as a nobleman's daughter.<sup>99</sup> This account of Helena's origins would have been problematic to a tenth-century audience, whose kings now had to be born of a lawfully-wedded couple to inherit the kingship: the wife of such an anointed king would also likely be noble. Although Helena's low birth was common knowledge, it did not present an issue to either Bede or the translator of the Old English *Orosius*.<sup>100</sup> This too suggests considering Cynewulf's *Elene* as an 'earlier' poem, when lordship and kingship were personal offices ruled largely by charismatic leadership, rather than highly theorized and sanctified, as they became by the late tenth century.<sup>101</sup> Elene's status and power, like that of any other Anglo-Saxon queen, are of course directly related to the status of her male relatives. However, her

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<sup>97</sup> Klein, *Ruling Women*, p. 61-6. The *hapax legomenon*, 'guðcwen' appears only in *Elene* (ll. 254, 331). The comparable male epithet, 'guðcynning', appears in *Genesis A* (l. 2123), *Beowulf* (ll. 199, 1969, 2563, 2677 and 3036), and is defined by *DOE* as 'warrior king, warlike king'; *guðcwen* is defined by *DOE* only as 'warlike queen'.

<sup>98</sup> T. D. Hill, 'Sapiential Structure and Figural Narrative in the Old English *Elene*', in Bjork, ed., *The Cynewulf Reader*, pp. 207-28, repr. from *Traditio* 27 (1971), 159-77.

<sup>99</sup> A. Harbus, *Helena of Britain in Medieval Legend* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 13.

<sup>100</sup> For Bede, by contrast, Constantine may have been an example of how God raises up the lowly; see Harbus, *Helena*, pp. 39-42. In the Old English *Orosius*, likely produced in a late-ninth or early-tenth century West Saxon context, where the origins of a king's mother did not play a role in the king's legitimacy, he is described as *his suna* [...] *þone he hæfde be Elenan his ciefese*, 'his son, whom he had by his concubine Helena' (J. Bately, ed., *The Old English Orosius*, EETS Supplementary Series 6 (Oxford, 1980), p. 148, cf. Lat., *qui Constantinum filium ex concubina Helena* ('his son Constantine, whom he had by his concubine Helena') (VII.25), p. 493; trans. A. Fear, *Orosius: Seven Books of History against the Pagans* (Liverpool, 2010), p. 363).

<sup>101</sup> On the nature of kingship in Mercia, see above, p. 46 and below, p. 250.

personal characteristics and behaviour demark Cynewulf's Elene as queen not only by blood, but also by deeds.

### Elements of Queenship: the Queen Mother

Maternity was always a key element of queenship. In Mercia, as we have seen, the appearance of queens as signatories on charters and other formal documents can often be linked to the birth or recognition of her children as the designated heir.<sup>102</sup> Cynewulf presents Elene first as a mother, and she has her greatest successes as a literal, allegorical and spiritual mother. After the story of Constantine's victory and conversion, a narrative opening likely adopted from the Latin source, Cynewulf advances to the poem's main concern, the recovery of the cross by a woman introduced first as Constantine's mother:

þa wæs Cristes lof þam casere  
on firhð-sefan, forð gemyndig  
ymb þæt mære treo, ond þa *his modor* het  
feran fold-wege folca þreate  
to Iudeum, georne secan  
wigena þreate hwær se wuldres beam  
halig under hrusan, hyded wære,  
æðel-cyninges rod. (ll. 212-19a).<sup>103</sup>

Cynewulf thereby introduces Elene as the mother of Constantine, emphasizing this aspect of her identity by delaying the introduction of her name five lines later (l. 219b).<sup>104</sup> Other features of Elene's behaviour also foreground her role as a mother. Indeed, scholars have interpreted Elene as a personification of *mater ecclesia*.<sup>105</sup> As such, she attempts to discipline the Jews as her adoptive children: in ll. 372-6 and 406-10, after a long litany of the Jews' failures to understand

<sup>102</sup> Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, pp. 121-22; P. Stafford, 'Family Politics in the Early Middle Ages', in *Medieval Women*, ed. D. Baker (Oxford, 1978), pp. 79-100, at 90-1.

<sup>103</sup> 'Then the praise of Christ was in the heart of that emperor; he went forth, mindful about that renowned tree, and then he ordered *his mother* to travel on paths to the Jews with an army of their kinsmen, to seek eagerly with that host of warriors where the tree of glory, holy across the earth, the noble King's cross, was hidden.' Emphasis mine.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. the introduction of Beowulf's name at l. 343.

<sup>105</sup> Regan, 'Evangelism'.

salvation history, she instructs them to use their learning and wisdom to answer her earlier requests regarding the location of the Cross. Indeed, in response to the Jews' lengthy defense of their traditional learning (passed down by their fathers), Elene's first quotation of the Old Testament cites Moses on Mary's maternity, setting up a direct contrast between the errant paternal traditions of the Jews and maternity:

Eow acenned bið cniht on degle  
 mihtum mære, swa þæs modor ne bið  
 wætmum geacnod þurh weres frige. (ll. 339-41)<sup>106</sup>

Elene attempts to teach them the error of their ways, rather than destroying or only punishing them. She punishes Judas Cyriacus, as she says for lying (ll. 574, 665), until he reveals what he has known to be the truth all along (ll. 674-708). She treats this errant child of God, as the poem says, *mid arum* ('with mercy', l. 714). The qualities of Elene as a queen and mother indeed recall Alcuin's advice to Ecgfrith, to learn the qualities of a Christian ruler from both of his parents:

Disce diligenter illorum exempla: a patre auctoritatem, a matre pietatem; ab illo regere populum per iustitiam, ab ista conpati miseris per misericordiam; ab utroque christianae religionis devotionem, orationum instantiam, elymosinarum largitatem et totius vitae sobrietatem.<sup>107</sup>

These qualities, piety and pity, as would be expected of Cynethryth, and which Elene portrays, form a key aspect of Christian lordship. The queen acts not only as mother of her children and heirs, but as a protectress of the downtrodden and a keeper of the faith for the whole kingdom. In this capacity, Elene acts as queen and allegorical mother, *mater ecclesia*, to the Jews, who address Elene as a *queen* (l. 324, repeated eighteen times).<sup>108</sup>

<sup>106</sup> 'To you will be born a child in secret, famous in might, the mother of whom is not increased in pregnancy through the love of a man.'

<sup>107</sup> 'To learn authority from his father and piety from his mother, from him how to rule the kingdom with justice, from her how to have pity on suffering, and true Christian devotion to both of them.' Trans. S. Allott, *Alcuin of York* (York, 1974), p. 48; *Monumenta Alcuiniana*, ed. P. Jaffé, Bibliotheca Rerum Germanicarum VI (Berlin, 1873), No. 45, pp. 266-7, at 267.

<sup>108</sup> Regan, 'Evangelism'.

Cynewulf further stresses the importance of maternity to the office of queen by expanding his source's dichotomy between the paternal traditions of the Jews and the merciful, maternal message Elene offers. Elene chooses to cite Scripture which refers to the maternity of Christ and to motherhood in her attempts to demonstrate the Jews' errors, including the prophecy that the mother of the Saviour will not know man (Isaiah 7:14, ll. 339-41). The Jews, by contrast, repeatedly rely on *fædera lare* ('teachings of the fathers', ll. 388, 396 and 431-2), which they have misinterpreted and rejected falsely. Cynewulf also constructs a balance between the narrative of the crucifixion passed down by Judas Cyriacus's father, Simon, and grandfather, Zacheus, (ll. 436-546) and maternity, with Elene standing in the role of the mother. Indeed, Cynewulf refers to her most frequently as *cwen* ('queen', twenty-three times including compounds), but also as *wif* ('woman', ll. 223, 286 and 1141), a term which, though not meaning 'mother', nonetheless acknowledges the difference in gender and its inherent potential for maternity. Elene restores balance to the Jews' traditional, simple-minded rejection of figurative meaning and truth. She engages them as a figurative mother, the Church, which also allows her character to become a spiritual mother to Judas and foster his conversion.<sup>109</sup>

Elene's spiritual adoption of Judas, an individual representative of the whole, draws attention to the very personal nature of conversion. Cynewulf reasserts this in his personal epilogue, recounting briefly how the Cross revealed the truth to him (ll. 1236-56).<sup>110</sup> Elene acts authoritatively in Judas's conversion and rebirth, ordering him confined to a pit for several days without food. Superficially it appears like a death sentence or torture, but Elene explains why she must do this:

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<sup>109</sup> Klein addresses some of these issues, but from the perspective of tenth-century queens, see *Ruling Women*, pp. 83-4.

<sup>110</sup> See Leneghan, 'Teaching the Teachers', 647-8.

... þu scealt geagninga  
 wisdom onwreon, swa gewritu secgaþ  
 æfter stede-wange hwær seo stowe sie  
 Caluarie ær þec cwealm nime,  
 swilt for synnum, þæt ic hie syððan mæge  
 geclænsian Criste to willan. (ll. 673b-8).<sup>111</sup>

Elene adopts Judas Cyriacus as her spiritual son before he acknowledges the Christian faith, and punishes him for his own spiritual well-being. In burying him alive, she allows the old, faithless Judas to die, and resurrects in baptism a Cyriacus full of faith, seeing him through conversion, baptism and consecration as a bishop. In his confession of Mary as the mother of God (ll. 774-5), Cyriacus recognizes maternal influence as a counterbalance to the paternal traditions of the Jews. Elene's figurative motherhood manifests the power of a mother and *mater ecclesia*.

Elene is also a dutiful literal mother to her son, Constantine. At first, she operates within traditional power dynamics in which women obey male relatives, by serving her son.<sup>112</sup> However, as we shall see in the next section, Elene's power as a literal mother is more complex than mere gender dynamics. She eagerly seizes the opportunity to fulfill her son's just desire and undertakes a holy quest at his bidding (ll. 219-24). But once this task is complete, Elene acts as an independent agent in the role of a mother. After informing Constantine that her mission is accomplished, she enquires after the fate of the nails used in the crucifixion. Obeying her command, Judas Cyriacus retrieves them in a miraculous revelation (ll. 1079-92). Elene consults with wise men to determine what to do with them, who advise that they be fashioned into a bridle which will make its bearer invincible (ll. 1168-95). Elene does not covet this treasure for herself; rather, she sends it to her son. Her primary concern on the earth is her own son's welfare.

<sup>111</sup> 'You shall completely explain wisdom, as the writings say, about the plain where the place might be, Calvary, before death take you, death for your sins, so that I may afterward cleanse [them], Christ willing.'

<sup>112</sup> Klein, *Ruling Women*, pp. 78-82.

The depiction of motherhood, the most important element of medieval queenship, in *Elene* can be best accounted for against the background of Mercian queenship. Elene is a mother who acts on behalf of her son, but also with her own authority and methods, an unusual phenomenon in Anglo-Saxon England outside of the normal circumstances of regency. Elene's actions as an agent for her son while retaining her own autonomy, however, also suggests a context in which queens were trusted and expected to act as powerful royal agents. Her success in Jerusalem, a mixture of mercy and piety exercising power mirrors the very attributes which Alcuin attributes to Cynethryth. As queen, Elene succeeds as a literal, figurative and spiritual mother. Cynewulf's exploitation of the difference between the patriarchal traditions of the Jewish religion and the Christian metaphor for the powerful mother church implies acceptance of female authority. The maternal component of Elene's power also suggests that Cynewulf wrote in a culture in which not only metaphorical or typological readings of women, but also literal women, mothers and queens, wielded considerable power, a situation which mirrors most closely that of Mercia in the eighth and ninth centuries.

Cynewulf's depiction of the sources of Elene's power as queen also conform to the historical sources of queenly power, namely, her family, which underpins her ability to act. As a woman in Anglo-Saxon England, much of a queen's power was drawn from the identities and positions of her male relations, which had powerful implications. For example, the birth family of Cynethryth may have helped bolster the claims of Offa for the throne, as did those of the later Cynethryth married to Wiglaf, and certainly did in the case of Æthelflæd, daughter of Ceolwulf, king of the Mercians, who was married to Wiglaf's son, Wigmund, and mother of the heir to the throne, Wigstan. In contrast, Osthryth, the sister of the powerful Northumbrian king, Ecgfrith, was killed by her own Mercian nobles after the death of her brother and protector, despite being



the wife of the Mercian king Æthelred.<sup>113</sup> Osthryth's fate represents the collapse of her male lines of support in a foreign kingdom almost a century before the elevation of queenship in Mercia under Offa.

The humble origins of the historical Helena, as discussed above, meant that the power of her birth family was relatively tenuous, much like Osthryth's after the death of her powerful male relations. It is unlikely that Helena was lawfully wedded to Constantine's father, Constantius, and she appears to have been of Macedonian descent, though later traditions asserted that she was born in Britain.<sup>114</sup> The term used to describe her in various patristic sources, 'stabularia', suggests she was a stable-maid or inn-keeper.<sup>115</sup> The historical Helena, then, was in her origins among the lowest of the low. As depicted in *Elene*, only her relation to Constantine elevated her to be one of the most powerful women in the West. With that relationship intact and valued by both parties, Helena commanded men and armies, just as her son did. In such a position, she had the support to force the Jews to reveal the Cross. As we have seen above, women in Mercia were able to command similar prestige: in addition to the family dynastic foundation at Winchcombe, Cwenthryth was also abbess of Minster-in-Thamet and Reculver, wealthy minsters in Kent during the reign of her father, Cenwulf (d. 821), and defended her holdings archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>116</sup> As I shall explore below, the familial relations of Æthelflæd, descended from both the Mercian and West-Saxon royal dynasties, appear to have qualified her to rule in her own right as the Lady of Mercia, an acting queen. This

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<sup>113</sup> Hollis, *Women and the Church*, pp. 230-1. Guthlac's decision to enter monastic life in the same year as Osthryth's murder, perhaps revenge for her sister's involvement in the murder of Peada, may stem from his role in the murder. See Kirby, *English Kings*, p. 127.

<sup>114</sup> Harbus, *Helena*, pp. 69-78.

<sup>115</sup> Harbus, *Helena*, p. 13.

<sup>116</sup> Kelly, 'Cwenthryth'.

was different from a regency, in which the dowager queen ruled until her son came of age: Æthelflæd and Ealdorman Æthelred of Mercia had no sons.

Cynewulf's depiction of Elene's sources of power may be read as reflecting his conception of the stature and power of an Anglo-Saxon woman. A queen's two main sources of power and protection were her own kinsmen and her husband.<sup>117</sup> Elene draws power from her son, Constantine. She leads those who come on her journey, the *byrn-wigendum, werum ond wifum* ('armour-clad warriors, men and women', ll. 235-6), and she commands that power by means of her relationship to Constantine, as well as his command which she carries out (cf. ll. 224-5). A queen was often a foreigner and an outsider within a dynasty and her failure to integrate could lead to her rejection and death. Cynewulf does not mention Elene's background, though in a reading of this poem within a Mercian context, we may infer that he treats her as a Roman, either by birth or marriage, perhaps as a reflection of the Mercian tendency to marry nobles from within the kingdom. Marrying within one's own nobles was often a way to boost the support of a royal dynasty and create powerful allies out of what might have been rivals.<sup>118</sup> Most Mercian kings married Mercian noblewomen, rather than allying with dynasties of other kingdoms: the first Mercian king to intermarry with the West Saxon dynasty was Burgred (r. 852-74), whose bride, Æthelswith, was Alfred's sister. In several cases, Mercian kings selected brides from what may be the family of Penda's bride, Cynewise, or daughters of other Mercian kings, like Æthelflæd, daughter of Ceolwulf and wife of Wigmund.<sup>119</sup> Perhaps, just as the West Saxons distrusted the title 'queen', Mercian kings distrusted foreign brides after Osthryth.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Hollis, *Women and the Church*, p. 61.

<sup>118</sup> Stafford, *Queens*, pp. 37-41.

<sup>119</sup> PASE, 'Cynethryth 1', 'Cynethryth 2', 'Cynethryth 3', 'Cynethryth 7', 'Cynegyth 2'. On Æthelflæd, see North, *Origins*, pp. 302-5.

<sup>120</sup> These scruples were laid aside during failed negotiations between Offa and Charlemagne for an intermarriage between their lines.

Cynewulf depicts Elene as a member of Constantine's family and a leader of a military expedition, but in so doing reflects what may have been established lines of familial power in eighth- and ninth-century Mercia.

Secondly, in obeying Constantine, her son, Elene does not merely conform to gender and social norms. Elene derives her power only from Constantine's power as king. Her choice to send the reliquary bridle to her son acknowledges the contingencies of her position. It is tempting to compare Elene's position with that of Wealhtheow in *Beowulf*, whose name many have interpreted to mean 'foreign slave', and who would occupy a similar position in the Danish court, where her marriage to Hrothgar and relation to their sons would be her sole sources of support.<sup>121</sup> Yet as Elene moves away from the Roman court, she herself takes on the role of a lord and king. Elene's power flows from her relationship to Constantine. Yet her ability to cultivate the loyalty of the warriors in her retinue reflects the second essential component of Elene's queenship: effective leadership.

#### Hlæfdige Min: the Lordly Lady

Anglo-Saxon kings retained power by descent from a mythic ancestral line but also by personal leadership. A monarch rarely succeeded without having to defend his right to the throne. Personal leadership was one of the key factors which unified the original tribes living in the midlands into a Mercian kingdom.<sup>122</sup> Constantine, too, inherited a great kingdom from his father, but quickly had to defend it, as evidenced in the opening of the poem (ll. 1-147).

The value of leadership as a key component of lordship, and thus kingship (or indeed queenship) is also an important theme in *Elene*. Cynewulf presents Constantine as a courageous

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<sup>121</sup> T. D. Hill, "'Wealhtheow' as a Foreign Slave: Some Continental Analogues", *Philological Quarterly* 69 (1990), 106-12.

<sup>122</sup> Yorke, 'Origins', p. 20.

and charismatic Christian king, qualities which later Elene imitates in Jerusalem. Reading *Elene* in light of both the prominent role of leadership in kingship and the elevated role of queenship highlights the potential for Elene to act as her own agent, much as her son, Constantine, does.

The Legatine Canons of 786 indeed enjoined kings that:

Sed audire mereantur: ‘Inveni virum secundum cor meum, qui facit omnes voluntates meus’: ideo ‘posui adiutorium super potentem’ ‘et odientes eum in fugam convertam’ ut longaevitatem felicitatemque regni sibi suisque nepotibus distribuat, et aeternam futuri regni gloriam concedat; habeantque reges consiliarios prudentes, Dominum timentes, moribus honestos, ut populus bonis exemplis regum et principum eruditus et confortatus, proficiat in laudem et gloriam omnipotentis Dei.<sup>123</sup>

Constantine acts as a qualified leader of a war band in his encounter with the heathens and, following his conversion, combines this with elements of a Christian lordship. Elene too can be seen to enact these qualities in Jerusalem, once she has completed the task her son has assigned her and becomes her own acting lord and queen in the search for the nails. Though this episode exists in his source, Cynewulf’s *Elene* asks as the commanding leader of a war band where the Helena of the *Acta Cyriaci* behaves as a pious and meek dowager. The unique development of queenship in Mercia makes it likely that such an active queen would only have been acceptable – or celebrated – in a Mercian context. Jane Chance asserts:

Anglo-Saxon society demanded passivity, rather than leadership and initiative, from most of its women. Those exceptions who became political, social or religious leaders and models did so through great wisdom and chastity, virtues which – according to the metaphors used throughout the literature – were themselves considered heroic.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> ‘But let them be worthy to hear: “I made man after my own heart, to whom I gave all my free will”: for that reason, “I have extended help over the mighty” and “him that I hate I will put to flight”, so that a lengthy and fortunate reign be appointed to you and to your children, and be granted an endless reign in glory; and let the king have prudent counselors, fearing the Lord, honest of manners, so that the king be a good example to the people, and foremost learned and strengthened, let him succeed in praise and glory to almighty God.’ Dümmler, *Epistola Karolini Aevi* II, p. 23. Translation my own.

<sup>124</sup> Chance, *Woman as Hero*, p. 111.

Yet in eighth- and ninth-century Mercia, as we have seen, there are numerous examples of women with initiative and authority were welcomed or supported as leaders, rather than the passivity more typically observed of women in Old English literature.<sup>125</sup>

Though she is carrying out the command of her son, Elene's actions essentially mark her as a leader equal to a king. She commands the expedition to Jerusalem, treats with the Jews as both subjects and adversaries and orders the construction of churches. Furthermore, the quest for the nails is solely Elene's initiative, and in this respect she displays greater sovereignty than that appointed to her in the Latin source. Cynewulf thus portrays Elene as a queen who commands, rules and, like her son, leads by her own example. In the wrong circumstances, these actions might characterize a tyrant, such as Eadburh was perceived to be in ninth-century Wessex. But here, they are celebrated as qualities befitting a powerful queen, such as those we know to have existed in eighth- and ninth-century Mercia.

Cynewulf endows Elene with the qualities of a secular leader, without the martial component usually expected of a man. For example, Elene takes ownership of the journey to Jerusalem, though she was ordered to undertake it:

Elene ne wolde  
þæs siðfates sǣne weorðan,  
ne ðæs wil-gifan word gehyrwan,  
hiere sylfre suna, ac wæs sona gearu  
wif on will-sið, swa hire weoruda helm,  
byrn-wiggendra, beboden hæfde. (ll. 219b-24).<sup>126</sup>

<sup>125</sup> For a further discussion of passivity and women in Old English literature, see H. Damico and A. Hennessy Olsen, 'Introduction', *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1990), pp. 1-28, at 12-15; Richards and Stanfield, 'Concepts of Women in the Laws', in *New Readings*, pp. 89-99, at 93-7; J. Hill, "'Ðæt Wæs Geomuru Ides!'" A Female Stereotype Examined', in *New Readings*, pp. 235-47, at 242.

<sup>126</sup> 'Elene desired not to be sluggish on this fateful journey, nor would she ill-treat the words of the gracious king, her own son, but was soon ready, a woman on a desired journey, as the protector of warriors, of corsleted warriors, had bidden her.'

Cynewulf describes this journey as a *will-sið* ('desired journey'), though it is not made explicit who desires to make it; the desirer may refer primarily to Constantine's will, though it may also be interpreted that Elene, too, desires this journey. Cynewulf further emphasizes how uncommon and worthy Elene's leadership is. In an often-discussed expansion, Cynewulf highlights Elene's status:

Ne hyrde ic sið ne ær  
on eg-streame idese lædan  
on mere-stræte, mægen fægerre. (ll. 240b-2).<sup>127</sup>

Elene is unique in Cynewulf's versification, an uncommonly brave woman who aspires to great deeds. In a largely land-locked region like Mercia, the sea-journey may have struck its audience as an even more remarkable feat. Yet the poetic personal formula, *ne hyrde ic*, implies that the poet is familiar of literary accounts of, or may well have had first-hand knowledge of sea journeys, perhaps like that of Beowulf (to which Elene's is frequently compared).<sup>128</sup> Neither is this journey shameful for those warriors in the queen's retinue: Cynewulf notes that they are *bliðe, collen-ferhð*, 'happy, proud at heart' (ll. 246-7). In this, we may read the satisfaction of her loyal retinue and troops.

Elene's leadership becomes more apparent in Jerusalem. Hers is, however, a gendered rule. Elene does not do so much as she commands, perhaps an admission of the limitations of her gender: she orders the Jews to assemble (l. 276), to answer her question and to depart (l. 406); she orders Judas to speak (l. 607), and has him tortured and released (ll. 691-7, 710-11). We might compare her to the legendary queen Modthryth in *Beowulf*, who similarly commands the execution of other men, but does not herself carry it out (ll. 1931b-40a). In some sense, this may

<sup>127</sup> 'I have not heard before or since of a woman leading a voyage on the sea, on the sea-path a fairer force.'

<sup>128</sup> The formula appears in verse works with Mercian connections, e.g. *Beowulf* l. 36, *Andreas* l. 360, and the *Menologium*, l. 1840. See J. J. Campbell, 'Cynewulf's Multiple Revelations', *Medievalia et Humanistica* 3 (1972), 257-77, at 264; J. Steen, *Verse and Virtuosity: The Adaptation of Latin Rhetoric in Old English Poetry* (Toronto, 2008), p. 136; G. Sarrazin, 'Beowulf und Kynnewulf', *Anglia* 9 (1886), 515-50, at 515.

accurately represent the power of a contemporary queen: there are few historical records of queens participating in battle or striking men; as queen, Æthelthryth had a retinue; Bede writes that Penda's queen, Cynewise, held Ecgfrith of Northumbria as a hostage (*HE* III.24), and the Mercian Register in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records the actions of Lady Æthelflæd in fortifying and besieging and ruling in her own right after the death of her husband. It is worth noting that two of these prominent historical examples do in fact hail from Mercia, albeit some three centuries apart. More traditionally, a queen's power was in her words and relayed by the actions of others. Yet this is also parallel to the oral authority of a king's speech.<sup>129</sup> The judgments and pronouncements of a king, which often incited action in Anglo-Saxon England, conventionally took the form of a speech, and speech is the primary act in which Elene engages.<sup>130</sup> Not only does the queen command her retainers and the Jews, she also instructs the Jews, engaging them in a wisdom contest for which they lack the necessary perspective to compete. In relying largely on speech acts, Elene joins a company of poetic lords, like *Beowulf's* Hrothgar and *Juliana's* Eleusias (the local lord who pursues the saint's hand in marriage) who speak and command others to act, but perform little action themselves.<sup>131</sup> Commanding is a lordly activity. When Elene speaks to the multitudes, she does so like a lord:

Elene maðelade    ond for eorlum spræc,  
undearninga    ides reordode  
hlude for herigum. (ll. 404-6a).<sup>132</sup>

<sup>129</sup> S. D. Keynes, 'Royal Government and the Written Word in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. R. McKitterick (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 226-57, at 243; P. Wormald, 'Æthelred the Lawmaker', in *Ethelred the Unready: Papers from the Millenary Conference*, ed. D. Hill, British Archaeology Reports 59 (Oxford, 1978), pp. 47-80, at 64; P. Wormald, 'Lex Scripta and Verbum Regis: Legislation and Germanic Kingship from Euric to Cnut', in *Early Medieval Kingship*, ed. P. Sawyer and I. Wood (Leeds, 1977), pp. 105-138, at p. 125.

<sup>130</sup> Bjork, *Verse Saints' Lives*, pp. 62-89.

<sup>131</sup> For the argument that Wealhtheow's instructions are ignored or not acted upon, see Fulk, Bjork and Niles, pp. 196-7; M. Bridges, 'The King, the Foreigner and the Lady with a Mead Cup: Variations on a Theme of Cross-Cultural Contact', *Multilingua* 18 (1999), 185-208, at 195.

<sup>132</sup> 'Elene made a speech, and spoke openly before the men, the noblewoman spoke loudly before the multitudes.'

Elene's speeches are sure to be heard and heeded, marked with the poetic formula used by lords and guardians, *maðelian* ('to make a formal speech').<sup>133</sup> Indeed, Elene is the only woman in the poetic corpus to perform a speech act preceded by the verb *maðelian*. Elene is not confined to commanding: she can also ask politely, as she does of Judas when she needs the True Cross identified from among the three found (ll. 856-8). She takes advice when considering what to do with the nails of the Crucifixion, and, as a good Christian queen, gives thanks to God. In short, she is a leader with authority, piety and pity.

Elene's titles also serve to construct her authority as a queen and leader. Cynewulf refers to her by various titles twenty-eight times, as opposed to her name, which he uses only sixteen times. These titles include *peodcwen* ('people-queen', l. 1155b), *cwen seleste* ('best queen', l. 1169a), *guðcwen* ('battle queen', ll. 254a, 331a) and *sigecwen* ('victory queen', ll. 260a, 997a). The poet, her own people, and the Jews signal her authority by referring to her as both a *hlæfdige* ('lady, *domina*', ll. 400, 656), the feminine titular equivalent to *hlaford* ('lord, *dominus*') and a title used in later West Saxon charters to refer to the wife of the king, and *cwen*, even in the absence of the male relatives from whom she derives these positions.<sup>134</sup> Elene's authority is evident in her arrangements to have Judas Cyriacus ordained as bishop of Jerusalem, and confirmed in the exciting and problematic discovery of the nails. Elene orders Judas Cyriacus ordained bishop to replace the recently deceased bishop of Jerusalem. A queen commanding bishops is perfectly acceptable if we allow for a typological reading of Elene as the Church; however, this becomes problematic if we consider the dimensions of a queen as a secular lord.

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<sup>133</sup> Interestingly, this term appears in *Beowulf* twenty-six times.

<sup>134</sup> The Bosworth-Toller entry suggests that William of Malmesbury indicates this term was used for the wife of the West Saxon king after Beorhtric, but I have not found any direct statement to this effect in the cited location (*Gesta Regum Anglorum* II.2). The title is principally used for Emma of Wessex (d. 1052). See S 981, 1229, 1386, 1423, 1426, 1449, 1465, 1471, 1484, 1497, 1511 and 1530.



Such a situation might have appealed to the widowed Cynethryth, who came into dispute with the archbishop of Canterbury over the monastery of Cookham.<sup>135</sup> Furthermore, as Hollis has discussed, bishops and queens in Anglo-Saxon England competed for the role of the king's closest advisor, a position which could make or break the success of either.<sup>136</sup> In this case, the figure of the king is absent in Jerusalem and Elene becomes the king-figure from whom the bishop must seek favour. Yet it is not only as Constantine's representative that she attains this position: her actions regarding the episcopacy of Jerusalem do not stem from Constantine. Elene is effectively acting as the king in the situation – something hinted at in the titles used of Elene, such as *hlæfdige*, which was used in charters of female heads of household.<sup>137</sup> Because this term could be used of a head of household and a lady or effective lord, by extension it admits the possibility of an independent and ruling queenship.

The episode of Judas Cyriacus' consecration also raises problems about hierarchy of secular and ecclesiastical authority. Elene orders one bishop to perform a consecration of another bishop: the secular lord commands ecclesiastical lords. An antique precedent to such a hierarchy would have been especially welcome to Offa and his successors, who frequently quarreled over land and other issues with bishops. Offa and Jænberht, for example, quarreled intensely throughout their careers; Cwenthryth disputed ownership of minsters with Wulfred. Elene's 'advice' (*gerædum*) (l. 1053), to the bishop is as good as a command: Eusebius consecrates and renames Judas Cyriacus as a direct result (ll. 1056-60). In some sense, this is the legacy of Constantine, the first Christian emperor, who exercised considerable influence over the Church. Elene's role as Constantine's representative gives her the authority to command bishops.

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<sup>135</sup> Kelly, 'Cynethryth'.

<sup>136</sup> Hollis, *Women and the Church*, pp. 151-78; see also S. Rowley, *The Old English Version of Bede's Historia Ecclesiastica*, Anglo-Saxon Studies 16 (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 114-20.

<sup>137</sup> A. Bammesberger, 'On the Prehistory of Old English *hlæfdige*', *Language Sciences* 24 (2002), 213-19.

However, as a deviation from her mission, Elene's command over the bishops represents the imposition of secular authority over ecclesiastical. A queen acting as the dominant secular ruler with authority over bishops and other matters, stemming from her role as mistress of the household, again accords well with the posited Mercian context for *Elene*. For example, Alcuin's letters to Cynethryth state that she was *propter occupationes regis meos apices legere licuisset* ('so busy about the king's business that she had little time to read his letters').<sup>138</sup> The traditional responsibilities of a queen included the running of the royal household, which involved distributing hospitality, helping with administration, as well as keeping and displaying the wealth of the household.<sup>139</sup> The power attributed to these Mercian queens as recorded by their formal appearance in charters, and suggested by Alcuin's correspondence, far surpasses that of their contemporaries from other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Elene's domination of Eusebius, and her independently conceived and executed search for the nails, therefore finds an (arguably unique) counterpart in the power and influence of the Mercian queens in the eighth and ninth centuries.

After Elene accomplishes her official task, finding the true Cross and building churches in Jerusalem, she instigates a search for the nails of the Crucifixion. The terms in which Cynewulf casts this additional quest differ from those of the *Acta Cyriaci*. In both versions, Elene delegates the task of locating the nails, yet the terms vary between Cynewulf's depiction of this *cwen* and the Latin, Roman Empress. In the Latin source, Helena initiates the search, inspired by her faith and the Holy Spirit:

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<sup>138</sup> Stafford, 'Political Women', p. 39. See also Dümmler, *Epistola Karolini Aevi* II, No. 62, pp. 105-6, at 106.

<sup>139</sup> Stafford, *Queens*, pp. 93-114.

Beata autem Helena [...] iterum coepit studiose requirere qui in cruce confixi fuerant clauī, in quibus impīi Iudaei confixerunt saluatorem. Et conuocans Iudam, qui cognominatus est Quiriacus, dixit ei: ‘Quod circa lignum crucis erat repletum est desiderium meum, sed et de fixoriis, qui in eo fixi sunt, imminent tristitia. Sed non requiescam et de hoc, donec Dominus compleat desiderium meum. Sed accede adhuc et de hoc deprecare Dominum.’<sup>140</sup>

Following her entreaty, Judas beats his breast, prays, and miraculously the nails are revealed in the same location that the Crosses had been found. Helena’s summoning of Cyriacus and instructing his prayers differs from that of Cynewulf’s Elene. Presented in a manner which would be appropriate for an Anglo-Saxon queen, Elene commands the search with more authority than her Latin model. Furthermore, the encounter between Cyriacus and Elene continues the same power dynamic inaugurated at Cyriacus’ consecration in which secular lords hold authority over ecclesiastics. As in the Latin *Acta Cyriaci*, Elene summons Cyriacus and makes her command:

Be ðam frignan ongan  
cristenra cwen, Cyriacus bæd  
þæt hire þa gina gastes mihtum  
ymb wundor-wyrd willan gefylde,  
onwriga wuldor-gifum, ond þæt word acwæð  
to þam bisceope; bald reordode:  
‘Þu me, eorla hleo, þone æðelan beam,  
rode rodera cininges ryhte getæhtesð [...]

Wolde ic þæt ðu funde þa ðe in foldan gen  
deope bedolfen dierne sindon,  
heolstre behyded.’ (ll. 1067b-74, 1079-81).<sup>141</sup>

<sup>140</sup> F. Holthausen, ed., *Cynewulf’s Elene (Kreuzauffindung) mid Einleitung, Glossar, Anmerkungen und der Lateinischen Quelle*, Alt- und Mittelenglische Texte 4 (Hedlberg, 1936), p. 40. Trans. Calder and Allen, p. 67: ‘Blessed Helena [...] began again to inquire zealously for the nails which had been fixed in the Cross and with which the wicked Jews had crucified the Saviour. When she had summoned Judas, surnamed Cyriacus, she said to him, “My wish concerning the Cross has been granted, but I am very sad about the nails which were fixed in it. I shall not rest in this matter until the Lord grants my desire. Come here and pray to the Lord about it.”’

<sup>141</sup> ‘The queen of the Christians began to ask about [the nails], and bade Cyriacus, that in the spaciousness of the might of his spirit, that he fulfill her desire about the wondrous fate, reveal in his glorious grace, and spoke words to the bishop, the bold one spoke: “Protector of men, you rightly revealed to me that noble beam, the Cross of the King of the Heavens [...] I desire that you should find those that are still deeply buried in the earth in secret, hidden in darkness.”’

Cynewulf highlights the audacity of her request and the fervency of her desire by remarking on her *bald reorde* ('bold speech'). Like Helena, she is sorrowful in thought until her request is granted, but in the Old English she directs the recovery of the nails. Cynewulf intensifies Elene's authority: whereas Helena requests Cyriacus to pray, Elene tells him how to do so (ll. 1086-92). The urgency of her request, indicated by the temporal markers, *Nu*, 'now', and *hrædlice*, 'quickly' (l. 1086), distinguishes Elene as an imperious secular lord, more like the busy Cynethryth of Alcuin's correspondence than the patient saint of the Latin text.<sup>142</sup> Elene's command drives this discovery. Where Elene's expedition in Jerusalem has been seen as the fulfillment of Constantine's will, a male fantasy of domination over the female, in the discovery of the nails of the Cross, the gender roles are reversed.<sup>143</sup> Here, Cyriacus obeys the demands of a female authority. The balance of these two hierarchies, one male over female, one female over male, suggests that the milieu in which this text was composed could in certain instances accept the notion of female authority. These concepts were emerging and developing possibly as early as the seventh century under Penda, but continued and thrived in eighth- and ninth-century Mercia to the extent that in the early tenth century, Mercians could accept the reign of Æthelflæd and possibly support the succession of her own daughter Ælfwynn over her uncle.

As we have discussed here, *Elene* might have appealed a Mercian audience in this period for a number of reasons, foremost among them the contemporary elevation of queenship. Rumours of 'a new Helena' in Byzantium, in the person of the Empress Irene, a strong queen in a classical and Christian empire not perhaps unlike the queens of Offa's day, may have also spurred interest in Helena, a strong queen in a classical and Christian empire. Other attempts to

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<sup>142</sup> On the temporal markers, see B. Redwine, "'Ofost is selest": the Pragmatics of Haste in *Beowulf*", *Studia Neophilologica* 54 (1982), 209-16.

<sup>143</sup> Klein, *Ruling Women*, pp. 81-5.

read the poem contextually have linked its composition to Alfred the Great's reception of a relic of the True Cross in 883.<sup>144</sup> Yet as the poem is concerned principally with the figure of the queen rather than the finding of the cross, an Alfredian context seems less likely for reasons outlined above. Before the eschatological conclusion containing the author's runic signature, Cynewulf closes *Elene* with the queen's departure from Jerusalem. The narrative of the poem is thus directly concerned with the queen from beginning to end: its opening explains the background for Elene's journey and establishes a paradigm of lordship which Elene later fulfills; the middle section recounts the unique circumstances and manifestations of her lordship; the end fulfills one last component of Christian lordship: teaching. Her final words encourage Christian belief and living:

[O]nd þa eallum bebead  
on þam gum-rice    God hergendum  
werum ond wifum,    þæt hie weorðeden  
mode ond mægene    þone mæran dæg,  
heortan gehigdum,    in ðam sio halige rod  
gemeted wæs,    mærost beama  
þara þe of eorðan    up aweoxe,  
geloden under leafum. (ll. 1219b-26a).<sup>145</sup>

Elene's missionary work has been a success, resulting in the conversion of both Judas and Jerusalem. Like Constantine, Elene has a responsibility as a leader to strengthen the faith of her people. As we have seen, Cynewulf's presentation of Elene builds on the narrative of the *Acta Cyriaci*, transforming the Byzantine Empress into an Anglo-Saxon queen. I would suggest that the contemporaneous reduction of the status of queens in Wessex makes it more likely that this poem originated in Mercia rather than Wessex; the subject and presentation of *Elene* mirrors developments in queenship in eighth- and ninth-century Mercia more closely than it does other

<sup>144</sup> G. Cubbin, ed. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: a Collaborative Edition: Volume 6 MS D* (Woodbridge, 1996), p. 28.

<sup>145</sup> '[T]hen she bid all in that kingdom of men, men and women, to follow God, that they should honour in mind and might that glorious day with the thoughts of their hearts, when the Holy Cross which was discovered to them, the most glorious beam that rose up out of the earth, grown up under leaves.'

kingdoms in other periods. For example, the tenuous claims of Offa and his heir to the Mercian throne required that he seek additional means to legitimize his reign, and he did so through his wife, Cynethryth, possibly a descendent of Penda, whilst also distinguishing himself from his bachelor predecessor, Æthelbald. On the other hand, the descendants of Ecgberht defined their dynasty by eschewing the title of ‘queen’ and female figures of power after the reign of one of their unrelated predecessors was defined in terms of his domineering and tyrannical bride and queen, a Mercian princess. West Saxon notions of female and queenly identity and power did not normalize until the climate of succession again needed the queen’s legitimacy in the late tenth century, and did not approach the Mercian levels of elevation for another century.<sup>146</sup> Nor, as discussed above, were the queens of Northumbria or Kent so celebrated in the eighth and ninth centuries.

#### *Elene in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries*

As outlined in the introduction to this chapter, some of the best evidence for female literary production and readership is in eighth- and ninth-century Mercia. Noblewomen of Mercia, as princesses, abbesses, queens and saints, exhibited power and elevation unparalleled in Anglo-Saxon England in this period. I would suggest, then, that this provides a plausible context for the composition and reception of Cynewulf’s *Elene*. Cynewulf’s depiction of this *sigecwen* may be seen to reflect the particulars of queenship in Mercia, in which maternity constituted a significant portion of her identity and her means of relating to the world; Cynewulf emphasizes this by contrasting Elene and her message with the erroneous paternal traditions of the Jews. Yet Elene also acts as her own sovereign lord, leading her own quest, speaking as a lord or warrior and

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<sup>146</sup> Klein, *Ruling Women*, pp. 80-1; Stafford, *Queens*, pp. 127-34.

commanding troops, church and subjects. Her behaviour therefore may reflect developments in Mercia which elevated the status of queenship.

Contemporary developments in queenship on the Continent also support reading *Elene* in light of the eighth and ninth centuries. In Byzantium, the city of the historical Constantine, the Empress Irene (c. 752-803), mother of Constantine VI, acted as a ‘new Helena’ in restoring the worship of icons, and ruled as empress.<sup>147</sup> Irene, like her close contemporary, Cynethryth, and their historical type, Helena, issued coinage in her own name.<sup>148</sup> The need for dynastic stability that motivated these elevations of queenship also extended to Francia. In the eighth century, Irene’s son, Constantine VI, was consecrated as Holy Roman Emperor during the reign of his father, just as Charlemagne and Carloman had been consecrated during the reign of their father, Pepin, and, after them, Charlemagne’s son, Louis the Pious in the early ninth century. Ecgfrith’s consecration directly imitated these imperial precedents, as did the later consecrations of the kings of Wessex.<sup>149</sup> Marriage negotiations between the Mercians, Frankish and Byzantine courts attest also to the desire for sanctioned and anointed marriages for these anointed rulers.<sup>150</sup> A common desire for stability on the throne yielded three similar responses to the status of queenship and anointment in the eighth and early ninth century. Such figures, including the

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<sup>147</sup> Pope Hadrian referred to Irene as ‘a new Helena’; see T. Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm and the Carolingians* (Philadelphia, PA, 2009), pp. 150-1; L. Garland, *Byzantine Empresses: Women and Power in Byzantium ad. 527-1204* (London, 1999), pp. 76, 78-80, 83, 87, 92-4; A. McClanan, *Representations of Early Byzantine Empresses: Image and Empire* (Basingstoke, 2002), p. 146. Like Helena, Irene came from relatively humble origins, but as regent, and later empress in her own right, she pursued marriage alliances with Charlemagne and his dynasty; see C. Diehl, *Byzantine Empresses*, trans. H. Bell and T. de Kerpely (London, 1964), pp. 17, 20; Garland, p. 73. Note she did not allow her son’s wife, Maria, to be invested as Empress; see Garland, p. 84.

<sup>148</sup> Naismith, *Money and Power*, p. 63; Gannon, *Iconography*, p. 40.

<sup>149</sup> It is unclear whether Alfred was in fact consecrated as king; see J. Nelson, ‘The Problem of King Alfred’s Royal Anointing’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 18 (1967), 145-63.

<sup>150</sup> Irene broke off the engagement between her son and one of Charlemagne’s daughters the year before negotiations for a similar alliance began between Offa and Charlemagne, though queenship never achieved the same high status in Francia as it did in Mercia. Irene may even have attempted to marry Charlemagne himself after his consecration as Holy Roman Emperor in 800.

rumour of a new Helena, a pious Empress of the Constantinian dynasty ruling in the Orient, may have inspired Cynewulf's subject in *Elene*.

