

# Conflict and Society in the Anglo-Saxon Landscape



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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
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A.W.H.

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## Abstract

This thesis is about the communication of collective identity in the landscape of Anglo-Saxon England. The goal of this research is to examine the way landscape was perceived in historical writing, and how landscape shaped the strategies by which political authority and collective identity was transmitted. Thus, this thesis is concerned with the relationship between practice and perception. From a historiographical perspective, this work will bring together three aspects of research that are sometimes not in simultaneous dialogue, namely: landscape, identity, and political history, providing an opportunity to synthesise major historiographical work, and demonstrate the interconnectedness of topics often dealt with in isolation. The central contention of this work is that the landscape was not 'passive' or mute; it was ideologically charged and fiercely contested. Not only did this guide political and social strategies, but it also underpinned historical writing, and the landscape itself could be used for rhetorical effect. The first major argument of this thesis is that Anglo-Saxon collective identity was layered and flexible, and it cannot be entirely determined or discussed in ethnic terms. As such, techniques that communicated collective identity needed to be robust enough to incorporate complex layers of Anglo-Saxon self-perception. It will be argued that 'conflict', as a broad process and set of interactions which were interpreted and communicated in historical writing, was an important way to locate collective identity in a landscape context. The places where battles took place and were memorialised, where assemblies publicly asserted the status of the military elite, and where acts of reconciliation took place were perceived as being significant and were incorporated into wider landscapes. Thus, the perception of the landscape, and the layers of meaning that it evoked in Anglo-Saxon society could subvert the traditional dichotomy of 'core-and-periphery' by emphasising the ideological significance of landscapes that might traditionally be understood as 'peripheral', such as forests, moors, or fens.

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## Abstract

This thesis is about the role of conflict in the communication of collective identity in the landscape of Anglo-Saxon England. The goal of this research is to examine the way landscape was perceived in written sources, and how this related to the strategies by which political authority and collective identity was communicated. Thus, this thesis is about the relationship between practice and perception. By bridging the themes of landscape and social-political history, a holistic approach will be offered in order to demonstrate the relationship between themes that are often studied in relative isolation. The over-arching argument of this thesis is that the landscape was not 'passive' or mute; it was ideologically charged and fiercely contested. Not only did this guide political and social strategies, but it also underpinned historical writing, and the landscape itself could be used for rhetorical effect. Furthermore, it is argued that the perception and interpretation of 'conflict', understood here as a broad process and set of inter-related interactions, in written sources located collective identity in the landscape. This was important in the context of the heterogenous and layered nature of identity in Anglo-Saxon society. By emphasising the ideological significance of the places where the process of conflict and reconciliation played itself out, the traditional dichotomy of 'core-and-periphery' is subverted, as the importance of landscapes that might normally be understood as peripheral is recognised.

Chapter one will contextualise the discussion by reviewing the historiography of medieval and Anglo-Saxon frontiers and introducing the concept of 'core-and-periphery'. It will be argued that notions of core-and-periphery are inherent to the study of frontiers, and that the concept largely revolves around the matter of perspective and perception; a place can be both peripheral and of the core depending upon the vantage of the observer and the specific context. Following this, the role of 'inherited landscapes' in Anglo-Saxon England, and the significance of monuments to the communication of collective identity and political authority will be discussed. With this context in mind, the regions that will comprise the case-studies that form the second half of this thesis will be defined.

Chapter two begins with a paradox: the landscape of Britain was highly diverse, and as a result, the communities of Anglo-Saxon England correspondingly demonstrated a high degree of regional particularism. At the same time, from the seventh century on it is

possible to detect an equally high degree of cultural homogeneity among Anglo-Saxon elites, who were becoming more homogenous as society also appeared to become increasingly highly stratified. It is argued that such a paradox does not need to be ‘resolved’: it represents an important point of tension that existed throughout Anglo-Saxon history. This chapter argues that regional particularism—though the phenomenon may have changed its shape or manifestation—was a constant part of Anglo-Saxon society. Traditional historical narratives emphasise the winnowing of political entities between *c.* 600 and the eventual consolidation of the English kingdom in the middle of the tenth century, under the auspices of the West Saxon royal dynasty. Such political consolidation did indeed take place at the highest level, but it is suggested in this chapter even as this process was underway, there was a strong tendency toward regionalism. Rather than trying to stamp this out, tenth-century kings wove their way into the fabric of local society, subsuming and incorporating themselves into relationships and utilising the connections and ambitions of regional potentates. At the same time, this must be balanced against the homogeneity of an elite that had far-flung interests and connections. It is argued that the inter-regional character of the elite did not require a ‘unified’ English kingdom, and while the evidence for elite interpersonal connections is well-known, it is argued that elite society also maintained inter-regional landholding interests from the seventh century onward. While this was a constant feature of Anglo-Saxon society, it was also a constant point of tension.

Chapter three builds upon this by addressing the question of collective identity. Having established that Anglo-Saxon history suggests a constant trade-off between elite homogeneity and regional particularism (not to mention ethnic diversity), it is argued that conflict was an important way in which kings could assert and maintain collective identity that was not predicated upon ethnicity, and which could incorporate the broad spectrum of diversity represented in society. The chapter then seeks to establish this in a more concrete landscape context. It is argued that the twin processes of conflict and reconciliation were closely connected to law in Anglo-Saxon society, and that the sharp distinction between ‘war’ on the one hand, and violence and reconciliation in legal disputes on the other hand, such as we might draw today, is anachronistic. Conflict should be seen on a spectrum of interactions and activities ranging from legal dispute to what a historian might conventionally understand as ‘war’, and that the types of violence within this spectrum shared a common register and vocabulary. Both ‘war’ and ‘law’ emphasised the primacy of the king and communicated collective identity that was not predicated upon ethnicity, but around the king. It is argued that just as different categories of violence and reconciliation shared a common register and vocabulary, they also shared a common landscape context. The places deemed appropriate for meetings, assemblies, and acts of reconciliation were also appropriate to warfare. It is shown that regions traditionally considered ‘peripheral’ in the geography of Anglo-Saxon England, such as moors and forests, were essential places for these processes to unfold, subverting the dichotomy of ‘core-and-periphery’.

The inversion of ‘core-and-periphery’ is suggested throughout the following three chapters, which take the form of regional case-studies designed to show how the themes discussed generally in the preceding chapters might be demonstrated in specific landscapes—each with vastly different topographies, political histories, and available sources.

Chapter four discusses the so-called ‘eastern lowland zone’ in the seventh century, which corresponds to the catchment areas of the Wash and Humber. The eastern zone was topographically coherent and economically and socially interconnected, while being politically fragmented. This chapter argues that in the seventh century, the region was competed over between the Bernician, Mercian, and East Anglian royal dynasties, and this competition forms a significant undercurrent in the narrative of Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica*. It is shown that the places Bede referenced in his text were mainly located on the eastern seaboard, speaking to the integrated routes of communication throughout the east, and the elite cultural homogeneity that extended throughout the entire landscape. Bede’s narrative, along with other written sources, suggests that collective identity and political authority in the eastern zone was communicated through the founding and patronising of important minsters such as Ely and Peterborough, among others, which stood to represent royal dynasties in a contested landscape. However, the prestige and influence of these monasteries and the people associated with them was such that they came to exert their own centrality in the landscape. Furthermore, they served as places for the enactment of the processes of negotiation and reconciliation between rival actors.

Chapter five discusses the region between the rivers Dee and Conwy in the eighth and early ninth centuries. This chapter argues that far from being peripheral, this landscape was at the centre of an interconnected Irish Sea zone, and it was fiercely contested between the Mercian kings and their counterparts in Gwynedd and Powys. This chapter focuses on the significance of routeways along the Irish Sea coast and through the Clwydian mountains and argue that the ways that Mercian authority was asserted and maintained in Wales were not dissimilar to techniques found elsewhere across their hegemony. Most importantly, it is shown that changes taking place in the broader Anglo-Saxon landscape were also occurring in the region discussed in this chapter. Finally, it will be demonstrated that several major monuments in the landscape: the famous linear earthworks known as Offa’s Dyke and Wat’s Dyke, and the inscribed stone cross known as the Pillar of Eliseg, were ideologically charged monuments that communicated political authority through the lens of Roman imperial legitimacy.

Chapter six focuses on the downlands of Berkshire and north-eastern Wiltshire, called here for the sake of convenience the ‘North Wessex Downs’. It is argued that the monumental landscape of the Downs had a significant impact upon the Anglo-Saxon consciousness, and the landscape was used in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* to ‘locate’ warfare in the landscape, and many of the battles that the *Chronicle* reports were associated with prehistoric monuments and the prehistoric track known as the Ridgeway. It will be argued that the *Chronicle*’s evocation of monuments and battles created a historical association between

the landscape and the West Saxon dynasty. The fusion of legendary and historical material in the text legitimised West Saxon authority, and this could be used to rhetorical effect in the *Chronicle* as a means to reinforce West Saxon claims to the landscape or even to criticise the king. Furthermore, when considered in relation to the wider role of the landscape in society, it is shown that the Ridgeway and the landscape of the Downs formed part of a royal circuit, which was utilised by West Saxon kings for a variety of purposes that reinforced the authority of the dynasty and communicated collective identity.

Chapter seven will then compare and contrast the regions of the case-studies. The way collective identity was communicated in each of the preceding case-studies was in some ways specific to both time and place; different mechanisms were appropriate to different periods, and the efficacy of various strategies were in turn guided in some ways by the specific landscapes in question. However, a certain amount of continuity is also demonstrated. All three case-studies rely upon a certain degree of shared cultural vocabulary between the communicant and the audience; all three studies confirm the significance of conflict—not just as a political act, but as a means to build a solidarity and communicate authority in the landscape; and all of the case-studies emphasise the significance of dynastic power and class-based solidarities over ethnic solidarities, which appear to be of secondary concern. Finally, all three case-studies establish the significance of routeways and the imperative to defend them, and it is argued that the focus on routeways and connections between specific places erode the traditional distinction between core-and-periphery.

## Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations .....	ix
List of Figures .....	xiii
Introduction.....	1
1: Central Questions and Key Definitions .....	5
i.1: Landscape .....	6
i.2: Identity.....	7
2: Core Arguments.....	9
3: Over-Arching Structure .....	11
Chapter I: Historiographical Context: Frontiers, Core-and-Periphery, Inherited Landscapes.....	15
1: Frontiers and Borders in Anglo-Saxon Sources .....	15
i.1: Historiography of the Medieval Frontier.....	22
i.2: Anglo-Saxon Frontier Historiography.....	25
i.3: Turner and the Frontier.....	28
2: Core-and-Periphery.....	37
ii.1: Core-and-Periphery in Anglo-Saxon England: Perspective.....	40
ii.2: Core-and-Periphery in Anglo-Saxon England: Perception .....	49
ii.3: Core-and-Periphery: Summary.....	57
3: Inherited Landscapes .....	58
iii.1: Inherited Landscapes in the Present Work .....	65
4: Conclusion: Frontiers, Core-and-Periphery, and Inherited Landscapes .....	70
5: Regions of the Case Studies.....	73
Chapter II: Regional Particularism and Elite Homogeneity in Anglo-Saxon Society .....	80
1: Regions and Regionalism .....	80
2: Regionality in Anglo-Saxon Society .....	86
3. Elite Homogeneity.....	99
4: Inter-Regional Landholding.....	109
5: Conclusion .....	118
Chapter III: The Spectrum of Conflict and the Anglo-Saxon Landscape.....	119
1: Introduction.....	119

2: Conflict, Law and Society .....	127
3: Territorial Contexts.....	139
4: Minsters and Peace-Making in the Landscape .....	143
5: Meeting-Places and Warfare in the Landscape.....	147
6: Conclusion .....	157
Chapter IV: The Eastern Zone in the Seventh Century .....	161
1: Landscapes.....	162
i.1: Description of the Region.....	162
i.2: Routeways and Connectivities.....	164
2: The Political Landscape.....	168
3: The Perception of the Landscape in the <i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i> .....	171
4: Dynastic Identity and Minsters.....	174
5: Minsters and the Inversion of Core-and-Periphery.....	181
6: Minsters and Conflict in the Landscape .....	185
7: Conclusion .....	190
Chapter V: North-Eastern Wales, c. 757–823 .....	193
1: The Perception of the Landscape and the Creation of a Periphery.....	193
2: Warfare: Military Campaigns in the <i>Annales Cambriae</i> .....	198
3: The Maintenance of Client-Kings and Mercian Hegemony.....	203
4: Core-and-Periphery: The Irish Sea Context.....	206
5: Landscape and Control: Settlement and Fortifications.....	208
6: Landscape and Control: Monumentality and Power.....	212
7: Conclusion .....	221
Chapter VI: The North Wessex Downs and the <i>Anglo-Saxon Chronicle</i> .....	223
1: Landscape: .....	223
i.1: The Character of the Downs.....	223
i.2: Landscape and Monumentality.....	225
i.3: Warfare and Monumentality.....	225
2: Warfare in the <i>Anglo-Saxon Chronicle</i> .....	230
ii.1: Warfare as Rhetoric in the <i>Chronicle</i> : Three Strategies.....	233

I: Ancient Legitimacy .....	233
II: Contemporary Claims in a Contested Landscape .....	235
III: Criticism of the King .....	242
3: Warfare in a Changing Landscape .....	247
4: Conclusion .....	257
Chapter VII: Conflict and the Communication of Collective Identity in the	
Anglo-Saxon Landscape .....	260
1: Regional Variation and the Changing Landscape.....	262
2: Shifting <i>Loci</i> within a Region.....	269
3: Continuity and Points of Comparison.....	271
iii.1: Shared Cultural Vocabulary .....	271
iii.2: Conflict.....	273
iii.3: Kingship and Conflict in a Landscape Context.....	275
iii.4: Communicating Collective Identity .....	277
iii.5: The Significance of Routeways.....	279
I: The Ideological Significance of Routeways .....	280
II: Routeways, Bridges and Fortifications: Royal Control at the	
Nexus of Communication.....	284
III: Routeways, Fortresses, and Territorial Formation.....	289
IV: Routeways, Interconnected Landscapes, and Hegemony.....	294
Conclusion: Final Thoughts and Directions for Further Study.....	300
Bibliography .....	306

## ABBREVIATIONS

- AC ..... *Annales Cambriae, A.D. 682–954: Texts A–C in translation*, ed. and trans. D. Dumville (Cambridge, 2002).
- ASC ..... *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* =
- MS A: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, vol. 3: MS A, ed. J.M. Bately (Cambridge, 1986).
- MS B: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, vol. 4: MS B, ed. S. Taylor (Cambridge, 1983).
- MS C: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, vol. 5: MS C, ed. K. O’B. O’Keefe (Cambridge, 2001).
- MS D: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, vol. 6: MS D, ed. G.P. Cubbin (Cambridge, 1996).
- MS E: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, vol. 7: MS E, ed. S. Irvine (Cambridge, 2004).
- MS F: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, vol. 8, MS F, ed. P.S. Baker (Cambridge, 2000).
- ASE..... *Anglo-Saxon England*
- ASPR..... *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: A Collective Edition*, 6 vols. ed. G.P. Krapp and E. Dobbie (New York, NY, 1931–1953).
- ASSAH..... *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*
- Asser ..... Asser, *De Rebus Gestis Ælfredi*, in *Asser’s Life of King Alfred together with the Annals of St Neots erroneously ascribed to Asser*, ed. W.H. Stevenson (Oxford, 1904).
- Æthelweard *Chronicon*. ..... *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. A. Campbell (London, 1962).

BAR Brit. Ser.....	British Archaeological Reports, British Series
<i>Beowulf</i> .....	<i>Beowulf</i> , ed. and trans. M. Swanton (Manchester, 1978).
<i>Bosworth-Toller</i> .....	<i>An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary: Based on the Manuscript Collections of the Late Joseph Bosworth</i> , ed. Thomas Northcote Toller (Oxford, 1898), consulted online at <i>An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online</i> , ed. S. Christ and O. Tichý < <a href="http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/">http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/</a> > [accessed 24/9/2019].
CBA Res. Rep.....	Council for British Archaeology Research Report
<i>Chron.HC</i> .....	<i>The Peterborough Chronicle of Hugh Candidus</i> , ed. W.T. Mellows (London, 1949).
DB.....	<i>Domesday Book</i> , ed. J. Morris <i>et al.</i> , 35 vols. (Cambridge, 1975–85).
<i>EHD</i> .....	<i>English Historical Documents</i> , vol. 1: c. 500–1042, ed. and trans. D. Whitelock (2 <sup>nd</sup> ed. repr., London, 1996).
<i>EHR</i> .....	<i>English Historical Review</i>
<i>EME</i> .....	<i>Early Medieval Europe</i>
Gildas, <i>DEB</i> .....	Gildas, <i>De excidio et conquestu Britanniae</i> , in <i>Gildas: De Excidio Britanniae, or The Ruin of Britain</i> , ed. and trans. H. Williams (facsimile repr., Lampeter, 2006).
<i>HB</i> .....	<i>Historia Brittonum</i> , in <i>Historia Brittonum cum additamentis Nennii</i> , MGH <i>Chronica Minora</i> , vol. 3, ed. T. Mommsen (Berlin, 1898).
<i>HE</i> .....	Bede, <i>Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum</i> in <i>Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People</i> , ed. B. Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969).
<i>JEGP</i> .....	<i>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i>

- JW Chron.*.....John of Worcester, *Chronicon ex chronicis*, in *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, vol. 2: The Annals from 450 to 1066, ed. and trans. R.R. Darlington, J. Bray and P. McGurk (Oxford, 1995).
- LE*.....*Liber Eliensis*, ed. E.O. Blake (London, 1962).
- MGH*.....*Monumenta Germaniae Historica*
- NCMH*.....*New Cambridge Medieval History*
- Or*.....*The Old English Orosius*, ed. J. Bately (London, 1980).
- P&P*.....*Past and Present*
- P-Ns Berks.* .....M. Gelling, *The Place-Names of Berkshire*, 3 vols., English Place-Name Society vols. 49–51 (Cambridge, 1973–1976).
- P-Ns Shrops.* .....M. Gelling and A. Foxall, *The Place-Names of Shropshire*, 7 vols., English-Place Name Society vols. 62–3 (1990).
- PASE*.....J.N.L. Nelson, S. Keynes and S. Baxter, *et al.*, *The Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, consulted at <http://www.pase.ac.uk/index.html> [accessed 18/9/2019].
- S.* .....P.H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography* (London, 1968); revised S. Kelly, *The Electronic Sawyer*, consulted at <http://esawyer.org.uk/about/index.html> [accessed 18/9/2019].
- TRHS*.....*Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*
- VSG*.....Felix, *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, in *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1956).
- VSO* .....Byrhtferth of Ramsey, *Vita Sancti Oswaldi*, in *Byrhtferth of Ramsey: The Lives of St Oswald and St Ecgwine*, ed. and trans. M. Lapidge (Oxford, 2009).

- VSW.....Stephen, *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi*, in *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus. Text, Translation and Notes*, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1927).
- Wills* .....*Anglo-Saxon Wills*, ed. and trans. D. Whitelock (Cambridge, 1930).

Note on the citation of laws:

Legal texts are cited from *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, ed. F. Liebermann (3 vols. Halle, 1903–16), unless otherwise noted. References follow those set out in *Die Gesetze*, vol. 1, p. xi.

Note on the citation of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*:

*Chronicle* entries are cited in accordance with the conventions established by Whitelock *et al.* Citations of the ‘Mercian Register’, incorporated in mss B, C, D are given as ‘MR’. Translations are based on D. Whitelock, D.C. Douglas, and S.I. Tucker, ed. and trans., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Revised Translation* (London, 1961).

## Figures

Fig. 1: The Eastern Zone .....	164
Fig. 2: Places Referenced in the <i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i> .....	173
Fig. 3: Minsters of the Fens .....	177
Fig. 4: Potential Dependencies of Peterborough and Ely .....	184
Fig. 5: North-Eastern Wales between the Dee and Conwy .....	195
Fig. 6: The Landscape of the Pillar of Eliseg.....	219
Fig. 7: The Pillar of Eliseg.....	220
Fig. 8: Battles of the North Wessex Downs.....	226
Fig. 9: The Record of Conflict on the North Wessex Downs.....	227
Fig. 10: The Wansdyke and the Ridgeway .....	230
Fig. 11: The Battle of Kennet, 1006 .....	245
Fig. 12: The Downs with Estates held by Royal Women and Meeting Places.....	253
Fig. 13: Fortifications at the Nexus of Drainage Basins .....	287
Fig. 14: Military Activity Between the Thames and the Humber.....	292
Fig. 15: Timeline of Military Activity between the Thames and the Humber .....	293

### Note on the figures:

Maps drawn by author unless otherwise referenced.

## Introduction

This thesis explores how landscape contextualised the communication of collective identity in Anglo-Saxon society. This is understood in two senses: first, how landscape and topography informed and underpinned the strategies by which political authority was transmitted; and second, how the landscape was perceived in historical writing. An essential premise of this work is that the landscape was not passive stage-dressing, but that it was charged with ideological importance and full of significance and meaning. In other words, it is about the relationship between *practice* and *perception*.

A brief example will illustrate the line of approach. In the *Chronicon ex chronicis* of John of Worcester and the *Gesta Regum Anglorum* of William of Malmesbury, vivid accounts are given of King Edgar's council at Chester in 973.<sup>1</sup> The post-Conquest version of the story is an extraordinary narrative in which Edgar arrived in Chester and was greeted by eight kings from Wales, Scotland, and the Isles, 'as he [Edgar] commanded,' and they swore to be loyal to Edgar on land and sea. Then the kings took ship with Edgar at the helm, and they rowed the course of the River Dee with Edgar's nobles following close behind until they came to the monastery of St John the Baptist.<sup>2</sup> It is a remarkable and strikingly imperial narrative, and the account has a lot to do with how twelfth-century historians understood Chester as a *place* in history. Chester was not just a convenient place for kings around the Irish Sea to hold a summit; it was the City of the Legions, vested with martial and imperial significance, evocative of the Roman past, and used to frame the imperial pretensions of English kings and define their relationship with the other rulers of Britain.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> JW *Chron.* 2, s.a. 973; WM *GR* 1, ii.148.

<sup>2</sup> The minster of St John the Baptist in Chester lies in the shadow of the Roman amphitheatre; the *romanitas* of the occasion would have been undeniable (for St John's at Chester, see below, pp. 270–1).

<sup>3</sup> 'City of the Legions' is derived from *HE* ii.2 (*ciuitatem Legionum, quae a gente Anglorum Legacaestir, a Brettonibus autem rectius Carlegion appellatur*). The term is used repeatedly by John of Worcester (e.g. s.a. 603,

The twelfth-century version of the story was derived from a terse entry of the D and E versions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which laconically state that Edgar met with six (as opposed to the eight kings of later versions) unnamed kings and they gave pledges and swore to support each other by land and sea.<sup>4</sup> Whether this indicates that the six kings gave Edgar their submission is debatable.<sup>5</sup> By c. 1000, however, Benedictines were depicting the event starkly in terms of the submission of neighbouring kings to Edgar's overlordship.<sup>6</sup> We need not insist that the imperial overtones of the story were entirely due to the eagerness of reformed monks to glorify the reign of Edgar. Tenth-century Anglo-Saxon kings sometimes framed their authority in imperial terms and conceptualised their hegemony as extending throughout Britain, as has recently been discussed by Julia Crick and George Molyneaux, among others.<sup>7</sup> The imperial and Roman significance of holding Edgar's coronation at the Roman city of Bath, and then in the same year bringing a fleet to the Roman city of Chester for a meeting with the kings of the Irish Sea could not possibly have been lost on Edgar's court.

Barrow suggests that Chester was chosen because it was a 'neutral' venue for a meeting between kings in the Irish Sea zone.<sup>8</sup> This is not the case. Chester played an important part in the consciousness of tenth-century English kings. As Molyneaux notes, Edgar granted six estates to

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894), who—following Bede's example—takes time to note that Chester was known as 'Caerlleon' among the Britons, perhaps suggesting he understood it as a place of interface between the English and the Britons. cf. also Henry of Huntingdon, *HA* i.3, and *HB* 3.

<sup>4</sup> ASC D, E, 972, *recte* 973: *se cyning gelædde ealle hi scipfyrde to Leiceaster, 7 þær comon ongean .vi. cyninges, 7 ealle wið hine getreowsodon þæt hi woldon enfenwyrhtan beon on sæ 7 on lande.*

<sup>5</sup> J. Barrow, 'Chester's Earliest Regatta? Edgar's Dee-rowing Revisited', *EME* 10, 1 (2001), pp. 81–93.

<sup>6</sup> e.g. Ælfric, *Natale Sancti Swyðuni episcopi*, in *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat (London, 1881), 21.443–53, p. 468; Barrow, 'Chester's Earliest Regatta?', pp. 89–92; cf. also, D. Thornton, 'Edgar and the Eight Kings, A.D. 973: *Textus et Dramatis Personae*', *EME* 10, 1 (2001), pp. 49–79.

<sup>7</sup> J. Crick, 'Edgar, Albion and Insular Dominion', in D. Scragg (ed.), *Edgar: King of the English, 959–975* (Woodbridge, 2008), pp. 158–70; G. Molyneaux, 'Why Were Some Tenth-Century English Kings Presented as Rulers of Britain?', *TRHS* 21 (2011), pp. 59–91; S. Foot, 'Where English Becomes British: Rethinking Contexts for Brunanburh', in J. Barrow and A. Wareham (eds.), *Myth, Rulership, Church and Charters: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Brooks* (London, 2008), pp. 127–44.

<sup>8</sup> Barrow, 'Chester's Earliest Regatta?', pp. 81–9.

the minster of St Werburgh in Chester in 958.<sup>9</sup> St Werburgh, the principal saint of Chester, was intimately associated with Anglo-Saxon royalty. Werburgh was allegedly the daughter of Wulfhere of Mercia, and she was associated with the Ely saints Æthelthryth and Seaxburh, as well as St Chad, the apostle to the Mercians. Werburgh—whose relics were translated to Chester from Hanbury in Staffordshire in (probably) the late ninth century—was an important saint with a royal pedigree, and the veneration of her cult surely reinforced Edgar’s connection to the Mercian kingdom.<sup>10</sup> Chester was also within the purview of Edgar’s more recent forebears. In 893, Alfred of Wessex and Æthelred of Mercia besieged a viking army that had taken refuge in Chester, and in 924 Edward the Elder died at Farndon Bridge, seven miles upstream of Chester along the River Dee.<sup>11</sup> In 907, the Mercian Register reported that Æthelflæd ‘restored’ Chester.<sup>12</sup> This should be seen as part of a wider effort to assert legitimate authority in Mercia through the construction or restoration of fortresses. The Æthelflædian *burhs* were not only important for their strategic significance, they also served to assert dynastic authority in the landscape. Therefore, it is clear that throughout the tenth century the Cerdicing dynasty strove to assert their authority in Chester through various means; it was hardly ‘neutral’. The first reference to Chester in an Anglo-Saxon source is Bede, who wrote of Æthelfrith of Northumbria’s attack on Chester; he described the way Æthelfrith made a great slaughter of the Britons there, and claimed that he killed 300 monks from the nearby monastery of Bangor-is-Coed. Bede framed this as the execution of divine justice against the Britons, and said that the massacre was committed in fulfilment of a prophecy of St Augustine.<sup>13</sup> There were those at the court of Edgar who ruminated on history, and as Edgar’s

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<sup>9</sup> S. 667; Molyneaux, ‘Tenth-Century English Kings’, p. 67.

<sup>10</sup> C.P. Lewis, ‘Edgar, Chester, and the Kingdom of the Mercians’, in D. Scragg (ed.), *Edgar*, pp. 104–23.

<sup>11</sup> ASC 893; ASC MR 924; D. Griffiths, ‘The North-West Frontier’, in N.J. Higham and D.H. Hill (eds.), *Edward the Elder 899–924* (London, 2001), pp. 167–87.

<sup>12</sup> ASC MR 907: *Her Ligcester geedniwod*.

<sup>13</sup> *HE* ii.2.

advisors sought a place to hold a great council with the kings of Britain, they would have remembered their Bede and recalled Chester as a place of victory for the Angles and divine judgment for the Britons—a suitable place, in other words, to define the relationship between Britons and Angles for their own day.

A central contention of this thesis is that political borderlands were not neutral: they were aggressively claimed and fiercely contested, not just politically and militarily, but also ideologically. The purpose is to examine how places in the landscape were perceived in Anglo-Saxon England, and how the perception of the landscape related to the structure of Anglo-Saxon society. The over-arching argument is that the landscape, and the way in which places in the landscape were perceived, communicated collective identity. It will be shown that the process of conflict and reconciliation was essential to this communication; therefore, *where* such activities of conflict and reconciliation took place, the way such places were interpreted, and how they fit into wider social structures is essential to this work. This is to say that conflict had a landscape context, and the places where men fought, made peace, gathered in assembly, and participated in collective or public action served to both locate and communicate collective identity in the landscape itself in order to articulate territorial control and legitimacy.

Geography provided a means to frame historical narrative. Bede began his *Historia Ecclesiastica* with a long description of the geographic orientation of Britain and a catalogue of its abundant resources. This was part of a broad tradition in classical and Late Antique writing ultimately derived from Pliny.<sup>14</sup> It came naturally to Bede to supplement his catalogue of natural resources with a description of the built landscape—Britain’s twenty-eight ancient and noble cities and

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<sup>14</sup> Bede’s chapter may have been suggested by Orosius, *Historiae adversus paganos*; Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*; and—particularly his reference to the twenty-eight cities—Gildas, *DEB* 3; cf. *HB* 66a.

innumerable strong fortresses guarded by walls and lofty towers—before ending with his famous comment on the five languages of Britain: English, British, Irish, and Pictish, representing the chief *gentes* of the island, and the unifying language of Latin. For medieval writers, history and geography went hand-in-hand. Such narrative techniques were not limited to works as encompassing as the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. The *Liber Eliensis*, for instance, a history of the abbey and Isle of Ely compiled in the twelfth century, begins with a description of the topography of the Isle, a description of its abundant resources, and a disclaimer that the Isle was its own distinct entity, ‘free from anyone’s jurisdiction and power.’ The monks of Ely understood the richness of the fens and perceived the landscape of the Isle as being essential to their wealth and their sense of identity.<sup>15</sup>

### 1: *Central Questions and Key Definitions*

This thesis is about the communication of power and collective political identity in the Anglo-Saxon landscape. It is about the ideological importance associated with the geographical limits of political authority, and the ways that landscapes were contested and claimed. Furthermore, it is about the various and intersecting layers of meaning—political, ideological, and so forth—that were contained and perceived within the wider Anglo-Saxon landscape. This research was inspired by the historiography of medieval frontiers, which will be discussed in detail below. The chronological parameters are deliberately broad, covering the period between *c.* 600 and *c.* 1000.

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<sup>15</sup> *LE, de situ Eliensis insulae*, pp. 2–5; and see also *Chron.HC* 2; and *Ramsey Abbey’s Book of Benefactors*, vol. 1: *The Abbey’s Foundation*, ed. Edgington (1998), pp. 5–6. Ely as a refuge is essential to the foundation story of the minster: *LE* 8 describes the way in which St Æthelthryth sought refuge at her estate of Ely after the death of her first husband, ‘as if reaching the shore after a shipwreck... she fled from the empty honours of the world in pursuit of silence.’ Ely as a fastness is referred to again in *LE* 39–41, when the Isle was attacked by Danes; and *LE* 102–10, when Hereward the Wake held Ely in rebellion against William the Conqueror. In both of the later examples, *Liber Eliensis* specifically describes Ely as a focal for the nobility to gather against their enemies and enemies of the Isle. During the ‘Hereward narrative’ Archbishop Stigand fled to Ely from the wrath of the king in 1070 and brought with him the relics of St Alban (*LE* 103). The fen as a source of wealth for Ely and the other fenland houses is discussed below, chapter four.

While this seems vast, it will be useful. By adopting a broad chronological and geographical remit, this research should complement studies dedicated to a particular region or kingdom by setting them in a wider perspective and context.<sup>16</sup> Because so much of the interest of this work concerns historical perception, adopting a broad chronology will help to demonstrate the way in which historical writing was generative, constantly building upon what came before it.

I am interested in two things in particular: how the landscape was perceived in historical writing, and how the landscape itself, and specific places situated in a distinct landscape context, shaped the strategies by which political authority and collective identity were articulated. Therefore, it is about the relationship between practice and perception, and the relationship between landscape, identity, and political history, particularly through the lens of historical writing.

#### Key Definitions i.1: *Landscape*

What is a landscape? The term is often used to refer to settlement morphology, field-systems, administrative boundaries, and place-names. Often the implicit interest is in the history of lordship and manorialism. The scope is often, but by no means always, local. However, I would like to step back and think about landscape more broadly. Put simply, I understand landscape to be land that is the subject of human agency, and in the early Middle Ages that was virtually all of Britain. More specifically though, I see landscape as a sequence of interconnected places (places being centres for action, intention and meaningful concern created through common experiences, symbols, and

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<sup>16</sup> e.g. J. Blair, *Early Medieval Surrey: landholding, Church and settlement before 1300* (Stroud, 1991); Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire* (Oxford, 1994); B. Yorke, *Wessex in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1985); D. Hooke, *The Anglo-Saxon Landscape: The Kingdom of the Hwicce* (Manchester, 1985); P. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600–800* (Cambridge, 1990); P. Stafford, *The East Midlands in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1985); M. Gelling, *The West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1992); D.M. Hadley, *The Northern Danelaw* (Leicester, 2000); D. Rollason, *Northumbria, 500–1100: the Creation and Destruction of a Kingdom* (Cambridge, 2003); B. Eagles, *From Roman Civitas to Anglo-Saxon Shire: Topographical Studies on the Formation of Wessex* (Oxford, 2018); T. Green, *Britons and Anglo-Saxons: Lincolnshire, AD 400–650* (Lincoln, 2012); in addition to the seminal papers in S. Bassett (ed.), *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms* (Leicester, 1989).

meanings). Landscape encompasses the man-made, the built, and the natural environment, which in itself is subject to human agency through its appropriation and interpretation. As a set of places, it is perceived by the observer as a cohesive entity, and as such it can be ‘nested’, as landscapes become places and in so doing constitute ever wider landscapes.<sup>17</sup>

### Key Definitions i.2: *Identity*

One thing to make clear is that this thesis is not necessarily about *ethnic* identity.<sup>18</sup> Ethnicity was undoubtedly important, and it could be deployed in various ways, but it was not the only type of identity in early medieval Britain.<sup>19</sup> The position taken here is that identity was both fluid and layered. Regional identities, class-based solidarities, and the various strands of vertical and horizontal connections were also of great importance. This thesis will explore an apparent paradox

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<sup>17</sup> This is mostly derived from C. Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape* (Oxford, 1994); Tilley, ‘Round Barrows and Dykes as Landscape Metaphors’, *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 14, 2 (2005), pp. 185–203; also: T. Ingold, *The Appropriation of Nature: Essays on Human Ecology and Social Relations* (Manchester, 1986), pp. 130–64; Ingold, ‘The Temporality of Landscape’, *World Archaeology*, 25, 2 (1993), pp. 152–74; and M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. S. Rendall (Berkeley, CA, 1984).

<sup>18</sup> My understanding of early medieval ethnicity is largely derived from: W. Pohl, ‘Conceptions of Ethnicity in Early Medieval Studies’, in Little *et al.* (eds.), *Debating the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 13–24; Pohl, ‘Telling the Difference: Signs of Ethnic Identity’, in W. Pohl and H. Reimitz (eds.), *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of the Ethnic Communities, 300–800* (Leiden, 1998), pp. 17–70, and many of the assembled papers in H-W Goetz, J. Jarnut and W. Pohl (eds.), *Regna and Gentes: The Relationship between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World* (Leiden, 2003). Also of great importance is P. Geary, ‘Ethnic Identity as a Situational Construct’, pp. 15–26; Geary, *Before France and Germany* (1988), pp. 39–75; Geary, ‘Barbarians and Ethnicity’ in G.W. Bowersock, P. Brown and O. Graber (eds.), *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* (London, 1999), pp. 107–29. Opposition to this school is best represented in: W. Goffart, ‘Two Notes on Germanic Antiquity Today’, *Traditio* 50 (1995), pp. 9–30; C. Bowlus, ‘Ethnogenesis Models and the Age of Migrations: A Critique’, *Austrian History Yearbook* 26 (1995), pp. 147–64; and the papers in A. Gillett (ed.), *On Barbarian Identity* (Turnhout, 2003).

<sup>19</sup> For identity and ethnogenesis in Anglo-Saxon society, important works include: the papers in W.O. Frazer and A. Tyrrell, (eds.), *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain* (London, 2000), especially: Frazer, ‘Identities in Early Medieval Britain’, pp. 1–22; J. Moreland, ‘Ethnicities, Power and the English’, pp. 23–52; Yorke, ‘Political and Ethnic Identity: A Case Study of Anglo-Saxon Practice’, pp. 69–89; A. Woolf, ‘Community, Identity and Kingship’, pp. 91–110. In addition, see: P. Wormald, ‘Bede, the Bretwaldas and the Origins of the *Gens Anglorum*’, in Wormald *et al.* (eds.), *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 99–29; Wormald, ‘*Engla Lond*: the Making of an Allegiance’, *Journal of Historical Sociology* 7, 1 (1994), pp. 1–24; S. Reynolds, ‘What Do We Mean by “Anglo-Saxon” and “Anglo-Saxons”?’’, *Journal of British Studies* 24, 4 (1985), pp. 395–414; Yorke, ‘Anglo-Saxon Origin Legends’, in Barrow and Wareham (eds.), *Myth, Rulership, Church and Charters*, pp. 15–30; Yorke, ‘Anglo-Saxon *Gentes* and *Regna*’, in Goetz *et al.* (eds.), *Regna and Gentes*, pp. 381–408; Woolf, ‘Imagining English Origins’, *Quaestio Insularis* 18 (2017), pp. 1–20; D. Dumville, ‘Origins of the Kingdom of the English’, in Naismith and Woodman (eds.), *Writing, Kingship and Power in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 2017), pp. 71–121.

in Anglo-Saxon society, in which considerable regionalism was balanced against cultural homogeneity among elite society. A great deal of scholarship has been devoted to the gradual consolidation of Anglo-Saxon polities between c. 600 and the formation of the English kingdom of the mid-tenth century.<sup>20</sup> However, I hope to demonstrate the general continuity of this dichotomy throughout Anglo-Saxon history, and it will be argued that political consolidation did not erase the tendency toward regional particularism (indeed, new layers of identity were introduced as the Cerdicing realm expanded). This was a constant feature of Anglo-Saxon society. My position is that the Anglo-Saxon polities of Britain were *always* ethnically diverse. Britons are frequently attested, not just in the early Anglo-Saxon period and in well-known examples such as the Laws of Ine (c. 700), but even in the eleventh-century code known as *Norðleoda laga*, where Britons are accorded a *wergild*.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, though the Scandinavian presence in eastern and northern England from the mid-ninth century onwards is well-known, it is also recognised that there were Scandinavians throughout the English kingdom during the late Anglo-Saxon period.<sup>22</sup> Layered in with such ethnic heterogeneity were other sorts of divisions: Angles, Saxons and Jutes; Mercians, West Saxons and Northumbrians; the men of Wiltshire and Hampshire; the *Pecsætan* and *Magonsætan*; the *Basingas* and *Suningas*, and so forth. These are just a few, and all of these identities needed to be asserted, reasserted, and negotiated at different times and were appropriate to different circumstances. They could disintegrate, fall into disuse, be revived, or created *de novo*. Woven through were myths of common descent and origin stories, real and perceived kinship connections, and political histories of interaction between all of these groups. Such layered

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<sup>20</sup> The classic narrative, of course, is F.M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Oxford, 1971); S. Bassett, 'In search of the origins of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms', in Bassett (ed.), *Origins*, pp. 3–27.

<sup>21</sup> *Norðleod 7: And gif Wilisman geþeo þæt he hæbbe hiwisc landes 7 mæge cyninges gafol forðbringan, þone bið his wergild CXX scill* ('and if a Welshman prospers so that he has a hide of land and may produce the king's tribute, then his *wergild* is 120 shillings').

<sup>22</sup> e.g. the papers in R. Lavelle and S. Roffey (eds.), *Danes in Wessex: The Scandinavian Impact on Southern England, c. 800–c. 1100* (Oxford, 2016).

identities interacted with varied legal jurisdictions, loyalties, and obligations, which were manifested in different ways throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. Ethnicity was just one aspect of the broad spectrum of identity that encompassed Anglo-Saxon society. Therefore, a concept of identity that relies upon relatively simple ethnic binaries is not sufficient.

## 2: Core Arguments

The over-arching argument is that between the seventh and eleventh centuries, Anglo-Saxon society contained many interwoven layers of social, ethnic, and political identities. While there was a certain amount of cultural homogeneity among elites, Anglo-Saxon society could also manifest itself in highly regional ways, and that regional differences were meaningful long after the political consolidation of the tenth-century kingdom (which, as Molyneaux rightly notes, never encompassed all the members of the *gens Anglorum* on the eve of the Norman Conquest).

I will argue that ‘conflict’, which I understand to be a broad set of processes and inter-related interactions encompassing both disputation and reconciliation and including both ‘legal disputes’ and what might conventionally be described as ‘war’, is a useful way of expressing concepts of identity in written sources, and writing about conflict can therefore clarify concepts of collective identity by defining in-groups and out-groups.

Assemblies in which collective decisions were taken and consent was given, disputes were resolved, and rituals were enacted, all demonstrated and affirmed collective identity.<sup>23</sup> These should not be separated from military musters, the prosecution of military campaigns, acts of peace-making and reconciliation, and the memorialisation of conflict. These actions intrinsically assert collective identity, and the places where such interactions occurred communicate territorial

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<sup>23</sup> L. Roach, *Kingship and Consent in Anglo-Saxon England, 871–978: Assemblies and the State in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2013).

control and legitimacy. It will be shown that there was a close correspondence between these related activities and the places where they occurred. Such places—often seen to be moors, heaths or forests and the like—might *seem* ‘peripheral’, but because they were so important in asserting and maintaining collective identity, they achieved their own centrality. The same, it will be seen, is true of contested landscapes where there was competition for political control and legitimacy between competing sources of authority. These landscapes might be far from centres of power and seem peripheral from one perspective, but their ideological importance gave them their own centrality.

Essential to this is the theme of core-and-periphery, which is central to my conclusions. That certain places or regions were ‘core’ to the constitution of a polity or society and that other regions or places were ‘peripheral’ is deeply ingrained, and this dichotomy can be understood in political, economic, cultural, or geographical terms. However, allegedly peripheral places could also exert a sort of centripetal force that encouraged political action, and this could give places and landscapes their own ideological centrality. When this is taken together with the regionalism and interwoven layers of Anglo-Saxon society, the dichotomy of core-and-periphery erodes.

Ultimately, this thesis will emphasise the importance of specific places, their wider landscape context, and the routeways that connected them. I do not see the assertion and maintenance of political control in the landscape as something passive, but rather as something that was achieved through *action* in a specific place and the *perception* of such activity in written sources, which reinforced an association between a community and land. I hope that this will provide a more nuanced way of understanding the relationship between early medieval polities and the geographical limits of their authority than one in which power emanates out from a central point to either a fixed border or a vague ‘border zone’.

### *3: Over-Arching Structure*

Chapter one will be made up of four parts: part one will consist of a discussion of the historiography of medieval frontiers and a detailed critique of this line of research. It will be made apparent that in an early medieval context a new approach is required. Following this, part two will examine the related theme of core-and-periphery, and it will be argued that the concept is essential to the study of frontiers (though perhaps generally under-theorised in medieval history). Part three will discuss the inherited landscape in Anglo-Saxon England and the relationship between monuments of the prehistoric and Roman past and Anglo-Saxon collective identity. Part four will use the preceding discussion to establish the regions of the case studies that will comprise chapters four through six.

Chapter two begins with a paradox: the landscape of Britain was highly diverse, and as a result, the communities of Anglo-Saxon England correspondingly demonstrated a high degree of regional particularism. At the same time, from the seventh century on it is possible to detect an equally high degree of cultural homogeneity among Anglo-Saxon elites, who were becoming more homogenous, yet they also appeared to become increasingly highly stratified. It is argued that such a paradox does not need to be ‘resolved’; it represents an important point of tension that existed throughout Anglo-Saxon history. This chapter argues that regional particularism—though the phenomenon may have changed its shape or manifestation—was a constant part of Anglo-Saxon society. Traditional historical narratives emphasise the winnowing of political entities between *c.* 600 and the eventual consolidation of the English kingdom in the middle of the tenth century under the auspices of the West Saxon royal dynasty. It is not my goal to challenge the arguments for the creation of an ‘English’ identity, but to demonstrate that ethnic identity was only one layer of a

complex of interconnected affinities that commanded loyalty.<sup>24</sup> Though there has been considerable attention paid to the apparent uniformity of the institutions of the ‘late Anglo-Saxon state’,<sup>25</sup> it will be clear that the regionality that was inherent to Anglo-Saxon society was never erased, even if it changed form in the wake of the assertion of royal authority.<sup>26</sup> Political consolidation did indeed take place at the highest level, but even as this process was underway, there was a strong tendency toward regionalism. Rather than trying to stamp this out, tenth-century kings wove their way into the fabric of local society, incorporating themselves into relationships and utilising the connections and ambitions of regional potentates. At the same time, this must be balanced against the homogeneity of an elite that had far-flung interests and connections. It is argued that the inter-regional character of the elite did not require a ‘unified’ English kingdom, and while the evidence for elite interpersonal connections is well-known, it is argued that elite society also maintained inter-regional landholding interests from the seventh century onward. While this was a constant feature of Anglo-Saxon society, it was also a constant point of tension. Chapter three will attempt to establish this in the landscape: in the wake of such heterogeneity, how was collective identity asserted, and how was this translated into a landscape context? I will argue that conflict, which emphasised the primacy of the king and royal dynasty, was an important means of achieving this, and—perhaps crucially—by framing this in terms of interpersonal relationships between the king and his leading subjects; this allowed for a distinctly non-ethnic conceptualisation of collective identity. The main part of the chapter will argue that the twin

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<sup>24</sup> Foot, ‘The Making of *Anglecynn*: English Identity before the Norman Conquest’, *TRHS* 6 (1996), pp. 25–49.

<sup>25</sup> The chief examples of this include: J. Campbell, ‘The United Kingdom of England: The Anglo-Saxon Achievement’, pp. 31–54; Campbell, ‘Some Agents and Agencies of the Late Anglo-Saxon State’ pp. 201–225; and Campbell, ‘The Late Anglo-Saxon State: A Maximal View’, pp. 1–30, all reprinted in his *The Anglo-Saxon State* (London, 2000); cf. the well-known warning of K. Leyser, ‘Ottonian Government’, *EHR* 96 (1981), pp. 721–53, on ‘shadow institutions’ that may not have existed.

<sup>26</sup> See in particular Molyneaux, *The Formation of the English Kingdom in the Tenth Century* (Oxford, 2015), chapters four and five; T. Lambert, *Law and Order in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2017), chapters six and seven.

processes of conflict and reconciliation were closely connected to law in Anglo-Saxon society, and that the sharp distinction between ‘war’ on the one hand, and violence and reconciliation in legal disputes on the other hand, such as we might draw today, is anachronistic. Conflict should be seen on a spectrum of interactions and activities ranging from legal dispute to what a historian might conventionally understand as ‘war’, and that the types of violence within this spectrum shared a common register and vocabulary. Even as the landscape changed, and military and legal practice evolved, there was still a language of continuity that may have conferred legitimacy and helped make such reforms palatable to a diverse realm. Both ‘war’ and ‘law’ emphasised the primacy of the king and communicated collective identity that was not predicated upon ethnicity, but around the king. It is argued that just as different categories of violence and reconciliation shared a common register and vocabulary, they also shared a common landscape context. The places deemed appropriate for meetings, assemblies, and acts of reconciliation were also appropriate to warfare. It is shown that regions traditionally considered ‘peripheral’ in the geography of Anglo-Saxon England, such as moors and forests, were essential places for these processes to unfold, challenging the dichotomy of ‘core-and-periphery’.

The ambiguity between the core and the periphery will be suggested throughout the following three chapters (cc. 4–6), which consist of regional case-studies designed to show how the themes discussed generally in the preceding chapters might be demonstrated in specific landscapes—each with vastly different topographies, political histories, and available sources. They will proceed chronologically, and they have been selected to represent a diverse spectrum of Anglo-Saxon England. Chapter four will examine the ‘eastern lowland zone’ in the catchment area of the Wash and Humber during the seventh century; chapter five will focus on the landscape between the rivers Dee and Conwy in the eighth and early-ninth centuries; chapter six will consider the downlands of

‘northern Wessex’ in the tenth and early-eleventh centuries. All three landscapes are topographically distinct and displayed markedly different social and political histories, and the source material available to each is vastly different. However, it will be shown that some of the techniques by which collective identity was constructed were shared across all three landscapes, while others were specific to both time and place. These regions will be discussed in greater detail at the bottom of chapter one in reference to the discussion of the chapter.

Chapter seven will proceed by comparing and contrasting the regions of the case studies. This will allow the case studies to be seen in a broader context, and in reference to how the communication of authority and collective identity changed, both over time and in the context of the sources available to each region. This chapter will move from the regional perspective of the case studies to a broad one that demonstrates the ideological and strategic significance of routeways in order to emphasise the connectivity of different Anglo-Saxon landscapes. As will be discussed below, an essential aspect of ‘regionalism’ is that a region is part of a perceived whole. Emphasising the connectedness of different regions is important because the regional dynamics that will be made apparent in chapters four through six did not exist in a vacuum, but as part of a broader society and, eventually, polity.

## Chapter I

### Historiographical Context: Frontiers, Core-and-Periphery, Inherited Landscapes

This chapter will serve to contextualise the arguments of this thesis. This will consist of four parts: part one will discuss the historiography of medieval frontiers and Anglo-Saxon frontiers in particular; part two will explore the related concept of ‘core-and-periphery’; and part three will address the inherited prehistoric and Roman landscape, and the use of influence of this inheritance in Anglo-Saxon England. Following this, part four will identify and explain the regions of the case studies that make up the second half of the work. Each case study is about how power and collective identity was asserted and communicated in the landscape, and how the landscape itself contextualised political interaction, particularly in regard to routes of communication. It will be demonstrated that each landscape was politically contested, and, depending upon perspective, could be seen as both a ‘core’ and a ‘periphery’. In all three landscapes, it will be argued that both the act of conflict and, perhaps more importantly, the memorialisation and perception of conflict was an important way to assert authority and collective identity in such contested landscapes.

#### *1: Frontiers and Borders in Anglo-Saxon Sources*

One of the most elusive terms in medieval historiography is the notion of ‘the frontier’. Frontiers have multiple layers of meaning that can be almost endlessly configured or reconfigured by the historian. Put most simply, a frontier can refer to a straightforward political division between two territories. However, the word is also used in a more expansive sense to refer to a transitional zone between two poles: the settled and unsettled, the civilised and the barbarous. This can also be expanded to refer to the transitional zone between two *political* poles (e.g. the capitals of two modern states). Central to this theory is an understanding that such zones of transition displayed a

distinctive mingling of culture, language, legal custom, economics, and settlement patterns through which the frontier zone attained its own distinctive identity. Over time, the frontier zone exerted its own influence (cultural, political, or otherwise) over the original core.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, it is the dynamism and sense of agency given to the peoples of such zones that makes a frontier noteworthy. Another way one could put it is to say that a frontier is inherently spatial, as it describes the relationships and mechanisms *between* core and periphery, as one acts upon the other.

It is useful to think of a frontier as a set of processes or interactions between people (e.g. conflict, reconciliation, accommodation, negotiation and ‘self-shaping’) that are enacted in a specific landscape context between two or more apparent poles.<sup>28</sup> This is different to a border, which refers to a specific place in the landscape—usually conceptualised as a demarcating line—that is charged with ideological significance in order to articulate ownership, control or authority in the landscape; a border, then, is best understood as an instrument of political communication that can exist within a frontier zone.<sup>29</sup>

To be clear, the Anglo-Saxons could conceptualise both borders and wider zones. Rivers often appear as ‘borders’ in Anglo-Saxon writing, but this could depend upon the perspective of the source in question. A straightforward example is the River Idle, which Bede describes as being *in finibus gentis Merciorum*.<sup>30</sup> More complicated is the River Humber. Bede writes about the Humber as a river that divided *gentes: nam in duas provincias gens Nordanhymbrorum antiquitus diuisa erat, the regnum Deirorum and the regnum Berniciorum*.<sup>31</sup> Note that here the relevant *gentes* are

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<sup>27</sup> See below, pp. 38–59 for ‘core-and-periphery’.

<sup>28</sup> A ‘unipolar’ concept would be appropriate to Turner (below, pp. 29–30), but few would endorse such a view today. For ‘self-shaping’ and its applicability to Anglo-Saxon history, see below, p. 27.

<sup>29</sup> P. Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley, CA, 1989), pp. 1–7.

<sup>30</sup> *HE* ii.12.

<sup>31</sup> *HE* iii.1: ‘of old the Northumbrian *gens* was divided into two provinces [...] the kingdom of the Deirans [and the] kingdom of the Bernicians.’

the ‘Northumbrians’, and therefore implicitly, the ‘Southumbrians’. This frames the Deirans and Bernicians as related peoples distinct from their southern neighbours; it serves to alienate them from other Anglian dynasties to the south. References to the *Transhumbranae regionis* can also be found in Bede’s *Historia Abbatum*.<sup>32</sup> This is echoed in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* when Bede writes of the *Transhumbranae gentis partem ab aquilone*, while Stephen uses *Ultrahumbrenses* seven times in his *Vita Wilfrithi*.<sup>33</sup> References to the *provincia*, *regnum*, and *gens Nordanhymbrorum* are regularly found in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. All of these references emphasise that the kingdom was ‘beyond the Humber’. Other references to the ‘northern’ kingdom include Stephen, who wrote of *Aldfrith rex Aquilonalium / Aquilonensium*.<sup>34</sup> Aldhelm, in a letter to King Aldfrith, wrote: *ACIRCIO, aquilonalis imperii scepra gubernanti*, with *Acircius* as a metaphor for the north wind.<sup>35</sup> Significantly, these names are geographical: they refer to the orientation of the kingdom in relation to the geography of Britain, with the Humber serving as the focal point. Thus, ‘Northumbrians’ and not, say, the ‘Northern Angles’. Only on one occasion is a combined geographic-ethnic marker used: in book one, chapter twenty-five Bede claimed Æthelberht of Kent’s hegemony ‘extended to the boundary of the great river Humber which divides the northern from the southern Angles.’<sup>36</sup>

However, this was not the only way to perceive the Humber. The river could also be seen as a feature that *unified* peoples north and south of it: The Anonymous Whitby *Vita Gregorii* refers to

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<sup>32</sup> Bede, *Historia Abbatum*, in *Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow*, ed. and trans. C. Grocock and I.N. Wood (Oxford, 2013), 4.

<sup>33</sup> *HE* iii.14; *VSW* 44, 45, 47, 58, 65.

<sup>34</sup> *VSW* 41, 43.

<sup>35</sup> *Sancti Aldhelmi, opera quae extant*, ed. J.A. Giles (Oxford, 1844), p. 216: ‘To Acircius, governing the sceptres of the northern empire’.

<sup>36</sup> *HE* i.25: *qui ad confinium usque Humbrae fluminis maximi, quo meridiani et septentrionales anglorum populi dirimuntur, fines imperii tetenderat.*

*gens nostra que dicitur Humbrenses*.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, an account of the Synod of Hatfield (679) supplied in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* refers to Ecgfrith as *rex Humbronensium*.<sup>38</sup> If the synodal book from which Bede's account derived was nearly contemporary to the synod, then this would be the earliest written reference to the realm of the Æthelfrithings; indeed, one might posit that Bede included the text without much emendation because *Humbronensium* is unlike any other term used in his writing. Moreover, if the account was made before the battle of the Trent, which also took place in 679, then it should be recalled that Ecgfrith was in control of Lindsey, south of the Humber. Thus, the two earliest written references, the synodal record of the council of Hatfield and the Whitby Anonymous *Vita Gregorii* use 'Humbrians', and it is only in later sources, for which our first record is Aldhelm's letter to Aldfrith (composed 685 x 695), that the cardinal signifier was applied. This suggests that the designation of 'Northumbria' only became standard in the eighth century through the *Vita Wilfrithi* and *Historia Ecclesiastica*. This may be a result of the generation after the battles of the Trent and Nechtansmere coming to terms with the territorial losses suffered during the reign of Ecgfrith, as is suggested by Bede, who wrote that Ecgfrith's successor Aldfrith 'ably restored the shattered state of the kingdom although within narrower bounds.'<sup>39</sup>

The concept of the Humber as a river that oriented a wider 'Humbrian' people who inhabited both banks is similar to Bede's reference to the Trent as the river which divided the Northern and Southern Mercians, a political configuration that has only a brief valence in our sources, when Oswiu asserted his overlordship over the Mercians and set Peada up as king of the southern Mercians. It is impossible to know if the division was relevant to the internal functioning of the

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<sup>37</sup> Whitby Anon. *Vita Gregorii*, in *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great by an Anonymous Monk of Whitby*, ed. B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1985), 12.

<sup>38</sup> *HE* iv.17.

<sup>39</sup> *HE* iv.26: *destructumque regni statum, quamuis intra fines angustiores, nobiliter recuperavit.*

Mercian kingdom, and while Bede does accord each region a specific hidage, perhaps his use of the qualifying ‘*ut dicunt*’ in his description suggests the division was not particularly well known.<sup>40</sup>

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is consistent in referring to the Thames as the border between the Mercians and West Saxons, for instance in entries under 825, 871, 1006 and elsewhere. However, it will be shown in chapter six that the situation was much more complicated, and that for much of the history of Wessex and Mercia as independent kingdoms, the Thames was not a straightforward border. Rivers and other geographical and topographical features could be used in tandem: the Treaty of Alfred and Guthrum, for example draws a (short-lived) border between the dominions of Alfred and Guthrum using a combination of the rivers Thames, Lea, Ouse and then the Roman road known as Watling Street.<sup>41</sup> Such features could also form a border between regions that were perceived as being unlike, for example Bede curiously describes a see ‘for people who dwell west of the River Severn (*i.e.* the see of Hereford).’<sup>42</sup> This may reflect Bede’s lack of information concerning the lands west of the Severn, and he clearly did not feel comfortable, or was not able, to describe the area as a *provincia* or a *regnum*, even though there was a bishop. In other words, he is describing the Severn as a border between two regions that were of a significantly different character. There is a similar hint of this in the *Chronicle’s obit* for Aldhelm, which describes him as the bishop ‘west of the wood’, suggesting that Selwood Forest (the wood which is referred to) served as a border between two parts of the West Saxon kingdom that were perceived as being different in character.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *HE* iii.24: *Quo tempore donauit praefato Peada filio regis Pendan, eo quod esset cognatus suus regnum Australium Merciorum, qui sunt, ut dicunt, familiarum quique milium, discreti fluuio Treanta ab Aquilonaribus Mercis, quorum terra est familiarum vii milium.*

<sup>41</sup> For more on AGu, see below pp. 140–2.

<sup>42</sup> *HE* v.23: *eis populis qui ultra Sabrinam ad occidentem habitant.*

<sup>43</sup> ASC 709. See also Yorke, *Wessex*, pp. 23–4, 98.

This may be the original sense of the name of the Mercians, ‘the Borderers’. Typically, the word *mearc*, from which the name of the Mercian kingdom was derived, is simply translated as border or boundary.<sup>44</sup> However, perhaps ‘Mercia’ originally represented a view from elsewhere (Canterbury, for instance) that saw a chaotic plethora of pagan Angle and Christian British polities before the consolidation of the kingdom by Penda and its conversion under Wulfhere. The word *Mearcland* can sometimes be used to mean ‘borderland’, ‘waste’, or ‘wilderness’.<sup>45</sup> The implication in Old English literature is that it is a dangerous and violent space. One thinks of the description in *Beowulf* of Grendel, in which he is described as a *mearcstapa*, a ‘proowler of the marches.’<sup>46</sup> In the Old English poem *Andreas*, which is found in the late tenth-century Vercelli Book, the city of the Mermedonians is described as both a *ceaster* and a *burh* that was the *eald enta geweorc* (‘the old work of giants’), marvellously wrought with paved streets, marble and multicoloured tiles, and guarded with strong walls, gates and towers.<sup>47</sup> Yet beyond the walls was the *mearcland*: *eal wæs þæt mearcland morðre bewunden, feondes facne*.<sup>48</sup> In the Old English poem *Exodus*, contained in the tenth-century Junius manuscript, Moses is described as a war-leader in the *mearcland*:

The army was urged onward,  
Proud was their leader, the kin-leader of the people  
He journeyed with his people through many remote fastnesses,  
The lands and pryncedoms of hateful men.  
The narrow lone paths, unknown ways  
Until they bore their battle-gear, ready, upon the *Guðmyrce* [warlike march].  
Their lands were blanketed by a helmet of clouds,  
Their borderland-dwellings in the reaches of the moors  
Moses led the army on through many perils.  
About two nights later, the glorious hero ordered,  
After they escaped from these fiends,

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<sup>44</sup> Bosworth-Toller, s.v. *Mearce* ii.b–c, iii.

<sup>45</sup> Bosworth-Toller, s.v. *Mearceland*.

<sup>46</sup> *Beowulf*, 103.

<sup>47</sup> This is discussed in a different context in N. Guenther-Discezza, *Inhabited Spaces: Anglo-Saxon Constructions of Place* (Toronto, 2017), pp. 157–8.

<sup>48</sup> *Andreas*, in *The Vercelli Book*, ed. G. Krapp, ASPR 2 (New York, NY, 1932), 19–20: ‘All of the *mearcland* was wound around with murder and the treachery of the fiend.’

That the bright company should besiege  
with the whole host the fortress [*byrig*] of Etham,  
With the greatest power in the *mearc*land.<sup>49</sup>

The overall impression is that the Anglo-Saxons could delineate territory in a variety of ways. Charters and texts such as the Treaty of Alfred and Guthrum show the precise demarcation of territory using natural and man-made features. Rivers seem in particular to be perceived as borders, but it is clear that a single river could occupy many conceptual spaces depending on context. Of course, it is obvious that rivers were also thoroughfares, and they connected places as much as they separated regions or kingdoms (perhaps even more so given the efficacy of riverine transportation). This will be emphasised throughout this thesis. One might consider the territoriality of Anglo-Saxon society as a network of places at the intersections of riverine, littoral, and road-based routes. Borders of polities are referenced relatively rarely in Anglo-Saxon sources, and this is at odds with the precise nature by which charter-producing regions of Anglo-Saxon society delineated landholding through boundary clauses. I think this is quite relevant. The jurisdiction of the polity did not necessarily radiate out from a fixed-point to an established border, it was determined by the allegiances of people to one lord or the other (or one might have obligations to multiple lords concurrently). A border might need to be ‘drawn’ in moments of crisis or for specific purposes such as the regulation of trading or contact at a specific point (a *port*, a *wic* or a *burh*, perhaps a crossing or a landing for ships), but due to the shared cultural milieu and inter-personal relationships of Anglo-Saxon elites, a precise border would not have always been necessary.

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<sup>49</sup> *Exodus*, in *The Junius Manuscript*, ed. Krapp, ASPR 1 (New York, NY, 1931), 54–67: *Fyrd wæs gefyſed, from se ðe lædde, / Modig magoræswa, mægburh heora. / Oferfor he mid folce fæstena worn, / Land and leodweard laðdra manna. / Enge anpaðas, uncuð gelad, / Oðþæt hie on Guðmyrce gearwe bæron, / Wæron land heora lyfthelme beþeapt, / Mearchofu morheald. Moyses ofer þa, / Fela meoringa, fyrde gelædde. / Heht þa ymb twa niht tirfæste hæleð, / Siððan hie feondum oðfaren hæfdon, / Ymbwicigean werodes bearhtme / Mid ælfere æthanes byrig, / Mægnes mæste mearclandum on.*

In addition to ‘borders’, broader ‘zones’ could also be conceptualised. There are a handful of references in historical documents, such as the examples in the *Chronicle* and the *Historia Ecclesiastica* cited above, but the idea may be more prevalent in literary sources, such as in the examples of *Andreas* and *Exodus*, which depict ‘borderlands’ as dangerous and violent places. I will further discuss the connection between borders, border zones and warfare in chapter three.

### i.1: *Historiography of the Medieval Frontier*

In the 1990s and 2000s, a raft of scholarship emerged that sought to investigate the concept of the frontier in medieval society. In recent years, however, this strain of research has attenuated as stalemates have emerged in matters of fundamental conceptualisation, and the usefulness of the frontier as a tool for examining medieval society has been called into question. Interest in medieval frontiers greatly accelerated with the publication of an edited volume by Robert Bartlett and Angus MacKay entitled *Medieval Frontier Societies*.<sup>50</sup> This has proven an enduring and influential work that has nevertheless received criticism for being too heavily focused on frontier arrangements in post-Conquest Britain, north-eastern Europe, and Spain, reflecting the primary research interests of the editors. *Frontier Societies* was followed in 1993 by Bartlett’s masterful survey, *The Making of Europe*.<sup>51</sup> Further significant contributions to the field include *Frontiers in Question*, edited by Powers and Standen, which is notable for its broad geographical and chronological remit, in which frontier processes are examined across the Eurasian landmass, and Abulafia and Berend’s

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<sup>50</sup> R. Bartlett and A. MacKay (eds.), *Medieval Frontier Societies* (Oxford, 1989).

<sup>51</sup> R. Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change, 950–1350* (Princeton, NJ, 1993).

*Medieval Frontiers*, which addresses a specific criticism of *Frontier Societies and Making* by devoting several papers to the Mediterranean and the Byzantine ‘worlds’.<sup>52</sup>

Meanwhile, historians of Late Antiquity also began to address the question of the frontier. In 1995, an interdisciplinary conference was held at the University of Kansas produced a book the following year edited by Mathisen and Hagith entitled *Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity*, which sought to ‘offer alternatives to the conventional concept of linear-cum-geographical-cum-military frontiers’ by devoting sections to ‘Frontiers of Person and Gender’ and ‘Frontiers of Ritual, Piety, and Spirit.’<sup>53</sup> The perceived success of this line of research has resulted in thirteen biennial conferences covering an extraordinarily broad range of topics in the spirit of the 1995 inaugural. Also of significance is a 2001 contribution to the Transformation of the Roman World series edited by Pohl, Wood and Reimitz.<sup>54</sup> Much of the work on Late Antiquity was influenced by recent studies of Roman frontiers, such as C.R. Whittaker’s controversial but intriguing *Frontiers of the Roman Empire* and Benjamin Isaac’s seminal article ‘*Limes and Limitanei*’.<sup>55</sup> Both *Shifting Frontiers* and *Transformation* contain stimulating papers, but taken as a whole, they lack conceptual clarity. As Philippe Buc commented in his review of *Transformation*, by accumulating ‘pell-mell linguistic, artistic, religious and philosophical frontiers,’ while viewing the whole of Late Antiquity as a chronological frontier between the ancient and medieval period, ‘the frontier’ loses its weight as a concept and becomes a metaphor.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> D. Power and N. Standen (eds.), *Frontiers in Question: Eurasian Borderlands, 700–1700* (Basingstoke, 1999); D. Abulafia and N. Berend (eds.), *Medieval Frontiers: Concepts and Practices* (Aldershot, 2002).

<sup>53</sup> R. Mathisen and S. Hagith (eds.), *Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity: papers from the first interdisciplinary conference on Late Antiquity, the University of Kansas* (Aldershot, 1996), quoted on p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> W. Pohl, I. Wood, and H. Reimitz (eds.), *The Transformation of Frontiers: From Late Antiquity to the Carolingians* (Leiden, 2001).

<sup>55</sup> C.R. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A Social and Economic Study* (Baltimore, MD, 1994); B. Isaac, ‘The Meaning of the Terms *Limes* and *Limitanei*’, *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 78 (1988), pp. 125–47.

<sup>56</sup> P. Buc, review of Pohl, Wood and Reimitz (eds.), *Transformation* [2001], *Annales* 58, 6 (2003).

On firmer ground is some of the work done on Carolingian frontiers, particularly by Julia Smith, T.F.X. Noble, and most recently, Jonathan Conant.<sup>57</sup> Smith's work in particular is adroit in its shifting focus between the imperial court and Brittany, or 'the macroscopic and molecular'.<sup>58</sup> It is notable, however, that Smith eschews the word 'frontier' almost altogether, and refrains from categorising Brittany as a 'frontier society' because of its controversial implications and the opacity of the concept.<sup>59</sup> A relatively recent collection of essays edited by Florin Curta sought to restore some clarity to the historiographical debate and bridge a perceived gap between early medievalists, historians specialising in Late Antiquity and archaeologists, and to emphasise the role of frontiers in the 'creation, as opposed to separation, of ethnic groups.'<sup>60</sup> A particularly important contribution to *Borders, Barriers, and Ethnogenesis* was supplied by Michael Kulikowski, who argued that we need to consider whether or not the concept of the frontier is a useful 'lens' for studying early medieval societies. He writes of Visigothic Spain, saying that while we can see many of the hallmarks of a frontier society, 'a mingling of populations, outsiders and insiders, hostile and friendly, in a polarized atmosphere of perceived ethnic difference. Their interaction produced a new society, different from anything that had gone before [...] without the benefit of a frontier zone. That is to say, the social change and cultural genesis regularly associated with the frontier experience cannot be explained by the existence of a frontier.'<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> J.M.H. Smith, 'Fines Imperii: The Marches', in R. McKitterick (ed.), *NCMH II* (Cambridge, 1995); Smith, *Province and Empire: Brittany and the Carolingians* (Cambridge, 1992); T.F.X. Noble, 'Louis the Pious and the Frontiers of the Frankish Realm', in P. Godman and R. Collins (eds.), *Charlemagne's Heir: the reign of Louis the Pious* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 333–47; J. Conant, 'Louis the Pious and the Contours of Empire', *EME* 22, 3 (2014), pp. 336–60.

<sup>58</sup> Sahlins, *Boundaries*, p. xv.

<sup>59</sup> Smith, *Province and Empire*, pp. 2–3.

<sup>60</sup> F. Curta (ed.), *Borders, Barriers and Ethnogenesis: Frontiers in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2005), quoted on p. 5. This is also discussed in D. Power, 'Frontiers: Terms, Concepts, and the Historians of Medieval and Early Modern Europe', in Power and Standen (eds.), *Frontiers in Question*, pp. 1–12.

<sup>61</sup> M. Kulikowski, 'Ethnicity, Rulership and Early Medieval Frontiers', in F. Curta (ed.), *Borders, Barriers and Ethnogenesis*, p. 254.

## i.2: Anglo-Saxon Frontier Historiography

Anglo-Saxon frontiers have also received some attention, but perhaps not in the same sort of sustained way as other regions or periods. Most research has been devoted to a singular frontier, or aspect of a frontier, rather than the phenomenon in Anglo-Saxon society as a whole. Darby, for instance, wrote of the ‘fenland frontier’ in the east midlands, attempting to demonstrate how the marshy fens came to be a political frontier;<sup>62</sup> more recently Griffiths has provided a case-study discussing Chester and the Wirral as a frontier zone during the reign of Edward the Elder;<sup>63</sup> Baker and Brookes have written about the northern frontier of Wessex, and how the landscape in northern Wessex was gradually delineated by a network of fortifications designed to control territory.<sup>64</sup> Northumbrian frontiers were discussed by Peter Hunter Blair in a series of papers between 1948 and 1954;<sup>65</sup> subsequent work on Northumbria largely derived from this.<sup>66</sup> Other subjects adjacent or related to Anglo-Saxon frontiers include work on the legal texts known as the *Ordinance Concerning the Dunsæte* and the Treaty of Alfred and Guthrum.<sup>67</sup> Other examples include the historiography surrounding Offa’s Dyke and relations between the Anglo-Saxons and the Britons.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> H.C. Darby, ‘The Fenland Frontier in Anglo-Saxon England’, *Antiquity* 8, 30 (1934), pp. 185–99.

<sup>63</sup> Griffiths, ‘The North-West Frontier’, pp. 167–99.

<sup>64</sup> J. Baker and S. Brookes, ‘From Frontier to Border: The Evolution of Northern West Saxon Territorial Delineation in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries’, in H. Hamerow (ed.), *ASSAH* 17 (2011), pp. 108–23. Also: S. Brookes, ‘Mapping Anglo-Saxon Civil Defence’, in J. Baker, S. Brookes and A. Reynolds (eds.), *Landscapes of Defence in Early Medieval Europe* (Turnhout, 2013), pp. 39–63.

<sup>65</sup> P. Hunter Blair, ‘The Northumbrians and their Southern Frontier’, in *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 4<sup>th</sup> ser. 26 (1948), pp. 98–126; ‘The Boundary Between Bernicia and Deira’, *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 4<sup>th</sup> ser. 27 (1949), pp. 46–59; ‘The Bernicians and their Northern Frontier’, H.M. Chadwick *et al.*, *Studies in Early British History* (Cambridge, 1954), pp. 137–72.

<sup>66</sup> e.g. Rollason, *Northumbria*, pp. 25–43; N.J. Higham, *The Kingdom of Northumbria, 350–1100* (Stroud, 1992), pp. 142–4; Higham, ‘Northumbria’s Southern Frontier: a Review’, *EME* 14, 4 (2006), pp. 391–418; cf. N. Brooks, ‘The Formation of the Mercian Kingdom’, in S. Bassett (ed.), *Origins*, pp. 159–70, at pp. 160–2.

<sup>67</sup> Below, chapter two.

<sup>68</sup> Below, chapter five.

Several recent works stand out, however. These include a 2009 thesis by Felicity Clark, which re-examined the issue of Northumbrian frontiers, incorporating up-to-date research on frontier theory. Utilising such methods, Clark argued that frontiers should be seen as a set of processes that took the form of interactions between groups of peoples. The notion of ‘self-shaping’, borrowed from the American historians Cronon, Miles and Gitlin, which refers to the varied processes by which communities came to identify themselves, is particularly useful.<sup>69</sup> In 2017, Brady published *Writing the Welsh Borderlands in Anglo-Saxon England*, an interesting monograph that discusses several aspects of ‘Anglo-British’ relations as they were depicted in Anglo-Saxon textual sources, and how the Welsh ‘borderlands’, despite being geographically nebulous, retained a conceptual identity in literary and historical texts before the Norman Conquest. Brady’s work is stimulating, and addresses an important and relatively under-studied topic, but much of the book is more concerned with perceptions of the Britons in Anglo-Saxon literary and historical writing than it is with the ‘borderlands’ as a territorial or geopolitical entity in their own right.<sup>70</sup>

Meanwhile, a recent collection of papers edited by Semple, Orsini and Mui diverge from a textual approach by taking a predominantly archaeological focus and covering a wide-range of topics—not just frontiers—set in a broader European context. One might venture to say that despite its title, the theme of the book is not frontiers as such, but rather the elusive topic of ‘liminality’ more generally.<sup>71</sup> The book reflects the tendency noted by Phillippe Buc, as cited above, to turn frontiers into ‘metaphors’; however, the key contribution of the collected papers in the volume is to

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<sup>69</sup> F.H. Clark, ‘The Northumbrian Frontiers c. 500–c. 850 (Unpublished D.Phil thesis, University of Oxford, 2009); and Clark, ‘Thinking About Western Northumbria’, in D. Petts and S. Turner (ed.), *Early Medieval Northumbria: Kingdom and Communities, 450–1100* (Turnhout, 2011), pp. 113–28 provides example of the approach through specific area case-studies. For ‘self-shaping’: W. Cronon, G. Miles and J. Gitlin, ‘Becoming West’, in their edited volume, *Under an Open Sky* (New York, NY, 1992), p. 18.

<sup>70</sup> L. Brady, *Writing the Welsh Borderlands in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2017).

<sup>71</sup> S. Semple, C. Orsini and S. Mui (eds.), *Life on the Edge: Social, Political, and Religious Frontiers in Early Medieval Europe* (Braunschweig, 2017). See within Baker and Brookes, ‘Gateways, Gates and *Gatu*: Liminal Spaces at the Centre of Things’, pp. 253–62.

recognise the fluidity of the concept of core-and-periphery. The editors note that a ‘place on the periphery can be changed into something central by human action, and a boundary can act as a place of activity and negotiation.’<sup>72</sup> I shall return to this idea below.

Several landscape-based and archaeological approaches address the question of frontiers (or issues adjacent to the concept of the frontier). There has been a considerable amount of work connecting burials to socio-political or ‘natural’ boundaries.<sup>73</sup> Howard Williams, for instance, has discussed the significant site of Lowbury hill, which features a weapon burial beneath a prominent barrow next to a Roman temple complex. As Williams writes, Lowbury hill provides the best viewpoint in the region, and argues that it may have served as a waypoint for travellers. Here, the Berkshire Downs—as will be discussed in detail in chapter six—may have served as a boundary in some sense, bisecting a north-south axis, but the prehistoric Ridgeway on the crest of the Downs also provided a significant east-west routeway.<sup>74</sup> In a similar vein did Sam Lucy argue that elite seventh-century burials high up on the Yorkshire wolds were placed for their prominence, and that burial mounds dug-out in the white chalks of the wolds would have been especially visible upon the otherwise green hillsides.<sup>75</sup> Additionally, Semple and Reynolds have discussed boundary burials, demonstrating that burials at socio-political boundaries could be associated with the

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<sup>72</sup> Semple *et al.*, ‘At the Limits: Frontiers and Boundaries in Early Medieval Northern Europe’, in Semple *et al.* (eds.), *Life on the Edge*, pp. 7–20, quoted at p. 9.

<sup>73</sup> e.g. D. Bonney, ‘Pagan Saxon Burials and Boundaries in Wiltshire’, *Wilt. Arch. Mag.* 61 (1966), pp. 25–30; A. Goodier, ‘The Formation of Boundaries in Anglo-Saxon England: A Statistical Study’, *Med. Arch.* 28 (1984), pp. 1–21; M. Welch, ‘Rural Settlement Patterns in the Early and Middle Anglo-Saxon Periods’, *Landscape History* 7 (1985), pp. 13–25; Hooke, *The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon England* (Leicester, 1999), pp. 66–7 is circumspect regarding the evidence here; H. Williams, *Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 185–7.

<sup>74</sup> Williams, ‘Placing the Dead: Investigating the Location of Wealthy Barrow Burials in Seventh-Century England’, in M. Rundkvist (ed.), *Grave Matters: Eight Studies of Burial Data from the First Millennium AD from Crimea, Scandinavia and England*, BAR, Intl. Ser. 781 (Oxford, 1999), pp. 57–86.

<sup>75</sup> S. Lucy, *The Early Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries of East Yorkshire*, BAR Brit. Ser. 272 (Oxford, 1998), p. 99.

supernatural,<sup>76</sup> or with deviancy, criminality and execution sites.<sup>77</sup> For example, Semple has written that the area around Avebury in Wiltshire has certain distinctive trends in the burial record, such as the predominant reuse of prehistoric sites for secondary burial, and the high frequency of isolated barrow burials as a result of competition in the region between the West Saxons and Mercians in the seventh century.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, Reynolds has linked the negative associations of deviant burials on boundaries with deepening social hierarchies within increasingly consolidated Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in the seventh and eighth centuries.<sup>79</sup> These are all important studies that emphasise the ideological significance of the landscape itself and the way that the landscape was perceived, interpreted, and utilised as a tool that could communicate collective identity and either political authority or political competition.

### i.3: *Turner and the Frontier*

In one way or another, most work on frontiers in the Middle Ages and Late Antiquity is indebted to—or produced in reaction to—the work of the American historian Frederick Jackson Turner, whose seminal essay ‘The Significance of the Frontier in American History’ has been extraordinarily influential and controversial.<sup>80</sup> Turner argued that the western frontier was unique to America, and that the westward expansion of the United States influenced the development of American culture and institutions. Turner’s thesis was always influential with medieval historians, among others, but it was the publication of *Frontier Societies* in 1989 that reintroduced Turner’s

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<sup>76</sup> S. Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric in Anglo-Saxon England: Religion, Ritual, and Rulership in the Landscape* (Oxford, 2014), esp. chapters five and six.

<sup>77</sup> A. Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs* (Oxford, 2009), esp. p. 155, table 24, and pp. 235–50.

<sup>78</sup> Semple, ‘Burials and Political Boundaries in the Avebury Region, North Wiltshire’, in Griffiths, Reynolds and Semple (eds.), *Boundaries in Early Medieval Britain, ASSAH 12* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 72–91.

<sup>79</sup> Reynolds, *Deviant Burial Customs*, pp. 181–250.

<sup>80</sup> F.J. Turner, ‘The Significance of the Frontier in American History’ (1893), repr. in Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York, 1920).

thesis to the fore of medieval history.<sup>81</sup> The link between Turner and *Frontier Societies* is most apparent in the contribution of the late Robert Burns, an eminent Hispanist and historian of the Jesuit order, who, in addition to his studies on the Kingdom of Valencia, also wrote influentially about the Indian Wars in the Pacific Northwest in the nineteenth century.<sup>82</sup>

By the late twentieth century, Turner had taken a battering.<sup>83</sup> Burns himself wrote that ‘Turner has become a kind of vampire, killed on many a day with a stake through his Thesis, yet ever undead and stalking abroad.’<sup>84</sup> Very few historians would present an unmodified version of Turner’s thesis today, but it remains important. One particular aspect of Turner’s thesis is the emphasis on territorial *expansion*, but even more than that, it is about manifest destiny. For Turner, the closing of the frontier was the fulfilment of America’s manifest destiny and the culmination of the frontier society. Medieval historians may not put things in those terms, but nevertheless the study of the frontier has been strongly—though sometimes subtly—related to nationalist historiographies, in which the ‘closing of the medieval frontier’ has been considered an essential point in the process of state formation. The legacy and implications of the Laws in Wales Acts of 1535 and 1542 or the Conquest of Granada in 1492 spring immediately to mind, and in this way the study of the frontier often becomes a study of the state ‘filling out its borders’. Bartlett and MacKay’s *Frontier Societies* contains no less than three contributions on the frontiers of Castile, for instance. Bartlett’s *The Making of Europe* does not often mention ‘states’, as such, and he rightly emphasises that much of the expansion he describes was the result of independent initiatives by aristocrats,

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<sup>81</sup> e.g. A. Lewis, ‘The Closing of the Medieval Frontier, 1250–1350’, *Speculum* 33, 4 (1958), pp. 475–83; O. Lattimore, ‘Origins of the Great Wall of China: A Frontier Concept in Theory and Practice’, *The Geographical Review*, 27, 4 (1937), pp. 529–49.

<sup>82</sup> R. Burns, *The Crusader Kingdom of Valencia: Colonial Survival in The Thirteenth-Century Kingdom of Valencia*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1967); Burns, *The Jesuits and the Indian Wars of the Northwest* (New Haven, CT, 1966).

<sup>83</sup> Recent American historiography is usefully summarised in N. Berend, ‘Medievalists and the Notion of the Frontier’, *The Medieval History Journal* 2, 1 (1999), pp. 55–72 with an emphasis on medieval history.

<sup>84</sup> Burns, ‘The Significance of the Frontier in the Middle Ages’, in Bartlett and MacKay (eds.), *Frontier Societies*, pp. 307–30, at p. 307.

burghers and peasants. Nevertheless, the spectre of the state looms over the book, the explicit purpose of which is to contextualise the emergence of the aggressively rapacious nation-states of late medieval and early modern Europe, to seek an explanation for their expansionist tendencies, and to demonstrate that the principals of conquest, colonisation and acculturation were in fact fundamental to the creation of a ‘European’ identity that became increasingly homogenous during the central Middle Ages, due in part to the shared experiences and common institutions of the frontier. This suggests that at the heart of it all is the question of European identity. It should come as no surprise then that Angus MacKay, the co-editor of *Frontier Societies*, was mentored by Denys Hay and that both Bartlett and MacKay were based at the University of Edinburgh when *Frontier Societies* was being compiled and where Hay had previously served as Professor of Medieval and Renaissance History between 1954 and 1980—one might suggest his legacy loomed large there throughout the 1980s.<sup>85</sup>

The interest in frontiers and their relation to a European identity reflects the preoccupations of the 1990s and early 2000s. It does not seem to be a coincidence that the study of European frontiers accelerated as the Berlin Wall was coming down, NATO and the European Union were expanding, and European and American policy-makers were giving serious thought to how Warsaw Pact successor states would be integrated with the newly renamed European Community (if there was to be integration at all).<sup>86</sup> In his review of *Making*, Wickham draws attention to the 1992 Treaty of Maastricht, and from this context, it is no wonder an essential theme of *Making* is the expansion, and by association, the homogenisation, of the European ‘core’ during the central Middle Ages.<sup>87</sup> Bartlett suggests that Germanized areas of Poland, for instance, were not *colonies*, as such, that

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<sup>85</sup> D. Hay, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (Edinburgh, 1957) is a classic and influential work.

<sup>86</sup> The way in which this was discussed in the Clinton administration is demonstrated in: M. Walker, ‘Variable Geography: America’s Mental Maps of a Greater Europe’, *International Affairs* 76, 3 (2000), pp. 459–74.

<sup>87</sup> C. Wickham, review of Bartlett, *Making* [1993], *New Left Review* 1, 208 (1994).

were dependent upon the home country, but *copies* of Germany, in which legal and social institutions were imported wholesale.

Therefore, before re-assessing the usefulness of frontier theory in medieval history it is important to keep in mind that in the original formulation, the theory was inextricably tied to the territorial expansion of the United States and the cultural force of the ‘American West’. So much is well-known, but it is equally important to recall that the revival of frontier studies in the 1990s was tied to the processes of globalisation in the aftermath of the Cold War and the territorial, economic, and cultural expansion of Europe. This does not mean that the theory of the frontier is necessarily untenable, but the context is important.

The fundamental issues suggested to me by the study of the historiography of the frontier are twofold: first, the frontier model relies too heavily on an ethnically determined ‘clash of civilisations’, in which ‘Latin Christendom’ expanded into the Celtic, Slavic, and Islamic ‘worlds’. Since the emphasis is usually on the interlopers, be they members of the military aristocracy or incoming burghers and peasant settlers, the treatment of indigenous societies can be simplistic. They serve as a foil against the practices and institutions of the aggressors or they are invoked to explain cultural or institutional shifts in the society of the frontiersmen. Moreover, this approach tends to portray a homogenous and undifferentiated core (e.g. Latin Christendom). This leads directly to the second problem, which is the emphasis on ‘core-and-periphery’. The concept of a frontier is based in polarity, and thus a ‘core’ with an attendant ‘periphery’, but all too often early medieval cores and peripheries prove themselves ambiguous and difficult to precisely define. This will be discussed further below, but for now suffice to say here that the heterogenous nature of early medieval polities makes the construction difficult to sustain for early medieval societies, and it seems clear that the dynamics of a ‘frontier society’—the processes of conflict, accommodation,

and synthesis—can be seen everywhere and at all levels. To this end, not enough attention has been given to so-called ‘internal frontiers.’<sup>88</sup> I believe that these issues stem from the implicit association of frontiers with nation-states.

Kulikowski wrote that it needs to be determined whether the state could impose a correlation between political action, culture, ethnicity, and geographic boundaries in order to create the conditions necessary for a frontier. Is this correlation really possible in Anglo-Saxon society? Identity in Anglo-Saxon society was complex and multi-layered, and it could be composed and communicated in a variety of ways according to the appropriate circumstance. We know, of course, that the people we now call ‘Anglo-Saxons’ understood themselves to be comprised of Angles, Saxons and Jutes (the three most prominent of the Germanic peoples of post-Roman Britain, though there must also have been Franks and Frisians present, among others, and this is not to mention large numbers of Britons living within Anglo-Saxon polities). These broad groups understood themselves to be related and—by 731—they all encompassed the wider *gens Anglorum*. However, this did not correspond to political unity. In the eighth century, the *gens Anglorum* could exist without a *rex Anglorum*, and there were no respective kingdoms or over-kingdoms specifically for the Angles, Saxons, or Jutes. Political identities could be associated with being an Angle or a Saxon, as in the case of the East Angles and West Saxons and so on, but we should not imagine that these kingdoms were homogenous: among the ‘Germanic’ peoples of the West Saxon kingdom (thus, for the present example excluding considerable numbers of Britons), there were Jutes from the Isle of Wight and the Meon Valley, to give just one example.

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<sup>88</sup> A notable exception is the exemplary Power, *The Norman Frontier in the Twelfth and Early Thirteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 2004).

As shall be discussed in chapter two, despite the political fragmentation of Anglo-Saxon society, Anglo-Saxon political and ecclesiastical elites demonstrated notable cultural homogeneity from the seventh century onwards, and they maintained cosmopolitan connections across a very wide geographical remit. These interpersonal contacts extended throughout Britain and to the Continent (say, from Iona in the north-west to Faramoutiers-en-Brie, the mission field of Germany, and ultimately Rome in the east and south). Manifestations of shared aristocratic culture did not regard political boundaries. Furthermore, it is difficult to know how to take Anglo-Saxon polities themselves, due in no small part to the slipperiness of the word *gens*, and while we know about the *gens Anglorum*, which could exist without a *regnum Anglorum*, this did not prevent the use of the word *gens* for constituent groups as well, for instance the *gens Merciorum*. Even within Anglo-Saxon polities, there was considerable diversity, and there were major divisions within the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. East and West Kent, for example, had very different archaeological and territorial profiles, and the early existence of two dioceses in Kent (Rochester and Canterbury), could suggest two kingdoms that consolidated at an early date.<sup>89</sup> The East Anglian kingdom was divided between the people of Norfolk and Suffolk, and it may be that Suffolk had considerable early connections with the East Saxons.<sup>90</sup> The expanding Mercian kingdom of the seventh and eighth centuries was comprised of several sub-kingdoms such as Lindsey or the kingdom of the Hwicce, as well as smaller groups, such as those collectively referred to as ‘Middle Angles’. The Northumbrian kingdom, of course, was divided between the people of Deira in the south and

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<sup>89</sup> A. Everitt, *Continuity and Colonization: The Evolution of Kentish Settlement* (Leicester, 1986); N. Brooks, ‘The Creation and Early Structure of the Kingdom of Kent’, in Bassett (ed.), *Origins*, pp. 55–74, at pp. 68–9; Yorke, ‘Joint Kingship in Kent, c. 560–785’, *Archaeologia Cantiana* 99 (1983), pp. 1–20, at p. 5.

<sup>90</sup> T. Williamson, ‘East Anglia’s Character and the “North Sea World”’, in D. Bates and R. Liddiard (eds.), *East Anglia and its North Sea World in the Early Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 2013), pp. 44–62, at pp. 58–9; M. Parker Pearson, R. van de Noort, and A. Woolf, ‘Three Men and a Boat: Sutton Hoo and the East Saxon Kingdom’, *ASE* 22, 27 (1993), pp. 27–50.

Bernicia in the north, but other groups, such as the people of Elmet, were gradually incorporated into the polity.

Further to these major divisions, there were smaller groups of peoples, those bearing *-inga*, *-sæte*, or *-wara* names, for example. Such groups will be discussed at further length in chapter two. Furthermore, there was considerable ethnic diversity in many Anglo-Saxon polities. The presence of Britons is attested in Anglo-Saxon polities throughout the period, and from the ninth century on, there was a considerable Scandinavian presence in eastern Britain in particular. This is not to say that the polities and territories of Anglo-Saxon society were unchanging by any means: kingdoms rose and fell, they expanded and contracted, some lost their royal status, and were incorporated by various—and sometimes tenuous—means into the tenth-century kingdom. There were major shifts in internal territoriality as well, most obviously seen in the adoption of hundreds in the mid- to late- tenth century, the shiring of the midlands by the eleventh century, and the reformation of dioceses at various points. The most important examples of which include the division of the West Saxon diocese between Winchester and Sherborne in 704 x 705, the absorption of Hexham by Lindisfarne in 854, the removal of the seat of the Bishop of Leicester to Dorchester in 878, the collapse of the see of Whithorn in *c.* 800, and the establishment of sees at Crediton, Ramsbury and Wells in the early tenth century. The most famous examples of this, of course, are the removal of Lindisfarne to Chester-le-Street in 883, thence to Durham in 995, and the temporary elevation of the see of Lichfield in 787.

In addition to the political jostling and administrative reforms that are so familiar, there is also reason to suggest that there were changes in the way that territories were perceived. Wiltshire, for example, seems to have *originally* referred to a territory organised around a river valley, that of the River Wylye. The earliest reference to ‘Wiltshire’ in an entry of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*

for 802 mentions the men of the *Wilsætan*, referring to a territorial name derived from the Wylye. In other words, the *Chronicle* refers to the ‘dwellers by the Wylye’, suggesting a territorial orientation perceived principally in terms of the river and its valley.<sup>91</sup> However, in the 890s when Asser refers to the region, he uses the term ‘*Wiltunensis pagae*’ [*sic*], presumably referring to the hinterland of the high-status site of Wilton (which derived its name from the Wylye) where there was a minster and, by the time of the Burghal Hidage, a *burh*.<sup>92</sup> In the *Chronicle*’s record of the Battle of Edington (878), *Wilsæte* is used again. The next reference, the *Chronicle*’s 897 obit for ealdorman Æthelhelm of Wiltshire, uses *Wiltunscire*.<sup>93</sup> This suggests that in the late-ninth century, when the common stock of the *Chronicle* was being compiled and Asser was composing the *Life of Alfred*, both forms seem to have been in use. By the time Wiltshire is mentioned again in the *Chronicle*, in 1003, and in all subsequent references, *Wiltunscire* is used exclusively.<sup>94</sup>

This suggests a change in the perception of the landscape that calcified over the course of the tenth century, from a territory based on the River Wylye and its valley, to one centred upon the *place* of Wilton. Ultimately, the bounds of Wiltshire as they came to exist by Domesday far exceeded the valley of the Wylye from which it derived its name. Wilton itself, however, is very strategically placed, lying as it does between the river Wylye in the north, the Nadder in the south, and the upland hunting region of Cranborne Chase. Three miles east of Wilton, the Nadder joins the Hampshire Avon, which proceeds to empty into the Channel at Christchurch (OE *Tweoxneam*), some twenty-two miles to the south. This seems to reflect more general trends of the tenth century, as territories came to be defined by their relationship to fortified places that people were

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<sup>91</sup> ASC 802.

<sup>92</sup> Asser 56. Asser also uses *Summertunensis pagae* and *Hamunensis pagae* in the same passage, referring, respectively, to Somerset and Hampshire, and describing these districts in terms of specific places—Somerton and *Hamwic*—with appurtenant hinterlands.

<sup>93</sup> ASC 878, 897.

<sup>94</sup> ASC C 1003; subsequent references can be found in CDE 1011 and 1015.

understood to ‘pertain to.’<sup>95</sup> Thus, when Edward the Elder campaigned in the east midlands, he took the submission of the men of Northampton, Bedford, and Stamford and the men who pertained to those *burhs*. It is important to note, however, that these territorial divisions were interwoven with other forms of identity: the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* entry refers to the ‘men of Hereford’ in 914, and to *Scrobbesbyrigscire* (i.e. ‘the shire of Shrewsbury’, that is Shropshire), in 1006, but in 1016 the *Chronicle* also referred to the men of the *Magonsæte*, a people whose territories were thought to correspond to the medieval diocese of Hereford, which encompassed much of Shropshire and Herefordshire. Therefore, a shire related to the place of Shrewsbury existed, but this did not supersede people continuing to belong to a *-sæte* group. We should be very wary of assuming that *-inga*, *-sæte*, and *-wara* identities were completely overwritten and rendered defunct by the advent of shire and hundredal organisation. Territorial arrangements, which were constantly fluctuating and evolving, could be as situational as the forms of identity to which such territories pertained.

To bring this back to the concept of frontiers more directly, both Anglo-Saxon identities and territories were diverse and multi-layered, with different identities and attendant territories existing simultaneously. The process of acculturation by which people with multiple levels of collective identity came to be constituents of wider polities, the *regnum Merciorum*, for instance, and eventually the *regnum Anglorum*, and to develop a sense of collective identity pertaining to such wider polities suggests the existence of frontier processes such as self-shaping everywhere and at all levels.<sup>96</sup> This does not mean that studying an individual ‘frontier zone’ is useless, but it seems

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<sup>95</sup> II As. 20.1.

<sup>96</sup> This is alluded to in R. Davies, ‘Frontier Arrangements in Fragmented Societies: Ireland and Wales’, in Bartlett and MacKay (eds.), *Frontier Societies*, pp. 77–99, see p. 80: ‘Countries in which the units of political power and governance are multiple and which lack a central, stable, unchallenged supervisory source of jurisdiction and power have their own internal complex frontiers.... Wales and Ireland may, therefore, be considered as counties of plural

conceptually flawed to isolate a singular region as being ‘a frontier’ when the dynamics considered essential to concept were in play *everywhere*.

In the *Making of Europe*, Bartlett’s great achievement was to show that the states of late medieval western Europe were a product of the coalescence of many frontier zones, as innumerable marches spun themselves out from the centrifugal core of Latin Christendom (i.e. north-eastern France, the Rhineland, the Po Valley). As important as Bartlett’s thesis is, it can create the impression of a homogenised core. This runs the risk of underemphasising considerable ‘internal’ diversity and heterogeneity.<sup>97</sup> The emphasis on an ‘ethnic lens’ has the potential to miss the frontier-like processes that occur at other levels of society.

## 2: *Core-and-Periphery*

The concept of core-and-periphery is essential to frontier studies, and indeed to landscape studies, but it is often taken as self-explanatory. What exactly is meant by core and periphery, and what does it mean in an Anglo-Saxon context? To take an almost ubiquitous example, one of the most prominent ways to divide the landscape of Britain is into a ‘highland’ periphery and ‘lowland’ core. This has underpinned a great deal of historical writing since the early twentieth century, which envisaged the highland zone—which encompassed those lands west of an imaginary line that ran diagonally between the Exe in the south-west and the mouth of the Tees in the north-east—as a periphery to the more productive and urbanised lowland zone, which in the original formulation of early twentieth-century geographers was known as ‘Metropolitan Britain’.<sup>98</sup> As the model was adopted by historians of Roman Britain, the highland zone became the ‘military zone’,

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frontiers, none of which exactly coincided with one another, notably the frontiers of conquest, settlement, peoples, culture, and units of power.’

<sup>97</sup> Power, ‘Frontiers’, pp. 11–12.

<sup>98</sup> H.J. Mackinder, *Britain and the British Seas* (London, 1902), pp. 46–62.

and the lowland zone was the ‘civilian zone’.<sup>99</sup> While the geographical distinction between upland and lowland Britain is very real, the concept took on profound cultural implications: the lowland zone was the core of both the Roman province and later the English state, and the highland zone was the barbarous ‘Celtic fringe’, and it is very clear the way this early articulation of ‘core-and-periphery’ is related to the concept of the frontier as a division between civilization and barbarism.

The familiar modern sociological concept has its origins in the work of Immanuel Wallerstein and his world-systems theory.<sup>100</sup> For Wallerstein, the core was the ‘West’, as understood in the Cold War sense of the term, and it was marked by high-skill and capital-intensive production, as opposed to the periphery, which was marked by low-skill labour-intensive production based upon the extraction of raw materials. The core exploits the resources of the periphery, and continually reinforces and renews its hegemony. Though states are at the heart of the model—it is nation-states that are designated to the core or to the periphery—the mode of analysis is global, and the theory is, at its heart, about linkages between states and production. However, it must be said that the term has taken on wider connotations, as the ‘periphery’ has come to refer to a perceived cultural, economic or political backwater, and can be used to refer to a zone, region, or specific place, not just a state. Likewise, while a politically, culturally, or economically powerful state or polity (or group of polities) can be considered a core in relation to neighbours on the periphery, so too can a

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<sup>99</sup> F. Haverfield, *The Romanization of Roman Britain* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Oxford, 1915), pp. 24–8; Haverfield, ‘The Geography of Britain and the Roman Conquest’, in his *The Roman Occupation of Britain* [Being Haverfield’s Ford Lectures, first delivered in 1907] (rev. ed. G. MacDonald, Oxford, 1924), pp. 89–124; R.G. Collingwood and J.N.L. Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements* (Oxford, 1936), pp. 1–15; S.S. Frere, *Britannia: A History of Roman Britain* (London, 1967), pp. 3–4. Frere writes more generally about the Highland/Lowland divide at pp. 2–5, 264–81, and 311. The most important articulation, however, is C. Fox, *The Personality of Britain: its influence on inhabitant and invader in prehistoric and early historic times* (Cardiff, 1932).

<sup>100</sup> I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York, NY, 1974). The model has been subject to extensive criticism: e.g. J. Nederveen Pieterse, ‘A Critique of World Systems Theory’, *International Sociology* 3, 3 (1988), pp. 251–66; W.I. Robinson, ‘Globalization and the Sociology of Immanuel Wallerstein: A Critical Appraisal’, *International Sociology* 26, 6 (2011), pp. 723–45.

region or singular place be a core with relative peripheries. As will be discussed in chapter two, the sense that these places are connected to each other or form part of a hierarchy within a wider whole is important.<sup>101</sup> As shall be seen below in this chapter, whether a place is of the core or of the periphery is a matter of relative perspective and perception.

For the purposes of this thesis, the concept is important because of how deeply rooted the historiography of the frontier is in notions of polarity. The connection between Wallerstein's core-and-periphery and Turner's frontier is not a difficult conceptual leap, and indeed in many ways it is pervasive. An essential aspect of frontier studies is the exercise and limitations of power, and how power is imposed upon a landscape and the people of that landscape. It becomes a question of how a 'core' acts upon a 'periphery'.<sup>102</sup> There is a sense that the imposition is active, requires maintenance, or is in some way contested, either by indigenous peoples of the periphery or by the people of the opposite pole (e.g. a rival state). This can be enacted through a variety of means; Daniel Power writes about repression and accommodation as two strategies by which power is asserted in a periphery; to this I would add that the landscape could also be acted upon: prehistoric and Roman monuments could be repurposed and reimagined, earthworks could be dug, barrows raised, halls built, minsters founded, charters could delineate the landscape in the name of the king for the use of his men, and so on. All of this activity—repression and accommodation, yes, but also activity *upon* the landscape—is both part of the maintenance and communication of authority in the landscape.<sup>103</sup> This is not a phenomenon limited to peripheral regions, it is equally true to regions within the 'core'. This is not to say that an Anglo-Saxon king had no geographical limits to his authority, or that it was not easier and more reflexive to communicate authority in some

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<sup>101</sup> Below, pp. 81–6.

<sup>102</sup> This before the action of the periphery upon the core, which is the culmination of the Turnerian frontier.

<sup>103</sup> Power, *The Norman Frontier*, pp. 4–5, gives the Vexin as an example of 'repression', and the Welsh Marches as an example of 'accommodation'.

places than it was in others, but we should be wary before assuming that the underlying practices of accommodation, repression, coercion, and ideological communication were not at work everywhere and at all times.

ii.1: *Core-and-Periphery in Anglo-Saxon England: Perspective*

Core-and-periphery is really about perspective and perception; a single place can occupy both roles at once and the nature of a place can change over time. This has been observed in many different contexts: Marquardt and Crumley have focused on the dual nature of core-and-periphery dynamics with regard to Burgundy.<sup>104</sup> They describe the way boundaries are also what they call ‘functional’ centres that draw people and goods together. They write, ‘Some centers and some boundaries are sparsely populated, yet charged with meaning, e.g. “no-man’s-land,” “ceremonial center”; some teem with human mental and physical activity, e.g., “gateway cities,” “markets”; all gather their importance because spatially localized coincidence of various scales of activity and thought on the face of the earth.’<sup>105</sup> Marquardt and Crumley discuss the importance of perspective, scale, and change over time in regard to the question of core-and-periphery. For instance:

Vichy, a spa and symbol of provincial elegance in east-central France since ancient times, was established as a Roman center of administrative control and also as a center of healing and relaxation; but it was also used as a wedge between the two great, rival Celtic powers, the Arverni and Aedui, who had in pre-conquest times enjoyed the greatest power in the east of Gaul and whose territories lay in two major mountainous areas, the Massif Central and the Morvan. Reached easily from the east, Vichy served a similar purpose during World War II as the seat of government for German-occupied France. The Massif Central and the Morvan were now strongholds of the Resistance; the Germans wisely knew the risks of being trapped in Paris if this mountainous region, which also has contained since pre-Roman times some of the most important commercial activities and routes in western Europe, were to be regained by the French. Similarly Dijon, the administrative and cultural center of modern-day Burgundy, is situated at the juncture of the *côtes* (southeast-facing slopes of the Saône river valley) and the rolling uplands of Champagne, and at the break in terrain between the low country west of the Belfort Gap and the Paris Basin. Dijon’s strategic importance as a break-in-bulk point, or gateway city, in both north-south and east-west commerce, and is central

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<sup>104</sup> W.H. Marquardt and C.L. Crumley, ‘Theoretical Issues in the Analysis of Spatial Patterning’, in Crumley and Marquardt (eds.), *Regional Dynamics: Burgundian Landscapes in Historical Perspective* (San Diego, CA, 1987), pp. 1–19.

<sup>105</sup> Marquardt and Crumley, ‘Theoretical Issues’, p. 13.

location relative to a wide variety of resources, has assured its continuing importance since the times of the dukes of Burgundy.<sup>106</sup>

This in an over-arching theme of this thesis: the dynamics of the frontier and manifestations of core-and-periphery can be enacted anywhere; authority needs to be maintained and communicated everywhere, and the lens through which we assess a region as a ‘core’ or as a ‘periphery’ is often a question of perspective, as individual sites or wider regions could occupy both roles at the same time, depending on the scale or perspective of the observer.

Robert Bartlett provides a good Continental example of this in a medieval context. In a 2007 paper, he established a so-called ‘Rome-Maastricht axis’ as *the* core of ‘Latin Christendom’ in the high Middle Ages. The choice of Rome and Maastricht, the location of two of the most important European treaties in the second half of the twentieth century, must not be coincidental, and this seems to reflect once again the close connection between the study of frontiers (and core-and-periphery) and modern European politics. This region was, of course, at the very centre of imperial politics in the late Roman and Carolingian periods, but its character had changed dramatically after the abeyance of Carolingian authority. By *c.* 1200, this strip was not only productive agriculturally, it was also the most deeply and comprehensively urbanised part of Europe. Despite the zone’s economic and urban development, as Bartlett writes:

The wealthy urbanized zone running from the valley of the Po to the mouths of Rhine has rarely been politically united and has not been the cradle of a powerful modern state in the way that south-east England or north-east France have been. This Rome-Maastricht zone was rather a region of miniscule principalities, ecclesiastical lordships, and independent towns. The powerful states of early modern Europe emerged in areas beyond this central core and indeed fought over it. The contrast between this central *Kleinstaaterei*, the land of tiny states, and the growing territorial powers around it can be seen very clearly in those beautifully produced historical atlases that show the states of Europe in different colours. Broad bands of green in France, of blue in Prussia, and so on, contrast with the astonishing and confusing kaleidoscope that results from trying to give

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<sup>106</sup> Marquart and Crumley, ‘Theoretical Issues’, pp. 13–14.

cartographic representation to the multiple political entities of northern Italy, the Rhineland, and the Low Countries.<sup>107</sup>

The ‘Rome-Maastricht axis’ is a zone of many different layers, it was—taken as a whole—an economic and urban ‘core’ beyond which lay largely agrarian ‘peripheries.’ There was also for a considerable period a great amount of historical and ideological prestige associated with this old imperial heartland. The region’s prelates, from the Bishop of Rome north through to Cologne and Trier exerted a huge amount authority (though there were of course attempts to marginalise Rome in the later Middle Ages), and individual cities were cores over their own hinterlands and dominions. Politically, the region was both centre and edge: it was politically peripheral to the developing kingdoms upon its margins, and yet hegemony over this zone was aggressively sought and fiercely contested, both by competing great kingdoms and by the cities and principalities within the ‘Rome-Maastricht axis’.

This illustrates the manifestation of a phenomenon that has been noted in many places, in which the most economically productive area of a given region does not correspond to political power.<sup>108</sup> It will be shown in chapter four that a similar dynamic can be seen in Anglo-Saxon society. For now, London represents a good example of this. London was a major trading *emporium* from the seventh century, but despite the apparent productive capacity and wealth of the *emporium* of London, the East Saxon kingdom—to which London belonged—never became politically dominant. Instead, London and the East Saxons were subordinated first to Kent, then to the

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<sup>107</sup> Bartlett, ‘Heartland and Border: The Mental and Physical Geography of Medieval Europe’, in H. Pryce and J. Watts (eds.), *Power and Identity in the Middle Ages: Essays in Memory of Rees Davies* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 23–36, at p. 29.

<sup>108</sup> This was described as early as 1954 by A. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, vol. 8 (Oxford, 1954), with reference to the Macedonian relationship to the Greek world and the Manchu to the Qing. See also the papers in T.C. Chapman (ed.), *Centre and Periphery: Comparative Studies in Archaeology* (London, 1989), for an archaeological perspective. Chapman, ‘Introduction’, pp. 1–19 provides some theoretical grounding.

Mercians. Indeed, Burghart has suggested that London was something of an ‘open city’, with many kings and bishops maintaining commercial interests in the *emporium*.<sup>109</sup> Though the precise chronology is unclear, in the early eighth century London must have been detached from Essex as the territory of Middlesex was created under Mercian aegis.<sup>110</sup> The character of the city changed from being ‘East Saxon’ to ‘Mercian’ over the course of the eighth and ninth centuries, and the city was restored *to* Mercia by Alfred in 886, before being annexed to Wessex by Edward the Elder in 911. Meanwhile, Essex itself had been conquered by the West Saxons in 825. Kings coveted London due to its economic prominence and its advantageous position at the nexus of important riverine and land-based communication networks, but the city itself did not form the nucleus of a powerful polity. Thus, London can be seen from two perspectives: on the one hand an economic and productive centre—Bede’s *metropolis* of many nations; on the other, a place on the periphery of powerful polities that competed over its wealth. It was not until the eleventh century, when London truly became a centre for royal government and the Londoners themselves forcefully asserted their political influence within the realm, that the city’s political power matched its economic status.<sup>111</sup>

It will be shown in chapter four that the so-called ‘Eastern lowland zone’, which is to say the catchment of the Wash and Humber, can be viewed through a similar lens. The region was markedly more productive and economically wealthy than much of Anglo-Saxon England, and yet

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<sup>109</sup> M. A. Burghart, ‘The Mercian Polity, 716–918’, (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, King’s College London, 2007), pp. 133–53, esp. pp. 137–40; R.H.M. Dolley and C.E. Blunt, ‘The chronology of the coins of Ælfred the Great, 871–99’, in R.H.M. Dolley (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Coins* (London, 1961), pp. 77–95, makes a similar suggestion for the 870s at p. 81.

<sup>110</sup> Perhaps a process starting in *c.* 709, after which there is no record of East Saxon kings wielding authority in the London region: Burghart, ‘The Mercian Polity’, p. 136.

<sup>111</sup> At various points it seems to have had special favour, for instance during the reign of Coenwulf, and increasingly throughout the tenth century before emerging in the eleventh century as a centre of royal government. See R. Naismith, *Citadel of the Saxons: The Rise of Early London* (London, 2019), for an excellent overview of London’s Anglo-Saxon history.

it was territorially fragmented and competed over by more powerful polities on its periphery. The key may be that in the eastern zone after the death of Edwin of Deira, local potentates were wealthy enough to keep their local rivals from consolidating too much power and claiming some sort of regional *imperium*, or to stave off advances from, say, the king of Lindsey, but when subject to the predatory expansion of the over-kings of the Mercians, Northumbrians, and East Angles in the mid- to late-seventh century, the people of the Wash-Humber catchment were overmatched. A later analogue for this might be Williamson's argument that eastern England did not see a greater degree of freedom in the Domesday survey because of the intrinsic freedom-loving character of the descendants of Scandinavian settlers, but due to high population density, which helped to keep landholders wealthy enough to be sokemen; but the process of territorial fission which ensued prevented sokemen from easily becoming greater magnates. Meanwhile, a drier and more agriculturally productive climate made small-holding less risky, and thus better able to resist the encroachment of powerful magnates upon their freedoms.<sup>112</sup>

Thus far, we have focused on broad concepts of core-and-periphery at the highest political and economic layers. However, the concept can also be examined through a local landscape perspective. As early as 1952, Hoskins noted that in Devon places such as Tawton and Taviton, which derived their place-names from rivers—the Taw and the Tavy—and are situated in the river valleys, were associated with outlying upland stocks, Tawstock and Tavistock, respectively, which were distinct places but thought to be part of the same geographical unit.<sup>113</sup> This was a

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<sup>112</sup> Williamson, *Environment, Society and Landscape in Early Medieval England: Time and Topography* (Woodbridge, 2013), pp. 107–24 for 'the gradient of freedom', esp. pp. 121–3; *contra* Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 519, describing in eastern England 'a social organisation to which there is no parallel elsewhere in England occurs in the one part of the country in which the regular development of native institutions had been interrupted by foreign settlement.'

<sup>113</sup> W.G. Hoskins, 'The Open Field in Devon', in W.G. Hoskins and H.P.R. Finberg (eds.), *Devonshire Studies* (London, 1952).

foreshadowing of the multiple estate model of Glanville Jones. A multiple estate refers to a system of territorial organisation and resource extraction in which relatively extensive territorial units contained several economically specialised settlements which owed renders of goods and services to an estate centre. Gradually, these territories underwent a process of fission in which the specialised settlements were gradually alienated from the estate centre.<sup>114</sup> The term ‘multiple estate’ has fallen out of favour for various reasons.<sup>115</sup> In particular, the work of Gregson, Davies, and Hadley brought the tenability of the model into question.<sup>116</sup> As Faith has written, Jones’s model was ‘too fiscal, too royal, too mathematical, and above all too *Welsh*,’ in reference to Jones’s use of twelfth-century Welsh law codes, thereby developing a model from what was an already idealised (and late) vision of territorial organisation. Meanwhile, Hadley argued that the evidence for multiple estates does not automatically reveal early territorial structures, but rather that the evidence demonstrates the end results of generations of fragmentation and amalgamation, and that while territorial blocs may *seem* to be of great antiquity, there is no reason that they could not represent the later fusion of smaller ‘unitary’ estates.<sup>117</sup>

Historians tend not to use the term ‘multiple estate’ for the reasons described above; instead they sometimes favour ‘small shires’ or ‘extensive lordships’, following the example of Geoffrey

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<sup>114</sup> G.R.J. Jones, ‘Multiple Estates and Early Settlement’, in P.H. Sawyer (ed.), *Medieval Settlement: Continuity and Change* (London, 1976), pp. 15–40; ‘Early Customary Tenures in Wales and Open-Field Agriculture’, in T. Rowley (ed.), *The Origins of Open Field Agriculture* (London, 1981), pp. 202–25. Jones’s work returns in some ways to the ideas of J.E.A. Joliffe, *Pre-Feudal England: The Jutes* (Oxford, 1933); and ‘The Era of the Folk in English History’, in *Oxford Essays in Medieval History Presented to H.E. Salter* (Oxford, 1934), pp. 1–32, who writes about ‘federative manors’ and ‘a federation of folk-land and folk-right under private or royal lordship,’ at p. 15.

<sup>115</sup> A thorough historiographical review is provided in B.K. Roberts and P.S. Barnwell, ‘The Multiple Estate of Glanville Jones: Epitome, Critique, and Context’, Barnwell and Roberts (eds.), *Britons, Saxons, and Scandinavians: The Historical Geography of Glanville R.J. Jones*, *The Medieval Countryside* 7 (Turnhout, 2011), pp. 25–128.

<sup>116</sup> N. Gregson, ‘The Multiple Estate Model: Some Critical Questions’, *Journal of Historical Geography* 11 (1985), pp. 139–51, and see Jones’s response: ‘Multiple Estates Perceived’, pp. 352–63; W. Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1982); Hadley, *The Northern Danelaw*, pp. 42–164; Hadley, ‘Multiple Estates and the Origins of the Manorial Structure of the Northern Danelaw’, *Journal of Historical Geography* 22, 1 (1996), pp. 3–15.

<sup>117</sup> R. Faith, ‘Forms of Dominance in the Early Medieval Landscape’, *Medieval Settlement Research Group, Annual Report* 23 (2008), pp. 9–13, at p. 9; Hadley, *Northern Danelaw*, pp. 84–6, 162–4.

Barrow.<sup>118</sup> Other historians have adopted Bede's own terminology and use the term *regio*, which I will favour from this point forward.<sup>119</sup> In essence, though, and with important caveats in mind, the principle remains more-or-less accepted, particularly when the flexibility of the model is emphasised.<sup>120</sup> Indeed, small shires or *regiones* have been suggested or identified in great numbers throughout the country. Bruce Eagles, for instance, in his recent collection of essays has identified eight such in Hampshire alone, and the situation is potentially similar throughout Britain.<sup>121</sup>

What makes the multiple estate model important despite its flaws is its emphasis on linkages between cores and peripheries, and the recognition that upland pasture, pannage, timber and so forth is just as important as the arable in the valley floors. Della Hooke's work on the Felden and Arden of Warwickshire is a good example of this, and particularly important here is Faith's reminder of the importance of pasturage in early medieval Britain, and David Rollason's work on the social importance of hunting in early medieval society.<sup>122</sup> These landscapes were economically and socially important, but they were only sparsely or irregularly populated, so from the perspective of settlement—irregularly or sparsely populated, removed from estate centres—they seem peripheral.

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<sup>118</sup> G.W.S. Barrow, 'Pre-Feudal Scotland: Shires and Thanets', in his *The Kingdom of the Scots: Government, Church and Society from the Eleventh to the Fourteenth Century* (London, 1973), pp. 7–56. Faith, *The English Peasantry and the Growth of Lordship* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 1–14 favours 'extensive lordship'; Williamson, *Environment, Society and Landscape*, uses 'small shires.'