Furthermore, the consecration of Charlemagne in 800 as Holy Roman Emperor renewed interest in the first man to hold that title, Constantine. In *Elene*, Cynewulf presents Constantine as a Christian king. He is described as generous, *beorna beag-gifa* ('giver of rings of men', l. 100) and *eorlum arfæst* ('honourable to noblemen', l. 12a). As shall be discussed later in this thesis, generosity and the ability to retain loyalty were key elements of Anglo-Saxon kingship.<sup>151</sup> He is also brave in battle: though he knows he has too few soldiers to break the Huns' siege, he does not shy away from the fight, nor do his loyal Romans (ll. 55b-68). As a good war-leader, Constantine also seizes the booty from the battle (ll. 148-50), which enables him to be generous to his loyal retainers and warriors, and later, to endow the churches he sends Elene to found in Jerusalem (l. 49). Constantine also actively seeks out advice and learning regarding the Christian miracle of revelation that has saved him, which represents right belief, a common feature in Cynewulf's works.<sup>152</sup> Reading this in the context of eighth- and ninth-century Mercia again invites us to see the actions of contemporary Christian kings reflected in Cynewulf's work: Charlemagne undertook educational and ecclesiastical reforms and sought out scholars from across Europe to instruct him and his subjects.<sup>153</sup> Offa too may have been a major patron of learning: he corresponded with Alcuin and is thought to have owned one of Ceolfrith's great

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<sup>151</sup> See below, pp. 253, 270.

<sup>152</sup> Bjork, *Verse Saints' Lives*, p. 1; Leneghan, 'Teaching the Teachers', 646-8.

<sup>153</sup> G. Brown, 'Introduction: the Carolingian Renaissance', in *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation*, ed. R. McKitterick (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 1-51; W. Levison, *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century: the Ford Lectures Delivered in the University of Oxford in the Hilary Term, 1943* (Oxford, 1946), pp. 152-73; R. McKitterick, 'Royal Patronage of Culture in the Frankish Kingdoms under the Carolingians: Motives and Consequences', in her *The Frankish Kings and Culture in the Early Middle Ages* (Aldershot, 1995), pp. 93-129.



pandects, as well as a copy of Bede's *HE*.<sup>154</sup> Indeed, Rory Naismith has recently found that a limited run of Offa's coinage minted at London use Constantinian designs, perhaps acknowledgement of the Roman emperor as a model for Anglo-Saxon Christian kingship.<sup>155</sup> Knowledge and promotion of faith, not only in seeking out the relics of the Crucifixion, but in building churches and spreading the faith were key aspects of such a Christian kingship, which Constantine accomplished on an unprecedented scale, with his mother's assistance.

Cynewulf presents Constantine as a paradigm of good kingship at the start of the poem:

He wæs riht cyning,  
guð-weard gumena. Hine God trymede  
mærdum ond mihtum, þæt he manegum wearð  
geond middan-geard mannum to hroðer,  
wer-þeodum to wræce, syððan wæpen ahof  
wið hetendum. (ll. 13b-8a).<sup>156</sup>

Like the *Beowulf* poet's signposts of Scyld Scefing, Hrothgar and Beowulf as *god cyningas*, this allows Cynewulf's audience to focus on Constantine's method of kingship.<sup>157</sup> As part of being a good leader is listening to good advice, Constantine obeys the message the angel communicates in his dream (ll. 79-85). As a good king, he is also the direct commander during the battle:

<sup>154</sup> Dümmler, ed., *Epistolae Karolini Aevi*, no. 64, p. 107, trans. *EHD I*, no. 195; Fragments of British Library MS Additional 25025, together with Additional MS 37777 and Loan MS 81 (Gneuss and Lapidge No. 293), are thought to be the remains of one of Ceolfrith's three great Pandects donated by Offa to the monks at Worcester; see L. Webster and J. Backhouse, eds., *The Making of England: Anglo-Saxon Art and Culture, AD 600-900* (London, 1991), pp. 122-3; R. Marsden, 'Manus Bedae: Bede's Contribution to Ceolfrith's Bibles', *ASE* 27 (1998), 65-85; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Learning*, pp. 182-3; P. Meyvaert, 'Bede, Cassiodorus and the Codex Amiatinus', *Speculum* 71 (1996), 827-83, at 878-80. On Offa's access to the *HE*, see Levison, *England and the Continent*, pp. 245-6.

<sup>155</sup> R. Naismith, *Money and Power in Anglo-Saxon England: the Southern Kingdoms, 757-865*, Studies in Medieval Life and Thought (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 54-64.

<sup>156</sup> 'He was an upright king, a war-lord of men. God strengthened him in renown and might, so that he became a solace to many men throughout middle earth, vengeance to other nations when he raised weapons against enemies.'

<sup>157</sup> G. Whately, 'The Figure of Constantine the Great in Cynewulf's *Elene*', *Traditio* 37 (1981), 161-202, at 161-2; L. Carruthers, 'Kingship and Heroism in *Beowulf*', *Heroes and Heroines in Medieval English Literature: a Festschrift Presented to André Crépin on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday*, ed. L. Carruthers (Woodbridge, 1994), pp. 19-29.

Flugon instæpes  
 Huna leode, swa þæt halige treo  
 aræren heht Rom-wara cyning,  
 heaðo-fremmende. (ll. 127b-30a).<sup>158</sup>

Constantine is an active king who seeks good counsel, leads by example, and accepts good advice.<sup>159</sup> He promotes the faith both in his own kingdom and abroad.

Contemporary Christian kings in Western Europe behaved much as Constantine did. Notably, the Emperor Charlemagne (r. 768-814) promoted Christianity in his kingdom, Francia, and recently conquered territories.<sup>160</sup> Moreover, a well-known historical inaccuracy in Cynewulf's *Elene* aligns Constantine's situation more closely with that of Charlemagne. Cynewulf's account of the Battle of the Milvan Bridge in 312 has the Roman Constantine battling invading heathen Huns; in fact, the battle was one of a series in a civil war between rival Roman emperors. Though the replacement of the Roman forces with a 'large barbarian host' is in the Latin source,<sup>161</sup> it presents Constantine as a great Christian emperor fit for Christian kings to imitate. Charlemagne's similar battles to subdue and convert heathens in his domain demonstrate a parallel model of good kingship.<sup>162</sup> Though the conversion period was long over by the end of the eighth century in Anglo-Saxon England, kings could imitate the work of these holy emperors by patronizing learning and endowing religious establishments.

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<sup>158</sup> 'The fighting-people of the Huns fled immediately from battle as the king of the Romans ordered that holy tree raised.'

<sup>159</sup> See G. Whatley, 'The Figure of Constantine the Great in Cynewulf's *Elene*', *Traditio* 37 (1981), 161-202; N. Howe, 'Rome: Capital of Anglo-Saxon England', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34 (2004), 147-72.

<sup>160</sup> For a summary of Charlemagne's territorial expansion, see L. Halphen, *Charlemagne and the Carolingian Empire*, Europe in the Middle Ages: Selected Studies 3, trans. G. de Nie (Amsterdam, 1977), pp. 41-71.

<sup>161</sup> Calder and Allen, p. 60.

<sup>162</sup> Around this time, Charlemagne defeated and looted invading Huns, and sent some of their treasure to Offa; see J. Story, *Carolingian Connections: Anglo-Saxon England and Carolingian Francia, c. 750-870* (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 101-4.

Conclusion: Elene's Heirs, Æthelflæd and Ælfwynn

Developments in queenship and the elevation of powerful women throughout the eighth and ninth century in Mercia culminated in the independent rule of Æthelflæd, Lady of the Mercians (r. 911-918). After the partitioning of Mercia in the wake of Viking occupation, those portions of Mercia still under English control swore fealty to Alfred. In recognition of the loyalty of Ealdorman Æthelred of Mercia, Alfred gave Æthelflæd, his daughter by Ealhswith, as a bride to his new Mercian ally. Perhaps taught by her mother about her homeland and the traditions of women there, on the death of her husband, Æthelflæd ruled on her own for seven years, collaborating with her brother, Edward the Elder, in their continued fight against the Vikings.<sup>163</sup> Æthelflæd fostered her brother's son and heir, Æthelstan, at the Mercian court, and seems to have intended her own daughter, Ælfwynn, to rule in Mercia after her.<sup>164</sup> Indeed, Stafford has argued that *Judith*, a late Old English poem about the Old Testament heroine who rescued her people from the foreign tyrant, Holofernes, may have been written for Æthelflæd.<sup>165</sup> Æthelflæd's remarkable rule was a culmination of her identity as a West Saxon and Mercian princess and a

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<sup>163</sup> Asser tells us that Alfred's children Edward, Ælfthryth and Æthelweard were all educated, the former two at court, the latter seemingly amongst nobles in one of the schools Alfred set up in his court (Asser, ch. 75). Of Æthelflæd, we are only told that she was married, but her mother may have transmitted knowledge of how the Mercian court worked, as queens and other noblewomen 'had the childhood and education appropriate to their origins, not to their future status as king's wife.' Stafford, *Queens*, p. 54. On education and the role of mothers and literacy, see Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, pp. 45-51.

<sup>164</sup> Stafford, *Queens*, pp. 140-1.

<sup>165</sup> Stafford, *Queens*, p. 41. An alternative source of inspiration might be the Frankish princess Judith, second wife of Alfred's father Æthelwulf as the inspiration for the poem. Jane Chance groups *Elene* and *Juliana* with *Judith* as three kinds of allegorical levels functioning as types of the Virgin Mary; see J. Chance, *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* (Syracuse, NY, 1986), pp. 31-52. Scholars have proposed a range of dates and dialects of composition in which *Judith* might have been composed, see E. Dobbie, *Beowulf and Judith*, ASPR 4 (London, 1953), pp. lxii-lxvi; B. J. Timmer, *Judith*, Methuen's Old English Library 7 (London, 1952), pp. 6-11. Most scholars now agree that *Judith* differs from the Cynewulfian corpus in date if dialect evidence is conclusive (*HOEM*, §§ 220, 376); as Dobbie observes, 'If we assume an earlier date for the poem, we are faced by the paradox of a poet who was so familiar with the older poetry that he could produce a work in the heroic style which falls little short of imitating the older and more rigid alliterative patterns. Such poets existed late in the tenth century (as witness the author of *Maldon*) but, so far as we know, not any earlier period.' For the purposes of this thesis, *Judith* must be considered as part of a tradition indebted to the works under discussion here, rather than a part of it. See Orchard, 'Both Style and Substance', pp. 286-7.

tradition of queenship traceable to the wife of Offa, Cynethryth.<sup>166</sup> These developments are perhaps best approximated by the fictional rule of Elene, which, as we have argued here, can be fruitfully read as a product of eighth- and ninth-century Mercia. Doing so helps to account for the linguistic features of Cynewulf's verse, both dialectally and temporally as well as the transmission state of his poems, his choice of subject and adaptation of her into an Anglo-Saxon queen, as well as potential audiences, both ecclesiastic and secular, for this work. Together with *Juliana*, *Elene* offers a modes of sanctity which might appeal widely throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, but would have resonated specifically with the noblewomen of Mercia in the eighth and ninth centuries.

### *The Cult of Juliana in Anglo-Saxon England*

Cynewulf's *Juliana* adapts the *passio* of a Roman virgin martyr as a model of steadfast faith by which the saint transcends her vulnerable earthly position, into the form of Old English heroic poetry. Anglo-Saxon England did not have its own virgin martyrs, though cults of Roman virgins appeared as part of Romano-centric culture alongside the most popular native female saint, the perpetual virgin Æthelthryth of Ely.<sup>167</sup> Virginity was a virtue by which women could imitate Mary, the mother of God, and a considerable number of virgin martyrs are celebrated in passionals, homilies and other texts from Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>168</sup> Aldhelm's *De Virginitate* includes Cecilia, Agatha, Agnes, Eugenia, Justina, Lucia, Thecla and Eulalia, Chionia Irene and

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<sup>166</sup> Stafford, 'Political Women', p. 47.

<sup>167</sup> J. Wittig, 'Figural Narrative in Cynewulf's *Juliana*', *ASE* 4 (1974), 37-55; K. Steele, 'The Ladies of Ely', *Quest* 6 (2009), 61-74, at 61-5; J. Black, "'Nutrix pia': The Flowering of the Cult of St Æthelthryth in Anglo-Saxon England", in *Writing Women Saints in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. P. E. Szarmach (Toronto, 2013), pp. 167-90.

<sup>168</sup> Though there are some signs of devotion to the Virgin in the Tiberius Group, this seems to be an extension of the virgin as a popular figure for devotion for vowed virginal women. See M. Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, *CSASE* 2 (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 96-103.

Agape, but not Juliana.<sup>169</sup> She shares the paradigm of the chaste, faithful Christian virgin, rejecting her wealthy suitor before being subjected to torture and eventual martyrdom for her faith, which features in the tales of Agatha, Chionia, Irene and Agape, among others. Yet, interestingly, the extant works of Byrthferth of Ramsey, Wulfstan and Ælfric also make no reference to Juliana.

There are, however, references to Juliana in some earlier texts in Anglo-Saxon England. Alcuin makes mention of her in his *De laude Dei*, thought to be written during his time at York, though his reference may derive from Carolingian Francia.<sup>170</sup> The martyrology of pseudo-Jerome, also known as the Hieronimian Martyrology, and Bede's Martyrology, commemorate the date of her passion on 16 February.<sup>171</sup> The section including February has been lost from all manuscripts of the *OEM*, but likely would have included her. Entries in martyrologies are typically succinct, recalling a few important details, but not enough to serve as the main source for Cynewulf's poetic retelling. Several full-length passions of Juliana survive from Insular contexts. The earliest, Würzburg Universitätsbibliothek M. p. th. q. 28b, is a late eighth- or early ninth-century manuscript written, according to Lapidge, 'in an Anglo-Saxon centre on the continent, presumably in the Fulda-Würzburg region'.<sup>172</sup> It groups together female virgin martyrs Cecilia, Juliana and Agnes along with other texts. Presumably copied in the eighth century in a monastery founded by and in contact with Insular houses, the Würzburg miscellany provides evidence of the *passio Iulianae* in an Insular context before the ninth century. A second is found in a ninth-century passion, and member of the Tiberius group, now Paris, BN lat. 10861.<sup>173</sup>

<sup>169</sup> Lapidge and Herren, *Aldhelm*, pp. 57-8.

<sup>170</sup> M. Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 228, 233.

<sup>171</sup> Lapidge, 'Passio S. Iulianae', pp. 148-50.

<sup>172</sup> Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, p. 163. A *Passio S. Iulianae* also appears in London, British Library, Harley 3020, a late tenth or early eleventh century manuscript from Winchester or Glastonbury (Gneuss and Lapidge No. 433.3).

<sup>173</sup> Lapidge, 'Passio S. Iulianae', p. 155. See above, p. 106.

There are some indications that Juliana's cult in Anglo-Saxon England may have been Mercian in character. Of the four manuscripts of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle which record the death of Abbot Æthelwig in 1077, only the *Worcester Chronicle* (London, BL Cotton Tiberius B. iv: Gneuss and Lapidge No. 372, Ker No. 192) refers to it as St Juliana's Day:

1078: [O]nd Æthelwig se woruldsnotra abbod on Eofeshamme forðferde on sancta Iuliana mæssedæg, ond Waltere wæs to abode geset on his stede.<sup>174</sup>

Whilst Juliana was known in Anglo-Saxon England before the tenth century, her cult was restricted compared to those of other Roman virgin martyrs and native female Anglo-Saxon saints.<sup>175</sup>

The Tiberius-group *passio* of BN lat. 10681 and Cynewulf's *Juliana*, as well as the later reference in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, suggest the presence of a cult of Juliana in Anglo-Saxon England by the eighth century, and one principally connected to Mercia. The solitary reference in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle provides evidence of the lasting relevance of the saint in only one region.<sup>176</sup> As such, the decision to render the *passio* of the Roman virgin martyr Juliana again supports the hypothesis of reading Cynewulf as a Mercian poet, an identification underpinned, as we have seen, by linguistic evidence. In Cynewulf's adaptation of his likely source text, he presents the virgin martyr in a manner consistent with the earlier Anglo-Saxon

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<sup>174</sup> 'Æthelwig, the abbot of Evesham, who was skilled in secular affairs, died on St Juliana's Day, and Waltere was set as abbot in his place'; the Chronicle was not necessarily compiled in Worcester, but was there by 1565, and shows an interest in Worcester from the tenth century on. See G. Cubbin, ed., *The Worcester Chronicle*, p. 88; 'Æthelwig 15', PASE.

<sup>175</sup> A life of Juliana is also found in the Cotton-Corpus legendary and derivative legendaries; see Lapidge, 'Passio S. Iulianae'. On the Cotton-Corpus Legendary, see R. C. Love, *Three Eleventh-Century Anglo-Latin Saints' Lives* (Oxford, 1996), pp. xviii-xxiii.

<sup>176</sup> By the eleventh century, Worcester is the prime focus of the local history recorded in MS D. Æthelwig had profited at the expense of Worcester once, and then been an ally at times of its bishop, Wulfstan. On the contemporary Worcester connections of the chronicle, see Cubbin, pp. lxviii-lxxv. Also of interest is the unique record of the death of Earl Waltheof in 1077, and his interment at 'Crulande', Crowland, the final resting place of Guthlac.

practice of female monasticism and, in particular, with the role of powerful religious women in Mercia.

Personal Sanctity, Earthly Power: Mercian Abbesses and Female Saints in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries

In contrast to the history of the region, names and identities of a number of Mercian abbesses and princess saints are relatively well preserved. These women may have acquired their positions within the church as a result of their earthly connections, their relationship with the church allowed them to transcend the limitations on their earthly stations. The women descended from Penda's line feature prominently among the numbers of princess saints and abbesses whose identities survive in the historical record. Cynethryth, one of Penda's daughters, was an abbess, probably at a Mercian house associated with Wilfrid.<sup>177</sup> Another set of daughters, Cyneburg and Cyneswith, were both later venerated as saints at Castor, of which Cyneburg had been the founding abbess.<sup>178</sup> Penda's granddaughters by Merewalh, Mildburg, abbess of Much Wenlock and saint, Mildgyth, abbess at a Northumbrian minster and saint, and most famous of all, Mildrith, abbess of Minster-in-Thanel and saint.<sup>179</sup> Their names survive, in part preserved in the Anglo-Saxon *Secgan*, which records the resting places of saints, as well as the Kentish Royal legend, and a number of late popular traditions, many of which cannot be securely tied to the historical women who now bear these stories.<sup>180</sup> Bede mentions very few of these women, and rarely in their capacity as abbesses or saints; for example, Cyneburg appears as the first wife of Alchfrith of Northumbria (*HE* III.27). This may be related either to Bede's well-documented bias

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<sup>177</sup> PASE, 'Cynethryth 1' and 'Cynethryth 7'.

<sup>178</sup> PASE, 'Cyneburg 1' and 'Cyneswith 1'.

<sup>179</sup> PASE, 'Merewalh 2'.

<sup>180</sup> Rollason, 'Lists'. Rollason mentions some overlap with the saints of the *OEM*, but none of these are Mercian abbesses or princess saints. This is possibly consistent with the *OEM* being a product of Mercian Canterbury, however, see above, p. 94.

against the Mercians, but also, as Hollis has pointed out, because Bede favoured the Roman model of the persecuted virgin for female saints, which fits none of these women.<sup>181</sup> Like Hild, these women often owed their position to their familial relations, but as monastic women, the church ‘represented an alternative form of protection.’<sup>182</sup> Wulfhere’s daughter, Werburh, entered monastic life at Ely, to which she had connections on her mother’s side, but was promoted by her uncle, the Mercian king Æthelred, to have authority over all Mercian nunneries, and was later revered as a saint.<sup>183</sup> Werburh’s power, then, was both ecclesiastical and familial. The church could, however, also support women against family.

We might see the church’s power in the case of Ælfthryth of Repton. Repton was founded in the seventh century, and enjoyed a close relationship with the Mercian royal family, as seen in chapter one.<sup>184</sup> Ælfthryth, unlike the women mentioned above, does not appear to have been related to Penda, based on known genealogies. A dispute between Coenred and Ælfthryth, is recorded as being resolved c. 704-5, which has been linked to the murder of Ostthryth, Coenred’s sister-in-law, by Mercian nobles (*HE* V.24), and the arrival of Guthlac, then a prominent Mercian noble, at her minster.<sup>185</sup> A letter written by her contemporary, Wealdhere, bishop of London, describes how this reconciliation was the prerogative of Brihtwold, archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>186</sup> The church acted as a powerful defender of its family when threatened by temporal powers. Other abbesses and princess saints may have been similarly favoured, though no record survives. Princess saints, often culted by their royal families as a means of promoting unity with distant territories, such as Werburh in Kent and Mercia, or

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<sup>181</sup> Hollis, p. 249.

<sup>182</sup> Hollis, p. 139.

<sup>183</sup> Thacker, ‘Werburh (d. 700x07)’, *ODNB*; *PASE*, ‘Wærburg 4’.

<sup>184</sup> Its foundation charters were signed by a Mercian *princeps*, Frithuric, see S1805 and S68.

<sup>185</sup> Parks and Weston, pp. 22-3.

<sup>186</sup> Whitelock, *EHD*, No. 764, p. 845.



Mildrith, surpassed worldly power by performing miracles. For example, Werburh is said to have restored a dead goose to life, and Mildburh to have struck a spring, and commanded wild birds. In these miracles, saints demonstrate the power to restore Creation to a prelapsarian state, if temporarily, by their holiness, such as those in the *Vita sancti Guthlaci* and the *Vita sancti Cuthberti*.<sup>187</sup>

Nor were these powerful monastic women confined to the direct descendants of Penda. Offa too promoted his daughters in ecclesiastical careers, and his queen as a widow was abbess of one of the most affluent minsters, Cookham. Their daughter, Æthelburh, who corresponded with Alcuin, was abbess of Fladbury in Worcestershire, which may have been founded by the Northumbrian Ælflæd in the early eighth century, and held by Hwiccean royalty as late as the 770s.<sup>188</sup> Another daughter, Æthelflæd, is recorded as an abbess in a charter dated to 787, though there is no evidence of her, or another, probably spurious daughter, 'Æthelswith'.<sup>189</sup> That none of Offa's descendants were later revered as saints, despite reputations as virgins and positions comparable to those of Penda's, can be attributed to the extinction of the male line in which temporal power rested, though these women would have maintained their positions despite their familial fall from power. Cwenthryth, the daughter of Offa's successor, Cenwulf, too maintained her position as abbess of Winchcombe and Minster-in-Thamet after the deaths of her brother and father. Again, as the throne passed away from Cwenthryth's family, there was no impetus to elevate her reputation further, and indeed, her clashes over authority within the church hierarchy possibly even hindered it. While these women were installed in their positions as a consequence of their familial relations, they maintained their statuses independently as brides of Christ, and

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<sup>187</sup> Brooks, 'Creation', pp. 203-17.

<sup>188</sup> Alcuin, *Epistola* 36, 300; Sims-Williams, pp. 37, 92; 'Æthelburh 8' and 'Æthelburh 9', *PASE*.

<sup>189</sup> See S 127.

members of the Christian family. Like Juliana, these women found means to overcome the unpredictability of shifting, temporal power by joining the Church.

### A Model of Power through Faith

Just as *Elene* models female sanctity through secular power, *Juliana* serves as a complementary model of female power through sanctity. Juliana's authority and autonomy stem from her Christian faith and virtue, which place her in a privileged relation with God. Her virgin martyrdom is incidental to her commitment to faith, making her a model of sanctity available to a wide female audience. Yet Cynewulf's rendering of the legend manifests her sanctity in terms of strength and power, aligning her with the popular *miles Christi* topos, which was also favoured by the early female Anglo-Saxon religious.<sup>190</sup> As I will discuss below, Cynewulf again closely follows his source text, suggesting that, as with *Elene*, he carefully chose a saint in *Juliana* whose life was suited to the interests of his audience. The association of female strength and sanctity displayed in *Juliana* also manifests itself in several of the female Mercian royal saints prior to the Viking age.

This section first explores Cynewulf's adaptations to his main source text, suggesting its suitability for demonstrating the value of faith and teaching, a common theme in many works of this period but also found in Cynewulf's works, with a specifically female audience in mind. It then compares the qualities of *Juliana* and Cynewulf's treatment of his saint with the lives and cults of other native Mercian female saints, exploring parallels which suggest that these texts originate in the same milieu. Finally, it discusses the ways in which Cynewulf portrays his empowered saint, and identifies her faith as the base of her power. As with *Elene*, these parallels support the hypothesis that Cynewulf composed *Juliana* in a late eighth- or ninth- century

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<sup>190</sup> Hollis, pp. 82-97.

Mercian context, which, as we have seen, accepted powerful women in both secular and sacred ways of life.

*A Suitable Saint: Cynewulf's Adaptations of the Juliana Legend*

Alan Thacker has proposed that female Mercian royal saints such as Cyneburh and Cyneswith, Osgyth, Werburg, Eadburh and Frideswide were often celebrated first as members of their own families, whose greatness they enhanced, but also as individuals who served as protectors and conduits to divine power.<sup>191</sup> Barbara Yorke argues that the role of royal saint was reserved for women in early Anglo-Saxon England as a means of supporting the royal family's claims for legitimacy, providing their family with the power and legitimacy of sanctity.<sup>192</sup> It is plausible, then, to read *Juliana* against this background of faithful, saintly daughters who were valued as potential queens and abbesses in eighth- and ninth-century Mercia.<sup>193</sup>

Cynewulf makes several significant changes to his source, itself probably a member of the 'Wurzberg' recension of the *Passio S. Iulianae*, similar to that preserved in B.N. lat. 10861. Some of these alterations may or may not originate in the exact Latin recension from which Cynewulf worked, while others likely are Cynewulf's own emendations, such as the detail that Juliana was hung by her hair from a high cross (ll. 227-8), the name of the city, and the inclusion of the name of the prefect responsible for sentencing the apostle Andrew to death, Egias, to accord with the same tradition in *Fates of the Apostles*. By and large, however, Cynewulf has selected only the most essential elements of the story and dialogue, and expanded where he felt necessary. For example, Cynewulf significantly reduces chapter three of the *passio* as in the

<sup>191</sup> Thacker, 'Kings, Saints and Monasteries', 20.

<sup>192</sup> Yorke, *Nunneries*, p. 187.

<sup>193</sup> Cf. Stafford, 'Family Politics', p. 97.

Tiberius group manuscript, B. N. lat. 10861, which is related to, but not the exact, recension of his source. In other sections, Cynewulf adheres more closely to the Latin, such as in the remaining text of the demon's confession following the missing leaves of the text (ll. 289-312), which is largely identical to the Latin source. Other sections, in particular, Cynewulf's characteristic runic epilogue, are entirely independent of the Latin source. On the whole, Cynewulf adheres to the narrative of the source, selecting and simplifying the narrative and dialogue, whilst simultaneously amplifying and adapting it to fit the constraints of Old English poetic metre and diction. The majority are omissions or truncations of scenes of torture, or simplifications of the dialogue. Cynewulf's approach to his Latin sources can be compared with that of other Old English translations conventionally attributed with to Mercia, such as the *OEPG* and the *OEB*, which also follow their sources closely in terms of structure, only omitting sections which were deemed irrelevant to a contemporary audience. In turn, the selection, retention and adaptation of the material may suggest the suitability of the Latin *vita* for adaptation to an audience interested in autonomous women. In both versions the Latin and Old English versions, Juliana is a well-educated, graceful, intelligent and faithful woman. Yet I would suggest that Cynewulf carefully adapts her to model faith for Anglo-Saxon (and perhaps specifically Mercian) noblewomen.

Juliana's social position enhances her role as a widely appealing example of faith. Like Helen, her socio-historical position is ambiguous: this aspect of her character reappears in Cynewulf as both a detail from the source, and as an aspect of his own characterization. Juliana was the daughter of Africanus and lived in the city of Nicomedia (lat. ch. 1, OE ll. 21, 158-9). She is clearly a Roman; her parentage and nationality are explicit. The Latin life seems to suggest that her birth was relatively high: for example, she stipulates that her fiancée, Eleusius,

attain the rank of prefect before she will consider marrying him. Cynewulf, focusing more intensely on right faith as Juliana's sole motivation, omits this detail.<sup>194</sup> This omission casts Juliana as a model of female autonomy and authority tied to merit and action rather than social position. Though Cynewulf presents Juliana's sanctity largely as a matter of her faith and personal decisions, the acknowledgement of her power by a demon (ll. 430-7) also suggests that Juliana is a model for female power through sanctity.

Juliana's beloved status in her family similarly mirrors that of Mercian noblewomen of the eighth and ninth centuries. Juliana's father, on learning of her rejection of Eleusius, rushes to her first to ascertain whether the allegations are true, but describes her in loving terms:

Ðu eart dohtor min    seo dyreste  
and seo sweteste    in sefan minum,  
ange for eorþan,    minra eagna leoht,  
Iuliana. (ll. 93-6).<sup>195</sup>

Though Africanus has already promised to turn Juliana over to Eleusias if she will not comply (ll. 80-8), we have no reason to believe he is disingenuous. While Cynewulf omits the description of Juliana as *habens animum rationabilem, prudentemque et digna conuersatione et uirtute plenissima*,<sup>196</sup> we are in no doubt that she is similarly virtuous in Old English. Instead, in the Old English, Juliana enacts her virtues and her father, Africanus, readily references them:

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<sup>194</sup> Lapidge, 'Passio S. Iulianae', p. 157; D. Bzdyl, 'Juliana: Cynewulf's Dispeller of Delusion', in *The Cynewulf Reader*, ed. Bjork, pp. 193-206, repr. from *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 86 (1985), 165-75.

<sup>195</sup> 'You are, my daughter, the dearest and sweetest in my heart, the only one on earth, the light of my eyes, Juliana'

<sup>196</sup> '[H]aving intelligence, prudence, and dignified conversation, and plentiful virtue,' Lapidge, 'Passio S. Iulianae' c.1, p. 157; trans. Calder and Allen, p. 122.

þu on geape hafast  
 þurh þin orlegu unbipyrfe  
 ofer witenas dom wisan gefongen.  
 Wiðsæcast þu to swiþe sylfre rædes  
 þinum bryd-guman, se is betra þonne þu,  
 æþelra for eorþan, æht-spedigra  
 feoh-gestreona. (ll. 96b-102a).<sup>197</sup>

Africanus acknowledges his daughter's wisdom and rationality in Cynewulf's rendition. The Latin merely presents Juliana with his desire that she marry Eleusius.<sup>198</sup>

Juliana is a dear daughter to Africanus, who values her rationality. Again this aspect of her character fits well with the situation of women in eighth- and ninth-century Mercia. Given the evidence for female book production and female audiences for manuscripts in Mercia during this period, as well as the existence of well-documented circles of correspondence including women from Mercia as well as Anglo-Saxon England and on the Continent, we must assume that certain Mercian women received an education, even though the first documented princess to receive a non-monastic education is Alfred's daughter, Ælfthryth.<sup>199</sup>

### Gendered Sanctity

Cynewulf exploits gender difference to further emphasize Juliana's female sanctity. His adaptations of Africanus and Eleusius suggests that we ought to read them like the Jews of *Elene*: blind to all but the literal truth and expedencies of earthly existence. Whereas in the Latin source Eleusius merely reports Juliana's rejection to her father, in *Juliana* he recounts his humiliation; whereas in the Latin Africanus insists Juliana obey his wishes, in Cynewulf's poem

<sup>197</sup> 'In foolishness you have, through your unfriendly hostility, seized ways against the judgments of the wise [man]. You renounce too quickly by your own judgment, your bridegroom, who is better than you, wealthier in treasures and nobler on this earth.' Cf. also ll. 32-4.

<sup>198</sup> Lapidge, '*Passio S. Iulianae*', p. 157.

<sup>199</sup> Stevenson, pp. 57-9; trans. Keynes and Lapidge, pp. 90-1.

he attempts to persuade her that her reason is flawed. Cynewulf exploits the relationship between Eleusius and Africanus to assert the superiority of saintly over earthly power.<sup>200</sup> Juliana's father and Eleusius are overly concerned about earthly power and status, which Africanus mentions explicitly (ll. 100-2). Indeed, Cynewulf expands Eleusius' meeting with Africanus, in which he articulates that Juliana's rejection is less bothersome than the public embarrassment it causes him:

Audiens haec praefectus, uovavit patrem eius et dixit ei omnia uerba quae ei mandauerat  
Iuliana.<sup>201</sup>

... Me þin dohtor hafað  
geywed orwyrðu. Heo me on an sagað  
þæt heo mæg-lufan minre ne gyme,  
freondrædenne. Me þa fraceðu sind  
on mod-sefan mæste weorce,  
þæt heo mec swa torne tæle gerahte  
fore þissum folce. (ll. 68b-74a).<sup>202</sup>

Cynewulf's Africanus and Eleusius are concerned entirely with their earthly reputations.

Cynewulf's departure from his source here further emphasizes the triumph of faith over worldly values.

Cynewulf further reinforces the gender dichotomy, and thereby emphasizes the special position of female sanctity, by omitting Juliana's mother from his tale. In the Latin *vita* Juliana's mother occupies an ambiguous position:

<sup>200</sup> Bzdyl, 'Juliana: Cynewulf's Dispeller', pp. 195-6.

<sup>201</sup> 'The prefect, hearing this, summoned her father and related all the words which Juliana had confided in him.' Lapidge, 'Passio S. Iulianae', p. 157.

<sup>202</sup> 'Your daughter has shown dishonour to me. She says to me only that she does not care for my love nor my affections. These are insulting to me, most distressful in my heart, that she has dealt with me with such a bitter reproach before these people'.

Cuius pater Africanus cognominabatur, qui et ipse erat persecutor Christianorum. *Vxor uero eius, dum intentione animi sacrilegia Marti perorresceret, neque Christianis neque paganis miscebatur.*<sup>203</sup>

Cynewulf omits Juliana's nameless mother, who plays no part in the narrative.<sup>204</sup> This shifts the gender roles of the narrative into a clear dichotomy between male, world-dominated paganism and antagonism, and a female, Christian sanctity. If *Elene* served as Cynewulf's model of female sanctity within secular power, by simplifying the narrative of *Juliana* to remove her mother, he presents a clear case of female sanctity which surpasses the secular world and powers.

Other adaptations mark Juliana as a powerful model of female sanctity. As in *Elene*, the titles and attributes which Cynewulf gives his heroines guide interpretation of both the character and the poem. Many of these alterations draw clear distinctions between Juliana's model of female sanctity above or against worldly power, and Elene's sanctity in her worldly power. Among these differences are their attitudes towards wealth. As a queen, Elene displays the wealth and power of her household in her adornments; she is a *geatolic guðcwen golde gehyrsted*, 'a stately war-queen, adorned in gold' (l. 331). By contrast, Juliana distinguishes between the things of this world (wealth, marital love, status) and those of heaven:

Hire wæs Godes egsa  
mara in gemyndum þonne eall þæt maþpum-gesteald  
þe in þæs æþelinges æhtum wunade. (ll. 35b-7).<sup>205</sup>

Eleusius is repeatedly presented as a worldly temptation of wealth, the *goldspedig guma* ('the gold-wealthy warrior') (l. 39), with multiple references to his wealth (ll. 18-9). Cynewulf renders Eleusius and Africanus as representatives of worldly, male power for Juliana to reject in favour

<sup>203</sup> 'Her father was called Africanus; he was a persecutor of Christians also. *His wife, while she was inwardly horrified at the sacrileges committed in Mars's name, did not associate with either Christians or pagans.*' Trans. Calder and Allen, p. 122. Italics mine; see also Lapidge, 'Passio S. Iulianae', fn. 46.

<sup>204</sup> For an alternative view, see J. Hermann, *Allegories of War: Language and Violence in Old English Poetry* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1989), pp. 161-2.

<sup>205</sup> 'To her, the terror of the Lord was greater in her thoughts than all that treasure which dwelt in the possessions of the noble man.'



of female sanctity, a superior form of power. The titles used of Juliana highlight her status as a saint beyond worldly power. She is first mentioned in the poem as a *fæmnan* ('virgin') (l. 27), a position of no worldly power; without male relations, Juliana has no secular power.<sup>206</sup> Eleusius's conference with Africanus is more than a meeting between diabolical pagan conspirators; they are the two men whose interests most impact and affect Juliana's worldly stature. Yet, as shall be discussed below, through the power of her faith, she too becomes a *hlæfdige* (l. 539).

### A Position of Power

Just as Cynewulf signposts Constantine as a good king in *Elene*, he references Juliana's status as pre-ordained from her first actions: Juliana answers her father as *seo eadige* ('the blessed one') (l. 105). Further titles draw attention to Juliana's access to alternate, female forms of power through sanctity. Juliana answers Eleusius as *seo æbele mæg* ('the noble maiden') (l. 175), and *þæt æbele mod* ('that noble heart') (l. 209). The adjective *æbele* may mean 'noble, famous, glorious, holy, splendid, magnificent.'<sup>207</sup> Thus *æbele* on its own may represent an ambiguous denotation of excellence or superior quality. Its appearance in the text elsewhere suggests, however, a narrower and more precise reading.

The first appearance of *æbele* applies not to Juliana, but to her suitor, Eleusius:

Sum wæs æht-welig æbeles cynnes  
rice gerefa. (ll. 18-9a).<sup>208</sup>

In its first instance, then, *æpel* denotes a social rank of some power. Juliana's father reinforces and further clarifies the terms by which we ought to understand nobility and excellence. In his reproach to Juliana, he states that Eleusius is noble, and better than Juliana on this earth (ll. 100-01). Cynewulf thereby sets up a contrast between the nobility of the earth, represented by

<sup>206</sup> M. Richards and B. Stanfield, 'Concepts of Women in the Laws', in *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, ed. H. Damico and A. H. Olsen (Indianapolis, 1990), pp. 89-99.

<sup>207</sup> DOE, 'æbele'.

<sup>208</sup> 'A certain wealthy man, of noble kin, was the magistrate of the kingdom.'

Eleusius, and that of Juliana. The earthly nobility, as we see, is limited compared to the nobility and holy power of Juliana.

In worldly terms, Juliana is essentially powerless. An unmarried virgin of inferior rank, rejected by both her father and her fiancée, and who further spurns riches, she has neither means to command the loyalty of men nor recourse to the men who would traditionally support her. Elene's secular power, drawn from her position and relations, needed to be worldly in order to compel Judas and the Jews to see their errors. Juliana's power, which is ultimately superior to the worldly power of her male tormentors, is, by contrast, drawn from the immediate source of her nobility: her faith. Treating the autonomy of Cynewulf's women largely as reflexes of Germanic models, Alexandra Olsen traces Juliana's power as mental strength drawn from her virginity.<sup>209</sup> However, as articulated below, in the sections relating to the *miles Christi* topos, will-power, rather than virginity alone, propels this female saint toward sanctity. Because Juliana's power is in her sanctity, she provides a model of nobility, autonomy and sanctity widely available to women in Anglo-Saxon England.

Juliana's active character in her vernacular *passio* can again be fruitfully read in the context of Mercian women of the eighth and ninth centuries, particularly the religious. As Stephanie Hollis has outlined, in the period immediately following the conversion, the English church was neither as stringent nor as authoritative on its attitude towards the women within its monastic ranks as it was after the Conquest.<sup>210</sup> Though Aldhelm does not include Juliana among his examples in *De Virginitate*, he addresses his audience, the nuns at Barking, as fellow soldiers of Christ.<sup>211</sup> Cynewulf depicts the conflict between the righteous soul and the devil in martial

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<sup>209</sup> A. H. Olsen, *Speech, Song and Poetic Craft: the Artistry of the Cynewulf Canon* (New York, 1984), pp. 222-9.

<sup>210</sup> Hollis, *Women and the Church*, p. 107.

<sup>211</sup> Hollis, *Women and the Church*, p. 82; Aldhelm, ed. and trans. Lapidge and Herren, pp. 67-70.

terms. Juliana clearly places her trust in God, which provides her strength to withstand the assaults and torments of her passion, but also to triumph over them.

Cynewulf approaches the conflict between the soul and the world as a martial motif. Juliana, as a female saint divorced from earthly intercessors, offers the perfect example of the supreme power of sanctity. Though Christianity embraced certain egalitarian strains, Anglo-Saxon writers such as Bede did reference the nobility of both birth and virtue which their contemporary nuns possessed. The potential for a woman like Juliana, presented as less noble in the world but noble in the eyes of the Church, to triumph over worldly nobility and power, demonstrates the value of the Church and faith over the vain things of this world, but also the triumph of sanctity and faith over worldly pursuits. It presents the life of a faithful and dedicated Christian as capable of the highest power in the world, because a saint may access otherworldly power.

Similarly, Mercian women such as Mildburg, Osgyth, Cyneburh and Cyneswith and Frithuswith, overcame worldly powers in their lifetimes through holiness. Mildburg, the daughter of the Mercian *princeps*, Merewalh and the Kentish princess, Domne Eafe, became abbess at the family double monastery in Much Wenlock, where she was later venerated as a saint.<sup>212</sup> Cyneburh and Cyneswith, daughters of Penda, also became abbesses later venerated as saints at Castor; various later traditions differ as to whether these royal princesses were married to kings of Northumbria and East Anglia, respectively, or if they escaped this fate to remain virgins. It seems likely that they helped to persuade their brother, Wulfhere, to found the abbey at Medeshamstede, and ‘witnessed’ its foundation in the spurious charter S68. According to legends, Frithuswith was a princess of the (fictitious) king of Oxford, Didan, who fled the

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<sup>212</sup> J. Blair, ‘Mildburg (*d.* in or after 716)’, *ODNB*.

advances of the pagan king Algar of Leicester, and was miraculously transported away from him, and lived out her days as a nun.<sup>213</sup> Osgyth was a legendary granddaughter of Penda and abbess at Chich, with whom a number of miracles are associated, including a miraculous recovery from drowning, and from marriage to an East Anglian king.<sup>214</sup> Especially in these last two examples, these women turned to the power of faith to fend off the most powerful men in the world, kings, showing faith to be the most superior power.

In all of her interactions, Juliana occupies a position of authority by placing herself in relation to God. Eleusius offers her one last opportunity to change her mind, but the maiden rejects his protection and lordship and instead identifies her Lord in a Cynewulfian expansion:

‘Ne ondræde ic me domas þine  
 awyrgeð wom-sceaða, ne þinra wita bealo.  
 Hæbbe ic me to hyhte heofon-rices weard,  
 mildne mund-boran, mæгна waldend,  
 se mec gescyldeð wið þinum scinlace  
 of gromra gripe, þe þu to godum tiohhast.’ (ll. 210-15).<sup>215</sup>

Juliana rejects the world and aligns herself to the heavenly kingdom. This choice empowers her with divine aid. When Juliana is cast into prison and faces the lies of a devil, she again reaffirms her belief in God, calling out for him to identify the ‘angel’ sent to her. Juliana’s commitment to her faith removes her from the domain of earthly lordship and activity and instead situates her among the blessed, to whom extraordinary abilities and strength are granted. Juliana seizes the devil, and he confesses his ills throughout creation.<sup>216</sup> Just as athane exchanges an oath with his

<sup>213</sup> J. Blair, ‘Frithuswith (d. 727)’, *ODNB*.

<sup>214</sup> J. Blair, ‘Osgyth (fl. late 7th cent.)’, *ODNB*.

<sup>215</sup> ‘I do not fear your judgements, cursed evil-doer, nor your wicked torments. I have for my help the Guardian of the Heavenly Kingdom, a benign protector, the Ruler of Might, who shields me against your sorcery, from the hostile grip of those whom you take as gods.’

<sup>216</sup> Compare the action of seizing to Grendel’s attacks in *Beowulf* (ll. 738-745a). The episode in which Juliana grasps the demon has been lost in the Exeter Book but exists in the Latin source.

lord for the shield and weapons by which he may defend himself, God provides Juliana with power, with which she defends herself in exchange for her faith.<sup>217</sup>

The devil's interactions with Juliana also indicate that she has achieved empowerment through sanctity. Midway through his confessions, he demands she answer a question of his own:

Dic mihi et tu quomodo ausa es me tenere nisi quia confides in Christum? Sic et ego confido in patrum meum, quia malorum artium est, et quod uult hoc facio.<sup>218</sup>

‘Þu me ærest saga  
hu þu gedyrstig þurh deop gehygd  
wurde þus wig-þrist ofer eall wifa cyn,  
þæt þu mec þus fæste fetrum gebunde,  
æghwæs orwigne. Þu in ecne god,  
þrym-sittendne, þinne getreowdes,  
meotud mon-cynnes, swa ic in minne fæder,  
hell-warena cyning, hyht staþelie.’ (ll. 430b-7).<sup>219</sup>

This is a battle of faith in words, in which Juliana has been on the attack since declaring herself under the lordship of God, rather than any mortal.

In *Juliana*, then, Cynewulf sets up a clear paradigm of the power structure through the use of dialogues. Robert Bjork has analysed the rhetorical control with which Cynewulf invests his characters in *Juliana*, which highlights the processes by which the heroine achieves sainthood.<sup>220</sup> In addition, as we see here, the character in a position of superior power typically speaks first, and his or her inferior answers. Thus in the interaction between Juliana's father, Africanus, and Eleusius, her suitor, Eleusius speaks first (ll. 66-77), and Africanus replies (ll. 80-88). Likewise, Juliana responds to her father's request (ll. 93-116). Juliana communicates with her earthly, secular superiors, by speaking when spoken to. Yet by rejecting the earthly

<sup>217</sup> Cf. *Beowulf*, ll. 2864-72.

<sup>218</sup> ‘You tell me! How do you dare seize me, unless it is because you trust in Christ? So I too trust in my father, since he is the author of wicked deeds; and I do what he wants.’ Lapidge, ‘*Passio S. Iulianae*’, p. 161; trans. Calder and Allen, p. 127.

<sup>219</sup> ‘First, you tell me how you, bold through deep thought, became so daring in battle over all other women, that you bound me, completely defenseless, thus in fetters strongly. You strengthen your faith in the eternal God, sitting in majesty, the Creator of Mankind, as I do in my father, the King of the Hell-Dwellers.’

<sup>220</sup> Bjork, *Verse Saints' Lives*, pp. 45-61.

temptations of Eleusius, Africanus and the demon disguised as an angel, and placing herself directly and solely under God's lordship, Juliana surpasses the temporal power structure and inverts it, proving spiritual power to be superior. She is the demon's superior. Every exchange begins with the saint issuing a command or question to the demon, which he then answers or obeys. Hence, she demands:

'Þu scealt furþor gen, feond mon-cynnes,  
siþfæt secgan, hwa þec sende to me.' (ll. 317-8).<sup>221</sup>

The demon elaborates about his 'father', the king of hell. The demon is completely under Juliana's dominion, paralleling Elene's authority over Cyriacus in the search for the nails of the Cross: both women are the spiritual and secular authorities. Not only does Juliana assume the position of authority in the dialogue, her possession over the demon climaxes with the demon declaring her as his lord:

'Ic þec halsige, hlæfdige min,  
Iuliana, fore Godes sibbum,  
þæt þu furþur me fraceþu ne wyrce.' (ll. 539-41).<sup>222</sup>

Juliana therefore stands hierarchically only beneath God, the Lord of Lords, above even the demon's *helwarena cyning* ('king of the hell-dwellers', l. 544).

From this point forward, there are no dialogues between Juliana and any demon or mortal in which Juliana is placed in the subordinate position. The demon addresses Eleusius, indicating Eleusius' subordination to the demon (ll. 619-28, 632-4). Finally, reaffirming the saint's preeminent status on earth as well as under God, Juliana addresses them all:

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<sup>221</sup> 'You, enemy of mankind, shall further yet relate who sent you to me.'

<sup>222</sup> 'I entreat you, my Lady, Juliana, work no further shame against me, for God's peace.'

Ða wæs gelæded lond-mearce neah  
 ond to þære stowe þær hi stearcferþe  
 þurh cumbol-hete cwellan þohtun.  
 Ongon heo þa læran ond to lofe trymman  
 folc of firenum on him frofre gehet  
 weg to wuldre, ond þæt word acwæð. (ll. 635-40).<sup>223</sup>

Juliana's audience is undefined: she appears to be addressing the entire world, both the faithful Christians and those about to murder her. In the source, she addresses only a small band of faithful Christians: the omission of the identity of her final audience strengthens the saint's didactic role.<sup>224</sup> By the end of the *passio*, Cynewulf's Juliana occupies the position of greatest authority, below only God himself and his angels. Cynewulf anticipates this in the opening of *Juliana*. In the first dialogue, between the emissaries of Eleusius, and the blessed maiden, Juliana responds to the request (ll. 38-57). In the paradigm followed above, in which the first speaker is superior, Eleusius appears to have the upper hand. Yet the reply which Juliana gives does not actually follow direct speech. Juliana is the first to speak in both the poem and its source. This places her in the position of authority, since it is she to whom Eleusius, presented as the most powerful secular authority, must present his requests, just as the demon does when he begs her to release him. From the beginning, though she appears to be under the power of her suitor and her father, Juliana is superior to not only the demons, but also the men in her life.

The demon offers the clearest measure of how Juliana has attained superiority over her secular superiors. Thrice singling out Juliana's boldness of faith, the demon attests her empowerment, much in the same way that Elene's boldness and personal leadership empower her as the leader of a band of warriors. First, the demon asks how she has become so bold (ll.

<sup>223</sup> 'Then she was led near to the boundary and the place where they, intended to kill her, the courageous-hearted one, in war-like hate. She began to teach the people against sin and to strengthen the praise and to ask comfort for them, a way to glory, and spoke these words.'

<sup>224</sup> '*Passio S. Iulianae*', p. 164.

430-7), but in each instance she declines to answer him, demanding instead that he continue confessing his evil deeds. He then calls her the boldest he has ever encountered, of both men and women:

Ne wæs ænig þara  
 þæt me þus þriste, swa þu nuþa,  
 halig mid hondum, hrinan dorste,  
 næs ænig þæs modig mon ofer eorþan  
 þurh halge meaht, heah-fædra nan  
 ne witgena. Ðeah þe him weoruda God  
 onwriga, wuldres cyning, wisdomes Gæst,  
 gief e unmaete, hwæpre ic gong to þam  
 agan moste. Næs ænig þara  
 þæt mec þus bealdlice bennum bilegde,  
 þream forþrycte, ær þu nuþa  
 þa miclan meaht mine oferswiðdest,  
 fæste forfenge, þe me fæder sealde,  
 feond mon-cynnes, þa he mec feran het,  
 þeoden of þystrum, þæt ic þe sceolde  
 synne swetan. (ll. 510b-25a).<sup>225</sup>

Juliana's bold faith overcomes the powers of darkness as well as the desires of mortal men. In acknowledging his defeat, the devil confirms the remarkable quality of Juliana's boldness:

Ic to soþe wat  
 þæt ic ær ne sið ænig ne mette,  
 in woruld-riče wif þe gelic  
 þristan geþohtes ne þweorh-timbran  
 mægþa cynnes. Is on me sweotul  
 þæt þu unscamge æghwæs wurde  
 on ferþe frod. (ll. 547b-53).<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> 'None of them was so bold, as you are now, who dare to touch me, holy one, with your hands, nor any man so high-spirited upon the earth through holy might, none of the patriarchs nor of the prophets. Though the God of Hosts, the King of Glory, the Spirit of Wisdom, revealed the immense gift to them, nevertheless I still might have had them. There is not any [man] who so boldly surrounded me in bonds, suppressed me with reproaches, before you now overcame my great might, deprived me strongly of that which my father, the enemy of mankind, gave me when he ordered me to go, the lord from the darkness, to sweeten sins for you.'

<sup>226</sup> 'I know in truth that I have never come across any woman in the worldly kingdom like you, bolder in thought nor more resolute among the kin of maidens. It is clear from my example that you have become ashamed of nothing, wise in mind.'



Juliana's *þweorh-timbran* ('stubborn', literally 'cross-grained') faith has allowed her to triumph over all worldly and demonic powers and decide her own fate.

Cynewulf further emphasizes the power of faith by employing martial and the *miles Christi* topos, a register favoured by earlier Anglo-Saxon authors, particularly Aldhelm.<sup>227</sup> As Stephanie Hollis observes,

[T]he heroic forms which Christianity assumed in its early coalition with warrior society have the appearance of offering more support to the strength and independence of women religious, and women generally, than the postures that accompanied emotional piety.<sup>228</sup>

Over time the metaphor of the spouse replaced that of the *miles Christi* for female religious.<sup>229</sup>

Interestingly, Juliana specifically rejects the identity of a spouse, having fixed her

*freondrædenne*, 'friendship (*amicitia*)', in God (l. 107), saying that unless Eleusius converts,

'Næfre ic þæs þeodnes þafian wille  
mægrædenne' (ll. 108-9a).<sup>230</sup>

This situation had clear parallels in Anglo-Saxon England effecting the Mercian succession.

Edwin of Northumbria had to assure Æthelberht of Kent that his daughter, Æthelburh would be allowed to practice Christianity in marriage in Northumbria (*HE* II.9); Oswiu insisted that Peada and the Middle Angles convert to receive his daughter, Alhflæd, in marriage (*HE* III.21). Juliana insists that her spouse share her faith, perhaps mirroring the gradual shift from martial imagery and the *miles Christi* topos, to the imagery of marriage.

Cynewulf depicts the battle with sin as a war in which teachers, right belief and action are the warriors and the weapons. Juliana makes several references to the importance of correct faith

<sup>227</sup> In *De Virginitate*, Aldhelm casts the nuns of his audience as warriors in battle against vice; see Lapidge and Herren, *Aldhelm*, esp. C. XII, p. 68; see also Hollis, *Women and the Church*, pp. 75-112.

<sup>228</sup> Hollis, *Women and the Church*, p. 97.

<sup>229</sup> Hollis, *Women and the Church*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>230</sup> 'I will never consent to kinship with the prince.'

and action.<sup>231</sup> Using the same imagery, the devil describes his temptation of men as an attack on warriors:

Gif ic ænigne ellen-rofne  
 gemete modigne metoddes cempa  
 wið flan-præce, nele feor þonan  
 bugan from beauwe, ac he bord ongean  
 hefeð hyge-snottor, haligne scyld,  
 gæstlic guð-reaf, nele gode swican,  
 ac he beald in gebede bid-steal gifeð  
 fæste on feðan, ic sceal feor þonan  
 hean-mod hweorfan, hroþra bidæled,  
 in gleda gripe, gehðu mænan,  
 þæt ic ne meahte mægnes cræfte  
 guðe wiðgongan, ac ic geomor sceal  
 secan oþerne ellenleasran,  
 under cumbol-hagan, cempa sænran,  
 þe ic onbryrdan mæge beorman mine,  
 agælan æt guþe.<sup>232</sup> (ll. 382-97).

Though referring to men as warriors is, of course, an element of traditional poetic diction, the reference to spiritual armour draws on the *topos* of the Christian as a *miles Christi* developed in popular *vitae* including Evagrius' *Vita S. Antoni*, Felix's *Vita S. Guthlaci*, and applied to the nuns of Barking in Aldhelm's *De Virginitate*.<sup>233</sup> Much like Juliana, the desert hermits, including Guthlac, battle against literal demons. In Aldhelm's *De Virginitate*, the pursuit of virtue is a battle against vices. Cynewulf, however, constructs a battle in which right belief and action defend against the vices which drag a soul to damnation:

<sup>231</sup> For example, ll. 133-9, 153-7, 233-5.

<sup>232</sup> 'If I come across any warrior of the Creator brave-in-spirit against attack, refusing to go far from that battle, but if he begins to heave a shield, wise in thought, a holy defense, spiritual armour, desiring not to wander from God, but he, bold in prayer, gives a stand strong in the foot-troop, I must turn far from the high-spirited [one], deprived of joy, in the grip of fires, to lament my cares, that I could not by craft of might prevail in battle, but I shall, sad in mind, seek another less courageous warrior in the phalanx, a weaker warrior, whom I might encourage with my leavening, hinder in battle.'

<sup>233</sup> See Hermann, *Allegories of War*, pp. 157-60.

þeah he godes hwæt  
 onginne gæstlice, ic beo gearo sona,  
 þæt ic in-gehygd eal geondwite,  
 hu gefæstnad sy ferð innanweard,  
 wiðer-steall geworht. Ic þæs wealles geat  
 ontyne þurh teonan; bið se torr þyrel,  
 in-gong geopenad, þonne ic ærest him  
 þurh earg-fare in onsende  
 in breost-sefan bitre geþoncas  
 þurh mislice modes willan,  
 þæt him sylfum selle þynceð  
 leahtras to fremman ofer lof godes,  
 lices lustas. Ic beo lareow georn. (ll. 397-409).<sup>234</sup>

The devil battles against the soldiers of Christ in his quest to damn them through his teachings.

Fittingly, Juliana's final action is to teach the people (l. 647). In *Juliana*, the heroine rejects marriage in favour maintaining her powerful position as *miles Christi*, teacher, and saint. I would suggest that reading *Juliana* in the context of the uncommonly powerful abbesses, princesses, queens and saints of eighth-and ninth-century Mercia may account for Cynewulf's choice of Juliana as a subject as well as his enhanced presentation of her.

### Conclusion

Cynewulf's two vernacular lives of female saints, *Juliana* and *Elene*, clearly complement each other in offering two models of female sanctity. However, though they present particularly female models of sanctity, they do not appeal exclusively to a female audience. The virginal purity of Juliana may be taken to represent the ideal relationship between the Christian and the

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<sup>234</sup> 'Though he may set to work something good spiritually, I am quickly ready that I examine all his inner thoughts, how his heart is fixed inwardly, wrought in resistance. I open a door in those walls through mischiefs; there will be a hole in the tower, an entrance opened when first I send bitter thoughts into his heart with a volley of arrows, through various wills of his heart, so that he thinks to give himself to enjoy vices, the lusts of the body, over the love of God. I am an eager teacher.'

world, and Elene may be taken as a symbol for the Mother Church.<sup>235</sup> Cynewulf's insistence on right belief, right action and the importance of teaching in these works suggest that these poems ultimately have a didactic function. The lives of these two holy women offer advice on how to resist temptation, avoid spiritual blindness, as well as how to live in the world as a Christian and reject the world as a Christian. In the epilogues to both poems, Cynewulf, too, offers a personal paradigm for humility and a *memento mori*, in recounting his own approaching departure from this life. The variety of interpretations which have been applied to these texts testify to the richness of the poems themselves. Yet this richness of interpretation, and their fundamentally didactic and Christian message also account for the currency of these poems in the late tenth century manuscripts in which we now find them.

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, the strength of a theory is to be tested on its explanatory power; a theory capable of explaining more phenomena is to be regarded a stronger hypothesis. In this chapter, I have articulated and expanded upon a unique feature recognised by historians, that women in Mercia held positions of power unparalleled in eighth- and ninth-century Anglo-Saxon England. This may have been a development from traditional roles of Anglo-Saxon royal women, combined with succession politics which enhanced the power of noblewomen as potential agents of legitimacy and peace-weaving for the throne. In addition, some of the best evidence for female manuscript production and use in this period appear to be of Mercian origin. Here, I have offered a reading of two of Cynewulf's signed poems in this context, which is able to explain many features of these poems: the Anglian and at times Mercian character of his language, including rhymes; the transmission state of his works, separated by at least a century from the Exeter and Vercelli Books in which they now survive;

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<sup>235</sup> Wittig, 'Figural Narrative', 150; Campbell, 'Cynewulf's Multiple Revelations', 235.

his choice of subject in two strong women of continental origin, and adapting them into two models of power and faith within the context of an Anglo-Saxon heroic genre; a potential audience for these works either in the secular court or at any number of religious foundations either headed by a woman or with a number of women at them; the enhanced leadership of Elene as queen, perhaps in response to developments in Mercian queenship. We might even theorize that Cynewulf had a female patron, or was perhaps himself a member of an ecclesiastical foundation in Mercia headed by an abbess. Though much of this argument is speculative, it offers a plausible account of the conditions which may have shaped the composition of these poems. It also offers further links with other phenomena observed in this thesis. As with the texts of the cult of Guthlac, these are two verse hagiographies, similar to *Guthlac A* and the potentially Cynewulfian *Guthlac B*, and the later *Andreas*.<sup>236</sup> A version of the Latin *passio Iulianae* similar to that used by Cynewulf written at the scriptorium of Christ Church, Canterbury survives, and indeed, much as the *OEM* may exhibit links with that scriptorium; so too does the *OEB*, as I shall argue below.

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<sup>236</sup> Bintley and North, pp. 97-102. See also *ibid.* pp. 46-8 (on dialect and date) and see pp. 58-62 (on Cynewulfian allusions).

### Chapter 3. From Northumbria to Wessex: The *Old English Bede*

#### Introduction

The Old English translation of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (*OEB*) has traditionally been associated with King Alfred's late ninth-century cultural renaissance and is often identified as a key text in the king's efforts to promote a sense of English national identity.<sup>1</sup> However, recent scholarship, notably that of George Molyneaux, Gregory Waite and Sharon Rowley, has found reason to dissociate the *OEB* from Alfred's project.<sup>2</sup> This chapter offers a new reading of the *OEB* against the background of eighth- or ninth-century Mercia, which, I propose, may help to explain its straightforward, literal style of translation and penchant for doublets, a feature of other Mercian translations as seen in the introduction; the omission of certain materials whilst retaining nearly all of the hagiographical content of the *HE*; the rearrangement of the content of the *libellus responsionum*; small textual adaptations; linguistic characteristics and rare words encountered most in works of likely Anglian, and possibly Mercian provenance; and art historical features which may be linked to Mercian traditions.

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<sup>1</sup> For the attribution of the work to Alfred, see Ælfric, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, p. 79. For the argument that the *OEB* was part of Alfred's educational program, see, for example, Miller, *Old English Version*, I, pp. xxxiii, lviii-ix and IV, p. xxii; Klaeber, *Commentary*, Appendices 1 and 2; Rowley, *Old English Version*, pp. 46-7, 54-6; Wallis, 'The Old English Bede', pp. 203-4; Potter, *On the Relation*, pp. 71-3; Whitelock, 'The Old English Bede'; S. Kuhn, 'Synonyms in the Old English Bede', *JEGP* 46 (1947), 168-76; and three articles by Janet Bately, 'Old English Prose'; 'The Alfredian Canon Revisited', in *Alfred the Great: Papers from the Eleventh-Centenary Conferences*, ed. T. Reuter (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 107-20; and 'Did King Alfred Actually Translate Anything? The Integrity of the Alfredian Canon Revisited', *Medium Ævum* 78 (2009), 189-215. On the role of the *OEB* in the construction of an Alfredian English national identity, see S. Foot, 'The Making of Angelcynn: English Identity before the Norman Conquest', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6 (1996), 25-49; P. Wormald, 'Engla Lond: The Making of an Allegiance', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 7 (1994), 1-24. For arguments against locating it in an Alfredian canon, see Godden, 'Did King Alfred Write Anything?'; and M. Godden, 'The Alfredian Project and its Aftermath: Rethinking the Literary History of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries', Sir Israel Gollancz Memorial Lecture, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 162 (London, 2009), 93-122.

<sup>2</sup> See G. Molyneaux, 'English Ideology or Christian Instruction', 1289-323; Rowley, *Old English Version*; Waite, 'Vocabulary', 'Translation Style', 'The *Old English Bede* and the Glosses in the *Tiberius Bede*', *Parergon* 30 (2013), 1-49; Waite and Rowley, *The Old English Bede* (forthcoming).

As much an adaptation as a translation, the *OEB* omits large sections of Bede's narrative, but adds no substantial new material, truncating the history of Roman Britain (*HE* I.1- 12, except I. 7) and the Easter controversy (II.19), as well as omitting its account of Pelagianism, including the famous synod of Whitby (III.25-6), and much of the continental material.<sup>3</sup> As discussed in the introduction, the *OEB*'s straightforward, word-for-word translation style is closer to Wærferth's translation of *Dialogues* than to later, Alfredian works such as the *Boethius* and *Soliloquies*.<sup>4</sup>

Basing much of his discussion on the evidence of the preface, George Molyneaux has recently identified the *OEB* primarily as an educational text, rather than a piece of West Saxon propaganda.<sup>5</sup> Molyneaux also casts into doubt the relevance of the *OEB* to the political ambitions of Wessex, arguing that the translator is relatively uninterested in matters of national identity. Nicole Guenther Discenza argued that the *OEB*'s preface constructs its authority quite differently than the canonical 'Alfredian' prefaces, such as those accompanying the *Pastoral Care*, *Boethius* and *Soliloquies*.<sup>6</sup> Gregory Waite's recent discovery that the preface to the *OEB* is in fact the work of a different, later translator further weakens the connection with West Saxon politics. This chapter will therefore focus on the text of the body of the *OEB*.<sup>7</sup>

The text of the *OEB* survives in five manuscripts and one fragment, the earliest of which dates from the close of the ninth century or the opening of the tenth, all of which reveal various stages of adaptation and revision of the text by later West Saxon scribes, who updated spellings, retranslated sections and substituted words of common late West Saxon for

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<sup>3</sup> See Rowley, *Old English Version*, pp. 3, 77. On the minor additions of the translator, see Potter.

<sup>4</sup> S. Keynes and M. Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, pp. 292-3; Potter, pp. 5, 71-2; Waite, 'Vocabulary', p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> Molyneaux, 'English Ideology or Christian Instruction?', 1289-1323.

<sup>6</sup> Discenza, 'Construction of Anglo-Saxon Authority'.

<sup>7</sup> Waite, 'Translation Style'.

Anglian dialect words.<sup>8</sup> The earliest nearly complete copy, Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Tanner 10, has preserved the largest amounts of Mercian vocabulary, and is considered to be the most accurate representation of the lost original archetypal text which Waite argues was composed in a Mercian dialect.<sup>9</sup>

The vocabulary of the *OEB* offers several notable points of correspondence with works now considered likely to be Mercian. Simeon Potter, for example, noted ‘pronounced resemblances’ between the word-for-word, literal style of translation, identical use of word pairs, and dialectical features between the *OEB* and *Dialogues*.<sup>10</sup> More recently, Waite has noted certain formulae in the *OEB* which also appear in ninth-century Mercian charters, as well as similar lexical choices in the glosses in the Vespasian Psalter and certain glossaries, and in saints’ lives such as the *OEPG* and the *Life of St Chad*.<sup>11</sup> He concludes that ‘the style and lexical consistency of the text suggest a centre of production where bilingual scholarship had been practiced for some time, perhaps interlinear glossing and glossary compilation, if not necessarily a tradition of sustained prose translation.’<sup>12</sup> Scholars have often independently noted the Anglian – and likely Mercian – character of many of the early glossaries, including the Épinial, Erfurt and Corpus glossaries, as well as the glosses in the Vespasian Psalter and the Rushworth Gospels. Franz Wenisch similarly concludes on a study of vocabulary that an Anglian origin for the *OEB* may be accepted.<sup>13</sup> Other instances of vocabulary reinforce the

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<sup>8</sup> These are the fragmentary late ninth or early tenth century, London, British Library, Cotton Domitian A. ix, f. 11<sup>r</sup>, which is likely the earliest surviving attestation of the text, as it appears stylistically similar to other late ninth-century manuscripts, and in general ‘seems more “old-fashioned” than Oxford, Bodleian Library, Tanner 10, the next oldest copy, according to Janet Bately, *Tanner Bede*, p. 39. Tanner 10 is an early tenth-century manuscript commonly considered within the early Winchester style of illumination. It is written in five hands, four of which are classified as representative of Dumville’s fourth reformed Insular minuscule and early square minuscule, which would place the text in the early tenth century. Three further manuscripts were copied through the middle of the eleventh century; for the most up to date discussion, see Waite, ‘Translation Style,’ pp. 4-9, 31; Wallis, ‘The Old English Bede’. A similar phenomenon is found in the various manuscripts of the *Old English Martyrology*, see Rauer, *Martyrology*, pp. 24-5.

<sup>9</sup> Waite, ‘Translation Style’, pp. 28, 31; Waite, ‘Vocabulary’; Miller, *Old English Version*, p. xxxiii.

<sup>10</sup> Potter, *On the Relation*, pp. 71-2.

<sup>11</sup> Waite, ‘Vocabulary’.

<sup>12</sup> Waite, ‘Translation Style’, p. 4; Waite, ‘Glosses’.

<sup>13</sup> Wenisch, *Spezifisch anglisches Wortgut*, p. 237.



case for reading the *OEB* as composed in Mercia. For example, the compound *iserngeloma* ('iron instrument') occurs eight times in the Old English corpus, including in the *OEB*, *Letter*, *OEM* and twice in the *Dialogues*. A number of other words appear in only one other text, such as *godgespræc* ('oracle'), *gelise* ('reading, study') and *ungefered* ('inaccessible'), which all occur in the *Letter*, or *gægslic* ('wanton') and *ongyrdan* ('to unfasten, unbuckle') in the *OEM*; it shares the most rare vocabulary with the *Dialogues*. The *OEM* has also been considered to be a ninth-century Mercian production by its most recent editor, Christine Rauer.<sup>14</sup> Placing the translation of the *OEB* also in Mercia offers the simplest explanation for the stylistic and lexical similarities between these works.

In this chapter, I offer both a reading of the text and a hypothetical narrative of its transmission into tenth-century Wessex, based on features of the palaeography and decoration of the early manuscripts. George Molyneaux argues that the translator 'appears to have regarded the *Historia ecclesiastica* as valuable principally as a store of examples to inculcate Christian behaviour', rather than as a work of national history as has often been supposed.<sup>15</sup> I have argued above that Cynewulf's works of vernacular verse hagiography, which may be read as intended for a lay and or female audience, are a product of his adaptation of heroic tradition which fits well with the interests of Mercian court culture. Sharon Rowley has noted similar interest in the activities of women in the *OEB* as revealed through the omission of other material.<sup>16</sup> Such an emphasis on the activities of women, alongside the accessibility of the text to audiences whose Latinity may have been minimal, suggests that the *OEB* may have been created in a similar culture to that which produced the works of Cynewulf.

I will begin by reading how the textual adaptations from Bede's eighth-century, Northumbrian perspective in the *OEB* may be fruitfully read within a ninth-century Mercian

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<sup>14</sup> Rauer, *Martyrology*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>15</sup> Molyneaux, 'English Ideology or Christian Instruction?', 1316.

<sup>16</sup> Rowley, *Old English Version*, p. 114.

context. Connecting the author's interest in vernacular hagiography with Cynewulf, I explore his or her active engagement with church councils held under the Mercian hegemony. In the final section of this chapter, I identify features in the earliest manuscripts which trace the text's movement from Mercia to Wessex, a path which many texts, manuscripts, scholars and scribes seem to have made in the late ninth and early tenth centuries. In particular, I argue that the scribes and early manuscripts of the *OEB* show the influence of Tiberius style, a distinctively Mercian style of illumination. Thus we can trace the journey of the *OEB* from its Latin, Northumbrian original to the tenth-century, West Saxon vernacular manuscripts in which it survives today.

### *Text*

The material included and omitted in the *OEB*, as well as its treatment, can be taken as indications of the translator's perspective, intentions and audience. Notable alterations include the omission of irrelevant material, explanation of unfamiliar concepts, and shaping of the text into a compendium of vernacular hagiography and other material of interest to the church in the ninth century. The most significant of these features is the inclusion, arrangement and treatment of conciliar documents in the *OEB*, which, as I argue below, may have been shaped by the culture of Mercian ecclesiastical councils in the eighth and ninth centuries. Reading the *OEB* against the background of ninth-century Mercia helps to explain these features of the translation as well as certain linguistic features and other aspects of the transmission history of the *OEB*.

The *OEB*'s minor alterations to the Latin may reflect the perspective of a later translator, based in Mercia. Indeed, the translator's account of the *adventus Saxonum* condenses Bede's Latin:

Porro de Anglis, hoc est de illa patria quae Angulus dicitur, et ab eo tempore usque hodie manere desertus inter provincias Iutarum et Saxonum perhibetur, Orientales Angli, Mediterranei Angli, Mercii, tota Northanhymbrorum progenies, id est illarum gentium quae ad boream Humbri fluminis inhabitant, ceteri que Anglorum populi sunt orti. (*HE* I.15).<sup>17</sup>

And of Engle coman Eastangle 7 Middelengle 7 Myrce 7 eall Noðhembra cynn; is þæt land ðe Angulus is nemned, betwyh Geatum 7 Seaxnum; is sæd of þære tide þe hi ðanon gewiton oð to dæge, þæt hit weste wunige. (*OEB* I.12).<sup>18</sup>

The direct, word-for-word style can be connected to the direct style of other Mercian translations, as discussed in the Introduction. Yet where Bede glosses the meaning of ‘Northanhymbrorum’ in Latin for his presumably non-English-speaking audience, it is self-evident in Old English and the translator simply omits the explanation. Further, omitting the reference to other *Anglorum populi* in the Old English may reflect the perspective of a Mercian translator of the late eighth or ninth century: many of the Anglian tribes recorded in the Tribal Hidage, such as the Magonsætan, Hwicce and Gyrwe, who were consolidated into Mercia by the eighth century.<sup>19</sup> Æthelbald’s title in the 736 Ismere Diploma, often considered overly-ambitious and inflated, *rex non solum Marcersium sed et omnium prouinciarum quae generale nomine Sutanglie dicuntur*, hints at similar changes.<sup>20</sup> It is important to remember Bede’s bias against the Mercian kingdom, and his rather distant source of information, the monastery founded by Chad and Cedd at Lastingham, north of York.<sup>21</sup> The altered

<sup>17</sup> ‘Besides this, from the country of the Angles, that is, the land between the kingdoms of the Jutes and the Saxons, which is called *Angulus*, came the East Angles, the Middle Angles, the Mercians and all the Northumbrian race (that is those people who dwell north of the river Humber), as well as the other Anglian tribes’.

<sup>18</sup> ‘And from the Angles came the East Angles and the Middle Angles and the Mercians and all the Northumbrian kin; that land is named Angulus, which is between the Geats and Saxons; it is said that from that time that they departed until today, that it remains a wasteland.’

<sup>19</sup> J. Blair, ‘Tribal Hidage’, in M. Lapidge, et al., eds., *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford, 2014), pp. 473-74; D. Dumville, ‘The Tribal Hidage: an Introduction to its Texts and their History’, in S. Bassett, ed., *Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms* (Leicester, 1989), pp. 225-30.

<sup>20</sup> ‘King not solely of the Mercians but of all the regions which are generally called by the name South Anglians’, S89. Yet if Æthelbald could claim the overlordship of a majority of these southern Anglian tribes the title may be rather accurate.

<sup>21</sup> *HE*, Preface, pp. 4-5; Higham, *An English Empire*, pp. 9-12.

geographical and temporal situation of the translator of the *OEB*, as well as different purposes and intended audiences, can explain the omission of the *Anglorum populi* in the *OEB*.

Reading the *OEB* in a Mercian context can also help explain its widely divergent presentation of the Irish bishop, Aidan, compared to the *HE*. Mercia's first missionaries, Cedd, Adda, Betti and Diuma (*HE* III.21, *OEB* III.15), were Northumbrians and disciples of Aidan, except Diuma, who was also Irish.<sup>22</sup> The Mercian church, with its celebrated bishop-saint, Chad, may have been keen to present in a positive light the teacher and model of their own saint, who had recently been honoured with the construction of a shrine in either the late eighth or early ninth century at Lichfield.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the *OEB* distances itself from the political and ecclesiastical controversies in Bede's *HE*. It omits material relating to the heresies. For example, it removes the entire Easter controversy, including the Synod of Whitby, in which Aidan argued for the losing side, which incurred Bede's censure:

[A]ccepit namque pontificem Aidanum summae mansuetudinis et pietatis ac moderaminis uirum habentemque zelum Dei, quamuis non plene secundum scientiam. Nameque diem paschae dominicum more suae gentis, cuius saepius mentionem fecimus, a quarta decima luna usque ad uicesimam obseruare solebat. (*HE* III.3).<sup>24</sup>

7 heo him lustlice tigðodon 7 him biscop sendon; Aidan was haten micelre monþwærnesse 7 arfæstnisse 7 gemetfæstnisse monn; 7 he hæfde Godes ellenwodnisse 7 his lufan micle. (*OEB* III.2).<sup>25</sup>

Stripping out Bede's criticism rehabilitates the reputation of the Celtic bishop whom Chad emulated, and may be read as similarly removing the taint of heresy from Chad's cathedral seat at Lichfield, which was elevated to its own archiepiscopacy by papal decree in 787.

Reading small omissions, such as the *ceteri Anglorum populi* and Bede's criticism of Aidan, can be simply explained as the work of a Mercian translator influenced by his perspective,

<sup>22</sup> D. Farmer, 'Ceadda (d. 672?)', *ODNB*; H. Mayr-Harting, 'Áedán (d. 651)', *ODNB*.

<sup>23</sup> M. Brown, 'The Lichfield Angel and the Manuscript Context: Lichfield as a Centre of Insular Art', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 160 (2007), 8-19, at 13-14.

<sup>24</sup> 'They sent him Bishop Aidan, a man of outstanding gentleness, devotion, and moderation, who had a zeal for God though not entirely according to knowledge. For after the manner of his race, as we have very often mentioned, he was accustomed to celebrate Easter Sunday between the fourteenth and the twentieth day of the moon.' *HE*, pp. 218-9.

<sup>25</sup> 'And they gladly granted his desire and sent him a bishop, called Aidan, a man of great gentleness, and piety, and moderation; and he had great love and zeal for God.'

temporally, geographically and culturally. Yet more substantial alterations may also be explained by reading this translation as a work translated in eighth- or ninth-century Mercia.

### Hagiography

Scholars have noted that alterations made to the text of Bede's *HE* in the *OEB* suggest that it was intended as a work of vernacular hagiography. This invites considering it alongside other roughly contemporary Mercian works of hagiography, such as the texts of the cult of Guthlac, the *OEM* and the works of Cynewulf. The translator intersperses these hagiographical sections with official documents which helped to shape Christian life in Anglo-Saxon England, within the wider context of a Christian, national history. As Sharon Rowley observes, 'One result of the way the OEHE [i.e. *OEB*] translator reinterpreted his source is that it now reflects a focus on local history, Anglo-Saxon saints and their miracles; its style is more seamlessly hagiographical than Bede's Latin original.'<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the *OEB* may have served as a vernacular collection of Anglo-Saxon saints' lives before Ælfric composed his *Lives of Saints*.<sup>27</sup> While of course not all vernacular hagiography is Mercian – indeed, the works of Ælfric and a large number of anonymous saints' lives are West Saxon – this thesis has proposed that much of the early verse and prose hagiography may be Mercian in origin. Moreover, the generic, linguistic and stylistic similarities between the *OEB* and *Dialogues* are also most simply explained by viewing them as part of the same cultural climate.

The translator's interest in hagiography can be seen in his treatment of the *passio Albani*. Though the translator heavily abridges Book I of Bede's *HE*, which details the Roman interaction with Britain, he retains the *passio* of St Alban in its entirety.<sup>28</sup> In addition,

<sup>26</sup> Rowley, *Old English Version*, pp. 158-9.

<sup>27</sup> Several hagiographical sections of the MSS have been marked as readings, cf. Rowley, *Old English Version*, pp. 187-94; the Mercian *Life of St Chad* interestingly is not drawn directly from the *OEB* but from the Latin, the homily having 'stronger poetic influence', see Vleeskruyer, *Life of St Chad*, pp. 12-15, 18-20. Thus the *Life* may predate the *OEB*.

<sup>28</sup> Molyneux, 'English Ideology or Christian Instruction?', 1311-12, notes the retention of the Alban material, but connects it to the intentions to instruct communicated in the preface.

the medieval materials of the cult of St Alban articulate a connection with the Mercian royal dynasty at the turn of the ninth century that may also have stimulated the translator's particular interest.

The Anglo-Saxon abbey at St Albans was probably founded by King Offa in 793.<sup>29</sup> Though early charters relating to the abbey's holdings and endorsed by Offa, appear mostly inauthentic, they are invariably endorsed by Offa, who features prominently in its foundation narrative.<sup>30</sup> The arms of the abbey, and later, those of the city, feature azure with a golden saltire, traditionally said to derive from the arms of Offa, and later, of Mercia. Moreover, Offa is credited not only with the foundation and endowment of the abbey, but also with the invention of the saint's body. The foundation narratives by Matthew Paris in his *Vie de Seint Auban* and Roger of Wendover give Offa pride of place.<sup>31</sup> That these later materials clearly promote an association between Offa and the early medieval cult of Alban may reflect a historical fact, that the cult was revived and therefore a current interest at about the same time as the composition of the *OEB*.

A number of features of the position and presentation of the *passio Albani* suggest reading the passion as a means of educating an Anglo-Saxon audience on sanctity. Generically, Anglo-Latin *vitae* and *passiones* served as a statement of the place of the English church within Christianity;<sup>32</sup> conversely, vernacular saints lives provided examples of Christian life to an English audience. Whereas in the rest of Book I the OE translator

<sup>29</sup> J. Crick, *Charters of St Albans*, Anglo-Saxon Charters 12 (Oxford, 2007), pp. 8-16.

<sup>30</sup> On the forgeries in general, see J. Crick, 'St Albans, Westminster, and Some Twelfth-Century Views of the Anglo-Saxon Past', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 25 (2002), 65-83. On S 136, see C. Cubitt, *Councils*, pp. 273-4; M. Gelling, *The Early Charters of the Thames Valley* (Leicester, 1979), pp. 80-1, 101. On S 136a see S. Keynes, 'A Lost Cartulary of St Albans Abbey', *ASE* 22 (1993), 253-79, at 264, 272-3. On S 138, Keynes, 'Lost', 264, 268, 269, 272.

<sup>31</sup> S. Keynes, 'Changing Faces: Offa, King of Mercia', *History Today* 40 (1990), 14-19; M. Biddle, 'Alban (d. c. 303?)', *ODNB*.

<sup>32</sup> Anderson, 'Saints Legends', p. 135.

removes other voices from the narrative, he opens the narrative of St Alban with a direct quotation from another author:<sup>33</sup>

[B]e þam Fortunatus presbyter on fæmnena lofe, ða he gemynegode þara eadigra martyra, ða þe of eallum middangearde to Drihtne coman, cwæð he: Þone æðelan Albanum seo wæstmberende Bryton forðbereð. (I.7).<sup>34</sup>

In so doing, the translator retains the authority of a famous Latinate poet and Merovingian bishop, while also presenting that material, and the story of Albans to an Anglo-Saxon audience. The translator's especial interest in Alban is further highlighted by the unusual addition of details, one of only six occasions he does so, here elaborating on the location of St Alban's martyrdom:<sup>35</sup>

Qui uidelicet fluuius ministerio persoluto, deuotione completa officii testimonium relinquens reuersus est ad naturam. Decollatus itaque martyr fortissimus ibidem accepit coronam uitae, quam repromisit Deus diligentibus se. (HE I.7).<sup>36</sup>

7 nu seo wylle 7 þæt wæter, gefylledre wilsumnesse 7 ðære ðenunge þæs eadigan martyres wæs forlætende ða cyþnesse þære ðenunge, 7 hwearf eft to gecynde. Wæs seo stow hwæthwugu on healfre mile fram þære ceastre wealle, 7 fram þære burnan þe he ær drigum fotum ofereode. Ðær wæs þa hæfde beslagen se strengestra martyr Sanctus Albanus, 7 þær he onfeng beah 7 sige eces lifes, þone ylcan sige God behet eallum þam ðe hine lufian wyllað. (OEB I.7).<sup>37</sup>

The retention of a Latin quotation, supplementary detail and the relation of the episode in full among heavily abridged and omitted neighbouring material is perhaps best explained by reading the *OEB* as the work of the Mercian translator of the eighth or ninth century.

<sup>33</sup> R. Bassi, 'Saints' Lives and Miracle Stories in Bede, the *Old English Bede*, and Ælfric between Translation and Rewriting' (unpubl. PhD dissertation, University of Bergamo, 2011), p. 15; Discenza, 'Construction of Anglo-Authority', 69-80; Whitelock, 'The Old English Bede', 4-5.

<sup>34</sup> 'About him the priest Fortunatus, in praise of Virginité, when he was mindful of all the blessed martyrs who came to the Lord from all over middle-earth, said: Fruitful Britain bears forth the noble Albanus.' p. 34. Interestingly, the translator omits Bede's quotation of St Basil's *Hexameron* in (I.1).

<sup>35</sup> Potter, *On the Relation*, p. 5; Bassi, pp. 64-5.

<sup>36</sup> 'The river, when it had fulfilled its duty and completed its pious service, returned to its natural course, but it left behind a witness of its ministry. And so in that spot the valiant martyr was beheaded and received the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him.' *HE*, pp. 32-2

<sup>37</sup> 'And now the well and that water, having fulfilled the devotion and service of the blessed martyr, abandoned the witness of that service, and returned to its habit. *That place was about a half mile from the city walls, and from the stream where he earlier passed over with dry feet.* There was the head struck from the strongest martyr Saint Albanus, and there he received the crown and victory of eternal life, the same victory which God promised to all who will love him.' (Italics mine). See Potter, *On the Relation*, p. 5.

The translator may also have retained the *protomartyr Anglorum* for its articulation of a Christian identity through faith and action. Bede adapts his story of St Alban's passion from the latest version of the *passio Albani* and the account given by Gildas in his *De Excidio*.<sup>38</sup> Alban, a heathen who entertains a persecuted Christian priest, from whom he observes and learns the Christian faith, serves as a model of conversion and everyday faith: when authorities demand that he hand over the priest, Alban offers himself instead and is martyred (*OEB* I.7). Alban becomes a Christian by imitating the example of his guest, perhaps also inviting its audience to imitate his example. Conversion remained relevant through the eighth and ninth centuries in Anglo-Saxon England. For example, the final canon from the visit of the Papal Legates in 786 urged immediate conversion, along with confession and penance.<sup>39</sup>

The force of the story of Alban as an example for imitation is most apparent in the dialogues between the saint and his persecutor, a heathen governor. When the martyr refuses to acquiesce to the governor's commands to make heathen sacrifices, the governor demands to be told the identity of the martyr. Closely following Bede's Latin, Alban's answer crystallizes ideal daily Christian conduct:

And þa andswarede him *Sanctus* Albanus: Hwæt limpeþ þæs to ðe of hwylcum wyrtruman ic acenned si? Ac gif ðu wylle gehyran þæt soþ minre æfestnysse, þonne wite þu me cristene beon: 7 ic cristenum þenungum ðeowian wylle [...]. Albanus ic eom geciged fram minum yldrum; 7 þone soðan God 7 þone lifigendan, se gescop heofon 7 eorðan 7 ealle gesceafta, ic symble bigange, 7 me to him gebidde. (*OEB* I.7).<sup>40</sup>

Alban recognizes but rejects temporal assertions of identity, instead clinging to the Christian identity he himself enacts. The *OEB* itself consistently reiterates this pattern, narrating the origins and nations of many notable Christians, including Theodore, Ægelbert, Aidan, Oswald, Peada, Wilfred and Paulinus. Bede and his Old English translator weave an elaborate

<sup>38</sup> *HE*, pp. 28-9, fn 2; Crick, *Charters of St Albans*, pp. 4-8. Biddle, 'Alban (d. c. 303?)'.