<sup>119</sup> Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England* (Princeton, NJ, 2018), pp. 4–5, 104.

<sup>120</sup> As in Campbell, 'Bede's *Reges* and *Principes*', in his *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London, 1986), pp. 86–98, at pp. 95–6.

<sup>121</sup> B. Eagles with R. Faith, "'Small shires' and *regiones* in Hampshire and the formation of the shires of eastern Wessex', in his *From Roman Civitas to Anglo-Saxon Shire*, pp. 157–84, naming the *Hyltingas* (the area of Southampton), the *Basingas* (Old Basing/Basingstoke), *Andeferas* (Andover), *Cleras* (Kingsclere/Highclere), the *Meonware* (valley of the Meon), Micheldelver, and possible *regiones* around Chilcomb, and the upper valleys of the Bourne and Test.

<sup>122</sup> Hooke, *The Kingdom of the Hwicce*; Faith, 'Forms of Dominance'; Rollason; *The Power of Place: Rulers and Their Palaces Landscapes, Cities, and Holy Places* (Princeton, NJ, 2016).

This is closely related to the model of territorial organisation developed by Alan Everitt, Harold Fox, and Charles Phythian-Adams known as the ‘river and wold’ model.<sup>123</sup> This model argues that upland ‘wolds’ were exploited for pannage, grazing, and hunting on an occasional or seasonal basis, and were therefore only impermanently settled. These form the periphery in relation to population centres in the river valleys. The implication of this is that because upland regions were less intensively exploited, they served as ‘cut-off’ points in patterns of human interaction and formed the margins of social territories, which, in theory, should correspond to drainage basins.<sup>124</sup>

There is some evidence of small-scale territorial organisation corresponding with drainage basins: Semple, for example, has argued for the orientation of polities in Sussex around river valleys between the fifth and eighth centuries, in which the placement and positioning of burials at estuary headlands and the crests of escarpments were used to visually emphasise the perimeters of land defined by estuaries and rivers.<sup>125</sup>

Similarly, Bassett has written about the *regiones* of the *Stoppingas* in the valley of the river Alne, and that of the *Rodingas* in the valley of the River Roding.<sup>126</sup> Likewise, Hooke has suggested several other possible *regiones* that became minster *parochiae* in Warwickshire, such as Stratford in the valley of the Avon and Tredington in the valley of the Stour.<sup>127</sup> In some cases, such as

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<sup>123</sup> Everitt, ‘River and Wold: Reflections on the Historical Origins of Regions and Pays’, *Journal of Historical Geography* 3 (1977), pp. 1–19; H.S.A. Fox, ‘The People of the Wolds’, in M. Aston, D. Austin and C. Dyer (eds.), *The Rural Settlements of England: Studies Presented to Maurice Beresford and John Hurst* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 77–104; C. Phythian-Adams, *Re-thinking English Local History* (Leicester, 1987).

<sup>124</sup> Williamson, *Environment, Society and Landscape*, pp. 55–9.

<sup>125</sup> Semple, ‘Polities and Princes AD 400–800: New Perspectives on the Funerary Landscape of the South Saxon Kingdom’, *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 27, 4 (2008), pp. 407–29; drawing in part on M. Gardiner, ‘Economy and Landscape Change in Post-Roman and Early Medieval Sussex, 450–1175’, in D. Rudling (ed.), *The Archaeology of Sussex to AD 2000* (King’s Lynn, 2003), pp. 151–60.

<sup>126</sup> S. Bassett, ‘In search’, in Bassett (ed.), *Origins*, pp. 3–27; ‘Continuity and fission in the Anglo-Saxon landscape: the origins of the Rodings (Essex)’, *Landscape History* 19, 1 (1997), pp. 25–42.

<sup>127</sup> Hooke, *The Kingdom of the Hwicce*, p. 93; ‘Mercia: Landscape and Environment’, in M.P. Brown and C.A. Farr (eds.), *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe* (Leicester, 2001), pp. 163–5, map 5.

Blything in Suffolk and Braughing in Hertfordshire,<sup>128</sup> apparently early territories that corresponded to local watersheds gave way to later hundreds, suggesting long-standing continuity in territorial forms. Similarly, Williamson has observed that in Norfolk, some hundred boundaries followed ‘chains of commons’ strung out along watersheds.<sup>129</sup> However, this was *not always the case* with hundredal organisation. By 1086, the territory of the *Rodingas* was divided between Dunmow and Ongar hundreds; the chief manor of White Roding was royal demesne, while land in Abbess Roding and Beauchamp Roding was in the hands of Barking Abbey, and Ely maintained an interest in Aythorpe Roding and High Roding that dated to the beginning of the eleventh century at least. Similarly, the *regio* of the *Stoppingas* does not correspond to a Domesday hundred. Instead, the core territory of Wootton Wawen was incorporated into Pathlow hundred, while the outlying estates of the *regio* became part of Ferncumbe hundred. Whether the breakup of such *regiones* was done deliberately for political or administrative reasons, or the process of fission had already rendered them obsolete by the time hundreds were organised in the tenth and eleventh centuries, is unclear. In any case, the correspondence between river valleys and territorial forms did not always hold as hundreds were being organised in the late tenth century. Furthermore, shires do not correspond to the river-and-wold model of core-and-periphery either. As noted above, Wiltshire far exceeds the valley of River Wylye, whence the shire derives its name. Meanwhile, Buckinghamshire straddles two drainage-basins, with the southern part of the shire in the valley of the Thames and the northern third in the basin of the Ouse. Similarly, Hertfordshire does not correspond to any drainage basin, and its borders ‘seem largely arbitrary... [it is] a county without

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<sup>128</sup> P. Warner, *The Origins of Suffolk* (Manchester, 1996), p. 120–1, 159–9; Williamson, *Environment, Society and Landscape*, pp. 84–6; Williamson, *The Origins of Hertfordshire* (Hatfield, 2010), pp. 126–9; D. Short, ‘Braughing: A Possible Saxon Estate?’, *Hertfordshire’s Past* 23 (1988), pp. 8–15.

<sup>129</sup> Williamson, *Environment, Society and Landscape*, p. 87.

an identity,' particularly in the east, where the Suffolk and north Essex clays merge seamlessly into the county's landscape.<sup>130</sup>

## ii.2: *Core-and-Periphery in Anglo-Saxon England: Perception*

Core-and-periphery is not just a question of raw politics and economics. In addition to *perspective*, another important aspect of this is the matter of *perception*. That is to say how people were perceived and how they perceived themselves in relation to geography. For example, one is always struck by Asser's comment that when Æthelwulf of Wessex was ousted by his son Æthelbald in 856, a great indignity was done to Æthelwulf because he was confined to the eastern provinces of the realm, and this was disgraceful in part because the western part of the kingdom had always been '*principalior*'.<sup>131</sup> Lapidge and Keynes translate *principalior* as 'more important', but perhaps a better way to understand the sense of the word is 'more stately', older and more traditional. If, as is usually supposed, the partition was organised so that Æthelbald ruled in Wessex proper while Æthelwulf was confined to those provinces incorporated into the realm by Ecgberht in 825 (Sussex, Surrey, Kent and Essex), then it is highly illustrative that the late ninth-century West Saxons seemed to think that Kent, where the senior prelate of the English church sat, and where there existed an economically vibrant proto-urban axis of London-Rochester-Canterbury, was rather shabby in comparison to the country gentlemen and ealdormen of Old Wessex.<sup>132</sup>

But how were the Anglo-Saxons perceived and how did they perceive their place in the world more generally? As has often been remarked, in some ways the Anglo-Saxons saw themselves as

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<sup>130</sup> Williamson, *Origins of Hertfordshire*, pp. 1–20, esp. figs. 5–6, quoted at p. 4.

<sup>131</sup> Asser 12: *Ubi enim pater iusto iudicio regnare debuerat, illic iniquus et pertinax filius regnabat; nam occidentalis pars Saxoniae semper orientali principalior est* ('Where the father by just right should have reigned, there his unjust and obstinate son did reign; for the western part of Wessex had always been *principalior* than the east.')

<sup>132</sup> For London-Rochester-Canterbury, below, p. 116 n. 346.

existing on a broad periphery. Bede situates Britain within a geographical context by stating that Britain lay in the north-west, opposite from *Germania*, *Gallia*, and *Hispania*, which make up ‘the greater part of Europe’ (*maxima Europae partibus*), but at a great distance from those lands. Beyond which is ‘the boundless ocean’ (*Oceano infinito*).<sup>133</sup> Famously, Gregory I understood that the name of the Angles was fitting because they lived in the ‘corner of the world’ (*gens Anglorum in mundi angulo posita*).<sup>134</sup>

However, Bede and other Northumbrian sources for the conversion era consciously draw the Anglo-Saxons *into* a Roman core. Note that Bede’s description of Britain’s geographic orientation includes reference to the nearest port for travellers to the Continental port of Boulogne; indeed Bede’s choice of describing the territory across the Channel as *Gallia Belgica* and more specifically, the land of the *Morini*, is derived directly from classical Roman writing. Even the choice of *Gessoriacum* for Boulogne-sur-Mer is classicising, and it hearkens back to a more unified imperial past: among Late Antique writers, the city was normally known as *Bononia*.<sup>135</sup> In its broadest setting, the *Historia Ecclesiastica* is a text about the conversion of the *gens Anglorum*, their place in a Christian history, and their relationship with Rome.<sup>136</sup> The direct connection with Rome permeates Bede’s other works, such as his *Life of Ceolfrid* and *History of the Abbots*; we see evidence for this in his description of the Wearmouth panel-paintings brought back from Rome by Benedict Biscop, for example.<sup>137</sup> Material evidence of this link is demonstrated through the

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<sup>133</sup> *HE* i.1.

<sup>134</sup> *Registrum Epistularum*, in *The Letters of Gregory the Great*, ed. and trans. J.R.C. Martin (Toronto, 2004), vol. 2, viii.29; and see: M. Richter, ‘Bede’s *Angli*: Angles or English?’, *Peritia* 3 (1984), pp. 99–114, at p. 103.

<sup>135</sup> *HE* i.1: *Habet a meridie Galliam Belgicam, cuius proximum litus transmeantibus aperit ciuitas quae dicitur Rutubi portus, a gente Anglorum nunc corrupte Reptacæstir uocata, interposito mari a Gessoriaco Morinorum gentis litore proximo, traiectu milium L siue* (‘To the south lies Belgic Gaul, from which the city called *Rutubi portus*, now corruptly called by the English ‘*Reptacæster* [Richborough]’, is the nearest landing for travellers. Across the sea, the nearest landing is *Gessoriacum* [Boulogne] in the land of the *Morini*; a crossing of fifty miles.’)

<sup>136</sup> N. Howe, ‘Rome: Capital of Anglo-Saxon England’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34, 1 (2004), pp. 147–72; Wood, ‘The Most Holy Abbot Ceolfrid’, *The Jarrow Lecture* (1995), pp. 1–38.

<sup>137</sup> P. Meyvaert, ‘Bede and the church paintings at Wearmouth-Jarrow’, *ASE* 8 (1979), pp. 63–77.

extraordinary *Codex Amiatinus* and the church of Jarrow itself, with its conspicuously ‘Roman’ stone architecture.<sup>138</sup> We even know of some of the luxury imports the Wearmouth community enjoyed, such as a cosmographical codex from Rome, silk *pallia*, and it is said that on his death-bed Bede had his box of treasures containing ‘some pepper, and napkins, and some incense’ distributed among the community.<sup>139</sup> Drawing upon Gildas, Bede also understood Britain as a Roman province, isolated from the flock due to the sins of the Britons, and recently returned to the fold due to the success of the seventh-century conversion. Moreover, Continental sites such as Langres, Lyon, and Lérins feature prominently in Bede’s writing (and in other contemporary writings, such as the *Vita Wilfrithi*).<sup>140</sup> Recently, P.N. Darby has drawn attention to the extent to which Bede was familiar with contemporary Continental religious debate.<sup>141</sup> This connection is manifested through various elements of material culture, but it is mostly related by Bede through his description of travellers making the journey from Northumbria to Rome.<sup>142</sup> The integration of Anglo-Saxon society into the ‘core’ was related to the creation of new ‘peripheries’. Bartlett sees the Synod of Whitby and the Easter Controversy in 664 as a dramatic set-piece that brought Anglo-Saxon society into the Romanist core, and he draws attention to the way Wilfrid relegated the Britons, Picts and Irish to a geographical and ecclesiastical periphery by noting the strikingly chauvinistic speech put into Wilfrid’s mouth:

We have seen the Easter that we keep celebrated by everyone at Rome, where the blessed apostles Peter and Paul lived, taught, suffered martyrdom and are buried; we have observed that this is done

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<sup>138</sup> For *Codex Amiatinus*: C. Chazelle, ‘Ceolfrid’s Gift to St Peter: the first quire of the *Codex Amiatinus* and the evidence of its Roman destination’, *EME* 12, 2 (2003), pp. 129–57; for the Roman architecture of Jarrow: *Historia Abbatum* 5; R. Cramp, *Wearmouth and Jarrow Monastic Sites* (Swindon, 2005), pp. 229–41.

<sup>139</sup> *Historia Abbatum* 15, 9; ‘Cuthbert’s Letter on the Death of Bede’, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 584; D. Heisey, ‘Bede’s Pepper, Napkins, and Incense’, *The Downside Review* 129, 454 (2011), pp. 16–30.

<sup>140</sup> e.g. Langres: *Historia Abbatum* 21–3; Anon. *Vita Ceolfridi* 32–40; Lyon: *HE* iii.25, v.19; Lérins: *Historia Abbatum* 2; *VSW* 3, 5.

<sup>141</sup> P.N. Darby, ‘Bede, Iconoclasm and the Temple of Solomon’, *EME* 21 (2013), pp. 390–421.

<sup>142</sup> The connection between Anglo-Saxon England and Rome has been written about extensively: J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, ‘Rome and the Early English Church: Some Questions of Transmission’, in his *Early Medieval History* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 115–37; É. Ó Carragáin, *The City of Rome and the World of Bede*, Jarrow Lecture (1994).

in the whole world... except by these [the Irish] alone and their accomplices in obstinacy, the Picts and Britons, inhabitants of the two furthest islands of the Ocean (and not the whole of these), who fight with stupid effort against the whole world... even if your fathers were holy men, surely their small number from one corner of a furthestmost island is not to be preferred to the universal church of Christ throughout the world.<sup>143</sup>

The successful conversion and integration of the Anglo-Saxons was marked with deep approval by the Papacy, which saw the Augustinian Mission as a successful model of conversion that could be used in the integration of other places perceived to be on the periphery.<sup>144</sup> The most striking example of this is Anglo-Saxon activity on the German mission field, particularly through the activity of Boniface, Willibrord, and Lull. In this context, I will suggest in chapter five that Mercian military activity in North Wales in the eighth century may have been related to the adoption (or even imposition) of paschal conformity among the north Welsh.

In this way, Anglo-Saxon England was a geographical and rhetorical periphery that was drawn into a Roman ideological core over the course of the seventh century, a process which is best represented in the retrospective work of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. This was important to both the Roman church and to the self-perception of at least some Anglo-Saxons; as a new ideological periphery was drawn, upon which the Anglo-Saxons lay just on the other side, they found a new role in the vanguard of Roman Christianity.<sup>145</sup> It is undeniable that Bede himself admired the Irish greatly, and they are portrayed in a largely positive light in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, but there is perhaps some evidence that Bede had internalised this shift in cultural perception. He writes of the Northumbrian monk Egberht, who went to Iona in order to instruct the Irish there in the proper

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<sup>143</sup> *HE* iii.25; Bartlett, 'Heartland and Border', p. 26.

<sup>144</sup> H. Mayr-Harting, *Two Conversions to Christianity: the Bulgarians and the Anglo-Saxons*, The Stenton Lecture (1994).

<sup>145</sup> This is a phenomenon that can be seen among the coalescing convert-polities of Eastern and Central Europe in the tenth and eleventh centuries, particularly the Kingdoms of Hungary and Poland. The key difference is that with the Central/Eastern European polities, their political formation was linked to conversion. This was obviously not the case in Anglo-Saxon England, but one might wonder as to the degree to which spiritual *renovatio* in the form of Benedictine reform filled the same role in England that conversion did in Hungary *et al.*

observance of Easter and the adoption of the Petrine tonsure, stating that ‘through the English nation, they are brought to a more perfect way of life in matters wherein they were lacking.’<sup>146</sup> Thus, to Bede’s mind the students became the teachers, and the Anglo-Saxons took on a preeminent role in the relationship.<sup>147</sup>

One way in which certain Anglo-Saxons such as St Wilfrid saw themselves in 731, then, is as the outermost region of a ‘core’ of Christendom bound to Rome and keeping the Roman Easter, set in opposition to non-conforming Britons, Irish, and Picts; and later, to the pagan Old Saxons, Slavs, and Scandinavians. However, another way to see Anglo-Saxon society is at the very centre of a wide North Sea zone that ranged from Ireland to the Baltic and the shores of the North Sea. The depth and consistency of these contacts has often been recognised, notably in the work of John Hines, among others.<sup>148</sup> Additionally, the work of many historians and archaeologists has served to draw Anglo-Saxon society into a wider North Atlantic milieu, demonstrating the political and cultural connections between British, Irish, Pictish, Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon societies.<sup>149</sup> Wilfrid’s antagonistic understanding of the relationship between Anglo-Saxons, Britons, and the Irish represents one perspective of a situation that varied considerably throughout Britain. It is well-known that the Bernician dynasty continued to maintain links with Iona and Ireland (and the

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<sup>146</sup> *HE* v.22. Keep in mind that Ecgberht himself was educated in Ireland.

<sup>147</sup> For Bede on the Irish, see: A. Thacker, ‘Bede and the Irish’, in L.A.J.R. Houwen and A.A. MacDonald (eds.), *Beda Venerabilis: Historian, Monk and Northumbrian* (Groningen, 1996), pp. 31–59; S. McCann, ‘Plures de Scottorum regione: Bede, Ireland, and the Irish’, *Journal of the American Society of Irish Medieval Studies* 8 (2015), pp. 20–38.

<sup>148</sup> J. Hines, *The Scandinavian Character of Anglian England in the Pre-Viking Period*, BAR, Brit. Ser. 124 (Oxford, 1984); and see below, p. 166, nn. 530–3.

<sup>149</sup> J. Fraser, *From Caledonia to Pictland: Scotland to 795* (Edinburgh, 2009); A. Woolf, *From Pictland to Alba: Scotland, 789–1070* (Edinburgh, 2007) are particularly important in this regard. See also works such as: Clark, ‘Northumbrian Frontiers’; Blair, *The British Culture of Anglo-Saxon Settlement*, The H.M. Chadwick Memorial Lectures (2013).

Irish themselves were not homogenous), most famously during the reign of Aldfrith.<sup>150</sup> Continued links between the Irish and Bernicia long after the Synod of Whitby are an important reminder that the alleged alienation of the Irish, in which they were consigned to a rhetorical periphery by Wilfrid and the Romanist party at Whitby, is just one perspective of many. The rhetorical clarity of the speech given to Wilfrid at Whitby belies a much more complicated reality of relationships and means of self-perception.<sup>151</sup>

Furthermore, Yorke has written about Malmesbury as a nexus of interaction between the Irish, Britons and Anglo-Saxons.<sup>152</sup> Similarly, Bede writes ‘of the people who live west of the River Severn, Walhstod is bishop’.<sup>153</sup> Walhstod (Bishop of Hereford, *fl. c. 727–36*) means ‘British interpreter’, perhaps suggesting one of his functions as bishop in a frontier region (if indeed the name was a sobriquet).<sup>154</sup> Perhaps behaving in a similar manner, Aldhelm was in correspondence with Gereint of Dumnonia, and Gereint was remembered as a patron of Sherborne.<sup>155</sup> Aldhelm could demonstrate a certain amount of antagonism toward the British in the manner discussed above. He instructed Gereint and his clergy on the proper calculation of Easter and the tonsure, and in his *Carmen Rhythmicum*, Aldhelm wrote *Quando profectus fueram / Usque diram Domnoniam / Per*

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<sup>150</sup> The evidence for this is manifold and need not be recited here, but see: Yorke, ‘*Rex Doctissimus: Bede and King Aldfrith of Northumbria*’, *Jarrow Lecture* (2009); Fraser, *From Caledonia to Pictland*, pp. 175–234; G. Noble *et al.*, ‘Between Prehistory and History: The Archaeological Detection of Social Change Among the Picts’, *Antiquity* 87 (2013), pp. 1136–50, at p. 1142, esp. for artefacts demonstrating an affinity with Anglo-Saxon England; E. Campbell, ‘Anglo-Saxon/Gaelic Interaction in Scotland’, in J. Graham-Campbell and M. Ryan (eds.), *Anglo-Saxon/Irish Relations Before the Vikings* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 253–63.

<sup>151</sup> Indeed, one would not like to suggest either that the Irish were straightforwardly ‘anti-Rome’ or homogeneously against the Roman Easter. As Peter Brown so memorably states, at Whitby Wilfrid ‘made a triumphant push against an open door’: P. Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Oxford, 2003), p. 361.

<sup>152</sup> Yorke, ‘Aldhelm’s Irish and British Connections’, in K. Barker and N. Brooks (eds.), *Aldhelm and Sherborne: Essays to Celebrate the Founding of the Bishopric* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 164–80; and see D.W. Probert, ‘Church and Landscape: A Study in Social Transition in South-Western Britain, A.D. c. 400 to c. 1200’ (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Birmingham, 2002) has written about the gradual process by which the Britons of the southwest were gradually brought into an ‘Anglo-Roman’ orbit and long-term acculturation.

<sup>153</sup> *HE* v.23, p. 558.

<sup>154</sup> Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, p. 40, n. 122.

<sup>155</sup> M. Lapidge and M. Herren (eds.), *Aldhelm: The Prose Works* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 155–60; M. O’Donovan (ed.), *Charters of Sherborne* (Oxford, 1988), 81–2, xlvi–ix; Yorke, *Wessex*, p. 179.

*caentem Cornubiam / Florulentis caespitibus / Et fecundis graminibus...* suggesting an arrogance toward the Britons that was framed in geographical terms: they live in a remote and miserable corner of the world. It is hard not to see this in a similar vein as Wilfrid's 'speech' at Whitby.<sup>156</sup> Nevertheless, Aldhelm also paid Gereint all due respect as a king (*Domino gloriosissimo, occidentalis regni scepra gubernanti*), and demonstrated familiarity with Irish works of *computus*. His tenure as Abbot of Malmesbury and Bishop of Sherborne may have meant much practical interaction with British clerics and secular leaders.<sup>157</sup>

Turning east across the North Sea, contact with Scandinavia is in some ways the most readily visible spoke in the wheel of Anglo-Saxon interconnections. The effect of Scandinavian influence upon Britain generally (and Anglo-Saxon society more specifically) has been frequently discussed in terms of archaeological contact, Scandinavian settlement in eastern England, migration, place-name shifts and so forth.<sup>158</sup> This in addition to political interaction between Anglo-Saxon kings and the Scandinavian peoples that so mark the narrative accounts of the ninth through eleventh centuries. In some quarters, the connection between Anglo-Saxon society and Scandinavia was deeply felt in a collective consciousness and sense of shared history.<sup>159</sup> *Beowulf* is the most famous example of this and suggests that in Anglo-Saxon England—among certain audiences at least—there was an appreciation of a shared legendary past. There are other examples of this as well: the voyages of Wulfstan of Hedeby and Ohthere of Hålogaland, whose travel accounts in the North Sea, the White Sea, and the Baltic are contained in the Old English *Orosius* and suggest the

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<sup>156</sup> D.R. Howlett, 'Aldhelmi Carmen Rhythmicum', *Archivum Latinitatis Medii Aevi* 53 (1995), pp. 119–40: 'When I had set forth / toward dire Dumnonia / through Cornwall lacking flowering turves and fertile grasses...'

<sup>157</sup> Yorke, 'Aldhelm's Irish and British Connections', pp. 175–8.

<sup>158</sup> e.g. Hadley, *The Northern Danelaw*; C. Hart, *The Danelaw* (London, 1992); S. McLeod, *The Beginning of Scandinavian Settlement in England: the Viking 'Great Army' and Early Settlers, c. 865–900* (Turnhout, 2014), and see below, p. 87 n. 228

<sup>159</sup> Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Haven, CT, 1989).

preservation of geographical knowledge and interest in the distant north and east at the court of Alfred.<sup>160</sup> Additionally, there are considerable references to the Anglo-Saxons in Old Norse saga literature.<sup>161</sup> This is certainly not the place to discuss the usefulness of later medieval sagas as a source for Anglo-Saxon history, but within reason they might be able to tell us something about the perception of the Anglo-Saxons in a wider North Atlantic context. For example, Barnes has argued that in Icelandic sources the Anglo-Saxons had a reputation for wealth, luxury and refined manners, and she suggests ‘a general enthusiasm in Old Norse material for things English.’<sup>162</sup> Allowing for the late nature the saga material, the implication of Anglo-Saxon England as cosmopolitan centre and a cultural exporter rings true for a society at the heart of extensive North Atlantic communication networks. The key here is that the thirteenth-century Icelanders seemed to be fascinated with Anglo-Saxon England (though details of historical events are often either wrong or impossible to substantiate), yet they demonstrated little interest in contemporary English affairs; Fjalldal suggests that the idealised depiction of Anglo-Saxon England and its kings could serve as an effective foil against the Norwegian kings.<sup>163</sup> By the thirteenth century the Anglo-Saxon kingdom had long since fallen, but there was a fascination with Anglo-Saxon England in Icelandic literature where its glorious but fated past took on poetic resonance. Quick analogies might be made to the perception of the British kingdoms of the Old North in Middle Welsh poetry, or indeed the depiction of Scandinavia in *Beowulf*. For our purposes, the essential point is that

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<sup>160</sup> N. Lund *et al.*, ed. and trans., *Two Voyagers at the Court of King Alfred: The Ventures of Ohthere and Wulfstan, Together with a Description of Northern Europe from the Old English Orosius* (York, 1984).

<sup>161</sup> M. Fjalldal, *Anglo-Saxon England in Icelandic Medieval Texts* (Toronto, 2005).

<sup>162</sup> G. Barnes, ‘The Medieval Anglophile: England and its Rulers in Old Norse History and Saga’, *Parergon* 10, 2 (1992), pp. 11–25, quoted on p. 15.

<sup>163</sup> Fjalldal, *Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 121–3.

Icelandic writers were interested in Scandinavian history, and as such it seemed natural for them to include Anglo-Saxon England in that shared history.<sup>164</sup>

This section has attempted to demonstrate the different axes of connectivity around which Anglo-Saxon society was oriented: we see a western and northern axis toward the Britons, Irish and Picts; a northern and eastern axis toward Scandinavia; and a southern axis toward Francia, and ultimately, Rome. All of these axes were important, and where Anglo-Saxon society fits into the picture is a matter of perspective and rhetoric. Therefore, Anglo-Saxon England was both on the fringe of the Frankish, Scandinavian or North Atlantic ‘worlds’, and at the same time it was a crucible where all of these societies, ethnicities, cultures, and influences came together.

### ii.3: *Core-and-Periphery: Summary*

In conclusion, it is clear that notions of ‘core-and-periphery’ are relative, and they are manifested at different levels of society. The concept intertwines cultural, political, and economic relationships, and relates to both how people perceive of themselves and others in a relative sense. We have seen that among some clerics in the seventh century, there was a conscious attempt to emphasise links with Rome, and that this endeavour often required the relegation of the Irish and Britons to a geographical and cultural periphery. If there was an effort to draw the Anglo-Saxons into a ‘Roman World’, there is also evidence for constant engagement with the Britons and Irish in the north and west, and Scandinavians in the east: it is just as valid to see the Anglo-Saxons as existing in a ‘North Atlantic world’.

We have also seen the manifestation of core-and-periphery in broad political and economic terms, suggesting that in Anglo-Saxon society—as has been demonstrated elsewhere—wealth and

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<sup>164</sup> Fjalldal, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 121.

economic productivity did not necessarily correspond to political power. Thus, a region could be politically peripheral and economically central. Finally, in a local context, we also see manifestations of core-and-periphery linked to models of territorial organisation and estate structures. In particular, we have considered the local core-and-periphery formulations of the multiple estate and river-and-wold models. These suggest that ‘peripheral’ regions had economic importance; in the river-and-wold model, the peripheral heights of land separating drainage basins or river valleys should, in theory if not in practice, form the boundary between territorial units, thereby becoming places of interface between groups of people (perhaps in seasonal or occasional contexts: shepherds and drovers, hunting parties, and so forth).

### 3: *Inherited Landscapes*

The landscape of Anglo-Saxon England did not emerge *ex nihilo*, and as Anglo-Saxon polities entered onto the historical record, they coalesced in landscapes that were indelibly marked by both the prehistoric and Roman past. It is clear that prehistoric monuments were of significant importance to the way the landscape was perceived, and the perception of the prehistoric was something that was constantly changing throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. The complexity of the relationship between society, landscape, and the perception of the past has been the subject of many important studies in recent years.<sup>165</sup> In Anglo-Saxon England, there was considerable monument reuse for secondary burial, for instance. It has been shown that all manner of monuments were used for burial: barrows, henges, stone circles, linear ditches, hillforts, and so forth.<sup>166</sup> However, after the cessation of prehistoric reuse for burial in the early-eighth century, the

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<sup>165</sup> e.g. R. Bradley, *Altering the Earth* (Edinburgh, 1993); *The Significance of Monuments* (London, 1998); Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape*; for an anthropological perspective: P. Jordan, *Material Culture and Sacred Landscape: The Anthropology of the Siberian Khanty* (Walnut Creek, CA, 2003). See also: Williams, *Death and Memory*, esp. pp. 185–7, 198–217.

<sup>166</sup> Williams, ‘Ancient Landscapes and the Dead’, *Medieval Archaeology* 41 (1997), pp. 1–32.

way in which monuments were interpreted in Anglo-Saxon society changed. As noted above, barrows became feared and haunted places and prehistoric monuments often became the site of execution cemeteries and came to be associated with boundaries in the hundredal organisation of late Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>167</sup> Prehistoric earthworks could also be incorporated into shire boundaries: the border of Hampshire and Wiltshire follows Grim's Dyke for a considerable stretch, and boundary of Hampshire and Dorset follows Bokerley Dyke.<sup>168</sup>

The liminality of these monuments manifested itself in many ways, and monuments could be turned to many purposes, and it has been shown that prehistoric monuments were also used as assembly sites and as palimpsests for royal display that could be incorporated into the administrative framework of expanding kingdoms; they might provide the staging for assemblies such as at Irthlingborough in 787 x 796 or Amesbury in 932 and 995.<sup>169</sup> In addition to such major royal assemblies, prehistoric features were often used in a local context, as has been demonstrated in many places.<sup>170</sup> As Pantos demonstrates, mounds or barrows are the most common feature referred to in the names of assembly-places, usually making use of the OE elements *hlāw*, *beorg*,

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<sup>167</sup> Above, pp. 27–8.

<sup>168</sup> Yorke, *Wessex*, pp. 85–6, and see fig. 23.

<sup>169</sup> For Irthlingborough: S. 1184; Blair, *Building*, pp. 209–10; for Wandlebury; for Amesbury: S. 418–9; *ASC* E 995; for the prehistoric context, Semple, *Perceptions*, p. 212. See also: R. Lavelle, 'Why Grateley? Reflections on Anglo-Saxon Kingship in a Hampshire Landscape', *Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society* 60 (2005), pp. 154–69.

<sup>170</sup> There is a vast and expanding literature on assembly sites. Of particular importance is: A. Pantos, 'Assembly-Places in the Anglo-Saxon period: Aspects of Form and Location', (unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2001); Pantos, 'On the Edge of Things': The Boundary Location of Anglo-Saxon Assembly Sites', in D. Griffiths, A. Reynolds and S. Semple (eds.), *Boundaries in Early Medieval Britain*, *ASSAH* 12 (2003), pp. 38–49; and the papers in S. Semple and A. Pantos (eds.), *Assembly Places and Practices in Medieval Europe* (Dublin, 2004), esp. Semple, 'Locations of Assembly in Early Anglo-Saxon England', pp. 135–54; Pantos, 'The Location and form of Anglo-Saxon Assembly-Places: Some 'Moot Points'', pp. 155–80; and Pantos, 'In medle oððe þinge': The Old English Vocabulary of Assembly', pp. 181–201; A. Tudor Skinner and S. Semple, 'Assembly Mounds and the Danelaw: Place-Name and Archaeological Evidence in the Historic Landscape', *Debating the Thing in the North: The Assembly Project II, Journal of the North Atlantic*, Special Issue 8 (2016), 115–133. See also J. Baker and S. Brookes, 'Identifying outdoor assembly sites in early medieval England', *Journal of Field Archaeology* 40, 1 (2015); Baker and Brookes, 'Governance at the Anglo-Scandinavian Interface: Hundredal Organization in the Southern Danelaw', *Journal of the North Atlantic* 501 (2013), pp. 76–95. J. Baker, 'The Toponymy of Communal Activity: Anglo-Saxon Assembly Sites and their Functions', in J. Tort-Donada (ed.), *Els noms en la vida quotidiana. Actes del XXIV Congrés Internacional d'ICOS sobre Ciències Onomàstiques* (2014), pp. 1494–1509.

or the ON *haugr*, sometimes in conjunction with words suggesting speech, such as OE *gemōt*, *rād*, and *spell*, or with assembly words (e.g. Thingoe, Suffolk: *Ping-haugr*).

Hillforts or prehistoric earthworks were occasionally used for the siting of minsters, such as at Hanbury (Worcs.) and Malmesbury (Wilts.), but this does not seem to have been particularly common.<sup>171</sup> Blair has recently written about the reuse of hillforts in the eighth century for royal purposes—but generally *not* defence—and the way that the Anglo-Saxon royal landscape was organised around hillforts and their appurtenant satellite locations (the *burh-tūnas*) in which the hillforts themselves were perhaps only utilised on an occasional basis.<sup>172</sup> However, in the Burghal Hidage, prehistoric hillforts such as that at Chisbury are listed, suggesting that in the late-ninth or early-tenth century hillforts could be used for defensive purposes.<sup>173</sup> Even if they were only lately or occasionally used for defensive purposes, prehistoric hillforts could be memorialised as places of battle and warfare, as shall be discussed in more detail below.

It is not a contradiction to see monuments in the landscape as both places of violence and fear and places where royal government was enacted. Kings, after all, could be both terrible and just. Bede, for instance, wrote approvingly of how Edwin was feared and loved by all people.<sup>174</sup> Prehistoric monuments were evocative of the ‘powerful dead’, perhaps this related to themes of protection. They could be places of fear, violence, and assembly. When they were written about in narrative historical sources, they also imprint collective identity in the landscape; they create shared views

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<sup>171</sup> Pantos, ‘Assembly-Places’, pp. 69–70; Semple, *Perceptions*, pp. 213–18.

<sup>172</sup> Blair, *Building*, chapter six.

<sup>173</sup> J. Baker and S. Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage: Anglo-Saxon Civil Defence in the Viking Age* (Leiden, 2013), pp. 52–4, 225–30.

<sup>174</sup> *HE* ii.16.

of the past that ‘inform the identity of a particular community or social group.’<sup>175</sup> To paraphrase Julian Thomas, they epitomise the past in the present.<sup>176</sup>

In the introduction, it was suggested that the Roman character of Chester was significant to the ideological message communicated by Edgar’s court in 973. The Anglo-Saxon landscape was full of Roman monuments and ruins, and it may be that these were quite visible and marked significant visual contrast to the largely timber building vernacular of Anglo-Saxon society. The striking nature of such ruins inspired the meditative Old English elegy known as *The Ruin*, which may refer to Bath.<sup>177</sup> *The Ruin* uses the fallen splendour of the city to contemplate the desolation of time and fate, but if Bath was the inspiration of the poem, then it should be said that the city was not a derelict and ghostly spectre of former glories, but was a place of growing political importance in the eighth century, as Mercian kings established the city as a centre of authority along the Fosse Way.<sup>178</sup> Its significance continued into the ninth and tenth centuries: Bath is recorded in the Burghal Hidage, and coins were minted there during the tenth and eleventh centuries.<sup>179</sup> Bath achieved the pinnacle of its royal prominence during the reign of Edgar, when the city was used as the site of the king’s coronation before his sojourn to Chester.

The influence of Roman architecture was wide ranging, both in the secular and religious spheres. In the seventh century, the royal landscape of Anglo-Saxon England was highly mobile and had a

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<sup>175</sup> Williams, ‘Death, Memory, and Time: A Consideration of the Mortuary Practices at Sutton Hoo’, in C. Humphrey and W.M. Ormrod (eds.), *Time in the Medieval World* (York, 2001), pp. 35–71, at p. 37.

<sup>176</sup> J. Thomas, *Time, Culture, and Identity* (London, 1996), pp. 183–233; Bradley, *Significance of Monuments*, pp. 85–100.

<sup>177</sup> *The Ruin*, in the *Exeter Book*, ed. G.R. Krapp and E. Dobbie, ASPR 3 (New York, NY, 1936).

<sup>178</sup> Burghart, ‘The Mercian Polity’, pp. 96–105, 196–9.

<sup>179</sup> The Bath mint may have been especially important during the reign of Edward the Elder, where coins from the beginning of the reign were struck with the legend *BAÐ* on the reverse and *+EADVVEARD REX SAXONVM* on the obverse. This was unusual for Edward’s reign: S. Lyons, ‘The Coinage of Edward the Elder’, in Higham and Hill (eds.), *Edward the Elder*, pp. 67–78.

light archaeological footprint.<sup>180</sup> The exceptions to this, of course, are the monumental great hall complexes, but these represented a relatively brief phenomenon that was also geographically limited.<sup>181</sup> It is possible that the great hall complex itself emerged out of a Romano-British building tradition that may have been considered prestigious.<sup>182</sup> Sometimes Romano-British architectural features could be incorporated into great hall complexes, as with the enclosure at Cowdery's Down.<sup>183</sup> Inherited monuments could be used to situate later great hall complexes. For example, Semple has written about the hall complex at Sutton Courtney and its spatial relationship with the prehistoric assemblage at Barrow Hills and the Roman town of Dorchester-on-Thames, and the likely importance of this relationship in the forging of a 'royal heartland' in the upper Thames valley.<sup>184</sup> In the religious sphere there are more concrete and obvious examples of Roman places becoming the seats of Anglo-Saxon bishops and used for minsters, such as at Burgh Castle and *Cnobheresburh*.<sup>185</sup> However, there was not necessarily a clear line between the secular/royal and the religious: king's houses and lands were given for the founding of minsters (and thus it is plausible that a Roman site could be associated with a royal residence before the location was given over for a minster), which were often ruled by members of royal dynasties, and which were often expected to provide hospitality for the king and his household.

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<sup>180</sup> Semple, *Perceptions*, pp. 209–10; Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005), p. 279.

<sup>181</sup> On halls, see now A. McBride 'The Role of Anglo-Saxon Great Hall Complexes in Kingdom Formation, in Comparison and in Context, AD 500–750 (Unpublished D.Phil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2018).

<sup>182</sup> Blair, *Building*, p. 37–9; S. James, A. Marshall, and M. Millett, 'An Early Medieval Building Tradition', *Archaeological Journal* 141, 1 (1984), pp. 182–215.

<sup>183</sup> M. Millett and S. James, 'Excavations at Cowdery's Down, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 1978–81', *Archaeological Journal* 140 (1981), pp. 151–279.

<sup>184</sup> Semple, *Perceptions*, pp. 94–6, 210; J. Cook and R.T. Rowley (eds.), *Dorchester Through the Ages* (Oxford, 1985).

<sup>185</sup> For Roman sites becoming diocesan seats: Bassett 'Church and Diocese in the West Midlands: The Transition from British to Anglo-Saxon Control', in J. Blair and R. Sharpe (eds.), *Pastoral Care Before the Parish* (Leicester, 1992), pp. 13–40.

How much of the territorial pattern of Anglo-Saxon England derived from prehistoric and Roman Britain? There is some evidence: the names of the kingdoms of Kent, Deira, Bernicia, and Lindsey, for instance are suggestive of some continuity with Romano-British territories. In the south-west, there is also evidence of potential administrative continuity, as the shires of Dorset and Devon derive their names from the Roman cities of *Durnovarium* (Dorchester) and *Isca Dumnoniorum* (Exeter), the probable capitals of the *civitates* of the *Durotriges* and the *Dumnonii*. However, this was not always the case: *Calleva Atrebatum*, the capital of the *Atrebates*, was deliberately abandoned by the seventh century, and despite its important place at the nexus of communication routes from Dorchester-on-Thames to London and from Gloucester to Winchester (all Roman places with important Anglo-Saxon contexts), there is no evidence that it had any impact on later territorial arrangements.<sup>186</sup> That being said, many Roman places *did* become the central points of territorial units, even if this was not related to the old *civitates*: In addition to the above, the Roman sites of Gloucester, Worcester, Chester, Leicester, Cambridge, Lincoln, and York all became the seats of shires for which they were named.

Regarding estate structures, hillforts gave their name to some estates, such as at Brent (Somerset), which was granted to Glastonbury in the seventh century (*terra autem haec sita est in monte et circa montem qui dicitur Brente*).<sup>187</sup> According to Michael Costen, the example of Brent together with further potential examples at Cannington and Congresbury, suggest the possibility that in Somerset estates were organised around large territorial units that possibly succeeded the territory of villa estates which were oriented around hillforts, even if the hillforts themselves were

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<sup>186</sup> G. Speed, *Towns in the Dark? Urban Transformations from Late Roman Britain to Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2014), pp. 61–70; M. Fulford, ‘Calleva Atrebatum (Silchester, Hampshire, UK): An Early Medieval Extinction’, in A. Augenti and N. Christie (eds.), *Vrbes Extinctae* (Aldershot, 2012), pp. 331–51.

<sup>187</sup> S. 238; M. Costen, *The Origins of Somerset* (Manchester, 1992), pp. 61–5.

unoccupied or only occasionally utilised.<sup>188</sup> Within Berkshire, grants pertaining to land *æt Æscesburh* suggest a large territorial unit named for, and perhaps centred upon, the hillfort of Uffington Castle (known in Old English as *Æscesbyrig*) which was later partitioned into territories corresponding to the parishes of Woolstone and Uffington.<sup>189</sup> There may have been continuity from the Roman or Romano-British periods, and this may have been particularly pronounced in the western Wessex. Susan Pearce, for instance, has argued for the continuity of Roman or Romano-British estates organised around villas, suggesting that they formed the endowment for early minsters.<sup>190</sup>

More broadly, there is also evidence for the reuse of Roman field systems. Recent work by Rippon, Smart and Pears has suggested that sixty-four percent of late-Roman fields share a common orientation or alignment with medieval field systems. As the authors note, this does not mean that sixty-four percent of the landmass of England demonstrates such continuity, only examples where field-systems can be recovered. Nor does it suggest continuity in usage; it may be (indeed it is quite likely) that arable gave way to pasture.<sup>191</sup>

It is not implausible to suggest a fair amount of landscape continuity and corresponding territorial units from the Iron Age through the Anglo-Saxon periods, while bearing in mind that the landscapes of these periods were far from homogenous.<sup>192</sup> Coaxial field systems—large stretches

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<sup>188</sup> Costen, *Somerset*, p. 65.

<sup>189</sup> Bounds describing Uffington: S. 1208 (c. 931), 561 (953). For land in Woolstone: S. 317 (856), 503 (944), 575 (958); Hooke, 'Anglo-Saxon Estates in the Vale of the White Horse', *Oxoniensia* 52 (1987), pp. 129–43.

<sup>190</sup> S. Pearce, 'Estates and Church Sites in Dorset and Gloucestershire: The Emergence of an Early Christian Society', in S. Pearce (ed.), *The Early Church in Western Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 117–38.

<sup>191</sup> S. Rippon, C. Smart and B. Pears, *The Fields of Britannia: Continuity and Change in the Late Roman and Early Medieval Landscape* (Oxford, 2015). Rippon *et al.* explicitly contrast their quantitative methodology from previous anecdotal approaches, specifically citing S. Oosthuizen, *Tradition and Transformation in Anglo-Saxon England: Archaeology, Common Rights and Landscape* (London, 2013), which argues for a continuity of commoning and communal land management from the Neolithic through the Anglo-Saxon period. See Rippon *et al.*'s arguments at pp. 321–2.

<sup>192</sup> e.g. J. Taylor, *An Atlas of Roman Rural Settlement in England* (York, 2007).

of fields that follow the same ‘grain’—are often seen as evidence of extensive large-scale Iron Age or Roman-era planning. They often greatly surpass the boundaries of later medieval manors, and the because the features determining such relict landscapes are not always followed by later parish boundaries, which sometimes follow stratigraphically later features, such as lanes or footpaths that slight fields, they are often taken to suggest field-systems of a pre-medieval date. Williamson has recently cautioned against reading such extensive continuity, arguing that not enough attention has been paid to underlying geography, noting that most coaxial landscapes follow the dominant direction of a slope, running from the edge of a floodplain into the upland, suggesting the importance of environmental constraints and the need to move livestock from lowland fields to upland pasture. It is suggested that such boundaries could in fact be the remains of tracks linking upland and lowland resource areas, which became field boundaries as the process of in-filling occurred.<sup>193</sup> Therefore, it is difficult to prove that Anglo-Saxon territorial patterns descended from the prehistoric or Roman period. There is some evidence that suggests continuity but not necessarily in a systematic way. Evidence for continuity in the south-west may be rather exceptional. Overall, we should be cautious here because it is ultimately impossible to know the boundaries of Roman or Romano-British *civitates* and *pagi*.

### iii.1: *Inherited Landscapes in the Present Work*

The landscape of Britain is replete with prehistoric and Roman monuments, but their significance was not uniform in the Anglo-Saxon period. There are some practical reasons for this. For instance, The sparse population of upland regions may have allowed for increased monument survival, as

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<sup>193</sup> Williamson, ‘Parish Boundaries and Early Fields: Continuity and Discontinuity’, *Journal of Historical Geography* 12, 3 (1986), pp. 241–8; and Williamson, ‘The Ancient Origins of Medieval Fields: A Reassessment’, *Archaeological Journal* 173, 2 (2016), pp. 264–87.

has been suggested by Ozanne in regard to the Peak District.<sup>194</sup> Moreover, chalk downs were particularly beloved of early modern antiquarians.<sup>195</sup> It is also possible that the proximity of, say, the Berkshire downs to the University of Oxford attracted the attention of antiquarians such as the Francis Wise, the university's Keeper of the Archives, and John Wilson, the President of Trinity College. Even today, there may be something to this: the Hillforts of the Ridgeway Project of 1994–2000, for instance, which oversaw the excavations of Uffington Castle, White Horse Hill, Segsbury Camp, and Alfred's Castle formed the training excavation for archaeology students at the University of Oxford.<sup>196</sup>

However, the most important point is made by Semple, which is that the Anglo-Saxons made use of the landscape available as was necessary and available. That meant taking some things, leaving others, and adapting to the specific landscape context. In this thesis, I am particularly concerned with the way that the inherited landscape was used to communicate collective identity and project political authority.

First, it should be emphasised that written sources are composed in distinct landscape contexts, they engage with the landscape in different ways, and have their own limitations. As shall be demonstrated in chapter six, we understand the importance of prehistoric monuments as places of conflict in northern Wessex because the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* frequently mentions them in the course of its narrative. In places without detailed narratives, a positive connection is more difficult to prove. In some cases, it is not a matter of how the landscape was or was not used, but how the available sources *perceive* the use of the landscape and identify as significant in that specific context.

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<sup>194</sup> A. Ozanne, 'The Peak Dwellers', *Medieval Archaeology* 6, 1 (1962–3), pp. 15–52.

<sup>195</sup> Reynolds, *Deviant Burial Customs*, p. 152.

<sup>196</sup> <<http://projects.arch.ox.ac.uk/HOR1.html>> [accessed 24/9/2019].

The second point is that the line between practical and ideological reuse was blurry or even non-existent. For example, a prehistoric barrow might serve a practical purpose as a waypoint for travellers or as a territorial marker—it may have even served as a podium. Linear earthworks may have been practical as ‘stop-lines’ against hostile parties riding through the landscape; the ramparts of a hillfort may have been useful for corralling livestock and gathering flocks and herds in times of danger, but the association of an earthwork or a hillfort with a royal dynasty cemented the ideological association of the dynasty with the landscape itself and reinforced the theme of the king as a wall-builder or the protector of his people. Similarly, the restoration of Roman walls may have been useful for defensive purposes, but it also conveyed an aura of *romanitas* that kings were keen to cultivate. As we shall see below, even the use and control of Roman roads had both practical and ideological significance.

The third point is the way monuments, particularly Roman monuments, related to Anglo-Saxon ideas about ideological cores and peripheries. As discussed above, an important consequence of the conversion era was to reframe the place of the Anglo-Saxons in Christendom as they were drawn into the Romanist core. This means that Roman monuments took on added significance when they could be utilised at the interface of the core and periphery. Bede makes this clear in his description of Lindisfarne, which he describes as being built ‘after the Irish method, not of stone but of hewn oak, thatching it with reeds.’<sup>197</sup> This is an interesting line, because Bede and his countrymen must have been surrounded by the timber architecture he describes as being in *more Scottorum*, so perhaps this is a specific contrast to the stone-built church at Jarrow and a reflection upon the *ideological* significance of loyalty to Rome and the Easter question. Here, Bede is conscious that the adoption of Romanising forms projects status, and it also places the Irish in the

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<sup>197</sup> HE iii.25: *quam tamen more Scottorum non de lapide sed de robore secto totam composuit atque harundine textit.*

periphery and in opposition to the Roman core. This was also tied to royal power: for instance when Oswiu stood as godfather to Peada and Sigebert of Essex, they were baptised at ‘*Ad Murum*’ (Hadrian’s Wall) in a ceremony that evoked Christian authority upon a distinctly Roman stage that also served as an exercise of Bernician hegemony.<sup>198</sup> However, it should be noted that Peada and Sigebert were baptised by the Irish bishop Finan in c. 653, which is to say about a decade before the events at Whitby discussed above. Similarly, the Irish St Fursa was granted *Cnobheresburh* (the Roman shore-fort of Burh Castle, Norfolk), for the founding of a minster.<sup>199</sup> This suggests that a possible disassociation of the Irish with Roman forms was a slow process that unfolded in the decades after the Synod of Whitby, as the effort for conversion gave way to the debate over orthodoxy.

It is also possible to see a similar—and indeed more hostile—attitude toward the Britons in the eighth century. In the *Vita Guthlaci*, Guthlac retreats to the wilderness of the fens at Crowland and establishes his hermitage on the site of an ancient barrow. As has been established, the way that barrows were perceived changed in the eighth century, as they gained increasingly negative connotations. Here Guthlac was infamously assailed by British-speaking demons. The vivid imagery of the hagiographer Felix is not subtle: the fens are dangerous and wild *mearcland* (complete with military imagery); the barrow is holy but frightening, and there is more than a touch of anti-British chauvinism. This is contrasted with the aftermath of Guthlac’s death, when Æthelbald endowed the saintly hermit’s tomb ‘with wonderful structures and ornamentations.’<sup>200</sup> If these decorations were—as seems plausible—in the form of stone sculpture, they may have been similar to the Mercian sculpture work which often looked to long-standing classical styles of

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<sup>198</sup> *HE* iii.22.

<sup>199</sup> *HE* iii.19.

<sup>200</sup> *VSG* 51.

monumental art. In a recent thesis, Bergius has discussed the influence of Late Antique Italo-Gallic sarcophagi on the apostle-arcade sepulchral sculptures at Peterborough, Breedon, Castor, and Fletton. Peterborough, Castor, and Fletton, it should be added, are all within ten miles of Crowland.<sup>201</sup> This suggests more than the simple embellishment of a tomb: it suggests a triumph through artistic form of *romanitas* and Roman orthodoxy over the dangerous wilderness, while connecting Crowland itself to Æthelbald and his dynasty, as shall be discussed further below. We are not talking about individual ‘frontier zones’ or borderlands here. An individual borderland is the wrong scale of analysis because the examples given above are suggestive of a segment of society undergoing a gradual transition in self-perception in which they increasingly saw themselves as being part of the core of Christendom at the expense of the Britons and Irish. Roman monuments were used as set pieces to illustrate this process. Thus, it is such passages in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and the *Vita Guthlaci* that established the precedents for Edgar’s coronation at Chester, and the way tenth-century kings perceived themselves in relation to their neighbours to the north and west.

Æthelbald’s endowment of Guthlac’s tomb leads to the final point: the way inherited monuments inspired Anglo-Saxon forms. It may not matter so much if monumental structures such as the basilicas at Brixworth, Northampton and Wareham were Roman so much as that they looked Roman (or the Anglo-Saxon idea of what *romanitas* after *renovatio* was supposed to look like), and therefore conjured the appropriate sentiment in the imagination of the beholder. This

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<sup>201</sup> G. Bergius, ‘The Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture of Mercia as Evidence for Continental Influence and Cultural Exchange’ (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Durham, 2012), pp. 96–108, 169–70.

contextualises such features as the theatre at Yeavinger, the diffusion of grid-planning techniques for both halls and minsters, and structures such as the church at Jarrow or the crypt at Repton.<sup>202</sup>

The landscape cannot be compartmentalised; it is experienced holistically, and it represents a synthesis of history, legend, genealogy, and contemporary manipulation that could be taken together to communicate collective identity and political legitimacy. Offa and Wat's Dykes, for instance, were contemporary monuments, but it will be argued in chapter five they specifically conveyed a sense of Roman imperial power associated with wall-building. At the same time, it was part of a long legacy of earthwork building in Britain, and it would have had resonances with the legendary past: Offa the eighth-century king of the Mercians who built 'a great wall from sea to sea' and his legendary ancestor, Offa of Angel who 'with a single sword set the marches against the Myrgings.'<sup>203</sup> Chapter six will be concerned in detail with the barrow known to the Anglo-Saxons as *Cwichelmeshlæwe*, a mound named after a seventh-century king of the West Saxons, but the barrow is entirely prehistoric: wherever Cwihelm was buried, it was not beneath the mound that came to bear his name. Nevertheless, the association was significant in staking West Saxon dynastic claims to the landscape itself.

#### 4: *Conclusion: Frontiers, Core-and-Periphery, and Inherited Landscapes*

This chapter has discussed the historiography of frontiers, the theory of core-and-periphery, and the effect of the inherited landscape in Anglo-Saxon society. It was argued that frontier historiography can lack conceptual clarity, and that the historiography of the concept is too heavily rooted in discourse about the development of late medieval nation states. There has been a

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<sup>202</sup> P.S. Barnwell, 'Anglian Yeavinger: A Continental Perspective', in P. Frodsham and C. O'Brien (eds.), *Yeavinger: People, Power and Place* (Stroud, 2005), pp. 174–84; for grid-planning: Blair, *Building*, pp. 118–32.

<sup>203</sup> Asser 14; *Widsith*, in *The Exeter Book*, 40–5: *Ane sweorde merce gemærde wið Myrgingum bi Fifeldore* [the River Eider].

tendency to emphasise ethnic frontiers at the expense of what might be called ‘internal frontiers.’ Furthermore, frontier studies can suggest an overly homogenous core that belies internal divisions. However, without the centralising administrative apparatus of a late medieval or early modern state, and due to the heterogenous nature of Anglo-Saxon society, in which collective identity was complex and multi-layered, the dynamics of a frontier zone, in which there is a process of conflict, accommodation, and collective self-shaping, existed *everywhere*. This is not to say that individual frontiers cannot be identified, but to think about the phenomenon as a whole requires engagement with the various sublayers of collective identity in early medieval Britain. Thus, the processes of ‘the frontier’ need to be examined between broadly generalised supra-regions, individual polities, and the constituent regions of such polities. Throughout the rest of this thesis, I have only rarely used the word ‘frontier’. Generally, I prefer to think in terms of ‘contested landscapes.’ This is more flexible, and it does not have the same ideological and historiographical preconceptions and problems of the frontier. It allows one to think about the communication and limits of power and collective identity in the landscape without the lingering spectres that can make the historiography of the frontier so troublesome.

It should be clear by this point that two major elements of frontier studies are scale and perspective, and the way that these relate to ideas about ‘core’ and ‘periphery’. The concept is intrinsic to the study of frontiers, which are essentially rooted in notions of polarity, but this is under-theorised in medieval history. Above, this has been discussed generally by considering ideological core-and-periphery on a broad scale and the shifting perspectives by which Anglo-Saxon society can be viewed as a whole, and about how on a more local level, ideas of core-and-periphery shape the way we understand the Anglo-Saxon landscape. In the subsequent case studies, I will examine specific landscapes through the lens of core-and-periphery, and it will be demonstrated that each

landscape under investigation can be seen as both a core and a periphery, depending upon perspective.

The third section of this chapter has considered the inheritance of the prehistoric and Roman landscape. As has been thoroughly discussed in previous work, there was considerable reuse of prehistoric and Roman monuments in the landscape. Some monuments became the focal points of administration, defence, assembly, or ritual. There was also a considerable amount of continuity of sites into the Anglo-Saxon period (though given the polyfocal nature of Anglo-Saxon settlement, we should think in terms of association, and not always direct reuse of a singular point). This could be due to the monumental ruins or earthworks of such sites and their high visibility, but just as often the continuity may be owed to the positioning of such sites on the communication network. I also want to emphasise that reuse in the landscape is part of an ongoing dialogue by which people engage with the past to communicate something about the present. Semple and Reynolds have both argued persuasively that the meaning of prehistoric landmarks changed in the eighth century, as they became places of fear; in the same vein, an infrastructure oriented around hillforts developed at the same time, and such hillforts became places associated with kings and collective identity (due to their use as places of assembly). We should consider the activity around such monuments: as the keeper of the *burh-tun* trimmed the brambles and mowed the lawn, as the banners were unfurled and tents pitched, and the proceedings of the assembly took place, such hillforts would become highly visible, spectacular, and often strategically located places that communicated the authority of the king and his men.<sup>204</sup> This would create a lasting impression of the importance of a place in the landscape, which, as shall be demonstrated in chapters three and six, could also make such monuments appropriate to war.

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<sup>204</sup> Blair, *Building*, pp. 193–219.

In considering the Roman inheritance, not only were Roman sites and monuments reused and re-appropriated, but the influence of Rome also inspired new monuments that conveyed imperial power in the landscape. I do not think that new Romanising monuments should be entirely separated from the reuse of actual Roman monuments because they occupy a similar ideological space. Both are part of the constant engagement with Rome that continuously marked Anglo-Saxon history. There is some evidence for the reuse of Roman territorial patterns but given the heterogeneity of the landscape of Roman Britain, it is not clear that this was systematic. That being said, the favourable topographical siting of both prehistoric and Roman monuments (and perhaps in some cases their sheer monumentality) could make them focal points of Anglo-Saxon arrangements. As it will be made clear throughout the remainder of this thesis, Anglo-Saxon territoriality still owed much to prehistoric and Roman routes of communication and the use of both monuments themselves and the construction of new monuments that took visual and ideological inspiration from those that came before.

### *5: The Regions of the Case Studies*

Bearing these conclusions in mind, the regions of the case studies that will comprise the second half of this thesis will now be discussed. I have selected the regions based on the following criteria: All three landscapes a) are geographically coherent and are oriented in relation to routeways and river systems; b) demonstrate features of being both a 'core' and a 'periphery', depending upon perspective; c) were, at various points in the Anglo-Saxon period, 'contested landscapes'. Each region also has specific historical and/or archaeological sources that describe the communication of authority at different times. Each method of communication described has its own 'landscape context', and contemporary sources were also composed in distinct landscape contexts with their own perceptions and preoccupations. The approach is led by the sources available and specific to

each region. Finally, in each region monumentality was important to the way political authority and collective identity was asserted in the landscape. In some cases, this was achieved through the reuse and appropriation of prehistoric or Roman monuments, and in other instances new monuments were built.

Chapter four relies largely upon the *Historia Ecclesiastica* to understand the communication of power in the region in the seventh century; chapter five uses the Welsh *Annales Cambriae* as well as monumental evidence such as the Pillar of Eliseg and Offa's and Wat's Dykes to analyse the dynamics of the late eighth and early ninth centuries, and chapter six uses the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and charter evidence to examine the region of the North Wessex downs between the late-ninth and early-eleventh centuries. It is important to acknowledge that the sources available to each region are not consistent throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. Thus, rather than trying to trace the often-attenuated history of each region across a broad chronological scope, I have chosen to keep each case study chronologically focused and to allow the primary sources for each region take the lead. A more sustained comparative discussion will be undertaken in chapter seven.

The 'Eastern Lowland Zone' is the region of chapter four. More specifically, this refers to the catchment areas of the rivers Wash and Humber. This is to say—in terms of the pre-1974 counties—Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire, Lincolnshire, Rutland, eastern Northamptonshire, eastern Leicestershire, eastern Bedfordshire, and eastern Yorkshire up to the north-slope of the Vale of Pickering. Because of the way that the eastern zone drew actors to it, places beyond the zone itself must be discussed, such as Whitby, which one could argue served as a place of interface between the eastern zone and the 'northern orientation' of Northumbria. Indeed, the chief source for the eastern lowland zone, the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, was composed at Jarrow, over sixty miles north of the northernmost part of the region (albeit connected by the east coast littoral).

On the whole, the region is characterised by its low elevation, but for the relative uplands of the wolds of Lincolnshire, Yorkshire, Bromswold and Northamptonshire, and Leicestershire, the limestone uplands of the Lincoln Edge, and the forests of Rockingham and Rutland.<sup>205</sup> It is important to include these upland regions because so much of the focus of this case study is on riverine connectivity, and because so many royal sites were located upon the interface of upland and lowland districts. The chief rivers of the area are those draining into the Wash: the Great Ouse, the Nene, the Welland, the Witham, the middle and lower reaches of the Trent; and those rivers draining into the Humber, especially the Yorkshire Ouse and the Yorkshire Derwent. The principal road was Ermine Street, the Roman road that ran from London to York.

These communications networks bear themselves out in various distribution maps, which further serve to make the region distinctive. Williamson has focused on the correlation between the region and stereotyped ‘Anglian’ grave goods, typified by cruciform brooches, cremation cemeteries, and wrist-clasps in the fifth and sixth centuries.<sup>206</sup> Furthermore, Blair has shown how the region is characterised by a distribution of metal work, pottery sherds (particularly Ipswich ware), coin-finds, and archaeologically visible settlement between c. 650 and c. 850. The region was, as Chris Wickham has noted, economically precocious, given the early evidence for exchange networks for granite-tempered Charnwood ware and shell-tempered Maxey ware.<sup>207</sup>

None of these distributions correlate exactly. Anglian grave goods, sceattas, and Ipswich ware are not limited to the region of the case-study. All these proliferate in Norfolk in particular, which has largely been left out of the analysis. The study has been limited because I am chiefly interested in the communication and projection of power in regard to the transportation network of the Wash

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<sup>205</sup> For the wolds of Northamptonshire and Leicestershire: Fox, ‘People of the Wolds’.

<sup>206</sup> Williamson, *Environment, Society and Landscape*, pp. 61–71; Blair, *Building*, chapter two.

<sup>207</sup> Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2005), p. 811.

and Humber and the relationship of the river systems to the road networks. Furthermore, the limits of the study were drawn as such because the region was clearly contested between rivals in a way that is visible in the relevant sources. In this sense, the region is both core and periphery: it is a core insofar as it was economically productive and rich, it was at the centre of extensive trade networks, and this is evident in the archaeological record. It is a periphery in the sense that no native dynasties (after the death of Edwin of Deira) coalesced in the region and it did not form the nucleus of a powerful overkingdom. In terms of its political history, I would argue, it is both: it was relatively distant to the powerful dynasties of the Mercians, Bernicians and East Angles, and yet they were drawn into the region as they competed for it, turning it into a focal point for hegemonic conflict.

Chapter five concerns the region between the River Conwy in the west and the Dee in the east. These are the historic counties of Flintshire, western Denbighshire, and a small part of eastern Caernarfonshire. In broad geological terms, this marks the boundary between the aforementioned ‘Lowland’ and ‘Highland’ zones, as described by Cyril Fox, as the so-called ‘Midland Gap’ meets the Cambrian mountains.<sup>208</sup> The southern boundary of the region is the upper course of the Dee, which bends sharply to the west as the river crosses Offa and Wat’s Dykes. The geographical centre of the region is the agriculturally rich Vale of Clwyd, a relatively narrow valley, which, at its widest extends for about ten miles across from east to west. In the east, the Vale is flanked by the Clwydian Range, which reaches an elevation of nearly 2,000 feet at Moel Famau and Moel-y-Gamelin. In the west, the Vale of Clwyd is flanked by the Denbigh Moors (Mynydd Hiraethog).

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<sup>208</sup> C. Fox, *The Personality of Britain: Its Influence on Inhabitant and Invader in Prehistoric and Early Historic Times* (Cardiff, 1932).

The western-most point of the region Creuddyn peninsula, which overlooks the Bay of Conwy from the east; and the eastern-most point is the mouth of the River Dee.

Land-based communication networks would have been relatively constricted. Both the Denbigh Moors and the Clwydian Ranges extend almost all the way to the coast of the Irish Sea, leaving only a narrow strip for a Roman road between Chester (*Deva*) and Caernarfon (*Segontium*). This road joined the scattered Roman sites in the region, notably a settlement at Prestatyn.<sup>209</sup> The route may have been linked to a now largely lost road that connected the *Deva-Segontium* route to another fort at Ruthin, about sixteen miles south of the mouth of the Clwyd.<sup>210</sup> A postulated route from the Dee at Llantysilio north into the Vale of Clwyd will be central to the argument of the chapter.

As with chapter four, this was a contested landscape, as the Mercian kings contended with their rivals in Gwynedd and Powys. Indeed, this region—later known as the Four Cantrefs (i.e. Rhos, Tegeingl, Dyffryn Clwyd and Rhufoniog) or the *Perfeddwlad*—was frequently contested between the English kings and the princes of Gwynedd until the conquest of 1283. Unlike in the first case study, there is a significant element of inter-ethnic rivalry in this chapter. However, it will be shown that the techniques used to communicate power were largely shared, and that Mercian practice in north-eastern Wales had much in common with the methods of projecting power elsewhere in their dominions. Furthermore, the region was both core and periphery. As with the region of chapter four, the zone between the Dee and Conwy was somewhat removed from the Mercian royal core of the Upper Trent, as well as the Venedotian core in Anglesey and the Powysian core south of the Dee. As with the eastern lowland zone, the region between the Dee and Conwy was not the nucleus of a substantial polity, yet it attained an ideological centrality

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<sup>209</sup> K. Blockley and D. Allen, *Prestatyn 1984–5: An Iron Age Farmstead and Romano-British Industrial Settlement in North Wales*, BAR Brit. Ser. 210 (Oxford, 1989).

<sup>210</sup> E. Waddelove *et al.*, 'The Roman Fort at Ruthin, Clwyd', *Britannia* 21 (1990), pp. 299–302.

based upon the activity of the kings who contested it, and a logistical centrality as the place of interface between the Cheshire Plain (and thus midland England and Fox's Lowland Zone) and the Irish Sea.

Chapter six will examine the chalk downs of Berkshire, northern Hampshire, and north-eastern Wiltshire. This area is unhelpfully known by various overlapping regional names: the Berkshire, Lambourn, Marlborough, and North Hampshire Downs are all referred to, in addition to other local names such as the 'White Horse Hills'. I will demonstrate, however, that the region should be considered a coherent and contiguous landscape that should not necessarily be partitioned by modern county borders. For convenience, I have used the term 'the North Wessex Downs'. As we shall see, this is an imperfect designation due to the landscape's turbulent political history, but the name has recently gained currency for conservation purposes. Geologically, the region is not dissimilar to the Cretaceous chalk downs that dominate the landscape of southern and eastern England, such as the South Downs, Cranborne Chase, and the Salisbury Plain. The North Wessex Downs are separated from Salisbury Plain by the Vale of Pewsey and the upper valley of the Hampshire Avon in the south-west. These chalk hills—the North Wessex Downs, Salisbury Plain, Cranborne Chase, and the South Downs—form a crescent around the Palaeocene sands and clays of the Hampshire Basin. Of these ranges, the North Wessex Downs form the northern flank of this formation and boast the highest elevation.

From a geological perspective, the region of this case study is not particularly more distinctive than the adjacent ranges of downlands. Two things, however, set them apart. First, the North Wessex Downs form the most substantial drainage divide—this is the height of land separating drainage basins—between the rivers of southern England: The headwaters of the Hampshire Avon and Test flow south from the Downs into the Channel. The westernmost slopes of the Downs form

the eastern wall of the Vale of Avon, the ten mile plain separating the chalks of the east from the limestone hills of the Cotswolds in the west. Rivers west of the Downs flow into the Bristol Channel. The River Kennet and its tributaries rise in the Downs before discharging into the Thames in its middle valley. The second feature that unifies the region is the prehistoric track known as the Ridgeway, which runs east to west along the downs before arcing south in the west of Downs before passing into the Vale of Pewsey. It will be shown below how important the Ridgeway was in the orientation of the region.

As with the other landscapes, the Downs were contested during the Anglo-Saxon period, first between the Mercian and West Saxon kings, but it also was used as a theatre for conflict during wars against Scandinavian armies in the 870s and the early eleventh century. In this way, it will also be demonstrated that the landscape served as both core and periphery. The region was sparsely populated upland which seems to have been used principally for hunting and transhumance, politically it was contested between the Mercian and West Saxon dynasties, and it will be argued that control of the region may not have been settled until the final throes of the Mercian kingdom. At the same time, the Ridgeway served as a keystone, connecting the middle valley of the Thames with the Vale of Pewsey (thence to the Salisbury Plain or Vale of Avon) in the west, making it an important nexus of communication and transportation. Furthermore, as the region was incorporated into the tenth-century kingdom, it will be argued that the landscape formed part of a royal itinerary, and an ideological association developed between the landscape and the royal dynasty, thereby forming part of a royal 'core'.

## Chapter II

### Regional Particularism and Elite Homogeneity in Anglo-Saxon Society

The discussion in chapter one focused on the historiography of medieval and Anglo-Saxon frontiers and the perception of ‘core-and-periphery’ in Anglo-Saxon society. Thinking about the dynamics of core-and-periphery requires consideration of how people perceived themselves and were perceived in relation to others. How did they remain distinctive within broader groups while still signaling membership? A traditional approach to Anglo-Saxon narrative history would see local groups or political entities gradually but inevitably extinguished as they were incorporated into larger polities, before eventually being subsumed into the English kingdom of the tenth century.<sup>211</sup> The argument of this chapter is that regional particularism was a *constant feature* of Anglo-Saxon history, surviving even the formation of the English kingdom in the tenth century. However, this needs to be set against the relative homogeneity of Anglo-Saxon elite identity, which began in the seventh century and continued through the eleventh century. I do not suggest that this is a juxtaposition that needs to be ‘resolved’; instead, I would recognise it as a central tension of Anglo-Saxon society.

#### 1. *Regions and Regionalism*

What is a region? The definition can be rather slippery: they can be both perceived and accepted by contemporaries or observed by later historians.<sup>212</sup> They can be geographical, political, administrative, cultural, economic, or some combination of all of these. The key is that a region is

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<sup>211</sup> As per Bassett, ‘In Search’, pp. 3–27.

<sup>212</sup> Everitt, ‘Country, County and Town: Patterns of Regional Evolution in England’, *TRHS* 29 (1979), pp. 79–108, see p. 80: ‘There is a clear difference between what one might call a “conscious” region, on the one hand, an area with a sense of its own identity, a sense of belonging together, and on the other hand a region which is rather a perception of historians and geographers.’

‘nested’; it is a part of a wider whole, but nevertheless—to either historians or contemporaries—it remains somehow distinctive. Regional particularism refers to the emphasis on the region as opposed to an emphasis on the wider whole; the inverse of particularism is universalism.<sup>213</sup>

Not all regions were necessarily observed by contemporaries. For example, the so-called ‘Anglian culture-province’ is revealed through the distribution of material culture and settlement formation, and this was a region of longstanding distinctiveness. Throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, this region would have *looked* somewhat different to a traveller from other parts in terms of its settlement footprint, landholding patterns, and so on. However, if there is any indication that this region was recognised by contemporaries, it is very faint indeed, perhaps only recalled in the names of East Anglia and the briefly extant kingdom of the Middle Angles.

The difficulty in precisely articulating regions can sometimes reflect the preoccupations of the historian. In reference to modern history, Julian Hoppitt wrote that ‘The historiography of national, regional, and local identities is in a state of flux, with the meanings of “Britishness” being much more fully explored than other collective politico-cultural identities.’<sup>214</sup> On the other hand, landscape historians working from a *longue durée* perspective are highly attuned to the region as a cultural, economic and geographical entity, though as Green and Pollard have written—explicitly criticising the great English landscape historian W.G. Hoskins—there can be a sense that regional identity is detached from politics; that it is ultimately rooted in physical geography and thus ‘as old as the hills (and river, plains and marshes).’<sup>215</sup> For landscape historians, the French concept of

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<sup>213</sup> The ideas are common in sociology and other disciplines of the social sciences, e.g. G. de Blasio, D. Scalise and P. Sestito, ‘Universalism and Particularism: A Round Trip from Sociology to Economics’, *Review of Social Economy* (2019), pp. 1–24; S. Wolff, *Disputed Territories: The Transnational Dynamics of Ethnic Conflict Settlement* (New York, NY, 2003).

<sup>214</sup> J. Hoppitt, *A Land of Liberty? England 1689–1727* (Oxford, 2000), p. 520.

<sup>215</sup> A. Green and A.J. Pollard, ‘Introduction: Identifying Regions’, in Green and Pollard (eds.), *Regional Identities in North-East England, 1300–2000* (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 1–25, at pp. 7, 10–11.

*pays* is essential. Developing out of the naturalist movement of the nineteenth century, *pays* are, as a rule, disinterested in administrative and political boundaries; they refer to the interrelation of physical geography, geology, pedology, flora and fauna, material culture, vernacular building culture, dialects, and local patterns of economic and social organisation.<sup>216</sup> As Bedos-Rezak has written in a useful review of the concept, a view in which each of these categories buttresses the other and seems to provide ever-more evidence for the existence of the *pays* runs the risk of teleology, in which the *pays* is not only self-evident, but perpetual and inexorable.<sup>217</sup> Sometimes, the concept has been invoked by English landscape historians. For instance, Hoskins' famous comment that 'to fully understand the scene' the landscape historian must be 'a botanist, a physical geographer, and a naturalist, as well as a historian' was certainly evocative of *pays*.<sup>218</sup> Alan Everitt was more direct, writing about the 'natural *pays*' of the Kentish Weald, arguing that the Weald (and 'wold areas' more generally) formed 'a distinct species of landscape and society in their own right.'<sup>219</sup> Sometimes, as Rippon notes, these might have been recognised as early as the medieval

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<sup>216</sup> Green and Pollard, 'Introduction', pp. 10–11; some of the foundational studies are P. Vidal de la Blache, *La France de l'Est* (Paris, 1917); L. Gallois, *Régions naturelles et noms de pays: Études sur la région Parisienne* (Paris, 1908); A. Demangeon, *Le Picardie et les régions voisines: Artois, Cambrésis, Beauvaisis* (Paris, 1905); among the founders of the influential journal *Annales Géographie*.

<sup>217</sup> B. Bedos-Rezak, 'French Medieval Regions: A Concept in History', *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 19, 2 (1993), pp. 151–66, at p. 152.

<sup>218</sup> Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape* (1955), p. 18. One notes that here Hoskins describes the landscape as a 'scene', reflecting the origin of the word as a term of visual art. For the use of 'landscape' in this way, see e.g. D. Lowenthal and H.C. Prince, 'The English Landscape', *The Geographical Review* 54, 3 (1964), pp. 309–46; for the historical origins of the word, see: R. Muir, *Approaches to Landscape* (Basingstoke, 1998).

<sup>219</sup> Everitt, 'River and Wold', quoted on p. 18; this is expressed even more sharply in Everitt, 'Country, County and Town'; and see Fox, 'Peasant farmers, patterns of settlement and *pays*: transformations in the landscapes of Devon and Cornwall during the later Middle Ages', in R. Higham (ed.), *Landscape and Townscape in the South West* (Exeter, 1989), pp. 41–73, esp. pp. 57–64, which examines the growth of regional specialisation in the later Middle Ages as market opportunities expanded and internal engrossing led to a consolidation of agricultural land. More recently, see the papers in J. Thirsk (ed.), *The English Rural Landscape* (Oxford, 2000), in which different categories of *pays* are described (e.g. downlands, wolds, lowland vales etc.), before individual case-studies are discussed in detail. S. Rippon, *Making Sense of an Historic Landscape* (Oxford, 2012), understands the Blackdown Hills of the Somerset-Devon border as a distinctive *pays*. Note that the *pays* skirts the boundaries of the administrative counties.

period, as is the case of the fens or Romney Marsh.<sup>220</sup> However, it would not be accurate to assume an automatic correspondence between physical geography and culture; even contiguous landscapes with very similar geography can still be culturally very different; it may be that the sense of cultural difference only emerged so strongly because of the imposition of a political border. Political developments cannot be entirely taken out of the equation, and *pays*, as cultural regions, are not simple outgrowths of physical geography; they are shaped in themselves by political, economic, and social developments.<sup>221</sup>

Indeed, there was much variation. There is evidence that the people who lived in one apparent *pays*, Romney Marsh, were known as the *Mersware*. Likewise, the *Peacsæte*, *Cilternsæte*, *Wreocansæte* and *Magonsæte* derived their political identities from obvious landscape features. On the other hand, there is no evidence that the people of another *pays*, such as the Kentish Weald were understood to be a singular people, and the ‘Wealden’ territories of the *Cæsterwara*, for example, were not confined to the upland Weald; rather, their defining geographical characteristic was the way in which they formed north-south strips from the lowlands into the uplands of the Weald. This pattern does not conform to the county borders of Kent: East Kentish territories, such as the lands of the *Limenwara* look entirely different, while the ‘Wealden’ territorial patterns clearly continue into Surrey and Sussex. Furthermore, the *Cæsterwara* did not derive their primary sense of identity from the Weald, but from the city of Rochester. To take another example, there is considerable evidence that the Fens were understood as a coherent region by Anglo-Saxons, as

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<sup>220</sup> Rippon, *The Transformation of Coastal Wetlands* (London, 2000), pp. 7–8; S. 111 (*in occidentali parte regionis qui dicitur Mersware*). The current document is forged, but N. Brooks, ‘Romney Marsh in the Early Middle Ages’, in J. Eddison and C. Green (eds.), *Romney Marsh: Evolution, Occupation, Reclamation* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 90–104, argues that the charter was based on a genuine eighth-century document, see pp. 98–100); see also ASC 796 (*recte* 798), 838 (*recte* 841).

<sup>221</sup> Rippon, *Beyond the Medieval Village: The Diversification of Landscape Character in Southern Britain* (Oxford, 2008), p. 7, gives the example of Cornwall and Devon.

is made clear in the *Liber Eliensis*, and alluded to in texts such as the *Vita Guthlaci*; and while there may have been an early political or group identity associated with the fens—Bede calls the land of the *Gyrwas* (whose name means ‘fen’ or ‘marsh’) a *prouincia*—already by the seventh century political fragmentation in the region was the norm, as shall be discussed in chapter four.<sup>222</sup> *Pays* do not necessarily correspond to polities, even if they were understood as contemporary regions. Moreover, *pays* cannot be studied in isolation, because so much of their history is determined by the relationship of a particular region or *pays* with other groups, or, from a more landscape-based perspective, in terms of linkages and connections between one *pays* or region and another.

Regionalism is a slightly different issue. It is primarily a political expression. Regionalism is often equated to political separatism or framed in terms of a conscious community desiring some degree of autonomy or independence.<sup>223</sup> This is certainly evident at various points throughout Anglo-Saxon history, and it can be seen at different scales of the political spectrum: sometimes we see revolts against overlordship throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, such the Mercians’ rebellion against Oswiu, Kentish and East Anglian rebellions against the Mercians, or when Cerdicing hegemony in Northumbria was challenged at various points between c. 939 and 954.<sup>224</sup> However, the concept does not need to be so narrowly defined: territories can continue to be distinctive even without asserting autonomy or some sort of secessionist movement. In the tenth century, Mercian regional particularism was manifested on at least two occasions—the accession of Æthelstan in 924 and of Edgar in 957—but in each case members of the ruling dynasty were chosen,

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<sup>222</sup> Bosworth-Toller s.v. ‘Gyr’; *HE* iii.20.

<sup>223</sup> Bedos-Rezak, ‘French Medieval Regions’, p. 151, citing D.M. Cameron (ed.), *Regionalism and Supranationalism: Challenges and Alternatives to the Nation-State in Canada and Europe* (Montreal, 1981), p. xv.

<sup>224</sup> *HE* iii.24; *ASC* 798, 825. For a narrative of the tenth-century competition for Northumbria: Molyneaux, *Formation*, pp. 30–3.

emphasising that the Mercians understood themselves to be distinct from the West Saxons but still part of the wider Cerdicing *imperium*. Other examples of this include the poems known as the *Battle of Brunanburh* and the *Battle of Maldon*, which pay close attention to the regional pride of the various provinces of the Cerdicing dominion while still emphasising their place in a broader whole. There is a Continental analogy to this. As Simon MacLean has written, in the *De Bellis Parisiaca Urbis* of Abbo of St Germaine-de-Prés, the protagonist, Count Odo of Paris, is distinctly manifested as a Neustrian, and this can be taken as an example of Neustrian regional particularity. There is no sense, however, of a secessionist impulse. While Odo *rex futuris* is celebrated as a great man of Paris and Neustria, Charles the Fat is still honoured as the *basileus Francorum*, and the poem stresses both the diversity and the strength of the Empire under Carolingian rule.<sup>225</sup> Therefore, secessionism is not necessarily what is important; what is crucial is that the people of the region are *perceived* as being distinct in some way within a recognised whole. In addition to *pays* and culture-provinces, every polity, diocese or administrative district in early medieval Britain can fairly be described as a ‘region’. In part, this is because the Anglo-Saxons understood themselves to be inhabitants of the Isle of Britain, and, after the conversion, to be a part of Christendom. Therefore, Britain was part of Christendom, and Britain was divided into metropolitan provinces (two provinces, after 735), which were divided into dioceses. Interwoven with the ecclesiastical divisions of Britain were the island’s kingdoms, which were in themselves comprised of sub-kingdoms, *regiones*, and, eventually, shires and hundreds.

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<sup>225</sup> S. MacLean, *Kingship and Politics in the Late Ninth Century: Charles the Fat and the End of the Carolingian Empire* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 55–64; citing Abbo, *Bella Parisiaca Urbis*, in Abbon. *Le Siège de Paris par les Normands*, ed. H. Waquet (Paris, 1942).

## 2. *Regionality in Anglo-Saxon Society*

The evidence for regionality in the pre-Conversion era can be seen through the diverse practices of Anglo-Saxon burial: communities reasonably considered ‘Anglo-Saxon’ used both cremation and inhumation rites, and were buried with diverse dress accessories and other grave goods; this had a strong regional correlation, as has been demonstrated in many places.<sup>226</sup> Various intersecting layers of identity are also well known: Angles, Saxons, and Jutes; Middle Angles, Bernicians, Deirans; Hwiccas and Lindseymen; Mercians, Northumbrians, West Saxons and so forth.<sup>227</sup> In addition to this, it is well-understood that cultural influences impacted Anglo-Saxon society from all directions: Hines has written about the Scandinavian influence on the material culture of eastern England, and Innes and Hadley in particular have written about the complexity of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian identity in the ‘Danelaw’.<sup>228</sup> Connections between the Northumbrian kingdom and the Irish and Picts have long been commented upon,<sup>229</sup> and the extensive relationships between Britons and Anglo-Saxons have been increasingly realised.<sup>230</sup> To this we might also add the influence of Merovingian and Carolingian Francia in the southeast, as has been discussed by Ian

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<sup>226</sup> Lucy, *Way of Death*, for instance.

<sup>227</sup> Yorke, ‘Anglo-Saxon *Gentes and Regna*’; Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1990); D.P. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings* (rev. ed., London, 2000); the papers in Bassett (ed.), *Origins*, etc.

<sup>228</sup> Hines, *The Scandinavian Character*; M. Innes, ‘Danelaw Identities: Ethnicity, Regionalism and Political Allegiance’ in D.M. Hadley and J.D. Richards (eds.), *Cultures in Contact: Scandinavian Settlement in England in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries* (Turnhout, 2000), pp. 65–88; Hadley, ‘‘Cockle amongst the Wheat’’: The Scandinavian Settlement of England’, in W.O. Frazer and A. Tyrrell (eds.), *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain* (London, 2000), pp. 111–136; Hadley, ‘Viking and Native: Re-Thinking Identity in the Danelaw’, *EME* 11, 1 (2002), pp. 45–70; Halsall, ‘The Viking Presence in England? The Burial Evidence Reconsidered’, in Hadley and Richards (eds.), *Cultures in Contact*, pp. 259–76; R. Lavelle and S. Roffey, ‘West Saxons and Danes: Negotiating Early Medieval Identities’, in R. Lavelle and S. Roffey (eds.), *Danes in Wessex*, pp. 7–34; C.P. Lewis, ‘Danish Landowners in Wessex in 1066’, in Lavelle and Roffey (eds.), *Danes in Wessex*, pp. 172–211: it is increasingly being recognised that Scandinavian identities were present throughout the English kingdom in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

<sup>229</sup> See above, pp. 54–5, esp. nn. 148–52.

<sup>230</sup> e.g. the papers in Higham (ed.), *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2007); esp. D. Tyler, ‘Early Mercia and the Britons’, pp. 91–101; A. Woolf, ‘Apartheid and Economics in Anglo-Saxon England’, pp. 115–29; Lewis, ‘Welsh Territories and Welsh Identities in Late Anglo-Saxon England’, pp. 130–43; and Thornton, ‘Some Welshmen in Domesday Book and Beyond: Aspects of Anglo-Welsh Relations in the Eleventh Century’, pp. 144–64; providing a sample of papers demonstrating continued relations between Britons and Anglo-Saxons throughout the period.

Wood and Joanna Story.<sup>231</sup> Thus, in addition to the various interwoven layers of identity in Anglo-Saxon society, Anglo-Saxon culture was in itself a crucible of different strands of cultural influence from all directions.

Place-name evidence suggests a high degree of localisation: the small shires or *regiones* discussed above are mostly known through place-name evidence, and they can be difficult to date without corroborating textual evidence. That being said, *-inga*-type place-names probably began to be used in the sixth century, and they refer to small groups of people, often named after some sort of (possibly legendary) progenitor or leader.<sup>232</sup> Some of them must have been old by *c.* 700: the *regiones* of the *Husmeræ* and *Stoppingas* were referenced in two charters of Æthelbald of Mercia, and it is implied that the *regiones* were of some antiquity (and quite possibly defunct) when the grants were made.<sup>233</sup> Other *-inga* place-names and collective groups attested in early sources have been usefully surveyed by Cox.<sup>234</sup>

The crucial point is that even as top-level political entities winnowed from the eighth century onward, it should not be assumed that the essentially local character of Anglo-Saxon society flattened out in a corresponding way. This is not to say that the landscape was unchanging: when Edward the Elder conquered the east midlands, he did not gain the support of the *Gyrwas* and so forth, but the of principal men ‘pertaining to’ Bedford, Northampton and Stamford. For instance, in 914, the *Chronicle* records that *Purcýtel eorl hine gesohte him to hlaforde, 7 þa holdas ealle, 7*

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<sup>231</sup> I. Wood, ‘Frankish Hegemony in England’, in M.O.H. Carver (ed.), *The Age of Sutton Hoo: The Seventh Century in North-Western Europe* (Woodbridge, 1992), pp. 235–41; J. Story, *Carolingian Connections* (Aldershot, 2003).

<sup>232</sup> J. Dodgson, ‘The Significance of the Distribution of the English Place-Name in *-ingas*, *-inga-* in South-east England’, *Medieval Archaeology* 10 (1966), pp. 1–29.

<sup>233</sup> S. 89: *in provincia cui ab antiquis nomen inditum est Husmeræ iuxta fluvium vocabulo Stur*; S. 94: *in regione quae antiquitus nominatur Stoppingas*.

<sup>234</sup> B. Cox, ‘The Place-Names of the Earliest English Records’, *Journal of the English Place-Name Society* 8 (1975–1976), pp. 12–66.

*þa ieldstan men ealle mæste ðe to Bedanforda hierdon, 7 eac monige þara þe to Hamtune hierdon.*<sup>235</sup>

Some of the territorial change may have been due to the natural process of fission, but some of it was probably more deliberate: there is reason to suggest that the founding of Burton Abbey may represent the final stage of breakup of the *regio* of the *Tomsæte*, which was specifically associated with the old Mercian kings and their centre at Tamworth.<sup>236</sup> That the historic shire boundary between Staffordshire and Warwickshire runs right through Tamworth may be suggestive of a deliberate policy to erase the territory in the tenth century. It is true, as Molyneaux notes, that the *locus* of Mercian identity seems to have migrated to Gloucester, which subsequently did become the focal point of an administrative unit; perhaps the breakup of the *regio* of the *Tomsæte* and the apparent relegation of Tamworth was meant to suppress the potential of a rival power centre in the old Mercian kingdom, not to suppress Mercian identity altogether.<sup>237</sup>

Despite a great deal of territorial change, the tendency toward regional particularism survived both the suppression of royal dynasties in the eighth and ninth centuries, and the gradual expansion of the Cerdicing realm in the tenth century. The evidence for this is manifold. To start with some anecdotal evidence from the ninth century, a charter for 848 from Berhtwulf of Mercia refers to a certain Hunberht, *princeps* of the *Tomsæte*, referring to the aforementioned *regio* in the Tame valley in the vicinity of Tamworth.<sup>238</sup> Alfred the Great's own grandfather may have been the representative of a subgroup within the West Saxon kingdom that still commanded some sort of

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<sup>235</sup> ASC A 914: 'Earl Thurcetel came and sought him as lord, as did all the *holds* and most of the principal men pertaining to Bedford and also many of those that belonged to Northampton.'

<sup>236</sup> S. 1536, 906; see this in conjunction with royal grants to Wulfsgie the Black in 941–2 in Staffordshire and Derbyshire: Blair, *Building*, pp. 180, 312–13; C. Insley, 'The Family of Wulfric Spott: An Anglo-Saxon Mercian Marcher Dynasty?', in D. Roffe (ed.), *The English and Their Legacy, 900–1200* (Woodbridge, 2012), pp. 115–28; Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 337; Gelling, *The West Midlands*, pp. 146–53, esp. p. 152.

<sup>237</sup> Molyneaux, *Formation*, p. 161.

<sup>238</sup> S. 197; Keynes, *The Councils of Clofesho*, Vaughn Paper 38, Brixworth Lecture 1993 (1994), pp. 39–40.

legitimacy at the end of the ninth century: Alfred's mother, Osburh, was described by Asser as being 'of the Gothic nation, descended from the Goths and Jutes, and in particular the descent of Stuf and Wihtgar.'<sup>239</sup> In this, Asser demonstrates that Osburh's father Oslac was distinguished—his daughter was *nobilis ingenio, nobilis et genere* ('noble in the mind and noble by birth')—and that he himself had an important place at court as the king's butler (*famosi pincernae*). Asser's statement could suggest that Osburh's family represented the repository of a sense of identity that had some currency in the ninth century that was in some way distinctive.<sup>240</sup> Asser chose to emphasise that Stuf and Wihtgar were the nephews of Cerdic, from whom Alfred traced his descent, and who allegedly granted Stuf and Wihtgar the Isle of Wight, thereby establishing an ancient connection with the Cerdicings that still emphasised Cerdicing dominance. As shadowy as the aristocracy of ninth-century Anglo-Saxon England can be, it is not possible to definitively establish the landed interests of Osburh's family, and land in Wight, Dorset, Hampshire, and Kent have all been suggested, though none of these potential holdings need be mutually exclusive.<sup>241</sup> So too with the kin of Alfred's wife, Ealhswith. Ealhswith's father, Æthelred *Mucel*, was referred to by Asser as the *comes* of the *Gaini*, an otherwise unattested peoples whose name is preserved in the place-name of Gainsborough (Lincs.), on the eastern bank of the Trent.<sup>242</sup> Clearly, Asser was comfortable thinking about aristocrats in terms of the varied layers of their identities, and it

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<sup>239</sup> Asser, 2, p. 4: *Qui Oslac Gothus erat natione; ortus enim erat de Gothis et Iutis, de semine scilicet Stuf et Wihtgar*

<sup>240</sup> Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, p. 68, n. 8, suggest that Asser may have been trying to hint that Oslac was of Danish extraction; J. Nelson, 'Reconstructing a Royal Family: Reflections on Alfred', in I. Wood and N. Lund (eds.), *People and Places in Northern Europe: 500–1600* (Woodbridge, 1991), pp. 47–66, lends some support to this notion, arguing that adding a 'Danish' element to a royal genealogy that was still being tinkered with would lend Alfred legitimacy among Scandinavians in Britain, at pp. 51–2. See also: A.C. Murray, 'Beowulf, the Danish Invasions, and Royal Genealogy', in C. Chase (ed.), *The Dating of Beowulf* (Toronto, 1981), pp. 101–11, at p. 105.

<sup>241</sup> Nelson, 'Reconstructing a Royal Family', pp. 49, n. 12, 56, n. 49, 58, nn. 58–9; Nelson, 'The Queen in Ninth Century Wessex', in S. Keynes and A. Smyth (eds.), *Anglo-Saxons: Studies Presented to Cyril Roy Hart* (Dublin, 2006), pp. 67–77, at p. 76.

<sup>242</sup> Asser 29, p. 24; also referenced in ASC C 1013 as *Genesburuh*.

was natural to him to represent men like Oslac and Æthelred *Mucel* as the representatives of peoples. This helps contextualise the royal or semi-royal light in which some of the greater magnates of the tenth century were sometimes described; most notably Æthelred and Æthelflæd of Mercia, Ælfhere of Mercia, and the lords of Bamburgh.<sup>243</sup>

The implication of this is that an Anglo-Saxon aristocrat was not just an office holder, but the leader of *a people* who had a sense of territorial identity. Consider Eadric Streona, the chief villain of the early eleventh-century *Chronicle*. According to John of Worcester, Eadric came from the territory of the *Magonsæte*, in modern Shropshire and Herefordshire.<sup>244</sup> One might dismiss this association as later fancy, but in Domesday Eadric Streona's descendant, Eadric 'the Wild' also held land in Shropshire and Herefordshire.<sup>245</sup> Furthermore, according to the *Chronicle*, when Eadric went over to Cnut around the Christmas of 1015, Edmund Ironside and Uthtræd of Northumbria gathered an army and ravaged Staffordshire and Shropshire, possibly to target Eadric's family lands. In 1016, at the Battle of *Assandun*, Eadric (having at this point gone back to Edmund) was the first to flee the field along with the men of the *Magonsæte*.<sup>246</sup> There is one more piece of evidence which seems to corroborate this. In 1006, as a Danish army was marching almost unopposed through Wessex, the chronicler reports that as this was happening 'the king was across the Thames in Shropshire receiving his midwinter *feorme*.' Of course, 1006 was the year of the so-called 'palace revolution,' when several prominent members of court were removed, in some cases violently, and Eadric Streona came to power.<sup>247</sup> This suggests that here, as will be

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<sup>243</sup> Molyneaux, *Formation*, pp. 59–61.

<sup>244</sup> JW *Chron.* 1006, pp. 456–9.

<sup>245</sup> S. Baxter, *The Earls of Mercia: Lordship and Power in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2007), p. 23 n. 23.

<sup>246</sup> ASC C 1016: *Þa dyde Eadric ealdorman swa swa he ær oftor dyde, astealde þæne fleam ærest mid Magesæton.*

<sup>247</sup> ASC C 1006, 1007 [the year Eadric was made ealdorman]; Keynes, *The Diplomas of Æthelred the "Unready" (978–1016): a study in their use as historical evidence* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 209–14; Keynes, 'Declining Reputation of Æthelred the Unready', in D. Hill (ed.), *Æthelred the Unready: Papers from the Millenary Conference*, BAR Brit. Ser. 59 (1978), pp. 227–53.

discussed further in chapter six, the chronicler contrasts the absence of the king in Wessex with his presence in Shropshire—the territory of Eadric and the *Magonsæte*—to mark a shift in the political situation. By discussing territory, the chronicler could underscore divisions within the English kingdom, and utilise the regionalism that was inherent to Anglo-Saxon society to affect political discourse.

The *Magonsæte* are fleeting in the Anglo-Saxon record. An 811 charter records an exchange between Archbishop Wulfred and Coenwulf of Mercia in which Wulfred gave land at Yarkhill (Herefords.) *on Magonsetum* in return for a *sulung* at *Liminum* in Kent. The charter notes that Wulfred had received the land at Yarkhill from Queen Cynethryth, the wife of King Offa.<sup>248</sup> A list of benefactors for St Peter's Gloucester (perhaps 834 or 835) claimed to have received four hides in *Briencandafelda* [Archenfeld?] from *Nodehardus praefectus et comes regis in Magonsetum*.<sup>249</sup> Finally, in 958, Edgar granted six hides at Staunton-on-Arrow *in pago Magesætna* to his faithful *minister* Ealhstan.<sup>250</sup> This might be compared to the *Pecsæte*, of the Peak District, who are to be found in the Tribal Hidage with a valuation of 1200 hides. In 920, their country may be referred to when the *Chronicle* reports that Edward the Elder went to '*Peaclond*' and ordered a burh to be built at *Badecanwiellon* (Bakewell). Finally in 963 Edgar made a grant at Ballidon (Derbs.) *in pago Pecset*.<sup>251</sup> It is sometimes suggested that old 'folk names' like the *Magonsæte* were revived during the reign of Edgar, but instances where the name occurs only *begin* in the ninth century and they continue into the eleventh century; in the eleventh century, this small sporadically-mentioned

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<sup>248</sup> S. 1264.

<sup>249</sup> S. 1782; W.H. Hart, ed., *Historia et cartularium monasterii sancti petri Gloucestriae* (London, 1863), vol. 1, p. lxxiii; the suggestion of Archenfeld is K. Pretty, 'Defining the Magonsæte', in Bassett (ed.), *Origins*, pp. 171–83, at p. 182. cf. Thacker, 'Some Terms for Noblemen in Anglo-Saxon England, c. 650–900', *ASSAH* 2 (1981), pp. 201–36, at p. 213; P. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, pp. 39–53.

<sup>250</sup> S. 677.

<sup>251</sup> S.712a.

people had a leader in Eadric Streona who briefly catapulted them to wide-ranging infamy. With these examples in mind, it seems clear then that caution is needed before assuming that such small groups were rendered defunct as the uppermost layer of the political landscape became increasingly consolidated.<sup>252</sup>

Though Anglo-Saxon law could strike a universalising note, as in the laws of Alfred and elsewhere,<sup>253</sup> the regional particularism of Anglo-Saxon society is also thoroughly embedded in legal texts. This has been identified in several tenth-century texts, most notably *IV Edgar, II* and *III Æthelred* and the laws of Cnut, which are often seen to be ‘directed’ toward certain subgroups.<sup>254</sup> In a related vein, clauses 8.2–3 of *VI Æthelstan* provide clear evidence of the strength of local kin-groups, and the essentially local way in which they were to be dealt with should trouble arise, stating rather infamously that:

If it happens that any kindred (*ænig mægð*) is so strong and so large, within the district or outside it (*innon landes oððe uton landes*), whether men of a twelve-hundred wergild or of a two-hundred, that they refuse us our rights and stand up for a thief, we are to ride thither with all our men with the reeve whose district it is. And also we are to send in both directions to the reeves and request help from them of as many men as seem to us suitable in so great a suit, so that the guilty men may stand in awe of our association (*ure gesomnunge*); and we are all to ride thither and avenge our injury and kill the thief and those who fight with him and support him, unless they will desert him.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Which is not to say that such identities did not have to *reorient* themselves to meet the challenges of new circumstances, nor that such identities were inherently stable. Undoubtedly the constitution and territorial interest of such groups changed over time. For an argument along these lines about reorientation: Insley, ‘Collapse, Reconfiguration or Renegotiation? The Strange End of the Mercian Kingdom, 850–924’, *Reti Medievali Rivista*, 17, 2 (2016), pp. 231–49.

<sup>253</sup> e.g. Af. Int. 49.7–10. For the ideological importance of this, P. Wormald, ‘*Lex Scripta* and *Verbum Regis*: legislation and Germanic kingship, from Euric to Cnut’, in P.H. Sawyer and I.N. Wood (eds.), *Early Medieval Kingship* (Leeds, 1977), pp. 105–38, at pp. 115–25, 132–3, 135; cf. Keynes, ‘Royal Government and the Written Word in Late Anglo-Saxon England’, in R. McKitterick (ed.), *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 226–57; D. Pratt, *The Political Thought of Alfred the Great* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 217–18; Also IV Eg. 2.2, etc.

<sup>254</sup> IV Eg. 2.1, 12; II Atr. 1; III Atr. 1.1–2, 3.2–3; and from the reign of Cnut: *Norðleoda laga* and *Mircna laga*, printed in Liebermann (ed.), *Gesetze* 1, pp. 456–69; for this see Innes, ‘Danelaw Identities’, pp. 72–8; Lund, ‘King Edgar and the Danelaw’, *Medieval Scandinavia* 9 (1976), pp. 181–95.

<sup>255</sup> VI As. 8.2–3; translation after Whitelock, *EHD*, no. 37, p. 389.

This, it should be remembered, was not a royal text but rather a product of bishops and reeves of the London ‘peace-guild’, seemingly conceding the difficulty agents acting on the behalf of the king might face in attempting to dislodge or outmanoeuvre powerful kindreds. Take for example Æthelred’s rather extraordinary charter of 998, in which a certain Æthelsige of Kent was subject to attainder as he ‘openly attacked whomever he was able to... and moreover he killed my able and faithful reeve who was defending my possessions against his attack.’<sup>256</sup> We do not know who Æthelsige’s kinsmen were, or if he held any offices, but he must have been quite influential, as Æthelred claims to have followed his (wicked) advice in his youth.<sup>257</sup> The local tenor of peacekeeping arrangements is further suggested in *III Æthelstan*, a response from the bishops and councillors of ‘*Centscyre*,’ which declares in the epilogue that ‘if in this document there is either too much or too little, that you [King Æthelstan] command changes to be made according to your wishes,’ suggesting a dialogue between the king and the localities.<sup>258</sup>

Two brief tenth-century examples will demonstrate the point further. Both the *Fonthill Letter* and *The Ordinance Concerning the Dunsæte* are concerned with local accommodation, particularly regarding cattle-rustling.<sup>259</sup> Both texts delegate considerable authority to the men of the district.

The very first clause of the *Ordinance* insists that:

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<sup>256</sup> S. 893, for the restitution of six *sulungs* at Bromley with swine pastures in the Weald to Rochester.

<sup>257</sup> Stafford, ‘Political Ideas in Late Tenth-Century England: Charters as evidence’, in P. Stafford, J. Nelson and J. Martindale (eds.) *Law, Laity and Solidarities: Essays in honour of Susan Reynolds* (Manchester, 2001), pp. 68–82 discusses the redemptive ideology of this charter.

<sup>258</sup> III As. Ep.: *Precamus, domine, in misericordiam tuam, si in hoc scripto alterutrum sit vel nimis vel minus ut hoc emendari iubeas secundum velle tuum.*

<sup>259</sup> For the *Ordinance*: F. Liebermann (ed.), *Die Gesetze* vol. 1, pp. 374–8. A translation with facsimile of CCC MS 383 is provided in F. Noble, *Offa’s Dyke Reviewed*, ed. M. Gelling, BAR, Brit. Ser. 114 (1983), pp. 103–9. The text has recently been discussed in Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century*, vol. 1: *Legislation and its Limits* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 228–44; M. Fordham, ‘Peacekeeping and Order on the Anglo-Welsh Frontier in the Early Tenth Century’, *Midland History* 32 (2007), pp. 1–18; David Pratt, ‘Written Law and the Communication of Authority in Tenth-Century England’, in D. Rollason, C. Leyser and H. Williams (eds.), *England and the Continent in the Tenth Century: Studies in Honour of Wilhelm Levison (1876–1947)* (Turnhout, 2010), pp. 332–50, at pp. 345–6; Molyneux, ‘The *Ordinance Concerning the Dunsæte* and the Anglo-Welsh frontier in the

If anyone follow the track of stolen cattle from one river bank to the other, then he is to commit the tracking to the men of that land (*befæste man þæt spo[r] landesmannum*), or show by some mark that the track is rightfully pursued. The man who owns that land must take up the search himself and within nine days and nights he must compensate for the cattle.<sup>260</sup>

Meanwhile *Fonthill* describes a winding and long-running dispute over five hides at Fonthill, in Wiltshire. In one episode of the dispute, Helmstan, then holding the land at Fonthill by lease, stole untended cattle and attempted to drive the cattle to Chicklade, where he was apprehended. The letter claims that *his speremon ahredde ða sporwreclas* ('his drover recovered the stolen cattle'),<sup>261</sup> and that when Helmstan fled he was scratched on the face by a bramble, by which he was identified, and his lands were seized by the local reeve.<sup>262</sup>

Both texts are set within a wider context of Anglo-Saxon legislation concerning cattle-tracking, suggesting that rustling was an ongoing concern in the tenth-century kingdom.<sup>263</sup> In the first instance, all of these law codes leave peace keeping and conflict resolution in the hands of the

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late tenth and eleventh centuries', *ASE* 40 (2011), pp. 249–72. The *Ordinance* cannot be securely dated. It is traditionally associated with the reign of Æthelstan, for whom Fordham and Pratt make the case. Molyneaux, however, suggests the reign of Edgar, and admits that the *terminus ante quem* cannot be established before the turn of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when the *Ordinance* was incorporated into CCC MS 383 (in the vernacular) and four manuscripts of *Quadripartitus* (Latin). In both Corpus Christi and the *Quadripartitus* MSS the *Ordinance* follows *II Æthelred*, a treaty made between Æthelred II and a Scandinavian group, probably in 994. As Wormald noted, the Corpus MS and *Quadripartitus*—which also contain *The Treaty of Alfred and Guthrum*—are the only surviving manuscripts which contain Anglo-Saxon treaties: Wormald, *Making*, pp. 235–6. For *Fonthill*: S. 1445. The key discussions are Keynes, 'The Fonthill Letter', in M. Korhammer (ed.), with K. Reichl and H. Sauer, *Words, Texts and Manuscripts* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 53–97, providing a commentary and translation. Other recent treatments include M. Gretsch, 'The Language of the "Fonthill Letter"', *ASE* 23 (1994), pp. 57–92; Wormald, *Making*, pp. 144–8; and C. Hough, 'Cattle-Tracking in the Fonthill Letter', *EHR* 115, 463 (2000), pp. 864–92.

<sup>260</sup> Duns. 1–1.1: *gif man tride bedrifð forstolenes yrfes of stæðe on oðer, ðonne befæste man þæt spo[r] landesmannum oððe mid mearce gecyðe, þæt man riht drife... Fo se syððan to ðe þæt land age 7 hæbbe him ða æscan* ['to search for']; 7 ðæs on IX nihton gylde þæt yrfe

<sup>261</sup> This is a confusing point, but the tracker may have been obliged as per the stipulation of II Ew.4.

<sup>262</sup> Keynes, 'Fonthill', p. 78—following Whitelock, *EHD* no. 102, p. 503—gives: 'the man who tracked him rescued the traced cattle [?]', admitting the confusing nature of the passage at p. 78 n. 100, by noting that Thorpe, *Diplomatarium*, p. 172 n. 1 omitted the line with an ellipsis, writing 'This I do not understand'. I have followed Gretsch, 'The Fonthill Letter: language, law and the discourse of disciplines', *Anglia* 123 (2005), pp. 662–86, with *corrigenda* in 124 (2006), p. 604, in translating *speremon* as 'drover', rather than 'tracker'.

<sup>263</sup> II Ew.4; V As.2; VI As.8.iv; III. Em.6–6.2.

local men. However, the spectre of royal power looms in all of them. It has been argued that Anglo-Saxon society maintained a high degree of regional particularism, and it stands to reason that this should inform the procedures of peacekeeping. I will suggest here that tenth-century royal authority did not seek to ‘flatten out’ the local texture of peacekeeping, but rather that it wove its way through the rhythms and relationships of the district to affect its power.

Both *Dunsæte* and *Fonthill* do this in slightly different ways, but the effect is similar. In *Dunsæte*, it is noted that ‘the *Wentsæte* [the men of Gwent?] had of a time belonged to the *Dunsæte*; but more properly they belonged to the West Saxons; thus they [the *Wentsæte*] will have to send tribute and hostages [to the West Saxons].’<sup>264</sup> This sounds as though the king was seeking to *subsume*, rather than fundamentally *change* the political relationship between *Wentsæte* and *Dunsæte*. Meanwhile, should ‘the *Dunsæte* have need, [and] if the king will grant it them, they will at least be allowed *friðgistas* [peace-hostages].’<sup>265</sup> This suggests the establishment of the personal relationship between the (unnamed) king and the *Dunsæte* by forcing the *Dunsæte* to appeal to the royal court for hostages, presumably from the *Wentsæte*, in order to guarantee peace.<sup>266</sup> This essentially makes the king responsible for the protection of the *Dunsæte*. In this instance, it appears that royal authority endeavoured to utilise the local relationships and strategies of accommodation, while providing a channel by which the *Dunsæte* could appeal to the king against the neighbouring *Wentsæte*. One wonders if the *Wentsæte* could also appeal to the king for their own hostages.

*Fonthill* is quite different in many ways, but similar principles of local accommodation underpin the arrangement. In *Fonthill*, the process by which royal authority became involved was driven by

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<sup>264</sup> Duns. 9: *Hwilan Wentsæte hyrdan into Dunsætan; ac hit gebyreð rihtor into Westseaxan; ðyder hy scylan gafol 7 gistas syllan.*

<sup>265</sup> Duns. 9.1: *Eac Dunsæte beþyrfan, gif heom se cyning an, þæt man huru friðgistas.*

<sup>266</sup> Lavelle, ‘The Use and Abuse of Hostages in Later Anglo-Saxon England’, *EME* 14, 3 (2006), pp. 269–96, at pp. 284, 290–2.

local potentates. The author of the letter, who might have been Ealdorman Ordlaf,<sup>267</sup> was clearly close to both Alfred and Edward. The author was writing to King Edward, but he also described meeting with Alfred on at least one occasion, at Wardour, where he made a report to the king in the presence of one of the disputants, Æthelhelm Higa. Following this, the author describes attending King Edward at Chippenham, when the recidivist Helmstan came to him after visiting the grave of King Alfred. The author then appealed to Edward, who removed the sentence of outlawry and granted Helmstan an estate to live on in a quiet way.<sup>268</sup> If the author was Ordlaf, Keynes notes that the ealdorman was one of the more important figures at court during the last decade of the ninth century and the first decade of the tenth, and he attested some nineteen charters between 900 and *c.* 909.<sup>269</sup> The author/Ordlaf was also a figure of local significance. It is made clear very quickly in the letter that the author was in fact the godfather of Helmstan, revealing his local kin-based connections, and explaining why he appealed to the king on Helmstan's behalf. Moreover, it is made explicit that the author had a vested interest in the case. After all, the estate of Fonthill passed into his hands during the course of proceedings, before being granted in turn to the Bishop of Winchester in exchange for five hides at Lydiard, in northern Wiltshire.<sup>270</sup> If the

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<sup>267</sup> It was J.M. Kemble, *The Saxons in England*, 2 vols. (London, 1849), vol. 1, p. 314, who first associated the letter with Ordlaf, and this was supported in Whitelock, *EHD* no. 102, pp. 501–3; and Keynes, 'Fonthill', pp. 55, 87. This is challenged in M. Boynton and S. Reynolds, 'The Author of the Fonthill Letter', *ASE* 25 (1996), pp. 91–5. The point is taken that the internal evidence associating the authorship of *Fonthill* with Ordlaf is rather circular, and that the charter pertaining to the estate of Lydiard, S. 1284, which is used by Whitelock and Keynes to corroborate their argument is not above suspicion (as *per* Keynes' own 'The West Saxon Charters of King Æthelwulf and His Sons', *EHR* 109 (1994), pp. 1109–49, at pp. 1141–2). Nevertheless, Boynton and Reynolds' conclusion that Helmstan's godfather and the author was *not* Ordlaf, but an unnamed participant in the events, and that there was a third, unnamed estate which Helmstan held in *len* from Ordlaf seems equally speculative.

<sup>268</sup> Keynes, 'Fonthill', pp. 73–4, 88 with notes, discussing the chronology of these events.

<sup>269</sup> Keynes, 'Fonthill', pp. 55–8, p. 57 nn. 21, 27. He attests: S. 350, dated 898 (doubtful); S. 354, undated from the reign of Alfred (dubious in current form); S. 359, S. 1284, dated 900; S. 362, 364, 1205, dated 901; S. 367, 368, 369, dated 903; S. 372, 373 and 1286, dated 904; S. 374, 375, 376, 377, 378, dated 909; S. 381, 382, 383, undated but *c.* 909.

<sup>270</sup> It would seem that S. 1284, which attests to the exchange between Bishop Denewulf and Ordlaf is not genuine in its current form.

author was indeed Ordlaſ, he also held land at Chelworth near Malmesbury,<sup>271</sup> Stanton St Bernard in the Vale of Pewsey,<sup>272</sup> and Wylſe, some six miles northeast of Fonthill itself.<sup>273</sup> Thus, he is revealed to be a man of regional importance with regional connections and regional ambitions, but still bound up with royal power.

A second royal officer makes an appearance in the person of the king's reeve, Eanwulf Penearding. Eanwulf arraigned Helmstan after he stole the cattle and seized Helmstan's estate of Tisbury, saying that he did so because he was 'the king's man' (*forðon he wæs cinges mon*). Eanwulf's cognomen possibly derived from a place, perhaps his own lands, called *Peneard*, which is most likely to be Pennard in Somerset, some twenty-five miles west of Fonthill.<sup>274</sup> Perhaps this was close enough to have the local contacts which made his job possible, but far enough away to be seen as an effective reeve. It is possible, though necessarily speculative, that the very name 'Penearding' was used by the Wiltshiremen to highlight his (relative) 'foreign-ness', and so maybe there is a sense in the author's questioning of the reeve after his seizure of Tisbury (*Ða ascade ic hine hwy he swa dyde*) that Eanwulf was meddling in local affairs and frustratingly escalating the situation to the point at which Helmstan faced the serious peril of outlawry and the author's control of Fonthill was jeopardised, leaving the author/Ordlaſ and Helmstan with little choice but to appeal to the king.

While *Dunsæte* and *Fonthill* certainly appear very different, both demonstrate the flexible ways in which the king utilised local relationships to keep the peace, and the importance of local leaders to the maintenance of justice. Flexibility and accommodation in the face of entrenched local

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<sup>271</sup> S. 1205.

<sup>272</sup> S. 368.

<sup>273</sup> S. 469.

<sup>274</sup> Keynes, 'Fonthill', p. 80 nn. 104–5.

interest was surely a crucial aspect to the successful expansion of royal authority in the tenth century, and a way in which to *avoid* the scenario laid out in *VI Æthelstan* 8.2–3, as quoted above, which must have been seen as a very bad outcome indeed. Perhaps even worse was the scenario suggested in *II Edmund*, in which the king’s own men were left with no choice but to intervene with violence as the peace-making process broke-down.<sup>275</sup> This may inform the punitive expeditions sent out by Eadred, Æthelred and Harthcnut in 942, 986 and 1041: an escalated, violent royal response to a breakdown in the techniques of local accommodation.<sup>276</sup> Perhaps the model we should see for the tenth century is one in which the local arrangements of disparate communities were respected (or tolerated), but with channels open to the royal court for redress and assistance, and in which the threat of royal intervention could serve as a deterrent against parties that might otherwise seek escalation of a conflict.<sup>277</sup>

The first half of this chapter argued that the tenor of Anglo-Saxon society was highly localised and was marked by multiple layers of interconnected collective identities. It has been argued that the essentially local character of Anglo-Saxon society and the predisposition to regional particularism never abated, and it survived the gradual formation of the tenth-century kingdom. As the uppermost political layer of the Anglo-Saxon landscape became increasingly consolidated, the West Saxon dynasty did not seem to obliterate most of these regional entities (with some possible exceptions), but rather it seems that they found flexible ways to utilise local social structures in order to assert their authority, winding their way into the roots of society, rather than ploughing

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<sup>275</sup> II Em. 1.3.

<sup>276</sup> Eadred: the sack of Thetford in 852 (*ASC D* 852) ‘in vengeance for the abbot Eadhelm’. Consider also Eadred’s Northumbrian campaign of 948; Æthelred: the harrying of the diocese of Rochester in 986 (*ASC C* 986), for which see: Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 178–80, demonstrating that in this process, the king—of course—could also be a bad actor; Harthcnut: ravaged all Worcestershire in vengeance for the slaying of two of his huscarls (*ASC C* 1041).