<sup>39</sup> Dümmler, ed., *Epistolae Karolini Aevi* II, No. 3, p. 27; a partial translation is available in *EHD* I, No. 191, p. 894.

<sup>40</sup> 'And then Saint Albanus answered him: What does it matter to you of what stock I am born? But if you will hear the truth of my religion, then know you me to be Christian: and I will follow Christian sacrifice. Albanus I am called by my parents: and I always worship and pray to him, the true and living God, who created heaven and earth and all creation.' Miller, *Old English Version*, p. 36.



tapestry of words and deeds, sources and documents related to these individuals: these refer to the earthly origins of these individuals, but emphasize their actions as Christians.

St Alban's expression of identity in the *OEB* welcomes new Christians of any origin. Read in a ninth-century Mercian context, this espousal of performative ideas of Christian identity, combined with the translator's withdrawal of much of the invective against the Britons, may have served to encourage Anglo-Saxon interaction with other peoples, such as the Welsh or Vikings. The *OEB*'s theory of Christian identity as one of conviction and action which supersedes race, prior religion, parentage or nationality certainly makes it a text amenable to a time of immigration and cultural assimilation.<sup>41</sup>

Reading the *OEB* in the context of eighth- and ninth-century Mercia may also explain the position which female saints' lives occupy in it. Scholars have detected Bede shaping his works to accommodate his discomfort with both secular and religious women, who, as we saw in the previous chapter, in Mercia held unparalleled power when compared to their contemporaries in Anglo-Saxon England in this period.<sup>42</sup> Though, as a faithful translation, the *OEB* perpetuates the logic of Bede's Latin, championing the activities of bishops in the conversion while downplaying the role which royal women played in order to emphasize the role of the Church as a unifier, it does not relegate women further.<sup>43</sup> Both the *HE* and the *OEB* include the story of the major female Anglo-Saxon saint, Æthelthryth, as well as the names and details of other early Anglo-Saxon women, principally royal and religious. As discussed in the introduction and Chapter 2, the branch of the Mercian dynasty descended directly from Penda founded a number monastic houses headed by royal women who were

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<sup>41</sup> Sarah Foot considers the *OEB* to function largely within such a framework, but, in seeing as a product of the Alfredian court, treats it as an agent of English identity over Christian identity: 'Making of *Angelcynn*', 34-7. Molyneaux's argument that the translator seems to have been more interested in Christianity than in political unity maintains a position midway between Foot and what I present here. On Alban as an appealing saint in the late ninth century, see Lemke, p. 317.

<sup>42</sup> Hollis, *Women and the Church*, p. 270.

<sup>43</sup> Rowley, *Old English Version*, pp. 117-8.

frequently regarded as princess saints, such as Mildburg, abbess of Much Wenlock, Cyneburg and Cyneswith, daughters of Penda culted at Castor.<sup>44</sup> As the surviving material from these cults is late, it is quite possible Bede was unaware of them, especially given his limited access to Mercian sources. Further, their connection to Penda does not fit with Bede's narrative glorifying Northumbria at Mercia's expense. As Pulsiano has pointed out, 'Anglo-Saxon female saints must often operate and interact within immediate social and political contexts', and as much as Bede's narrative sets up his female saints in the *HE* as pearls of the faith, they remain set in the golden trappings of their aristocratic and political identities.<sup>45</sup> He does, however, include women like Eafe (*Æbbe*),<sup>46</sup> Christian princess of the Hwicce married to Æthelwealh, king of the South Saxons (*HE* IV.13; *OEB* IV.12), and the noble princess saints Eanflæd (*HE* II.9, II.20, III.15, IV.26 ; *OEB* II.8, II.16, III.13, IV.27), Eorcongota (*HE* III.8; *OEB* III.6), and Ælflæd (*HE* III.24, IV.26; *OEB* III.18, IV.27). As Roberta Bassi observes:

The *OEB* does not alter the picture offered by Bede, on the contrary it faithfully reproduces the source text as well as the scope of Bede's hagiographical narrative. In fact, Bede's emphasis on the passages devoted to Æthelthryth's illness and to the elevation of her incorrupt body is further enhanced by the increased number of word pairs that rhetorically expands those key moments.<sup>47</sup>

The general faithfulness of the translator to Bede's content in this respect is best explained as adapting the text into a hagiographical, rather than principally historical, narrative centred on Britain: these are all Anglo-Saxon women who, with the exceptions of Eorcongota, Sæthryth and Æthelburh (*HE* III.8; *OEB* III.6), carried out their vocations in England. The stories of these women might have appealed to a similar audience to the one I have proposed for Cynewulf's poetry and several of the Tiberius group manuscripts.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, Fry has noted that the translator of the *OEB* 'perceives, transmits and even occasionally improves' the

<sup>44</sup> 'Cyneburg 1' and 'Cyneswith 1', *PASE*.

<sup>45</sup> P. Pulsiano, 'Blessed Bodies: The *Vitae* of Anglo-Saxon Female Saints', *Parergon* 16 (1999), 1-42, at 9.

<sup>46</sup> The *OEB* gives her name as 'Æbbe.' She may have become an abbess at Gloucester, see 'Eafe 2', *PASE*.

<sup>47</sup> Bassi, p. 108; see further discussion in Bassi at pp. 73-103, 107-9.

<sup>48</sup> See above, p. 104, and further discussion of the Tiberius group below, p. 210.

devices which Bede uses to unify the miracles of the nuns at Barking.<sup>49</sup> There is good documentation of female scribes, users and owners of manuscripts in ninth-century Mercia, though it is by no means unique: manuscripts of Æthelwold's translation of the Benedictine Rule in the late tenth century also shows signs of adaptation for a female audience.<sup>50</sup> The translator's interest in female hagiography may gesture to audiences and a social context similar to that of the poet Cynewulf and the production of manuscripts of the Tiberius group, all of which can be identified (with varying degrees of confidence) to Mercia.

Reading the *OEB* in the context of eighth- and ninth-century Mercia also offers a coherent explanation for the selection and placement of documents retained in the translation, while also situating the translation in a plausible context of composition. The translator, as others have noted, transforms the *OEB* into a primarily hagiographic narrative centred in Anglo-Saxon England, and includes certain documents related to the practice of the faith. As such, I suggest that this may reflect the translator's participation in bilingual clerical culture, which may have influenced his selection and treatment of documents (letters, canons, scriptural citations). For example, one striking change is the repositioning of the *libellus responsionum*, a booklet of responses from Gregory the Great to Augustine's questions on how to guide the laity in his new church. While in the *HE* it appears chronologically in Book I, contemporary with Augustine's arrival Kent, in the *OEB* it is wedged without introduction between the end of Book III and Book IV. By considering the translator as an active participant in contemporary clerical culture, the repositioning of the *libellus responsionum* can be explained as an intentional change to highlight its relevance to Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical conciliar culture of the eighth century, which was held largely under the secular leadership of the Mercian kings and in Mercian territory. In particular, similarities and

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<sup>49</sup> D. Fry, 'Bede Fortunate in His Translator: the Barking Nuns', in *Studies in Earlier Old English Prose*, ed. P. E. Szarmach (Albany, 1986), pp. 345-62, at 356.

<sup>50</sup> R. Jayatilaka, 'The Old English Benedictine Rule: Writing for Women and Men', *ASE* 32 (2003), 147-87.

resonances between the *libellus responsionum*, canons of Hertford and canons of Hatfield, all located proximately in the *OEB*, share concerns rearticulated in later ecclesiastical synods, such as the councils held at *Clofesho* and the 786 visit of Papal Legates George of Ostia and Theophylact of Todi. In addition, the role and use of Latin and the vernacular feature in most of these documents, and provide a perspective on translation in Mercia in this period.

### Mercian Conciliar Culture

By virtue of its geographic location and its political primacy, the ecclesiastical councils of the eighth and ninth centuries in Southumbria were closely tied to the Mercian hegemony. A significant proportion of the many council and synods of the early eighth century were held at locations in Mercia and/or attended by the Mercian king.<sup>51</sup> The site of *Clofesho*, still unidentified, hosted as many as eleven councils in the eighth and ninth centuries at which the Mercian king was often (if not always) present.<sup>52</sup> Of particular relevance to this thesis is the fact that the synod of *Clofesho* in 747 set out an ambitious programme of reform in which the use of the vernacular to spread Christianity played an important role: this, including stipulations for the teaching of the Lord's Prayer and the Creed in Old English, also featured letters from Pope Zachary read out in translation by Archbishop Cuthbert, and dated by the regnal year of the Mercian king, Æthelbald.<sup>53</sup> The other major ecclesiastic meeting site in this period, Chelsea, also hosted councils potentially eleven times, at each recorded instance

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<sup>51</sup> For detailed discussion, see Cubitt, *Councils*, pp. 247-95.

<sup>52</sup> On the site of *Clofesho*, see Keynes, *The Councils of 'Clofesho'*, Eleventh Brixworth Lecture Vaughan Papers 38 (Leicester, 1994); D. Parsons, 'Brixworth and the Boniface Connection', *Northamptonshire Past and Present* 6 (1980), 179-83; C. Offer, *In Search of Clofesho: The Case for Hitchin* (Norwich, 2002); on the attendance of the synods, see Cubitt, *Councils*, pp. 304, 263, 281, 185-7.

<sup>53</sup> Lemke, p. 221; R. Liuzza, 'Religious Prose', in *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. P. Pulsiano and E. Treharne, Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture 11 (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 233-51, at 234-5; Haddan and Stubbs, *Councils* III, p. 362: 'et cum magna diligentia, juxta quod ipse apostolica sua auctoritate praecepit, et manifeste recitata, et in nostra quoque lingua apertius interpretata sunt.' There are three poetic translations of the Lord's Prayer, one in the Exeter Book ('Lord's Prayer I'), one in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 201, and one in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 121, in which is also found a bilingual poetic translation of the Creed, see Dobbie, ed, *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ASPR VI (London, 1942), pp. lxxix-lxxiv.

attended by the reigning Mercian king.<sup>54</sup> Chelsea's proximity to London and ease of access, held by Mercia during its hegemony through approximately 877, explains its popularity as a second location.<sup>55</sup> The ecclesiastical councils of the eighth and ninth centuries cooperated with and reflected the influence of the contemporary Mercian hegemony.

These eighth- and ninth-century church councils respond directly to decisions made at the earlier councils recorded in the *HE*, and included some of the few documents retained and translated in the *OEB*. For example, the councils of Hertford in 672 established that:

Septimum: 'Vt bis in anno synodus congregetur.' Sed quia diuersiae causae inpediunt, placuit omnibus in commune, ut kalendis Augustis in loco qui appellatur Clofaeshooh semel in anno congregemus. (*HE* IV.5).<sup>56</sup>

Se sefoða is: þætte twigea on gere seonoð gesomnode. Ac forðon missenlice intingan 7 unmaetan oft gelimpað, licade us eallum gemæneline, þætte in Augustus Kalende æne siða on gere seonoð gesomnode in stowe, seo is nemned Clofeshoh. (*OEB* IV.5).<sup>57</sup>

The *HE* is our sole source of information concerning this council.<sup>58</sup> The earliest fragment of the *OEB* testifies to its value as a documentary record. Dated to the late ninth or early tenth century, London, British Library Cotton Domitian A.ix, f. 11r, is a single leaf of excerpts from the *OEB*, specifically, canons 9 and 10 of the canons of Hertford (*HE* IV.5; *OEB* IV.5), Augustine's consecration in Arles (*HE*. I.27, *OEB* I.16), and Augustine's consecration of Mellitus as bishop of London (*HE* II.3, *OEB* II.3).<sup>59</sup> Bede's focus on bishops and the omission of Paulinus's consecration (*HE* II.3) in the fragment's excerpt has fueled speculation that the fragment may be connected to London.<sup>60</sup> As an important ecclesiastical document, all copies of the *OEB* include the canons of Hertford; the Domitian fragment

<sup>54</sup> Cubitt, *Councils*, pp. 269-86.

<sup>55</sup> J. Haslam, 'King Alfred, Mercia and London, 874-86: a Reassessment', *ASSAH* 17 (2011), 120-46; Cubitt, *Councils*, pp. 308-9.

<sup>56</sup> 'Seven. That a synod shall be summoned twice yearly. (But on account of various hindrances, it was unanimously decided that we should meet once a year on 1 August at the place known as *Clofæshoh*)', p. 353.

<sup>57</sup> 'The seventh [chapter] is that a synod be summoned twice a year. But because diverse and innumerable matters often come to pass, it pleased us all in general that we should gather once a year in the month of August at the place that is named "Clofesho".'

<sup>58</sup> As it is also for Hatfield, *HE* IV. 17, *OEB* IV. 19.

<sup>59</sup> Rowley, *Old English Version*, p. 16. J. Batley, *The Tanner Bede*, EEMF 24 (Copenhagen, 1992), p. 39; Whitelock, 'The Old English Bede'.

<sup>60</sup> Batley, *Tanner*, p. 37; Rowley, *Old English Version*, p. 16.

contains these canons, while other letters and documents are cut entirely from the *OEB*. This raises the possibility that the translator valued the canons as part of the narrative he was shaping for the present. In conjunction with the numerous councils held at Chelsea, the Hertford canon's selection of *Clofesho*, which was clearly in Mercian territory in this period, gives an impression of the prevalence of conciliar culture in Mercia in this period.

The 786 Legatine Canons connect conciliar culture with the activity of translation at the Mercian court in the eighth century, and respond to concerns regarding the governance of religious, the authority of leaders such as kings and priests, and the celebration of mass, as well as strict observations on the consecration and behaviour of kings, and issues with marriage. Catherine Cubitt has argued that there is a Northumbrian context for the visit and its resulting canons, yet a majority of these issues could easily apply to Mercia, as she acknowledges.<sup>61</sup> The canons were drawn up after inspections, visits and meetings in Southumbria and Northumbria, respectively, and witnessed first at the court of King Ælfwald of Northumbria (r. 779-88):<sup>62</sup>

Haec namque decreta, beatissime papa Hadriane, in concilio publico coram rege Aelfuualdo et archiepiscopo Eanbaldo et omnibus episcopis et abbatibus regionis seu senatoribus, ducibus et populo terrę proposuimus et illi, ut superius fati sumus, cum omni devotione mentis iuxta possibilitatem virium suarum adiuvante superna clementia se in omnibus custodire devoverunt, signo sanctę crucis in vice nostra in manu nostra confirmaverunt, et postea stilo diligenti in charta huius pagine exaraverunt signum sanctę crucis infigentes ita.<sup>63</sup>

The Legatine Report to Pope Hadrian then records their reception in Mercia:

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<sup>61</sup> Cubitt, *Councils*, pp. 187-90.

<sup>62</sup> Dümmler, *Epistola Karolini Aevi II*, No. 3; trans., *EHD* I, No. 191, p. 895.

<sup>63</sup> 'These decrees, most blessed Pope Hadrian, we propounded in the public council before King Ælfwald and Archbishop Eanbald and all the bishops and abbots of that region and also the councilors, eadlormen and people of that land; and they, as we have said above, vowed with all devotion of mind that, the divine clemency helping them, they would keep them in all things to the utmost of their ability; and they confirmed them in our hand in your stead with the sign of the Holy Cross, and afterwards inscribed with a careful pen on the paper of this page, affixing thus the sign of the Holy Cross.' Dümmler, *Epistolae Karolini Aevi II*, No. 3, p. 27, trans. Whitelock, *EHD* I, p. 895.

Qui una nobiscum pergentes et ipsa decreta secum deferentes in concilium Merchiorum, ubi gloriosus rex Offa cum senatoribus terrę, una cum archiepiscopo Iænberhto sanctę ecclesię Dorovernensis et ceteris episcopis regionum convenerat. Et in conspectu concilii clara voce singula capitula perlecta sunt et tam latine quam theodiscę; quo omnes intellegere potuissent, dilucide reserata snt, qui omnes consona voce alacri animo gratias referentes apostolatus vestri admonitionibus promiserunt se divino adminiculante favore iuxta qualitatem virium promptissima voluntate in omnibus hae statua custodire. Qui etiam, ut supra taxavimus, tam rex quam principes sui, archiepiscopus cum sociis suis in manu nostra in vice domini vestri signum sanctę crucis firmaverunt et rursus presentem chartulam sacro signo roboraverunt.<sup>64</sup>

At the Mercian council, in the presence of Offa and his *principes* and *senatoribus*, as well as the archbishop of Canterbury and the principal ecclesiastics of Southumbria (and those subject to Mercia, like Ceolwulf, bishop of Lindsey), the decrees were interpreted in detail in both Latin *and* – crucially for this discussion – the vernacular.<sup>65</sup> Conversely, at the Northumbrian court, the Legates *proposuimus* (‘we set forth, laid out, exposed to view’) the decrees; the report only mentions the vernacular and that the decrees *perlecta sunt* (‘were examined thoroughly, viewed all over’) at the Mercian court.<sup>66</sup> This may have been a reflection of the larger gathering (twenty-one signatories present, as opposed to eleven in Northumbria), the slightly larger presence of laymen (five versus four in Northumbria), or a difference in courtly practice. Nonetheless, Alcuin’s letter provides direct evidence of active translation involving the highest levels of the Mercian court and church. This provides a

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<sup>64</sup> ‘They travelled with us and brought the same decrees with them to the council of the Mercians, where the glorious King Offa had come together with the senators of the land, along with Jaenberht, archbishop of the holy church of Canterbury and the other bishops of those parts. And in the presence of the council the separate chapters were read in a clear voice and lucidly expounded both in Latin and in the vernacular, in order that all might understand. And they all, giving thanks with a ready mind for the admonitions of your apostolate, promised with one voice that they, the divine favour supporting them, would observe these statutes in all things with a most prompt will according to their ability. They, too, just as we set about above, both the king and his chief men, the archbishop and his colleagues, confirmed in our hand in your lordship’s stead the sign of the Holy Cross, and again ratified the present document with the sacred sign.’ Dümmler, *Epistolae Karolini Aevi* II, No. 3, p. 28; trans. Whitelock, *EHD* I, pp. 895–6.

<sup>65</sup> E. Dümmler, *Epistolae Karolini Aevi* II, No. 3, p. 28. On Brorda, see Chapter 4; Thacker, ‘Brorda (d. 799)’, *ODNB*. The term used for ‘vernacular’ is *theodiscæ*.

<sup>66</sup> Whitelock has translated these respectively as ‘propounded’, ‘To put forward, set forth, propose, or offer for consideration,’ OED ‘propound, v.’ and ‘expounded’, ‘to set forth, declare, state in detail’ (sense 1), but also ‘to explain, interpret’ (sense 2), OED ‘expound, v.’. While the similarity is appropriate in translation, as these were similar actions in similar contexts, the additional function of the translation and explanation is exceptional.

context in which to read the *OEB*: one involved in church councils and translation in late eighth- or early ninth-century Mercia.

Considering the translator of the *OEB* within the context of Mercian conciliar and clerical culture helps to account for its selection and treatment of documents. One of the more puzzling instances of selection and treatment regards the *libellus responsionum*, a booklet of responses from Gregory guiding Augustine on key issues facing his mission from Gregory the Great in 601. It remained a document of relevance both on the continent and in Anglo-Saxon England, and survives separately in continental manuscripts from the late eighth and early ninth century, and often circulated in England with Theodore's Penitential.<sup>67</sup> The copy of the *libellus* Bede used at Wearmouth-Jarrow was defective, and the text in certain recensions of the *HE* was corrected, probably at Canterbury.<sup>68</sup> Bede includes the *libellus responsionum* in the *HE* as one of a series of letters regarding the arrival of the Gregorian mission in England (I.27). The Old English translator, however, has either summarized or removed most of those letters, decentring Roman authority in the conversion, making the *libellus responsionum* inappropriate in this section of the narrative.<sup>69</sup> Most explanations for the inclusion of the *libellus responsionum* cite references to the document in a letter of Pope John IV in the 870s or correspondence from Archbishop Fulk of Rheims and Pope Formosius to Alfred, Plegmund and the English bishops in the 880s and 890s, hypothesizing it was included as an afterthought, without providing an explanation for its new location.<sup>70</sup>

Reading the *OEB* as participating in Mercian conciliar culture however can explain the position and treatment of the *libellus responsionum* as a deliberate shift proximate to the

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<sup>67</sup> Lapidge, 'Latin Exemplar', pp. 235-46.

<sup>68</sup> Lapidge, 'Latin Exemplar', pp. 235-46.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Rowley, *Old English Version*, p. 103.

<sup>70</sup> Molyneaux, 'English Ideology or Christian Instruction?', 1313. See also S. Rowley, 'Shifting Contexts: Reading Gregory the Great's *Libellus Responsionum* in Book III of the *Old English Bede*', in R. Bremmer *et al.*, eds, *Rome and the North: The Early Reception of Gregory the Great in Germanic Europe*, Mediaevalia Groningana 4 (Paris, 2001), pp. 83-92.



arrival of Theodore and the canons of the first councils he held because of similarities in content, and to highlight conciliar tradition and culture during the Mercian hegemony. As Andreas Lemke has noted, the Latin used in these documents and elsewhere in the *OEB* serves as a point of authority and emphasis.<sup>71</sup> The content of the *libellus responsionum* provides points of correspondence with the two proximate conciliar documents in the *OEB*, to which the Legatine Canons of 786 offers additional parallels.

The positioning of the *libellus responsionum* in the *OEB* draws attention to its similar content with nearby conciliar material. It is copied in between the end of Book III, in which Jaruman, fourth bishop of the Mercians, restores faith among the East Saxons, and the beginning of Book IV, which recounts the events leading up to the consecration of Theodore as Archbishop of Canterbury. This moves it closer to the canons of Hertford (OE IV.5) and Hatfield (OE IV.19). The council of Hatfield simply affirmed the English church's rejection of condemned heresies (*HE* IV.17). The canons of the council of Hertford are overwhelmingly concerned with ecclesiastical, especially episcopal, governance and regulation, along with matters which solidify Roman practice in Anglo-Saxon England, namely, the date of Easter and marriage practices. The Legatine Canons address a number of issues similar to those in these documents included in the *OEB*. The first chapter of the Legatine Canons reasserts the entire content of the Canons of Hatfield, emphasising the importance of upholding the Nicene Creed and the six universal synods. The fifth Legatine canon outlines the election of heads of monastic houses, both abbots and abbesses, building on from the third canon of Hertford: 'Se þridda is: þætte þa mynster, þa þe Gode gehalgode syn, nængum biscope alefed seo in ængum þingum þinge heo unstillan, ne owiht of heora eahtum þurh nednyme ongeneman' (*OEB* IV.5).<sup>72</sup> Of particular interest here is the provision

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<sup>71</sup> Lemke, pp. 221-2.

<sup>72</sup> 'The third is: that the monastery, which is consecrated to God, no bishop be permitted to disturb it in any matter of thing, nor seize through forcible taking anything of its possessions.'

for additional and regular synods and councils. As discussed above, canon seven of the Hertford council established the recommended annual ecclesiastical meeting at *Clofesho*. The Legatine canons repeat the need for a biannual meeting, the original intention of the Hertford canon, and further stipulate that bishops should visit throughout their diocese twice annually.<sup>73</sup> These are not exceptional recommendations, but similarities in content discussed above and the authoritative weight given to them suggest reading these documents in the *OEB* alongside the Legatine Canons, which may all derive from a similar political, historical and cultural context.

The *libellus responsionum* also addresses a number of concerns contemporary with the Legatine Canons and previously addressed in the canons of Hertford, some of which are marked with original quotations in the Latin. Lemke has conjectured that the retention of Latin is potential evidence of the intended audience, especially delivered aloud to minor clergy or high-ranking secular officials.<sup>74</sup> The Latin serves an authorizing role in the places where it remains in the *OEB*.<sup>75</sup> A significant proportion of these Latin quotations occur in Book IV of the *OEB* and as part of these documents. Three of the six occur in the *libellus responsionum*, and there are an additional two instances of Latin in the canons of Hatfield. Many have connections to Mercia, some more direct than others. In *OEB* III.14, an Irish *perigrinatus*, Fursey, recalls the angels singing Psalm 84:8 ‘*Ibunt de virtute in virtutem; videbitur Dominus Deorum in Sion*. Halige gongað of mægene in mægen; bið gesegen haligra God in wlite sceawunge.’<sup>76</sup> Fursey landed in Wales before founding a monastery in Suffolk;

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<sup>73</sup> Dümmler, *Epistolae Karolini Aevi* II, No. 3, pp 21-2.

<sup>74</sup> Lemke, pp. 221-2.

<sup>75</sup> Lemke addresses seven instances of Latin, pp. 221-2; though the council of Hatfield (occurs in *OEB* IV.19, not V.19), and there is an additional example in *OEB* I.24, the entry of Augustine onto Thanet, where the monks sing: ‘Deprecamur te, Domine, in omni misericordia tua ut auferatur furor tuus, et ira tua a ciuitate ista et domo sancta tuo quoniam peccauius.’

<sup>76</sup> ‘*Ibunt de virtute in virtutem; videbitur Dominus Deorum in Sion*. The holy go from strength to strength; Holy God is seen with a face in contemplation.’ Cf. Lat *Ibunt sancti de uirtute in uirtutem*, et iterum, ‘*Videbitur Deus deorum in Sion*. (III.19); ‘The saints shall go from strength to strength’ and again, ‘The God of gods shall be in Sion.’ (*HE* pp. 270-1). Cf. Lemke, pp. 214-5.

the most logical land-route there would have been through Mercia.<sup>77</sup> The account of Chad, who established the Mercian bishopric at Lichfield, quotes Ecclesiastes and Psalm 17:14-5 (*OEB* IV.3). The vision of the wicked Mercian thane of Coenred (*OEB* V.14) quotes Psalm 32:1.<sup>78</sup> Most of these are accompanied by a translation, though not all: the monks enter into Thanet under Augustine singing a Gregorian litany without translation (*OEB* I.17). Some of these instances seem to preserve aspects of Latinity in ecclesiastical culture, as in the singing of the litany, or in the preservation of documentary styles and the Latinity of conciliar culture, as in the canons of Hatfield. The remaining instances are all followed by translations into Old English. These Latin quotations in the conciliar documents and the *libellus responsionum* authorize stances on contemporary issues. The Latin *libellus* refers to or quotes Scripture twenty-five times; the OE translation quotes, translates directly or indirectly, or references only eleven of these, nine of which are direct quotations, seven of which quote the Latin accompanied by translation. These occur in three responses, regarding the conduct of the early church, the issue of consanguinity in marriage and female purity.

The first quotation, responding to the conduct of the church, uses scriptural citation to authorize the value of almsgiving, particularly to those who have adopted religious life:

Mid þy eall, þætte ofer bið to lafe on heora weoruldspedum, arfæstum 7 godum is to recenne and to sellenne, swa swa ealra magister Drihten Crist lærde 7 cwæð: *Quod est superest, date elmosynam et ecce omnia munda sunt vobis*: ðætte ofer seo 7 to lafe, sellað ælmesse, 7 eow beoð eal clæno. (*OEB* III.28).<sup>79</sup>

The value of almsgiving clearly factored in the translator's ideals of good Christian practice. He includes many examples of almsgiving from Bede's narrative: Aidan's gift of a sumptuous steed to a beggar (*HE* III.5, *OEB* III.3), Oswald's breaking of a silver plate into *sticmælum* ('little pieces') to give as alms to the poor at Easter (*HE* III.6, *OEB* III.4) and

<sup>77</sup> P. Fouracre, 'Fursa (d. 649)', *ODNB*. Missionaries were admitted in approximately 653; Fursey left Ireland for Wales in 638.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Lemke, pp. 217-8. See also above, p. 74.

<sup>79</sup> 'With all that, that which remains over of their worldly goods, is to be devoted and given to the pious and good, just as the master of all Lord Christ taught and said: *Quod est superest, date elmosynam et ecce omnia munda sunt vobis*: what is over and above, give as alms and all will be clean to you.'

Chad's reluctance to ride a horse (*HE* IV.3, *OEB* IV.3). The majority of these examples hail from the Irish tradition, thus marrying Roman directive to Irish practice. The interest in almsgiving also corresponds to contemporary documents. The 747 Council of Clofesho has a lengthy canon on the subject of almsgiving.<sup>80</sup> A letter of Boniface to king Æthelbald in 746/7 also commends the king for giving alms.<sup>81</sup> Lemke has connected the topic of almsgiving with exhortatory homilies and an Alfredian context. Almsgiving would have been of interest in all Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, though the collocation of documents concerning it around the eighth century suggests seeing the retention of this Latin quotation as a reflection of contemporary concerns. Reading the text of the *OEB* in a Mercian context, therefore, can explain this interest in almsgiving, as well as other minor textual adaptations, linguistic features, the style of the translation, and, as I hypothesize below, the transmission of the text.<sup>82</sup>

The next response which contains Latin in the *libellus responsionum* concerns consanguinity. While this was an issue of considerable relevance throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, if read in the context of eighth- and ninth-century Mercia, the inclusion of the lengthy response on consanguinity as a whole suggests the translator shaped his text to respond to contemporary political and ecclesiastical concerns, as well as hinting at the existence of a literate conciliar and clerical culture in Mercia. As Rowley notes, the omission of other papal letters shifts the focus of the conversion narrative such that women, marriage and kinship figure more prominently, making consanguinity a key concern in the *OEB*.<sup>83</sup> For example, consanguinity motivated Bishop Cedd's damning of the otherwise pious king of the East Saxons, Sigeberht, which now precedes the *libellus* by five chapters in the Old English

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<sup>80</sup> Cubitt, *Councils*, p. 101; Haddan and Stubbs, *Councils* III, pp. 371-2.

<sup>81</sup> Boniface, ed. Tangl, *Die Briefe*, No. 73, pp. 146-55. Trans. Whitelock, *EHD* I, No. 177, p. 871. On links between Boniface and the 747 Canons of Clofesho, see Cubitt, *Councils*, pp. 102-10. For more correspondences of this letter with other aspects of the *libellus*, see below, p. 203.

<sup>82</sup> Lemke, pp. 211-2.

<sup>83</sup> Rowley, *Old English Version*, pp. 114-23.

translation.<sup>84</sup> Its new location near the canons of Hertford also draws attention to canon 10, which states:

Seo teogoða is for gesinhigum: þætte nængum alefed sy nemne ælice gesincipes habban; ne ænige mæghæmed ne unclæne fremme, ne nænig his agen wif forlæte, swa þæt halig godspel læreð, for intingan dyrnre forlegenesse (*OEB* IV.5).<sup>85</sup>

Certain continental copies of the *HE* included an additional tract, *De consanguinitate*, to supplement Gregory's response.

Gregory's response regarding consanguinity cites Scripture three times in the Latin, and the adaptations of this material in the OE can be read in response to contemporary issues.

Two of the three citations appear in the *OEB*, quoted directly in the Latin and translated:

Hefig mánn is 7 godfre nis þæt mon hine menge mid his steopmodor, forðon in Godes æ is awriten: *Turpitudinem patris tui non revelabis*: Ne onwreoh þu scondlicnesse þines fæder. Ac forðon þe awriten is: *Erunt duo in carne una*: wer 7 wíif, heo tu beoð in anum lichoman, ono se ðe gedyrstigað onwreon þa sceondlicnesse his steopmeder, seo án mid his fæder wæs, hwæt se soðlice onwriið his fæder scondlicnesse. (*OEB* III.27)<sup>86</sup>

Here, the translator retains the authorizing scriptural citation in the Latin before translating it into Old English for his audience to understand. Addressing the issue, while part of the general, faithful style of the translation, also draws attention to the currency of the issue of consanguinity; the Latin, as Lemke has observed, draws additional attention to the issue.<sup>87</sup>

The Legatine Canons of 786 placed particular importance upon the issue of consanguinity, both in banning 'unjust marriages', especially incestuous and consanguineous, and in stipulating that anointed kings be the offspring of legitimate marriages.<sup>88</sup> Canon twelve,

<sup>84</sup> *OEB*, III.16; cf. Rowley, *Old English Version*, pp. 129-30; M. Clunies Ross, 'Concubinage in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Anglo-Saxon History: Basic Readings*, ed. D. Pelteret, Basic Readings in Anglo-Saxon England 6 (London, 2000), pp. 251-88, at 267; see also Hollis, *Women and the Church*, pp. 27-33.

<sup>85</sup> 'The tenth is about married persons: that none be permitted to have any but lawful marriage; nor to do any incest or defilement, nor any forsake his own wife, just as that holy gospel teaches, about matters of secret fornication.'

<sup>86</sup> 'It is a great sin and wickedness that a man combine with his stepmother, for it is written in God's law: *Turpitudinem patris tui non revelabis*: Do not reveal the shame of your father. But because it is written: *Erunt duo in carne una*: man and wife, they are two in one body, indeed he who dares to reveal the shamefulfulness of his stepmother, who was one with his father, lo he truly reveals the shame of his father.' p. 70.

<sup>87</sup> Clunies Ross, 'Concubinage', pp. 271-2; Lemke, pp. 221-2.

<sup>88</sup> Dümmler, ed., *Epistolae Karolini Aevi* II, pp. 18-29. c. 15, c. 12; Clunies Ross 'Concubinage'; Hollis, *Women and the Church*, pp. 27-33.

which stipulates that the king must be born of a legitimate union and upholds the king and ruler as sacred and inviolable, in particular responds to the political concerns of Offa, Cynewulf of Wessex and Ælfwald I of Northumbria (r. 779-88). Each of these kings had gained the throne amid dynastic strife which included the deposition and death of other reigning kings, and such assurances may have been set against the unrest of their own ascensions, though both Cynewulf and Ælfwald were later murdered.<sup>89</sup>

The translator prioritized making the text relevant to an audience informed by conciliar culture over the authority of his source. The translation omits the third scriptural citation, thereby equating speaking out against injustices committed by the rulers with ‘holy martyrdom’:

Pro qua re etiam Iohannes Baptista capite truncatus est et sancto matyrio consummatus, cui non est dictum ut Christum negaret, et pro Christi confessione occisus est; sed quia isdem Dominus noster Iesus Christus diexerat: ‘Ego sum ueritas’, quia pro ueritate Iohannes occisus est, uidelicet et pro Christo sanguinem fudit. (HE I.27).<sup>90</sup>

For þære wiisan eac swilce Iohannes se Baptista wæs heafde becorfen 7 halige martirdome his liif geendade, þa he þam cyninge sægde, þæt him alyfed nære þæt he his broðor wiif brohte 7 hæfde. (OEB, III.27).<sup>91</sup>

The translation’s simple evaluation of John’s death as *halige martirdome* shifts the focus away from the Latin’s justification of what martyrdom constitutes and refocuses the prohibition against consanguinity. Further, as John spoke out against a powerful political figure, it presents a situation in which impurity compromises the political leader’s authority. The Legatine Canons of 786 too stipulate that the church ought to address such issues:

<sup>89</sup> Dümmler, *Epistolae Karolini*, No. 123, 124, trans. E. Whitelock, *EHD* 2, No. 177 and 178, pp. 870-7.

<sup>90</sup> ‘For this reason also John the Baptist was beheaded and ended his life in on holy martyrdom. He was not bidden to deny Christ nor was he executed for his confession of Christ. But since our Lord Jesus Christ said, ‘I am the truth’, and John was killed for the sake of the truth, therefore he shed his blood for Christ.’ *HE* I.27, pp. 84-5.

<sup>91</sup> ‘For this reason so also John the Baptist was beheaded and ended his life in holy martyrdom, because he said to the king, that it was not permitted that he brought and had his brother’s wife.’ Miller, *Old English Version*, p. 70.

Si presules ecclesiarum silent propter timorem aut amicitiam secularem, peccantes non arguunt, ut pravi pastores non habentes curam de ovibus et videntes lupum fugiunt: cur magis non pertimescunt principem principum, regem regum, dominum dominatum?<sup>92</sup>

Though the responsibility of the church to advise sinners had been inherited from Old Testament prophets, many of whom are quoted in the canon, the reassertion of the idea in conjunction with the adaptation of the martyrdom of John the Baptist recalls similar interactions between Church and state in Anglo-Saxon England, as would be occasioned at major ecclesiastical councils. The simplification of the definition of holy martyrdom as *Ego sum veritas* in the Latin to speaking out against the king also incentivizes the church to speak out against secular wrong and provides additional injunctions against consanguinity, especially among the secular leaders.

Consanguinity continued to be relevant to later Anglo-Saxon audiences. Offa's celebrations of his marriage to Cynethryth may be a reaction to the conditions that prompted such notice in the Legatine canons and *libellus responsorum*. In Wessex, however, Judith of Flanders, the widow of Æthelwulf of Wessex, and her stepson, Æthelbald, married in 858 or 860.<sup>93</sup> An audience familiar with the *OEB* and or the Legatine canons would have been aware of the impropriety of such an act and the scriptural precedents prohibiting it. The linguistic features of the text, however, do not encourage a reading of the text in Wessex in this period. The Latin quotations in the Gregory's fifth response in the *OEB* appear to be addressing issues also of concern in contemporary documents, if read in the context of the eighth and ninth centuries.

The question of how the reproductive functions of the female body (menstruation, pregnancy, intercourse) impact purity and suitability for the reception of sacraments is the subject of the final response in which scriptural Latin accompanies the translation. Gregory's

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<sup>92</sup> Dümmler, *Epistolae Karolini Aevi* II, No. 3, pp. 21-2. 'If the bishops of the churches are silent because of fear or worldly friendship, and do not chastise sinners, like crooked shepherds not taking care of their sheep and seeing a wolf, they flee: why are they not more afraid of the Prince of princes, the King of kings, the Lord of lords?' Translation mine with assistance from Prof. Orchard.

<sup>93</sup> Asser notes the event with disapproval, see *King Alfred the Great*, ed. S. Keynes and M. Lapidge, p. 73.

lengthy response references scripture fifteen times. Twelve of these scriptural references reappear in the OE translation: seven of these are direct quotations, and in four the Latin appears alongside a translation. The response deals with a number of circumstances in which actions and conditions of women might compromise purity, and the related administration of sacraments.<sup>94</sup> Of course, these considerations remained relevant throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. Yet, as seen in Chapter 2, a number of texts in certain Tiberius group manuscripts have a notably female component and deal with similar issues. A subgroup of private devotional prayerbooks in Tiberius style, *The Book of Nunnaminster*, the *Harley Prayer Book* (Harley 7653) and the *Royal Prayer Book* all have prayers with feminine endings, indicating a potentially female author audience, in addition to other external factors which suggest potential female ownership or use.<sup>95</sup> Some texts of a specifically medical nature occur in the *Book of Nunnaminster*, such as the charm to stop bleeding, which is repeated three times and may relate to the Gospel passage concerning the woman with the flow of blood, Matthew 9:20-2 (f. 9r of *Nunnaminster*). Jennifer Morrish concluded that *Royal 2 A. xx* was possibly a physician's book, and even that of a female.<sup>96</sup> Gregory's response cites the same Gospel passage, concluding 'Hwæt wiifum heora monaðadle blodes flownes bið untrymnis.'<sup>97</sup> The retention of four quotations in Latin in this response and the feminine and often bodily content of these late eighth- or early ninth-century prayerbooks suggests they may have all derived from the same cultural context.

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<sup>94</sup> The ninth response deals with conditions of men which might compromise purity.

<sup>95</sup> *The Book of Cerne* (Cambridge, UL Ll. 1. 10), has one prayer with feminine endings but no other obvious signs of a female interest. Brown, *Book of Cerne*, pp. 137. 142, 151-3; Brown, 'Female Book-Ownership'; Morrish, 'Examination'.

<sup>96</sup> Brown, *Book of Cerne*, p. 152.

<sup>97</sup> 'Indeed the monthly flow of blood is an illness to women.' (III.28).



The four biblical quotations in this response are from Genesis, Psalms and two from 1 Corinthians. In the first, Gregory propounds that women be allowed in church after childbirth and may even be baptised whilst pregnant, if need be:

Bi ðon þære ærestan meder ealles moncynnedes wæs cweden: *In dolor paries*: In saare þu cennest bearn. Ono gif we beweriað þæt acennede wiif, þæt heo ne mot in circan gongan, hwæt we þonne þæt sar 7 wiite hire in synne tellað. (*OEB* III.28).<sup>98</sup>

The citation from Genesis 3:15 establishes that the pain of childbirth had never been a sin which needed cleansing.<sup>99</sup> In the final instance, Gregory responds to the question of whether a man may attend church after intercourse with his wife; the issue remains the capacity for contact with a woman to cause impurity:

Deah þe we þas þing cweðe, ne tellað we synne weosan gesinscipe; ac forðon seo alefde gemængnis wiifes buton willan þæs lichoman ne mæg beon, from ingonge þære halgan stow is to ahaabbenne, forðon se seolfa willa nænge þinga buton synne beon mæg. Ne wæs acenned of unrehthæmde ne þurh dyrne forlegnesse, ac acenned wæs of ælicum gesinscipe, se ðe cwæð: *Ecce enim in iniquitatibus conceptus sum et in delictis peperit me mater mei*: ic wat þæt ic wæs in wænnessum geeacnod 7 in scyldum mec cende min modor. (*OEB* III.28).<sup>100</sup>

As Gregory explains, intention rather than the contact with woman causes impurity, a position he repeats concerning male pollution in the next response. The speaker of the scriptural citation, David, confirms that he has original sin because his father desired his mother. The scriptural citation provides authority in clarifying the causes of impurity.<sup>101</sup>

The set of Latin quotations from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 7, clarifies the roots of impurity in sexual contact. The appearances of this particular verse in two Mercian documents of the eighth century also suggests that it was also well-known by

<sup>98</sup> 'About that the first mother of all mankind was told: *In dolor paries*: In pain will you bear children. If we restrain the woman who has given birth, that she may not go into church, indeed we then count that her pain and torment is a sin.'

<sup>99</sup> Lemke does not note this quotation in his discussion of this response, pp. 213-5.

<sup>100</sup> 'Though we say these things, we do not reckon marriage to be a sin; but because the union with a wife may not be permitted without the desire of the body, he is to abstain from going into the holy place, because he could not do any sin without his own will. Nor was he born of adultery, but he was born of lawful wedlock, he who said: *Ecce enim in iniquitatibus conceptus sum et in delictis peperit me mater mei*: I know that I was conceived in iniquity, and in sin my mother bore me.'

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Lemke, pp. 214-5.

secular audiences, which may explain the quotation of the Latin in the *OEB*. The passage reads:

Forðon se Sanctus Paulus mid ðy cwæð, *Qui se continere non potest, habeat uxorem suam*, se ðe hine ahabban mæg, hæbbe his wiif, he ða sona se apostol underðeodde 7 æfter cwæð: *Hoc autem dico secundum indulgentiam, non secundum imperium* ðis ic cweðo æfter forgifnesse, nales æfter bebodo. (*OEB* III.28).<sup>102</sup>

The Latin clarifies that marriage is a remedy against fornication, but does not order intercourse within marriage. The first quotation, however, appears in two other instances linked to eighth-century Mercia.

According to the *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici* database, 1 Cor. 7:2 is quoted or referenced in four Anglo-Saxon works; two of these post-date the *OEB*.<sup>103</sup> Earlier references have clear early, Mercian contexts; one a direct quotation, and one is an indirect reference, which occur in a pair of letters from the Anglo-Saxon missionary, Boniface (d. 754), concerning the conduct of the Mercian king, Æthelbald (d.757). The first, dated 746/747, sends well-wishes but expresses shock at rumours of the king's sins:

Sed inter haec una malę aestimationis fama de vita pietatis vestrae ad auditum nostrum pervenit, qua audita contristi sumus, et illam optamus non fuisse veram. Multis enim narrantibus conpertum est nobis, quod numquam legitimam in matrimonium uxorem duxisses. Quod a domino Deo ab ipso mundi primordio constitutum est, quod etiam per apostolum Dei Paulum praeceptum et iteratum est docentem atque dicentem: 'Propter fornicationem autem unusquisque suam uxorem habeat et unaquęque virum suum.'<sup>104</sup>

<sup>102</sup> 'For when the apostle Saint Paul says, *Qui se continere non potest, habeat uxorem suam*, he who cannot restrain himself, let him have his wife, the apostle immediately subordinated it and said: *Hoc autem dico secundum indulgentiam, non secundum imperium*, but this I say by permission, and not as commandment.'