<sup>277</sup> cf. Lambert, *Law and Order*, who would see the level at which royal agents infiltrated the localities as being much greater in the eleventh century.

everything out and starting anew. The potential dismantling of an old Mercian royal core in the vicinity of Tamworth may suggest an exception that proves the rule.<sup>278</sup>

### 3. *Elite Homogeneity*

This is just one half of the story, however, because just as Anglo-Saxon society was marked by regional particularism and heterogeneity, it *also* demonstrated considerable cultural homogeneity among elite society. This is the case from the seventh century onwards, and it was woven through the interpersonal relationships of both secular and ecclesiastical elites. Much of this is familiar: the connections that intertwined the aristocracy of Anglo-Saxon England have received considerable attention.<sup>279</sup> This is not the place for more prosopographical work, but this section will argue that the interpersonal relationships that stitched together the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy were consistent throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. This is to say that the social conditions which enabled the closely enmeshed aristocracy of the tenth century were already coming into place in the seventh century; the creation of a unitary English kingdom *was not* a necessary precondition. Elite cultural homogeneity overlay the heterogenous and regional society discussed in the previous section of this chapter. I suspect that elites probably had two registers and could represent themselves in either local or cosmopolitan terms, as the situation demanded. This may have been

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<sup>278</sup> cf. Blair, *Building*, pp. 214–15 n. 124, arguing that a similar dismantling may have occurred in the area of Bourton-on-the-Water (Gloucs.) during the reign of Eadred.

<sup>279</sup> Most recently, for example, T. Pickles, *Kinship, Society and the Church in Anglo-Saxon Yorkshire* (Oxford, 2018) has discussed the Deiran aristocracy and their role in the conversion process and the establishment of the seventh-century church; while Molyneaux, *Formation*, pp. 48–85 has written about the ‘greater subordinates’ of the Cerdicing kings in the tenth century. Robin Fleming, *Kings and Lords in Conquest England* (Cambridge, 1991) has discussed the connections and networks of the aristocracy of the tenth and eleventh centuries, and Cyril Hart’s study of the great tenth-century East Anglian ealdorman Æthelstan Half-King and his family remains essential: C. Hart, ‘Athelstan ‘Half-King’ and his family, *ASE* 2 (1973), pp. 115–44. The Mercian aristocracy has received a considerable amount of attention in its own right, for instance Ann Williams has written about the family and connections of Ealdorman Ælfhere of Mercia: Williams, ‘*Princeps Merciorum Gentis: The Family, Career and Connections of Ælfhere, Ealdorman of Mercia, 956–83*’, *ASE* 10 (1982), pp. 143–72; and Burghart’s prosopographical work on Mercian elites has contributed greatly to our knowledge of the eighth and ninth centuries: Burghart, ‘The Mercian Polity’. For the eleventh century, Baxter’s *Earls of Mercia* is invaluable.

a feature of political rhetoric, such as when in the *Vita Oswaldi*, Ælfhere of Mercia was described as ‘a mad blast of wind from the western borders.’<sup>280</sup>

I have defined elites broadly for the purposes of this chapter. Thus, those people who were kings, queens, *æthelings*, and royal daughters. This also includes people known in Latin as *reguli*, *subreguli*, *duces*, *principes*, *praefecti*, *comites*, etc. or referred to in English as *undercyningas*, ealdormen, earls, thegns, *gesiths*, *holds*, and so forth.<sup>281</sup> I have also included archbishops, bishops, abbots, and abbesses. Though it is axiomatic that Anglo-Saxon society became increasingly stratified in the sixth century, after the cessation of grave goods and the end of great halls elites become difficult to recognise on the ground, and for the most part they are only archaeologically visible in a monastic context (though the line between secular and monastic was hardly clear-cut) until the tenth century.<sup>282</sup> Despite their archaeological ephemerality, elite society can be recognised in written sources from the very beginning of the Anglo-Saxon textual record in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, the *Vita Wilfrithi*, and earliest law codes.<sup>283</sup> To put it simply, in this chapter, I am referring essentially to people who were *eorlisc*, rather than those who were *ceorlisc*, or—to borrow from Cnut’s First Letter to the English—those who were *twelfhynde* and above rather than *twyhynde* and below.<sup>284</sup> This is the fundamental division between free men in Anglo-Saxon society, and in theory it could encompass all of the king’s free subjects.

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<sup>280</sup> VSO iv.12: *uesani uenti flatum qui uenerat de finibus occiduis*. See also Williams, ‘*Princeps Merciorum gentis*’; D.J.V. Fisher, ‘The Anti-Monastic Reaction in the Reign of Edward the Martyr’, *Cambridge Historical Journal* 10, 3 (1952), pp. 254–70.

<sup>281</sup> As a starting point, see: Thacker, ‘Some Terms for Noblemen’, pp. 201–37; Baxter, *Earls of Mercia*, chapter three gives a good overview of the role of ealdormen and earls. See also A. Williams, *The World Before Domesday: The English Aristocracy, 900–1066* (London, 2008).

<sup>282</sup> Blair, *Building*, pp. 354–80.

<sup>283</sup> Lambert, *Law and Order*, p. 50.

<sup>284</sup> A formulation that occasionally occurs in Anglo-Saxon legal texts, most famously *Geþyncðo* (see below), and Af. 4.2: *ge ceorle ge eorle. Twelfhynde* (a 1200s wergild) and *Twyhynde* (200s) is found in Cn 1020 1.

This is a simplification, of course. Throughout the Anglo-Saxon period there a number of gradations of status, and some people were in between a *ceorl* and a nobleman. The laws of Alfred, for example, refer to people with a wergild of 600 shillings—three times that of a *ceorl* but half that of the thegn. Other people did honourable service but were not thegnly, such as *radcnihts*, who are seen in Domesday, and whose name suggests they performed riding duties.<sup>285</sup> Some of these ranks were variable. *Geneats* appear as high-ranking members of the royal household in early law-codes (often as *cyninges geneat*; e.g. Ine 19, which suggests a 1200s. wergild), and even as late as 896 a ‘king’s *geneat*’ is mentioned as being killed alongside a king’s reeve fighting the Danes in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.<sup>286</sup> However, in the tenth- or eleventh-century text known as *Rectitudines Singularum Personarum*, the *geneat* appears as a prosperous peasant freeman who performed a variety of duties. Thus, the status of the *geneat* was either declining, variable by region, or their status varied depending on whether they were the ‘king’s *geneat*’ or if they performed duties for another lord.<sup>287</sup>

Furthermore, it is not the case that these social ranks or offices were static throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, their application to an individual might be inconsistent, and the precise nature of a particular rank could change over time. This is made clear by the apparent ‘demotion’ of *subreguli* in the eighth and early ninth centuries, the reorganisation and shifting territorial reimits of ealdordoms and later earldoms, the evolution of the rank of earl in the eleventh century, and the

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<sup>285</sup> Williams, *Before Domesday*, pp. 79–80.

<sup>286</sup> ASC 896.

<sup>287</sup> *Rect. 2*; n.b. the Latin translation of *geneat* in *Quadripartitus* is *Uillani*. See P.D.A. Harvey, ‘*Rectitudines Singularum Personarum* and *Gerefa*’, *EHR* 108, 426 (1993), pp. 1–22; also of relevance here is L. Oliver, ‘*Cyninges Fedesl*: The King’s Feeding in Æthelberht, ch. 12’, *ASE* 27 (1998), pp. 31–40; C. Hough, ‘The Structure of English Society in the Seventh Century: A New Reading of Æthelberht 12’, in her *An Ald Recht: Essays on Anglo-Saxon Law* (Cambridge, 2014), pp. 74–86; T.M. Charles-Edwards, ‘The Distinction Between Land and Moveable Wealth in Anglo-Saxon England’, in P.H. Sawyer (ed.), *Medieval Settlement: Continuity and Change* (London, 1976), pp. 180–7, on a sort of *cursus honorem* for young noblemen in regard to such ranks.

increasing importance of sheriffs in the late tenth and eleventh centuries, to briefly name but a few examples.<sup>288</sup>

Even among the categories I have called ‘elite’, there were enormous quantitative differences between such people. Some ealdormen, like Æthelstan *semirex*, had an air of royalty (whether this was to be admired or held in suspicion must depend on perspective) due to their wealth and offices, and were indeed closely related to the royal family through marriage. Some thegns must have seemed rather rustic. In practice, some thegns would have been materially closer to *ceorls*, hovering just on the edge of good-standing. There is a sense, however, of shared status derived from a collective sense of nobility.

This is articulated most strikingly in the eleventh-century legal tract associated with Wulfstan known as *Gepyncðo*, which famously states that ‘it once used to be... if a *ceorl* has prospered that he possessed fully five hides of land of his own [a church and a kitchen,] a bell and a gatehouse, a seat and special office in the king’s hall, then he was henceforth entitled to the rights of a thegn.’<sup>289</sup>

The temporal nature of this excerpt is what is important: ‘it once used to be... then he *was*,’ suggesting some anxiety over how things were when the text was compiled. Indeed, it actually seems like it was quite hard to become a thegn because in addition to material wealth, a seat in the king’s hall was required. This is emphasised in the next clause, which asserts that a thegn would prosper who ‘served the king and rode in his household troop on his missions, if he had a thegn who served him, possessing five hides *on which he discharged the king’s dues*, and who attended

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<sup>288</sup> For this: Baxter, *Earls of Mercia*, pp. 71–4; Lambert, *Law and Order*, chapter seven on the importance of sheriffs to the administration of later Anglo-Saxon England.

<sup>289</sup> *Gepyncðo* 1–2: *Hwilum wæs... gif ceorl gepeah þæt he hæfe v hida fullice agenes landes, [ecclesiam et coquinam (Textus Roffensis only, for this see Blair, Church in Society, p. 371 n. 11)], bellan 7 burhgeat, setl 7 sundornote on cynges healle, þonne wæs he þanon forð þegenrihtes wyrðe.*

his lord *in the king's hall*...<sup>290</sup> This makes it clear that royal service was considered essential, even insofar that the ‘intermediate thegn’ who served the thegn to whom the clause refers aids his lord’s social status by serving the king, both in terms of *utware* for his own five hides and by attending his lord at the royal court.<sup>291</sup> Social rigidity is reinforced in the contemporary legal tract known as *Norðleoda laga*, which is also cynical about the prospect of social advancement, declaring that ‘even if [a *ceorl*] prospers so that he possesses a helmet and a coat of mail and a gold-plated sword, if he has not the land [*i.e.* five hides on which to discharge his obligations to the king], he is a *ceorl* all the same.’<sup>292</sup> Perhaps in the wake of the wars and upheavals of the late tenth and early eleventh century there were many dead or dispossessed thegns and ealdormen, and room for a *ceorliscman* to prosper materially. Texts such as *Gepyncðo* and *Norðleoda laga* suggest the reactionary impulse of an elite society that was not particularly eager to open its ranks.

While it is true that there is a great difference between the great secular and ecclesiastical magnates and the lesser thegns, reeves and abbots further down the social hierarchy, it will be demonstrated that while the networks of the aristocracy had broad branches that reached out across Anglo-Saxon society, they also had deep roots. I will show in various ways throughout this chapter how this was articulated through the personal connections of this broad class, and how this was leveraged through both horizontal and vertical connections.

The homogeneity of elite society is suggested by several things. For instance, during the so-called ‘Final Phase’ of Anglo-Saxon grave goods (the late-sixth and seventh centuries), regional dress

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<sup>290</sup>*Gepyncðo* 3: 7 se þegen þe geþeah, þæt he þenode cyng 7 he radstæfne rad on his hirede, gif se þonne hæfde þegn, þe him filigde, þe to cynges[utware] v hida hæfde 7 on cyninges sele his hlaforde þenode.’

<sup>291</sup> Williams, *Before Domesday*, focuses particularly on the importance of royal service.

<sup>292</sup> *Norðleoda laga* 10: 7 þeah he geþeo þæt he hæbbe helm 7 byrnan 7 golde fæted sweord, gif he þæt land nafað, he bið ceorl swa þeah.

accessories almost entirely disappear, and grave goods become more homogenous.<sup>293</sup> This can be seen alongside the striking uniformity of great hall complexes, and Hines has suggested that linguistic changes that were underway during the conversion-period created a newly homogenised language which fostered a new mutual intelligibility throughout the Anglo-Saxon world.<sup>294</sup> All this occurred despite marked political disunity. As this was happening, the process of conversion was under way. It seems very likely that the nascent church both rode upon these currents and, perhaps, accelerated them by articulating a concept of the *gens Anglorum* unified under the authority of Canterbury, thereby providing a centre of gravity for Anglo-Saxon society that hitherto had not existed.<sup>295</sup> This was gradual, of course, for it required all of the Anglo-Saxons to both convert and to acknowledge the primacy of Canterbury.

This homogenising and expansive Anglo-Saxon elite society was mediated through interpersonal relationships that spanned across the whole of Britain, both coexisting with and supporting political structures, and coming into conflict with them in equal measure. This created a *layered* identity of interwoven horizontal and vertical relationships that enmeshed Anglo-Saxon society. Such relationships were essential in forging horizontal relationships between, say, royal courts, but also for maintaining vertical relationships. Two brief examples from the seventh century will demonstrate the point. The relationship between St Wilfrid and Queen Eanflæd provides an excellent example. Wilfrid, who was probably of Deiran descent, was recommended by the nobles of his father's household to Queen Eanflæd, who in turn commended Wilfrid to her husband Oswiu

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<sup>293</sup> H. Geake, *The Use of Grave-Goods in Conversion-Period England c. 600–c. 850*, BAR. Brit. Ser. 261 (1997), p. 123, 132–6.

<sup>294</sup> Great halls: H. Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2012), p. 25; McBride 'The Role of Anglo-Saxon Great Hall Complexes'; Language: Hines, 'Philology, Archaeology and the *adventus Saxonum vel Anglorum*', in A. Bammesberger and A. Wollmann (eds.), *Britain 400–600: Language and History* (Heidelberg, 1990), pp. 17–36, esp. pp. 31–3. Bede uses both *lingua Anglorum* (*HE* i.1, p. 16) and *Saxonum* (*HE* v.8, p. 474), but the context suggests that they were synonymous in his mind.

<sup>295</sup> Wormald, 'Bede, the Bretwaldas', pp. 99–129.

and his companion Cudda, a monk of Lindisfarne, thereby bringing the queen's Deiran connections and the king's Bernician companions into contact. In time, Eanflæd recommended Wilfrid to her cousin, Eorcenberht of Kent, who assisted Wilfrid in his pilgrimage to Rome. Thus, we see the layered nature of queenly mediation, as Eanflæd used her patronage and connections to facilitate travel and communication between Bernicia, Deira, Kent, and ultimately, Rome. Eanflæd was the daughter of Edwin of Deira, and it is suggestive of Eanflæd's status among the Deirans that the men of Wilfrid's father's household recommended Wilfrid to her specifically. As such, she was able to leverage vertical relationships—between Eanflæd, representing the Deiran royal house, and the local Deiran nobility—and horizontal relationships—between Eanflæd and her husband's Bernician circle and Eorcenberht's court in Kent—acting as an interface between these three interconnected networks.<sup>296</sup>

A second example of interpersonal connections mediating vertical relationships can be found in the story Bede tells of the Northumbrian thegn Imma. After being captured by the Mercians at the Battle of the Trent in 679, Imma was sold to Frisian slavers, who brought him to London. At length, the Frisians ransomed Imma to King Hlothere of Kent. Bede specifically states that Hlothere paid the ransom because Imma had once been in the service of Hlothere's maternal aunt, Æthelthryth of Ely, who had been married to Ecgfrith of Northumbria.<sup>297</sup> It is important in this regard that Hlothere would be compelled to accept Imma's ransom, as their connection seems tenuous, but it may speak to the prestige and sanctity of Æthelthryth of Ely throughout the wider region, and by extension, the honour done to her associates.

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<sup>296</sup> *VSW* 2–3.

<sup>297</sup> *HE* iv.22.

Seventh-century ecclesiastical figures demonstrated elite homogeneity through their striking ability to transcend political divisions in order to enjoy the patronage of the disparate royal dynasties with which they had dealings. For example, Eorcenwald, the Bishop of London from 675–93, was the founder of Chertsey in Surrey and Barking in Essex before his elevation to London in 675. While it is likely that Surrey was once part of the East Saxon kingdom, and that the region was certainly part of the diocese of London at this point, Eorcenwald was active during a period of major political transition in the Middlesex and Surrey region.<sup>298</sup> Accordingly, Eorcenwald fostered relationships with many kings and dynasties throughout his career. The original benefactor of Chertsey was in fact Ecgberht of Kent.<sup>299</sup> In the same charter which remembers Ecgberht as the builder of the minster, however, Chertsey was given a grant of land by Frithuwold, a *subregulus* of Surrey, which was confirmed by Wulfhere of Mercia.<sup>300</sup> Eorcenwald's foundation of Barking was also notable. For instance, it is one of only three minsters for which there are recorded grants from East Saxon kings.<sup>301</sup> Eorcenwald also received patronage from Cædwalla of Wessex for Barking,<sup>302</sup> and it has been suggested that Eorcenwald drafted Cædwalla's charter to Farnham.<sup>303</sup> He also witnessed several of the West Saxon king's charters.<sup>304</sup> Eorcenwald's association with Cædwalla did not stop him from enjoying the favour of Æthelred of Mercia, who was resurgent in the area in the 690s,<sup>305</sup> and *this* association did not prevent Ine of

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<sup>298</sup> *HE* ii.3, p. 142; K. Bailey, 'The Middle Saxons', in Bassett (ed.), *Origins*, pp. 108–22, at 111–12; Yorke, 'The Kingdom of the East Saxons', *ASE* 14 (1981), pp. 1–36, at p. 29.

<sup>299</sup> S. 1165.

<sup>300</sup> Blair, 'Frithuwold's Kingdom and the Origins of Surrey', in Bassett (ed.), *Origins*, pp. 97–107.

<sup>301</sup> Yorke, 'The East Saxons', p. 4.

<sup>302</sup> S. 1248; Hart (ed. and trans.), *The Early Charters of Eastern England* (Leicester, 1966), pp. 135–41, 44.

<sup>303</sup> S. 235; Kirby, *Earliest Kings*, p. 105.

<sup>304</sup> S. 230, 233, 235.

<sup>305</sup> S. 1246; J.R. Maddicott, 'London and Droitwich, c. 650–750: Trade, Industry and the Rise of Mercia', *ASE* 34 (2005), pp. 7–58, at p. 17.

Wessex from calling Eorcenwald ‘my bishop’ in his law code dated to 693/4.<sup>306</sup> Ine’s sister became a nun at Barking, creating a connection between the minster and Ine’s family.<sup>307</sup>

Eorcenwald’s successor Wealdhere (693–705x716) continued Eorcenwald’s pattern of land acquisition during his episcopacy, acquiring estates at Ealing, Twickenham and Fulham through the largesse of Æthelred of Mercia and Swæfred of Essex.<sup>308</sup> The charter pertaining to Fulham was approved by Sigeheard of Essex and Coenred of Mercia.<sup>309</sup> Finally, a charter granting an estate at Hemel Hempstead was made to Wealdhere by Offa of Essex (abdicated, 709) in his own right.<sup>310</sup> Wealdhere’s 704 letter to Archbishop Brihtwold is most instructive in that it demonstrates Wealdhere’s many connections with the kings of Essex, Wessex and Mercia, as well as the Archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>311</sup>

These interactions are reflected elsewhere among Eorcenwald and Wealdhere’s contemporaries. Malmesbury, for example, on the frontier of Wessex and Mercia in the late seventh century, received grants of land in the 680s from the West Saxon *subregulus* Baldred and from the kinsmen of Æthelred of Mercia.<sup>312</sup> As Abbot of Malmesbury, Aldhelm secured a grant of privileges from Pope Sergius I in which both Ine of Wessex and Æthelred of Mercia guaranteed that Malmesbury would not suffer in any wars fought between the Mercians and West Saxons.<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> Ine Prol.

<sup>307</sup> Yorke, ‘The East Saxons’, p. 34, n. 195; Lapidge and Herren, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, pp. 15, 52 and 59.

<sup>308</sup> S. 1783, 65; a recent discussion may be found in Burghart, ‘The Mercian Polity’, pp. 128–37.

<sup>309</sup> S. 1785.

<sup>310</sup> S. 1784; Yorke, ‘The East Saxons’, p. 28, n. 158.

<sup>311</sup> ‘Letter of Wealdhere, bishop of London to Brihtwold, archbishop of Canterbury’, *EHD* no. 164, pp. 792–3; P. Chaplais, ‘The letter from Bishop Wealdhere of London to Archbishop Brihtwold of Canterbury/ the Earliest Original “Letter Close” in the West’, in M. Parkes and A. Watson (eds.), *Medieval Scribes and Libraries: Essays Presented to N.R. Ker* (London, 1978), pp. 3–23.

<sup>312</sup> S. 1170, 1169, 71; H. Edwards, *The Charters of the Early West Saxon Kingdom*, BAR, Brit. Ser. 198 (1988), pp. 94–7

<sup>313</sup> Edwards, ‘Two Documents from Aldhelm’s Malmesbury’, *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 59, 139 (1986), pp. 1–19 includes a transcription in the appendix; Yorke, *Wessex*, p. 61.

Of course, these interpersonal relationships also had profound political implications. To cite but two brief examples, Eanflæd was crucial to the negotiations surrounding the Synod of Whitby in 664, providing a bridge between the Romanist and Irish factions, and she aided her husband in establishing himself in Deira by convincing him to found a minster at Gilling in penance for the murder of the Derian king Oswine in 651.<sup>314</sup> Interpersonal connections were clearly related to the expansion of a king's hegemony. Consider the rapprochement between Peada, who had been set up by his father Penda over the Middle Angles, and Oswiu.<sup>315</sup> Oswiu stood as godfather to Peada of the Middle Angles and Sigebert of the East Saxons.<sup>316</sup> In the case of Peada, the bond of spiritual kinship was further augmented by one of blood kinship: Bede claims that Oswiu would only give his daughter to Peada if he *and his people* [the Middle Angles] converted.<sup>317</sup> This territorialises Peada. Bede accords him a hierarchical relationship over a people, the Middle Angles, who are associated with a territory, Middle Anglia—the origins of the *provincia* notwithstanding—whom Bede explicitly locates in geographical terms by calling them the *Mediterranei Angli*.<sup>318</sup> These relationships are essential to Bede's narrative; they form the warp and weft of the political map of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and they create what we might call a royal 'cousinhood', as has been

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<sup>314</sup> *HE* iii.14, 24; Fraser, *From Caledonia to Pictland*, pp. 189–90, whose suggestion that if Eanflæd contracted an alliance with Alhfrith, it would prove dangerous for Oswiu, who would be obliged to remove Alhfrith, thereby making room for Eanflæd's children is too good to ignore.

<sup>315</sup> *HE* iii.21. For the Middle Angles: Dumville, 'Essex, Middle Anglia and the expansion of Mercia in the South-East Midlands', in Bassett (ed.), *Origins*, pp. 123–40; and Dumville, 'The Terminology of Overkingship in Anglo-Saxon England' in J. Hines (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxons from the migration period to the eighth century. An ethnographic perspective* (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 345–65, p. 358; cf. W. Davies, 'Middle Anglia and the Middle Angles', *Midland History* 2 (1973), pp. 18–20.

<sup>316</sup> *HE* iii.21–22.

<sup>317</sup> *HE* iii.21.

<sup>318</sup> For more on spiritual kinship: J.H. Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton, 1986); Lambert, *Law and Order*, pp. 35–9. It is no coincidence that godparenthood was revived as an essential part of Anglo-Saxon diplomatic practice in the ninth and tenth centuries: ASC 878, 890, D 926. For more on this see: Foot, *Æthelstan: First King of England* (New Haven, CT, 2011), pp. 52–6; Nelson, 'Carolingian Violence and the Ritualization of Ninth-Century Warfare', in G. Halsall (ed.), *Violence and Society in the Early Medieval West* (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 90–107, at pp. 91–2; T. Charles-Edwards, 'Alliances, Godfathers, Treaties and Boundaries', in M. Blackburn and D. Dumville (eds.), *Kings, Currency and Alliances: History and Coinage of Southern England in the Ninth Century* (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 47–62.

described for royal women of the seventh century.<sup>319</sup> It is not hard to connect these instances of conversion, spiritual kinship and marriage ties to the political history of the seventh century, and suggest that these strategies aided the extension of Oswiu's political hegemony across eastern England.

#### 4. *Inter-Regional landholding*

It is well-known that the great magnates of the tenth century held lands widely and diffusely.<sup>320</sup> It has sometimes been thought that this was specifically enabled by the expansion of the West Saxon dynasty in the tenth century, and that the imposition of a sort of West Saxon 'settler aristocracy' in Mercia was a deliberate policy of the dynasty to control the old Mercian kingdom. This has been challenged recently, but the impetus for inter-regional landholding is still ascribed to the tenth century.<sup>321</sup> While it may be that such landholding would have been easier as the Cerdicing realm consolidated, I will suggest that such practice did not *need* a 'unitary' English kingdom; aspects of this tendency were already in place in the seventh century and continued through the ninth century.

To begin with some obvious examples, powerful seventh-century ecclesiastics such as Wilfrid were able to acquire vast amounts of land from kings and lords they befriended (or overawed). A key priority for the nascent church was the acquisition of land, which in the seventh century, as far as can be seen, was usually granted by a royal figure.<sup>322</sup> There is some ambiguity here, as Wilfrid was hosted by a 'prefect' named Berhtwald, who granted Wilfrid land for the foundation of a small monastery.<sup>323</sup> Usually though, endowments were granted by royal figures and endowments were

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<sup>319</sup> Campbell, 'Some Twelfth-Century Views of the Anglo-Saxon Past', in his *Essays*, pp. 209–28, at p. 218.

<sup>320</sup> For this see Fleming, *Kings and Lords*, pp. 3–20.

<sup>321</sup> e.g. Molyneux, *Formation*, pp. 43–4, with references.

<sup>322</sup> See especially Blair, *Church in Society*, pp. 84–100 for the 'royal and sub-royal context of monastic foundations'.

<sup>323</sup> VSW 40.

facilitated by royal interpersonal connections. Indeed, throughout Wilfrid's career he accumulated a vast endowment of land: forty hides from Alhfrith for Ripon; Wulfhere of Mercia made grants to Wilfrid: 'for the good of his soul [he], granted our bishop many pieces of land in diverse locations, in which he immediately founded monasteries for the servants of God.'<sup>324</sup> In Sussex, king Æthelwealh granted him eighty-seven hides with which to found Selsey.<sup>325</sup> Cædwalla rewarded Wilfrid with 300 hides on the Isle of Wight, according to Bede, and *innumeris terrarum partibus* ('innumerable parcels of land'), according to Stephen.<sup>326</sup>

The evidence for similar practices in lay society is speculative, but some evidence will be put forward to argue the point. First, there are certain place-names which are suggestive. For instance, if it accepted that *-inga* place-names represent the territorial representation of groups of peoples, then we might consider places such as Sonning (on the Thames near Reading), Sunningwell, and Sunbury.<sup>327</sup> The southern border of the *regio* of the *Sunningas* was mentioned in the charter of Frithuwold of Surrey for the foundation of Chertsey as lying somewhat northwest along the Thames of the 'ancient ditch' (*antiqua fossa*) known as the *Fullingadic*.<sup>328</sup> The territorial framework for eastern Berkshire and western Surrey is often thought to be rather tidy. Progressing clockwise from the north, one goes from the *regio* of the *Readingas*, to the *regio* of the *Sunningas* (Sunning), to that of the *Woccingas* (Woking), thence to the territory of the *Godhelmingas*.<sup>329</sup> It may be that the southern 'border' of the *Sunningas* is represented by the modern place-names (unattested in the

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<sup>324</sup> VSW 14.

<sup>325</sup> VSW 41.

<sup>326</sup> HE iv.16; VSW 42.

<sup>327</sup> Sunningwell: S. 166, an alleged 811 grant of Coenwulf to Abingdon, and S. 183, an alleged 821 grant of Coenwulf to Abingdon; Kelly, *Charters of Abingdon* (Oxford, 2000), nos. 8 and 9: Both spurious in current form but may be based on genuine ninth-century privileges. Briefly discussed in Eagles, 'Small shires' and *regiones*', p. 175, citing the boundaries of the *regio* as 'The Seven Hundreds of Cookham and Bray', and their Domesday equivalents of Charlton, Bray, Beynhurst and Ripplesmere. H. Cam, 'Early Groups of Hundreds', in *Liberties and Communities in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1944), pp. 91–106, at p. 98.

<sup>328</sup> S. 1165.

<sup>329</sup> Blair, *Surrey*, pp. 22–3, fig. 8.

early medieval period) of Sunninghill and Sunningdale, which lay on the border of the hundreds of Godley (which represented Frithuwold's Chertsey grant), and Ripplesmere, which was associated with Sonning.

However, about twenty miles east of Sonning on the north-bank of the Thames lies Sunbury, first referenced in a charter of 962 as *Sunnanbyrig*, potentially suggesting a detached territory named for the group some miles down the Thames in Middlesex (for more on Sunbury, see also below, pp. 117–19).<sup>330</sup> Perhaps even more notable is Sunningwell ('the stream of the *Sunningas*'), near Abingdon, on the north-side of the chalk formation of the Chilterns-Berkshire Downs, twenty-five miles upriver from Sonning. Is it plausible that the *regio* of the *Sunningas* extended north across the chalk downs to the area around Abingdon and east across the Thames to Sunbury, encompassing an area of almost 300 square miles? While not impossible, perhaps it is unlikely given how sparsely attested the group is in documentary sources. It is more likely that Sunningwell and Sunbury represent land that was held by, perhaps, other branches of the kin-group, or even detached riverine estates in the possession of a lord of the *Sunningas*. Indeed, it may be better to think of the *regio* of the *Sunningas* as a group of diffuse holdings strung-out along the Thames, rather than a contiguous bloc.

In Sussex, a boundary clause for a ninth-century charter pertaining to South Heighton, on the Sussex coast and near the estuary of the Sussex Ouse, refers to *Eccinga hlæwe* ('the barrow of the *Eccingas*').<sup>331</sup> Related place-names include Etchingham, twenty-two miles northeast in the High Weald, and Itchingfield, twenty-five miles northwest in Horsham. Rather than imagining an otherwise unattested folk group that ruled over some 450 square miles, perhaps we are better off

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<sup>330</sup> S. 702.

<sup>331</sup> S. 869.

imagining these as individual parcels of land, held diffusely by either the kin-group itself or their lords, perhaps for the purpose of resource exploitation—the land in the High Weald may have been useful as upland pasture, for example.<sup>332</sup> Wychnor (Staffs.), where Rykniel Street crosses the Trent between Lichfield and Burton-upon-Trent, means ‘the *ofer* (ridge or shelf) of the Hwicce’, but Wychnor is far to the northeast of the lands of the Hwicce in Worcestershire and Gloucestershire.<sup>333</sup> Perhaps this reflects a holding of the Hwiccan *subregulus* or ealdorman outside the core territory of the Hwicce, granted to them by a Mercian king. As speculative as this is, it is an attractive proposition because it supports a reassessment of the nature of the Mercian Supremacy. The Mercian period has often been seen as one of tyranny and violence on the part of the Mercian kings as they suppressed their weaker neighbours.<sup>334</sup> However, the potential for sub-royal or aristocratic families who supported the Mercian kings to be rewarded with land and wealth should not be underestimated.<sup>335</sup> This is particularly true if, as has been alleged, the dynasties of dependent subkingdoms such as those of the Hwicce or the *Magonsæte* only achieved local dominance thanks to Mercian support in the first place.<sup>336</sup> In this case, it would be easy to imagine that these families could come to possess or be granted land outside of their initial patrimonies. Indeed, this may have been a useful strategy of integration.

In the seventh century, Frithuwold of Surrey may have been just such a one. As referenced above, both in regard to the border with the *provincia* of the *Sunningas* and to his relationship with

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<sup>332</sup> The place-names in the latter example were suggested by R. Briggs, whose paper ‘Where there’s a well, there’s a way: Old English -ingas group-names, social identities, and negotiating control of land and water in the early Anglo-Saxon period’ was delivered at the Leeds IMC on July 3, 2017 and can be accessed here:

<[https://www.academia.edu/33857964/Where theres a well theres a way Old English -ingas group-names social identities and negotiating control of land and water in the early Anglo-Saxon period](https://www.academia.edu/33857964/Where_theres_a_well_theres_a_way_Old_English_-_ingas_group-names_social_identities_and_negotiating_control_of_land_and_water_in_the_early_Anglo-Saxon_period)> [accessed 19/06/2019, 22:00].

<sup>333</sup> Blair, *Building*, pp. 159, 161 fig. 51.

<sup>334</sup> e.g. Keynes, ‘The Kingdom of the Mercians’, pp. 1–26.

<sup>335</sup> As seems to have been the case with the East Saxon kings in a rather unambiguous way: Yorke, ‘East Saxons’, as well as the South Saxons in the late seventh century.

<sup>336</sup> Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, p. 33.

Eorcenwald of London and Wulfhere of Mercia, Frithuwold was clearly an influential semi-royal figure in Surrey in the late seventh century. One of the witnesses to Frithuwold's charter for the foundation of Chertsey, a certain Frithuric (who witnesses just below Frithuwold and Eorcenwald), may be the same *Friduricus princeps* who made a grant between 675x691 for the foundation of a minster at Breedon-on-the-Hill, in Leicestershire. It may be that Frithuric was a kinsman of Frithuwold.<sup>337</sup> A grant of Frithuric's in the territory of the *Hrepingas* (possibly Rippingdale, Lincs.) to Abbot Hædda of *Medeshamstede*, considered by Kelly to have some genuine basis, suggests a connection between Hædda and Frithuric.<sup>338</sup> Meanwhile, a papal privilege of 708 x 715 issued by Pope Constantine associates Hædda with the Surrey minsters of Bermondsey and Woking, possibly within the remit of Frithuric's putative kinsman Frithuwold.<sup>339</sup> If there is a genuine basis to these documents (even if they are not necessarily associated with *Medeshamstede*), and if Frithuric and Frithuwold were indeed kinsmen, then it suggests a kindred with landed interests throughout the midlands and into Surrey. Furthermore, Blair has also drawn attention to the fragmentary twelfth-century *Life* of St Osgyth of Aylesbury, which alleges that Osgyth was the daughter of a 'King Fredeswald', which is to say 'Frithuwold', and that she was born at her father's house in Quarrendon (Bucks.), in the Vale of Aylesbury, and with family connections in Oxfordshire. Slender though the evidence might be, Blair suggests the possibility

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<sup>337</sup> S 1165 is the Chertsey charter; S 1803 is the Breedon grant; and see: *Chron.HC*, p. 60. Stenton, 'Medeshamstede and its colonies', repr. in D.M. Stenton (ed.), *Preparatory to Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 179–92, postulated a 'monastic federation' including Breedon, Hoo, Bermondsey and Woking with Peterborough at the centre. This has been challenged in Kelly, *Charters of Peterborough Abbey* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 67–78, arguing that this occurred either after the re-founding in the tenth century or during the twelfth-century, when pre-Conquest material was used along with the *Chronicle* of Hugh Candidus and the 'E' manuscript of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* to promote Peterborough's primacy in the East Midlands and its position as one of England's great monastic houses. It may be that the various claims and traditions and its so-called 'monastic federation' only came to the minster as a result of disruptions during the Danelaw (p. 78).

<sup>338</sup> S. 1805; Kelly, *Peterborough* no. 4.

<sup>339</sup> *Cartularium Saxonicum*, ed. W. de G. Birch, vol. 1 (London, 1885–93), no. 133, p. 196; and see Kelly, *Peterborough*, appendix 2.

of a realm for Frithuwold and his family that encompassed Surrey, much of the Thames Valley, and the Vale of Aylesbury, with extended family connections throughout the midlands.<sup>340</sup>

While this is possible, perhaps it is more likely that the lands held by Frithuwold and putative members of his family were fragmented, and assembled piece-meal through various means under the aegis of a well-disposed overlord such as Wulfhere. Indeed, why need they be contiguous? In the seventh-century Chertsey charter, Frithuwold includes in his grant ‘a separate part of ten hides by the port of London (*portum Londoniae*), where ships come to land, on the same river [the Thames] on the southern side by the public way (*meridiana parte iuxta viam publicam*).’ By maintaining land in London, presumably for access to the port, Frithuwold was acting in exactly the same way as bishops, abbots and abbesses who maintained property and ships in London.<sup>341</sup> This makes sense; high ranking ecclesiastical figures and secular elites were from the same milieu, after all, so why should they behave differently in such matters? This reference to the port of London and the public road will be supported by the arguments made below in chapter seven regarding routes of communication and economic networks, demonstrating how important routeways were to the ordering of society—perhaps even more so in a circumstance of fragmented landholding, in which one can imagine that royal power safeguarding the roads would have been of even greater importance.<sup>342</sup>

This provides an early glimmer of a system that seems to have been firmly in place in later centuries.<sup>343</sup> For example, a certain Ceolmund maintained at some point before 857 a *haga* (enclosure or compound) near the west gate of London known as *Ceolmundingchaga*.<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> Blair, ‘Frithuwold’, pp. 105–7.

<sup>341</sup> S. 208, a charter of Burgred for London. Blair, *Building*, p. 270 n. 167 with references.

<sup>342</sup> See below chapter seven, esp. pp. 278–98.

<sup>343</sup> The following is drawn from Blair, *Building*, pp. 269–74.

<sup>344</sup> S. 208. The *haga* was granted to Bishop Ealhun of Worcester by Burgred of Mercia in 857.

Ceolmund, here called a *praefectus*, also had a *haga* in Rochester, in Kent, which he acquired from Æthelwulf of Wessex, interestingly styled *rex australium populorum*.<sup>345</sup> This suggests that if these parcels were held concurrently between 842 and 857, Ceolmund had land both in Mercian London and Kentish Rochester, which was by this point under West Saxon suzerainty; and as Blair notes, this is oriented around the axis of the Roman road from London to Canterbury, encompassing the all-important Rochester Bridge.<sup>346</sup>

Perhaps there is some comparison to be made between *Ceolmundingchaga* and *Aldberhtingun* in Canterbury, which is referenced in an 823 charter of Ceolwulf of Mercia.<sup>347</sup> *Aldberhtingun* may be named for ‘Ealdberht’, a prominent *minister* in Kent between c. 786 and 810.<sup>348</sup> Ealdberht was not known to have any holdings outside Kent, though he did attend councils at Chelsea and *Clofesho*.<sup>349</sup> Moreover, he and his sister Selethryth, the abbess of Lyminge, were known to be closely associated with, and received grants of land from Cuthred of Kent, as well as both Offa and Coenwulf of Mercia.<sup>350</sup> He and his sister seem to have been important in negotiating the imposition of Mercian authority in Kent during the transition between the period of Mercian overlordship during the reign of Cuthred, and the assumption of Coenwulf’s direct rule in Kent after Cuthred’s death.<sup>351</sup> Ealdberht and his sister had other interests in Canterbury. In 804, the Lyminge nuns were granted land within the city walls as refuge due to deprivations from viking attacks.<sup>352</sup> Furthermore, a forged charter ascribed to Offa for the year 786 granted a *vicus* in

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<sup>345</sup> S. 291; on the style: Keynes, ‘Alfred and the Mercians’, in Blackburn and Dumville (eds.), *Kings, Currency and Alliances*, pp. 1–45, at pp. 4–5 n. 16.

<sup>346</sup> Blair, *Building*, pp. 269–76.

<sup>347</sup> S 187; Blair, *Building*, p. 272 fig. 104.

<sup>348</sup> PASE Ealdberht 15.

<sup>349</sup> S. 123, 1434.

<sup>350</sup> S. 160, 39 are the grants from Cuthred.

<sup>351</sup> Keynes, ‘The Control of Kent in the Ninth Century’, *EME* 2, 2 (1993) pp. 111–31; Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, p. 43.

<sup>352</sup> S. 160.

Canterbury called *Curringtun* to Ealdberht and Selethryth.<sup>353</sup> It may be of interest here that *Curringtun* lay only about a quarter-mile from *Aldberhtingtun*. If the supposition that *Aldberhtingtun* was named for the family of Ealdberht is correct, perhaps the *Curringtun* charter demonstrates an attempt to further build up property in Canterbury itself and secure the area in the north and east of the city.

These examples begin to demonstrate the way in which aristocratic landholding may have been assembled piecemeal, rather than being necessarily oriented around contiguous territorial units. In proto-urban places such as London and Canterbury, this may have been driven by commercial interests, as aristocrats—like ecclesiastics and kings—sought access to expanding markets.

The examples of Ceolmund and Ealdberht also demonstrate an inherent tension of such practices in so far as the interests of aristocratic families relate to the interest of kings and the territorial extent of royal authority. This is something that I will return to in chapter six regarding Æthelwulf of Berkshire and Eanwulf of Somerset in the late ninth century, but for now one further example will demonstrate the continuity of this apparent tension into the tenth century. One of the most remarkable disputes of the tenth century regards the estate of Sunbury, about a mile north of the Thames in Middlesex. The dispute is recorded in a vernacular document composed between 968 x 988 and describes how Archbishop Dunstan came to acquire the estate.<sup>354</sup> The document is full of incident, and interesting for many reasons, but I will focus here on one particular aspect. According to the brief, Æthelstan of Sunbury forfeited his estate late in the reign of Eadred (d. 955) due to his implication in the kidnapping of a woman.<sup>355</sup> After Eadred's death, Eadwig granted the land to a certain Beornric. When Edgar came into power in Mercia in 957, Æthelstan tried his

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<sup>353</sup> S. 125, clearly based on S. 123.

<sup>354</sup> S. 1447.

<sup>355</sup> PASE Æthelstan 42.

case with the new king. Edgar and his court must have seen this as an opportunity to flex their muscles, because not only did Edgar rule against Æthelstan of Sunbury, he also took the opportunity to grant the land to Ealdorman Æthelstan (that is Æthelstan Rota), presumably removing Beornric, Eadwig's appointee in the process. The document is particular about Edgar's power in Mercia and the role of the Mercian *witan*, claiming that 'the Mercians chose Edgar as their king and gave him power over all royal rights (*Myrce gecuran Eadgar to cyngre 7 him anweald gesealdan ealra cyneriht*),' and that it was specifically the *witan* of the Mercians that ruled against Æthelstan in his appeal: *Ða æt demdon him Myrcna witan land buton he his wer agulde þam cyngre*.<sup>356</sup> Such desire to show strength and autonomy, and the willingness to overturn the decision of Eadwig may have been given further impetus due to the proximity of Sunbury to the Thames (a mile north), highlighting the tensions inherent to competing spheres of royal authority, and the way in which royal politics and the aristocratic politics of land were thoroughly enmeshed. This is what partition means; it opens new channels of patronage and redress that can be exploited by both landholders on the ground and competing royal courts. As a document related to Archbishop Dunstan, however, we should also see this as a text that favours Edgar at the expense of his brother Eadwig: As Scott Thompson Smith notes, Eadwig simply grants the land to Beornric, but Edgar decisively and wisely rules on the matter with the counsel of his advisors.<sup>357</sup> Ultimately, the document suggests the tension at the heart of this chapter. Interpersonal relationships that underpinned the cultural homogeneity of aristocratic society were important because they opened channels for patronage and redress. The Sunbury example suggests the tension that stemmed from

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<sup>356</sup> 'Then the Mercian *witan* ruled against him in respect to his land, unless he repaid his *wer* to the king.'

<sup>357</sup> S. Thompson Smith, *Land and Book: Literature and Land Tenure in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto, 2012), p. 94. Perhaps one might also read into this a message about fraternal strife. Earlier in the document, Æthelstan's brother Edward offers to take up his case for him if Æthelstan were to agree to cede Sunbury to Edward. Æthelstan replies to his brother that he would rather see the land burn than to concede.

competing sources of authority which could provide such things. In the strained political atmosphere of 957–958, it is no wonder that the Mercian context of the document, and the role of the Mercian *witan* in the decision making is made so explicit, and it is a testimony to a reconfigured sort of regional particularism that so clearly marks Anglo-Saxon history.

### 5. Conclusion

This chapter has laid out a juxtaposition between the regional particularism that is evident in Anglo-Saxon society from *c.* 600 on, and the homogeneity and wide-ranging interpersonal connections of elite society. I have argued that this can be traced faintly throughout the Anglo-Saxon period and suggest that there was no break in this aspect of society, despite considerable political change and upheaval between *c.* 600 and 1000. Most importantly, I do not believe that the winnowing of kingdoms that culminated in the eventual formation of the tenth-century kingdom led to the end of regionality in Anglo-Saxon society, even as some entities were rendered defunct and others were reconfigured, nor did a culturally homogenous and interconnected elite require a unitary English kingdom to sustain inter-regional interests. This is not a juxtaposition that needs ‘resolving’: the intent of this chapter was to draw attention to what should be seen as a central tension in Anglo-Saxon society.

## Chapter III

### The Spectrum of Conflict and the Anglo-Saxon Landscape

#### 1. *Introduction*

The traditional narrative of Anglo-Saxon history is of the inexorable expansion of royal power and the creation of an apparatus for the Anglo-Saxon state, which became increasingly intensive throughout the tenth century. In the previous chapter, I argued that the formation of the English kingdom did not homogenise the regional character of Anglo-Saxon society, and that royal power was asserted by weaving its way into the regional fabric of society. Such regionality can be juxtaposed against a great deal of cultural homogeneity among Anglo-Saxon elites, and no doubt this aided the assertion of royal authority throughout the expanding dominion of the Cerdicing dynasty.

An important way this was managed was by forging a solidarity between the royal dynasty and the leading subjects of the realm. This was achieved in part by emphasising the primacy of the king in warfare and his role as the leader and protector of both people and land. This can be seen in tenth-century poems such as the *Battle of Brunanburh* and the *Capture of the Five Boroughs*, which were embedded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, or the late tenth- or early eleventh-century poem known as *The Battle of Maldon*. All of these poems emphasise royal leadership, the central place of the royal dynasty, and the unity of disparate regions of the realm under the Cerdicing dynasty. This is important because the poems frame the kingdom in a way that is not inherently ‘ethnic’, emphasising instead the relationship with the king.

Such literary texts provided an effective and apparently timeless topos that emphasised the interpersonal connections between the king and his men. This ‘heroic’ mode may not have

reflected the realities of Anglo-Saxon warfare and military organisation, or even of Anglo-Saxon kingship. The obituary of Edward the Confessor, for example, seems distinctly out-of-character: ‘That ruler of heroes lavish of riches... He governed well the Welshmen, Æthelred’s son, ruled Britons and Scots, Angles and Saxons, his mighty champions. All that the cold sea waves encompass / brave young warriors faithfully obeyed King Edward the noble... At length he came forth in splendid array, a virtuous king, pure and mild, Edward the noble guarding his homeland, land and people.’<sup>358</sup> It is important, however, because it suggests the continued usefulness of the motif as a way of describing kingship in a way that was ethnically heterogenous and based upon the king’s interpersonal relationships.

That being said, I would not necessarily go so far as to call such texts ‘archaizing’ because it does seem that such affinities were actively fostered by late Anglo-Saxon kings. Even as the military capacity of Anglo-Saxon polities expanded, such interpersonal relationships still supported the horizontal and vertical connections between the king and his subordinates. Take for instance the 1014 will of Æthelstan *ætheling*, which demonstrates the way military gear fostered interpersonal relationships between the *ætheling* and some of the great men of the kingdom, including his brothers, ealdormen and other major magnates, and the Bishop of Winchester, as well as with lesser subordinates of his household, including his steward, sword sharpener, mass priest, and other retainers.<sup>359</sup> Another good example is the note made in the Mercian Register that two thegns dear

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<sup>358</sup> ASC CD 1065: *weol[an] brytnode... / hæleða wealdend, / weold wel gepungen Walum 7 Scottum / 7 Bryttum eac, byre Æðelredes / Englum 7 Sexum oretmæcgcum [mighty champions], / swa ymbclyppað ceald brymmas, / þæt eall Eadwarde, æðelum kinge, / hyrdon holdlice hagestealde menn... / Syððan forð becom freolice in geatwum / kyninge kystum god. Clæne 7 milde, / Eadward se æðela eðel bewerode, / land 7 leode...*

<sup>359</sup> *Wills*, no. 20, pp. 56–63; S. 1503. For this, Brooks, ‘Arms, Status and Warfare in Late-Saxon England’, in his *Communities and Warfare, 700–1400* (London, 2000), pp. 138–61; For a literary perspective: J. Bazelmans, *By Weapons Made Worthy: Lords, Retainers and their Relationship in Beowulf* (Amsterdam, 1999); for swords specifically, see now S. Brunning, *The Sword in Early Medieval Northern Europe: Experience, Identity, Representation* (Woodbridge, 2019).

to Æthelflæd were killed fighting for her before the gates of Derby in 917.<sup>360</sup> It is not right to think of such a mode of describing kingship as being at odds with the development of military obligations because these literary texts were not about practice so much as they were about perception. The king and his ealdormen and thegns—at any time—wished to be worthy of poetry and to be compared favourably to their mighty ancestors and the heroes of legend.

Even so, these literary texts should be seen in context with changes that were taking place in regard to military obligations and infrastructure. The most important change in regard to the landscape and the practice of warfare was the advent of fortifications in the eighth century. In the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and other sources for the seventh century, there is very little evidence for siege warfare. References occur occasionally, such as when Osric unsuccessfully besieged Cædwallon of Gwynedd ‘in a fortified town’ (*oppido municipio*) in 633x634. This may refer to a hillfort in the British tradition, rather than York, as is sometimes suggested.<sup>361</sup> In his account of Penda’s wars against the Northumbrians, Bede wrote that Penda could not capture Bamburgh by assault or siege (*neque armis neque obsidione capere poterat*), so he attempted to burn the *urbs regia* to the ground by setting alight salvaged timber piled before the walls.<sup>362</sup> In the *Vita Wilfrithi*, the *princeps* Berhtfrith, fighting on behalf of the child Osred, describes being besieged in Bamburgh by Eadwulf in 704x705 following the death of Aldfrith.<sup>363</sup>

However, later in the eighth century, fortress building seems to have become important. There is archaeological evidence for fortifications at sites such as Hereford, Tamworth, Worcester, and Winchcombe, and famously Mercian charters beginning in the reign of Æthelbald demand military

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<sup>360</sup> ASC MR 917.

<sup>361</sup> HE iii.1; Campbell, ‘Bede’s Words for Places’ in his *Essays*, pp. 99–120, at pp. 103–4.

<sup>362</sup> HE iii.16.

<sup>363</sup> VSW 60.

service, bridge-building, and the maintenance of fortresses for land held by charter, the so-called *trinodas necessitas* or ‘common burdens’.<sup>364</sup> The impetus for the building of fortifications is often ascribed to intensifying viking attacks. This was a problem that caught the attention of Offa: in a charter of 792, it was stipulated that military service in Kent was not to be remitted for service against the vikings (*contra paganos marinos*), nor for the building of bridges and the maintenance of fortresses.<sup>365</sup>

Viking attacks were undoubtedly a looming threat in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, but there are other relevant factors. It is possible that the need for fortresses became more pronounced in the Mercian period because of the breadth of their dominions, which may have required a military presence in places where the king was absent. Mobile viking raids could have exacerbated the need to fortify areas not normally defended, or where the king could not campaign personally (or did not deem it to be worth his effort). A consequence of this may have been an increase in the numbers of armies led by the king’s subordinates. There are relatively few examples of ealdormen leading armies in the seventh century, but this becomes increasingly noticeable in the ninth century (not least, however, because throughout much of the ninth century there are more instances of warfare involved the defence of provinces against viking attacks, rather than offensive campaigns led by the king).<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> For Mercian fortifications: Blair, *Building*, pp. 190–2, 201–19, 232–5; Bassett, ‘Divide and Rule? The Military Infrastructure of Eighth- and Ninth-Century Mercia’, *EME* 15 (2007), pp. 53–85; Bassett, ‘The Middle and Late Anglo-Saxon Defences of Western Mercian Towns’, *ASSAH* 15 (2008), pp. 180–239; Baker and Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage*, pp. 49–52, 73–9, 85–6, are sceptical, though they admit that the Burghal Hidage ‘is unlikely to represent the outcome of a single “big idea” (p. 417)’. G. Williams, ‘Military and Non-Military Functions of the Anglo-Saxon *Burh*, c. 878–978’, in J. Baker, S. Brookes and A. Reynolds (eds.), *Landscapes of Defence in Early Medieval Europe* (Turnhout, 2013), pp. 129–63, is also circumspect (p. 147). For the common burdens: N. Brooks, ‘The Development of Military Obligations in Eighth- and Ninth-Century England’, in P. Clemoes and K. Hughes (eds.), *England Before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock* (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 69–84.

<sup>365</sup> S. 134.

<sup>366</sup> Ealdormen defending against viking attacks, either on their own or with the support of neighbouring ealdormen include ASC 840, 841, 845, 851, etc.

A second potential reason for the proliferation of fortress building is the intensification of rural production, the growth of agricultural surpluses, and the large-scale exploitation and processing of resources from the late seventh century onward.<sup>367</sup> In the eighth and ninth centuries, for example, iron smelted at St Briavels in the Forest of Dean may have been transported up the Wye to be processed at the fortified site of Hereford.<sup>368</sup> To speculate, such surpluses may have also allowed the provisioning and maintenance of larger armies that could stay in the field longer. At the same time, a more productive landscape may have also required more substantial defensive infrastructure.

Related to this is the development in military organisation from one based on the following of the king and his aristocratic supporters, who served out of personal obligation, to one based in landholding, in which the royal army in the later Anglo-Saxon period should be seen as a host of the aristocratic landholders and their retainers.<sup>369</sup> Most recent commentators see this as a process that began with the imposition of the common burdens, but in which the key inflection point was the reign of Alfred. Particular importance is attached to the entry for the *Chronicle* 893, which famously—but rather obliquely—claims that Alfred ‘divided his army (*his fierd*) into two, so that always half of its men were at home, half on service, but for the men who guarded the fortresses (*healfe æt ham, healfe ute, butan þæm mannum þe þa burg healden scolden*).’<sup>370</sup> Abels sees this as the transition from a ‘sporadic levy’ to a ‘standing force’. This ensured that some of the king’s

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<sup>367</sup> M. McKerracher, ‘Agricultural Development in Mid Saxon England’ (Unpublished D.Phil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2014).

<sup>368</sup> J. Pine, J.R.L. Allen, and D. Challinor, ‘Saxon Iron Smelting at Clearwell Quarry, St Briavels, Lydney, Gloucestershire’, *Archaeology in the Severn Estuary* (2009), pp. 9–40.

<sup>369</sup> R. Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1988); in some ways building upon and significantly revising C.W. Hollister, *Anglo-Saxon Military Institutions on the Eve of the Norman Conquest* (Oxford, 1962), and E. John, *Orbis Britanniae* (Leicester, 1966), pp. 128–53, who first mounted an attack on the notion of the Anglo-Saxon ‘farmer-soldier’ epitomised in the work of Stenton, *English Feudalism* (Oxford, 1954), pp. 117–19. The best detailed historiographical discussion is Lavelle, *Alfred’s Wars: Sources and Interpretations of Anglo-Saxon Warfare in the Viking Age* (Woodbridge, 2010), esp. chapter three.

<sup>370</sup> ASC 893.

thegns would be on-hand both for peacekeeping and to buttress both the *burh* garrisons and whatever collection of men could be gathered in case of sudden attack. This reflects a continuation of developments from the eighth century: the increasing capacity to delegate forces to be where the king was *not* at any given time and to support ealdormen and their retainers who were responsible for the defence of their provinces.

Much weight is also given to the Burghal Hidage, an early tenth-century document which suggests a ‘system’ of land assessments for the maintenance of fortresses in Wessex and southern Mercia.<sup>371</sup> The text stipulates an assessment of one man per hide, and while this seems onerous, it probably refers to both equipped warriors and those who would provide maintenance, provisioning, carrying, and other essential roles, in addition to garrisoning the fortresses themselves at need. This argument is based on the military assessment of the Berkshire Domesday, which stipulates that ‘from five hides only one *miles* went out [with the army]’, and that he was supplied for two months from each hide.<sup>372</sup> As noted above, five hides was considered to be one essential aspect of achieving the status of a thegn in the eleventh-century compilations on status. As Abels argues, while the five hide assessment was certainly important, it was not a universal system.<sup>373</sup> Not only does Domesday have varying measures of land assessment, but other texts that assess military obligations also vary: *II Æthelstan* (c. 926 x 930) demands ‘two well-horsed men for every plough (*syhl*)’, while an entry of the *Chronicle* for 1008 calls for a helmet and coat of mail for every eight hides.<sup>374</sup> Despite these variations, the ability to connect the assessments of the Burghal Hidage to

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<sup>371</sup> D. Hill and A. Rumble (eds.), *The Defence of Wessex: The Burghal Hidage and Anglo-Saxon Fortifications* (Manchester, 1996); Baker and Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage*; Lavelle, *Alfred’s Wars*, chapter six.

<sup>372</sup> DB Berks. i.56b.

<sup>373</sup> Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation*, pp. 108–15.

<sup>374</sup> II As.16; the assessment of a *syhl* is not clear. It could be related to a Kentish *sulung* or to Danelaw assessments (the equivalent of two or one hides respectively). This seems like an onerous burden for ‘well-horsed’ (*gehorsed*) men, unless, as Lavelle, *Alfred’s Wars: Sources and Interpretations of Anglo-Saxon Warfare in the Viking Age* (Woodbridge, 2010), p. 98 suggests, these horsemen were not the thegns themselves, but mounted followers who supported the thegns; ASC C 1008.

the early eleventh-century compilations on status and the Berkshire Domesday has led Lavelle to argue for the ‘integrity of the system’ from the reign of Alfred through Domesday.<sup>375</sup>

The development of military obligations, however, was not at odds with personal obligations between man and lord or the king and his chief subjects. The essential premise of Abels’ thesis is that holders of bookland fought for the king, while their retainers fought for them.<sup>376</sup> Even in the eleventh century, personal obligations, reinforced by oaths, existed alongside tenurial obligations for military service; these were not in opposition to each other. Indeed, Abels describes lordship and land tenure as ‘the twin pillars on which the military organization of late Anglo-Saxon England rested. In a very real sense, the royal host never ceased being the king’s following arrayed for war.’<sup>377</sup> Therefore, while Abels demonstrates the way military obligations changed, he also emphasises a deep underlying continuity in the relationship between the king and his leading men.

A central argument of this chapter will be the correlation between military activity and the vocabulary of war, and assembly activity and the vocabulary of law. The importance given to the maintenance of the king’s *frið*, or peace, will be shown to be particularly significant. Even the earliest Anglo-Saxon legal texts are concerned with the maintenance of the king’s peace, but in the tenth century in particular there is more evidence that kings sought to assert control over legal proceedings.<sup>378</sup> As Molyneaux has written, during the reigns of Edward the Elder and Æthelstan,

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<sup>375</sup> Lavelle, *Alfred’s Wars*, p. 163.

<sup>376</sup> On the whole this is compelling, though it probably underestimates the importance of military service owed from *folcland*.

<sup>377</sup> Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation*, p. 186.

<sup>378</sup> For instance, in Abt. 2, the king is already asserting his right to call assemblies and his protection over the assembly. Crucially, in Abt. 6, the king is due a payment of fifty shillings, the value of his *mund* (as articulated in Abt. 8), for the killing of any free man as ‘lord ring’ (*drihtenbeag*), suggesting some assertion of lordship over all free men (note however that this is *not* a punitive fine (*wite*). The king, however, did reserve the right to exact fines in the case of theft: in Abt. 9 the king demands a fine of three-fold restitution should one free man steal from another. Subsequent law codes such as HIE.9 and Wi.26–26.1 expand the king’s remit, but it is clear that tenth-century kings were particularly ambitious in this regard: Lambert, *Law and Order*, pp. 83–8, 174–7.

*burhs* provided the infrastructural network for the implementation of royal law, which we have seen as important administrative *loci* for military assessment and defence.<sup>379</sup> However, in the mid-tenth century, the implementation of hundreds created more uniform local assembly districts. Lambert argues that the advent of the hundredal system allowed kings to bypass the local reeves or ‘privileged lords’ and issue commands to the hundreds on a uniform basis.<sup>380</sup> By the end of the tenth century, sheriffs provided a network of royal agents in the shires who were less reliant upon local networks for the enforcement of royal commands, as Lambert argues.<sup>381</sup> As shall be discussed below, the hundredal system most likely also had a military function, and sheriffs (perhaps under the title of ‘high reeves’ initially) were also to be found leading soldiers.<sup>382</sup>

This chapter seeks to discuss the role of conflict and peace-making in Anglo-Saxon society and to demonstrate the way these themes were connected to law. It will be argued that there was no sharp distinction between what historians might conventionally call ‘war’, and the violence and peace-making processes of legal disputation. I will call this the ‘spectrum of conflict’ and emphasise that different categories of violence and peace-making shared a common vocabulary and register. The vocabulary of conflict and reconciliation emphasised the primacy of the king in these situations, and these processes are often framed in interpersonal terms. Despite significant change in practice, there was a *vocabulary of continuity* running through the Anglo-Saxon period. This may have been a particularly important way to bind disparate groups to the king in the expanding and heterogenous tenth- and eleventh-century realm. It may have also made more onerous military demands and more intensive legal powers taken by kings more palatable and seem more legitimate.

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<sup>379</sup> Molyneaux, *Formation*, pp. 106–15.

<sup>380</sup> Lambert, *Law and Order*, pp. 244–7.

<sup>381</sup> Lambert, *Law and Order*, p. 276.

<sup>382</sup> As in ASC C 1001, 1002, 1056.

The second half of this chapter will establish this in a territorial context by looking at the landscape as more than a basis of military assessment. It will be shown that just as there was a common vocabulary and register for different types of violence and peace-making, there was also a common landscape context. Just as with the vocabulary of war and violence, even as the *character* of the landscape changed, there was a great deal of continuity in terms of the actual places or types of places chosen. We might call this a continuity in the ‘geographic vocabulary’ of Anglo-Saxon society. The same places that were appropriate to meetings, assemblies, and acts of reconciliation were also appropriate to warfare. This will begin to show how the dichotomy of core-and-peripheral places can be subverted, because it will be demonstrated that upland moors and heaths, forests, and crossing places, all of which can be seen as ‘peripheral’ (or at least liminal, in regard to crossing places), were places for assembly, war, and reconciliation: three processes that were essential to the creation, maintenance and communication of collective identity.

## 2. *Conflict, Law and Society*

There has been a considerable amount of research on violence in Anglo-Saxon law, particularly concerning the subject of feuding.<sup>383</sup> Recent work has emphasised the role of violence *within* Anglo-Saxon law. Hyams has demonstrated the relative inability of royal power to prevent those who perceived themselves as being wronged from seeking violent redress, and he suggests that a ‘feuding culture’ permeated Anglo-Saxon legal codes and contextualised the strategies of individuals on the ground.<sup>384</sup> More recently, Lambert’s *Law and Order in Anglo-Saxon England*

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<sup>383</sup> A huge amount of research on this, see for instance: Wallace-Hadrill, ‘The Bloodfeud of the Franks’, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 41 (1959), pp. 459–87; S. White ‘The “Peace in the Feud” Revisited’, in Leyser and Cooper (eds.), *Making Early Medieval Societies* (Cambridge, 2017), pp. 220–43; G. Halsall, ‘Reflections on Early Medieval Violence: The Example of the “Blood Feud”’, *Memoria y civilización* 2 (1999), pp. 7–29. Also, the important work of W.I. Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago, IL, 1990); and J. Byock, *Feud in the Icelandic Saga* (Berkeley, CA, 1982).

<sup>384</sup> P.R. Hyams, *Rancor and Reconciliation in Medieval England* (Ithaca, NY, 2003), pp. 71–110.

accepts the potential legitimacy of violence, challenging the notion that the only reason a king would not seek to prohibit feuding is because they were too weak to do so.<sup>385</sup> Instead, Lambert argues that the threat of violence underpinned a legal framework that sought to strike a balance between the honour of free, arms-bearing men and the cohesion of the wider community, and that royal legislation largely worked within this framework.<sup>386</sup> Central to Lambert's argument is the concept of *mund*, or 'protection', which every free man extended over his dependents, and the maintenance of which was essential to their honour and status. Lambert argues that the notion that feuding was inherently antithetical to the interests of the state and thus necessarily extra-legal is anachronistic, and it reflects the preconceptions of modern historians about the nature of the state and its impulse to monopolise violence within its bounds.<sup>387</sup>

Events that we might conventionally describe as warfare between kingdoms were often described interpersonally, in terms of wrongs that were done, compensation that was owed, and vengeance that was taken. First, an example from the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. In 626, an emissary from Cwichelm of the West Saxons was sent to assassinate Edwin of Deira; in the tumult the king was wounded and two of his thegns were killed. Edwin framed his response as one of vengeance: he sought 'victory over the king who had sent the assassin,' and when his wounds were healed 'he summoned his army and marched against the West Saxons. During the course of the campaign he

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<sup>385</sup> Lambert, *Law and Order*.

<sup>386</sup> That is, until the eleventh century, when it is argued that the proliferation of royal agents and the ability to extract fines and legal dues changed the relationship between the king and local assemblies which had hitherto been responsible for most justice, essentially making kings more jealous of their legal rights because of their revenue potential.

<sup>387</sup> Lambert, *Law and Order*, pp. 35–45, 58; Wormald, 'Inter Cetera Bona Genti Suae': Law-Making and Peace-Keeping in the Earliest English Kingdoms', repr. in his *Legal Culture in the Early Medieval West* (London, 1999), pp. 179–98, p. 93; Charles-Edwards, 'Early Anglo-Saxon kinship Revisited', in J. Hines (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxons*, pp. 171–210, at pp. 172–7; and White, 'Clotild's revenge: Politics, Kinship and Ideology in the Merovingian Bloodfeud', in S.K. Cohn and S.A. Epstein (eds.), *Portraits of Medieval and Renaissance Living* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1996), pp. 107–30; Halsall, 'Reflections', pp. 26–8.

either slew all who he discovered to have plotted his death or forced them to surrender.’<sup>388</sup> In 948, when Eadred’s army was returning from a campaign in Northumbria, the king’s army was overtaken and attacked at Castleford (*Ceasterford*). The chronicler wrote that ‘the king became so angry that he wished to march back into the land and utterly destroy it. When the councillors of the Northumbrians understood that, they deserted Eric Blood-Axe and paid to King Eadred compensation for their act.’<sup>389</sup> Similarly, in 952, Eadred ordered ‘a great slaughter to be made in the borough of Thetford in vengeance for the abbot Eadhelm, whom they had slain.’<sup>390</sup> The key here is that the events are framed in almost entirely interpersonal terms.

At the Battle of the Trent, the aforementioned Northumbrian thegn Imma was wounded and made a prisoner by a *comes* of Æthelred of Mercia. Imma pretended to be a *rusticus* to avoid being slain. As Imma’s noble bearing became impossible to disguise, his captor questioned him, and he then revealed that he was one of King Ecgrith’s men. Æthelred’s *comes* replied: ‘I realised by every one of your answers that you were not a peasant, and now you ought to die because all my brothers and kinsmen were killed in the battle.’<sup>391</sup> If this passage is at all reflective of the way in which Anglo-Saxons thought about conflict in the seventh and eighth centuries, it suggests that the *comes* primarily thought about his relationship with Imma in terms of the vengeance he was owed for the deaths of his kinsmen and brothers, and he believed that he would be justified in killing Imma for his participation in their death. The sentiment invoked is one of feud and restitution, and it is levied at an interpersonal level.

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<sup>388</sup> *HE* ii.9: *Quo tempore curatus a uulnere sibi pridem inflictio, rex collecto exercitu uenit aduersus gentem Occidentalium Saxonum, ac bello inito uniuersos, quos in necem suam conspirasse didicerat, aut occidit aut in deditionem recepit.*

<sup>389</sup> *ASC* D 948.

<sup>390</sup> *ASC* D 952.

<sup>391</sup> *HE* iv.22: *Et ego per singula tua responsa cognoueram, quia rusticus non eras; et nunc quidem dignus es morte, quia omnes fratres et cognati mei in illa sunt pugna interemti.*

Another casualty of the battle of the Trent was Ælfwine, King Ecgfrith's brother. Intriguingly, Bede wrote that Ælfwine was 'much beloved in both kingdoms [Northumbria and Mercia]; for King Æthelred had married his sister whose name was Osthryth.'<sup>392</sup> This speaks to the power of the interpersonal relationships that bound together elite society, even across their political allegiances. Moreover, Archbishop Theodore mediated the peace between the Mercians and Northumbrians, and Bede wrote that 'no further lives were demanded for the death of the king's brother, but only the usual money compensation which was paid to the king for his vengeance. So peace was maintained for a long period between these kings and their respective kingdoms.'<sup>393</sup> This is an extraordinary incident; it suggests that the king was subject to the same obligations of honour and redress as other freemen, and—perhaps reading between the lines of the incident between Imma and the Mercian *comes*—the king could expect his dependents to support him in the pursuit of his rights, through violence if necessary. Furthermore, because the legal processes depended on the marshalling of supporters, the process was inherently political. It seems impossible to disassociate the political relationship between the Mercians and Northumbrians from the exercise of the kings' legal rights.

Peace between the Mercians and Northumbrians was brokered by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Theodore of Tarsus, after the battle of the Trent. The *Penitentials of Theodore*, a compilation of penitential judgements probably composed around 700 decree *Qui per iussionem domini sui occiderit hominem, xl diebus abstineat se ab ecclesia, et qui occiderit hominem in publico bello xl*

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<sup>392</sup> HE iv.21: *utrique prouinciae multum amabilis. Nam et sororem eius, quae dicebatur Osthryd, rex Aedilred habebat uxorem.*

<sup>393</sup> HE iv.21: *nullius anima hominis pro interfecto regis fratre sed debita solummodo multa pecuniae regi ultori daretur. Cuius foedera pacis multo exinde tempore inter eosdem reges eorumque regna durarunt.*

*dies peniteat*.<sup>394</sup> The implication of this is important: participating in a great battle required the same penance as slaying a man on the orders of one's lord. Participating in battles, then, was still on the spectrum of legal activity that required compensation, in this case a penance of the same duration. There is no distinction between killing as an incident of 'law' and as an incident of 'war'. In later Old English penitentials from the tenth or eleventh century, *publico bello* is given as *folcgefoht*.<sup>395</sup> *Folcgefoht* is a relatively rare word in the *Chronicle*. It is given in 871 (for more on which see below), in 887 in a notice of battles in Italy after the deposition of Charles the Fat, and in 1066 to refer to the battles of Fulford and Stamford Bridge.<sup>396</sup> The word is also found in the Old English Orosius.<sup>397</sup> Simply speaking, the word suggests a large battle, or a short period with multiple battles, and this is probably a good enough definition; but more specifically I think the implication is that the word describes a period of conflict in which all of the king's strength is mustered.

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<sup>394</sup> *Paenitentiale Umbrense*, in K. Hildebrand (ed.), *Untersuchungen über die germanischen Pönitentialbücher* (Würzburg, 1851), i.4, pp. 86–125: 'Let him who slays a man by the command of his lord stay away from the church for forty days; and let one who slays a man in 'public war' do penance for forty days.' For a detailed study of the varied versions and MSS. of the Latin penitentials: Charles-Edwards, 'The Penitential of Theodore and the *Iudicia Theodori*', in M. Lapidge (ed.), *Archbishop Theodore: Commemorative Studies on His Life and Influence* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 141–74. Also J.E. Cross, 'The Ethic of War in Old English', in Clemons and Hughes (eds.), *England Before the Conquest*, pp. 269–82. cf. the *Leofric Missal*, ed. F.E. Warren (Oxford, 1883), p. 230, which distinguishes between war waged by the king against 'insurgents and rebels for royal or ecclesiastical justice' and war against pagans (penance of forty days against a penance of 'seven or fourteen or forty days'; clearly they could not make up their mind on the matter).

<sup>395</sup> For the Old English handbooks, see: A.J. Frantzen, 'The tradition of penitentials in Anglo-Saxon England', *ASE* 11 (1982), pp. 23–56; and for an online database of the relevant texts: <<http://www.anglo-saxon.net/penance/index.php>> [accessed 29/7/2019, 12:48].

<sup>396</sup> *ASC* 871: *ðæs geares wurdon .ix folcgefoht gefohten wið ðone here on ðam cinerice be supan Temese* ('in this year there were fought nine *folcgefoht* with the here in the kingdom south of the Thames.');

*ASC* 889: *ASC* 887: *7 tu folcgefoht gefuhton, 7 þæt lond [Italy] oft 7 gelome forhergodon*. For a narrative: P. Delogu, 'Lombard and Carolingian Italy', in R. McKitterick (ed.), *NCMH* II: c. 700–900 (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 290–319 at 315–18. *ASC* D 1066: *þas twa folcgefoht wæron gefremmede binnan fif nihtan* ('these two battles were fought within five nights').

<sup>397</sup> Or. ii.5, iii.9.

Another example: in 687 the *Chronicle* records that Mul, the brother of Cædwalla of Wessex, and twelve men with him were burnt to death by the men of Kent.<sup>398</sup> Ine, who succeeded Cædwalla, apparently inherited an obligation to avenge Mul, because in 694, the *Chronicle* records that ‘the men of Kent made terms with Ine, and paid him 30,000 [pence?] because they had burnt Mul.’<sup>399</sup> These entries assert the significance of compensation to the process of peace-making, as well as the responsibility of the king for taking vengeance. The distinction between political interaction and dispute resolution is elided. The word the *Chronicle* uses here to describe the act of peace-making, *geþingodan*, is not particularly common; it only occurs once more in the *Chronicle*, in *s.a.* 628 to describe the peace accorded between Cynegils, Cwihelm and Penda after a battle at Cirencester.<sup>400</sup> The element *þing*, however, is used to denote an assembly or a court in seventh-century legal texts. For instance in clause six of the laws of Hlothre and Eadric, it is stipulated that ‘If a man brings a charge against another, and he meets the man at an assembly or a meeting (*an medle oþþe an þing*), the man is to give surety to the other, and to do him such right as the judges of the people of Kent shall prescribe for them.’<sup>401</sup> Place-names with a *þing*-element are very common, of course, derived from both Old Norse and Old English.<sup>402</sup> This hints at the importance of assembly practices and peace-making, as will be discussed further below.

One of the most intriguing documents from the early eighth century is the letter of Bishop Wealdhere of London to Archbishop Brihtwold of Canterbury.<sup>403</sup> The letter of 704 or 705 was

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<sup>398</sup> ASC 687: *Her Mul wearþ on Cent forbærned 7 opre xii men mid him.*

<sup>399</sup> ASC 694: *Her Cantware geþingodan wiþ Ine 7 him gesaldon .xxx.m. forþon þe hie ær Mul forbærndon.*

Whitelock assumes the payment must have been pence. If so, I believe that this is about double the *wergild* assigned to a king’s *geneat*, that is 1200 shillings in Ine’s laws, cf. Ine 19, and Whitelock, *ASC*, p. 25.

<sup>400</sup> ASC 628: *Her Cynegils 7 Cuichelm gefuhtun wiþ Pendan æt Cirenceastre 7 geþingodan þa.*

<sup>401</sup> HIE 6: *Gif man oþerne sace tithre 7 he þane mannan mote an medle oþþe an þinge, symble se man þam oðrum byrigean geselle 7 þam right awyrce þe to hiorn cantwara deman gescrifen.*

<sup>402</sup> e.g. Semple, *Perceptions*, pp. 90–1, 213–21. *Mæðel* does not seem to occur in place-names with the possible exception of Matlock (Derbs.) = *mæðel-ac*, ‘assembly oak.’: A. Pantos, ‘*In medle oððe þinge*’, pp. 181–201.

<sup>403</sup> Whitelock, *EHD* no. 164, pp. 729–30.

composed probably in the context of West Saxon ambition in Surrey.<sup>404</sup> The letter describes conflict between the East and West Saxons, and Wealdhere wrote to Brihtwold of ‘how many and what sort of disputes and discords have meanwhile arisen between the king of the West Saxons [Ine] and the rulers of our country [*i.e.* the co-kings of the East Saxons],’ chief among which seems to be the harbouring of exiles. However, Wealdhere related that a council had been summoned at Brentford (Middx.) to ‘determine the causes of all dissensions, and in as far as each shall make amends to the other *with legal compensation.*’ I would suggest that this shows that hostilities between the East and West Saxons were understood not as a binary state of war or peace, but as an accumulation of disputes that threatened to boil over into violence.

Unlike on the Continent, Anglo-Saxon material related to assembly practices does not make much of carrying weapons at assembly—there is no known equivalent in Anglo-Saxon England to a *marchfeld*,<sup>405</sup> for instance, and it is equally unclear if weapons were brandished at *wapentakes* in an insular context.<sup>406</sup> However, there are some injunctions in law codes against the *use* of weapons in public—or semi-public—settings: the laws of Alfred, for example, specifically inveigh against fighting in a meeting in the presence of the king’s ealdorman, disturbing a public meeting by drawing a weapon, and drawing a weapon at a meeting in the presence of the deputy of a king’s ealdorman.<sup>407</sup> So it is plausible that men were presumed to be armed at assemblies, and as Eric

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<sup>404</sup> Yorke, ‘The East Saxons’, p. 34.

<sup>405</sup> T. Reuter, ‘Assembly Politics in Western Europe’, in his *Medieval Politics and Modern Mentalities*, ed. J.L. Nelson (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 193–216, at p. 197; cf. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Long-Haired Kings* (London, 1962), p. 95 n. 1.

<sup>406</sup> Brooks, ‘Arms, Status and Warfare’.

<sup>407</sup> e.g. HIE 13 (drawing weapons while drinking); Ine 6–6.5 (fighting in the king’s house, fighting in a minster, fighting in the house of an ealdorman, fighting in the house of a *gafolgelda* or *gebur*, fighting in the midst of the open country, fighting while drinking); Af. 7 (drawing weapons in the king’s hall); Af. 15 (drawing weapons in the presence of an archbishop); Af. 38–38.2 (fighting in the presence of an ealdorman, disturbing a public meeting by drawing a weapon, disturbing a public meeting by drawing a weapon or fighting in the presence of an ealdorman’s deputy); II Cn. 59 (fighting in the king’s court).

John wrote many years ago, the distinction between a legal and a military assembly was very blurry.<sup>408</sup> The tenth-century administrative unit of the hundred, which gave kings increased control in the localities, was also related to military organisation. In Æthelweard's *Chronicon*, as John noted, the military nature of the hundred is taken for granted, as Æthelweard writes of *Vuexstan dux cum centurias populi provinciae Vuilsætum*.<sup>409</sup>

During the tenth century, it is clear that legislation often used a vocabulary of war to describe peace-keeping. Above, *VI Æthelstan* was cited in regard to the regional character of peace-keeping in Anglo-Saxon society;<sup>410</sup> but it is also relevant that the code uses a language that is reminiscent of the language of war in the way it insists on riding out against transgressors: *we ridan ealle to 7 urne teonan wrecan*,<sup>411</sup> or *II Æthelstan*, which decrees against those that fail to 'be at peace with everything which the king will be at peace.'<sup>412</sup> The punishment for breaching the king's peace is that *þa yldestan men to ealle þe to þære byrig hyron*, and that *ða men ðe on þære rade beon* were to have half the spoils of the expedition, with the king receiving the other half.<sup>413</sup> The verb *ridan*, 'to ride', is frequently used to refer to military campaigns, for instance in 871 the chronicler wrote of *Elfred þæs cyninges broþur 7 anlipig aldormon 7 cyninges þegnas oft rade onridon*.<sup>414</sup> Other examples include 877, 893, 900. Sometimes, the word seems to be used to mean 'conquer', as in 878: *Se here... ofer tuelfan niht to Cippanhamme 7 geridon Wesseaxnalond 7 gesæton 7 micel þæs*

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<sup>408</sup> John, *Land Tenure in Early England* (Leicester, 1965), pp. 115–16. Also: John, 'English Feudalism and the Structure of Anglo-Saxon Society', in his *Orbis Britanniae*, pp. 128–53, at pp. 142–50.

<sup>409</sup> Æthelweard, *Chronicon*, iii.3, p. 28. Perhaps this might be compared to the use of the Gothic calque *hundafap*, used for *centurion* in Ulfila's Bible.

<sup>410</sup> Above, p. 70.

<sup>411</sup> VI As. 8.3: 'and we shall all ride thither and avenge our injury'

<sup>412</sup> II As. 20.3: *eal friþige, þæt se cyng friþian wille*.

<sup>413</sup> II As. 20.4: 'the eldest men are to ride thither, all those that pertain to the fortress... the men on the 'riding' (or expedition, perhaps).'

<sup>414</sup> ASC 871: 'The king's brother Alfred and individual ealdormen and the king's thegns often rode on expeditions.'

*folces ofer sae adræfdon 7 þæs opres þone mæstan del hie geridon 7 him to gecirdon buton þam cyninge Elfrede.*<sup>415</sup>

This evidence suggests to me that in Old English the language of war shared the same register as the language of law. This supposition is possibly strengthened by the record of a dispute resolution of 995 in which a man named Leofric stole a bridle. When he was discovered by the (unnamed) owners of the bridle, Leofric's lords, three brothers named Ælfnoth, Ælfric and Æthelwine, rushed to the defence of their dependent. The Latin reads: *et tres fratres predicti furis domini concito cursu bellum in inuicem insurgentes inierunt. Duobus uero fratribus in bello peremptis Ælfnoð scilicet et Ælfric, uix tercius Æþeluuine cum predicto latrone euasit, sancta Helene intrans ecclesiam.*<sup>416</sup> This is an interesting example, not least for its reference to sanctuary, but also because it so explicitly uses the language of war to describe what otherwise would be called private violence.<sup>417</sup> This dispute recalls Alfred 42.5, which claims that a man may fight on behalf of his lord if his lord is being attacked without incurring a feud; similarly the lord may fight on behalf of his man, thereby demonstrating the continued importance of interpersonal connections and obligations between lord and retainer.<sup>418</sup>

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<sup>415</sup> ASC 877: 'The *here*... came after Twelfth Night to Chippenham and 'conquered' Wessex, and they settled there, and many people were driven over the sea, and the others were 'conquered', and they submitted to the *here* except for King Alfred.' On this, see Lavelle: 'Geographies of Power in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', in A. Jorgensen (ed.), *Reading the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Turnhout, 2010), pp. 187–219, at pp. 202, 207; and R.H.C. Davis, 'Alfred the Great: Propaganda and Truth', *History* 56 (1971), pp. 169–82, at p. 171. *Oferode*, derived from an inflection of the verb *gan*, 'to go', is also used to mean 'conquer, overrun'.

<sup>416</sup> S. 883: 'and the three brothers, the lords of the aforesaid thief, rose up, and hurriedly rushed to battle against together. Two of the brothers, Ælfnoth and Ælfric, were killed in the battle, and the third, Æthelwine, barely escaped with the aforementioned bandit, entering the church of St Helen [at Abingdon].'

<sup>417</sup> Another potential example of this is S. 877 of 996; for which see Abels, 'The crimes by which Wulfbald ruined himself with his lord': The Limits of State Action in Late Anglo-Saxon England', *Reading Medieval Studies* 40 (2014), pp. 42–53.

<sup>418</sup> Af. 42.5.

The obverse of this is the process of peace-making. This has been well-studied, so I want to focus on tying peace-making into the spectrum of conflict in Anglo-Saxon law and establishing the process in a territorial context.<sup>419</sup> First, the concept of *frið*. Sometimes this is taken as ‘peace’, and indeed it is often given as the Old English translation of *pax*. However, it can be used more specifically to mean ‘treaty’, as has been discussed by Lund and Fell, among others.<sup>420</sup> *Frið* was not a passive condition; it was an active agreement that was entered into by relevant parties.<sup>421</sup>

Tenth-century legislation emphasises attempts to improve the people’s *frið*, often in regard to suppressing theft. While the punishment of theft was a long-standing royal prerogative, during the reign of Æthelstan particularly stringent punishments for theft were asserted, and this is often understood in the context of intensifying royal power in the tenth century.<sup>422</sup> Theft was a serious concern because unless the thief was caught in the act, there was no way to restore the honour of the offended party. Even in a legal context, the ‘treaty’ sense of the word is important because a treaty opens a channel for dialogue by which that fundamental principle of Anglo-Saxon law can take place: the negotiation of compensation and restitution.

However, *frið* can apply equally to the vocabulary of warfare. For example in a political/warfare context *frið*, or its counterpart, *unfrið*, is employed by the chronicler in 903 (*Her aspom Æðelwald þone here on Eastenglum to unfriðe, þæt hie hergodon ofer Mercna land oð hie comon to*

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<sup>419</sup> This has received considerable attention, especially: Lavelle ‘Peacemaking and Peace Agreements’, pp. 39–55; and P. Kershaw, *Peaceful Kings: Peace, Power, and the Early Medieval Political Imagination* (Oxford, 2011), esp. pp. 241–61; Abels, ‘King Alfred’s Peace-Making Strategies with the Vikings’, *Haskins Society Journal* 3 (1992), pp. 23–34; Wallace-Hadrill, ‘War and Peace in the Early Middle Ages’, *TRHS* 25 (1975), pp. 157–74.

<sup>420</sup> And note the semantic connection between Latin *pax* ‘peace’ and *pactus* ‘agreement’. For *frið*: Lund, ‘Peace and Non-Peace’; Fell, ‘*Unfrið*’.

<sup>421</sup> Lund, ‘Peace and Non-Peace in the Viking Age—Ottar in Biarmaland, the Rus in Byzantium, and the Danes and Norwegians in England’, in J.E. Knirk (ed.), *Proceedings of the Tenth Viking Congress* (Oslo, 1987), pp. 255–69, at p. 256.

<sup>422</sup> Lambert, *Law and Order*, pp. 174–7.

*Creccagelade...*);<sup>423</sup> 905/906 (*mon fæstnode þone frið æt Yttingaford, swa swa Eadweard cyng gerædde, ægðer wið Eastengle ge wið Norðhymbre.*);<sup>424</sup> and 910 (*Her bræc se here on Norðhymbrum þone frið, 7 forsawon ælc riht (MS A frið) þe Eadweard cyng 7 his witan him budon 7 hergodon ofer Mercna lond*),<sup>425</sup> to note just a few examples. Establishing *frið* with a viking host was important because it suggests the bestowal of legal status, opening the door to social relationships such as sponsoring baptism, standing as godparent or the contracting of a marriage in addition to the normal procedures of redress and compensation.

Meanwhile, law codes contain provisions about the maintenance of the king's *frið*, perhaps most famously in Æthelstan's Exeter code, in which he makes it known that *ic hæbbe geahsod þæt ure frið is wyrse gehealden ðonne me lyste oþþe hit æt Greatanlea gecweden wære 7 mina witan secgað þæt ic hit to lange forboren hæbbe*,<sup>426</sup> but statements that laws were being pronounced to maintain the peace are quite common.<sup>427</sup> What that *frið* represents is an active state, which needed to be constantly asserted and reasserted. It is as appropriate to a law code as it is to a peace treaty with a hostile army, which served to bring them into the king's *frið* and enter them into a personal relationship with the king based on principles of redress and compensation, but underpinned by the threat of violence.

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<sup>423</sup> ASC 903 (904 MSA, 905 B, C, D): 'In this year Æthelwold induced the *here* in East Anglia to break the peace so that they harried Mercia until they reached Cricklade.'

<sup>424</sup> ASC A 905, (906, C, D): 'Peace was made at Tiddingford with both the East Angles and Northumbrians, just as King Edward decreed it.'

<sup>425</sup> ASC 910 (911 C, D): 'In this year the *here* in Northumbria broke the peace and spurned every right (MS A: 'peace') King Edward and his councillors had given them, and they harried across Mercia.'

<sup>426</sup> V As. Prol. 1: 'I have learned that our peace is worse kept than I should like and than it was pronounced at Grately; and my councillors say I have borne it too long.'

<sup>427</sup> II Ew. 1; VI As. 8.4, 10; IV Eg. 2; II Cn. 8, etc. II Em. Prol. 1, p. 186, uses *gesibsumnesse*, for 'peace', which derived from *sib* (cf. Mdn English 'sibling'), which is the Old English word used to refer to the true peace in the *promissio regis*. Lambert suggests that this word was chosen to invoke shared kinship: Lambert, *Law and Order*, p. 225; M. Clayton, 'The Old English *Promissio Regis*', *ASE* 37 (2008), pp. 91–150.

The establishment of *frið*, therefore, brought people into society and created a solidarity that was constantly renewed and reasserted by kings as new circumstances arose (this may give an ideological underpinning to the need to establish peace with various viking armies besides the practicality of making them go away). Reassert the king's peace often enough, and it becomes an exercise in building a kingdom. This is of course a highly idealised view, but nevertheless it may be suggestive of the thinking behind such processes. This may be the implication of *IV Edgar* 12–15, which declares that the Danes had hitherto been allowed to keep their own laws because of the loyalty they had always shown the king (*for eowrum hyldum 7 þe ge me symble cyddon*) but nevertheless the king wished his pronouncement regarding cattle-theft to be obeyed even among the Danes. In the voice of the king, the code then commends the people (*IV.16*) for being so zealous in the maintenance of the *frið*, possibly suggesting that Edgar's fourth code should be seen as an *expansion* and *reassertion* of the king's peace following a change in circumstances—namely the 'sudden pestilence that had greatly vexed and reduced his people throughout his realm.'<sup>428</sup>

This section has argued that there was a great deal of continuity in vocabulary. There was not a sharp division between violence as an incident of law, and violence that we might call 'warfare', and throughout the period this was framed in interpersonal terms of a wrong done against the king, the breach of his peace and the legitimate seeking of redress for that wrong, and the maintenance and reassertion of the king's *frið*. Even as military obligation and royal legal authority intensified in the tenth century, and the institution of the hundred in the tenth century gave kings a greater degree of control in the localities, the language used in both narrative and legal texts was not dissimilar to texts from the eighth century, as examples from the Penitentials of Theodore, the

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<sup>428</sup> *IV Eg. Prol.: færcwealme ðe his leodscipe swyðe drehte 7 wanode wide gynd his anweald; cf. ASC 962: þa on geara wæs swyðe micel mancwealm.*

*Historia Ecclesiastica* and the Letter of Wealdhere show. It may be that this was the point: a language of continuity that emphasised the relationship between the king and his subjects in interpersonal terms made the important changes to military obligation and legal control in the localities more acceptable. Perhaps this was particularly important in the context of an expanding tenth-century kingdom that needed to bring diverse groups of people into the fold and provide them with a stake in the kingdom.

### 3. Territorial Contexts

Thus far, we have established that warfare and violence in law occupied a similar semantic range, and warfare basically operated within the legal ‘system’, and was governed by similar principles of compensation, vengeance, and the establishment of peace. The primacy of the king in war and the king’s primacy in law was not coincidental, and just as military campaigns and writing about warfare maintain and communicate collective identity, so too does the promulgation of law codes, the convening of legal assemblies, and the execution of justice by the men of the assembly. My goal now is to establish this within a territorial context, thereby bridging the themes of collective identity, warfare, and landscape. First, I wish to briefly discuss the so-called ‘treaty texts’, particularly *The Treaty of Alfred and Guthrum* (AGu), and the law code known as *II Æthelred* (II Atr.). *The Ordinance Concerning the Dunsæte* is sometimes included with the treaty texts, but I want to put this to one side for now, having discussed the text at some length above (pp. 71–6).

Both *Alfred and Guthrum* and *II Æthelred* were established within very specific historical contexts as responses to immediate circumstances.<sup>429</sup> These treaties were both promulgated in the aftermath of sustained armed conflict, which separates them from other texts that negotiate ethnicity, such as *Ine*, *Dunsæte* or *IV Edgar*. Both texts legitimise the opposing parties. AGu, of course, legitimises Guthrum and his followers: *Dis is þæt frið þæt Ælfred cyninc 7 Gyðrum cyning 7 ealles Angelcynnes witan 7 eal seo ðeod on Eastænglum beoð ealle gecweden habbað 7 mid aðum gefeostnod for hy sylfe 7 for heora gingran, ge for geborene ge for ungeborene* (MS B2: *for hy sylfe ge for heora ofsprung*).<sup>430</sup> Guthrum is accepted as a king, and the reference to the *ðeod on Eastænglum* recognises the heterogeneity of Guthrum's following. However, when the text turns to wergild equivalences, explicitly ethnic signifiers, *Englisce* and *Denisce* are used—and I would read this as being a statement about the respective lordships of Alfred and Guthrum rather than a straightforward ethnic binary.

Furthermore, Guthrum's followers are drawn into the legal system, and therefore drawn into society. A path to legal redress is opened. This went along with other rituals, such as Guthrum's baptism where he took the name of Æthelstan and had Alfred stand as his godfather. This occurred in 879 (probably some years before the promulgation of AGu).<sup>431</sup> *II Æthelred*, promulgated in 994, established a general peace (Prol.: *friðmal*, II Atr.1: *woruldfrið* = 'secular peace?') with Olaf, Jostein, and Guthmund, the leaders of the *here* that had been launching concerted attacks and

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<sup>429</sup> AGu: Davis, 'Alfred and Guthrum's Frontier', *EHR* 97, 385 (1982), pp. 803–10, Dumville, 'The Treaty of Alfred and Guthrum', in his *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar* (Woodbridge, 1992), pp. 1–27; Kershaw, 'The Alfred-Guthrum Treaty: Scripting Accommodation and Interaction in Viking Age England', in Hadley and Richards (eds.), *Cultures in Contact*, pp. 43–64.

<sup>430</sup> 'This is the peace which King Alfred and King Guthrum and the councillors of all *Angelcynn* and all the people in East Anglia have agreed upon and made fast with oaths, for themselves and for their subjects, both for the living and for the unborn (MS B2: ...made fast with oaths, for themselves and their offspring).'

<sup>431</sup> ASC 879.

receiving payments since 991.<sup>432</sup> *II Æthelred* draws the *here* into society—not only with rates of compensation, but also by bringing the *here* into arrangements for the common defence, stipulating that ‘if any [other] fleet harry in England, we are to have the help of them all [i.e. the military assistance of the *here*] and we must supply them with food as long as they are with us [i.e. with the royal host],’ and furthermore, ‘any region (*landa*) which gives sanctuary (*friðige*) to those who are harrying England are to be outlawed (*utlah wið us*) with us and the whole *here* (*wið ealne here*).<sup>433</sup>

Both texts also establish the *frið* within a territorial context. *II Æthelred* does not extend across the entire realm; its territorial jurisdiction is limited to the territories of Archbishop Sigeric, Ealdorman Æthelweard of the Western Provinces, and Ealdorman Ælfric of Hampshire.<sup>434</sup> The code focuses on routeways after a fashion, making repeated references to the peace extending to the estuaries (2–3), which seems to be a reference to the river-systems and an imperative to defend them.

*Alfred and Guthrum*, on the other hand, famously draws a boundary for the *frið* which reads as follows: ‘First concerning our bounds: up the Thames, and then up the Lea, and along the Lea to its source, then in a straight line to Bedford, then up the Ouse to Watling Street.’<sup>435</sup> Too often the focus of this has been on the creation of a border line between Alfred’s kingdom in the west and south and the ‘Danelaw’ in the east. This neglects the real significance of the bounds, which are actually *almost entirely concerned with routeways* and points where the respective dependents of

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<sup>432</sup> Keynes ‘The Historical Context’, pp. 88–93.

<sup>433</sup> *II Atr.* 1.1–2.

<sup>434</sup> *II Atr.* 1: *æfter ðam formalan ðe Sigeric arcebiscop 7 Æðelwerd ealdormann 7 Ælfric ealdormann worhton ða hu abædon æt ðam cyngre þæt hy mostan ðam læppan frið gebicgean ðe hy under cyngre hand ofer hæfdon* (‘according to the terms Archbishop Sigeric, Ealdorman Æthelweard and Ealdorman Ælfric made, when they obtained permission from the king to purchase peace for the areas [*læppan*] which they had rule over under the king.’).

<sup>435</sup> *AGu* 1: *Ærest ymb ure landgemæra: up on Temese, 7 ðonne up on Ligan 7 andlang Ligan oð æwylm ðonne on gerihte to Bedanforde, ðonne up on Usan oð Wætlingastræt.*

Alfred and Guthrum might interact with each other; the *landgemæra* are essentially concerned with the channels of transportation and interaction. The bounds of AGu use a language that is identical to that of the boundary clause of a charter. It is not unusual for charters containing dispute resolutions to end with the bounds of the estate in question, and sometimes the actual process of dispute resolution involved rituals at the boundary. For example, in 896 Æthelred of Mercia summoned a council of all his ‘bishops, ealdormen, and warriors’ at Gloucester, and resolved there a dispute over woodland between Bishop Wærferth of Worcester and a certain Æthelwold. Ruling in favour of Wærferth, it was ordered that a *geneat* of Æthelwold named Ecglaf should ‘ride with a priest from Worcester, Wulfhun by name; and Ecglaf led Wulfhun all along the boundaries, as Wulfhun read out from the old charters, how they had been determined of old by the grant of King Æthelbald.’<sup>436</sup> Another example includes S. 1460 (1020 x 1023), the record of a dispute between Bishop Æthelstan of Hereford and Wulfstan concerning land at Inkberrow (Worcs.), in which Wulfstan contested the bishop’s land at Inkberrow. At the *sciregemote* at Worcester, the case was resolved by Ealdorman Leofwine along with ‘all the shire.’ Subsequently, a day was established for the bounds to be ridden. The document reads: *Ða com se bisceop þærto 7 se þe him ær [to wit]nesse wæron. 7 com Wulfstan 7 his sunu 7 þa þe hyra geferan wæron. 7 heo ealle þa þa landgemære geridan,* and the bishop’s rights were re-established (*ful riht*).<sup>437</sup> This suggests the importance of establishing or re-establishing territorial legitimacy in resolving disputes.<sup>438</sup>

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<sup>436</sup> S. 1441: *his geneat, Ecglaf hatte, ridan mid Ceastersetna preoste Wulfhun hatte; 7 he hine þa gelædde all ða gemæru swa he him of þam aldan bocum rædde, hu hit ær Æþelbald cyning gemærude 7 gesalde.*

<sup>437</sup> S. 1460: ‘Then came the bishop thereto, and those who were his witnesses, and Wulfstan and his son came with their servants, and they rode along the boundaries.’

<sup>438</sup> Compare this perhaps to placing earth upon a gospel book (S. 1806 allegedly 675 x 692, but only contained in twelfth-century Peterborough material: Stenton, ‘*Medeshamstede* and its colonies’, p. 182); cf. Kelly, *Peterborough* no. 3, who argues that while the text is not contemporary, the substance may be genuine. Also of note are references to placing the charter upon an altar in the wake of dispute (S. 1258, 1434).

#### 4. *Minsters and Peace-Making in the Landscape*

We might also consider the foundation legend of Minster-in-Thanel, in which two Kentish princes, Æthelberht and Æthelred, were entrusted to the care of their uncle, King Eorcenberht, after the death of Eormenred, their father. Eorcenberht's son, Ecgfrith, and one of the king's councillors, Thunor, killed the princes and buried them beneath the throne of the royal residence at Eastry.<sup>439</sup> Though details differ somewhat across various versions of the legend, it is consistently written that Domne Eafe, the princes' sister, demanded Minster-in-Thanel as compensation for the death of her brothers. As Rollason notes, Old English versions of the legend use the word *wergild* specifically.<sup>440</sup> In four versions of the legend, Domne Eafe's tame hind runs a course around the territory that was to be granted in compensation for the murder, thereby completing a circuit of the bounds. In five versions of the legend, Thunor protested and was swallowed up by the earth and covered with a barrow—*Thunorshleaw*. Thus, the reconciliation process by which a violent dispute was ended includes the demarcation of territory. The death of Thunor and the emergence of his barrow should probably be seen in the same light as the use of barrows in boundary clauses, and their association with fear, royal justice, and the punishment of wrong-doers, which Reynolds argued became common during the eighth century.<sup>441</sup> Rollason has argued that the germ of the Kentish Royal Legend dates to the second quarter of the eighth century, and if so, the incorporation of a barrow in such a manner is probably not a coincidence.<sup>442</sup>

The Minster-in-Thanel legend is part of a wider tradition regarding the cult of murdered royal saints. This was an essential part of the process of reconciliation within Anglo-Saxon society. This

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<sup>439</sup> Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend*; see also S. Hollis, 'The Minster-in-Thanel foundation story', *ASE* 27 (1998), pp. 41–64.

<sup>440</sup> Rollason, *Mildrith*, p. 50.

<sup>441</sup> Reynolds, *Deviant Burial Customs*, esp. pp. 235–50.

<sup>442</sup> Rollason, *Mildrith*, pp. 15–16.

tradition was active across the Anglo-Saxon period, from the seventh century through the eleventh century. The culting of slain royal saints provided a *locus* for acts of reconciliation that tied together themes of kingship, conflict and peace-making in a landscape setting. Some examples include the cult of Oswine of Deira at Gilling and the cult of Edward the Martyr, principally at Shaftesbury.<sup>443</sup> This ties in to our earlier discussion of the interconnected nature of Anglo-Saxon royalty—many of the slain royal saints were culted far from their homes and drew patronage from the descendants of their enemies: Oswald’s relics were translated to Bardney in Lindsey, and his cult was allegedly patronised by Offa of Mercia; famously in 909 Æthelflæd of Mercia translated Oswald’s relics to Gloucester, where she and her husband were eventually interred.<sup>444</sup> King Æthelberht of East Anglia was executed by Offa of Mercia in 794 and was culted at Hereford, where he was killed, well over a hundred miles from home and at the western edge of the kingdom of his enemy.<sup>445</sup> Ealhmund, a son of the Northumbrian king Alhred, was killed in c. 800 while trying to seize power in Northumbria and was culted at Derby in Mercia.<sup>446</sup> His killer, Eardwulf was driven into exile some years later and, though the circumstances of his death are not known, he too was culted in Mercia, this time at Breedon-on-the-Hill in Leicestershire.<sup>447</sup> Such practices surely make more sense when the wide kin-based connections of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy, which transcended the boundaries of kingdoms, are considered. In the late tenth century, it can be seen that such traditions encompassed the aristocracy. According to the *Vita Oswaldi*, Ealdorman Ælfhere of Mercia was apparently implicated in the assassination of Edward the Martyr, and he

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<sup>443</sup> A list has been compiled in Rollason, ‘The Cults of Murdered Royal Saints in Anglo-Saxon England’, *ASE* 11 (1982), pp. 1–22.

<sup>444</sup> C. Heighway, ‘Gloucester and the New Minster of St Oswald’, in Higham and Hill (eds.), *Edward the Elder* (London, 2001), pp. 102–11. In some ways this echoes Bede’s comment that Oswiu came with an army to *Maserfeth* to reclaim Oswald’s severed head and hands and inter them at Lindisfarne and Bamburgh: *HE* iii.12, pp. 250–2.

<sup>445</sup> *ASC* 794; Rollason, ‘List of Saints’ Resting-Places in Anglo-Saxon England’, *ASE* 7 (1978), pp. 61–93; A. Thacker, ‘Kings, Saints, and Monasteries in Pre-Viking Mercia’, *Midland History* 10 (1985), pp. 1–25, at pp. 16–18.

<sup>446</sup> Symeon of Durham, *Historia Regum* 61, p. 63; Rollason, ‘Cults of Murdered Saints’, p. 4.

<sup>447</sup> Thacker, ‘Kings, Saints, and Monasteries’, pp. 15–16; Rollason, ‘Cults of Murdered Saints’, pp. 3–5

assisted in the translation of Edward's relics from Wareham to Shaftesbury, both in expiation for his sins and to help reconcile the aristocratic supporters of Edward to those of Æthelred.<sup>448</sup>

Sometimes such practices were also directly associated with large scale conflict, once again demonstrating the similar cultural space that different types of violence occupied in Anglo-Saxon thought. Oswald was killed in battle at *Maserfelth*, in modern Shropshire, which came to be named Oswestry after him.<sup>449</sup> According to Bede, miracles occurred at the site of the battle.<sup>450</sup> Bede also wrote that on the day before the anniversary of Oswald's death at *Maserfelth* (August 4, the feast of St Oswald), the monks of Hexham held vigil at Heavenfield, where Oswald had defeated Cadwallon in battle, 'for the benefit of his soul, to sing many psalms of praise, and, next morning, to offer up the holy sacrifice and oblation on his behalf.' As the tradition became ingrained, a church was built on the battlefield, making it a place 'sacred and worthy of honour' to all.<sup>451</sup> Moreover, the cross that Oswald had erected on the battlefield was allegedly still standing, and miracles occurred there. Bede wrote of how the ancient moss that covered the cross was applied as a salve to heal a broken limb. This is a fascinating story that shows how the monks of Hexham were devoted to the cult of Oswald, but also how they memorialised the battle, venerating both the cross and the battlefield itself.

Further manifestations of this in the seventh century will be discussed in the next chapter, but for now it is important to note that these practices were still active in the later Anglo-Saxon period. In 1020, when Cnut returned to England after a year in Denmark, he returned to *Assandune*, where

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<sup>448</sup> *VSO* 19; Stafford, *Unification and Conquest* (London, 1989), pp. 58–69.

<sup>449</sup> 'Oswald's Tree'; Welsh: *Croesoswalt*, 'Oswald's Cross'; The name is only attested in the twelfth century. *P-Ns Shrops.*, p. 193.

<sup>450</sup> *HE* iii.9–10.

<sup>451</sup> *HE* iii.2: *uigilas pro salute animae eius facere, plurimaque psalmodum laude celebrata, uictimam pro eo mane sacrae oblationis offerre. Qui etiam crescente bona consuetudine, nuper ibidem ecclesia constructa, sacratorum et cunctis honorabiliorem omnibus locum fecere*

he had defeated Edmund Ironside in 1016, and consecrated a minster there built of stone. The chronicler adds that he was attended by Archbishop Wulfstan, Earl Thorkel, and many bishops, abbots and monks.<sup>452</sup> Cnut pursued a varied policy in consolidating his position in England: there were more than a few banishments and executions, but also acts of reconciliation. The cult of Edward the Martyr, which had flourished during the reign of Æthelred, was also supported by Cnut.<sup>453</sup> Many English royal saints' cults were revived, such as that of St Wigstan, whose relics were translated to Evesham,<sup>454</sup> and the relics of Archbishop Ælfheah, who was killed by vikings in 1012, were translated from Canterbury to London.<sup>455</sup> In 1021, Cnut also had the minster of Bury reformed and rebuilt in stone for the veneration of Edmund the Martyr, the East Anglian king infamously killed by the Great Army in 869/70.<sup>456</sup> These ceremonies may have been very dramatic. According to William of Malmesbury, Cnut went to Glastonbury where he laid an ornate pall woven with the figures of peacocks—a symbol of resurrection—upon the tomb of his old enemy, Edmund Ironside.<sup>457</sup> This is all suggestive of a deliberate policy that was deeply tied to Cnut's success in war and attempts to reconcile the English and Danes after an intense and bitter period of hostility. Minsters, in addition to their spiritual role for expiation and penance, could provide bastions of support for the king and vivid tableaux ceremonies and rituals designed to promote comity within the realm.

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<sup>452</sup> ASC DCE 1020, MS F adds that the minster was built of stone and mortar. See T. Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great* (Leiden, 2008), pp. 92–4. This seems to have been part of a broader medieval tradition: Battle Abbey is the most famous example, but in 1410 Henry IV endowed a chantry and chapel on the field of Shrewsbury to commemorate his victory over Henry Percy in 1403. Masses were to be sung continually for the dead on both sides.

<sup>453</sup> Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut*, p. 98.

<sup>454</sup> Rollason, 'Cults of Murdered Saints', pp. 6–7.

<sup>455</sup> Bolton, *the Empire of Cnut*, pp. 87–8.

<sup>456</sup> ASC 870; A. Gransden, 'The Legends and Traditions Concerning the Origins of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds', *EHR* 100 (1985), pp. 89–95.

<sup>457</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum* 1, ii.184–5.

### 5. Meeting Places and Warfare in the Landscape

There are many examples of landscape, meeting-places and warfare intersecting in Anglo-Saxon England. On the Continent, assemblies had a strongly martial character in a general sense. Identity was expressed in militarised terms in early medieval society, and assembly was an important part of this expression. Assembly publicly asserted the legal status of those gathered, and their right to carry weapons, and by extension to participate in violent action. Many of the critical social features of assembly, such as access to the king, were replicated on campaign. Indeed, assemblies often preceded campaigns and were held near the frontier. Charlemagne, for example, held councils almost continuously at Regensburg between 791 and 793 in preparation for his campaign against the Avars.<sup>458</sup> Ideally then, assemblies can be seen as staging grounds that gathered and channelled the martial resources of the kingdom. In an Anglo-Saxon context Levi Roach has discussed the role of major royal assemblies in decisions of war and peace in the tenth century, most notably in 992 and 999.<sup>459</sup> It would not be inappropriate to understand assemblies as gatherings of military potential. Roach points to the reign of Æthelstan as providing a particularly clear example of this, in which Æthelstan began his 934 campaign in Scotland at an assembly at Winchester (Pentecost, 25 May), a second assembly was held at Nottingham while *en route* (7 June), and a third was convened at Buckingham upon the king's return (13 September).<sup>460</sup>

That being said, tension could also manifest itself at assemblies, and in cases such as this the line between assembly field and battlefield was a thin one. Bürstadt, between Worms and Lorsch, was recorded as an assembly place during the reign of Louis the German in 873, when he met with

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<sup>458</sup> S. Airlie, 'Talking Heads: Assemblies in Early Medieval Germany', in S. Fanning (ed.), *Political Assemblies in the Earlier Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2003), pp. 26–46, at p. 35.

<sup>459</sup> Roach, *Kingship and Consent*, pp. 158–9.

<sup>460</sup> Roach, *Kingship and Consent*, p. 24, 158–9; S. 407, 425–6.

envoys from the Danes and Slavs. In 984, however, Henry the Quarrelsome went to Bürstadt with his retinue and held a tense meeting with supporters of the child-king Otto III. Thietmar wrote that Henry did not relish the prospect of battle, but during the preceding weeks, Henry and his supporters had gathered in force while partisans of Otto III besieged and captured the castle of Ala, which had been held by Henry's allies.<sup>461</sup> The situation was delicate, then, and battle must have been a very real prospect before the meeting at Bürstadt.<sup>462</sup>

There are several potential examples of this in Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>463</sup> A proposed candidate for the location of the Battle of Brunanburh (937), the vicinity of Thingwall, is from the Old Norse *þing-völlr* ('assembly-field').<sup>464</sup> The site of the 1010 Battle of Thetford, known in Norse literature as *Hringmaraheiðr* and in an Anglo-Norman text as *Ringhemere* has been associated with either Ringmere (Norfolk) or Rymer (Suffolk), both of which probably share an etymology (OE *hring* 'ring', *mere* 'lake') which may describe a meeting-point for an administrative district. Indeed, nine parish boundaries converge on the Suffolk Rymer and seven on the Norfolk Ringmere.<sup>465</sup> Of course 'Thetford' (*Þeod-ford*, 'Ford of the People') is also suggestive of assembly in its own right. This suggests a duality in the way in which meeting-places were understood in the landscape. They could be considered places of negotiation or places of war.

It is also possible to isolate specific waypoints in the landscape that served this purpose. Barrows certainly had a role in this dual conceptualization of territory. The barrow of *Cwichelmshlæwe*, where the Danes marched to challenge the West Saxon *fyrð* before the Battle of Kennett was

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<sup>461</sup> Thietmar, *Chronicon*, ed. R. Holtzmann (Berlin, 1935), iv.3–4.

<sup>462</sup> Airle, 'Talking Heads', pp. 39–40.

<sup>463</sup> Baker and Brooks, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage*, pp. 205–6 goes through some of the evidence.

<sup>464</sup> P. Cavill, 'The Site of the Battle of *Brunanburh*: Manuscripts and Maps, Grammar and Geography', in O.J. Padel and D.N. Parsons (eds.), *A Commodity of Good Names: Essays in Honour of Margaret Gelling* (Donnington, 2008), pp. 303–19.

<sup>465</sup> K. Briggs, 'The Battle-site and Place-name Ringmere', *Notes & Queries* 58, 4 (2011), pp. 491–2.

referred to as a shire meeting-place during the reign of Æthelred,<sup>466</sup> and it has been suggested that a small rectangular structure of c. 6m x 6m excavated in 2004 may relate to the monument's period as an assembly place.<sup>467</sup> This would suggest that the arrival of the enemy army at an established meeting place could set in motion the mechanisms to bring about a pitched battle (and see below, chapter seven). Meanwhile in the *Vita Wilfrithi*, when Wilfrid and his men washed ashore in Sussex, they met the hostile South Saxons at a barrow. Wilfrid attempted to negotiate with the South Saxons and purchase the freedom of his men.<sup>468</sup> In this case, Wilfrid's gambit did not succeed, and battle was joined. Before the Battle of Winwæd, Bede reported that Oswiu promised Penda vast treasures in exchange for peace.<sup>469</sup> Once again, negotiations failed and Oswiu was forced to fight a battle in which the odds were heavily against him. From these examples, it is clear that the place of negotiation could quickly become the place of battle if an accord could not be reached.

Stones played a role as significant territorial markers that could be associated with assembly and warfare. Before the Battle of Edington, Alfred assembled his army at Ecgberht's Stone, named for his grandfather. Meanwhile, according to antiquarians, Alfred assembled his army before the Battle of Ashdown at Blowingstone Hill. While references only begin in 1761, and the association between the 'blowing stone' and Alfred only began in the 1850s, the sarsen stone on the hill does indeed project a loud trumpet-like noise when blown into that can be heard some six miles

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<sup>466</sup> S.1454 (dated 990 x 992).

<sup>467</sup> A. Sanmark and S. Semple, 'Places of Assembly: New Discoveries in Sweden and England', *Forvannen* 103, 4 (2008), pp. 245–59, p. 255.

<sup>468</sup> VSW 13, p. 26: *quibus sanctus pontifex noster copiosam pecuniam promittens, animas redimere cupiens leniter pacificeque loquebatur* ('our holy bishop spoke to them soothingly and peaceably, desiring to ransom the lives [of his companions] with the promise of a copious sum of money.')

<sup>469</sup> HE iii.24, p. 290: *Oswiu [...] ad ultimum necessitate cogente promisit se ei innumera et maiora quam credi potest ornamenta regia uel donaria in pretium pacis largiturum* ('Oswiu was finally forced by necessity to promise to grant him an innumerable and vast store of royal treasures and gifts as the price of peace'.)

distant.<sup>470</sup> Ecgberht's stone was an important nexus in the royal landscape of Wiltshire, perhaps representing a well-known landmark where men were accustomed to meet (perhaps, given the stone's association with Ecgberht, it represented more specifically a place where men were accustomed to gather at the behest of the king). In 603 Æthelfrith of Bernicia defeated Áedán mac Gabráin at *Degsastan* (Degsa's Stone),<sup>471</sup> and Maldon, the site of the aforementioned battle in 991 comes from the Old English *Mæl-dun* (cross or monument hill).<sup>472</sup>

Markers could also be used to commemorate battle. Bede, for example, wrote that there was a monument in eastern Kent dedicated to 'Horsa' after he was killed by the Britons that could still be seen in his day.<sup>473</sup> A British parallel may include the ninth-century Pillar of Eliseg, which commemorates the victory of a Powysian king over his Anglo-Saxon enemies.<sup>474</sup> Interestingly, the Pillar of Eliseg stands atop an Iron Age barrow. It is quite plausible that the battle scene depicted on the Aberlemno 2 sculpture stone may provide a Pictish example of a similar concept. Monuments to battles would serve as mnemonic devices in the landscape, recalling a point of interface between two groups, and articulating territorial possession by celebrating victories.

Trees or bushes also appear to be significant as markers for both battle and assembly. Bede describes Augustine's meeting with the Britons at Augustine's Oak, noting that even in his own time the site was remembered in Old English as *Augustinæ's Ác*, and that the meeting was held on the borders of West Saxon and Hwiccan territory (*in confinio Huiccorum et Occidentium Saxonum*). Moreover, the meeting was held under the auspices of Æthelberht of Kent (*adiutorio*

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<sup>470</sup> ASC 878. F. Rolt, 'Blowing a Trumpet for a Stone: The Blowing Stone at Kingston Lisle', *Oxoniensia* 84 (2019), pp. 69–84.

<sup>471</sup> *HE* i.34.

<sup>472</sup> Baker and Brooks, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage*, p. 206.

<sup>473</sup> Bede, *HE* i.15.

<sup>474</sup> See below, pp. 215–21.

*usus Ædilbercti regis*), the preeminent king south of the Humber.<sup>475</sup> It is certainly feasible that the council at Augustine’s Oak was as much a demonstration of Æthelberht’s political and, by extension, military power amongst the West Saxons, Hwicce and Britons. The 851 battle at *Acleah*, identified by Coates as Oakley (Hants.) near Basing, refers to a clearing in an oak wood. The region is marked by a Roman road—imprinted in the toponymy by the villages of East and West Stratton, six miles away—and the place-name of Herriard (OE *here*, ‘army’ and *geard* ‘yard, enclosure or encampment’) and it is some fifteen miles from Winchester.<sup>476</sup> The general suitability of *Acleah* place-names for assemblies is suggested by synods at a probably different *Acleah* (or *Acleahs*) in 782, 788, and 810, and a meeting recorded in a charter for 805.<sup>477</sup> Similarly in 970, there is reference to the provost of Chester-le-Street copying prayers in the bishop’s tent on Oakley Down (Dorset), while attending a royal council.<sup>478</sup> Asser recalls that the Battle of Ashdown (OE *Æscendun*, now the Berkshire Downs), which Asser renders in Latin as *mons fraxini* (hill of the Ash), was fought around a small and solitary thorn tree around which the armies clashed.<sup>479</sup> Likewise, after gathering forces at Ecgberht’s Stone, Alfred proceeded to Iley Oak, near Warminster, and he remained there for one night before marching against the Danes at Edington in 878.<sup>480</sup>

In addition, heaths and open moors filled a similar role, and can be seen as both battlefields and assembly sites. For instance, Hatfield Chase by the River Trent was the site of a battle in 633 in which Edwin of Northumbria was killed by Cadwallon and Penda.<sup>481</sup> Hatfield Chase occupied a

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<sup>475</sup> *HE* ii.2.