<sup>103</sup> *Homilies of Ælfric: a Supplementary Collection, Being Twenty-One Full Homilies of his Middle Career for the Most Part not Previously Edited with some Shorter Pieces Mainly Passages Added to the Second and Third Series*, ed. J. C. Pope, 2 vols, EETS OS 259 and 260 (London, 1967-8), II, ll. 90-4. *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici*, Fontes Anglo-Saxonici Project, University of Oxford. The second occurs in Alfred's translation of another Gregorian work, the *Pastoral Care*, as part of the source's antecedent.

<sup>104</sup> 'But among these things there has reached our ears a report of an evil kind concerning your Excellency's way of life, and we were greatly grieved when we heard it. And we may wish that it were not true. For it has been disclosed to us from the account of many persons that you have never taken in matrimony a lawful wife. This was ordained by the Lord God from the very beginning of the world, as is also enjoined and repeated by Paul, God's Apostle, who teaches and says: "But for fear of fornication, let every man have his own wife; and let every woman have her own husband."' Boniface, ed. Tangl, *Die Briefe*, No. 73, pp. 146-55, at 148. Trans. Whitelock, *EHD* I, No. 177, pp. 870-6, at 871.

Boniface recommends a wife to Æthelbald to avoid fornication, but to his priest, Herefrith, who is tasked with delivering the above letter, he explains the shame this king causes his people:

Obprobrium namque generis nostri patimur sive a christianis sive a paganis dicentibus, quod gens Anglorum spreto more ceterarum gentium et despecto apostolico praecepto, immo Dei constitutione legitimis uxores dedignentur habere et hinnientium equorum consuetudine vel rudentum asinorum more luxuriando et adulterando omnia turpiter fedet et confundat.<sup>105</sup>

Boniface, as a missionary, identified with the Apostle Paul, and refers to Paul twenty-two times in his correspondence, quoting him ninety-six times in his own epistles.<sup>106</sup> Whilst no one time or region can claim exclusive interest in a passage from scripture, these instances of 1 Cor. 7:2 suggest at least some enhanced recognition of the line in Mercian culture in this time.

The final location where 1 Cor. 7:2 appears is in the Legatine Canons, in canon sixteen, which disinherits children from illegitimate unions.<sup>107</sup> Alongside canon twelve, which outlines the ordination and sanctity of kings, these reflect stricter adherence to church teaching on marriage and its political implications. Yet they may also reflect the situation in Mercia caused by Æthelbald's bachelorhood, in which stringent regulations and placing church teaching and law above secular tradition benefitted the ruling dynasty. If the reports that reached Boniface were true, Æthelbald may have fathered sons by nuns, possibly of royal descent, to challenge the succession of Ecgrith at Offa's death.<sup>108</sup> Given the likely role of Cynethryth in Offa's advancement to the Mercian throne, an ætheling descended from both Æthelbald and Penda would have posed a serious threat to Offa's dynastic ambitions. The

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<sup>105</sup> 'We suffer, indeed, the reproach of our race both by Christians and by pagans, who say that the race of the English, spurning the custom of other nations and despising the apostolic command, nay, more, the ordinance of God, refuses to have lawful wives, and following the practice of neighing horses and the manner of braying asses, by wanton living and adultery wickedly brings everything to disgrace and confusion.' Boniface, ed. Tangl, *Die Briefe*, No. 74, pp. 155-6, at 155. Trans Whitelock, *EHD* I, No. 178, pp. 876-7, at 876.

<sup>106</sup> V. Heuchan, 'All Things to All Men: Representations of the Apostle Paul in Anglo-Saxon Literature' (unpubl. PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2012), pp. 23, 28.

<sup>107</sup> This does not appear in the *Fontes* database. Dümmler, *Epistolae Karolini Aevi* II, No. 3, p. 25. Trans. *EHD* I, p. 894.

<sup>108</sup> Yorke, *Nunneries*, pp. 53-57, 63, 154-5, 190.

address to the illegitimacy of heirs in the Legatine Canons, quoting 1 Cor. 7:2, in the same way as did Boniface and the *libellus responsionum*, can be read as a reaction to a political anxiety unparalleled in the other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, and which touched ecclesiastical, conciliar and courtly culture in the Mercian hegemony.

### Conclusion

Reading the *OEB* as the work of a Mercian translator, who operated in clerical culture involved with the production of documents and translations, offers a simple yet productively explanatory theory for a number of its features. At its simplest, it explains the Anglian, and in particular Mercian, linguistic features, which underlie all surviving manuscripts, as well as small shifts in perspective and focus, such as the identities of the Anglian tribes, the emphasis on hagiography, and the retention of conciliar documents with contemporary resonances. As we have seen, major councils were held in Mercia and attended by the Mercian king, and during at least one of these a translation was produced orally before the court. The translation of the *OEB* might be seen to fit well in the context of eighth-century and ninth-century Mercia; as I shall explore below, this hypothetical context also offers a plausible explanation for the transmission of the text to its two earliest, surviving West-Saxon manuscripts.

### *Transmission*

In the mid-ninth century, the balance of power in Anglo-Saxon England shifted from Mercia to Wessex, as did the majority of the production of manuscripts and literature.<sup>109</sup> The presence of Mercian scholars in Alfred's court combined with the intermarriage of the ruler of independent Mercia with Alfred's daughter, Æthelflæd, fostered political and cultural cooperation between the kingdoms with the result that texts, styles, scribes and scholars were

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<sup>109</sup> S. Keynes, 'Mercia and Wessex in the Ninth Century', in Brown and Farr (2001), pp. 310-28. For discussion of Wiglaf see above, p. 79, and below, p. 267.

imported into Wessex. S 367, an early tenth-century charter renewing a grant of land on the border between Mercia and Wessex, encapsulates this complex cultural and political transition. It replaces an original charter destroyed in a fire, to Æthelgith from her father, Æthelwulf, at the request of her husband, Æthelfrith, the ealdorman of southern and eastern Mercia.<sup>110</sup> The reissue does not recount the details of the original gift beyond the substance of the land in question and the occasion for the reissue. Its witnesses celebrate the affiliation of Mercia to Wessex: Edward the Elder witnesses first, followed by Lord Æthelred and his wife, Lady Æthelflæd, daughter of Alfred and sister of Edward, and their daughter and presumptive heir of Mercia, Ælfwynn; Plegmund, the Mercian archbishop of Canterbury and scholar at Alfred's court, and the bishops of Lichfield, Dorchester, and Rochester (all in Mercian territory), and Selsey next; finally Edward's brothers Osfrith and Æthelweard; at least one minister of Mercia, Eadnoth; and an abbot who was a kinsman of Wærferth, Cynehelm.<sup>111</sup> The individuals involved constitute a microcosm of the relationships that might be seen underlie the transmission of the *OEB*, if we accept the hypothesis that the text is a late eighth- or early ninth-century Mercian work.<sup>112</sup> The charter uses Edward's regnal years, and Edward witnesses first, covering the original Mercian document in a West Saxon veneer. Yet the reference to *omnes etiam senatores Merciorum* suggests that the land and individuals concerned were principally Mercian. The *OEB*, if read as a Mercian translation as we do here, can be seen undergoing a transmission similar to that of S 367, in which subtle changes underlie its transmission into the West Saxon manuscripts in which it survives today.

Tracing the provenance of a lost manuscript, such as that of the original translation of the *OEB*, is of course a matter of speculation; hypothesizing the characteristics and provenance of a known manuscript is equally problematic. Nevertheless, Christine Wallis has

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<sup>110</sup> S 367; PASE, 'Æthelgyth 1', 'Æthelwulf 30', 'Æthelfrith 3'.

<sup>111</sup> S 367; C. Hart, 'Æthelstan (fl. 932-56)', *ODNB*; PASE 'Eadnoth 2' and 'Cynehelm 9'.

<sup>112</sup> Wallis, 'The Old English Bede', p. 206; Whitelock, 'Old English Bede', p. 247.

identified several features of the original translation from a comparative study on the five textual witnesses of the *OEB*, such as the Mercian pronouns *ussa*, *mec*, *ðec* and *eowic*, the conjunction *nemne* ('unless, except'), as opposed to West Saxon *nefne*, and geminate vowels, which tend to be a characteristic of 'earlier' works.<sup>113</sup> Lapidge has conclusively demonstrated that the translator worked with a Canterbury recension of Bede's *Historia* which corrected readings in the *libellus responsionum* and other inaccuracies in Bede's sources.<sup>114</sup> In this section I offer a hypothetical narrative of the *OEB*'s transmission to its two earliest manuscript attestations, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Tanner 10, and London, British Library, Cotton Domitian A ix f. 11r. In so doing, I propose that the main hand of Tanner 10, T1, operated in a textual community that was stylistically influenced by Mercian styles of script and Tiberius style illumination. I then gesture to similar developments in the pre-Reform style of illumination known as early Winchester style, which may present a wider case for the influence of Mercian culture in Wessex before the tenth-century Benedictine reforms. Thus, like the hybridized dialect of the surviving manuscripts of the *OEB*, Mercian illuminations and script may lie beneath the early Winchester style of Tanner 10; just as Mercian original translations have been obscured by the Alfredian narrative and orthographic practices of copying scribes, Mercian Tiberius style may have influenced early Winchester style.

### Manuscripts

The two earliest manuscript attestations of the *OEB* are Tanner 10 and the Domitian fragment.<sup>115</sup> Arguably the fragment is the earlier of the two, dated to the end of the ninth

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<sup>113</sup> Miller, *Old English Version*, pp. xxiii-xxxii; for a full table, see Wallis 'The Old English Bede', pp. 203-4; See Waite and Rowley, *The Old English Bede* (forthcoming).

<sup>114</sup> Lapidge 'Latin Exemplar', pp. 235-46.

<sup>115</sup> London, British Library, Cotton Otho B.xi (Gneuss and Lapidge No. 357, Ker No. 180), dated from the middle of the tenth century but was badly burnt in the fire at Ashburnham House; Laurence Nowell made a transcript of it in 1562 which is of some utility but not completely reliable; see R. Grant, 'Laurence Nowell's Transcript of BM Cotton Otho B.xi', *ASE* 3 (1974), 111-24.; Wallis, 'The Old English Bede', pp. 19-20; Waite, 'Vocabulary' §1.1.

century and possibly of London origin.<sup>116</sup> It contains extracts from non-consecutive chapters of the *OEB*, marked with four decorated initials, which has led Bately to conclude that ‘the leaf once formed part of a document which was not of inconsiderable stature. That the verso was originally blank suggests that the Bede excerpts finished at this point.’<sup>117</sup> Rowley further observes ‘the fact that the *OEHE* was being excerpted by the late-ninth or early-tenth century may suggest that the text was in circulation and already of some importance.’<sup>118</sup> Richard Gameson assesses that its initials are ‘straightforward reiterations of earlier Insular work.’<sup>119</sup> Later in this discussion I will refine Gameson’s argument by comparing the script and initials of the Domitian fragment with examples from the Tiberius group of manuscripts, which this excerpt may reproduce or emulate.

Tanner 10 is generally dated to the beginning of the tenth century, and Gameson further restricts this to the period of 899-924.<sup>120</sup> Its Anglo-Saxon provenance is unknown, but it was certainly at Thorney by the fourteenth century.<sup>121</sup> It lacks the beginning through *HE* I. 16 and the end from *HE* IV.14.<sup>122</sup> Voth has discussed Tanner 10 as ‘a picture not only of script acquisition in the early decades of the tenth century, but also of the actual number and skill set of scribes one might find in nascent scriptoria.’<sup>123</sup> Wallis, Rowley, Miller and Waite all identify it as the ‘best’ text of the *OEB*.<sup>124</sup> The hand of the main scribe, identified as ‘T1’ has been classified as Dumville’s fourth reformed Insular minuscule.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Bately, *Tanner*, p. 37; R. Gameson, ‘The Decoration of the Tanner Bede’, *ASE* 21 (1992), 115-59, at 118-9.

<sup>117</sup> Bately, *Tanner*, p. 37.

<sup>118</sup> Rowley, *Old English Version*, p. 16.

<sup>119</sup> R. Gameson, *The Role of Art in the Late Anglo-Saxon Church* (Oxford, 1995), p. 183.

<sup>120</sup> Gameson, ‘Tanner’, 115, 130.

<sup>121</sup> Rowley, *Old English Version*, p. 20.

<sup>122</sup> Miller, *Old English Version*, pp. xiii.

<sup>123</sup> Voth, p. 77.

<sup>124</sup> Miller, *Old English Version*, p. xxii; Waite, ‘Glosses’ 3, fn. 3; S. Rowley, ‘Nostalgia and the Rhetoric of Lack: the Missing OE Exemplar for Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 41’, in *Old English Literature in its Manuscript Context*, ed. J. Lionarons (Morgantown, WV, 2004), pp. 11-35; Wallis, ‘The Old English Bede’, pp. 4-5.

<sup>125</sup> Bately, p. 17. Ker describes it as ‘an admirable hand’ and Gameson as ‘a reformed Insular minuscule’, ‘Tanner’ 129.

Michelle Brown identified the hand of T1 as the closest parallel bookhand for a prayer added to f. 40r of the Book of Cerne (Cambridge, University Library MS Ll. 1. 10), a deluxe Tiberius group manuscript of the ninth century, probably produced in Mercia or in the Mercian *schriftprovinz*.<sup>126</sup> She describes the hand of the prayer as ‘a heavy, rounded version of pointed minuscule which is reminiscent of that found in the Tiberius group, but which has relinquished most of the stylistic affectations of this script.’<sup>127</sup> Brown further observes: ‘This annotating hand finds its closest parallel in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Tanner 10, which also exhibits influence in script and decoration from a source very similar in style to Cerne.’<sup>128</sup> Voth discusses other hands and manuscripts decorated in similar styles to those that Brown identifies in relation to the development of English square minuscule.<sup>129</sup>

Below, I offer a discussion of Tiberius style in relation to Mercian visual and literate culture. I then trace the current account of the development of early Winchester style, before offering my own observations based on Brown’s identified parallels. I suggest that many of the stylistic features of early Winchester style may be reasonably explained by contact with Mercian scribes, artists, manuscripts and works of illumination in the culture of transmission between Mercia and Wessex in the late ninth and tenth centuries. We may then be able to hypothesize the transmission of the *OEB* from Bede’s *HE* at Wearmouth-Jarrow, via a corrected Canterbury recension, to the Old English translation influenced by eighth- and ninth-century Mercian culture, and finally tracking its adaptation in dialect, script and illumination to the early West Saxon copies in which it survives today.

As discussed above, the Tiberius Group is a group of eighth- and ninth-century Southumbrian manuscripts with distinctive script and style of illumination.<sup>130</sup> It is named for

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<sup>126</sup> Brown, *Book of Cerne*, p. 180. On the *schriftprovinz*, see pp. 164-8.

<sup>127</sup> Brown, *Book of Cerne*, p. 180.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Voth, pp. 48-111.

<sup>130</sup> For a summary, see Brown, ‘The “Tiberius” Group’.



a manuscript of the *HE*, London, British Library Cotton Tiberius C.ii (Gneuss and Lapidge No. 377, Ker No. 198), the earliest manuscript to descend from Lapidge's  $\kappa$ , which includes glosses which seem to derive from contact with the *OEB* at some point.<sup>131</sup> These manuscripts of the eighth and ninth centuries are thought to have been made either in Mercia or Mercian-dominated Kent, part of the Mercian *schrifprovinz*.<sup>132</sup> They include works such as the *Vespasian Psalter*, which has a ninth-century Mercian gloss,<sup>133</sup> the *Barberini Gospels* (Rome, Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Barberini Lat. 570; Gneuss and Lapidge No. 907), the *Royal Prayer Book*, the *Book of Nunnaminster*, the *Harley Prayerbook*, the *Royal Bible* (British Library, Royal Manuscript 1. E. vi), the *Stockholm Codex Aureus* (Stockholm, National Library of Sweden, Manuscript A. 135; Gneuss and Lapidge No. 837, Ker No. 385), the *Book of Cerne* and others. These manuscripts are characterized by Trewhiddle style, with zoomorphic and foliate motives, and share many parallels with contemporary sculpture and metalwork. Based on the script and style of decoration in the two earliest manuscript attestations of the *OEB*, I suggest that the original translator may have accessed his source in a Latin manuscript decorated in Tiberius style, a hypothesis which follows naturally from the reading of the text earlier in this chapter.

Tiberius style is a natural and fluid development from Insular styles of illumination, amplified in certain directions and infused with other continental influences and originating in Southumbria during the eighth and ninth centuries. Michelle Brown identifies the most characteristic elements of its decorative repertoire as 'biting beast heads used to terminate letter-strokes and to link them to other letters, the crouching-profile beasts and the chain

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<sup>131</sup> Lapidge, 'Latin Exemplar, Waite, 'Glosses', 3-4, 11-15, 30-1.

<sup>132</sup> Brown, *Book of Cerne*, pp. 17, 164-8. Brown, 'Mercian Manuscripts: the Implications of the Staffordshire Hoard, other Recent Discoveries, and the "New Materiality"', Inaugural Lecture to the Chair of Medieval Manuscript Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London, 22 June 2010, in E. Kwakkel, ed., *Insular Written Culture*, 450-1150 (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2013), pp. 23-66, at 23-31.

<sup>133</sup> Wright, *Vespasian Psalter*; P. Pulsiano, 'The Originality of the Old English Gloss of the Vespasian Psalter and its Relation to the Gloss of the Junius Psalter', *ASE* 25 (1996), 37-62.

interlace (with zoomorphic terminal) [...] outlining in red dots [...] and the grotesque figures and heads.’<sup>134</sup> As Brown acknowledges, beasts and beast heads feature regularly in many forms of Insular art of the seventh and eighth centuries, produced at centres such as Armagh, Canterbury and Lindisfarne, and continued to adorn later manuscripts in early Winchester style, such as Royal 5 F.iii (a manuscript of Aldhelm’s *De Virginitate* likely from Worcester, Gneuss and Lapidge No. 462, Ker No. 253), the Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 20, Old English translation of Gregory’s *Pastoral Care* (Gneuss and Lapidge No. 626, Ker No. 324), the Tanner Bede (Oxford, Bodleian Library Tanner 10: Gneuss and Lapidge No. 668, Ker No. 351) and the Durham Ritual (Durham Cathedral Library A.IV.19; Gneuss and Lapidge No. 223, Ker No. 106). These beast heads seem to have migrated from characteristic Insular interlace (for example, Lindisfarne Gospels) and the La Teine style of ornamentation before developing into robust elements of display script, initials and as fully corporeal line markers, as in the Book of Cerne, which indicate line run-ons (for example, f. 91v), or the dogs and other biting beasts which populate the margins in the Durham Ritual (ff. 4r, 15v). Whilst animals and figures inhabit and form part of the initials in Insular decoration, this style of ornament becomes more prevalent in Tiberius Style and, as I will suggest below, evolves into the more full figures of early Winchester style, particularly those in the Tanner Bede.

Though few of the manuscripts of the Tiberius group can be localized with any certainty, the works are all characterized as Southumbrian and date to the eighth and ninth centuries, which is coeval with the Mercian hegemony. Similarities beyond script and illumination of the Tiberius group link it with Mercian works and culture in this period. For example, as explored in the previous chapter, the works of the poet Cynewulf are informed by a culture in which female audiences and queens were particularly powerful. The Tiberius group includes three prayerbooks with female association: the Royal Prayerbook, and the

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<sup>134</sup> Brown, ‘Paris’, 135.

Book of Nunnaminster, donated to that establishment by its foundress, the Mercian noblewoman and wife of King Alfred, Ealhswith.<sup>135</sup> Furthermore, the display script in several Tiberius group manuscripts, particularly Harley 7653, Harley 2965 and Royal 2. A. xx, closely parallel the script of charters of King Offa, especially those of the 790s (i.e., S 139 and 106).<sup>136</sup> The script employed in many of the Tiberius group manuscripts developed from the period of charter production during the Mercian hegemony.<sup>137</sup> Indeed, the number of authentic charters produced at the sites of synodal meeting places during the Mercian hegemony, especially Clovesho and Chelsea, may be the remnants of a practice of drawing up charters during these meetings which brought together the leading men and members of the clergy from across the island.<sup>138</sup> Other manuscripts, such as Paris, B.N., lat. 10861, which contains a version of the *passio S. Iulianae* similar to the source for Cynewulf's *Juliana*, is a Canterbury production executed in a mannered minuscule similar to that found in charters associated with the archiepiscopacy of Wulfred, the Mercian Archbishop of Canterbury in the first half of the ninth century.<sup>139</sup> Other notable members of the Tiberius group have demonstrable Mercian links. The Vespasian Psalter and the Royal Prayer Book are glossed in a Mercian dialect.<sup>140</sup> Michelle Brown considers the Book of Cerne to be a product of Worcester or perhaps Lichfield from the first half of the ninth century.<sup>141</sup>

Distinctive script in the Tiberius group also links the style to Mercia, and its influence can be seen in the work of the principal hand of the Tanner Bede, T1. Like the charters of Offa, Ecgrith and Archbishop Wulfred, many Tiberius group manuscripts are written in an exuberant but elevated minuscule which Michelle Brown has usefully termed 'mannered

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<sup>135</sup> Brown, 'The "Tiberius" Group', p. 288.

<sup>136</sup> Brown, *Book of Cerne*, pp. 115-28.

<sup>137</sup> Brown, 'The "Tiberius" Group', pp. 279-80.

<sup>138</sup> See especially S 90 123, 125, 128, 131, 134, 137, 139, 150, 151 and 158.

<sup>139</sup> Brown, 'Paris'; Brown, 'The "Tiberius" Group', pp. 281-2.

<sup>140</sup> Sisam, 'Cynewulf', p. 4; Sisam, 'Dialect Origins', p. 120.

<sup>141</sup> Brown, 'The "Tiberius" Group', p. 282; Brown, *Book of Cerne*, pp. 179, 182.

minuscule.<sup>142</sup> A mixture of majuscule forms can be found in the ‘mannered minuscule’ of Tiberius style manuscripts and charters of Wulfred’s archiepiscopacy, as well as later manuscripts. Indeed, the script of the Book of Cerne displays certain parallels with that of Cotton Augustus II. 61, a copy of the 803 Synod of Clofesho, and that of the prayer added to f.40r of the Book of Cerne. Despite the differences in scale, one can see the angular, well-executed, Southumbrian pointed minuscule gradually smoothing and eventually approximating the hand of T1. The development of a high-status, calligraphic script in the Tiberius group manuscripts and related charters establishes a pattern and precedent of Irish and continentally influenced script.

Though Tiberius style is predominantly an Insular style, it also incorporates identifiable elements of Continental, and, in particular, Oriental art present in Mercia between the eighth and tenth centuries.<sup>143</sup> The Vespasian Psalter, a cornerstone of Tiberius style, was probably made at St Augustine’s, Canterbury, in the second half of the eighth century, and its illustrations are probably based upon a Greek exemplar or Oriental textiles.<sup>144</sup> Elements of its script parallel an endorsement on a charter of Æthelbald of Mercia (S 86), which reveal a confluence between Oriental culture and the work of Mercian scribes.<sup>145</sup> Like the Book of Cerne, whose masks also parallel Continental and Oriental exemplars, such influences may have been mediated by Carolingian manuscripts and sources; however, similar motifs in the corpus of eighth- and ninth-century Mercian sculpture may derive from Mediterranean or Byzantine ‘overtones’.<sup>146</sup> The ornament in these manuscripts also reveals potential inspiration from Carolingian, Irish, and Merovingian manuscripts, late Antique, Mediterranean and other

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<sup>142</sup> Brown, ‘Mercian Manuscripts’, pp. 5-6.

<sup>143</sup> Brown, ‘Mercian Manuscripts’, pp. 4-5.

<sup>144</sup> Wright, *Vespasian Psalter*, pp. 79-80. Wright prefers the manuscript to have been created in the 720s; the episcopacy of Tatwine (c. 731-4), a Mercian from Breedon, might be a preferable period during which the style of the Vespasian Psalter may have influenced members of the Tiberius group.

<sup>145</sup> Wright, *Vespasian Psalter*, p. 56.

<sup>146</sup> Wilson, *Art*, p. 85. Cramp, ‘Schools’, pp. 191-233; L. Webster, ‘Metalwork and the Mercian Supremacy’, in Brown and Farr (2001), pp. 263-77; Jewell, ‘Classicism’, pp. 247-8; on two eighth-century Insular, probably Mercian, scribes working at St Catherine’s, Sinai, see Brown, ‘Imagining’, pp. 38-9.

eastern sources, as well as contemporary sculpture and metalwork. This includes a distinctive kind of beast, inherited and stylized from the Lindisfarne and Durham Gospels, through to the Stockholm Codex Aureus and Barberini Gospels, and which may be compared to the beasts on the ninth-century friezes at Breedon-on-the-Hill, Leicestershire, an important Mercian church, and to the Book of Cerne.<sup>147</sup> As discussed above in the Introduction, Orientalism pervaded Mercian visual and literate culture in this period. Connections between the West Saxon and Mercian dynasties and the Carolingians may have aided the transmission of Oriental sources and influences.<sup>148</sup> However, the intensity of such Oriental themes in the art, sculpture, illumination, coinage and literature of Mercia during this period make it possible, and indeed likely, that later styles may have accessed these influences via the Tiberius style and Mercian artefacts of the eighth and ninth centuries.<sup>149</sup>

Scribes and artists in Anglo-Saxon England often relied upon their exemplars to produce the decorated initials and miniatures of their texts, and in some cases even imitated the outdated script of the text they were copying.<sup>150</sup> In the hypothetical narrative I propose, the centre responsible for the *OEB* included similar ornamentation in the translation as found in the manuscript of its source.<sup>151</sup> Francis Wormald, who authored much of the seminal scholarship, identified a number of individual manuscripts which he felt influenced or anticipated developments in early Winchester style. Several of these manuscripts are now

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<sup>147</sup> Brown, *Book of Cerne* p. 116; 'Imagining', pp. 24-5.

<sup>148</sup> For example, Trewhiddle Style, which is most often associated with the reign of Æthelwulf of Wessex (839-58), has many figures which appear to have been imported from Mercian styles. See Webster, 'Metalwork of the Mercian Supremacy', pp. 274-7. The mixture of West Saxon and Mercian traditions of figural representation can also be seen in the Wolverhampton Column, a tenth-century column in the Mercian Heartlands but displaying characteristic Winchester Style; see Jewell, 'Classicism', p. 262; Story, *Connections*, p. 170.

<sup>149</sup> Jewell, 'Classicism', p. 262, comments: 'the Classicism of Southumbrian sculpture parallels and is coeval with – but is rarely dependent on – the Carolingian Renaissance; often using the same fifth- to sixth-century source material, although evincing a greater interest in East Christian decorative art, and always eschewing acanthus in favour of Syrian-derived plant scrolls.'

<sup>150</sup> Gameson, *Role of Art*, pp. 14, 232; Bately, *Tanner*, p. 39, discussing Cotton Otho B. ii. See also Gameson, 'Tanner', pp. 118-20, p. 121 fn. 28, and p. 158, fn. 197; Voth, p. 126; M. Benskin and M. Laing, 'Translations and Mischsprachen in Middle English Manuscripts', in *So Meny People Longages and Tonges: Philological Essays in Scots and Mediaeval English Presented to Angus McIntosh*, ed. M. Benskin and M. L. Samuels (Edinburgh, 1981), pp. 55-106.

<sup>151</sup> On scribal adaptations in the Old English Bede, see Wallis, 'The Old English Bede'.

identified as members of the Tiberius group, and in this section I develop further parallels between early Winchester and Tiberius style. In conjunction with reading the *OEB* as a Mercian translation, considering the exemplar from which the two earliest manuscripts of the text derived as possibly also a Tiberius style manuscript may explain their decorative features, identify some sources of early Winchester style, as well as to explain the transmission of the text to the early West Saxon copies in which it survives today. As a whole, the theory of Mercian provenance advanced here offers the simplest and most complete narrative of the origins of the *OEB* to date.

Winchester style is most commonly associated with the tenth-century Benedictine reform movement. Although influenced by Insular ornament, it relies heavily on Carolingian imports, most demonstrably in the integration of Caroline minuscule into the Anglo-Saxon minuscules, and in the widespread adoption of Carolingian acanthus ornament.<sup>152</sup> The influence of Carolingian manuscripts can be seen in the *Benedictional of St Æthelwold* (BL London, MS Additional 49598, Gneuss and Lapidge No. 301) and the *Charter of the New Minster* (BL Cotton Vespasian A. viii, Gneuss and Lapidge No. 382), two manuscripts considered characteristic of Winchester style.<sup>153</sup> Winchester was the centre of production for many of the manuscripts and seat of the influential St Æthelwold, who promoted the reform and its accompanying style. This style was previously thought to have developed exclusively at Winchester, just as the ‘Court Style of Charlemagne’ had flourished at Rheims; however, scholars now recognize that several reformed monasteries produced manuscripts in the Winchester style, including Christ Church and St Augustine’s, Canterbury, Thorney,

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<sup>152</sup> F. Wormald, ‘Decorated Initials in English MSS. from A.D. 900 to 1100’, *Archaeologia* 91 (1945), 107-135, at 107, 109, 115; F. Wormald, ed., *The Benedictional of St Æthelwold*, Faber Library of Illuminated Manuscripts (London, 1959), p. 12; ‘The Winchester School before St Æthelwold’, in *England Before the Conquest: Studies Presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, ed. P. Clemoes and K. Hughes (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 305-13, at 309; M. Archibald, J. Backhouse, D. H. Turner and L. Webster, eds, *The Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon Art, 966-1066* (London, 1984), p. 19.

<sup>153</sup> Wilson, *Art*, p. 156.

Glastonbury and others. Because of the uniformity of practice at these centres, unless a manuscript of Winchester style has other means of identifying its provenance, it is impossible to assign its place of origin on stylistic grounds alone.<sup>154</sup>

The earliest surviving manuscripts of the *OEB* belong to the pre-Reform stage of Anglo-Saxon manuscript production. This early Winchester style may be contemporary with Alfred's late ninth-century cultural renaissance, the manuscripts of which stylistically rely heavily on the ornament of Tiberius style manuscripts.<sup>155</sup> The major distinctions between the products of Alfred's renaissance and earlier works are the introduction of and preference for Caroline minuscule, and the expanded scale of manuscript production. Continental influences were themselves not new in Anglo-Saxon England in Alfred's time: the Frankish royal court had been influential since Æthelberht married Bertha before the arrival of Augustine, and the influence of manuscripts from the Carolingian court school increased substantially during the Benedictine Reform. For Insular traditions, however, early Winchester style likely turned to local, Southumbrian manuscripts produced in the past century, likely to be decorated, as we have seen, in Tiberius style.

Francis Wormald defined the main elements of early Winchester style as 'small animal heads which grip onto the various parts of the letters, and bunches of foliage forming the finials.'<sup>156</sup> He identified three groups of cultural artifacts originating in Winchester before the Benedictine Reform with shared stylistic elements: a fragment of a wall painting reused in the foundations of the New Minster, Winchester, which therefore predates 903; the embroideries on the St Cuthbert vestments now in Durham, but fabricated in Winchester for

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<sup>154</sup> Most Tiberius groups are unlocalized, and only two major centres of production have been proposed, Canterbury and Lichfield.

<sup>155</sup> Webster declares that 'of all the products of Alfred's renaissance, the manuscripts are visually the most insignificant [...] in their decoration, these manuscripts look back towards ornamental modes some hundred years earlier, such as the beast-infested display scripts of the late eighth-century Barberini Gospels and the early ninth-century Book of Cerne. Archibald *et al.*, *Golden Age*, p. 18.

<sup>156</sup> Wormald, 'Before Æthelwold', pp. 305, 313.

bishop Frithestan between 909 and 916; and a few early tenth-century manuscripts, including Tanner 10.<sup>157</sup> Each of these artifacts displays one or more elements characteristic of early Winchester style: the Cuthbert vestments exhibit an early form of skinny acanthus, characteristic of pre-Reform Anglo-Saxon acanthus. The figures on the Cuthbert vestments also show an affinity with the New Minster wall painting fragment, particularly in the treatment of the eyes, hair and nose of the figures.<sup>158</sup> Wormald associates these two datable and localizable artifacts of the early Winchester style with a group manuscripts, including the Junius Psalter (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 27; Gneuss and Lapidge No. 641), the Tanner Bede (for example, f. 79v) and the Tollemache Old English *Orosius* (London, British Library, Add. 17967; Gneuss and Lapidge No. 300, Ker No. 133), some of which, namely the *Orosius* and the Psalter, can be palaeographically linked with Winchester. He concludes that while the style of figures in these manuscripts betrays some continental influences, the initial ornament derives directly from manuscripts now classified as members of the Tiberius group, particularly the beasts and beast heads.<sup>159</sup> I would suggest, therefore, that early Winchester style represents an early stage of fusion between Insular traditions manifested in Tiberius style and continental influences.

The Domitian fragment (Cotton Domitian A. ix, f. 11r ) exhibits points of contact and influence in script and initial style with Tiberius style manuscripts potentially made in the former Mercian city of London.<sup>160</sup> Its script is comparable to a contemporary added colophon on f. 40v in the Book of Nunnaminster, recording a gift of property by Ealhswith, Alfred's Mercian queen, and constitutes a similar confluence of ninth-century illumination with early tenth century script, as I propose for the Tanner Bede and early Winchester style more

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<sup>157</sup> Wormald, 'Before Æthelwold', pp. 305-14; Wilson, *Art*, pp. 154-7.

<sup>158</sup> Wilson, *Art*, pp. 155-6; Wormald, 'Before Æthelwold', p. 307; Gameson connects these also with the human figures in the Tanner Bede, 'Tanner', 144-5.

<sup>159</sup> Wormald, 'Before Æthelwold', p. 305.

<sup>160</sup> On Mercian London, see R. Cowie, 'Mercian London', in Brown and Farr (2001), pp. 194-209.



generally.<sup>161</sup> The treatment of its colour-washed and dotted initials resembles that of other ninth-century Tiberius group manuscripts (compare London, BL Royal 2 A xx, f. 17r), and is generally considered ‘archaic’, a suggested sign that its style was reproduced from its exemplar.<sup>162</sup> Operating in a similar milieu, the style of the first scribe of the Tanner Bede (T1), who was responsible for the majority of the text and initials in the text, exhibits several points of contact with the Tiberius group style which inspired his and early Winchester style more generally. Though the Domitian fragment cannot be located to Winchester, its script and ornament offers a useful corollary to the influence of Tiberius group manuscripts on the style of late ninth- and early tenth-century manuscripts.

This examination of the ornament of the Tanner Bede and a selection of its identified close parallels outlines the interplay of characteristic elements of early Winchester style which suggest their debt to the Tiberius style of illumination. The closest known stylistic parallels and potential sources for the figures of early Winchester style are to be found in the Tiberius group of manuscripts, produced in Mercian-dominated Southumbria in the eighth and ninth centuries. The New Minster fragment may be one of the only surviving examples of pre-Alfredian wall painting, and has been compared to southern manuscripts of the eighth century, such as the Stockholm Codex Aureus in its bold linear style and peltate decoration.

<sup>163</sup> Of particular relevance is the likeness which Wormald noted between the fragment’s figures to the heads in the Barberini Gospels and other manuscripts, and contemporary initials in the Junius Psalter and Tanner 10: all have the same characteristic narrow-shoulders, staring eyes, and long faces with a wig-like hair arrangement (see Oxford, Bodleian Library, Tanner

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<sup>161</sup> Indeed, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge MS 41, a copy of the *Old English Bede* donated by Leofric to the Exeter Cathedral Library, has in the section on the Synod of Hertford (excerpted in part on the Domitian fragments), Tiberius-inspired initials in the style of the Tanner Bede’s; however the Tanner Bede’s account of the Synod of Hertford has only one simple initial, ‘I’, to mark the first chapter (ff. 77r-78r).

<sup>162</sup> Bately, *Tanner*, p. 39.

<sup>163</sup> Archibald *et al.*, eds., *Golden Age*, p. 44 ; remnants may also exist at Nether Wallop, see R. Gem and P. Tudor-Craig, ‘A “Winchester School” Wall-Painting at Nether Wallop, Hampshire’, *ASE* 9 (1980), 115-36.

10, f. 79v).<sup>164</sup> This supports the hypothesis that early Winchester style drew on Tiberius style, which itself is associated with the Mercian hegemony of the eighth and ninth centuries.

Reading the Tanner Bede and the Domitian fragment as products of this link offers a hypothetical route of transmission for the text of the *OEB* which parallels that of the style of these manuscripts, in both cases, from Mercia to Wessex.

#### From Mercia to Wessex in Four Hands

Tanner 10 is written in five hands, four of which appear to be contemporary and belong to the early tenth century.<sup>165</sup> Michelle Brown identified one charter and two book hands as being stylistically similar to the hand of the added prayer on f. 40r in the Book of Cerne. The first was the hand of T1 in the Tanner Bede; the other book hand was the principal scribe of the Durham Ritual.<sup>166</sup> The final hand she indicated was that of S 367, whose contents and witness list encapsulate the cooperation between Mercia and Wessex at the turn of the tenth century (the sole attestation is a contemporary charter is London, BL, Stowe Charters 22), which may have occasioned the transmission of manuscripts and texts.<sup>167</sup> These four instances are unlikely to be the same individual, but their similarity in script, indebted to Mercian mannered minuscule of the preceding centuries and other stylistic points of Tiberius style suggests considering early Winchester style as heavily influenced by Tiberius style.

In a recent dissertation on BL Royal 12 D. xvii, Christine Voth proposes a reassessment of the development of Anglo-Saxon square minuscule, and categorizes all four

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<sup>164</sup> *Golden Age*, p. 44; Wormald, 'Before Æthelwold', p. 304.

<sup>165</sup> The majority of the manuscript and all of the ornamental initials (save two, ff. 188r and 119v), were likely executed by T1.

<sup>166</sup> Brown, *Book of Cerne*, p. 180.

<sup>167</sup> It is unclear whether Brown refers to the hand of the Latin of the charter, or of the vernacular boundary clause added, which may or may not be the same scribe. See N. Brooks and S. Kelly, *Charters of Christ Church, Canterbury*, 2 vols, Anglo-Saxon Charters 17 and 18 (Oxford, 2013), pp. 839-45. For simplicity, I refer to it as the work of one scribe. The charter is reproduced in W. B. Sanders, *Facsimiles of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts Photocopyographed by order of Her Majesty Queen Victoria*, 3 vols, III (Southampton, 1884), 24. Keynes asserts that the boundaries were in fact added by a later, tenth-century hand, see S. Keynes, 'A Charter of King Edward the Elder for Islington', *Institute of Historical Research* 66 (1993), 303-16, at 308, fn. 38.

of these hands as belonging to a transitional phase, ‘proto-’ square minuscule, among which she notes the presence of features associated by Dumville with Mercian script.<sup>168</sup> She notes in particular that conservative, Mercian scribes preferred Pointed Minuscule and adopted Square Minuscule relatively late, and that their hands seem to indicate the independent survival of the Insular script system which seemingly had subsided elsewhere.<sup>169</sup> Other examples of this trend are charter S 221 and 2188, and the first hand of the Trinity Isidore (Cambridge, Trinity College B.15.33), who also added a prayer on f. 41v of the Book of Nunnaminster (see London, BL, Harley 2695, f. 40v).<sup>170</sup> In this study, I have focused on the four hands Brown identified, each of which witnesses a trend in which Mercian manuscripts and potentially Mercian scribes were influential in the training and imagination of scribes and artists of early Winchester style.

The script of charter S 367 is particularly useful to connect the Cerne prayer on f. 40r and the hand of the Tanner Master. As became standard practice, the vernacular boundary clauses in charter were written in Old English, and in a separate script for the vernacular.<sup>171</sup> Variation in manner and actual hands in S 367 establishes that a range of scripts were being used in the tenth century as deemed linguistically appropriate. It also shows a range of letter forms which vary between the texts, such as the straight-back **d** used only in the Latin of the charter, but not in the text of the Old English of the charter, which both have a rather sloping Insular **d**.<sup>172</sup> Interestingly, the text of the Cerne prayer lacks the upright **d**. T1 also prefers the Insular, sloping **d**, but lengthens the ascender, similar to the long, pointed ascenders and descenders of Mercian scribes of the ninth century.<sup>173</sup> Though this is only one example, and

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<sup>168</sup> Voth, pp. 64-5, 76-82; D. Dumville, ‘English Script in the Second Half of the Ninth Century’, in his *Anglo-Saxon Essays, 2001-2007*, Studies on Anglo-Saxon Culture 1 (Aberdeen, 2007), pp. 183-204, at 203.

<sup>169</sup> Voth, pp. 58-9; D. Dumville, ‘Specima Codicum Palaeoangloricam’, in *Anglo-Saxon Essays 2001-2007*, Studies on Anglo-Saxon Culture 1 (Aberdeen, 2007), pp. 205-28, at 213-4.

<sup>170</sup> Voth, pp. 65-8.

<sup>171</sup> Voth, pp. 59, 73-5; Dumville, ‘Specima Codicum’, p. 215, notes that such practice became common in royal charters from 956.

<sup>172</sup> Further discussion of the hands of S 367 see Brooks and Kelly, pp. 839-45.

<sup>173</sup> Voth, p. 96.

potentially even the work of multiple hands at different times, it constitutes evidence for the range of influence I have hypothesized. Read in a narrative in which the *OEB* is considered a Mercian translation, these scribal hands function as a parallel to the text: both can be read most simply as Mercian works influencing early West Saxon (and early Winchester style) textual production.

The ornament of the three manuscripts also substantiates the relationship between Tiberius style and early Winchester style. The added prayer in the Book of Cerne f. 40r suggests that scribes of these early Winchester style works had contact with the script and ornament of at least one influential and impressive example of Tiberius Style. The ornament of the two other manuscripts also were deeply indebted to Tiberius style. For example, the artist of Cerne adorned a hole in the blemish of his vellum on f. 71r with a little turtle-like beast, a treatment which Michelle Brown notes that the artist-scribe of the Durham Ritual appears to have imitated on f. 59.<sup>174</sup> While its principal-artist scribe has also decorated a hole in the vellum at the time of the writing, the style hardly resembles that of the Cerne turtle. Rather, the scribe has drawn two miniatures of men with one arm raised in benediction. These features, I would suggest, betray further knowledge of the styles and exemplars of the Tiberius group and the Insular traditions of illumination from which it drew. The hair of the figure on f. 59r closely matches the wig-like stylized waves of the evangelist symbol and portrait of Matthew in the Book of Cerne, f. 2v.<sup>175</sup> However, if the figure on 59r represents Michelle Brown's 'youthful, clean-shaven' type of evangelist, his mirror on 59v represents

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<sup>174</sup> Brown, *Book of Cerne*, p. 180; J. Brown, *The Durham Ritual: a Southern English Collectar of the Tenth Century with Northumbrian Additions*, Durham Cathedral Library A. IV.19, EEMF 16 (Copenhagen, 1969). See also K. Jolly, *The Community of St. Cuthbert in the Late Tenth Century: the Chester-le-Street Additions to Durham Cathedral Library A. IV. 19, Text and Context* (Columbus, OH, 2012).

<sup>175</sup> For discussion of the Matthew miniatures in the Book of Cerne, see Brown, *Book of Cerne*, pp. 73-80, *passim*; most of the precursors Brown cites of this 'youthful' type are Irish or Northumbrian in origin, and for parallels in material culture finds the closest attitudes in contemporary Mercian stone sculpture.

the bearded model in the Lindisfarne Gospels (i.e., f. 25v)<sup>176</sup> or in the Barberini Gospels, f. 124v. Regardless of whether the Durham Ritual artist-scribe drew his inspiration directly or solely from Cerne, his treatment of the vellum blemish indicates multiple points of engagement with Tiberius style.

I have identified further parallels between these manuscripts and ornament in Tiberius group manuscripts.<sup>177</sup> Richard Gameson's study of the Tanner Bede identifies parallels in contemporary as well as earlier manuscripts; the manuscripts he cites as ultimate sources are, more often than not, members of the Tiberius group.<sup>178</sup> The hand of the T1 particularly appears to have been influenced by Mercian script; none of Tanner 10's contemporary scribes have such an obvious correspondence with the scripts of the Tiberius group. T1 was, as Julian Brown evaluates, 'an expert writer and draughtsman,' one of several active in the early tenth century who was privileged with familiarity of the more ornate, exuberant and affected script developed by scribes of the Mercian *schriftprovinz* in the late eighth through ninth centuries.<sup>179</sup>

The possibility that these four hands had access to ninth-century manuscripts of the Tiberius group, such as Cerne, or to scribes influenced by them, and potentially other Alfredian manuscripts of early Winchester style also drawing on Tiberius style ornament, may help to explain the diffusion of ornament, script and texts in their hands.<sup>180</sup> The initials of Tanner 10 executed by T1, as well as the rougher (and potentially earlier) initials of the Durham Ritual might be seen, then, as the heirs of a tradition of Insular ornament channeled

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<sup>176</sup> On the symbolism in the Lindisfarne Gospels, see Brown, 'Imagining,' p. 10, M. P. Brown, 'Bearded Sages and Beautiful Boys: Insular and Anglo-Saxon Attitudes to the Iconography of the Beard', in *Listen, O Isles, unto Me: Studies in Medieval Word and Image in Honour of Jennifer O'Reilly*, ed. E. Mullins and D. Scully (Cork, 2011), pp. 278-90.

<sup>177</sup> Gameson, 'Tanner', 126.

<sup>178</sup> Gameson, 'Tanner', 143, esp. 149 where he connects the ornament to 'Southumbrian manuscripts of eighth- and ninth-century date'.

<sup>179</sup> Brown, *Durham Ritual*, p. 14.

<sup>180</sup> On the value of books as sources of cultural transmission, see Brown, 'Imagining', pp. 12-13; see also Wormald, 'Before Æthelwold', p. 313.

by Tiberius style.<sup>181</sup> To account for the scholarly supposition that these two manuscripts are thought to be the work of small scriptoria, it is most likely that these scribes worked in direct contact with Tiberius manuscripts.

An obvious point of correspondence between the early Winchester style of the Durham Ritual and Tanner and the ornament of Tiberius style is the beast and beast heads in the initial ornament. Their biting beast heads share a similar attitude and treatment in form and use to Tiberius style exemplars. Biting beast heads populate terminals in the ornamental initials as in the Royal Prayerbook, the Book of Nunnaminster, the Royal Bible, the Barberini Gospels, and, earlier, the Tiberius Bede, as well as the eighth- or ninth-century inhabited vine scroll panels at Breedon -on-the-Hill, Leicestershire.<sup>182</sup> The occasional function of a full-figured beast as an indicator of a run-on in the text from other lines in the Book of Cerne (as at f. 91v) develops organically but infrequently in the Durham Ritual and finally into the composition of initials entirely of beast bodies in the majority of the Tanner Bede's initials. This transition is apparent in the referential but highly inventive initials of the Durham Ritual: full figures indicating textual run-ons, as on ff. 4r and 15r; and the bird-bodied beast of f. 35v, the exuberantly tongued dog forming the 'F' on f. 36r, by which bodies of entire beasts begin to form the letters or components of letters. Much like their scripts, these scribes adopted and experimented with the ornament of the manuscripts with which they came into contact, likely the works of other scribes of Tiberius style manuscripts.

To sum up, the ornament and script of these four identified parallels, the added prayer on Cerne f. 40r, charter S 367, the main scribe of the Durham Ritual, and T1 of the Tanner Bede, are proposed here to be the work of scribes operating in a milieu which had access to Mercian manuscripts of the Tiberius group, which inspired their performances. Whereas

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<sup>181</sup> Gameson, 'Decoration', 125, 140, 152; Voth, pp. 77-8, 81.

<sup>182</sup> The use of these terminals in initials may imitate the throne of St Luke in the evangelist miniature of the Lichfield Gospels, see *Book of Cerne*, p. 218.

studies of early Winchester style have noted its reliance on Insular traditions, this section establishes its dependence on Mercian exemplars in Tiberius style exemplars, which are associated with Mercia. The hypothetical use of Mercian exemplars in the production of early West Saxon texts and or early Winchester style can explain the transmission of a number of features of many of these works, such as script, decoration and linguistic dialect, such as the *OEB*. The ornament of the Domitian leaf suggests a similar transition and state of transmission of text and style as Tanner 10 from its Mercian exemplar, possibly in Tiberius style, to the early Winchester style of these manuscripts. Its initials, simple ink majuscules with splashes of red and yellow wash, dotting, and a few beast heads and bits of foliate ornament, resemble simpler or less elegantly executed initials as appear in the Book of Nunnaminster or the Book of Cerne. Several points of contact and correspondence in these works suggest this link, and the likelihood of such a transmission is further strengthened by the state of politics in the late ninth and tenth centuries, as the Mercian supremacy in Southumbria ceded to Wessex, and the subsequent documented flow of luminaries from Mercia to Wessex.

Reading these two early manuscripts of the *OEB* as copies derived from a Mercian exemplar offers a simple and plausible explanation for the origin of the manuscripts as we find them. Considered against a background of hands identified by paleographers as similar, this hypothesis also offers an explanation for the development of early Winchester style as parallel to that of Alfred the Great's intellectual programme: both appear to have relied on existing Mercian strengths to produce early West Saxon works.

### *Conclusion*

The *OEB* survives in two early manuscripts from the late ninth and early tenth century, written in early Winchester style and with some elements of dialectal West Saxonisation. Yet

these manuscripts, the Domitian fragment and Tanner 10, reveal hints of the exemplar from which they drew inspiration, preserving dialect and idiosyncratic forms in the language, but also, as I have argued, stylistic influences of their script and initial ornament, which betrays an awareness of and engagement with Mercian Tiberius group manuscripts. Thus the presentation of the two earliest manuscripts documents the shift of the text from Mercia to Wessex and Winchester, as we encounter it today. This also follows the narrative hinted at by Asser in his *Life of Alfred*, in which the scholars of Alfred's reform programme were largely imported from Mercia. The textual adaptations undertaken in the *OEB* also document the perspective of the eighth- or ninth-century Mercian translator who shaped the text to suit his own audience and purpose. His selection of key documents, shaped and translated to emphasize key contemporary issues, often highlighted in conciliar documents from the Mercian hegemony, may be explained by considering the *OEB* as the work of a Mercian translator.

The correspondences in the content of the ornament and text, supported by linguistic evidence, draw the *OEB* further into orbit of the other Mercian works examined in this thesis. The omission of much material from the Latin gives the *OEB* a predominantly hagiographical content, aligning it with the vernacular hagiography explored in the previous chapters. Its discussion of female sanctity in the *libellus responsionum*, replete with scriptural citation, may betray an awareness of the powerful position of women and queens in Mercia which informed the works of Cynewulf. As an extended translation of prose, it gestures towards the secular prose translations of the Nowell Codex explored in the next chapter. Thus the *OEB* as it survives may be representative of the transmission history of several early Old English texts which appear to have originated in Mercia but survive in later West Saxon copies.

This study raises one more issue regarding the origins of the *OEB*. Gregory Waite has recently proposed, based on the difference in the quality of hands and preparation and the



absence of T1 in the stints of hands 4 and 5, that Tanner 10 may have been constructed and begun in one scriptoria, and completed in another writing community. Indeed, T1 is usually dated between 890 and 930, but hands 4 and 5 are classified as a ‘proto-’ square Minuscule, at a different stage than that of hands 1 and 2.<sup>183</sup> Bately admitted the possibility that these ‘inferior’ and ‘rude’ hands were finishing an incomplete manuscript.<sup>184</sup> There are, however, a number of reasons to suspect that either Tanner 10, or its exemplar, if not the translation of the *OEB* itself, may have been undertaken at Christ Church, Canterbury. For one, Canterbury has one of the best attested of all the Anglo-Saxon scriptoria. If my arguments regarding the decoration and script of Tanner 10 are to be accepted, T1 was trained and influenced by Mercian script and decoration. A number of Tiberius group manuscripts are thought to have been produced or kept at Canterbury, including the Tiberius Bede.<sup>185</sup> Whilst certainly not the Latin source used for the translation of the *OEB*, the Tiberius Bede nevertheless descends from the Canterbury-corrected recension identified by Lapidge as its Latin source.<sup>186</sup> As Waite has shown,

a considerable number of rare words occur only in the *OEB* and the Glossaries in London, British Library Manuscript Cotton Cleopatra A. iii, (Gneuss and Lapidge No. 319, Ker No. 143), a Canterbury book of the mid-tenth century. A few idiosyncratic translations in the *OEB* [...] might indicate that the translator made use of a precursor of this collection.<sup>187</sup>

The simplest co-occurrence of these texts would be for their lost predecessors to have been produced or kept at Christ Church. It is important to recall that the Kentish church was treated as a part of Mercia, and that Archbishops Tatwine (r. 731-4), Nothelm (735-9), Cuthbert (740-60) and Æthelheard (792-805) were all Mercian, and its scriptoria was likely part of the Mercian *schriftprovinz*.<sup>188</sup> A number of documents and manuscripts appear to have been lost or destroyed between 796 and 798 during the revolt of Eadberht Præn when

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<sup>183</sup> Waite, personal communication; Voth, pp. 65-6.

<sup>184</sup> Bately, p. 17.

<sup>185</sup> Brown, ‘Mercian Manuscripts’, p. 282.

<sup>186</sup> Lapidge, ‘Latin Exemplar’, pp. 235-46.

<sup>187</sup> Waite, ‘Glosses’, p. 28.

<sup>188</sup> Brooks and Kelly, pp. 8-9, 130-1.

Æthelheard abandoned the see. He seems to have brought Mercian scribes and documents at his return, imposed by Cenwulf, which may partially explain the influence of Mercian script in the early Winchester style scribes discussed here. Furthermore, S 367 survives only in a Canterbury archive, likely a copy of Mercian original from when the estate was acquired, may, as Brooks and Kelly note, reflect ‘that the scribe had been trained to write in Caroline for Latin texts and was here struggling to write Latin in Insular minuscule, because that was what was in his model.’<sup>189</sup> This provides another possible point of contact between Mercia and circulating texts, including Tanner 10. Finally, the contents of a now-burned collection of documents, described by Brooks as ‘a booklet of *synodalia* belonging to a Mercian bishop [...] but reflecting the reforming concerns of Archbishop Cuthbert’, which may have been produced at Canterbury, provides evidence of precisely how other documents like those I suggest informed the translation of the *OEB*, may have circulated.<sup>190</sup> Brooks and Kelly also hypothesize the collection, Cotton Otho A. vi, from the first half of the eighth century, belonged to a Mercian bishop at Leicester or Lichfield.<sup>191</sup> Lichfield, too, has been suggested as a centre capable of producing a number of Tiberius group manuscripts.<sup>192</sup> However, a strong case can also be made for the production of the *OEB* at Canterbury, itself a part of the wider Mercian *shriftzprovinz* in the ninth century.

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<sup>189</sup> Brooks and Kelly, p. 839.

<sup>190</sup> Brooks and Kelly, p. 51.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> See Brown, *Book of Cerne*, pp. 168-71; Sisam, ‘Vespasian Psalter’, 1-10; S. Kuhn, ‘The Gloss to the *Vespasian Psalter*: Another Collation’, *JEGP* 40 (1941), 344-7; S. Kuhn, ‘The *Vespasian Psalter* and the OE Charter Hands’, *Speculum* 18 (1943), 458-83; Kuhn, ‘From Canterbury to Lichfield’; Kuhn, ‘Mercian Manuscripts’.

## Chapter 4: A Prose Secular Mercian Translation: *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*

In the final chapter of this thesis, I offer a reading of the Old English translation of *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle* (henceforth *Letter*) in the context of late eighth- and early ninth-century Mercia. Though few scholars have considered the *Letter* in this context, doing so has the ability to explain a number of its features. The text survives uniquely in a late tenth- or early eleventh-century manuscript, London, British Library MS Cotton Vitellius A. xv, also known as the Nowell Codex, in which it is accompanied by two other texts thought to be of Mercian origin and which, Sisam argues, might once have formed a discrete codex, the prose *Wonders of the East* and the heroic epic *Beowulf*.<sup>1</sup> The *Letter* is principally a close translation of its main Latin source, the *Epistola Alexandri*, itself ultimately based on a lost fourth-century AD Greek text by Pseudo-Callisthenes. Its word-for-word translation style resembles that of other Mercian prose translations, such as the *OEB* and *OEPG*, rather than the sense-for-sense style of the 'Alfredian' translations, as shall be discussed below.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the text features some Mercian dialect features which will be discussed below.<sup>3</sup> In this chapter, I suggest that these factors, together

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<sup>1</sup> Sisam, 'Compilation', p. 94; on the dialect of *Wonders*, see S. Rypins, *Three Old English Prose Texts in MS Cotton Vitellius A xv*, EETS OS 161 (Oxford, 1924), pp. xxvi, xlv-xlvii; Sisam, 'Compilation', pp. 78-82, 92-4. On the Mercian origins of *Beowulf*, see *Klaeber's Beowulf*, pp. clxv, clxvi, clxvii-clxxix; L. Neidorf, 'Introduction', in *The Dating of Beowulf: a Reassessment*, ed. L. Neidorf (Cambridge, 2014), pp. 1-18; L. Neidorf, 'Germanic Legend, Scribal Errors, and Cultural Change', in *The Dating of Beowulf*, pp. 19-36; R. D. Fulk, 'Beowulf and Language History', in *The Dating of Beowulf*, pp. 19-38; T. Bredehoft, 'The Date of Composition of *Beowulf* and the Evidence of Metrical Evolution', in *The Dating of Beowulf*, pp. 97-111; North, *Origins*; Sisam, 'Compilation', pp. 68, 83, 85. On the compilation of the Vercelli Book, see Scragg, 'Compilation'. The other two texts in the manuscript are *Judith* and an Old English translation of the *Passio Christophorus*, both thought to be late West Saxon; see R. D. Fulk, *The Beowulf Manuscript* (London, 2010), p. xxv; Sisam, 'Compilation', pp. 68, 72, 94; *Klaeber's Beowulf*, p. clxxvi.

<sup>2</sup> See below, p. 233.

<sup>3</sup> On dialect features, see Rypins, pp. xxxviii-xxxix, xli; Sisam, 'Compilation', pp. 88-94; R. D. Fulk, 'Localizing and Dating Old English Anonymous Prose, and How the Inherent Problems Relate to Anglo-Saxon Legislation', in *English Law Before Magna Carta: Felix Liebermann and Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, Medieval Law and its Practice 6, ed. S. Jurasinski, L. Oliver and A. Rabin (Leiden, 2010), pp. 59-79.

with a number of parallels with Mercian culture and history in the eighth and ninth century, can be most satisfactorily explained by reading the *Letter* as a Mercian translation of the eighth or ninth century.

Though one of five texts in perhaps the most famous vernacular manuscript from Anglo-Saxon England, the *Letter* has been largely neglected in modern scholarship. Scholars have examined the text for evidence of the scribal habits of the two scribes of the Nowell Codex and the dialect features of the exemplars they copied; however, most discussion has centred on its monsters, which Sisam identified as a unifying theme in the manuscript.<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Howe explored the *Letter* and *Wonders* in the Nowell Codex as a ‘book of elsewhere’, as a map that mediates the Anglo-Saxon world perspective, in his *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England*.<sup>5</sup> In *Pride and Prodigies*, Andy Orchard discusses the *Letter* ‘in context by first considering the potency, popularity, and bias of legends attached to Alexander the Great in Anglo-Saxon England’, deciding ultimately that ‘an Orosian [i.e. critical] perspective’ of the emperor prevails in the work.<sup>6</sup> Omar Khalaf’s recent work, however, argues that both the *Letter* and OE *Orosius*

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<sup>4</sup> Sisam, ‘Compilation’, pp. 66-7. See further Orchard, *Pride*, p. 116 fn. 2; Rypins, pp. xiv-xxix; K. Kiernan, *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript*, revised edn (Ann Arbor, MI, 1996), pp. 140-50; M. Busbee, ‘A Paradise Full of Monsters: India in the Old English Imagination’, *LATCH: A Journal for the Study of the Literal Artifact in Theory, Culture, or History* 1 (2008), 51-72; K. Powell, ‘Meditating on Men and Monsters: A Reconsideration of the Thematic Unity of the *Beowulf* Manuscript’, *RES* 57 (2006), 1-15; K. Powell, ‘Laying Down the Law: First-Person Narration and Moral Judgement in the Old English *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*’, *Bull. of the John Rylands Univ. Lib. of Manchester* 86 (2004), 55-68; K. Powell, ‘The Anglo-Saxon Imaginary of the East: A Psychoanalytic Exploration of the Image of the East in Old English Literature’ (unpubl. PhD dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2002); P. Lendinara, ‘Di meraviglia in meraviglia’, in *Circolazione di uomini, di idee e di testi nel Medioevo germanico: XXV Convegno dell’Associazione Italiana di Filologia germanica, Cassino - San Vincenzo al Volturno - Montecassino, 27-29 Maggio 1998*, ed. F. De Vivo (Cassino, 2002), pp. 177-229; P. Lendinara, ‘*Mirabilia Indiae* e le radici del discorso coloniale’, *Maschere dell’impero: Percorsi coloniali della letteratura inglese*, ed. E. Di Piazza et al. (Pisa, 2005), pp. 147-78; P. Dendle, ‘Cryptozoology in the Medieval and Modern Worlds’, *Folklore* 117 (2006), 190-206; A. Mittman, *Maps and Monsters in Medieval England*, Studies in Medieval History and Culture (London, 2006), pp. 66-114.

<sup>5</sup> N. Howe, *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England: Essays in Cultural Geography* (London, 2008), pp. 182-8.

<sup>6</sup> Orchard, *Pride*, pp. 117, 139.

present Alexander as a positive model of kingship, emphasizing the military aspect of his career.<sup>7</sup> While Khalaf proposes an Alfredian context for both translations, in this chapter I suggest that the translator's alterations in the *Letter* orient the text to a pre-Alfredian, Mercian audience, as suggested by the work's linguistic and stylistic attributes. Below, I discuss evidence which suggests Mercian origins of the *Letter*, which will ground an exploration of the possible relevance of the text to Mercian overkingship in this period. Finally, I will discuss the theme of orientalism, already identified as a feature of Mercian art and culture in this period, in relation to the translation.

### Language

As with the other texts in this thesis, reading the *Letter* as a Mercian translation copied by a later, West Saxon scribe, can explain some of its linguistic features. As a work of prose, Mercian dialect forms in the text may be used to establish its linguistic origins.<sup>8</sup> Scholars have recognised Mercian features in the *Letter*, as well as in its manuscript neighbours, *Beowulf* and the *Wonders*, though the origins of these features have not yet been explained satisfactorily. In the 1950s, Kenneth Sisam observed that all three texts, 'which are contiguous [in the Nowell Codex], preserve in different degrees forms which point to an Anglian, or more specifically a Mercian dialect'.<sup>9</sup> These include both dialectically Anglian and Mercian forms and spellings, as well as vocabulary, such as the Anglian pronoun forms *mec* and *usic*, which Wallis found present in the original translation of the *OEB*. In addition to a number of Anglian forms, the *Letter* also contains forms specifically associated with the Mercian dialect, such as *semninga* ('suddenly, at

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<sup>7</sup> O. Khalaf, 'The Old English *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle*: Monsters and Hybris in the Service of Exemplarity', *ES* 94 (2013), 659-67; O. Khalaf, 'A Study on the Translator's Omissions and Instances of Adaptation in the *Old English Orosius*: the Case of Alexander the Great', *Filologia Germanica* 7 (2015), 195-221. The military content of the *Letter* was earlier noted by Sisam, 'Compilation', pp. 86-8.

<sup>8</sup> Rypins, pp. xxxviii-xxxix, xli; Campbell, *Grammar*, §§ 16-22; Fulk, 'Localizing and Dating', pp. 71, 75; *HOEM* §§ 47-58; Sisam, 'Compilation', pp. 89-92; Sisam, 'Dialect Origins', pp. 119-39.

<sup>9</sup> Sisam, 'Compilation', pp. 94-5.

once') and *gelis* ('reading, *studium*'). Other linguistic features of the *Letter* which would be most easily explained by a Mercian provenance have been largely overlooked. For example, the verb *ofercwoman* (s. 19), rendering Latin *superato* appears only in other probable or certain Mercian works: as a gloss for *superuenit* in the Vespasian Psalter, which has been definitively identified as Mercian in origin, and in *Beowulf*, l. 1237b, 'ðy he þone feond ofercwoman'.<sup>10</sup> These words, associated with the Mercian dialect, suggest the *Letter* may be of Mercian origin. *Unmæt* also appears to be a predominantly Mercian dialect word, featuring in *Andreas*, the works of Cynewulf, the *OEPG*, the *Dialogues* and the *OEB*, among other works.<sup>11</sup> The *hapax legomenon*, *hleouige* (s. 294), translating *stauimus monimentum*, 'to raise a memorial', is often related to the OE *hleowan*, 'to shelter' and *hleowsian*, 'to shelter, protect'.<sup>12</sup> However, I would suggest rather that it derives from *hlæw*, 'mound', a word common in charters but having a predominantly Mercian distribution in literature, featuring in *Beowulf* (l. 2802b), the *OEPG*, and life of St Mildred in eight of its thirteen appearances outside of charters.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the two terms, *hleowan* and *hlæw* appear together uniquely in a Mercian charter of Offa's reign, describing the bounds as 'Ærest of ðam forða æt *hleowede hlawe* swa se broc sceot on nanes monnes land'.<sup>14</sup> If this term describes a man-made *tumulus*, *hleouige*, deriving from *hlæw*, in the *Letter* conforms to contemporary usage in Mercian charters and poetry. A further item of lexical

<sup>10</sup> All references to the *Letter* are taken from Fulk, *The Beowulf Manuscript*, which numbers by sentence. *Beowulf* refers to *Klaeber's Beowulf*. On the Vespasian Psalter glosses, see f, *Psalter*, pp. 400-15; Wright, *Vespasian Psalter*; DOEC, 'ofercwoman'.

<sup>11</sup> DOEC, 'unmæt'. Mercian texts account for approximately 60% of the uses of this term. The suffix *-niss* is also Anglian, Campbell, *Grammar*, §384.

<sup>12</sup> *Hleouige*, emended from MS 'leonige', Fulk, *Manuscript*, p. 223. One alternative reading in the Latin is *statuimus uirtutibus*, 'establish virtues'.

<sup>13</sup> DOEC, 'hlæw'.

<sup>14</sup> 'First from the ford at the *protected/towered mound* as the brook shoots towards no man's land.' Italics mine. S 141, d. 777x779 is preserved in an eleventh-century Worcester cartulary, London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius A. xxxiii, ff. 23r-24r, see eSawyer, <http://www.esawyer.org.uk/charter/141.html>. For more on *hlæw* in charters, see Brooks, 'Reorientation'.

interest is another *hapax*, *eafarena*, nominative plural of *\*ealƿara*, derived from the Hispano-Arabic *al-farás*.<sup>15</sup> This word, along with other Mercian artifacts, invites us to consider the *Letter* alongside other contact with the Orient in the eighth and ninth centuries in Mercia, as discussed in the Introduction. Another interesting translation feature, the *Letter* renders Latin *aggregationem* with the doublet phrase, *unmætnisse ond micelnisse* (s. 210). Doublets, as discussed in the introduction, are a common feature of the texts read in this thesis as Mercian translations, though they remained popular in later Old English prose. Though the translation has passed through stages of transmission, and the present dialect must be described as predominantly West Saxon, copied by a scribe known to prefer West Saxon forms, ‘an Anglian original may with some justification be urged for *Alexander’s Letter*’.<sup>16</sup> Reading the *Letter* as a Mercian translation of the eighth or ninth century, here copied by a West Saxon scribe, offers an explanation for its linguistic features, as well as other phenomena and potential connections.

### Style

The style of the translation also invites us to read the *Letter* as a Mercian translation. Three features in particular suggest connections with other known Mercian translations.<sup>17</sup> Firstly, it uses word pairs to render single words in its Latin source, as do other Mercian translations such as the *OEB* and *Dialogues*.<sup>18</sup> In addition, its author also employs a straightforward, word-

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<sup>15</sup> ‘ealfara’, *Toronto Dictionary of Old English A-G*; Sisam, ‘Compilation’, p. 89; R. Jordan, *Die altenenglischen Säugetiernamen* (Heidelberg, 1903), p. 126; Breeze, ‘Old English *Ealfara*’, suggests the loan is direct and not via Frankish sources.

<sup>16</sup> Rypins, p. xxxix.

<sup>17</sup> For a useful summary of critical opinion, see Orchard, *Pride*, p. 132.

<sup>18</sup> Orchard, *Pride*, pp. 132-33, counts nearly 200; see also I. Koskeniemi, *Repetitive Word Pairs in Old and Early Middle English Prose: Expressions of the Type Whole Sound and Answered and Said, and Other Parallel Constructions*, Turun Yliopiston Julkaisuja Annales Universitatis Turkuensis, Series B Vol. 107 (Turku, 1968). Koskeniemi does not discuss the *Letter*; Potter, pp. 23-4. The *Letter* was also excluded from this study.

for-word translation style, like that of the *OEPG*, *OEB* and *Dialogues*.<sup>19</sup> Consider, for example, the following passage:

Quae dum ponuntur, ipse sitem leuare cupiens amariore elleborae fluminis aquam gustavi, quam neque homo neque ullum pecus haurire sine tormento possit (§13).<sup>20</sup>

Mid þy we ðu gewicod hæfdon, ða wolde ic minne þurst *lehtan ond celan*. Ða ic þæt wæter bergde, ða wæs hit *bitterre ond grimre* to drincanne þonne ic æfer ænig oðer bergde, ond nowþer ne hit se mon drincan meahte ne hie ænig neat onbitan ne meahte (ss. 63-4).<sup>21</sup>

The first temporal clause follows the literal sense of the Latin, adding in the detail from the previous sentence that camp had been set. It follows the Latin closely with the detail of Alexander tasting the river water, but adding in the doublet *lehtan ond celan* ('whet and cool'). The translation also departs from its source by omitting the reference to hellebore, a species of poisonous plant referenced in the OE *Leechbook*, the *Peri Didaxeon*, another herbal reference work, and a number of glossaries, which suggests that knowledge of this term was restricted to technical circles.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, the translator instead supplies a doublet reiterating its bitterness, *bitterre ond grimre*, ('more bitter and more bitter'). The translation also retains the content and syntax of the final clause, though again substituting a comparative clause to fit the logic of the missing hellebore reference, *þonne ic æfre ænig oðre bergde* ('than any other I had ever tasted'). The translator thus primarily adopts a word-for-words translation style, without being a slave to

<sup>19</sup> For a summary of style, see *Pride*, p. 132; Potter, pp. 4, 16. On Alfredian non-literal style, see J. Bately, *The Literary Prose of Alfred's Reign: Translation or Transformation?* (London: University of London, King's College, 1980), p. 21.

<sup>20</sup> 'While [camp] was being set up, I myself, anxious to relieve my thirst, tasted river-water more bitter than hellebore, which neither man nor any beast could draw to drink without torment.' p. 208. All quotations from the *Epistola* are taken from Orchard, *Pride*; all translations my own with reference to L. Gunderson, *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle about India*, Beiträge zur Klassischen Philologie 110 (Meisenheim am Glan, 1980) and Prof. Orchard, p. 142.

<sup>21</sup> 'When we had then made camp, then I desired to *slake and cool* my own thirst. When I tasted the water, then it was more *bitter and sharp* to drink than any other I had ever tasted, and neither could man drink, nor any beast taste it.' Italics mine.

<sup>22</sup> DOEC, 'ellebor'.



it, adapting the content to his audience and, as I shall argue below, emphasizing Alexander's qualities as an exemplary overking.<sup>23</sup>

### Omissions and alterations

Finally, the translator also omits large sections from the narrative without adding any new substantial content. Notably, the OE *Letter* omits the majority of Alexander's journey after learning of his impending death (Lat. §39-40), which presumably did not advance the translator's purpose. This treatment resembles that of the *OEB*, in which the translator also abridged and omitted large sections, particularly in Book I, which did not serve the purposes of the new narrative, as well as other, later Alfredian translations, such as the *Orosius*.<sup>24</sup> In its largely word-for-word translation style, using doublet pairs to render single Latinate words, and omitting large sections of content, the *Letter* might be seen to resemble the style of other Mercian prose translations explored in this thesis.

In addition to linguistic evidence discussed above, some of the details in the content of the *Letter* can be read as potentially reflecting the interests of a ninth-century Mercian audience. The Latin *Epistola* references royal women seven times, all of which, as Orchard notes, are retained without alteration in the Old English. This is unremarkable in itself until we consider that the translator does not hesitate to omit irrelevant material or culturally inappropriate references.<sup>25</sup> This suggests the translator considered Alexander's relationship with his mother and sisters may have had some interest to his audience. In the *Letter*, Alexander accords them a position superior even to that of his famous tutor, Aristotle, *þu min se leofesta lareow, ond efne*

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<sup>23</sup> For an alternative view of the translator's style and adaptations, see Orchard, *Pride*, pp. 132-33.

<sup>24</sup> See chapter 3. Potter, pp. 7-12.

<sup>25</sup> Orchard §2, 5, 24, 31, 37, 40; see *Pride*, pp. 133-8.

to minre meder ond geswystrum þu me eart se leofesta freond (s. 3).<sup>26</sup> The formula, *leofesta lareow*, occurs only once more, in *Guthlac B* (l. 1008), a text which, as we have seen, may also be read as the work of the Mercian poet Cynewulf.<sup>27</sup> The references to Alexander's female royal relations also obscures the record of his purge of all of his male kinsmen (a crime of which Offa has been traditionally suspected), recounted in the *Orosius* (III. viii).

### *Mapping the Middle: Mercia and the Orient*

As discussed in the Introduction, the Orient featured heavily in the Mercian imagination, and may have mediated Mercia's sense of its own geographic and cultural location in the world. In medieval maps, Jerusalem typically appeared in the centre of the world, the East was depicted as up, and West as down.<sup>28</sup> Anglo-Saxon England lay at the borders of the known world, and Mercia, the westernmost of its kingdoms, at a greater extreme, as can be observed in the eleventh-century Cotton Tiberius map, in which Britain is squeezed into the bottom right-hand corner of the folio; Mercia is the bottom-most region of Anglo-Saxon England, and equally the most marginal in such a depiction and world view.<sup>29</sup> Such a world view was wide-spread throughout Anglo-Saxon England, articulated by intellectuals such as Isidore of Seville, whose works were influential, and Bede.<sup>30</sup> Mercia's interest in the Orient can be read as a reflection of

<sup>26</sup> 'you are to me the dearest teacher, and even next to my mother and sisters the dearest friend.'

<sup>27</sup> DOEC, 'leofesta lareow.'

<sup>28</sup> Anlezark, 'World View', pp. 69-70; N. G. Discenza, 'A Map of the Universe: Geography and Cosmology in the Program of Alfred the Great', in *Conversion and Colonization in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. C. Karkov and N. Howe, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 318, Essays in Anglo-Saxon Studies Volume 2 (Tempe, AZ, 2006), pp. 83-108, at 86; E. Edson, *Mapping Time and Space: How Medieval Mapmakers viewed their World*, British Library Studies in Map History 1 (London, 1997), pp. 9-10.

<sup>29</sup> Anlezark, 'World View', pp. 66, 67, 80; cf. the opening description in the *OEB*.

<sup>30</sup> C. Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words: Isidore's Synonyma in Anglo-Saxon England*, Toronto Old English Series (London, 2008); A. Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, fourth series (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 237, 254-60.

its own liminal geographic position, as well as traditional associations of the Orient with power and empire. The name *Mierce*, literally, ‘the border-dwellers’, further attests this liminal identity. Physically, linguistically and culturally divided from the Welsh by Offa’s Dyke to the West, Mercian expansion focused, by necessity, on the East, and, by implication, toward the ‘centre’ of the world.<sup>31</sup> With varying degrees of success, Mercian kings attempted to conquer Lindsey, East Anglia and Kent. Æthelbald may have aspired to bring East Anglia under Mercian rule, and Offa probably did, at least temporarily, after executing its king, Æthelberht in 794; however, two subsequent Mercian kings, Beornwulf and Ludeca, were killed whilst campaigning in East Anglia, and the last of the East Anglian royal dynasty was martyred by Vikings in 869. Like all of Anglo-Saxon England, situated in the extreme West of the world, Mercia conceived of the East as ‘Other’, but also as an identity and region that it could potentially incorporate into itself, both politically and culturally.

This alterity of the East also reveals Mercian perspectives on its own identity, allowing a view of the lens through which these texts may have been mediated. Nicholas Howe suggests interpreting these Oriental influences and subjects as a *topos*, which functions as ‘a site, a place, where the past can be held in its complexities, even in its contradictions.’<sup>32</sup> It allows current anxieties to be displaced into a location where they may be explored without threat to those who would be criticised. The idea of kingship justified primarily by leadership, which, as I shall argue below, the *Letter* promotes, could potentially support or threaten those on the already-unstable mid-ninth-century Mercian throne. Though neither these ideas nor this situation was unique to

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<sup>31</sup> Howe, *Writing the Map*, p. 10. On Anglo-Saxon attitudes toward the Welsh and the *mearc*, see L. Brady, ‘Echoes of Britons on a Fenland Frontier in the Old English *Andreas*’, *RES* 61 (2010), 669-89, esp. 672-3; Brady, ‘“The “Dark Welsh” as Slaves and Slave Traders in Exeter Book Riddles 52 and 72’’, *English Studies* 95 (2014), 235-55,

<sup>32</sup> Howe, *Writing the Map*, p. 193.

Mercia in this period, reading the *Letter* as originating in this context helps to explain some aspects of the selection of Alexander the Great and his travels in India.<sup>33</sup> Edward Said's observations of modern Orientalism, which responds 'more to the culture that produced it than its putative object, which was also produced by the West', can equally apply to this late Antique and early medieval conception: in representing an Oriental subject and setting in the vernacular, Old English, works such as the *Letter* depict the attitudes and issues of the culture which produced it (here, taken to be eighth- and ninth-century Mercia). This creates a hybrid text which mixes Orient with extreme Occident, thereby approximating the geographic and cultural centre. In such works, we may read the Mercians as merging their liminal position with the established yet marginal, exotic culture of the East, drawing themselves into a hybridized, central culture which matches their aspirations for territorial expansion and cultural centrality. Reading these texts as Mercian products allows us to see the Mercians reflecting on their own cultural marginality, but also relocating themselves centrally, like Rome and Jerusalem, drawing themselves into a cultural middle by way of the Orient.

#### The *Wonders of the East* as Encyclopedia

The *Wonders of the East* precedes the *Letter* in the Nowell Codex, and Sisam has suggested that, along with *Beowulf*, these texts may have been collected together in an earlier collection.<sup>34</sup> Often treated as an account of exotic and monstrous beings, the *Wonders* can also be read as an encyclopedic travel narrative which fits well within the context of the Orientalism of the Mercian hegemony. Such a reading offers one explanation for a broad range of its features, including its translation style, penchant for doublets, rare vocabulary, potential transmission alongside *Beowulf*, selection of content and resonances with Mercian visual culture. The *Wonders* also

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Khalaf, '*Alexander's Letter*'.

<sup>34</sup> Sisam, 'Compilation', p. 94.

shares Mercian linguistic features, and similar content and setting as the *Letter*, and in fact used the *Epistola Alexandri*, the Latin source of the *Letter*, as one of its many sources.<sup>35</sup> Some of its contents are similar to the *Liber Monstrorum*, an eighth-century Anglo-Latin text with stylistic similarities to the works of Aldhelm which may have been composed on the border between western Mercia and Wessex.<sup>36</sup> Like the *Letter*, it presents exotic material in a straightforward, word-for-word style with a similar penchant for word pairs:

Est locus euntibus ad mare rubrum qui dicitur lentibelsinea in quibus gallinae nascuntur quales apud nos rubicundo colore has cum aliquis adprehendere voluerit manum suam quam tetigerit totumque corpus comburit (III).<sup>37</sup>

Sum stow is þonne mon fereð to þære Rædan Sæ seo is haten Lentibelsinea, þæm beoð henna acenned onlice ðam þe mid us beoð reades heowes. Gif hi hwylc man niman wile oþþe him o æthrineð, þonne forbærnað hy sona eal his lic. Ðæt syndon ungefræglicu liblac (ss. 9-11).<sup>38</sup>

As with the *Letter*, the translator largely preserves both the content and syntax of its main Latin source, altering the ‘and’ causal of the ‘cum’ and ‘que’ into a doublet pair. As the exact recension of the Latin source has not been identified, it is impossible to know whether the evaluation appending the entry, *Ðæt syndon ungefræglicu liblac* (‘That is extraordinary witchcraft’), was an addition or part of the source. Many of the doublet pairs are in fact anticipated by the Latin. For example, the Latin describes barbarians with one hundred and ten kings over them as *genus pessimum et barbarorum est* (XIX) (‘the worst and most barbarian

<sup>35</sup> On similarity of sources, see Rypins, p.xlv; Sisam, ‘Compilation’, pp. 74-5; Orchard, pp. 87, 93, 119-20, 131-2. On the linguistic features, see Rypins, pp. xlv-xlvi; F. Knappe, *Das angelsächsische Prosastück Die Wunder des Ostens: Überlieferung, Quellen, Sprache und Text nach beiden Handschriften*, Inaugural-Dissertation zur Erlangung der Philosophischen Doctorwürde an der KGL, Universität Greifswald (Berlin, 1906), p. 41; Sisam, ‘Compilation’, pp. 73, 76 and 94.

<sup>36</sup> Orchard, *Pride*, pp. 86-94; M. Lapidge, ‘Beowulf, Aldhelm, the *Liber Monstrorum* and Wessex’, *Studi Medievali* 23 (1982), 151-91.

<sup>37</sup> ‘There is a place passing on the way to the Red Sea which is called ‘Lentibelsinea’, in which are born hens such as we have of red colour, when anyone wishes to take one, and as soon as he touches it with his hands, the whole body burns up.’ Rypins, p. 101. Translation mine.

<sup>38</sup> ‘There is a certain place when men goes to the Red Sea that is called Lentibelsinea, where hens are born like those that are among us of a red colour. If any man wants to capture them or touch them at all, they immediately burnup his entire body. That is extraordinary witchcraft.’ Fulk, *Beowulf Manuscript*, p. 16.

peoples’), which the OE renders as *Bæt syndon ða wyrstan men ond þa elreordegestan* (s. 64), (‘they are the worst people and the most foreign-speaking’).<sup>39</sup> An exception is the case of the *Homodubii*: in the Latin, *fugiunt* (‘they flee’), but in the translation *feorriað hi ond fleoð* (s. 62), (‘they flee and go far away’). The translator also employs a relatively unusual variation on the word pair construction, sometimes introducing an *oððe* rather than an *ond* doublet, as seen with the self-immolating hens above.<sup>40</sup> Though doublets are not as prevalent in this work, the translator seems unable to abandon the construction completely, even in instances unanticipated in the Latin. For example, the translator introduces the ‘or’ doublet phrase, *ongitað oþþe geseoð* (ss. 48, 77), in this particular case probably originally derived from biblical usage, as in Isaiah 6:9, while others are without precedent. Similar usages of doublets are found in *Dialogues*, the OE *Herbarium*, and later, in the OE *Boethius*, as well as the works of Ælfric and Wulfstan, but also feature in the works discussed as Mercian here.<sup>41</sup> The *OEPG*, for example, uses the formula twice, and a homily on St Martin (Vercelli Homily 18), identified by Scragg as a copy from a Mercian homiliary, uses similar phrasing.<sup>42</sup>

Unlike the *Letter*, the OE translation of *Wonders* survives in two copies: the first is in the Nowell Codex, which has a predominantly West Saxon dialect but which is likely a later copy of an Anglian original; the second is a better presented and more regularly West Saxon text side-by-side with a Latin text of the *Mirabilia*, which may or may not be its direct Latin source.<sup>43</sup> The format and content of the *Wonders* engages in a simplistic yet encyclopedic codification of

<sup>39</sup> Rypins, *Three Old English Texts*, p. 104, l. 13.

<sup>40</sup> Koskenniemi, pp. 76-9.

<sup>41</sup> Hecht, *Bischofs Wærferth*, p. 271; H. de Vriend, *The Old English Herbarium and Medicina de Quadrupedibus*, EETS 286 (London, 1984), p. 14; M. Godden and S. Irvine, eds, *The Old English Boethius: an Edition of the Old English Versions of Boethius’s De Consolatione Philosophiae* (Oxford, 2009), I, p. 317.

<sup>42</sup> Gonser, pp. 25, 315; Scragg, ‘Compilation’, 202; Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 303. There is a similar, though not identical, collocation at *Beowulf*, ll. 148-9.

<sup>43</sup> Rypins, pp. xvi, xliii-xliv.

knowledge. Starting with a known reference point, Babylon, it recounts the regions and creatures of the East without fixed interpretation.<sup>44</sup> In this respect, *Wonders* resembles not only the *Liber Monstrorum* but also the *OEM* and other practical reference works, such as *Bald's Leechbook*; all these texts have connections with Mercia and/or Wessex.<sup>45</sup>

Reading the *Wonders* as Mercian may also explain its choice of subject matter: the attention it gives to fantastic beasts accords well with the decorative elements and initials in Tiberius style. Several of these creatures seem to feature in Insular ornament, including hens, though perhaps not self-immolating (ss. 9-10),<sup>46</sup> two-headed-snakes (s. 17; cf. *Letter* s. 115), horned snakes (*corsiae*, ss. 20-2; cf. *Letter*, *cerastes*, ss. 108-11), cynocephali (ss. 27-9; cf. *Letter* ss. 200-1), the Phoenix (ss. 106-7) and dragons (ss. 57-8; cf. e.g. *Beowulf* ll. 2287-323). As we have seen, these beasts were a prominent part of the intellectual and visual culture of the Mercian hegemony, though not exclusively: for example, the cynocephalus Christopher is a West-Saxon saint's legend.<sup>47</sup> Though horned snakes (ss. 20-2; *Letter* ss. 108-11) do not feature in manuscript illuminations aside from the *Wonders*, there are two-headed snakes in Merovingian models and snakes feature on a coin of Offa, though interlaced snakes are a common Germanic motif.<sup>48</sup>

Reading the fantastic beasts of the *Wonders* as a Mercian translation can explain the correspondence in tastes between manuscript illuminations and stone sculpture of the Mercian hegemony.

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<sup>44</sup> D. Anlezark, 'The Anglo-Saxon World View', in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, ed. M. Godden and M. Lapidge (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 66-81, at 77-8.

<sup>45</sup> Anlezark, 'World View', p. 68; Lapidge proposes that the *Liber Monstrorum* was composed at Malmesbury, on the border of western Mercia and Wessex, '*Beowulf*, Aldhelm, the *Liber Monstrorum*', 179-82; Rauer argues that the *OEM* may have been composed in a Mercian context, pp. 11-13; Voth suggests that the exemplar for Bald's *Leechbook* was an Anglian and pre-Alfredian work, possibly Mercian, 'Analysis', pp. 144-5, 190.