<sup>476</sup> *ASC* 851; Asser 5; R. Coates, ‘The Battle at “Acleah”: A Linguist’s Reflection on the Annals 851 and 871 of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*’, in R. Hickey and S. Puppel (eds.), *Language History and Linguistic Modelling* (Berlin, 1997), pp. 605–14.

<sup>477</sup> *ASC* DE 782, 788; S. 1439; S. 40.

<sup>478</sup> Blair, *Building*, p. 109; citing T.J. Brown, ed., *The Durham Ritual* (Copenhagen, 1969), pp. 23–4.

<sup>479</sup> Asser 37, 39: *unica spinosa arbor, brevis admodum [...] circa quam ergo hostiles inter se acies.*

<sup>480</sup> *ASC* 878; Lavelle, ‘Geographies of Power’, p. 206 n. 84.

<sup>481</sup> *HE* ii.20.

distinctly nebulous position in Anglo-Saxon political geography: in the Tribal Hidage it is appended to the Kingdom of Lindsey as *Lindisfarona mid Hæðfeldlande*. In 702 Aldfrith of Northumbria convened a council at Austerfield. If the traditional association of the council with the Bawtry in the South Yorkshire is correct,<sup>482</sup> this would place the council seventeen miles south of the Humber (a reminder that we need to be cautious in regard to the southern bounds of the kingdom), less than ten miles from the Trent, and ten miles south of the aforementioned Hatfield Chase. If Austerfield was considered to be in *Hæðfeldlande*, then it would seem that this region was in the centre of Mercian, Northumbrian and Lindsey interests in the seventh century. As a point of comparison, in 679 a church council was held at a *different* Hatfield, in Hertfordshire—a similarly ambiguous part of the country between the East Saxons and the Middle Angles.<sup>483</sup>

Why might heaths, woodlands or woodland glades be suitable locations for negotiation and warfare? In the first place, Cubitt's argument that such places were conveniently located by both the road and river-network and had the space to accommodate large gatherings of people is surely correct.<sup>484</sup> Undoubtedly the logistical considerations were important, and more than that, an upland moor would not only be accessible, but also quite visible—possibly providing a dramatic setting for interaction between parties.<sup>485</sup> However, we might be able to go a little further. It is possible that it has much to do with hunting. As Lavelle has shown, many of the battles recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* between the West Saxons and Danes took place at sites that seem to have been royal centres.<sup>486</sup> So perhaps battles and meetings take place in the forests for quite a simple

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<sup>482</sup> C. Cubitt *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils* (Leicester, 1995), p. 303.

<sup>483</sup> Cubitt, *Church Councils*, pp. 252–8, 301–2.

<sup>484</sup> Cubitt, *Church Councils*, pp. 35–9, 319–21. This is supported by Roach, *Kingship and Consent*, pp. 47–8.

<sup>485</sup> As in Lavelle, 'Why Grateley?'; Baker and Brookes, 'Monumentalising the Political Landscape: A Special Class of Anglo-Saxon Assembly Site', *The Antiquaries Journal*, 93 (2013), pp. 147–62.

<sup>486</sup> Lavelle, 'Geographies of Power', pp. 187–219; also Abels, 'English Logistics and Military Administration, 871–1066: the Impact of the Viking Wars', in A. Nørgård Jørgensen and B.L. Clausen (eds.), *Military Aspects of Scandinavian Society in a European Perspective, AD 1–1300* (Copenhagen, 1997), pp. 257–65, at pp. 257–65; Brooks, 'England in the Ninth Century: The Crucible of Defeat', *TRHS*, 5<sup>th</sup> ser., 29 (1979), pp. 1–20, at pp. 9–11.

reason: that is where the king could be found. The importance of hunting in early medieval society is well-attested, and its aristocratic and martial tenor is quite clear.<sup>487</sup> In the one passage of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* concerning hunting, Oswine of Deira is to be found warming himself by the fire after returning from his hunt (*uenerat enim de uenatu*) with his retainers and he explicitly removes his sword when he is joined for supper by St Aidan, giving his weapon to one of his retainers (*discinxit se gladio suo et dedit illum ministro*).<sup>488</sup> There are two things which might be gleaned from this: first, that the king might be joined at his hunting lodge by councillors not directly associated with his hunting, in this instance St Aidan. It seems likely therefore that the hunting lodge was considered a suitable place for the king to entertain guests and, presumably, conduct business. Second, that the king was surrounded by his men and girded with a sword *directly* after returning from his hunt. In this context, it is easy to imagine the royal hunting party quickly becoming the royal war party. In 1065 there was an extraordinary episode in which Harold Godwinson subdued the Welsh at Portskewet (*Portascihð*) and ordered ‘building’ to be done (a hunting lodge?), and then thought to invite King Edward for the hunting; before all the preparations could be completed Caradog ap Gruffydd attacked and killed Harold’s workmen, and carried off all the goods collected there.<sup>489</sup> It is possible that there was something ‘liminal’ about forests in the organisation of Anglo-Saxon society in more general terms. The Forest of Selwood, for example, was the site of several battles in West Saxon historical memory. For instance, the *Chronicle* records the Battle of *Peonnum* (thought to be Penselwood, Som.) in 658.<sup>490</sup> The monuments of Ecgberht’s Stone and Iley Oak, so pertinent to the Battle of Edington, lie on the

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<sup>487</sup> N. Sykes, ‘Deer, Land, Knives and Halls: Social Change in Early Medieval England’, *The Antiquaries Journal* 90 (2010), pp. 175–93.

<sup>488</sup> *HE* iii.14.

<sup>489</sup> ASC CD 1065.

<sup>490</sup> ASC 658.

western reaches of the forest.<sup>491</sup> In Aldhelm's *obit* in the *Chronicle*, he was described as 'bishop west of the wood' (*westan wuda biscep*).<sup>492</sup> This suggests that Selwood was a dividing forest, and that the character of the territories west of the wood were considered different to those of the east, making the forest a liminal zone in West Saxon territorial organisation. David Rollason's recent work has shown the way in which royal centres were often found on liminal fringes between cultivated and uncultivated land, citing Tamworth, on the fringe of Cannock Chase, and Yeavinger on the edge of the Cheviots in support of this.<sup>493</sup> Rollason also notes the significance of hunting to the ideology of kingship, with a particular emphasis on the military symbolism of the hunt. Meanwhile, the recent work of FitzPatrick and Hennessy has shown the way in which royal power was connected to topography in early medieval Ireland, focusing particularly on the role of prominent hilltops—often known in literature as 'Finn's Seat'—as hunting grounds and places of conflict and military musters in boundary regions between polities which had mythological connotations in Irish literature as the domains of the *Fianna*. The authors call such landscapes 'royal marchlands,' suggesting that they are particularly associated with the activities of kings.<sup>494</sup> Rivers, fords and islands are prominent in the process of war and peace. Most of Bede's battles, for instance, were named for rivers: The River Idle (616), is a tributary of the Trent;<sup>495</sup> the Battle of Heavenfield (634), Bede wrote, was fought at a place known in English as *Denisesburn*, named for a stream that would have formed a tributary of the Tyne;<sup>496</sup> the Battle of the Trent (679) is self-explanatory.<sup>497</sup> As mentioned above, the Battle of Hatfield (633) was fought between the Humber

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<sup>491</sup> Lavelle, 'Geographies of Power', p. 205 map 1; Asser 55.

<sup>492</sup> ASC 709.

<sup>493</sup> Rollason, *The Power of Place*, pp. 136–68.

<sup>494</sup> E. FitzPatrick and R. Hennessy, 'Finn's Seat: topographies of power and royal marchlands of Gaelic polities in medieval Ireland', *Landscape History* 38, 2 (2017), pp. 29–62.

<sup>495</sup> HE ii.12.

<sup>496</sup> HE iii.1.

<sup>497</sup> HE iv.24.

and the Trent.<sup>498</sup> Meanwhile, the Battle of Winwæd was on the banks of a flooded river, and many men were drowned in the river during the rout.<sup>499</sup>

Brentford (Middx.) was the site of a 704 x 705 council that was intended to assuage tensions between the East and West kingdoms; a 781 synod presided over by Offa of Mercia; and a battle in 1016 between Cnut and Edmund Ironside.<sup>500</sup> Halsall has tallied some thirteen Anglo-Saxon battles at river-crossings or possible river-crossings, while place-name evidence suggests some association between river-crossings and warfare (e.g. Hereford, most notably).<sup>501</sup> But by the same token, the importance of river-crossings as places of negotiation where peace might be achieved can also be emphasised. The deposition of swords in water may have something to do with a peace-making process; as Blair has noted, there have been a remarkable number of late Anglo-Saxon weapons discovered in the Thames between Oxford and Reading.<sup>502</sup>

Islands may have been used as ‘quarantine zones’ (to borrow a modern term) for strangers. According to the ninth-century Welsh text, *Historia Brittonum*, the Saxons were first granted the Isle of Thanet in exchange for military service.<sup>503</sup> Likewise, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* recorded that ‘Hengist and Horsa’ arrived at Ebbsfleet, in the south of Thanet.<sup>504</sup> St Augustine and his missionaries were first confined to the very same island by Æthelberht of Kent before being invited to Canterbury.<sup>505</sup> It is well known that vikings first overwintered in England on the Isle of Sheppey,

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<sup>498</sup> *HE* ii.20.

<sup>499</sup> *HE* iii.24.

<sup>500</sup> 704x705: ‘Letter of Wealdhere’, *EHD*, 1, no. 164. For 781: S.1257; Cubitt, *Councils*, pp. 306–7. For 1016: *ASC* C 1016. Coincidentally (or perhaps not), Brentford was also the site of a Civil War battle in 1642.

<sup>501</sup> Halsall, ‘Anthropology and the Study of Pre-Conquest Warfare and Society: The Ritual War in Anglo-Saxon England’ in S. Chadwick-Hawkes (ed.), *Weapons and Warfare in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 155–77, at p. 166 fig. 11.4.

<sup>502</sup> Blair, *Oxfordshire*, p. 98; D. Wilson, ‘Some Neglected Late Anglo-Saxon Swords’, *Medieval Archaeology* 9 (1965), pp. 32–54; V.I. Evison, ‘A Sword from the Thames at Wallingford Bridge’, *Archaeological Journal* 124 (1967), pp. 160–89.

<sup>503</sup> *HB* 31.

<sup>504</sup> *ASC* 449.

<sup>505</sup> *HE* i.25.

less than twenty miles from Thanet. Asser comments on the liminal nature of the Isle of Sheppey itself, noting that it lies in the Thames between Essex and Kent.<sup>506</sup> Aidan may have chosen Lindisfarne as his seat because it reminded him of home, but one should also recall that the tidal island of Lindisfarne is a mere five miles from the royal seat of Bamburgh. For Oswald too, then, Lindisfarne may have been an ideal location for the Irish mission: close enough to keep an eye on but still at arm's length.<sup>507</sup> There may be something of this in the 1006 entry of the *Chronicle*, in which the Chronicler calls the Isle of Wight, where the Danes took winter quarters, a *friðstole*, a word usually associated with claiming sanctuary in churches.<sup>508</sup> The Isle of Wight is only twenty miles from the royal centre of Winchester; perhaps it was intended that the authorities in Winchester would keep a weather eye on the situation. Islands seem to have had a certain liminality about them: they appear in the above examples to be associated with 'others'; either newcomers who were as of yet an unknown quantity or people it was hoped would soon leave. Perhaps this liminality made it appropriate for dealing with strangers.

These strands appear to come together at Thorney in 893, when a Danish host was pursued across the Thames after being defeated at Farnham. According to the *Chronicle*, the Danes took refuge on an islet in the River Colne, which Æthelweard identified as Thorney (Isle of Thorns), where they were besieged by the English. According to Æthelweard, the Danes made terms with the *ætheling* Edward, swearing oaths and giving hostages before being allowed to depart.<sup>509</sup> In a final example, after much fighting, Edmund Ironside and Cnut made peace in 1016, meeting on the Island of Alney in the River Severn. The *Chronicle* reports that *þa cynegas comon togædere æt Olanege 7 hira freondscype þær gefæstnodon ge mid wedde ge mid aþe 7 þæt gyld setton wið þone*

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<sup>506</sup> Asser, 3. For Sheppey: *quae sita est in Tamesi flumine inter East-Seaxum et Cantuarios*.

<sup>507</sup> *HE* iii.3.

<sup>508</sup> ASC C 1006.

<sup>509</sup> ASC 893; Æthelweard, *Chronicon*. 893.

here, 7 hi tohwurfon ða mid þissum sehte, 7 feng Eadmund to Westsexan 7 Cnut to Myrcan.<sup>510</sup> It is worth noting that the ‘D’ manuscript of the *Chronicle* records that Alney is ‘near Deerhurst’ (*wið Deorhyrste*); in addition to being an important minster, could there be a hunting connection here as well?

## 6. Conclusion

To conclude, this section has examined the intersection between meeting places, landscape, and warfare. It has been shown that places in the landscape that served as points of negotiation were also used for war. It is clear that specific waypoints—barrows, stones, prominent trees or bushes—were used, and they could exist within larger ‘liminal landscapes’ such as forests or rivers. Some of these places also hold clear royal associations, such as Selwood Forest, *Cwichelmslæwe* or *Acleah*. This is not a contradiction: it allows the historian to break away from notions of ‘royal cores’ and distant peripheries and begin to reconceptualise Anglo-Saxon territoriality in a more layered fashion.

There is a notable degree of continuity regarding the places where these processes were enacted, even as the actual nature of these places changed, and as the processes of conflict, assembly practices, dispute resolution and peace making developed. Hertford represents an ideal example of this. It is described as an important meeting place in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, where it served as the site of an important synod organised by Theodore in 673.<sup>511</sup> Hertford had much to recommend it: at the confluence of four river valleys (the Rib, Beane, Mimram join the Lea at Hertford, which then flows south for twenty miles before joining the Thames near London). It also lies upon Ermine

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<sup>510</sup> ASC C 1016: ‘the kings came together at Alney Island and established their friendship with pledge and with oath, and fixed the payment for the army. And with this reconciliation they separated, Edmund took Wessex and Cnut Mercia.’

<sup>511</sup> *HE* iv.5.

Street, the chief Roman road that runs from London to the north. Furthermore, it may have been particularly useful for synods because of its political situation: central in terms of routes of communication, but in a nebulous political position between the East Saxon kingdom and the Middle Angles. It is likely that the name of the place itself suggests a hunting connotation.

Later, Hertford remained an important meeting place even as the landscape changed and the nature of the meetings that took place there changed. The next time Hertford emerges on the historical record is 912, when Edward ordered two *burhs* to be constructed, one on either side of the Lea.<sup>512</sup> The position of the two *burhs* reflects the continued importance of Hertford as a crossing point, but its nature as a place of assembly had changed from a place for general synods to a defensible place where men gathered to discharge military obligations.<sup>513</sup> There was also a mint established at Hertford, and this is in line with measures referred to in Edward's first code, which sought to control commerce under the auspices of a *burh*-reeve or a *port*-reeve.<sup>514</sup> Though not every *burh* had a mint, this emphasises the role of tenth-century fortifications as places that communicated royal power.<sup>515</sup> It is likely that there was some role for the *burh* in the implementation of law in the district, as suggested in Æthelstan's Grateley decree.<sup>516</sup> To this end, the will of Æthelgifu (c. 956) refers to oaths produced from 'all the senior men of Hertford and their wives', thereby demonstrating the *burh*'s tenth-century role as place to which people pertained for legal activity.<sup>517</sup> Hertford itself is not mentioned again until Domesday, but the Ramsey *Liber Benefactorum* notes the gathering of *potentes* from Hertford *scira* in 991 for the consecration of Ramsey's new church,

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<sup>512</sup> ASC 912.

<sup>513</sup> Of course, the importance of the Southumbrian synods declined in the mid ninth century. See Cubitt, *Church Councils*, pp. 235–40.

<sup>514</sup> I Ew.1; Lambert, *Law and Order*, p. 272.

<sup>515</sup> Molyneaux, *Formation*, pp. 136–41. For the mint of Hertford: C. Blunt, 'The Origins of the Mints at Hertford and Maldon', *British Numismatic Journal* 41 (1972), pp. 21–6.

<sup>516</sup> II As. 20.1.

<sup>517</sup> S. 1497.

and the *Chronicle* entry for 1011 remarks that a viking army ravaged through Hertfordshire, demonstrating the way a territorial unit—that is the shire—came to be defined by a single fortified place by the late-tenth century.<sup>518</sup> Thus, we see a general continuity as a place suitable for meeting throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, but the character of the place itself changed and with it changed the nature of such meetings. These changes reflect general political and administrative developments and attendant developments in the landscape itself. Of notable importance here is political consolidation and the construction of fortifications during the reign of Edward and the role of the fortress in becoming a centre of a discrete territorial unit.

Thus, we can see the way the crucial innovation of the *burh*, which represented a dramatic change in the Anglo-Saxon landscape, did not just represent a change in the defensive landscape or military tactics and strategy, it also gave rise to important developments to military obligations, legal practice, and assembly practice. These processes went hand-in-hand, and as such, all of these activities (which taken together communicated collective identity) had a common geographical vocabulary, and we see the same places being suited for all of these roles. Just as there was a continuity in terms of *place* within a changing landscape context, the language of conflict and reconciliation, which elided the distinction between violence in a ‘legal’ context and violence in a ‘warfare’ context and the process of reconciliation also suggests continuity by emphasising the primacy of the king and the interpersonal nature of these processes, even in the context of changes to the military, legal, and administrative framework of the expanding and consolidating realm of the tenth and eleventh centuries.

The following chapters will analyse the themes discussed in this chapter in distinct landscape settings. The three-case studies that follow will examine the ways in which collective identity and

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<sup>518</sup> *Chron. Abbatiae Ramesiensis* lviii; ASC C 1011.

authority were communicated in specific landscape contexts. Certain themes run through all of them: warfare, conflict and kingship are essential across all three studies; aspects of the landscape, particularly the importance of routeways, are also constant. However, it will be shown that beneath this layer of continuity, there was considerable difference in the way in which identity was communicated in different parts of Britain in different periods. Rather than attempt to use a single category of source material to discuss all three case-studies, I have allowed myself to be led by the specific and particular sources available for each region. One might suggest that this too can be seen as a manifestation of the regional particularism so prevalent in Anglo-Saxon society.

## Chapter IV

### The Eastern Zone in the Seventh Century

The previous chapters discussed the variability of the Anglo-Saxon landscape, the juxtaposition between regional particularism and elite cultural homogeneity, and the role of conflict—and writing about conflict—to the communication of collective identity. It was argued that the processes of conflict and reconciliation had distinct landscape contexts, and that the places where such action occurred served to locate collective identity in the landscape. Often, it was argued, these ‘performances’ of collective identity (battles, peace-making, assemblies, etc.) were located in liminal spaces. While such places often appear to be peripheral, they in fact invert the notion of core-and-periphery because of their importance as places where identity could be asserted, and the importance of such landscapes in both textual and non-textual sources. In this way these allegedly peripheral places could exert their own ideological centrality.

The previous chapter introduced this idea by discussing heaths, forests, and islands generally. The following three chapters will demonstrate this concept more specifically by examining the communication of collective identity through the processes of conflict and negotiation in distinct landscape settings. This chapter will make a regional case study of the ‘Eastern Lowland zone’ in the seventh century. I will begin with a description of the region and its networks of communication and transportation in order to demonstrate that the region was geographically and economically cohesive and thoroughly interconnected despite its political fragmentation.

The region was competed over politically by the East Anglian, Mercian, and Bernician dynasties, and it will be argued that establishing important royal minsters was a way in which to ‘anchor’ dynastic authority in the landscape. By doing this, important minsters—which were notably permanent compared to the peripatetic mode of kings and bishops—inverted the apparent dynamic

of core-and-periphery. All the minsters that will be discussed were relatively distant from the royal heartlands of the dynasties they represented, but it will be suggested that through the prestige of the people associated with them, their royal connections, and their territorial ambitions, these minsters came to assert their own centrality. Finally, it will be argued that far from being neutral retreats from worldly affairs, these minsters were active in the processes of conflict, negotiation, and reconciliation by which royal dynasties competed over the region, serving as places where the processes that communicated collective identity were enacted in the landscape.

## 1. *Landscape*

### i.1: *Description of the Region*

The ‘Eastern Lowland zone’ roughly corresponds to the East Riding of Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, the East Midlands, and Norfolk; this extensive region has been described by John Blair and Tom Williamson.<sup>519</sup> This chapter will expand on the approaches taken by Blair and Williamson, as well as scholars such as Alan Everitt and Charles Phythian-Adams, whose work on ‘river-and-wold’ models was discussed in chapter one. The cores of the region for this study are the estuaries of the Humber and the Wash, and the veins are their appurtenant river-systems. As a whole, the region is characterised by its low elevation: only the Lincolnshire and Yorkshire wolds, the Lincoln Edge and the so-called ‘East Anglian Heights’—the north-eastern extension of the southern chalk formation—rise to an elevation of more than 300 feet. There is evidence for the cultivation of grain of various type in the region, and this expanded in the late-seventh and eighth centuries, as rye and oats seem to have become more important. As McKerracher has written, there is evidence of considerable regional variation within the bounds of this case-study: rye and barley predominate in sandy soils, for example, while the chalks and clays respectively show evidence for the

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<sup>519</sup> Blair, *Building*, pp. 22–73 and *passim*; Williamson, *Environment, Society and Landscape*, pp. 36–81.

cultivation of barley and free-threshing wheat.<sup>520</sup> Moreover, McKerracher commented that peat fens around Ely demonstrated a tendency toward wheat production, while saline silt fens produced more evidence of barley.<sup>521</sup> Furthermore, highly fertile loess deposits were to be found in pockets which correspond with high densities of population in Domesday Book, as noted by Williamson.<sup>522</sup> More ubiquitous, though, was the pasturage of sheep and cattle, which thrive on the mineral-rich grasses and peat silts. Fen meadows were used for thatching materials; bull and spike rush and eelgrass were used for fodder or even the foundations of low dykes.<sup>523</sup> There was an abundance of other resources provided by the fens: monastic chroniclers from the fenland houses wrote at length about the richness of the wetlands for its fish and waterfowl.<sup>524</sup> This is at odds with other written evidence from monastic contexts that go to some length to describe the desolate isolation of the fens, a contradiction noted by Loveluck, among others.<sup>525</sup> Furthermore, iron was mined in the Driffield basin,<sup>526</sup> limestone was quarried on the Lincoln Edge,<sup>527</sup> and sandstone was quarried in the wolds to provide the stone for many late medieval buildings.<sup>528</sup>

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<sup>520</sup> McKerracher, 'Bread and surpluses: the Anglo-Saxon 'bread wheat' thesis reconsidered', *Environmental Archaeology: The Journal of Human Palaeoecology* 21, 1 (2016), pp. 88–102; cf. the arguments of D. Banham and R. Faith, *Anglo-Saxon Farms and Farming* (Oxford, 2014), pp. 20–33.

<sup>521</sup> McKerracher, 'Bread and surpluses'; P. Murphy, 'The Landscape and Economy of the Anglo-Saxon Coast: New Archaeological Evidence', in Higham and Ryan (eds), *Landscape Archaeology*, pp. 211–21.

<sup>522</sup> Williamson, *Environment, Society and Landscape*, p. 51.

<sup>523</sup> Williamson, *Environment, Society and Landscape*, p. 51; Oosthuizen, *The Anglo-Saxon Fenland* (Oxford, 2017), p. 3; W. van der Meer, 'Harvesting underwater meadows, use of eelgrass as indicated by the Dutch archaeological record', *Journal of the Archaeology of the Low Countries* 1, 1 (2009), pp. 97–105.

<sup>524</sup> Oosthuizen, *Fenland*, p. 6.

<sup>525</sup> e.g. VSG 24; C. Loveluck, *Northwest Europe in the Early Middle Ages, c. 600–1150: A Comparative Archaeology* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 178–80.

<sup>526</sup> Loveluck, 'The Development of the Anglo-Saxon Landscape: Economy and Society 'On Driffield'', East Yorkshire, 400–750 AD', *ASSAH* 9 (1996), pp. 25–48.

<sup>527</sup> Stafford, *The East Midlands*, p. 5.

<sup>528</sup> Michael Shapland, 'St Mary's, Broughton, Lincolnshire: A Thengly Tower-Nave in the Late Anglo-Saxon Landscape', *The Archaeological Journal* 165, 1 (2008), pp. 471–519, at 489–90.

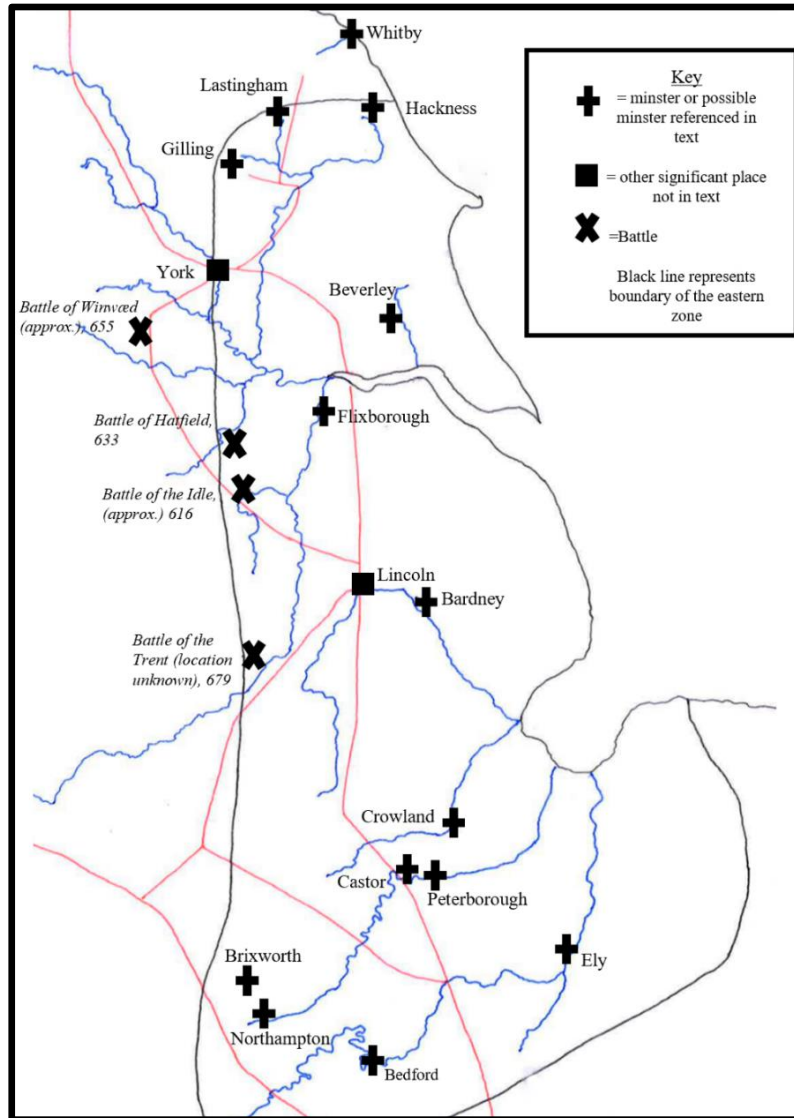


FIGURE 1: THE EASTERN ZONE. ROMAN ROADS REPRESENTED IN RED, RIVERS IN THE WASH AND HUMBER SYSTEM REPRESENTED IN BLUE. THE BOUNDARIES OF THE ZONE ARE REPRESENTED BY A BLACK LINE.

### i.2: *Routeways and Connectivities*

The chief North-South land route was the Roman road known as Ermine Street, but other Roman roads were also significant: the stretch of Watling Street between St Alban's and Venonis (High Cross, Leics.), and the stretch of the Fosse Way between Venonis and Lincoln seem to mark the western edges of this landscape. Further Roman roads include the routes from Leicester to Godmanchester, from Durobriviae (Water Newton) into Norfolk.

The extensive river-systems of the Wash and Humber that drain into the North Sea were also of great significance. Place-name evidence in the fens and the Wash catchment suggests extensive use of river transportation.<sup>529</sup> As Martin Carver has written in several places, the river-networks of eastern England were part of a cohesive zone that brought ‘all the estuaries of the east, in theory at least, nearer to each other than to their contiguous western landmass.’<sup>530</sup> The efficacy of maritime transportation has been demonstrated through recent experimental studies utilising reconstructed seventh-century Anglo-Saxon ships that plied the littoral from Canterbury to York in a matter of days, and could easily and swiftly navigate the eastern river systems. Recent research into early medieval travel-times suggests that a journey from Bamburgh to Francia, a distance of 400 miles, could be made in as little as thirty-two hours.<sup>531</sup>

Emphasis on maritime connectivity has often focused on overseas exchange networks. The maritime culture of the eastern seaboard extended across to the wider North Sea world, most famously navigated by Frisian sailors.<sup>532</sup> To this end, Loveluck has argued that communities on the North Sea littoral had more in common with their counterparts across the sea than with the inland communities.<sup>533</sup> Scholarly emphasis on overseas networks is indicative of the tremendous influence of Richard Hodges’ seminal 1982 work on the development of the trading *emporia* of

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<sup>529</sup> A. Cole, ‘The Place-Name Evidence for Water Transport in Early Medieval England’, in Blair (ed.), *Waterways and Canal-Building*, pp. 55–84.

<sup>530</sup> M. Carver, ‘Conversion and Politics on the Eastern Seaboard of Britain: Some Archaeological Indicators’, in B. Crawford (ed.), *Conversion and Christianity in the North Sea World* (Committee for Dark Age Studies, University of St Andrews, 1998), pp. 11–40, at p. 39; Carver, ‘Pre-Viking Traffic in the North Sea’, in S. McGrail (ed.), *Maritime Celts, Frisians, and Saxons*, CBA Res. Rep. 71 (York, 1990), pp. 117–25.

<sup>531</sup> C. Ferguson, ‘Re-evaluating Early Medieval Northumbrian Contacts and the ‘Coastal Highway’’, in D. Petts and S. Turner (eds.), *Early Medieval Northumbria: Kingdoms and Communities* (Turnhout, 2011), pp. 283–302, at p. 294, table 10, revising the calculations of Carver, ‘Pre-Viking Traffic’.

<sup>532</sup> e.g. S. Lebecq, *Marchands et navigateurs frisons du haut Moyen Age*, 2 vols. (Lille, 1983); more generally: Lebecq, ‘The Northern Seas (Fifth to Eighth Centuries)’, in P. Fouracre (ed.), *NCMH*, vol. 1: c. 500–c. 700 (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 639–59.

<sup>533</sup> C. Loveluck and D. Tys, ‘Coastal Societies, exchange and identity along the Channel and southern North Sea shores of Europe, AD 600–1000’, *Journal of Maritime Archaeology* 1 (2006), pp. 140–69.

*Gippeswic* (Ipswich), *Lundenwic* (London), *Eoferwic* (York) and *Hamwic* (Southampton) between c. 670 and 740. Hodges argued for the monopolisation of trade by elites and the establishment of trading-sites for the import of luxury goods. The *raison d'être* of the *emporium* was held to be long-distance trade, and consequentially, local exchange patterns were de-emphasised.<sup>534</sup> This has been significantly re-assessed, and new attention has been given to the significance of production and the extent to which *emporium* were integrated with the rural economy and associated with changes in the landscape. It is now clear that *emporium* were sites of production and trade, and that they served both import and export roles.<sup>535</sup>

The increasing focus on the hinterlands of the *emporium* has directed scholarly attention to the river-systems of eastern England. Naylor, using coin-loss as an index of trade, has stressed the importance of bulk goods; moreover, the distribution of coin-finds within 15km of the coast or navigable rivers suggests that the coin economy was based on both internal *and* overseas trade.<sup>536</sup> Inter-regional connectivities were principally fostered through maritime and riverine connections, as suggested by the work of Symonds, who has shown that at a local-level goods tended to travel by road, while riverine connections dominated inter-regional transportation.<sup>537</sup> Likewise, Thomas

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<sup>534</sup> R. Hodges, *Dark Age Economics* (London, 1982).

<sup>535</sup> For instance, see Moreland, 'The significance of production in eighth-century England', in L. Hanson and C. Wickham (eds.), *The Long Eighth Century: Production, Distribution and Demand* (Leiden, 2000), pp. 69–104.

<sup>536</sup> J. Naylor, *An Archaeology of Trade in Middle Saxon England* (Oxford, 2004); By no means are *sceattas* confined to the eastern zone; they are frequently found across much of southern England: they can be found in Hampshire, Sussex, Kent, and the Thames valley, for instance. Furthermore, not all networks of coin-use were related to each other. Costen and Costen, for example, have demonstrated a network of coin-use along the south coast in the period of c. 700 to 780, while the vicinity of Bidford-on-Avon has produced an abundance of coins between c. 710 and 830, particularly Frisian coins. See: Blair, *Building*, p. 253; M. Costen and N. Costen, 'Trade and Exchange in Anglo-Saxon Wessex, c. AD 600–780', *Medieval Archaeology* 60, 1 (2016), pp. 1–26; and K. Ulmschneider, 'More Markets, Minsters and Metal-Detector Finds: Middle Saxon Hampshire a Decade On', in M. Henig and N. Ramsey (eds.), *Intersections: The Archaeology and History of Christianity in England, 400–1200* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 87–98; also important is Ulmschneider, 'Settlement, economy and the "Productive" site: Middle Anglo-Saxon Lincolnshire A.D. 650–780', *Medieval Archaeology* 44 (2000), pp. 53–79.

<sup>537</sup> L.A. Symonds, *Landscape and Social Practice* (Oxford, 2003); also: Blair, 'Introduction', in Blair (ed.), *Waterways and Canal-Building*, pp. 1–18, esp. fig. 5.

has demonstrated how far inland the ‘coastal zone’ extended via easily navigable rivers, connected to the wider North Sea world due to favourable hydrological factors.<sup>538</sup>

Ipswich ware is one of the principal sources of evidence for contact and exchange in the region during the Middle Saxon period. By the eighth century, the distribution of Ipswich ware suggests a rapidly accelerating exchange economy that operated both within the region and further afield. Ipswich ware is one of the chief archaeological indicators of the eastern zone. It was the first post-Roman pottery series to be kiln-fired and produced on an ‘industrial scale’; it is virtually the only Middle Saxon pottery known in East Anglia, and it is the only indigenous pottery with a widespread distribution outside of its production hinterland.<sup>539</sup> The beginning of Ipswich ware can be dated relatively securely to *c.* 720 thanks to associated coin-finds, and an end-date of *c.* 850 has been tentatively assigned.<sup>540</sup> Ipswich ware’s distribution is thickest in East Anglia, but it can be found widely throughout eastern England, particularly in Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire. The pottery generally moves along the rivers, though the intersection of Roman roads and river-systems may be of interest: in Buckinghamshire, for instance, there is a cluster of Ipswich ware where Watling Street crosses the Ouse.<sup>541</sup> It is also found on estuarine sites in Kent and Essex.<sup>542</sup> Distribution is less dense in the west, but finds occur in Berkshire (Reading), Derbyshire (Repton), Nottinghamshire (Newark), and Gloucestershire (Lechlade, Winchcombe). The highest density of finds outside of East Anglia is London, where over 1700 sherds have been recovered. Blinkhorn suggests that outside the ‘primary zone’ of Ipswich ware in East Anglia and eastern

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<sup>538</sup> A. Thomas, ‘Rivers of Gold? The Coastal Zone Between the Humber and the Wash in the Mid Saxon Period’, *ASSAH* 18 (Oxford, 2013), pp. 97–118.

<sup>539</sup> P. Blinkhorn, *The Ipswich Ware Project: Ceramics, Trade and Society in Middle Saxon England* (London, 2012), pp. ix, 2.

<sup>540</sup> Blinkhorn, *Ipswich Ware*, pp. 3–8.

<sup>541</sup> Blinkhorn, *Ipswich Ware*, pp. 73–4.

<sup>542</sup> Blinkhorn, *Ipswich Ware*, pp. 77–8, 80.

Cambridgeshire, it is unlikely that Ipswich ware was a desirable object in its own right, but rather that it was a container for utilitarian items.<sup>543</sup> Other archaeological indices of communication networks include Mayen lava quernstones from the Eifel, which are well-distributed along the rivers Nene and Ouse, demonstrating the way in which river-systems allowed imports to venture deep into the hinterland.<sup>544</sup>

However, economic connectivities cannot be divorced from the socio-political interaction, and the extent to which they facilitated and ‘piggy-backed’ upon one another should not be underestimated. The same rivers that formed the sinews of exchange networks also fostered social and political contact. Crucially, the river-systems draining into the North Sea were speedily navigable. It has been demonstrated by Edwin and Joyce Gifford that a seventh-century ship could sail from Rendlesham, by the River Deben, to the River Idle in a span of a day.<sup>545</sup> In this context, it is worth recalling that the most significant battles of the seventh century, those of the Idle (616), Hatfield Chase (632), (probably) Winwæd (655) and the Trent (679) were all fought near rivers that were in the catchment of the Humber, serving as a reminder that interaction between hostile parties could be resolved swiftly as the Humber’s catchment drew rival actors together.<sup>546</sup>

## 2. *The Political Landscape*

The above discussion points to a relatively homogenous geographical landscape that was thoroughly interconnected economically. As Wickham has noted, the region shows signs of

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<sup>543</sup> Blinkhorn, *Ipswich ware*, p. 90.

<sup>544</sup> J. Parkhouse, ‘The Distribution and Exchange of Mayen Lava Quernstones in Early Medieval Northwestern Europe’, *Papers of the ‘Medieval Europe Brugge 1997’ Conference* 3 (Zellik, 1997), pp. 97–106.

<sup>545</sup> E. Gifford and J. Gifford, ‘The Sailing Performance of Anglo-Saxon Ships as Derived from the Building and Trials of Half-Scale Models of the Sutton Hoo and Graveney Ship Finds’, *The Mariner’s Mirror* 82, 2 (1996), pp. 131–53.

<sup>546</sup> The ease of riverine transportation stands in notable contrast to the river systems of the northwest draining into the Irish Sea: F. Edmonds, ‘Barrier or Unifying Feature? Defining the Nature of Early Medieval Water Transport in the North-West’, in Blair (ed.), *Waterways and Canal-Building*, pp. 21–36.

economic precociousness and interconnectedness long before the late seventh-century boom.<sup>547</sup> Indeed, economic connectivity is in many ways presaged by the distribution of stereotyped ‘Anglian’ material culture, which was discussed above, and suggests a way in which economic and cultural connections could ‘piggy-back’ off one another. Despite this, the region was marked by extreme political diversity, recalling the arguments of chapter two. The most powerful dynasties were certainly those of the Deirans, who had their heartlands in the Vale of Pickering and Driffield,<sup>548</sup> and the Wuffingas of East Anglia.<sup>549</sup> The Kingdom of Lindsey seems geographically to have been a significant entity, and in the Tribal Hidage *Lindesfarona mid Hæðfeldlande* (Lindsey and Hatfield Chase) are accorded 7,000 hides, suggesting that for the compiler, it was crudely of a par with the kingdoms of Essex, Sussex, and the Hwicce.<sup>550</sup> Furthermore, there were a number of smaller groups referenced in the Tribal Hidage who seem to have helped constitute the diverse peoples sometimes collectively known as the Middle Angles.<sup>551</sup> Some of these people, notably the *Gywre*, are also known from the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and the *Liber Eliensis*, but most of the others are only corroborated through place-name evidence.<sup>552</sup>

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<sup>547</sup> Wickham, *Framing*, p. 811.

<sup>548</sup> Wood, ‘Monasteries and the Geography of Power in the Age of Bede’, *Northern History*, 45, 1 (2008), pp. 11–25.

<sup>549</sup> Williamson, ‘East Anglia’s Character’, pp. 16–43.

<sup>550</sup> Yorke, ‘Lindsey: The Lost Kingdom Found?’, pp. 141–50; and Foot, ‘The Anglo-Saxon Kingdom of Lindsey’, both in A. Vince (ed.), *Pre-Viking Lindsey* (London, 1993), pp. 128–40.

<sup>551</sup> Dumville, ‘Essex, Middle Anglia and the Expansion of Mercia’, pp. 123–40.

<sup>552</sup> *HE* iv.19; *LE* i.4. For the Tribal Hidage there is extensive literature but see, for instance, the important starting points: Hart, ‘The Tribal Hidage’, *TRHS* 5, 21 (1971), pp. 133–57, which assigns the text to the reign of Offa; and W. Davies and H. Vierck, ‘The Contexts of the Tribal Hidage: social aggregates and settlement patterns’, *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 8 (1974), pp. 223–93, dating the Tribal Hidage to the reign of Wulfhere; see also: Dumville, ‘The Tribal Hidage: An Introduction to its Texts and Their History’, in Bassett (ed.), *Origins*, pp. 225–30; some scholars have favoured a Northumbrian provenance: e.g. Brooks, ‘the Mercian Kingdom’, in Bassett (ed.), *Origins*, pp. 167–8, who suggests Oswald, Oswiu or Ecgfrith; and Higham, *An English Empire: Bede and the Early Anglo-Saxons* (Manchester, 1995), pp. 74–111, suggesting the reign of Edwin. Blair, ‘The Tribal Hidage’ in M. Lapidge *et al.* (eds.), *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Chichester, 2014), cuts through much of the debate by noting that the exemplar of the extant manuscripts of the Tribal Hidage could have derived from several sources, explaining why some regions are dealt with in more detail than others.

The question is whether the situation presented in the Tribal Hidage was unique to the East Midlands, or if the apparent granularity of the political landscape reflects the particular complexion of the document itself. This is a difficult question, and the Tribal Hidage is a troublesome source. The general tenor of Anglo-Saxon society was intensely local on one level, while on another level secular and ecclesiastical elites who had *very wide* geographical range progressed the landscape in order to leverage vertical relationships with local communities.<sup>553</sup> It seems eminently plausible, as suggested in chapters one and two, that small groupings of peoples existed throughout Anglo-Saxon society. Within the remit of this case study, such small groups are represented in the Tribal Hidage in the East Midlands, but Lindsey was given a lump assessment of 7,000 hides, while Norfolk was included within the blanket assessment of East Anglia (30,000 hides) and Deira was excluded entirely. However, there is reason to suggest that similar small groups proliferated throughout Norfolk and Lindsey.<sup>554</sup> If this is the case, why are the small peoples of the East Midlands not represented as ‘Middle Anglia’ and attributed an according lump hidation?

The answer may lie in the failure of an ‘intermediate dynasty’ to take root (or be imposed) in the region as it was contested between the Mercians, East Angles, and—for a time—the Northumbrians. There is no reason that such small groups could not have survived within the superstructure of a mid to late seventh-century king’s *imperium*; there is reason to think that kings, where possible, promoted the local dominance of a single authority with whom they dealt. This seems essential to the origins of the medium-sized groups such as the Magonsæte and the Hwicce, whose dynasties were associated with the Mercian kings from the very beginning of their histories,

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<sup>553</sup> Charles-Edwards, ‘Early Medieval Kingdoms in the British Isles’, in Bassett (ed.), *Origins*, pp. 28–39.

<sup>554</sup> Williamson, *The Origins of Norfolk* (Manchester, 1993), p. 62–4; Green, *Britons and Anglo-Saxons*, see pp. 163–234

possibly owing their position to Mercian favour.<sup>555</sup> It has similarly been suggested that the territory of Middlesex was a Mercian administrative creation.<sup>556</sup> Peada's briefly-held kingdom of the Middle Angles seems to have been an unsuccessful attempt to impose a similar structure within the region of our case-study.<sup>557</sup> The Tribal Hidage is significant then because its picture of the East Midlands seems to show a political landscape without a royal varnish. The landscape of much of early medieval Britain may have looked much like the East Midlands in the Tribal Hidage, but in other places the presence of such small peoples is obscured as they were incorporated into the structure of larger polities. To put it simply, the Tribal Hidage may suggest that in the East Midlands (excluding Lindsey) there were no mid-level dynasties to serve as intermediaries between more powerful over-kings and local groups.<sup>558</sup> Thus, the paradox between homogeneity and heterogeneity is displayed yet again in a specific landscape setting. The next section will attempt to determine how, in the wake of such political diversity, royal authority and collective identity was asserted in this region in the seventh century.

### 3. *The Perception of the Landscape in the Historia Ecclesiastica*

After the death of Edwin of Deira in 632/3, political hegemony in the eastern zone was vested in dynasties situated *outside* the region: namely the Mercian dynasty of the upper valley of the Trent,

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<sup>555</sup> Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 44–8, suggested either a Mercian or a West Saxon provenance for the Hwicce. As early as 1862, Stubbs suggested a Northumbrian connection due to the common occurrence of certain names among both the Hwicce and Northumbrian dynasties: W. Stubbs, 'The Cathedral, Diocese and Monasteries of Worcester in the Eighth Century', *Archaeological Journal* 19 (1862), pp. 236–52, at pp. 237–8; drawing on this, Finberg, 'The Princes of the Hwicce', in his *Early Charters*, pp. 167–80, suggested a Northumbrian 'origin' for the Hwicce, suggesting that a 'Northumbrian warband' allied with Penda of Mercia in 628 and received the lands of the Hwicce in Gloucestershire and Worcestershire as a reward. cf. the arguments of Bassett, 'In Search', in Bassett (ed.), *Origins*, pp. 1–27, at p. 6 f. 19. See now Burghart, 'The Mercian Polity', pp. 85–6. For the Magonsæte: Pretty, 'Defining the Magonsæte', pp. 171–83; Finberg, 'Mercians and Welsh', in his *Lucerna* (London, 1964), pp. 66–82; Burghart, 'The Mercian Polity', pp. 112–19.

<sup>556</sup> Bailey, 'The Middle Saxons', pp. 108–22; Dumville, 'Essex, Middle Anglia and the expansion of Mercia', pp. 123–40.

<sup>557</sup> *HE* iii.24.

<sup>558</sup> Dumville, 'The Terminology of Overkingship', refers to such entities as 'mesne' kingdoms.

and the Bernician dynasty with its power centres on the Tyne and in the vicinity of Bamburgh and Lindisfarne. The East Anglian dynasty also contested the region, but apart from the brief reign of Rædwald (d. 624), the Wuffingas appear to have been at a disadvantage compared to the Mercians, to whom they were occasionally subordinated.<sup>559</sup> The narrative is ultimately provided by Bede, and competition between the dynasties of Mercia and Bernicia provides the roiling undercurrent of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and dominates the text's political narrative between 604 and 679. One of the most remarkable aspects of the *Historia* is Bede's ability to interpret multiple layers of meaning in the landscape. Bede's vantage point of Wearmouth-Jarrow lay beyond the topographic region of the eastern lowland zone, but this does not mean that the minster was isolated. Bede demonstrates a great deal of knowledge about eastern Britain in particular, not just Northumbria, and his sources suggest that he maintained widespread contacts during his life. Indeed, it is the extent of his contacts that made the composition of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* possible and has consistently impressed modern historians.<sup>560</sup>

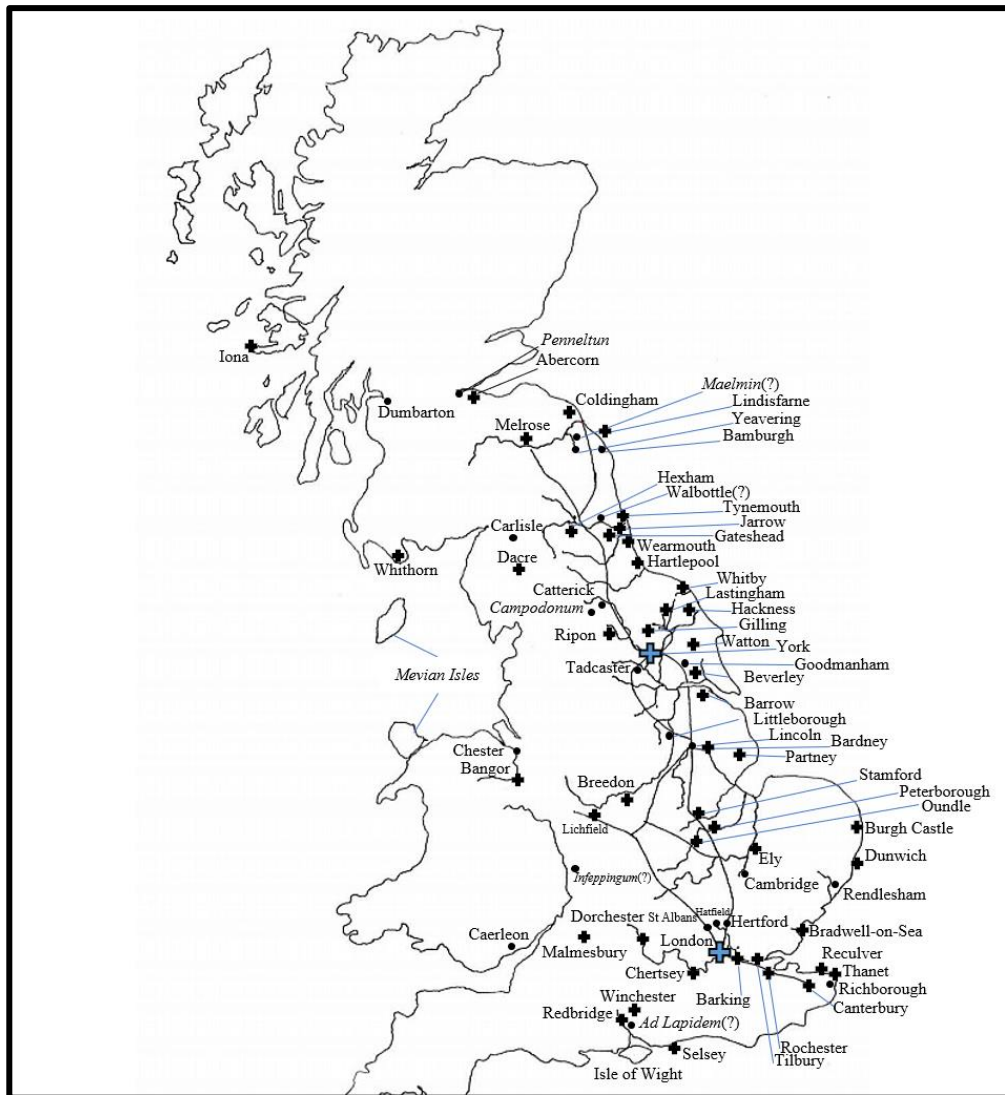
In some ways, the *Historia* is a text about the east of England, and its core, the 'eastern lowland zone'. Even though Wearmouth-Jarrow was *not* part of the core eastern zone from an archaeological perspective, it was still connected—perhaps directly—to it, and, in social and cultural terms, the wider Anglo-Saxon world. This brings up an important point about the *Historia Ecclesiastica*: Bede's knowledge of places seems to be overwhelmingly *eastern* and *coastal*. The majority of places named in the *Historia* are to be found in proximity to the east coast, and many of the others are located on major waterways draining into the North Sea (see fig. 2).

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<sup>559</sup> As per *HE* iii.24; *ASC* 794.

<sup>560</sup> e.g. Kirby, 'Bede's Native Sources for the *Historia Ecclesiastica*', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 48, 2 (1966), pp. 341–71.

Therefore, while the *Historia Ecclesiastica* is the principal narrative for the history of the seventh century, it is clear that the text is rooted in places on the east coast, particularly minsters. With these two core points established about the nature of the *Historia*, it will now be argued that in Bede's narrative, royal authority in this politically diverse and heterogenous landscape was asserted through the founding of minsters, which anchored collective dynastic identity in the landscape.



**FIGURE 2: PLACES REFERENCED IN THE HISTORIA ECCLESIASTICA. CROSSES REPRESENT MINSTERS. REGIONAL NAMES (E.G. 'NORTHUMBRIA', 'MIDDLE ANGLIA, ETC.') ARE EXCLUDED.**

#### 4. *Dynastic Identity and Minsters*

Minsters were used to assert dynastic authority in the region of this case-study, and the foundation of minsters in the ‘Gyrwan fens’ in particular demonstrated the political fragmentation of the region, and the way in which it was contested between the Mercians and East Angles. In the first instance, Ely bolstered the authority of the East Anglian dynasty, while *Medeshamstede* and Castor represented the Mercian dynasty. However, after the direct line of Penda went defunct with the death of Ceolred in 716 and the establishment of a new dynasty in Mercia, new minsters were founded to reassert royal authority by the new dynasty. These minsters included Crowland, Bedford, and possible minsters at Brixworth, Northampton and Flixborough. The association of the production of Felix’s *Vita Sancti Guthlaci* with Ely suggests that in the eighth century the minster may have been drifting into the Mercian orbit.

Ely was founded by Æthelthryth, the daughter of King Anna of the East Angles in 672. Bede relates that Æthelthryth had been married to a prince of the ‘South Gyrwe’ named Tondberht.<sup>561</sup> Bede also claims that after the end of Æthelthryth’s second marriage she returned to her father’s kingdom to found the Abbey of Ely, claiming that ‘Ely is a district of about 600 hides in the kingdom of the East Angles... this servant of Christ [Æthelthryth] wished to have her monastery here because... she sprang from the race of the East Angles.’<sup>562</sup> That being said, later material from Ely claims that Æthelthryth was gifted the Isle of Ely by Tondberht after their marriage, which seems to suggest that Ely was originally in the province of the Gyrwe.<sup>563</sup> Oosthuizen has argued that Ely *did not* lie in the territory of the Gyrwe, but rather that the *regio* of Ely was

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<sup>561</sup> *HE* iv.19: *princeps uidelicet Australium Gyruiorum uocabulo Tondberct.*

<sup>562</sup> *HE* iv.19: *Est autem Elge in prouincia Orientalium Anglorum regio familiarum circiter sexcentarum... ubi monasterium habere desiderauit memorata Christi famula, quoniam de prouincia eorundem Orientalium Anglorum ipsa... carnis originem duxerat.*

<sup>563</sup> *LE* i.4.

*neighbouring* to the province of the Gyrwe.<sup>564</sup> Oosthuizen cites the preface of book one of the *Liber Eliensis, de situ Eliensis insulæ*, which claims that the original *regio* of Ely extended *usque ad flumen iuxta Burch* [Peterborough<sup>565</sup>] *quod vocatur Nien in provincia Girviorum. Girvii sunt omnes australes Angli in magna palude habitantes in qua est Insula de Ely.*<sup>566</sup> This does not say, as Oosthuizen claims, that the *regio* of Ely and the territory of the South Gyrwe were neighbouring, but rather that *all* of the ‘South Angles’ who lived in the ‘Great Fen’, were ‘*Girvii*’, and it explicitly says that the Isle of Ely lay in that fen. This is consistent with the etymology of the word ‘Gyrwe’, which comes from ‘marsh’ (OE *gyr*, cf. ‘Jarrow’, *æt Gyrum*). Furthermore, it should be noted that Ely is here called *regio*, while the territory of the Gyrwe is referred to as a *provincia*. These terms are not necessarily synonymous, and there is no reason that Ely was not considered a *regio* in the *provincia* of the Gyrwe.<sup>567</sup> More practically, it does not seem plausible that Tondberht could have given Æthelthryth a marriage gift that was not part of his patrimony, if the *Liber Eliensis* is to be believed. On the balance, it is probable that in 672 Ely lay within the territory of the ‘South’ Gyrwe but maintained strong connections with the East Anglian royal house, perhaps in part because of Æthelthryth’s marriage to Tondberht.

An early foundation in the region was Castor. Two of Penda’s daughters, Cyneburh and Cyneswith, were responsible for a royal foundation of Castor, serving as the minster’s first two abbesses. Cyneburh was married to Oswiu’s son, Alhfrith, who was active in the process of

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<sup>564</sup> Oosthuizen, *The Anglo-Saxon Fenland*, p. 71.

<sup>565</sup> The name of *Burch* for Peterborough comes from *burh*; it first appears in the 963 interpolation of the MS E of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (the so-called Peterborough Chronicle or Laud MS), in an entry that refers to the gifts made to the refoundation and the acquisitions made by Abbot Ealdwulf. The entry also notes, interestingly, that Ealdwulf’s successor, Cenwulf, built a wall around the minster (*Kenulf... macode first þa wealle abutan þone mynstre, geaf hit þa nama Burch þe ær het Medeshamstede*). See: M. Home, *The Peterborough Version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: Rewriting Post-Conquest History* (Woodbridge, 2015), p. 39.

<sup>566</sup> *LE, de situ Eliensis insulae*, ed. Blake, pp. 2–5.

<sup>567</sup> Admittedly, Bede seems to use the words synonymously in *HE* iii.20 and iv.6

conversion in the Fenlands.<sup>568</sup> Cyneswith goes unmentioned by Bede, and it is not known if she married, but later hagiographical tradition associates her with Offa of Essex.<sup>569</sup> Castor, sited upon the Roman road of Ermine Street and less than five miles west of *Medeshamstede* along the Nene, was situated near both the Roman town of Durobrivae, across the Nene, and a Roman praetorium on the site of the current parish church of St Kyneburgha.<sup>570</sup> Eventually, however, Castor was eclipsed by the other great monastic house in the territory of the Gyrwe, *Medeshamstede* (later known as Peterborough).<sup>571</sup> The sources pertaining to the seventh-century foundation are difficult, and it may be that much of the material associating the minster with the Mercian kings owes more to either the tenth-century re-foundation or the twelfth-century propaganda program intended to portray Peterborough as the ‘most important Petrine centre in England.’<sup>572</sup> The minster is mentioned by Bede as being *in regione Gyruiorum*.<sup>573</sup> Bede notes that the first abbot of *Medeshamstede*, Seaxwulf, was later Bishop of the Mercians, so an early connection between *Medeshamstede* and the Mercian dynasty is not unlikely. However, another seventh-century ecclesiastic, Thomas, Bishop of the East Anglians, was also ‘from the province of the *Gyrwe*’, according to Bede.<sup>574</sup> Taken together with the Ely material, this suggests that in the seventh century, influence over the *Gyrwe*—as in the people—was being contested between the family of Penda and that of Anna of East Anglia. It may be that this competition created the territorial

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<sup>568</sup> *HE* iii.21.

<sup>569</sup> Blair, ‘A Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Saints’, in A. Thacker and R. Sharpe (eds.), *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 496–565, at p. 524.

<sup>570</sup> Kelly, *Peterborough Abbey*, p. 5.

<sup>571</sup> A process seemingly completed when the Castor saints were translated to the reformed Peterborough in 973.

<sup>572</sup> Kelly, *Peterborough*, p. 66. Much of the Peterborough material was forged, either after the re-founding in the tenth century or during the twelfth-century, when pre-Conquest material was used along with the *Chronicle* of Hugh Candidus and the ‘E’ manuscript of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* to promote Peterborough’s primacy in the East Midlands and its position as one of England’s great monastic houses. It may be that the various claims and traditions and its so-called ‘monastic federation’ only came to the minster as a result of disruptions during the Danelaw: see Kelly, *Peterborough*, p. 78; *contra* Stenton, ‘*Medeshamstede* and its Colonies’.