<sup>46</sup> These birds also feature in a similar text, the ninth-century Latin *Epistola Fermes ad Hadrian*. See M. R. James, *The Marvels of the East: a Full Reproduction of the three Known Copies* (Oxford, 1929), pp. 9-11, 29.

<sup>47</sup> Rypins, p. xlix.

<sup>48</sup> Gannon, *Iconography*, pp. 142-4.

Like many of the other texts featured in this thesis, reading the *Wonders* as a Mercian translation of the eighth or ninth century has the ability to explain not only a number of its features, but also apparent links with other works which have been commonly read as Mercian. In light of such considerations, we now offer a reading of the *Letter* in a Mercian context, which may fruitfully explain its content, linguistic features and relation to the compilation of the Nowell Codex.

### Alexander the Great in Anglo-Saxon England

Alexander the Great was one of the most popular and controversial figures in medieval literature, and the OE *Letter* is the earliest extant vernacular text in which he appears.<sup>49</sup> Medieval texts vacillate, according to the author's purpose, between depicting him positively, as a figure worthy of admiration, or as a villain and personification of pride. Classical moralists such as Seneca, as well as those later authors in the Stoic tradition such as Orosius criticize him harshly. The OE *Orosius*, as Andy Orchard has demonstrated, increases the severity of this criticism:

Athene budon gefeoht Alexandre, ac he hie sona forslog 7 gefliemde, þæt hie siþþan ungemetlicne ege from him hæfdon, 7 Thebana fæsten abræc 7 mid ealle towearp, þætte ær wæs ealra Crecra heafodstol, 7 siþþan þæt folc eall on ellpeodge him wið feo gesealde; 7 eall þa oðre þeoda þe an Crecum wæron he to gafolgiendum gedyde, buton Mæcedonium þe him æst to gecirdon, 7 þonan wæs farende an Nilirice 7 on Thraci 7 hie ealle to him gebigde. 7 siþþan he gegaderode fird wið Perse, 7 þa hwile þe he hie gaderade, he ofslog ealle his mægas þe he geræcan mehte. (III. viiii).<sup>50</sup>

<sup>49</sup> G. Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, ed. D. Ross (Cambridge, 1956), p. 15.

<sup>50</sup> 'The Athenians offered battle to Alexander, but he slew them and put them to flight so quickly, that afterwards they had such great terror of him, and he broke and completely destroyed the citadel of the Thebans, that previously had been the chief stronghold of all the Greeks, and afterwards he sold all that people into slavery in exchange for money, and all the other peoples that were among the Greeks he made into tributaries, except for Macedonia, which first turned to him. Then he went to the Illyrians and the Thracians and they all yielded to him. Then he gathered an army against the Persians, and while he gathered it, he killed all his kinsmen that he could reach.' Bately, *Orosius*, pp. 67-8; see Orchard, *Pride*, pp. 120-5. The translation expands on the Latin, which simply relates *Inde profecturus ad Persicum bellum omnes cognatos ac proximos suos interfecit* ('Then, as he was about to set off on his Persian expedition, he killed all his nearest relations.') (*Historiarum*, III.16.3-4), trans. Fear, p. 132. Cf. Lat. III. xvi. 3-4



On the other hand, medieval preachers and writers of exemplars recorded edifying anecdotes about Alexander, and, looking to cultivate the liberality of their patrons, cast Alexander as an ideal lord.<sup>51</sup> As Cary observes of conceptions of Alexander before 1400:

The secular writer writes of Alexander as a conqueror for comparison with other conquerors of the past or of his own age, or with patrons who would like to be conquerors. Admiration for so great a man inspires his work and provides the basis for the whole secular portrait of Alexander.<sup>52</sup>

Though the patron of the *Letter* is unknown, this chapter reads the OE *Letter* as belonging to this latter category. Orchard has noted that ‘there was no shortage of material relating to Alexander the Great in Anglo-Saxon England, reflecting a range of traditions.’<sup>53</sup> In this chapter I will argue that the OE *Letter* presents Alexander as a great conqueror, explorer and king, whose desire for glory is given more prominence than any judgement on his character or moral worth.

Reading the *Letter* as a Mercian translation draws into relief parallels between the legendary emperor and the overkingship which the Mercian hegemony exercised over other Anglo-Saxon kings in the eighth and ninth centuries. In particular, Alexander provides an interesting parallel to the career of one of Mercia’s greatest *bretwaldas* or overkings, Æthelbald.<sup>54</sup> Though Bede omits his name from the list of *bretwaldas*, or holders of *imperium* (*HE* II.5), Æthelbald ruled in Bede’s day and controlled territory in Anglo-Saxon England equal of that of the first recorded holder of *imperium*, Æthelberht of Kent, in the seventh century.

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<sup>51</sup> Cary, pp. 213-4.

<sup>52</sup> Cary, p. 195.

<sup>53</sup> Orchard, *Pride*, p. 120.

<sup>54</sup> On overkingship, see B. A. E. Yorke, ‘The Vocabulary of Anglo-Saxon Overlordship’, *Anglo-Saxon Studies in History and Archaeology* 2 (1981), 171-200; B. A. E. Yorke, ‘The Bretwaldas and the Origins of Overlordship in Anglo-Saxon England’, in *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald*, ed. S. Baxter (Farnham, 2009), pp. 81-95; P. Wormald, ‘Bede, Bretwaldas and origins of the *gens anglorum*’, in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies Presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill*, ed. P. Wormald *et al.* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 99-129; Higham, *An English Empire*, pp. 11-2, 22; Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship*, pp. 109-10; R. Girvan, *Beowulf and the Seventh Century*, revised edn (London, 1971), pp. 46-9. On Mercian overkingship, see Dumville, ‘Expansion’, pp. 123-140. I take the terms ‘overlordship’ and ‘overkingship’ synonymously, and, since all Mercian overlords were kings, shall refer to them as ‘overkings’.

Through ruthless warfare and territorial expansion, Æthelbald declared himself in the Ismere Diploma *rex non solum Marcersium sed et omnium provinciarum quæ generale nomine Sutangli dicuntur*.<sup>55</sup> However, like Alexander the Great, he was murdered by members of his own bodyguard. Just as Alexander had received a prophecy of his untimely death at the hands of his own bodyguard in the *Letter* (ss. 263, 269, 282-3), so too Guthlac, the Mercian hermit-saint prophesied to Æthelbald ‘þa lengce his lifes’ (*OEPG* XXI.31).<sup>56</sup> Similarly, due to the personal nature of overkingship in Anglo-Saxon England, Æthelbald’s *imperium* or personal empire collapsed at his death, like Alexander’s, though Offa reconquered and expanded it after seizing the throne. In Alexander, then, the Mercians may have found a classical precedent for their own great conqueror king of the eighth century, with important implications for his immediate and distant successors. These factors, together with others outlined below, help to support the case for situating the translation of the *Epistola* in Mercia in this period.

### *A Mirror for Princes?*

Some of the translator’s alterations of the *Epistola*, discussed below, can be interpreted as presenting Alexander as a positive model of kingship and even overkingship. In this respect, the *Letter* anticipates later medieval secular authors who tended to celebrate Alexander’s virtues according to their own social and historical context.<sup>57</sup> In particular, the *Letter* can be compared with the genre of the *speculum regum*, or mirror for princes, which either offers practical instruction on conduct and government, or presents an ideal king in a literary text.<sup>58</sup> This genre

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<sup>55</sup> ‘King not only of the Mercians but of all the provinces which are generally called by the name ‘South Anglian’. S89.

<sup>56</sup> ‘He related to him the length of his life.’ Gonser, p. 172.

<sup>57</sup> Cary, p. 223.

<sup>58</sup> C. Bratu, ‘Mirrors for Princes (Western)’, in *Handbook of Medieval Studies*, ed. A. Classen, 3 vols (Berlin, 2010), III, pp. 1921-49.

was widely popular in contemporary Carolingian Francia, which produced such notable works as Alcuin's *De Virtutibus et Vitiis* (c. 799-800), Smaragdus's *Via Regia* (c. 813) dedicated to Charlemagne's son Louis the Pious, and Jonas of Orléans's *De Institutione Laicali* (c. 818x828).<sup>59</sup> As an ideal model of an Anglo-Saxon overking, the *Letter*'s conception of Alexander seems to function as an early mirror, such as would have been appropriate for Mercian (and other) princes. The translator's attitude to the emperor may also represent a response to contemporary developments in literature and theorizations of kingship.

Similar challenges in Francia and England produced comparable responses in the conception of kingship. Military leadership was a large component of both the Carolingian and Mercian kings' succession over other actively reigning kings. Like Offa of Mercia, the Carolingian dynasty had deposed another king to seize the throne: in 751, Pepin, Charlemagne's father, deposed the last Merovingian king. Previously, as Mayor of the Palace, Pepin carried out reforms and compelled rebellious Frankish provinces into submission and reunification; though we do not know much of Offa's reputation before becoming king, his successes in battle as king suggest he too was a skilled commander who enlarged his rule and attracted a powerful retinue. As reigning kings, both Offa and Pepin had their sons anointed as heirs: Pope Stephen II anointed both Charlemagne and his younger brother, Carloman, in 754 when he confirmed Pepin's coronation. The anointing of Ecgfrith took place over thirty years after this ceremony, and had required negotiating the elevation of a new archbishopric at Lichfield with the pope. Both dynasties were also subject to emerging ecclesiastical restrictions on potential heirs to their

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<sup>59</sup> On Carolingian *speculi*, see T. F. Noble, 'Secular Sanctity: Forging an Ethos for the Carolingian Nobility', in *Lay Intellectuals in the Carolingian World*, ed. P. Wormald and J. L. Nelson (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 8-36.

thrones: Stephen II declared that all future kings must be elected from the Carolingian line;<sup>60</sup> while in late eighth-century Anglo-Saxon England, as we have seen, the Legatine Canons stipulated that kings must be born of legitimate marriages.<sup>61</sup> In this period, then, as part of developments in the interaction between church and state, both the Mercians and Carolingians began to conceive of the king as ‘anointed’.<sup>62</sup> Like all medieval conceptions of kingship, both drew heavily on the Old Testament as the ultimate model of power, a factor which would continue to influence West Saxon kingship in the late ninth and tenth century after the end of the Mercian hegemony.<sup>63</sup> Both Charlemagne and the Mercian kings supported the use of the vernacular in official and ecclesiastical capacities. At the 813 Council of Tours, Charlemagne decreed, *[U]t easdem omelias quisque aperte transferre studeat in rusticam Romanam linguam aut Thiotiscam, quo facilius cuncti possint intellegere quae dicuntur*.<sup>64</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Carolingian and Mercian kings of the eighth century, who came to power principally through their leadership and with the support of other nobles in similar circumstances, developed similar conceptions of kingship and its practices. A dynastic alliance was even proposed between the two lines, though it never came to fruition.<sup>65</sup> As was common in the middle ages, the Carolingian kings and Mercian overkings both behaved as kings extending their dominions, and often used

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<sup>60</sup> J. Nelson, ‘Kingship and Empire in the Carolingian World’, in *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation*, ed. R. McKitterick (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 52-87, at 54-6; J. Boussard, *The Civilisation of Charlemagne*, trans. F. Partridge (London, 1968), p. 23.

<sup>61</sup> Story, *Carolingian Connections*, pp. 55-92; Dümmler, *Epistolae Karolini Aevi II*, pp. 178-80, trans. Allott, *Alcuin*, pp. 57-9, at 58.

<sup>62</sup> On the possible anointing of Cynethryth, see S. Hollis, *Women and the Church*, pp. 215-6; on the anointing of Ecgrith, see J. Nelson, ‘The Lord’s Anointed and the People’s Choice: Carolingian Royal Ritual’, in *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies*, ed. D. Cannandine and S. Price (Cambridge 1987), pp. 137-80; Story, *Connections*, pp. 178-80.

<sup>63</sup> Nelson, ‘Lord’s Anointed’, pp. 149-54; Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship*, pp. 98-100.

<sup>64</sup> ‘And they should all take care consciously to transfer to ordinary Romance or German when reading these homilies, so that everyone can find it easier to understand what is being said.’ A. Werminghoff, ed., *Concilia Aevi Karolini I*, MGH (Hannover, 1906), No. 38, pp. 286-306, at p. 288; Translation R. Wright, *Late Latin and early Romance in Spain and Carolingian France* (Liverpool, 1982), p. 268.

<sup>65</sup> Story, *Connections*, pp. 184-8.

the title of king of their people, as did later West Saxon kings, though from 800 the Carolingians differed in also making use of the title 'emperor'.<sup>66</sup> The currency of developing ideas of kingship and use of the vernacular suggest considering the *Letter of Alexander* in the early ninth century.

Although both Carolingian Francia and Mercia increasingly came to conceive of kingship in similar terms, there were nonetheless some significant differences in their respective practices of kingship in this period. For example, where the Carolingians established a principle of familial succession which assured the throne remained within the dynasty, Offa and his successors had to challenge rivals for the throne. The location of these kingdoms also impacted their practice of kingship. With its base in the heart of continental Europe and its image as heir to the Roman Empire, the expansion of the Carolingian empire could be regarded as the reunion of a previous polity, and eventually (by 800), its king could claim to hold the title of 'emperor'.<sup>67</sup> Barbara Yorke notes that the Anglo-Saxons never used the title of emperor for their own kings in England through the end of the ninth century.<sup>68</sup> The Carolingians acted centrally, confronting the Moorish invasions in the 730s, yet also receiving papal visits and protecting the pope from adversaries in Rome. Relegated geographically to the margins of the Western world, the Mercian king could command the attention of Europe, but he would never aspire to rule the Continent itself.<sup>69</sup>

As was the case in all Anglo-Saxon (and continental) kingdoms, in both Francia and Mercia effective leadership, regardless of ancestry, was a key component of a successful ruler. In tracing the development of the early Carolingian *speculum principis*, Lester Born identified

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<sup>66</sup> Nelson, 'Lord's Anointed', p. 139; Yorke 'Vocabulary', 177-8. West Saxon kings adopted this title in the tenth century.

<sup>67</sup> Nelson, 'Kingship', pp. 52-73.

<sup>68</sup> Yorke, 'Vocabulary', 178.

<sup>69</sup> On Charlemagne's attempts to reduce Offa to status of 'underking', see Story, *Connections*, pp. 184-8.

Boniface's exhortatory letter to Æthelbald and letters from Alcuin to both Anglo-Saxon and Carolingian kings and princes as the earliest reflexes of the genre.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, Boniface wrote to Æthelbald as *Domno carissimo et in Christi amore ceteris regibus preferendo inclita Anglorum imperii sceptrā Æthelbaldo regi*, to exhort him to live as a more just ruler.<sup>71</sup>

His ergo admonitionibus, fili carissimi, imbutus rogo, ut adquiescas sanis sermonibus legis Dei et corrigas vitam tuam. Desere vitia et studium inpende sacris virutibus adimplendis; sicque in hoc mundo propere vives et in futuro praeium consequeris sempiternum.<sup>72</sup>

Alexander also featured in a few Carolingian *speculi*: Hincmar of Rheims wrote of Alexander in his revised preface to *De Ordine Palatii*, dedicated to Carloman II (c. 866-84), and Alcuin's library may have included the correspondence of Alexander the Great with the Brahmins.<sup>73</sup>

Viewed against this background of developments in the eighth- and ninth-century kingship, the Old English translation of the *Letter*, then, can be read as reflecting the needs and anxieties of the royal court in an age of rapidly expanding royal power, such as we find in eighth- and ninth-century Mercia, as well as wider cultural developments.<sup>74</sup>

### The Letter as *Speculum*

Alterations to the source material at both the beginning and end of the text highlight ways in which the *Letter* may be read as a tract on kingship or *speculum principis*. From the incipit, the translation raises the stature of kingship by redefining Alexander's title:

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<sup>70</sup> L. Born, 'The *specula principis* of the Carolingian Renaissance', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 12 (1933), 583-612, at 588-92.

<sup>71</sup> 'To the most dear lord, to be preferred in the love of Christ to all other kings, King Æthelbald, wielding the glorious sceptre of imperial rule over the English.' Boniface, *Die Briefe*, No. 73, p. 146; trans. *EHD I*, p. 870.

<sup>72</sup> 'Therefore, I beg, most dear son, that instructed by these admonitions, you assent to the wholesome words of the laws of God and amend your life. Abandon vices, and be zealous in the practice of holy virtues; and thus you will live prosperously in the world and will attain an everlasting reward in the future.' Boniface, *Die Briefe*, No. 73, pp. 154-5. Trans *EHD I*, No. 177, pp. 875-6. On this letter, see also above, p. 203.

<sup>73</sup> J. Nelson, 'Peers in the early Middle Ages', in *Law, Laity and Solidarities. Essays in Honour of Susan Reynolds*, ed. P. Stafford, J. L. Nelson and J. Martindale (Manchester, 2001), pp. 27-46, at 45, fn. 106; Levison, *England and the Continent*, p. 148; Orchard, *Pride*, p. 120.

<sup>74</sup> For a reading of a similar situation in Wessex, see Khalaf, 'Alexander's Letter'.

Incipit Epistola Alexandri Regis Magni Macedonis Ad Magistrum Suum Aristotlem. (§1)<sup>75</sup>

Her is seo gesetenis Alexandres epistles þæs miclan kyninges ond þæs mæran macedoniscan,  
þone he awrat ond sende to Aristotlem his magistre be gesetenisse Indie þære micalen þeode, ond  
be þære widgalnesse his siðfato ond his fora, þe he geond middangeard ferde. (s.1)<sup>76</sup>

Using the construction of the doublet phrase, which as we have seen is a prevalent feature of Mercian translations, the *Letter* presents Alexander as *þæs miclan kyning*, ‘the famous king’, distanced from the historical specifics of his geographic origin as *þæs mæran macedoniscan*, ‘the famous Macedonian.’ The *Letter*’s *incipit* also provides details of the location of Alexander’s travels. Altogether, a number of small changes suggests that the text presents Alexander principally as a king rather than principally an adventurer in a strange land.

The content of the concluding paragraph to the text also serves to frame the *Letter*’s focus on Alexander as king. Where the Latin records Alexander’s further journeys and marvels after the prophecy of his impending death by the trees of the sun and moon, the translation cuts to the final sentence of the *Epistola*. In so doing, the *Letter* omits further travels and marvelous snakes, but also Alexander’s order to his *praeceps*, Alan, to carry out the construction of memorials in his name (§41). The *Letter*, in contrast to the *Epistola*, focuses explicitly on Alexander as king and his actions as such, an interest further marked in its emphasis on his person and actions, as shall be seen below:

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<sup>75</sup> ‘Here begins the Letter of Alexander the Great King of Macedon to his Teacher Aristotle’

<sup>76</sup> ‘Here is the text of the letter Alexander the great and famous Macedonian king, which he wrote and sent to his teacher, Aristotle, about the make-up of the great people of India, and about his travels and wanderings in the vastness, when he traveled throughout middle-earth.’

Ibique legato meo praecepi, quem praesulem praeposueram, nomine Alanem, ut praciperet Persis et Babiloniis ut pilas solidas aureas duas pedum uigenum quinum altas fecissent praeciperentque ut his omnia gesta mea scriberent posuissent que in ultima India ultra Libberi et Herculi trophea, quorum centum erant quaedam in diuersis regionibus et ego quinque mea aurea eis altiora de his pedibus statui imperaui, quaeque miraculo futura sunt, carissime praeceptor, posteris saeculis non parua ammiratione. Nouum perpetuumque statuimus monimentum ut inuiendum mortalibus esset pereptua de nobis opinio et animi industriae optima. (§41).<sup>77</sup>

Ðas þing ic write to þon, min se leofa magister, þæt þu ærest gefeo in þæm fromscipe mines lifes ond eac blissige in þæm weorð-myndum. Ond eac swelce ecelice min gemynd stone ond hleouige oðrum eorð-cynningum to bysne, ðæt hie witen þy gearwor þæt min þrym ond min weorð-mynd maran wæron þonne ealra oþra kyninga þe in middan-gearde æfre wæron. *Finit.* (ss. 294-5).<sup>78</sup>

In the *Epistola*, Alexander compares his own reputation to that of the pagan gods Liber and Hercules; the Alexander of the *Letter*, on the other hand, compares himself to *ealra oþra kyninga þe in middangearde wæron*, ‘all the other kings who were in middle-earth.’<sup>79</sup> The Old English text appears to focus on Alexander as *king*.

### Mercian Kingship and Succession in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries

Between the succession of Æthelbald (r. 716-757) and Lord Æthelred (r. 883-911), the character of Mercian kingship and succession changed, impacted by stresses to the dynastic line and challenges to the supremacy, with the result that eventually strong military leadership became a more important factor than ancestry. The emphasis on Alexander’s kingship as being largely derived from leadership may be read as reflecting these changes in Mercian kingship. Æthelbald,

<sup>77</sup> ‘There I had previously ordered my ambassador, by the name of Alan, whom I had put in charge, to order the Persians and Babylonians that they made two solid gold pillars of twenty-five feet, and that they command that they should write on them all of my deeds, and that they should set them up in the remotest parts of India beyond the memorials of Liber and Hercules, of which there were 100 in diverse regions, I ordered my golden memorials set up five feet taller, which, dearest teacher, will prove to be a marvel to later generations and no small object of admiration. We have established a new and lasting monument to be gazed upon [or ‘envied’] by mortal men as a perpetual mark concerning us and of the spirit of the finest industry.’ Trans. mine, with reference to Gunderson, p. 156, and Orchard.

<sup>78</sup> ‘I write this things to you, my most beloved teacher, so that you first joy in the boldness of my life and also rejoice in the celebration. And also so greatly may my memory stand and tower over as an example to other earthly kings, so that they know more readily that my might and my honour were greater than all other kings which were ever in middle-earth. The end.’

<sup>79</sup> On the monuments, see Orchard, *Pride*, pp. 114-5, 131. On the shortening of the narrative, see Orchard, *Pride*, p. 135.



as discussed in Chapter 1, was the first king of Mercia not descended from Penda. Offa, who seems to have been of obscure origins, ousted Æthelbald's immediate successor to rule for over forty years.<sup>80</sup> Genealogies proclaimed Offa's descent from Eowa, Penda's brother; Offa also supported his claim with an alliance to the powerful family of his wife, Cynethryth.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, Offa took unprecedented steps to ensure the succession of his son, Ecgfrith, including obtaining a consecration by the most senior archbishop in England (which had required the elevation of Lichfield by papal decree), an attempted marriage with the dynasty of Charlemagne, and perhaps purges of rivals for the throne.<sup>82</sup> However, Ecgfrith died shortly after Offa in 796 with no clear heir; furthermore, Offa and Cynethryth's daughters could not succeed to the throne as they had married into foreign dynasties.<sup>83</sup> Cenwulf, a distant relation of Offa and Ecgfrith but likely also descended from the royal dynastic line, emerged as king from the ensuing dynastic chaos. Like Offa and Æthelbald, Cenwulf was an active military leader who both pursued war in client kingdoms, putting down rebellions in Kent and further demoting the East Saxon dynasty to solidify Mercian rule, and fending off a Northumbrian invasion in 801.<sup>84</sup> But Cenwulf failed to establish a dynastic hold, and his brother, Ceolwulf, was deposed in 823, replaced by Beornwulf, perhaps a relation of the Beornred from whom Offa had taken the throne in 757. Beornwulf later

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<sup>80</sup> Dumville, 'Royal Genealogies', 23-50; Dumville, 'Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists' in *Early Medieval Kingship*, ed. P. Sawyer and I. Wood (Leeds, 1977), pp. 72-104; A. L. Meaney, 'Scyld Scefing and the Dating of *Beowulf* - Again', in *Textual and Material Culture in Anglo-Saxon England*: Thomas Northcote Toller and the Toller Memorial Lectures, ed. D. Scragg (Woodbridge, 2003), pp. 23-74, at 64; Newton, *Beowulf and the Pre-Viking Kingdom*, pp. 66, 70-1.

<sup>81</sup> Stafford, 'Political Women', p. 36.

<sup>82</sup> *EKK*, pp. 115-18; Dümmler, *Epistolae Karolini Aevi* II, pp. 178-80, trans. Allot, *Alcuin* pp. 57-9, at p. 58.

<sup>83</sup> Offa had at least three daughters: Eadburh, married to Beorhtric, king of Wessex (d. 802), Ælfflæd, married to Æthelred I of Northumbria (d. 796, murdered), and Æthelburh, an abbess by 796. There is a fourth conjectured daughter, Æthelswith, who appears in a charter (S 127), identified as a daughter, but there are no other records of her. The name was relatively common, so the attribution may be a mistake. It is possible that Offa and Cynethryth in fact had only the three daughters. By the tenth century at the latest, the Mercians were prepared to accept Ælfwynn, daughter of Æthelflæd as sole ruler of the kingdom.

<sup>84</sup> Further discussion in North, *Origins*, pp. 257-66.

died in battle against the East Anglians, as did his successor, Ludecca, the following year. His successor, Wiglaf, may have been a regional ruler before assuming the throne by a combination of military might and diplomacy. In these circumstances in Mercia, whilst ancestry was important, leadership became a larger factor in a king's success.

Ancestry remained, however, important source of legitimacy, and royal genealogies developed and expanded through the eighth and ninth centuries, probably in response to Carolingian practices and increased contemporary literacy.<sup>85</sup> Eighth-century royal genealogies and subsequent expansions drew on heroic material, in some cases overlapping with traditions in poems such as in *Beowulf*. Transmitted alongside regnal tables, these early collections present a diachronic view of the succession alongside the lineage legitimizing the ruler, concerns also of interest to the *Beowulf*-poet.<sup>86</sup> The first Mercian pedigree was probably produced around Ecgfrith's consecration in 787 in order to smooth the dynastic succession.<sup>87</sup>

Yet from Æthelbald to the partitioning of Mercia in 877, no son succeeded his father on the Mercian throne longer than two years, and in several cases the throne passed along distantly related dynastic lines. Increasingly, kings needed to prove their ability to function as military leaders, and a majority of their activities remained martial. Between Æthelbald and Burgred, last king of the Mercians, four kings were deposed or murdered, and two more died in battle. Each faced military challenges to expand Mercian power, though this was declining from the time of Ceolwulf due to a combination of Viking incursions, increased power in rival Wessex, and

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<sup>85</sup> F. Leneghan, "'That Was a Good King!'" *Beowulf* and its Prologue' (unpubl. PhD dissertation, Trinity College, Dublin, 2005), pp. 164, 166-7, 189. See further Dumville, 'Royal Genealogies', 23-50; R. D. Fulk, 'Myth in Historical Perspective: The Case of Pagan Deities in the Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies', in *Myth: a New Symposium*, ed. G. Schrepp and W. Hansen (Bloomington, IN, 2002), pp. 225-39, at 230-36.

<sup>86</sup> Leneghan, "'That was a Good King!'", pp. 130, 174, 190-1. See further D. Dumville, 'The West Saxon Genealogical Regnal List and the Chronology of Early Wessex', *Peritia: Journal of the Medieval Academy of Ireland* 4 (1985), 21-66, at 23, n. 6; Dumville, 'Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists', p. 95; D. Anlezark, 'Scaef, Japheth and the origins of the Anglo-Saxons', *ASE* 31 (2002), 13-46, at 45.

<sup>87</sup> Dumville, 'Anglian Collection', 45-8.

weakening dynastic leadership within Mercia. Leadership, as well as descent, therefore, served as chief legitimizing factors in the succession of these kings.

This is also markedly different than the succession politics of Northumbria in the eighth and ninth centuries. In the seventh century, the king of Northumbria invariably hailed from either the Bernician or Deiran royal dynasties. Generosity to the church and noble families to gain their support during the seventh century depleted royal finances, and the loss of tribute from successful campaigns and underkingdoms further contributed to the lack of resources available to sustain stable dynasties.<sup>88</sup> Like Mercia, the dynasties of Northumbria also faced a dynastic crisis early in the eighth century, as the lack of male heirs and the power of the noble families, combined with factionalism and feuding, meant that the king was often an ealdorman acceptable to the most powerful noble families.<sup>89</sup> Military leadership, then, played a role in Northumbrian kingship, but it was arguably less important than the approval of the noble families; indeed, more than nine Northumbrian kings were murdered or deposed during the eighth century alone, suggesting that noble support was the leading factor in selecting a king successfully.<sup>90</sup>

The model of kingship in Wessex also differed significantly from the Mercian model of the king as warlord. Responding also to the Legatine Canons, the dynastic instabilities of the Anglian kingdoms and Carolingian theories of moral kingship, Alfredian kingship developed a further dimension to the success in war and royal ancestry required of earlier Anglo-Saxon kingship: it demanded wisdom and morality as well.<sup>91</sup> Though Offa of Mercia may have

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<sup>88</sup> *EKK*, pp. 89-91.

<sup>89</sup> *EKK*, pp. 86-94.

<sup>90</sup> *EKK*, pp. 86-8.

<sup>91</sup> Leneghan, 'Royal Wisdom', 75-8; D. Orton, 'Royal Piety and Davidic Imitation: Cultivating Political Capital in the Alfredian Psalms', *Neophilologus* 99 (2015), 477-92; J. Nelson, 'Wealth and Wisdom. The Politics of Alfred the Great', in *Kings and Kingship*, ed. J. Rosenthal, Acta 11 (New York, 1984), pp. 31-52.

anticipated this in his kingship, remembered by Alcuin for his *mores bonos et modestos et castos* ('good, moderate and chaste customs'), articulations of divinely-appointed, Davidic and Solomonic kingship abound in work typically considered Alfredian.<sup>92</sup> The only reference to wisdom in the *Letter* is to that of Aristotle (ss. 3-4), rather than Alexander himself. While *Beowulf* does address the wisdom of the king and may also be Mercian, it appears to value wisdom as a type of kingship (in opposition to the warrior king) that is at certain times the most appropriate. The warrior kingship of Alexander in the *Letter*, then, does not necessarily respond to Alfredian theories of kingship, even though the text may present him as a model of kingship in terms of military power and leadership.<sup>93</sup>

#### The King as Leader

Combined with the host of features explained by reading the *Letter* as Mercian, developments in Mercian succession politics favouring effective military leaders, encourage a reading of the *Letter* as a commentary on ideal kingship in the context of ninth-century Mercia. As Orchard has demonstrated, Alexander was frequently interpreted in Anglo-Saxon England negatively.<sup>94</sup> Read, however, in a manner which anticipates the treatments of many later medieval secular authors, in the *Letter* we can in fact read Alexander as a positive exemplar, whose leadership gains victory and prosperity for himself, his troops and, by extension, his people. The Alexander of the *Letter* is a leader who identifies with his troops, but also maintains an appropriate separation from them. His own ambitions drive the expedition, and he achieves his greatest successes when clearly leading. Though the structure of these episodes in the *Letter* is largely similar to the

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<sup>92</sup> Dümmler, *Epistolae Karolini Aevi*, No. 64, p. 105; trans. *EHD* I, No. 202; P. O'Neill, 'The Prose Translation of Psalms 1-50', in Discenza and Szarmach (2015), pp. 256-81.

<sup>93</sup> For an alternate view, see Khalaf, 'Alexander's Letter', 667.

<sup>94</sup> Orchard, *Pride*, pp. 118-20.

narrative of the *Epistola*, a large number of small changes, such as the addition of pronouns or a change in voice, emphasize Alexander's personal role as king and military leader.<sup>95</sup> These qualities offer a model of kingship based on effective military leadership, which remained available to the troubled Mercian succession throughout the ninth century. Though the importance of military leadership to successful kingship is of course hardly exclusive to the Mercians, the *Letter*'s representation accords well with the historical circumstances of ninth-century succession, as discussed above. Below, I examine some aspects of Alexander's military leadership which contribute to his success as king, namely, his relationship with his troops, his individuality and his ability to separate himself from the troops in order to lead them effectively.

Military leadership distinguished the ruling king from the *ætheling*.<sup>96</sup> This feature of Anglo-Saxon rule may account for the translator's interest in Alexander, whose relationship with his army forms an important part of his kingship in the *Letter*. I would suggest that the way in which Alexander in the *Letter* characterizes his relationship to the army reflects the current situation the army is in, which is echoed in the voice of Alexander's narration. In times of danger, Alexander adopts the first person plural, identifying closely with his army. For example, in the trek across the forests via the *frecnan wæg* ('the dangerous paths') (s. 41), Alexander and his army together are subject to terrible thirsts together:

Sed ut aliquid plerumque in secundis rebus fortuna obstrepat, accidit *nobis* siti laborare. (§12).<sup>97</sup>  
(Italics mine).

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<sup>95</sup> Cf. Sisam, 'Compilation', pp. 87-8; Khalaf, '*Alexander's Letter*', 660-4; Orchard, *Pride*, p. 135.

<sup>96</sup> cf. Dumville, 'The *Ætheling*', 1-33.

<sup>97</sup> 'But, just as in many things fortune intrudes on favourable matters, it fell to *us* to labor in thirst.' Trans. with reference to Gunderson, p. 142, and Orchard; italics mine.

Ac swa hit oft gesæleð on þæm selran þingum ond on þæm gesundrum þæt seo wyrd ond sio hio hie eft oncyrræð ond on oþer hworfeð, þa gelomp *us* þæt we wurdon earfoðlice mid þurste geswencte ond gewæcte. Ðone þurst we þonne earfoðlice abæron ond aræfndon. (ss 54-5).<sup>98</sup> (Italics mine).

The first person plural here is appropriate because the thirst afflicts the entirety of Alexander's forces, including the king himself and his animals (ss. 65-69). Yet the translation expands the number of connections, using three pronouns to the Latin's one and corresponding Latin inflections, and expanding the description of the affliction. Alexander does however separate his identity from his troops later in the ideal, when it becomes expedient to do so:

Qua res me dupliciter torsit. Primo de statu exercitus magis quam de proprio meo sollicitus fui periculo. (§16)<sup>99</sup>

Seo wise wæs þa in me on twa healfa uneþe, seo ærest be minre seolfre ned-þearfe, ond mines weorodes. (s. 72).<sup>100</sup>

The troops are still his concern, but he remains a commander primarily.

Alexander's personal leadership as an overking binds his troops together and cements the alliance to his subordinate underking, Porus. As observed above, overkingship was a personal office that could not be transferred to a successor. As such, the overking needed at times to place his welfare ahead of his troops. The translator modifies the narrative in the *Epistola* so that Alexander satisfies his own thirst before his troops and animals (§16, s. 96). Although Orchard has argued that this is a negative feature of Alexander's character in the *Letter*, comparing this apparent self-interest with the selfishness of which the Stoics accused him, it is also possible to view it rather as congruent with the values of Anglo-Saxon martial kingship, and especially in the context of an overkingship built upon personal leadership and reputation.<sup>101</sup> Namely, the

<sup>98</sup> 'But as it often happens with the better and sounder things in events and form, they often are changed and turn otherwise, then it befell *us* that we were afflicted and weakened by thirst painfully. That thirst we bore and endured painfully.' Italics mine.

<sup>99</sup> 'This matter tormented me in two ways. Firstly I was more disturbed by the state of the army more than about my own danger.' trans. with reference to Gunderson, p. 143, and Orchard.

<sup>100</sup> 'The situation was uneasy for me in two parts, the first about my own needs, and that of my troops.'

<sup>101</sup> See Orchard, *Pride*, pp. 137-8.

king's life is more valuable to the whole troop as its leader, but also, as discussed above, the unity of over kingship was bound up in his person. Accordingly, the distinction between the leader and the group was an essential component of good Anglo-Saxon leadership. In Alexander's encounters with attacking elephants and extreme weather, he receives the threat as a member of the army, then separates his identity and assumes control of the group, saving his troops from harm, as shall be discussed below. This protects his power base in the army and ensures their loyalty, a key component of his claim to rule in the *Letter*.

The two episodes of inclement weather and the rampaging elephants depict Alexander engaging as a member of his army, first perceiving a threat to that group, then dividing himself from it and then assuming leadership of the group. Alexander's deployment of the first person singular marks his division from the army; his actions, nearly always commanding or ordering, distinguish him as its head and leader. This pattern repeats itself twice in the episode of severe weather. Before the wind strikes, Alexander clearly identifies with the group:

Igitur rursus ad occidentem signa conuerti *imperaui*, ut ex eo loco usque ad duodecimum miliarium castra uicina equationi *poneremus*. (§30)<sup>102</sup> (Italics mine).

Onð we þa eft in Fasiacen þæt lond becwoman þanan we ær ferdon, onð we þær gewicodon be þæm neah-wætrum, onð we þær ure geteld bræddon ealle on æfen, onð þær wæron eac fyr wel monigo onæled. (s. 203).<sup>103</sup> (Italics mine).

Again the translation deviates from the Latin, in which Alexander orders his men to make camp, instead presenting him as one of the group making camp together. The translation has also multiplied the number of first person plural pronouns, from two in the Latin, *nobis*, ('to us') with the inflectional *poneremus* ('we had set down'), to five, which is required by the structure of Old

<sup>102</sup> 'Then again I ordered the signals to be changed to the west, so that we should set up camp twelve miles from there, near a watering hole.' trans. with reference to Gunderson, p. 149 and Orchard.

<sup>103</sup> 'And we came then again into the land of Fasiacen, where we had travelled earlier, and there we made camp by the neighbouring waters, and there we spread our tents in the evening, and there were also a good many fires lit.' Italics mine. At the only other clear making of camp in the text, Alexander personally commands the actions and dimensions at the lake of potable water (s. 98).

English, but nonetheless gives the impression of greater identification with the troops. In so doing, the translator allows Alexander to be one of the troops, showing a sort of camaraderie and mutual loyalty that made him such a charismatic leader. The narrative then recounts the wondrous weather impersonally, as do both the *Epistola* and *Letter* when describing wonders, but shifts to Alexander using the first person plural to narrate the arrival of the wind as it becomes a threat to the troops:

Etiam erecta cuncta tentoria erant largique ignes accensi, cum repente Euri uenti tanta uis flantis exorta est, ut omnia tabernacula principiaque maiorum in modum stupentibus *nobis*. Quadrupedi[a] multo uehementius uexabantur exitu scintillarum et titium his in terga uenientibus adurebantur. (§30).<sup>104</sup> (Italics mine).

Ða cwom þær semninga swiðe micel wind ond gebræc, ond to þæs unheorlic se wind geweoƿ þæt he þara getelda moniga gefylde, ond he ða eac *usse* feþer-fot-nietenu swiðe swencte. (s. 204).<sup>105</sup> (Italics mine).

On perceiving the threat, Alexander takes control of the situation and commands the troops' response:

Tum *ortor* milites quia noctuali tempore id accidisset, non deorum ira Octobre mense autumnoque urgueret. Uix tandem relictis sarcinis ex integro in priore ualle sedem castrorum inuenimus ordinatisque rebus omnibus cenare milites *iussi*. (§30).<sup>106</sup> (Italics mine).

Ða *het ic* gesomnigan eft þa geteld ond seamas ealle tosomne, ond hie mon þa seamas ond þa þing ðara ura wicstowa earfoðlice tosomne for þæm winde geseomnode. Ond ða on gehliuran dene ond on wearman we gewicodon. Mid þy we gewicod hæfdon ond ure þing eall gearo, þa *het ic* eallne þone here þæt he to swæsndum sæte ond mete þigde, ond hie þa swa dydon. (ss. 205-7).<sup>107</sup> (Italics mine).

<sup>104</sup> 'Yet as all the tents were erected and large fires lit, then suddenly such a force of a gusting southeast wind rose up, that it battered all of our main tents and destroyed the greater part while we were stupefied. And the four-footed beasts were much more violently distressed by the effusion of sparks and burning brands, and were burned by them falling on their backs. Trans. with reference to Gunderson, p. 149, and Orchard.

<sup>105</sup> 'Then suddenly a great wind and crashing [noise] came there, and the wind grew so fierce there that it felled many of *our* tents, and it also greatly troubled our four-footed beasts.' Italics mine.

<sup>106</sup> 'Then *I* encouraged the soldiers that it had happened because it was night-time, not through the anger of the gods, since it was the middle of autumn in the month of October. Having with difficulty completely picked up our packs again *we* found a place for our camp in the previous valley, and once everything was in place *I* ordered *my* soldiers to eat.' Trans. with reference to Gunderson, pp. 149-50 and Orchard; italics mine.

<sup>107</sup> 'Then *I* commanded that our tents and bags all be gathered together again, and the bags and the things of our camp were difficult for men to gather because of the wind. And then we made camp in a more sheltered and warmer valley. When we had made camp and all our things ready, then *I* ordered all the army that they should sit to have a



Though the adaptations in the translation are themselves minor, combined with other small changes throughout, they suggest that the translator aimed to highlight the role of Alexander as leader. The same pattern is readily apparent in small adaptations which emphasize Alexander's leadership in the encounter with the elephants (ss. 188-94). Alexander first perceives the threat as one of the group, receiving a command as *we*:

Cum subito paulatores lignatoresque examinati omnes simul aduenientes nuntiant, ut celerius arma *capere*mus. (§28).<sup>108</sup> (Italics mine).

Ða was semninga geboden þæt *we* wæpnu noman ond hie tioloden, on *us* wære micel þearf þæt *we* *us* scyldan. Ða dydon *we* swa, fengon to *ussum* wæpnum swa *us* beboden wæs. (s.188-9).<sup>109</sup> (Italics mine).

Again, the *Letter* emphasizes Alexander's identity with the troops with additional first person plural pronouns, where the Latin has only one first person plural inflection of *capere-emus*.

Alexander uses his knowledge to command the response, strategizing to avert the threat with the least damage to his own troops, using his personal knowledge to outwit the elephants:

*Imperaui ego* Thesalicis equitibus, ut ascenderent equos secumque *extollerent* sues, quorum grunnitus timere bestias noueram, et occurrere quam primum elephantis. (§28).<sup>110</sup> (Italics mine).

Ða *het ic* sona þa hors gerwan ond eored-men helapan up, ond *het* geniman swina micelne wræd ond drifan on horsum ongean þæm elpendum, forþon *ic* wiste þæt swin wæron ðæm deorum laðe, ond hiora rying hie meahte afyrhton. (s. 192).<sup>111</sup> (Italics mine).

Alexander's solution immediately repels the attacking elephants. The use of the first person plural and singular here distinguishes Alexander's relationship to the group, shifting from the perception of the threat in the first person plural, to his leadership in responding to the challenges

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meal and eat meat, and they did so.' Curiously, Alexander does not respond to his troops' fears of the anger of the gods in the *Letter* (s. 215).

<sup>108</sup> 'When suddenly breathless foragers and wood-cutters arriving all at once announce that we should take up arms quite quickly.' Trans. with reference to Gunderson, p. 148-9 and Orchard; italics mine.

<sup>109</sup> 'Then we were suddenly bidden that we should acquire and take up weapons, and that the need to *us* was great that we shield *ourselves*. Then we did so, taking to *our* weapons as it was bidden.' Italics mine.

<sup>110</sup> '*I ordered* the Thessalonian horsemen to mount their horses and take with them pigs, whose grunting *I had* known to frighten the beasts, to meet the elephants as quickly as possible.' Trans. with reference to Gunderson, p. 149, and Orchard; italics mine.

<sup>111</sup> 'Then *I* immediately ordered horses to be prepared and riding-men to mount them, and ordered a great herd of swine be taken and driven on the horses against the elephants, because *I* knew that swine were hateful to those creatures, and their crying might frighten them away.' Italics mine.

of the expedition, saving them all from harm. This account also highlights the importance of the relationship between the troops and their leader to Alexander's success as a military leader, conqueror and king. The troops' response to the elephants is to shield themselves; Alexander's insight and leadership uses the swine as an offensive tactic to defeat the elephants.

Martial prowess was an essential element of the noble identity, and military leadership a key factor in the elevation of a noble or ætheling to kingship. The demarcation of Alexander's individual leadership, indicated by a change of voice in the narrative and by actions of commanding, mirror the expected functions and behaviours of an Anglo-Saxon king. Alexander's actions as an ambitious king, like those of a *bretwalda*, position him as a model of ideal kingship, which would have been of interest to many Anglo-Saxon kings, including the great Mercian kings of the eighth and ninth centuries.<sup>112</sup> His personal ambitions, ability to delegate to subordinate leaders, and attention to the complicated logistics of an overkingship in particular invite a reading of Alexander as a positive exemplar, much as he appears in other secular medieval works.

### *The Letter of Alexander in Context: History and Literature*

In this section, I examine Alexander's leadership in two different but interrelated contexts. Firstly, I outline how aspects of leadership which Alexander can be seen as parallel to the leadership of the historical Mercian kings of the late eighth and ninth century, particularly regarding military leadership, the character of their status as overking, and their ambitions.

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<sup>112</sup> The term *bretwalda* appears only in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (829/827), and never in the *HE* or *OEB*. It appears to be an archaic and poetic term, and the Mercian kings are omitted from these politically biased lists. Stenton alternatively theorizes that the regnal style of Æthelbald as *Rex Britanniae* is a conscious translation of the term; see F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (Oxford, 1989), p. 34; cf. *HE* V. 23.

Though these characteristics were not unique to Mercian kings, as we have seen above, a reading of the *Letter* in an eighth- or ninth-century Mercian context has the ability to offer a fruitful understanding of the text and translator's intentions. I then discuss the implications of further similarities between Alexander and Offa, as great, conquering kings. Finally, I compare the leadership of Alexander to the various models of kingship in *Beowulf*. Located uniquely in the Nowell Codex, these two texts both have a number of linguistic and other features in common, as discussed above, which may indicate that they share a previous transmission history.<sup>113</sup> Together, similarities and different focuses in these works invite a reading of them together, as products of the same culture, responding to similar influences and issues.

#### Alexander and Mercian Kingship

As discussed above, military leadership was an essential component of noble and royal identity throughout the medieval period, but within the Anglo-Saxon period the martial prowess of a king, rather than other factors such as ancestry or royal wisdom, was of paramount importance in Mercia in the ninth century. Æthelbald, Offa and Cenwulf successfully conducted major military campaigns, upholding and expanding Mercian territory. Beornwulf, who succeeded Ceolwulf, had a mediocre record as a military leader, defeated at Ellendun in 825 and killed in East Anglia in 826. As Susan Kelly observes, 'During his brief reign the long-standing Mercian domination of southern England rapidly disintegrated.'<sup>114</sup> Unlike his successors Ludeca and Wiglaf, Beornwulf may have been descended from a previous king, and therefore may have succeeded to the throne based on ancestry in addition to (or instead of) his reputation for military leadership, especially given his previous status as a low-ranking ealdorman.<sup>115</sup> His attempts to suppress a

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<sup>113</sup> Klaeber's *Beowulf*, p. clxxviii; Sisam, 'Compilation', p. 94.

<sup>114</sup> S. Kelly, 'Beornwulf (d. 826?)', *ODNB*. For connections with the loss of Alexander's empire after his death, see above, p. 250.

<sup>115</sup> Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 231, fn. 1.

revolt in East Anglia seem to have been unsuccessful as the next year his successor, Ludeca, was also killed in East Anglia. As Viking attacks and the strength of Wessex increased, the ability of the king to lead the army, both in conquest and defense, became increasingly important in Mercia.

Military leadership was also a key component in the creation and maintenance of overkingship, a position which, like an empire, as shall be discussed below, is comparable with the kind of kingship which Alexander practices in India. Not every king, however, aspired to overkingship; only those with ambition and a desire for glory would attempt such risky conquests.<sup>116</sup> After Mercian expansion for nearly a century under successful overkings, the growing power of Wessex dramatically altered the balance of Southumbrian power. After defeat at the Battle of Ellendun in 825, Mercia ceded its dominant position. For subjects, overkingship involved extending the hospitality traditionally owed a king to an overking, but potentially also payment of additional tribute and any spoils taken in war.<sup>117</sup> While Æthelbald, Offa and Cenwulf were known most frequently as *rex Merciorum*, awareness of their status as overkings can be recognized in other titles which they adopted, including *rex Britanniae*, *decus Britanniae*, *rex Suthanglorum* and *rex non solum Mercensium sed etiam in circuitu populorum*.<sup>118</sup>

A number of parallels can be observed between the careers of the historical Offa and Alexander in the *Letter* which suggest that the translation was shaped by a climate similar to that of Offa's reign and influenced by theories and practices of kingship such as those which appear to have pertained during this period. The respective reputations of these kings as military leaders and conquerors is foremost in the historical record of Offa and the depiction of Alexander in the

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<sup>116</sup> Higham, *English Empire*, p. 64.

<sup>117</sup> EKK, pp. 16-7, 91.

<sup>118</sup> EKK, p. 114; Yorke, 'Vocabulary', 180-3, 186-93.

*Letter*. Offa was of unknown origins and seized the Mercian throne by deposing Beornred; the entry in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, for example, states that Beornred *feng to rice 7 lytle hwile heold 7 ungefealice, 7 þy ilcan geare Offa geflemde Beornred 7 feng to þam rice* ('succeeded to the kingdom and held it for a short time and miserably, and the same year Offa put Beornred to flight and succeeded to the kingdom').<sup>119</sup> The common stock text of the Chronicle implies what the Worcester Chronicle states: that Offa seized the throne by military action. Alexander's legendary reputation as a military commander and conqueror is evident in patristic works as well as the *Letter*. Both figures have also been accused of pride, yet in moments of mercy or political maneuvering could arrange to bury their rivals' corpses. Orosius' *Historia aduersos paganos* severely criticizes Alexander as a figure of pride, a position which, as Orchard demonstrates, is intensified in the OE *Orosius*.<sup>120</sup> The *Letter* opens with a brief reference to Alexander's previous victory over Darius (§6-7; ss. 19-20). The accounts of Alexander in both the *Historia* and the *Orosius* depict a glory-seeking conqueror and overking, but one tempered with respect for the status of other kings. During the battle, Darius was wounded and captured by his own relatives:

Darium uero cum a propinquis suis uinctum conpedibus aureis teneri conperisset persequi statuit [...] [et] inuenit in itinere solum relictum, multis confossum uulneribus et extrema uitae per uulnera efflantem. Hunc mortuum inani misericordia referri in sepulchra maiorum sepe liri que praecepit. (III.17.6-7).<sup>121</sup>

<sup>119</sup> G. P. Cubbin, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition Volume 6 MS D*, series ed. D. Dumville and S. Keynes (Cambridge, 1983), p. 14. The word *fælic* may also have ties to the Mercian dialect, appearing also in the four recensions of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (Parker, Abingdon II, Worcester and Peterborough), three homilies (one by Wulfstan, one anonymous in MS Junius 85, and the *Guthlac* poems of the Exeter Book, 'fælic', *DOEC*). I have selected MS D because it contains the Mercian Register, but also it contains a number of details which suggest a closer association with Mercian traditions at Worcester, such as the naming of St Juliana's day (see above, p. 153), though this detail is common to all recensions of the Chronicle.

<sup>120</sup> Orchard, *Pride*, pp. 117-25; Cary, pp. 101-2; 121-30; for a differing view of the presentation of Alexander in the *Orosius* which highlights the positive aspects of his character as an effective military leader, see Khalaf, 'Study'.

<sup>121</sup> 'When he heard that Darius's relatives had imprisoned him and bound him in golden fetters, he decided to give chase. So, after ordering his army to follow him, he himself set off with 6,000 cavalry. He found the king abandoned by the wayside: he had been stabbed many times and was breathing his last. And in an empty gesture of pity, Alexander ordered that the dead king be taken to, and buried in, the tomb of his ancestors.' K. Zangemeister, ed.,

7 siþþan for on Perse 7 geeode Persi[p]ulis þa burg heora cynestol, seo is giet welegast ealra burga. Ða sede man Alexandere þæt Darius hæfde gebunden his [agene] mægas mid gyldenre racentan. Ða for he [...] 7 funde hiene ænne be wege licgan, mid sperum tosticad, healfcucne. He þa Alexander him anum deadum lytle mildheortnesse gedyde, þæt he hiene hett bebyrgean an his ieldrena byrg. (III.viii).<sup>122</sup>

Alexander's actions are those of a conquering king bent on victory but also of a ruler who still respects his defeated enemy by arranging a proper burial. Reputation was a prime source of motivation for both kings. As Simon Keynes observes, 'Offa was driven by a lust for power, not a vision of English unity; and what he left was a reputation, not a legacy.'<sup>123</sup> In a passage unparalleled in the *Epistola*, Alexander too regrets his untimely demise in the *Letter*, but only because his glory was lessened:

Ond me næs se hrædlice ende mines lifes swa miclum weorce swa me wæs þæt ic læs mærdō gefremed hæfde þonne min willa wære. (s. 292).<sup>124</sup>

Offa's own bloodthirsty reputation, like that of Alexander, may have also been mitigated by infrequent acts of pity: Offa ordered the burial of Æthelberht, king of East Anglia, whom he had had executed, at Hereford Cathedral, perhaps to minimise political tension, perhaps as a measure of pity.<sup>125</sup> Alexander begins the narrative as a conquering king empowered by his military actions, not by inheritance, as his father is absent from the narrative.<sup>126</sup> Offa's identity as a conqueror is hinted at in the origins of his name. Sometimes hypothesized to have been of

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*Pauli Orosii Historiarum aduersum paganos*, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 5 (Vienna: C. Gerold and Sons, Academic Publishers, 1889), p. 176; trans. Fear, p. 135.

<sup>122</sup> 'And after he went into Persia and proceeded to Persepolis, the city which is their capitol, which is the wealthiest of all cities. Then men said to Alexander that Darius had been bound by his own kinsmen with golden fetters. Then he went forth [...] and found him alone laying in the road, wounded by spears, half-alive. Then Alexander, he showed the dead one a little mercy, that he ordered him to be buried alone in the city of his ancestors.' Bately, *Orosius*, p. 70. Compare Orchard's discussion, *Pride*, pp. 122-3.

<sup>123</sup> Keynes, 'Offa', *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. M. Lapidge *et al.*, 2nd edn (Chichester, 2014), p. 340.

<sup>124</sup> 'And the rapid end of my life was not so great a torment to me as that I should have achieved less glory that I had wished.'

<sup>125</sup> EKK, p. 59; Thacker, 'Kings, Saints and Monasteries', 1, 16-18; A. Todd, 'Æthelberht (779/80-794)', *ODNB*; Thacker, 'Saints', 17-8.

<sup>126</sup> See above, pp. 242, 264.

Hwiccean descent, his name recalls the heroic king of the Angles who, according to legends preserved in Old English heroic verse, expanded the borders of his kingdom and also married an extremely powerful wife.<sup>127</sup> The reputation of Offa of Angeln as a conqueror and overking and Offa of Mercia's association with this continental warrior-king again suggests that the Mercian ruler sought to imitate the practices and reputation of his namesake.

Medieval kings were deeply interested in the classical and legendary kings of the past as models for their own exploits. Indeed, the legendary heroic king, Offa of Angeln, from whom Offa of Mercia probably took his name, may also have served, like Alexander, as an aspirational model of kingship for Anglo-Saxon kings in this period. Offa of Angeln expanded his kingdom by warfare, a detail recorded in *Widsið* (ll. 35-44); the *Beowulf* poet records his feats as a warrior, successful marriage to the powerful princess, Modthryth, and the birth of their son and heir, Eomer, an ancestor of Offa of Mercia (ll. 1931b-62).<sup>128</sup> Indeed, Alexander features alongside Offa of Angeln in *Widsið*, potentially one of the oldest Old English poems:

þara wæs [H]wala hwile selast  
 ond Alexandreas ealra ricost  
 monna cynnes, 7 he mæst geþah  
 þara þe ic ofer foldan gefrægen hæbbe. (ll. 14-17).<sup>129</sup>

As overkings, both Offa and Alexander managed their subordinates shrewdly. Interestingly, both the *Epistola* and the *Letter* only ever refer to Alexander as 'king', though the vernacular

<sup>127</sup> Leneghan, 'Poetic Purpose', 547-53.

<sup>128</sup> Leneghan, 'Poetic Purpose', 538-60.

<sup>129</sup> 'Hwala was for a time the best, and Alexander the most powerful of all mankind, and he thrived most over all those of whom I have heard over the earth.' Malone, ed., *Widsið*, p. 23; nearly all editors agree that the unusual form *Alexandreas* is a result of the *Exeter* scribe confusing Alexander with Andreas; see Malone, p. 128; Chambers, *Widsið*, pp. 179, 190-1; K. Powell, 'Alexander the Great, Letter to Aristotle', in *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. M. Lapidge et al., 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Chichester, 2014), p. 29. Given the presence of other conquering kings like Caesar, however, the reading of *Alexandreas* as Alexander makes sense. Chambers further hypothesizes that the poem could have been written in seventh-century Mercia, pp. 149-50. Malone suspects this section may be an interpolation, see pp. 37-8. For further on the date of *Widsið*, see above, p. 33 and Neidorf, 'Dating of *Widsið*'.

rendering of ‘emperor’, *casere*, is almost never used in laws or charters of real, Anglo-Saxon kings.<sup>130</sup> As kings, Offa and Alexander cultivated a few close and trusted subordinates. For Offa, these were *ealdormen* whom he could trust in battle and for advice. Alexander too had his own close advisors: ‘mine þrie ða getreowestan frynd, ða wæron mine syndrige treow-geþoftan’ (s. 267) (i.e. Perticas, Clitumus and Pilotas).<sup>131</sup> The identities of Offa’s closest supporters, recorded in charters, were probably Eadbald, *dux*, and Eata, *dux*, and certainly Brorda, both *dux* and *praefectus*, a man of noble birth who also served Ecgrith.<sup>132</sup> Most Anglo-Saxon kings had a few close ealdormen, so this similarity should not be overemphasised, though the length and duration of their association with Offa suggests a similar degree of loyalty. While kings cultivated the loyalty of powerful and capable men from their own kingdoms, overkings drew the attention of a wider range of subjects and talents. They could also instill loyalty in newly subordinated kings, whether by mercy or terror. Offa made allies of men who stood to be his biggest rivals, or removed them from power, often replacing them with his own allies. Asser’s *Life of Alfred* glosses over Offa’s role in the exile of Alfred’s grandfather, Ecgberht, from Wessex. As overking of Southumbria and ally to the current king of Wessex, Beorhtric, by marriage, Offa may have recognized the potential threat of Ecgberht as a military leader. Asser describes Offa in the following terms:

Fuit in Mercia moderno tempore quidam strenuus atque universis circa se regibus et regionibus finitimis formidolosus rex, nomine Offa, qui vallum magnum inter Britanniam atque Merciam de mari usque ad mare fieri imperavit. (XVII).<sup>133</sup>

<sup>130</sup> Yorke, ‘Vocabulary’, p. 177-8; *DOEC*, ‘casere’. S 566, a charter of Eadred (c. 955), is an exception: as an ‘alliterative’ charter, *casere* alliterates with *cyning*, and is used to gloss *totius Britannię Deo gratias*.

<sup>131</sup> ‘My three truest friends, who were my especial trusty companions.’

<sup>132</sup> PASE, Eadbald 6, Brorda 2, Eata 5; Thacker, ‘Brorda (d. 799)’.

<sup>133</sup> Stevenson, pp. 12-13. ‘A certain vigorous king called Offa, who terrified all the neighbouring kings and provinces around him, and who had a great dyke built between Wales and Mercia from sea to sea’, trans. Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, p. 71.



Offa made a similar alliance with Æthelred I of Northumbria, restored king of the Northumbrians and son of Æthelwold Moll, another king with little dynastic claim, by marrying his daughter to him in 792.<sup>134</sup> With allies ruling Wessex and Northumbria, and direct control of Lindsey, East Anglia and Kent by conquest and alliance, Offa secured his position as the most powerful Anglo-Saxon king. In the *Letter*, Alexander similarly cultivates alliances with powerful figures, accepting King Porus as one of his companions and subordinates after returning him the kingdom which he had surrendered (ss. 167-9). In return, Porus gives Alexander and his troops gold from his treasury and other tribute (ss. 169-73), acting in a manner comparable with Anglo-Saxon underkings.

Both rulers also inspire fear by the ruthlessness of their actions. For example, Alexander's retribution against the faithless guides who lead him astray into the desert (ss. 143-4; cf. Lat. §22), and testing of the efficacy of the curse at Bacchus' cave on condemned men (ss. 220-4; cf. Lat. §31) reveals a lust for glory that supersedes all other considerations. Similarly, Offa's desire for glory may have motivated his murder of Æthelberht of East Anglia and prompted the purge of potential rivals of Ecgfrith for the Mercian throne.

The Mercian overkings resembled Alexander in their ambitions and lust for glory, but the position of the Mercian king changed from overking to client king from the 830s. Wiglaf was deprived of his kingdom in 829, but, like Porus, he regained it in 830, though probably by military conquest rather than reinstatement by Ecgberht.<sup>135</sup> Nonetheless, from Wiglaf's second reign through to the consolidation of Mercia and Wessex under Edward the Elder, the rulers of Mercia occupied a position of subordination to the West Saxon kings, and cooperated with their

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<sup>134</sup> Though Offa and later Mercian kings certainly had client kings (i.e., Eadred of the Hwicce, Ecgberht of Kent d. 779x784), neither of Offa's sons-in-law appear to have been inferior in power to him. Cf. Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, p. 236, n. 36.

<sup>135</sup> Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 233-4.

new overkings. Alexander's empire – depicted in the *Letter* as an overkingship – faced a similar fragmentation as the Mercian overkingship when Alexander died, which cautions audiences that that secular power is transitory.

### Alexander and Beowulf

The fates of kings and their famous deeds is, of course, a central theme in the *Letter*'s other MS companion-piece, *Beowulf*. An obvious point for comparison exists between Alexander, Offa and Æthelbald, all of whom expanded the borders of their rule, as did Scyld Scefing, Beow and Offa of Angeln, which suggests that the poem is interested in the practice of overkingship.<sup>136</sup> The poem praises these kings, employing terms such as *god cyning* (l. 11, 'a good king')<sup>137</sup> (Scyld), *leof leod-cyning* (Beow), (l. 54, 'a beloved king of the people'), while Offa of Angeln is described as *gar-cene man, wide geweorðod, wisdom heold eðel sinne* (ll. 1958b-60a, 'a spear-wise man, widely honoured, held his homeland with wisdom').<sup>138</sup> Yet the poet also reserves space for the reputations of kings who maintained their boundaries, like Beowulf himself, and Hrothgar, who might be likened to kings like Cenwulf or Wiglaf. Moreover, *Beowulf* also gives advice to these mighty kings to consider their deeds carefully. For example, in the 'sermon; spoken by the aged Hrothgar to the young Beowulf:

Nu is þines mægnes blæd  
ane hwile; eft sona bið  
þæt þec adl oððe ecg eafodnes getwæfeð [...]

Semninga bið  
ðæt ðec, dryht-guma, deað oferswyðeð. (ll. 1761b-3; 67b-8).<sup>139</sup>

<sup>136</sup> For a discussion of Swedish influence over Geatish succession, and the possibility that Hygelac was, for a time, joint ruler with Beowulf, see F. Biggs, 'Some Fictions of the Geatish Succession', *ASE* 32 (2003), 55-77.

<sup>137</sup> This occurs on two further occasions, in reference to Hrothgar and likely Beowulf.

<sup>138</sup> Leneghan, "'That Was a Good King!'", The phrase *god cyning* occurs twice more in the poem, most likely in reference to Hrothgar and Beowulf.

<sup>139</sup> 'Now your strength is in bloom, for a time; yet quickly it will be that illness or edge shall deprive you of strength. It will be suddenly, warrior of the people, that death overpowers you.'

This advice could apply to Alexander as much as Offa, Hygelac as Cenwulf or Wiglaf. A number of similarities between Beowulf and Alexander in the *Letter* may explain their shared transmission; both texts offer important advice and an array of exemplary kings and may have been read as mirrors for princes.<sup>140</sup> The similarities and parallels identified here, in addition to the linguistic and other factors discussed above, sit well with reading both the *Letter* and *Beowulf* as products of eighth- and ninth-century Mercia, when such an attitude to royal power was in vogue.

Indeed, as Orchard has noted, the characters of Beowulf and the Alexander of the OE *Letter* have a number of similarities, and the legitimacy of their claims to the royal succession can be explained by situating them in the context of eighth- and ninth-century Mercia.<sup>141</sup> For example, little is revealed about both characters' paternal ancestry, typically a key factor in the royal succession in earlier and later periods and kingdoms: Beowulf's frequently-named father, Ecgtheow, was exiled to avoid a feud (ll. 459-72) and is a member of the obscure Wægmunding tribe; Offa's father, Thingfrith, is unknown save for his supposed descent from Eowa, Penda's brother, by which Offa's claim to legitimacy derived. Alexander, on the other hand, derived his right to rule through his father, Philip.<sup>142</sup> However, as Philip does not appear in the *Letter*, Alexander seems to lack the *rihtfædrencyn*, or ancestry, explicitly associated with kingship, as mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon chronicle in relation to Cynewulf of Wessex. In the case of the *Letter*, Philip's absence implicitly elevates the female relations of these kings. Beowulf inherits

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<sup>140</sup> On Beowulf as a mirror for Anglo-Danish princes in the Danelaw, see L. Schücking, 'Wann entstand der Beowulf: Glossen, Zweifel und Fragen', translated in *Beowulf: The Critical Heritage*, ed. T. Shippey and A. Haarder (London, 1998), pp. 536-42, at 539-40.

<sup>141</sup> On the possibility that Offa claimed legitimacy from a fabricated genealogy, see Leneghan, 'Poetic Purpose', 549-50.

<sup>142</sup> Alexander also claimed instead to be descended from a god. On Philip and Alexander's male relations, see above, p. 242.

the Geatish throne through his unnamed mother, Hygelac's sister, after all other male heirs are dead. These situations recall the prominence of royal and noble Mercian women, as discussed in Chapter 2. As Orchard notes, Alexander and Beowulf both order the construction of memorials in remarkably similar and distinctively Mercian linguistic terms.<sup>143</sup> Mercian kings, too, were alert to the value of memorials to preserve their reputations, as demonstrated by the lavish burials of Æthelbald and Wigstan at Repton, and Cynehelm at Winchcombe, while the greatest Anglo-Saxon earthwork which preserves the name of its commissioning king is, of course, Offa's Dyke, a military earthwork marking the border between Wales and Mercia.<sup>144</sup>

A number of parallels, narrative, lexical and thematic, link *Beowulf* and the *Letter* such that Andy Orchard has suggested that the translator of the *Letter* knew the poem and adapted his work to reflect it: 'undoubtedly the *Letter* makes a fine companion piece to *Beowulf*, and perhaps deserves to be read more widely as such.'<sup>145</sup> Indeed, both texts address the difficulty of balancing the acquisition of glory and wealth and ensuring a stable succession, a topic which certainly troubled the Mercian throne after the unexpected death of Ecgfrith in 796.

Glory was a means of stabilizing a king's reign, but like overkingship, could not be passed on to a successor. Both Beowulf and Alexander recommend the pursuit of glory as a remedy against the pangs of mortality (ll. 1386-9a; s. 292). Might and glory were also elements of a king's reputation which factored into his success as a leader, in Mercia as elsewhere. Berhtwulf, who succeeded Wiglaf, appears to have lacked the reputation for glory and thus the

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<sup>143</sup> See above, p. 232.

<sup>144</sup> Kelly, 'Offa', *ODNB*. D. Hill and M. Worthington, *Offa's Dyke: History and Guide* (Stroud, 2003), pp. 108, 110; F. Stenton, Foreword in C. Fox, *Offa's Dyke: A Field Survey of the Western Frontier-Works of Mercia in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries A.D.* (Oxford, 1955), pp. xvii-xxi.

<sup>145</sup> A. Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 32, 36. Further parallels include the words *peodcynig*, *sceawian*, *wundor* and *nicor*; descriptions of men being dragged underwater by monsters, of the waters and meres where monsters dwell, and of the burial mounds of great leaders, the last of which also appears in the *Liber Monstrorum*, see pp. 26-36.

support it conferred, as his reign lasted merely months, the names of his supporters are unknown, and the Mercian nobles seem to have been decidedly against him, as Kelly notes:

These documents give the impression that Berhtwulf was anxious to build up his resources and to accumulate land with which to reward his followers. It seems likely that his position within Mercia was insecure, so that he needed to fight off challengers; the fact that he could not rely on the Mercian *witan* to support his depredations is a sign that he could not expect unconditional support from his subordinate nobles.<sup>146</sup>

Unlike Berhtwulf, however, more successful Mercian kings, such as Cenwulf and Offa, cultivated generosity much as Hrothgar uses wealth as a means of enticing and rewarding loyalty and bravery. In *Beowulf*, Hrothgar is depicted as a king who had success in battle and acquired the resources to build a splendid hall and attract an excellent retinue (ll. 64-85), then using treasure to repay deeds (ll. 660a-1; 1046-9).<sup>147</sup> He advises Beowulf to give treasure liberally, warning against the greedy behaviour of Heremod (ll. 1749-57). Hrothgar correlates generosity with a king's ability to retain power, a truth borne out by his retention of the throne despite Grendel's relentless attacks. Alexander, too, is a generous leader. Along the journey in India, his troops acquire plenty of booty, specifically *goldes ond eorcan-stana* (s. 48, 'gold and precious gems'. He also rewards the loyalty of his officer Seferes: *hine beforan ealra onsione mid deor-weorðum gyfym gegeafede for ðære dæde* (s. 58, 'before the sight of all [the troops] rewarded him with dearly worthy gifts for his deed'). Alexander also gives Porus back the kingdom just surrendered to him (s. 169), earning his loyalty as a friend. Generosity was an essential element of effective kingship: successful kings like Offa, Cenwulf and Wiglaf acquired wealth through conquest, taxation and the acquisition of land, and both kept and distributed their riches to attract and gain supporters for themselves and their heirs. Successful kings acquired and used gold and

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<sup>146</sup> S. E. Kelly, 'Berhtwulf', *ODNB*.

<sup>147</sup> D. Clark, 'Relaunching the Hero: The Case of Scyld and Beowulf Re-Opened', *Neophilologus* 90 (2006), 621-42, at 626.

glory to support their political ambitions, and shared these resources as necessary and appropriate.

An imbalance between present wealth and glory and the stability of the succession plagued a number of legendary and historic kings. Alexander, as portrayed in the *Epistola*, is a prime example, content to establish his memory without considering the fate of his army or empire in India. This is intensified in the *Letter*, which omits the reference to an appointed ruler of Persia in the Latin (§41). Alexander's glorious reign dominates the present of the *Letter* but no indications suggest a stable succession. Francis Leneghan and Frederick Biggs have highlighted how the *Beowulf* poet focuses on dynastic succession and the need to balance it with the acquisition of wealth and glory.<sup>148</sup> In *Beowulf*, the poet identifies that Heremod becomes a 'bad' king; his story is told twice, initially in relation to the deeds of Beowulf and Sigemund, characters both noted for their physical strength (ll. 898-915), and again when Hrothgar warns Beowulf against pride (ll. 1709-22a, 1739-57).<sup>149</sup> The change in Heremod's attitude to wealth is symptomatic of his poor leadership, giving violence instead of rings to his own people (l. 1719), and provides a significant contrast to the conduct of his more generous, and therefore more successful, successors on the throne, Heremod's son Scyld, and his son Beow (ll. 20-3). Hygelac dies on a raid undertaken *for wlenco*, 'for pride' (l. 1206), leaving his young, inexperienced son on the Geatish throne. And most significantly, Beowulf himself struggles with the balance between stability and glory as a king. As George Clark comments:

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<sup>148</sup> Leneghan, "'That was a Good King!'"'; F. Biggs, 'The Politics of Succession in *Beowulf* and Anglo-Saxon England', *Speculum* 80 (2005), 709-41; F. Biggs, 'Beowulf and some Fictions of the Danish Succession: Gift Giving as an Occasion for Complex Gesture', *Medievalia et Humanistica* 11 (1982), 177-97; F. Biggs, 'History and Fiction in the Frisian Raid', in *The Dating of Beowulf: a Reassessment*, ed. L. Neidorf (Cambridge, 2014), pp. 138-56, at 144, 147. See also S. Hollis, 'Beowulf and the Succession', *Parergon* 1 (1983), 39-54.

<sup>149</sup> Orchard, *Critical Companion*, pp. 112-3.

The poem identifies the role of an ideal king as it persistently describes kings as ringgivers, protectors, and guardians of their peoples. The dragon threatens the survival of the Geats, yet guards a treasure worthy of a nation. In challenging the dragon, Beowulf realizes the traditional language of the poets and becomes their ideal king.<sup>150</sup>

The problems of stable succession and glory, then, are prominent themes in both *Beowulf* and the *Letter*: in the epic, by its varied examples; in the translation, conspicuous by its absence. In the *Epistola*, Alexander nominates a sort of successor by leaving commands for Alan (§41); this is absent in the Old English, which leaves the impression of Alexander dying, and his overkingship or empire with him. Though the specifics of succession varied according to the situation in Mercia, with several instabilities caused by the purge of potential successors under Offa and by untimely deaths of sole heirs, other kings pursued aggressive campaigns without clear heirs, as with Beornwulf and Ludeca. The ensuing struggles for succession weakened the nobility, the throne and the kingdom, contributing to the eventual defeat, partitioning and absorption of Mercia. In such circumstances, as demonstrated by the succession of Lord Æthelred from 883, leadership superseded ancestry as the prime qualification for kingship.<sup>151</sup>

### *Conclusion*

This chapter has aimed to show that the ideal of kingship depicted in both the *Letter* and *Beowulf* can be fruitfully read in the context of eighth- and ninth-century Mercia. These ideas were not unique to this context, and likely appealed to late audiences, such as those of the late tenth or early eleventh century, when they were recopied into the surviving manuscript. The idea of leadership as a crucial factor of kingship, sometimes in spite of ancestry, and of the generosity of a king, and the behaviour of an overking would of course have been just as popular in Alfredian

<sup>150</sup> G. Clark, *Beowulf* (Boston, 1990), p. 140.

<sup>151</sup> On the tension between leadership and ancestry as criteria for kingship, see Biggs, 'The Politics of Succession'; Biggs, 'Beowulf and some Fictions'; Biggs, 'History and Fiction in the Frisian Raid'.

Wessex, or perhaps even in Northumbria, as they evidently were in the context of eighth- and ninth-century Wessex. Kings like Alexander provided medieval writers with models of overkingship in which martial leadership, generosity and the acquisition of glory contributed to a successful kingship. Absent in the *Letter*, however, is the issue of succession, which was a key issue for the Mercians in the ninth century. While in the *Letter*, Alexander acts as an exemplary king whose personal leadership alone may have legitimised his reign, his glory only brings into relief his mortality. As Cary observes:

The one pre-eminent fact of Alexander's career [was] that he was the greatest conqueror ever seen on earth [...]. And on this simplest tradition is based the simplest comment that may be made upon it: that Alexander is dead, and with his death his glory has passed away. To the Christian it is an insistent call to humility; to the pagan it is a tragic comment on the passing of all things.<sup>152</sup>

The complications of this tension between the heroic pursuit of glory and the importance of securing the succession are more fully examined in *Beowulf*. The *Letter* offers a model of how to act as a military leader, with further references of how to behave as an overking, a shrewd combination of ruthlessness and mercy. Thus the *Letter* may have served as a *speculum regum*, an idealized representation of a king, and especially princes, whose prime qualification to be elevated to kingship was their leadership. Yet the *Letter*'s major shortcoming – and Alexander's – receives ample attention in the depictions of kings attempting to balance their own reigns with their successors in *Beowulf*. If anything, the poem balances the prose text's narrative of the implications of short, glorious reigns without provision for the future. At Beowulf's death, without a strong son to succeed him, it is predicted that the various enemies accrued by the Geats will annihilate them (ll. 2910b-3027). Beowulf himself laments that he has no heir to whom he could pass his armour (ll. 2729-32a); unlike his own (semi-)namesake, Beow, son of Scyld, Beowulf had no secure heir:

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<sup>152</sup> Cary, p. 190.



Him þæs liffrea  
 wuldres wealdend woroldare forgeaf  
 Beow was breme- blæd wide sprang-  
 Scyldes eafera Scedelandum in. (ll. 16b-19).<sup>153</sup>

Together, these works of Old English literature offer what each alone does not: a commentary on kingship focusing on the present and future, set in the heroic past. These concerns continued to be relevant to Anglo-Saxon kings, including those of eighth- and ninth-century Mercia, who may well themselves have been the original audiences of these texts, and taken their examples to heart.

Consideration of these texts as originating from a similar context, eighth- or ninth-century Mercia, has the ability to explain a wide range of the features of the *Letter*, as well as its MS companion-pieces, the *Wonders* and *Beowulf*. These include a number of Anglian, and at times Mercian, linguistic features preserved in the overarching late West Saxon dialect of the manuscript, and the possible shared exemplar and transmission history of all three. It also accounts for the translation styles of the prose texts, and suggests linking their settings in the Orient with Oriental influences and interests in contemporary Mercian visual culture. Considering the interest in kingship in *Beowulf* and the *Letter* as Mercian accords neatly with evidence of the two texts sharing an exemplar prior to the addition of the *Wonders*. Reading these works as Mercian also draws attention to other texts considered in this thesis. The large number of small parallels and similarities are most simply explained by this theory. As Fulk has articulated, ‘the simpler hypothesis is to be preferred’ in such matters.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> ‘To them the Lord of life, the Ruler of Glory, gave worldly glory: Beow was illustrious, his renown spread widely, Scyld’s son in Scedeland.’ OE *blæd* can also mean, when unstressed, ‘leaf; blade of grass’ or ‘the blade of an oar’, and, when stressed, ‘blowing; the breeze; breath; inspiration; fire; glory’, *DOE*.

<sup>154</sup> Fulk, ‘*Beowulf* and Language History’, p. 24.

## Conclusion

This thesis offers one possible reading of a group of Old English texts suited to my methodology against a freshly-constructed historical background, which might be able to explain the linguistic features, translation techniques, choices of subject matter and transmission of these texts.<sup>1</sup> To recap briefly, I associated the production of the texts of the cult of St Guthlac in response to particular political needs of the Mercian throne, most frequently in relation to succession legitimacy. In addition to their linguistic features, I connect Cynewulf's selection and adaptation of the *Elene* and *Juliana vita* and *passio* into heroic Old English verse hagiography as a reflection of the powerful position of women in Mercia in the eighth and ninth centuries, which was unmatched elsewhere in Anglo-Saxon England at that time. The *OEB* is read as reflection of contemporary clerical culture, including the promotion of the vernacular in documents produced at councils held under Mercian secular and ecclesiastical leadership. Furthermore, the theory of the possible transmission of the *OEB*, based on linguistic features, art history, script development and political history, advanced here may be usefully applied to other texts. Finally, building on the work of various other scholars, I associate the original prose texts of the Nowell Codex, the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* and the *Wonders of the East*, with questions of good kingship in conjunction with *Beowulf*, and an Orientalism present in numerous cultural products of Mercia in this period. If we accept this hypothesis, we may consider the possibility that Mercia, a powerful and stable Anglo-Saxon kingdom with strong connections to the Continent and other major

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<sup>1</sup> A number of early glosses and glossaries have excellent linguistic claims for being considered of Mercian origin, such as the Vespasian Psalter, and the Épinal and Erfurt glossaries, as well as the entirety of the *OEM*, certain anonymous homilies, medical texts and the later glosses in the Rushworth Gospel. Because these texts lack a narrative, they were not the best suited for my methodology of reading them within a historical narrative. *Andreas* was also left aside as being of a second generation, familiar with the works of Cynewulf. See Bintley and North, *Andreas*, pp. 109-115, and also T. Toon, *The Politics of Old English Sound Change* (New York, 1983), but cautiously, see also R. M. Hogg, 'Review: The Politics of Old English Sound Change', *Journal of Linguistics* 21 (1985), 245.

cultural centres, produced its own corpus of vernacular literature and culture, comparable to the Northumbrian Golden Age in the seventh and early eighth century, and the Carolingian and Alfredian ‘renaissances’. As such, this thesis encourages a wholesale reassessment of the earliest chapters of English literary history.

The possibility of a Mercian tradition of vernacular literature has been proposed before, as has the likelihood of Mercian origins for a number of Old English works, including all those examined in this thesis.<sup>2</sup> I have offered a reading of certain texts within an eighth- or ninth-century Mercian context based on a hypothesis which ultimately cannot be proven. This reading, in some instances, has closely mirrored emerging scholarship, such as the growing consensus that Cynewulf was likely a Mercian, and that the *OEB* is now also a Mercian, rather than Alfredian translation.<sup>3</sup> Other aspects of this thesis have been more hypothetical or derivative, such as the arguments regarding the later texts of the cult of St Guthlac, or the prose texts of the Nowell codex, which rely largely on inferences and patterns observed throughout the thesis. These patterns, such as the word-for-word translation style prevalent in the prose translations, certain dialect vocabulary, the interest in the Orient, and a taste for vernacular hagiographic poetry, may be plausibly explained by reading these works as products of eighth- or ninth-century Mercia, though such features are not, of course, exclusive to Mercian works. For example, the hagiographical poem *Judith* has more West Saxon vocabulary and forms, and is stylistically quite different from the examples considered here. Vernacular hagiography may have been intended for both clerical and secular audiences, bridging the gap between traditional

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<sup>2</sup> F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, 1971), pp. 270-71; Peter Hunter Blair, *An Introduction to Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 1960), p. 173. See also more recently M. Brown, ‘*Beowulf*’, 104-5.

<sup>3</sup> One of the consequences of the reevaluation of this corpus is that it is increasingly difficult to distinguish between ‘Mercian’ and ‘Alfredian’ prose. This should not be surprising, given the involvement of four Mercian scholars from the earliest days in Alfred’s project.

heroic culture and Christian faith. In their idea of the Orient, the artists and kings of Mercia may have found models of authority and alterity with which to distinguish their culture, aligning this marginal kingdom with what for them was the conceptual and cultural centre of the world. This thesis offers the first concentrated reading of these texts together within any single context, grounded in a historical narrative sensitive to political and ecclesiastical developments, which is itself a new development from work done by other historians on Mercia in this period.

There is little to be gained by offering readings of the same texts in the same contexts that are ultimately equally without the ability to be proven. That said, the ability of a hypothesis to explain many features most simply is the measure of its strength, as noted at the outset of this thesis.<sup>4</sup> The argument presented here is substantially new, and while it may be unprovable, it has certain merits. The alternative view, that these works are best considered West Saxon texts from the very late ninth or tenth centuries, which has never really had a single coherent expression, rests on a litany of assumptions about the make-up of (early) West Saxon scriptoria and literature circles, which are equally unprovable but must require a complex combination of Mercian-inspired spelling practice and or glosses or glossaries used by West Saxon authors, translators and scribes, or indeed the presence of a number of Anglian (or Anglian-influenced) scribes in the production of these prose texts, in addition to the theory of a poetic *koine* with a number of Anglianisms for which no explicit explanation has ever been made. This already complicated scenario must be supplemented by a number of smaller correspondences that, on the whole, fail to fit as well with overall narrative of West Saxon production: the promotion of a saint intimately connected to a rival dynasty by a regime which actively suppressed the record of its rivals' achievements, which also failed to promote its own dynastic saints (although it must be admitted

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<sup>4</sup> cf. Fulk, *HOEM* §9. See above, p. 6.

this was mainly for lack of them); and the assumption of either a short but complicated and messy transmission history for these texts, or a series of heavily interfering and bumbling scribes miscopying the archaic work of poets who appear to have bungled their own craft in order to explain the state of the language in the texts as they survive. The assumptions required to support the prevailing scholarly line are in many ways more numerous and problematic, but less sweeping in their stakes, such as the unknowability of scribal practice and transmission in a surviving manuscript. In many cases, scholars have simply refused to engage in the admittedly complex question of provenance and date, treating the absence of context as an advantage. The assumptions in such readings are no less sweeping in their number.

The arguments presented here must be subject to the same scrutiny, and scholars will doubtless take issue with either individual elements or the entirety of my thesis. Considered individually, none of these cases necessarily constitutes ‘smoking-gun’ evidence for Mercian origins. On the whole, however, the hypothesis that these works are Mercian has the ability to explain many elements of history and literature which to date no other theory single-handedly has achieved. This thesis offers only a reading, because as a historian of literature at this far a distance, absolute proof of provenance and date for these texts is unlikely ever to materialize. Yet current scholars, such as Brown, Rauer and Waite, are increasingly giving credence to the possibility of a pre-Alfredian Mercian tradition of vernacular translation and or literature in some form or other.

The hypothesis I have tested in this dissertation could have major implications for the study of Old English. For one, it proposes pushing the known origins of vernacular English literary production (especially prose) at least a century earlier and into a completely different, and hitherto relatively unexplored, cultural and political context. The possibility of considering

other, non-West Saxon places and dates of composition for Old English literature has recently gained support from John Hines's argument that a line of verse found in *Azarias* and *Daniel* is attested earliest in a runic inscription found in Lincolnshire.<sup>5</sup> The hypothesis driving this reading also encourages a reassessment of the character of much of the shorter anonymous Old English prose as possible products of the culture of Mercian literary production as proposed here; the influence of Mercian literary culture may well have survived into the later Anglo-Saxon period after the demise of Mercia as a distinct political entity. The best candidates for Mercian influence or origin are various anonymous homilies and translations of saints' lives: the four homilies in the Vercelli Book which Scragg identified as derived from a Mercian homiliary (Homilies XV, XVI, XVII and XVIII), including one based on Sulpicius Severus's *Vita Martini*, which appears in two other manuscripts. Mercian sources might also be found to underlie the late Old English *Lives* of St Margaret, or the texts of the Katherine group, which includes a life of Juliana and was composed in the region of former Mercia in the thirteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Longer (and later) works of verse such as *Andreas*, or the *Metres of Boethius*, which may be indebted to the verse of Cynewulf, as well as shorter verse like *The Wife's Lament* in the Exeter Book, might also be candidates for Mercian composition.<sup>7</sup> Finally, it is to be hoped that the readings offered in this study provide further impetus for the reconsideration of the origins of other Old English texts, especially ones which can be married to a well-grounded narrative of intellectual, political and cultural context. We will never know for certain the origins of much Old English literature, but

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<sup>5</sup> Hines, 'The *Benedicte* Canticle'. For another recent argument in favour of reading Old English prose and verse within a pre-Alfredian context, see now M. Brown, 'Beowulf and the Origins of the Written Old English Vernacular', *SELIM* 20 (2013-14), 81-120, esp. 82-4 and 104-05.

<sup>6</sup> See M. Clayton and H. Magennis, eds., *The Old English Lives of St Margaret*, CSASE 9 (Cambridge, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> On a Mercian *Andreas*, see Bintley and North, *Andreas*; on the chronology of these poems, see *HOEM* §§ 353, 420. John Blair has suspected that *The Wife's Lament* may be Mercian based on its use of the term *burgtunas* (l. 31), which he identifies with the development of hill forts recorded in the place name 'Burton', see J. Blair, *Building the Anglo-Saxon Landscape: the Ford Lectures Delivered in the University of Oxford in Hilary Term 2013* (forthcoming).

reading them within the same, predominantly West Saxon narratives that have already been explored is unlikely to yield new perspectives on them.

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