<sup>573</sup> *HE* iv.6.

<sup>574</sup> *HE* iii.20.

division between the ‘North’ *Gyrwe* and the ‘South’ *Gyrwe* that is apparent in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and the Tribal Hidage.

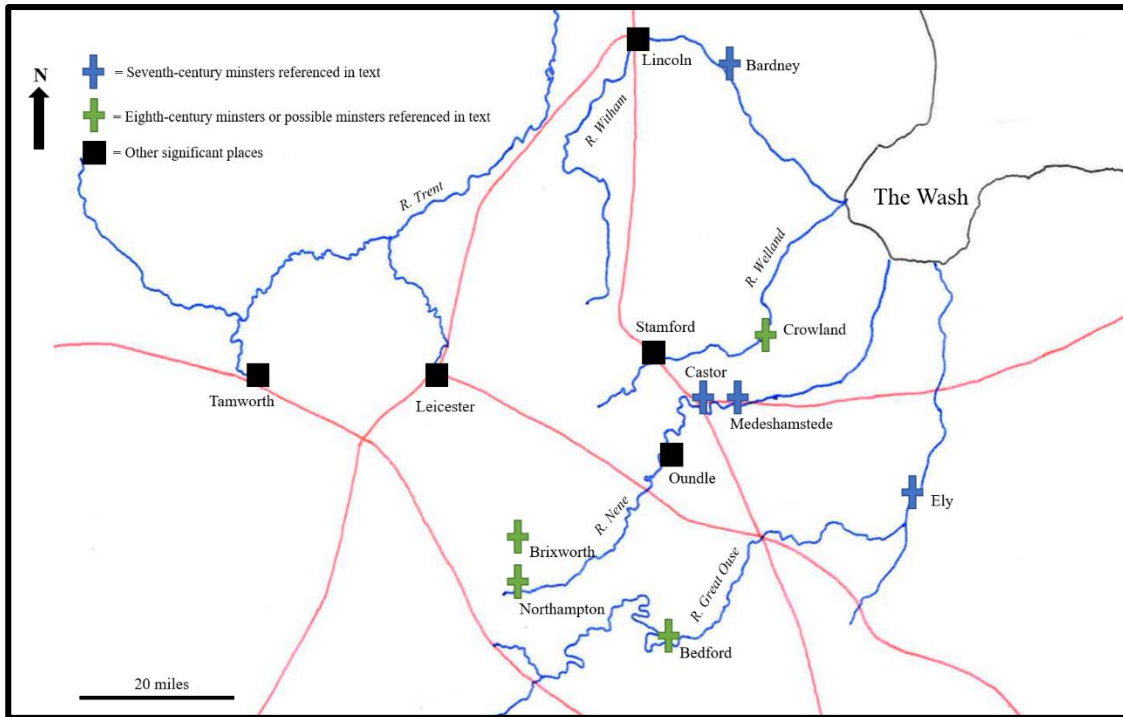


FIGURE 3: MINSTERS OF THE FENS SUGGESTING COMPETITION BETWEEN RIVAL DYNASTIES IN THE SEVENTH CENTURY, AND MERCIAN CONSOLIDATION IN THE EIGHTH CENTURY.

Some minsters continued to be patronised during the reigns of Æthelbald, Offa, and Coenwulf, even as Anglo-Saxon monasticism was generally in crisis and facing despoliation.<sup>575</sup> There is evidence that some of the seventh-century foundations continued to receive royal favour: Peterborough was held in esteem by Offa, as was Bardney, according to Alcuin.<sup>576</sup> However, it generally seems that new foundations were favoured above the prominent houses of the seventh century. This probably reflects dynastic change. Royal patronage and the invocation of royal power in the landscape was something that needed to be actively asserted and constantly reasserted; it

<sup>575</sup> As described by Blair, *Church and Society*, pp. 121–34.

<sup>576</sup> For Peterborough: Kelly, *Peterborough*, pp. 17–20; for Offa and Bardney: Alcuin, *Versus de patribus*, in Alcuin: *The Bishops, Kings and Saints of York*, ed. P. Godman (Oxford, 1982), lines 388–91.

was not passively maintained. After the death of Ceolred in 716, subsequent Mercian kings did not trace their descent from Penda, but from his brother Eowa. Ceolred usually appears as an archetypal wicked king thanks to the letters of Boniface; one such letter of 716 x 719 reports that a monk of Much Wenlock had a vision in which the king came under assault by a host of demons as his heavenly protectors abandoned Ceolred after being told of his crimes. A second letter of 746x747 described how Ceolred died in raving madness at a feast ‘gibbering with demons and cursing the priests of God,’ a just consequence for his despoliation of monasteries and violation of the privileges of the church.<sup>577</sup> Ceolred’s successor Æthelbald was hardly a saint,<sup>578</sup> but it may be that after the ignominious collapse of the House of Penda and the trauma done to the Mercian minsters during Ceolred’s reign, new links needed to be forged in the landscape between the Mercian kings and minsters.

The reassertion of hitherto attenuated royal power by Æthelbald may have required new places that were less closely tied to Penda and his descendants. Thus, Æthelbald formally endowed Crowland in 716, and Guthlac’s tomb was richly provided ‘with wonderful structures and ornamentations.’<sup>579</sup> Crowland is another important example of contested identity in the *Gyrwan* landscape. Later sources report that Crowland lay *on middan Gyrwan fenne*.<sup>580</sup> Crowland, of course, began as the hermitage of St Guthlac, a Mercian prince who retired from his secular life as a warrior late in Æthelred’s reign. After a stint at Repton, he established himself at Crowland, in the fens. His hagiographer, Felix, celebrates the desolate nature of the landscape on the edge of the inhabited world, but it is important to remember that Crowland, on the banks of the River

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<sup>577</sup> *S. Bonifatii et Lulli Epistolae*, in *MGH Epistolae Merovingici et Karolini aevi* vol.1, ed. E. Dümmler (Berlin, 1892), ep. no. 10.

<sup>578</sup> *Bonifatti et Lulli Epistolae*, ed. Dümmler, ep. no. 73.

<sup>579</sup> VSG 51.

<sup>580</sup> *Die Heiligen Englands: Angelsächsisch und Lateinisch*, ed. F. Liebermann (Hanover, 1889), pp. 11–12.

Wellend, lies a mere eight miles from *Medeshamstede* and ten miles from the Mercian cult-site at Castor. Crowland was not St Anthony's desert; it lay in the middle of the competing political interests of the Mercian and East Anglian dynasties and between the fenland houses of Castor, *Medeshamstede*, and Ely. Guthlac received many visitors at his fenland retreat, including Bishop Hædda of the Mercians (and possibly Abbot of *Medeshamstede*) and Abbess Ecgburh (of Ely?), the daughter of King Ealdwulf of the East Angles, demonstrating that Guthlac's ecclesiastical connections at Crowland spanned both kingdoms. His most famous visitor, however, was undoubtedly the exiled prince Æthelbald, the future king of the Mercians. Æthelbald often sought refuge and counsel with St Guthlac at Crowland, taking advantage of the contested nature of the region to escape his enemies. It may be that Æthelbald was actually being sponsored by the East Angles during his exile. The connections between Crowland, the East Angles, and the Mercians are made quite clear in Guthlac's *Vita*. The Life was commissioned by the East Anglian king, Ælfwald, perhaps in an attempt to achieve favour with now mighty Æthelbald.<sup>581</sup> Meanwhile, according to Crowland tradition Æthelbald was responsible for the formal foundation of Crowland Abbey after coming to power in Mercia.<sup>582</sup> Æthelbald did not trace his descent from Penda, so it may be that the Mercian royal cult at Castor, where Penda's daughters were enshrined, was unappealing. If so, Æthelbald chose Crowland because of his personal connection with the place and its saint, creating a new connection between Mercian royalty and the fenlands. Thus, we see how the *Gyrwan* fens were contested between the Mercian and the East Anglian kings and the fenland houses of Castor, Ely, and *Medeshamstede*, and Crowland became a place of interface.

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<sup>581</sup> VSG Prol.

<sup>582</sup> The foundation charter, S. 82, is a forgery. On this see: D. Roffe, 'The *Historia Croylandensis*: A Plea for Reassessment', *EHR*110, 435 (1995), pp. 93–108.

In addition to Crowland, possible minsters were established on a grand scale at Northampton, Brixworth, Bedford, and Flixborough.<sup>583</sup> Bedford, on the River Great Ouse, roughly twenty miles southeast of Northampton, was allegedly founded by Offa, and after Offa's death, his widow Cynethryth took possession of the churches of Bedford and Cookham.<sup>584</sup> Cynethryth's control of the minster at Bedford suggests an eighth-century example of the processes described above for the seventh century, in which royal women preserved dynastic memory and asserted dynastic interest in the landscape.<sup>585</sup> Thus, even without the testimony of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, there is some evidence to suggest continuity of practice between the seventh and eighth centuries.

Flixborough, another possible minster, was situated near the confluence of the Humber estuary and the River Trent and in proximity to Ermine Street. Though the site's monastic status has been contested, Blair has argued strongly in favour of a monastic context, not least due to the number of styli found at the site.<sup>586</sup> If Flixborough did have a monastic context, then the minster may have served a similar purpose to Northampton or Brixworth as a monumental representation of dynastic power in the landscape and oriented along strategic routes of communication. While it is true that none of the buildings uncovered at Flixborough match the scale of Northampton's ninth-century hall, the evident opulence of provisioning and personal effects at Flixborough demonstrate clearly

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<sup>583</sup> Blair, 'Flixborough Revisited', *ASSAH* 17 (2011), pp. 101–7, argues most strongly for a monastic context. The status of Flixborough, it should be noted, is still contested. Loveluck in particular cautions that certain evidence often taken as diagnostic of a monastic site, such as styli and window-glass, does not prove a monastic context. As the same time, he suggests that the extent of imported items at Flixborough suggests the settlement was part of broader Humber-wide pattern (and thus not indicative of an exceptional site at the pinnacle of the rural settlement hierarchy). Furthermore, according to Loveluck, the lack of recovered calf bones (suggesting vellum production), explicitly Christian metalwork, and stone sculpture should give one pause. Even with these reservations, Loveluck suggests that the specialisation of craft-working could indicate the transformation of Flixborough into a monastic context in the early ninth century (either a small minster or—and Loveluck suggests this is more likely—part of a monastic estate, possibly nearby West Halton). See: Loveluck, *Rural Settlement, Lifestyles and Social Change in the Later First Millennium AD: Anglo-Saxon Flixborough in its Wider Context*, Excavations at Flixborough, vol. 4 (Oxford, 2007) pp. 103, 124–6, 144–5, 152–4.

<sup>584</sup> S. 1258

<sup>585</sup> If there is any truth to the legends of Offa being buried at Bedford, as recounted by Roger of Wendover and Matthew Paris, this would be an even clearer indication of continuity of practice.

<sup>586</sup> Blair, 'Flixborough Revisited', pp. 102–4.

that even without a monumental hall, the site's occupants were very wealthy indeed; lying at (we assume) the northerly edge of Mercian political authority at the strategic junction of two major rivers and the principal north-south Roman road, Flixborough must have been an opulent symbol of royal power at the edge of the kingdom; for travellers going north or south by land, it would be the first or last place one would stop when crossing the Humber. Similarly, merchants sailing up the Trent from the Humber estuary would have to pass Flixborough before venturing inland to the Mercian heartlands of the Upper Trent. In this regard, it may be similar to the way in which Northampton lay near the junction of the Nene and Watling Street, where it would have been an essential stop for merchants going up the Nene by boat before venturing out of the eastern zone and into the interior. This strategic positioning made Flixborough rich, but it also made it ideologically powerful.

### *5. Minsters and the Inversion of Core-and-Periphery*

One of the most frequent tropes of medieval writing about monasticism is to emphasise the seclusion and isolation of monastic sites, wilfully placing them on the periphery of society. Felix writes of a 'most dismal fen of immense size... now consisting of marshes, now of bogs, sometimes of black waters overhung by fog, sometimes studded with wooded islands and traversed by the windings of tortuous streams,'<sup>587</sup> while Bede says of St Cedd's foundation of Lastingham that it was 'better fitted for the haunts of robbers and the dens of wild beasts than for human habitation.'<sup>588</sup> We know that this cannot be taken at face-value. Helen Gittos has written about the transformation of wilderness into holy sites, and that this was a literary device with rich symbolism and specific connotations.<sup>589</sup> Meanwhile, Blair has written about the economic importance of

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<sup>587</sup> VSG 24.

<sup>588</sup> HE iii.23: *in quibus latronum magis latibula ac lustra ferarum quam habitacula fuisse uidebantur hominum.*

<sup>589</sup> H. Gittos, *Liturgy, Architecture and Sacred Places in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 32–8.

minsters as productive sites.<sup>590</sup> Furthermore, virtually all of the minsters under discussion in this chapter were oriented along significant routes of communication and transportation. Lastingham, on the fringe of the Vale of Pickering, was part of an important Deiran ‘royal landscape’;<sup>591</sup> while the fenland houses were in politically contested landscapes, as demonstrated above. I will argue here that the minsters which defined the landscapes of this chapter inverted the dichotomy of core-and-periphery through their prestige and dominance in the landscape, and that this was achieved, at least in part, by the prestige of the people associated with them and their diverse interpersonal relationships.

One aspect that should be noted is the way powerful minsters exerted their own centrality due to the prestige of people associated with them, their territorial acquisitiveness, and through their cooperation with royal dynasties. This should be seen in tandem with the proliferation of female monasticism, and the powerful royal abbesses whose prestige and authority dominated the landscape. For the purposes of this chapter, Hilde of Whitby, and her successors Eanflæd and Ælflæd; Cyneburh and Cyneswith of Castor; and Æthelthryth and her successor Seaxburh of Ely were particularly important.<sup>592</sup> Such minsters emerged as ‘centres’ based on the people associated with them and they could exert their own ‘centrality’. The most important of these minsters produced bishops, such as Hædda of *Medeshamstede*, who became Bishop of the Mercians. Whitby also became an important source of bishops in the eastern region; agents from Whitby were essential to the establishment of other regional minsters, such as Beverley in Driffield and Hackness on the fringe of the Yorkshire wolds.<sup>593</sup> The *Liber Eliensis* comments that the East

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<sup>590</sup> Blair, *Church in Society*, pp. 251–61.

<sup>591</sup> Wood, ‘Geographies of Power’, pp. 15–17.

<sup>592</sup> Yorke, *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses* (London, 2003), pp. 17–47, for conversion-era foundations.

<sup>593</sup> Thacker, ‘Monks, Preaching and Pastoral Care in Early Anglo-Saxon England’, in Blair and Sharpe (eds.), *Pastoral Care*, pp. 137–70, at pp. 149–50.

Anglian king Ealdwulf was essential in supporting the foundation of Ely, and it should be remembered that Ealdwulf was the son of Hereswith, Hilde of Whitby's sister; and indeed while Wilfrid was apparently disliked by Abbess Hilde, he too was associated with Whitby, and according to *Liber Eliensis* he was quick on the scene to assist Æthelthryth when Ely was being founded.<sup>594</sup>

Due to her sanctity, places associated with Æthelthryth fostered connections with Ely. For instance, Stow Green near Threkingham on the Roman road of Mareham Lane in Lincolnshire has been identified as *Ædelreðstowe*, where—according to later sources—Æthelthryth stopped on her journey from Northumbria to her homeland and where a chapel was built.<sup>595</sup> Blair has recently brought South Kyme to attention: the twelfth-century Augustinian priory at South Kyme, on the banks of the River Sleas which feeds into the River Witham, contains fragments of a late eighth- or early ninth-century stone chest or shrine with stylistic links to the 'Hædda stone' at *Medeshamstede*/Peterborough and other Mercian sculpture at Breedon, Fletton, and Castor. This suggests that by 800, South Kyme (and perhaps Sleaford?) had come into the hands of *Medeshamstede*.<sup>596</sup> It is notable that South Kyme is only about ten miles north of Threkingham, and both sites lie to the north of *Medeshamstede* and Ely. If Kyme was a *Medeshamstede* dependency while Threkingham was in the hands of Ely, then it suggests that monastic landholding may have been piecemeal and diffuse. What makes this so interesting, though, is that Blair has identified possible minsters at Sleaford and Sempringham (*i.e.* the vicinities of South Kyme and Threkingham, respectively) as 'north' and 'south' districts of the *Billingas* 'folk-

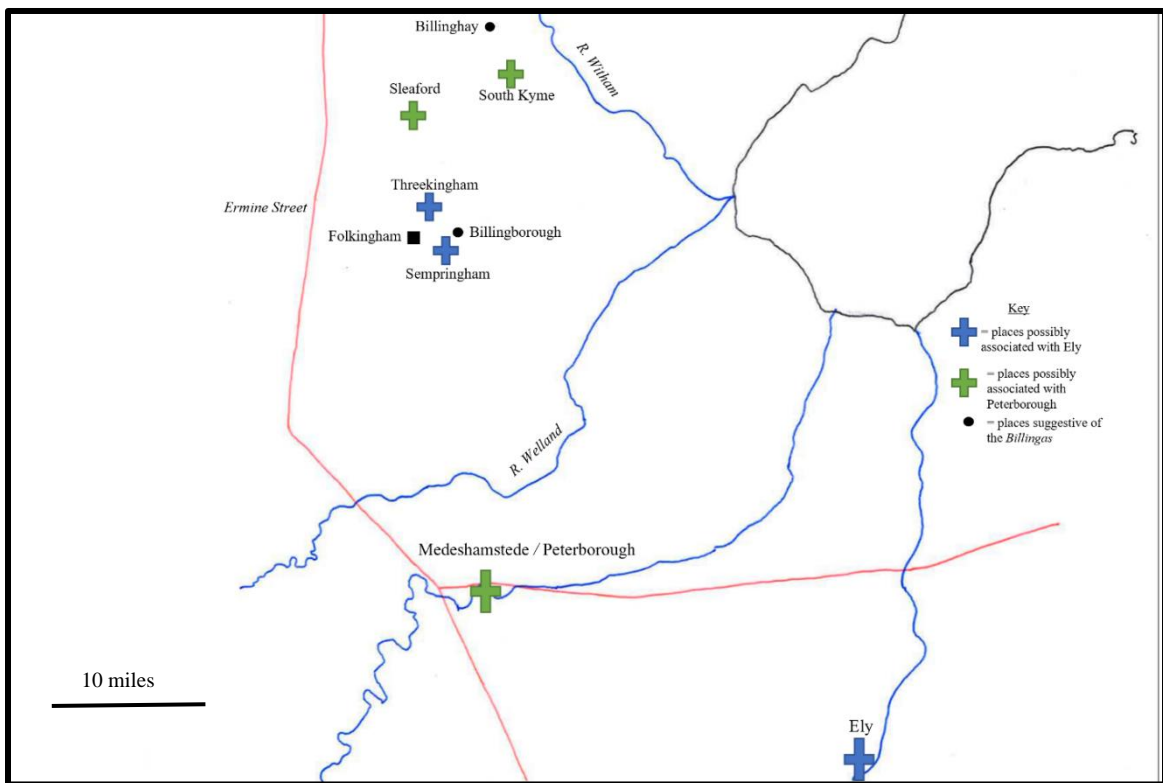
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<sup>594</sup> *LE* 15–16.

<sup>595</sup> Roffe, 'The Seventh Century Monastery of Stow Green, Lincolnshire', *Lincolnshire History and Archaeology* 21 (1986), pp. 31–3; *Goscelin of Saint-Bertin: The Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely*, ed. and trans. R. Love (Oxford, 2004), pp. xlii, 46 (*Vita S. Wærburh*, c. 10).

<sup>596</sup> Blair, 'Beyond the *Billingas*' (Forthcoming). For the sculpture: P. Everson, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, V: Lincolnshire* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 248–51, illustrations at 339–45.

group'. This echoes the division of the north and south *Gyrwe* very clearly, in which the territory of a 'folk-group' was divided at some point for the endowment of two minsters, which happened to eventually be subsumed by the *Gyrwan* houses of Ely and *Medeshamstede*. Thus, through their royal associations, wealth, the prestige and interpersonal relationships of the people connected to them, and their territorial acquisitiveness, the great minsters of the eastern lowland zone became focal points, not only in their individual landscapes, but throughout Anglo-Saxon society more widely, inverting the dichotomy of core-and-periphery and exerting their own centrality.



**FIGURE 4: POTENTIAL DEPENDENCIES OF PETERBOROUGH AND ELY IN THE TERRITORY OF THE BILLINGAS**

## 6: *Minsters and Conflict in the Landscape*

It is because of the aristocratic complexion of the seventh-century houses that they became focal points for the ‘performance of identity’ in a distinct landscape context. This section will argue that prominent minsters became theatres by which collective identity and dynastic authority could be negotiated and conflict could be reconciled. I will argue that Bardney, Whitby, Gilling, and possibly *Medeshamstede* all played this role.

One of the most famous examples of this is the minster of Bardney in Lindsey. After the death of Oswald of Bernicia at the hands of the Mercian king Penda in battle at Maserfeld in 641x642, Osthryth, Oswald’s niece and the wife of King Æthelred of Mercia, had her uncle’s relics translated to Bardney. According to Bede, the monks of Bardney initially refused to receive the relics because Oswald ‘was from another province originally and he had ruled over them, and they pursued him with their old hatred even while dead.’<sup>597</sup> Though this might reflect an element of political posturing on the part of the monks of Bardney, it nevertheless demonstrates an abiding sense of Lindsey identity within the minster. Osthryth was assassinated in 697 by members of the Mercian aristocracy for unknown reasons, and according to tradition she was buried at Bardney;<sup>598</sup> in 709, Osthryth was to be joined by her husband after his death. Moreover, Bede comments that King Æthelred greatly favoured Bardney, and he retired there to become the minster’s abbot in 704.<sup>599</sup> Thus, we see that Bardney became the resting place of a Mercian king, his wife, and a Northumbrian saint-king who was slain by Æthelred’s father, all the while it was remembered by Bede as a repository of Lindsey sentiment. To further contextualise this, Lindsey was contested

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<sup>597</sup> *HE* iii.11.

<sup>598</sup> *HE* v.24; various theories have been suggested. Kirby has suggested it was orchestrated in revenge for Peada’s murder forty years previously: Kirby, *Earliest Kings*, p. 127. Finberg, *West Midlands*, pp. 176–7, speculated that it was related to a fomenting rebellion among the Hwicce. For Osthryth’s burial at Bardney: Rollason, ‘Resting Places’, p. 89.

<sup>599</sup> *HE* iii.11.

between the Bernicians and Northumbrians until Æthelred's victory over Ecgfrith at the Battle of the Trent in 679. It is not unreasonable to suggest that Osthryth and Æthelred's favouring of Bardney served a dual purpose. On the one hand, it seems that Bardney was enshrined in the late seventh century as a place for reconciliation between the two dynasties. On the other hand, the minster represents an attempt to secure the province and form an association between his own family and a prestigious and prominent place in the landscape. Bardney's location, less than ten miles east of Ermine Street—the principal Roman road venturing north-south in the eastern zone—and on the River Witham, which feeds into the Trent, is suggestive of the way in which lines of communication intersected with interpersonal relations and political developments.

The Deiran sites of Whitby and Gilling can also be discussed as sites for dynastic reconciliation. The connection between the Synod of Whitby and the expression of Deiran identity was discussed above, where it was suggested that the Deiran sentiment was intertwined with the Romanist faction, and that Abbess Hilde's acceptance of Roman practice was a notable instance of public mediation between the Deirans and Bernicians. One wonders if perhaps the acceptance of the Roman rite was a price that Oswiu paid to secure the allegiance of the Deirans.<sup>600</sup> Whitby's role as a place of mediation was further emphasised when, before the Battle of Winwæd, Oswiu swore that his daughter would enter religion if he was granted victory over the Mercians. In fulfilment of his vow, his daughter Ælfflæd was given to the care of Hilde, then at the abbey of Hartlepool. After two years, Ælfflæd accompanied Hilde to Whitby, where she eventually became abbess, after ruling the house jointly with her Deiran mother for a time.<sup>601</sup> The same chapter reports that Oswiu swore to endow twelve monasteries, each on an estate of ten hides, and that six of these

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<sup>600</sup> So perhaps 'Deira is worth a mass' [or the date of Easter, in this case].

<sup>601</sup> *HE* iii.24.

were to be in Deira and six were to be in Bernicia. These houses were not named, but Ian Wood has suggested that they might include several of the monasteries clustered in or on the edge of the Vale of Pickering, such as Stonegrave, Hovingham, and Coxwold.<sup>602</sup> It is arguable that Whitby may have been one of these houses, since Bede specifically says that Whitby was built on an estate of ten hides.<sup>603</sup> Bede's language is worth considering here. He notes in the text that the monasteries were free from their earthly concerns so that the monks might 'wage heavenly warfare and to pray with unceasing devotion for the eternal peace of the *gens*.'<sup>604</sup>

First of all, this is demonstrative of what might be called the 'spiritual apparatus' that supported the royal dynasty. Oswiu established a whole network of minsters that were meant to pray for the success of the *gens*. It is also interesting that Bede articulates this in overtly militarised terms. The monks are *waging heavenly warfare*, and they are depicted as if they are fulfilling the same role as the king's secular thegns. Perhaps there is a sense that Oswiu was sharing-out land after victory in war in the same way that he might reward his secular warriors with the intention of consolidating his position after a major victory in battle. This is particularly salient if Æthelwald was deposed after Winwæd. In addition, Bede described Ælfflæd as going to her 'heavenly bridegroom' (*nuptias sponsi caelestis*). This is a standard way in which to describe a nun, but in light of the

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<sup>602</sup>HE iii. 24; Blair, *Church in Society*, pp. 72–3, 87; Wood, 'Monasteries and Power', p. 18. Of some other known monasteries in the Vale, there is Crayke, which was founded by Ecgfrith and granted to Cuthbert; Gilling, which was founded by Oswiu separately from his 'Winwæd grant'; Lastingham, which was founded by Cedd and supported by King Æthelwald; Kirkdale, which *might* be associated with Æthelwald based on nineteenth-century evidence. See: Wood, 'Monasteries and Power', p. 16 n. 48. Kirkdale was the site of an early minster however, see: P. Rahtz and L. Watts, 'Kirkdale Anglo-Saxon Minster', *Current Archaeology* 13 (1997), pp. 419–22; and Hackness, which is referenced in Bede, HE iv.23 and was founded by Hilde in the year of her death, that being 680. Hackness is some thirteen miles from Whitby and—as suggested by the survival of an eighth- or early ninth-century inscribed cross—was dedicated to the veneration of Abbess Æthelburh. For this, see Blair, *Church in Society*, pp. 145–6. Other Deiran minsters included Whitby, Ripon, *Campodonum*, York, Watton, and Beverley, among others. For Deiran minsters and the consolidation of dynastic power: Pickles, *Kingship, Society and the Church*, pp. 93–127.

<sup>603</sup> HE iii.24: *Quae post biennium comparata possessione x familiarum in loco qui dicitur Streanæshalch, ibi monasterium construxit.*

<sup>604</sup> HE iii.24: *ad exercendam militiam caelestem supplicandumque pro pace gentis eius æterna deuotioni sedulae.*

above comments, the mirroring of secular and religious roles might be considered. The role of minsters, particularly those ruled by royal abbesses, as places of mediation has been a constant undercurrent throughout this section. Perhaps the significance of these minsters as places of mediation and interface deliberately reflected the role of royal women in secular life. Indeed, just as a marriage may have been designed to secure or appropriate a territory, so too could the foundation of a minster; just as a marriage might secure a secular alliance, so too could the endowment form an alliance with God that was equally important in ensuring dynastic success.

The political implications of Oswiu dispatching Ælfflæd to Deira are notable. In 650, Oswiu infamously murdered the ruling king in Deira, Oswine.<sup>605</sup> At the Battle of Winwæd, the Deiran sub-king Æthelwald and his troop lingered on the edge of the battlefield where they awaited the outcome, and as mentioned above, Æthelwald disappeared from the record after Winwæd. His successor in Deira, Alhfrith, was also implicated in a rebellion against his father, and he disappeared in 664. Clearly, Deira was still a trouble spot for Oswiu, and sending his daughter to be raised at Whitby by a prestigious and holy Deiran abbess may have been intended as a sign of reconciliation. There was precedent for minsters as places of reconciliation: the most famous example is obviously in Deira itself. Eanflæd convinced Oswiu to establish a minster at Gilling as an act of public expiation after the murder of King Oswine. Interestingly, Bede says that prayers were said at Gilling ‘for the eternal welfare of both kings. For the one who planned the murder and for his victim.’<sup>606</sup>

In any case, when Oswiu died in 670, he was buried at Whitby, where he was later joined by his wife Eanflæd (d. 685) and his daughter Ælfflæd (d. 715). In addition, the relics of King Edwin

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<sup>605</sup> *HE* iii.15.

<sup>606</sup> *HE* iii.24: *orationes assiduae pro utriusque regis, id est et occisi et eius qui occidere iussit, salute aeterna fierent*

were taken to Whitby sometime after his death.<sup>607</sup> Thus, we see how Whitby was transformed from a place of mediation between Deiran and Bernician political identities into a royal mausoleum for the Bernician dynasty, enshrining Oswiu's family in the Deiran landscape permanently. In this, it seems to mirror Æthelred of Mercia's eventual burial at Bardney and foreshadows the possible use of Bedford as a Mercian royal mausoleum in the late eighth century.

Finally, though the evidence is late, it is just possible that *Medeshamstede* was founded under similar principals of reconciliation. The Peterborough Chronicle includes a long insertion under the year 656 about the founding of the monastery and the largesse of Peada's brother Wulfhere, who was said to love the monastery for 'love of his brother Peada, and for love of Oswiu, his sworn brother, and for love of Abbot Seaxwulf. He said that he would honour and exalt it by the counsel of Æthelred [his brother] and Merewalh [an alleged brother], and by the counsel of Cyneburh and Cyneswith, his sisters.'<sup>608</sup> This would be easy to dismiss, but it reintroduces themes that have run throughout this section: the veneration of dead kings, minsters as sites of dynastic reconciliation and peace-making—in this case between the Northumbrians and Mercians—and the mediation of royal women.

We can see, therefore, the many ways in which minsters became the focal points for dynastic identity in the region, serving as dynastic mausolea, meeting places, and theatres where the display of collective identity, negotiation and reconciliation was played out in the landscape. This section has also emphasised the role of royal women and their capacity as mediators and keepers of dynastic memory with diverse interpersonal connections; their role as royal abbess was not so

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<sup>607</sup> *HE* iii.24.

<sup>608</sup> *ASC E (The Peterborough Chronicle) 656: for his broðer luuen Peada 7 for his wedbroðeres luuen Oswi 7 for Saxulfes luuen þes abbodes; cweð þa þet he wolde hit wurðminten 7 arwurðen be his broðre ræd Æðelred 7 Merwala 7 be his swustre red Kyneburges 7 Kyneswiðes.*

dissimilar to their secular responsibilities. Moreover, these minsters were hardly passive landmarks removed from the world, but active participants in the conflicts of the region. Bede's description of Oswiu's foundations and the explicit military imagery associated with them is particularly telling. This is a prelude, however; the spiritual warfare waged by the inmates of royal minsters in the seventh century would turn to earthly warfare in the eighth—as charters increasingly made clear that the lands belonging to minsters would not be exempted from military service. All of this is an indication that though minsters were cosmopolitan places that drew inmates and visitors from across elite society and were themselves a *product* of a culturally homogenous elite, they were hardly neutral actors in the contested political landscapes of Anglo-Saxon England.

### *7: Conclusion*

This chapter has attempted to put some of the themes discussed in chapters one through three into a specific landscape context. The eastern lowland zone demonstrated the same dichotomy between regional particularism and cultural homogeneity that, it has been argued above, could be found throughout Anglo-Saxon society. Though the region was economically and culturally interconnected along major routes of transportation and communication, it was politically fragmented in the seventh century, and hegemony over the region was contested between the Mercian, Bernician, and East Anglian dynasties. By the end of the seventh century, the region found itself partitioned: Deira was firmly under Bernician control, Middle Anglia and Lindsey were incorporated into a wider Mercian hegemony, and the East Anglian dynasty, was at least occasionally under Mercian suzerainty over the course of the eighth century. Dynastic power was communicated in the region through the founding and endowment of royal minsters, which in their own way became important focal points in the landscape, inverting the dichotomy of core-and-periphery, and making this landscape on the fringes of three powerful kingdoms 'central' in its

own right. Perhaps it is for this very reason that the minsters of the region became theatres for the communication of collective identity and the processes of conflict, negotiation, and reconciliation. Therefore, we see how the themes discussed in the previous chapters, namely contested landscapes, the relativity of the core-and-periphery dichotomy, the juxtaposition between the local or regional and the culturally homogenous, and the importance of conflict and reconciliation as processes that occur in a landscape context which communicate collective identity and dynastic authority, were adopted in a specific context. I have sought to show that the relationship between minsters and dynastic power was not something abstract; it was concrete and based upon the presence and associations of actual people who inhabited or visited the places themselves, as well as the interpersonal interactions discussed in the previous chapters.

It might be asked whether this phenomenon was particular to the region. Clearly not; there is evidence of similar practice elsewhere: Aylesbury, Bicester, and Adderbury potentially represent a similar process in Oxfordshire and the Vale of Aylesbury, for instance.<sup>609</sup> However, as has been demonstrated above, the eastern seaboard of Britain was of particular concern to Bede. Thus, the *Historia Ecclesiastica* focuses on the foundation of minsters across the eastern seaboard: in the eastern zone, as we have discussed here, as well in Bernicia and Kent (beyond the scope of this chapter). Meanwhile, the narrative of conflict in the eastern zone forms an important undercurrent to the *Historia* and given the objective of the *Historia*, the role of minsters took centre stage. This is not to say that this is a distortion; it seems that minsters truly were essential to the assertion of dynastic power in the late seventh century because the next time the region becomes prominent in a historical narrative—Edward the Elder’s conquest between c. 903 and 918—minsters do not

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<sup>609</sup> D. Bethell, ‘The Lives of St Osyth of Essex and St Osyth of Aylesbury’, *Analecta Bollandiana*, 88, 1–2 (1970), pp. 175–127; C. Hohler, ‘St Osyth and Aylesbury’, *Records of Buckinghamshire* 18 (1966–70), pp. 61–72; Thacker, ‘Kings, Saints, and Monasteries’, p. 7.

make a single appearance, and there is no suggestion that Edward founded minsters in any of the lands he conquered. Like the composition of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, the proliferation of monasticism was of its time: the extraordinary monastic boom that excited the passions and imaginations of the kings and aristocrats of Anglo-Saxon society between c. 670 and 740; a phenomenon which was itself a product of the remarkable homogeneity of Anglo-Saxon elites in the seventh century.

## Chapter V

### North-eastern Wales, c. 757–823

This chapter will consider relations between the Mercians and the Welsh during the Mercian Supremacy, examining aspects of territorial control and the nature of Mercian power in the landscape, with an emphasis on north-eastern Wales. This region has often been seen as a peripheral backwater of Mercian activity, but this chapter will show that this was far from the case. It will be demonstrated that the region of this case study, the area between the Rivers Dee in the east and Conwy in the west, was in fact at the centre of an interconnected Irish Sea zone, and that Mercian kings were actively engaged with the wider dynamics of the region. In this ideologically contested landscape, both Mercian and Welsh kings considered carefully the ways in which they could communicate their authority. Some methods, such as the importance of routeways, military campaigning, and the leveraging of interpersonal relationships will be familiar to those methods seen in the previous chapter. However, other strategies seem rather different, and it will be argued that power in the landscape was also communicated through the use of ideologically charged monuments that were intended to convey both authority and a specifically Roman legitimacy.

#### *1. The Perception of the Landscape and The Creation of a Periphery*

It is axiomatic that the Mercian Supremacy lacks a native narrative source. The period rests between the two pillars of Anglo-Saxon narrative history, Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Bede, writing during the reign of Æthelbald, is vague on the subject of Mercian relations with the Welsh. He comments upon Æthelbald's authority south of the Humber while noting in the same passage that the 'Britons oppose the English through their inbred hatred' but they 'cannot obtain what they want [...]'. For, although they are in part their own masters, yet

they have also been brought partly under the rule of the English.’<sup>610</sup> Though it seems likely that the spectre of Æthelbald’s hegemony was influential to the writing of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Bede has very little to say about Æthelbald or about eighth century conditions between the Britons and Anglo-Saxons. This may have something to do with Bede’s apparent ‘hostility’ to the Britons, as has often been claimed, but more importantly, it is not within the remit of the *Historia*.<sup>611</sup> It may also be that Bede lacked Mercian sources.<sup>612</sup> Meanwhile, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is generally rather terse in its treatment of events before the ninth century, particularly those pertaining to Mercia.<sup>613</sup> In light of this, historians have primarily reconstructed the eighth century through the study of charters and numismatics. This has created—until recent years—a slightly skewed perspective of the Mercian kingdom. For the westernmost reaches of Mercian authority, there are no charters and there are no coins, and to some historians, the primary energy of the Mercian kings was expended in a relentless drive towards the south-east.<sup>614</sup> This is ironic, because the greatest symbol of Mercian power, and indeed one of the most important artefacts of the Anglo-Saxon age, the linear earthwork known as Offa’s Dyke, is specifically concerned with the kingdom’s west. It will be suggested here that the Mercian attitude towards the west was not one of ‘studied contempt’, as has been alleged in the past.<sup>615</sup>

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<sup>610</sup> *HE* v.23.

<sup>611</sup> For Bede’s hostility to the Britons, see W.T. Foley and N.J. Higham, ‘Bede on the Britons’, *EME* 17, 2 (2009), pp. 154–85.

<sup>612</sup> Kirby, ‘Bede’s Native Sources’, pp. 368–70.

<sup>613</sup> Wormald, ‘The Age of Offa and Alcuin’, in J. Campbell (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxons* (London, 1991), pp. 110–11.

<sup>614</sup> Keynes, ‘The Kingdom of the Mercians’, pp. 1–26.

<sup>615</sup> Keynes, ‘The Kingdom of the Mercians’, p. 10.

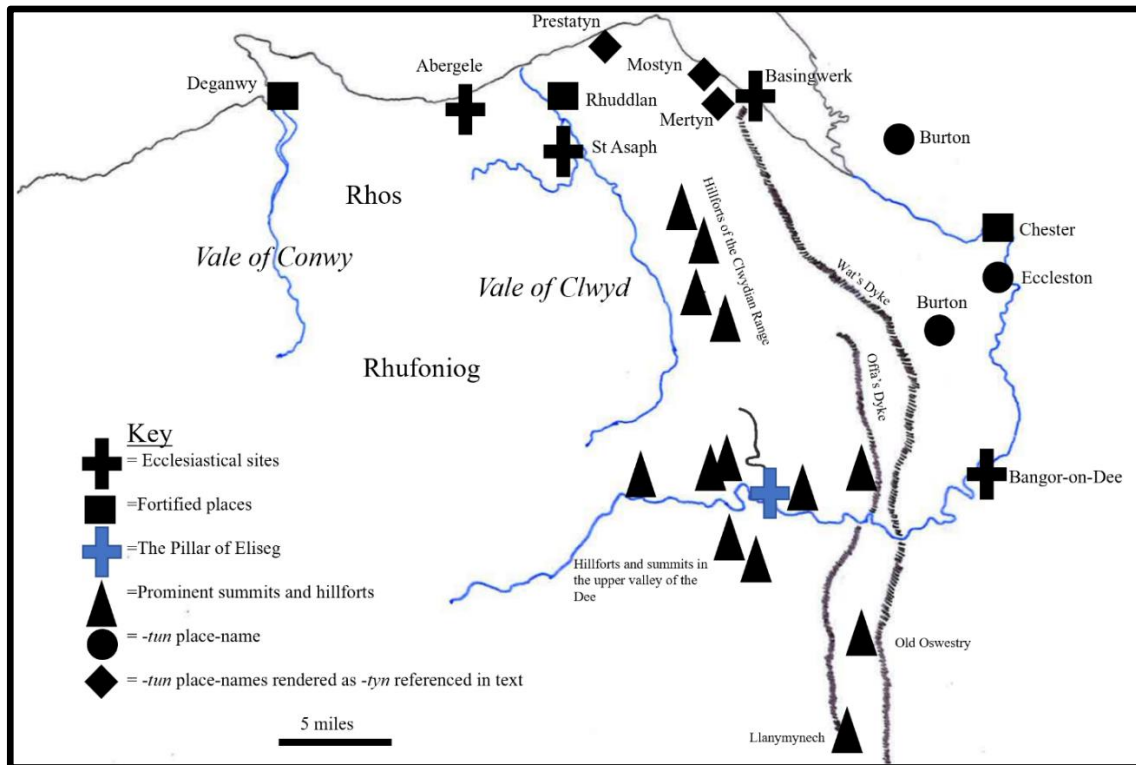


FIGURE 5: BETWEEN THE DEE AND CONWY.

This is not to say that nothing has been written about the relationship between the Welsh and the Mercians, but much of the existing literature concentrates on the seventh century, using information gleaned from the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and other sources such as Felix's *Vita Guthlaci*. Many scholars have been interested in the alliance between Penda of Mercia and Cadwallon of Gwynedd against the Northumbrians, which is attested in both the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and in the *Historia Brittonum*, a product of ninth-century Gwynedd.<sup>616</sup> Extrapolating from this, it has occasionally been suggested that relations between the 'Welsh' and Mercians were essentially friendly until the eighth century, reflecting a general tendency to consider the Welsh homogenously.<sup>617</sup> Even so, the seventh century has been relatively thoroughly studied, despite the difficulty of the source material; moreover, the significance of interactions with various British

<sup>616</sup> *HE* ii.20; *HB*, 64–5, pp. 79–80. Kirby, *Earliest Kings*, pp. 71–3; Tyler, 'An Early Mercian Hegemony: Penda and Over kingship in the Seventh Century', *Midland History* 30, 1 (2005), pp. 1–19.

<sup>617</sup> Finberg, 'Mercians and Welsh', pp. 66–82.

polities has been recognised for the formation and early history of Mercia since at least the early 1960s, when Nora Chadwick memorably claimed that even the name Penda ‘has a Welsh look.’<sup>618</sup> The eighth century has not received the same degree of attention. In part this is related to the nature of eighth-century source material, as has been suggested above.<sup>619</sup> However, it is also due in part to the monumental shadows cast by F.M. Stenton and J.E. Lloyd, the towering figures of the twentieth-century historiography of Anglo-Saxon England and medieval Wales. Both Stenton and Lloyd saw the eighth century as an age of nation-building, in which England and Wales each began to take their form. As such, both historians imagined the eighth century as an era in which borders were stabilised and eyes turned inwards. Indeed, Lloyd rather dramatically entitled his chapter on the period ‘The Age of Isolation’, and after a few brief pages on the determination of the border, he turned his attention to ‘the progress of the Welsh Church, the geographical and territorial divisions of Wales, [and] the social life and characteristics of the Welsh.’ For Lloyd, this was a necessary prelude to the ‘main interest’ of his work: ‘the action of individual princes and their opponents.’<sup>620</sup>

The ramifications of this vision of the eighth century have been far reaching: Cyril Fox, the first excavator of Offa’s Dyke, considered the construction of the earthwork to be a peaceful endeavour, the product of a ‘negotiated’ frontier between the ‘English’ and the ‘Welsh’. For Fox, this would explain why some apparently Anglian settlements fell west of the earthwork.<sup>621</sup> Fox’s theory was

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<sup>618</sup> N. Chadwick, ‘The Celtic Background of Anglo-Saxon England’, in K. Jackson *et al.*, *Celt and Saxon: Studies in the Early British Border* (Cambridge, 1963), pp. 323–52, at p. 335.

<sup>619</sup> The exception to this is Charles-Edwards, ‘Wales and Mercia: 613–918’, in Brown and Farr (eds.), *Mercia*, pp. 89–105; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons, 350–1064* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 424–7; Kirby, *Earliest Kings*, pp. 135–6, and Davies, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 67–73.

<sup>620</sup> J.E. Lloyd, *A History of Wales from the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest* (London, 1911), pp. 194–228. The ‘setting of the border’ is discussed on pp. 194–202, quote at p. 195.

<sup>621</sup> Fox, *Offa’s Dyke: A Field Survey of the Western Frontier-Works of Mercia in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries A.D.* (London, 1955), p. 217 n. 1.

given weight thanks to the authority of Stenton, who wrote the forward to Fox's 1955 study.<sup>622</sup> Ultimately, Fox's 'settled frontier' fits very well with both Stenton's perception of Offa's reign as a critical step towards the unification of the *patria Anglorum*, and Lloyd's insistence on the general stability of Welsh society and institutions from the post-Roman period through the Edwardian conquest, which provided the essential background for a narrative that focused on the fortunes of kings and princes 'who could be shown to have contributed to the development of Welsh nationality.'<sup>623</sup>

By largely turning away from the west of Mercia and seeing artefacts such as Offa's Dyke as symbols of détente rather than active engagement, the foundation of later arguments that the Mercian Supremacy was built on the drive to the southeast was laid. Thus, historiographical concerns of the twentieth century, together with the lack of traditional sources, have created an impression of relative apathy regarding Wales and Mercia in the eighth century. However, recent work that is more firmly rooted in the landscape has emphasised the diversity of practice across Anglo-Saxon England. Furthermore, a light archaeological footprint does not denote cultural or material poverty. I will argue, by way of analogy, that the different nature of evidence for the northwest does not suggest political disengagement or a contemptible backwater. Therefore, this chapter will demonstrate that an approach utilising landscape and place-name evidence, in addition to traditional historical evidence, will demonstrate something of the nature of Mercian power on its western reaches and the way in which Mercian hegemony was actively asserted and resisted in a landscape context.

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<sup>622</sup> Fox, *Offa's Dyke*, pp. xvii–xxi; Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 212–15.

<sup>623</sup> Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 202; H. Price, *J.E. Lloyd and the Creation of Welsh History: Renewing a Nation's Past* (Cardiff, 2011), see for instance p. 135 and the quotation on p. 153; it is interesting to compare Price's work on Lloyd to the papers included in M. Donald *et al.* (eds.), *Stenton's Anglo-Saxon England fifty years on: papers given at a colloquium held at Reading 11–12 November 1993* (Reading, 1994).

## 2: Warfare: Military Campaigns in the *Annales Cambriae*

The key textual source for unpicking Mercian activity in Wales is the *Annales Cambriae*.<sup>624</sup> Historians have often been forced to turn to external sources for a narrative of Mercian history. Bede's Northumbrian perspective dominates our understanding of seventh-century Mercia, and subsequent narratives come from Wessex, so turning to a Welsh source is not a great methodological deviation, but the annals have been relatively neglected by historians of the Mercian supremacy. They are a difficult source, to be sure, with a complicated textual history.<sup>625</sup> The oldest extant manuscript (MS 'A') is of c. 1100, written in an Anglo-Norman hand, probably in southern England.<sup>626</sup> Its exemplar was created sometime between 954, the year of the last annal, and 987, the year of the death of Owain ap Hywel of Deheubarth (950–987), whose pedigree is the subject of the so-called 'Harleian Genealogies' which are also appended to the manuscript.<sup>627</sup> Harley 3895 also includes the earliest known recension of *Historia Brittonum*. The annals themselves are local to St David's from 795 on, suggesting that a contemporary chronicle was being kept there from about 800, but much of the material for the eighth century stems from a hypothetical 'Northern Chronicle' that was concerned with the question of Easter and the adoption of paschal conformity in 768.<sup>628</sup> The northern material has been linked to Gwynedd, particularly

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<sup>624</sup> *Annales Cambriae, A.D. 682–954: Texts A–C in translation*, ed. and trans. D. Dumville (Cambridge, 2002).

<sup>625</sup> There are three manuscripts: **A**: London, BL, MS. Harley 3859, fos 190r–193r; **B**: London, TNA, MS. E 164/1, pp. 2–26. The manuscript is from Neath and was written in the late-thirteenth century. The annals extend to 1286, and Geoffrey of Monmouth influences entries up to 682. **C**: London, BL, MS. Cotton Domitian A.i., fos 138r–155r. This version is also from the late-thirteenth century, with annals extending to 1288. It was composed at the cathedral church of St David's. C is influenced by the Geoffrey of Monmouth until 734.

<sup>626</sup> D. Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts* (Cardiff, 2000), p. 41, n. 9.

<sup>627</sup> K. Hughes, 'Welsh Latin Chronicles: *Annales Cambriae* and Related Texts', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 59 (1973), pp. 233–58, repr. in her *Celtic Britain in the Early Middle Ages: studies in Scottish and Welsh Sources*, ed. D. Dumville (Woodbridge, 1980), pp. 67–85, at pp. 67–9; for the Harleian Genealogies: *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts*, ed. P. Bartrum (Cardiff, 1966), pp. 9–13.

<sup>628</sup> Dumville, 'The *Annales Cambriae* and Easter', repr. in his *Celtic Essays, 2001–2007*, vol. 2 (Aberdeen, 2004), pp. 25–33; Molly Miller, 'The Final of Stages of the Construction of the Harleian *Annales Cambriae*: The Evidence and Framework', *Journal of Celtic Studies* 4 (2004), pp. 205–12.

the monastery of Abergele, in north-eastern Wales.<sup>629</sup> It has been argued that during the reign of Owain ap Hywel, the northern material was collated with the St David's chronicle to create the exemplar for Harley 3859.<sup>630</sup> In the final estimation, it would be wrong to disregard the *Annales* as a source for the eighth and early-ninth centuries. It is true that the transmission is complicated and, perhaps more significantly, the entries themselves are terse and often lacking in detail, but nevertheless, we may be able to use them to glean considerable insight into the strategies of the Mercian kingdom on their western frontier. Three such strategies will be considered now.

First, warfare. In the *Annales Cambriae*, Offa is explicitly reported to be campaigning in Wales three times: in 778, 784 and 795.<sup>631</sup> In 760, towards the beginning of Offa's reign, a battle was fought between *Britones* and *Saxones* at Hereford, though Offa is not mentioned.<sup>632</sup> During the reign of his successor Coenwulf, a battle was fought at Rhuddlan in 797. In 816, *Saxones* invaded the mountains of Eryri (Snowdonia) and Rhufoniog in Denbighshire. In 818, Dyfed was invaded, and in 821 Coenwulf allegedly died at Basingwork, perhaps preparing for another campaign in the north.<sup>633</sup> He was succeeded by his brother, Ceolwulf. All of this culminated in 822, when *Saxones* destroyed the fortress of Deganwy in Rhos, and overran Powys (*in sua potestate traxerunt*).<sup>634</sup> Ceolwulf was deposed the next year, launching a period of instability in the Mercian kingdom that persisted throughout the decade.<sup>635</sup>

All told, there were eight campaigns against the Welsh in the period between 757 and 822. How does this compare with Mercian military activity in other theatres? According to the Moore

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<sup>629</sup> Miller, 'The Final Stages', pp. 205–12.

<sup>630</sup> Hughes, 'Welsh Latin Chronicles', pp. 67–8; cf. Dumville, 'The Welsh Latin Annals' [Review of Hughes, 'The Welsh Latin Chronicles'], *Studia Celtica* 12/13 (1977/8), pp. 461–7.

<sup>631</sup> AC 778, 784; AC C 795.

<sup>632</sup> AC 760.

<sup>633</sup> AC 797, 816, 818; for the death of Coenwulf: Gaimar, *L'Estorie des Engles*, line 2240, p. 90.

<sup>634</sup> AC 822.

<sup>635</sup> ASC 823.

Continuation of Bede, Offa had to fight to secure the kingdom after the assassination of Æthelbald in 757, but the first military campaign directed against external Anglo-Saxons opponents was in 771, when he defeated the *Hæstingas* of Sussex, according to Symeon of Durham.<sup>636</sup> In 776, Offa fought against the men of Kent at Otford, and it is usually argued that he lost this battle because he is not referenced in any Kentish charters for a decade after Otford.<sup>637</sup> In 779, Offa defeated the West Saxons at the Battle of Bensington, and ‘captured the town’, according to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.<sup>638</sup> Coenwulf suppressed a rebellion in Kent and ravaged Romney Marsh in 798, fended off a Northumbrian invasion in 801, and in 802 his ealdorman, Æthelmund of the Hwicce, was defeated by ealdorman Weohstan and the men of Wiltshire at Kempsford.<sup>639</sup> This gives us seven known military encounters, including the violence of 757, so essentially half of the known military campaigns undertaken by the Mercians between 757 and 823—more than sixty years—were directed against Britons.

Warfare was a specific way in which Mercian authority was asserted and maintained. It was a mechanism of hegemony and it helped to underpin social relationships. Campaigning, as a ‘motor of society’, was a way in which the mettle of a new king could be tested, and it gave him an opportunity to reward his supporters and gain new followers. It could be socially cohesive, binding together distinct groups in a heterogenous polity, or it could be disruptive, particularly if the military burdens imposed were too onerous. As discussed above, the Mercian kings of the eighth century were concerned with formalising military obligations through the institution of the

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<sup>636</sup> Moore Memoranda (*Chron. of 766*) 757; Symeon of Durham, *Historia Regum*, 47: *Offa rex Merciorum Hestingorum gentem armis subegerat*.

<sup>637</sup> ASC 776; for the traditional interpretation of Otford: Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 207.

<sup>638</sup> ASC 779; Blair, *Oxfordshire*, p. 55, on Offa’s victory and the possible consolidation of power in the Thames Valley.

<sup>639</sup> ASC 798, 802; for the invasion of Northumbria: Symeon of Durham, *Historia Regum* 63: *Eardulf rex Northanhymbrorum duxit exercitum contra Kenwlfum regem Merciorum*.

common burdens, and they may have faced an increased military need and a desire to draw soldiers from across wide dominions to undertake campaigns in a variety of places, including Wales. It may be that Mercian hegemony created a greater need for military service, perhaps in larger numbers, for longer durations, and potentially without the presence of the king himself, than had hitherto been customary.

The Welsh campaigns were very much part of the general dynamic of Offa and Coenwulf's reigns. They should not simply be seen in isolation. The Battle of Hereford took place in 760, and perhaps it was related to the instability of Offa's accession and it reflected a need to rebuild or preserve the hegemony of Offa's predecessor, Æthelbald. In the same way, Coenwulf needed to put down a rebellion in Kent in the first two years of his reign, and fight against the Welsh at Rhuddlan in 797. Two of Offa's Welsh campaigns, those of 778 and 784 (and the Battle of Benson, 779), took place in the decade after his defeat by the men of Kent at the Battle of Otford. Perhaps we should envision here a king under duress responding to a decade of acute crisis. His campaigns in Wales in 778 and 784 may reflect a need to maintain or reassert authority as rivals perceived weakness.

Indeed, the word employed in the *Annales* for all of Offa's campaigns in Wales—*deuastatio*—often bears the implication of punitive warfare. For example, in 986 Æthelred ordered the lands of the diocese of Rochester to be ravaged as the result of a long-standing dispute between the king and Bishop Ælfstan, and in 1041 Harthcnut had Worcester ravaged to avenge the murder of his tax collectors.<sup>640</sup> Additionally, it could be used to delegitimise an enemy: the rebellion of Æthelwold, a nephew of Alfred the Great, provides a useful example of both strategies. In 902, Æthelwold allied with the Danes of East Anglia and made a bid for the throne in opposition to Alfred's son, Edward the Elder. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* reports that 'Æthelwold induced the

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<sup>640</sup> ASC 986, 1041; Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 178–80.

army in East Anglia to break the peace so that they harried all over Mercia until they reached Cricklade. And they went then across the Thames and carried off all they could seize both in and round about Braydon.’ In response, Edward’s men began to ravage East Anglia. Both harrying raids were meant to challenge the authority of the other. Æthelwold hoped to show Edward’s ineffectiveness as a leader, while perhaps Edward meant to test the Danes’ commitment to Æthelwold and punish his supporters. The effect of a harrying raid could be catastrophic, as suggested by some of the *englynion* of the *Heledd* corpus, for which Rowland has tenuously accepted a possible ninth-century origin.<sup>641</sup> The poems, ostensibly set in the seventh century, are poignant in their description of destruction in war. In one such poem, Heledd laments the destruction of the settlement of *Eglwysseu bassa* (Baschurch):

*Baschurch is fallow land tonight*  
*Its clover is bloody*  
*It is reddened; too much is my emotion.*  
*Baschurch has lost its privilege,*  
*After the slaying by English warriors*  
*Of Cynddylan and Elfan Powys*

*Baschurch is destroyed tonight;*  
*Its warriors are no more.*  
*Men know me here.*  
*Baschurch is glowing embers tonight*  
*And I am sorrowful*  
*It is reddened; too great is my grief.*<sup>642</sup>

It is notable that the word *deuastatio*, or derivations thereof, is used twelve times in the *Annales* between 682 and 954. Six of these instances are explicitly attributed to Anglo-Saxons (778, 784, 795, 816, 818, 945), with one instance of a raid on Glywysing ascribed to a certain ‘Duda’ (865),

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<sup>641</sup> *Early Welsh Saga Poetry: A Study and Edition of the Englynion*, ed. and trans. J. Rowland (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 305–89.

<sup>642</sup> *Canu Heledd*, in *Saga Poetry*, ed. Rowland, 48–51.

which is a perfectly respectable Anglo-Saxon name.<sup>643</sup> Three are ascribed to vikings (853, 867, 894),<sup>644</sup> while only two instances are ascribed to Britons fighting other Britons (893, 953); in the 893 instance, it is specifically said that Anarawd ap Rhodri Mawr came *with Angles (cum Anglis venit)* to ravage Ystrad Tywi and the Ceredigion.<sup>645</sup> The repeated use of the word *deuastatio* suggests three possibilities, which are not mutually exclusive: the first is that the campaigns described in the *Annales* were indeed punitive, as is often suggested by Anglo-Saxon source material, and that the campaigns reflect the active reassertion of an abated hegemony. The second possibility is that the annals were responding to the destruction wrought by military campaigns that were of an unprecedented scale. This too is plausible, given the formalisation of military obligations that took place during the eighth century, which may have allowed for larger campaigns than had been previously possible. The third possibility is that the systems of redress and compensation that underpinned social relationships and served to moderate violence, as discussed in chapter three, were simply not in place between the Mercian kings and their British counterparts, suggesting that there may not have been an established method of asserting the *frið* and defusing conflict. The threat of the devastation of a ravaging campaign may have been such to compel British potentates to enter into interpersonal relationships with the Mercian kings. This will be discussed in the next section.

### 3. *The Maintenance of Client-Kings and Mercian Hegemony*

A second strategy employed by the Mercians, both in Wales and elsewhere, was the maintenance of client-kings. We can possibly see evidence of this in Gwynedd. The *Annales Cambriae* report

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<sup>643</sup> AC 778, 784; C 795; C 816; B C 818; 945. For the period prior to 682, the only instance I have found is an intriguing reference for 658 reporting that *Osguid venit et praedam duxit* [‘Oswy came and took spoils’]: *Annales Cambriae*, ed. John Williams ab Ithel (London, 1860), p. 7. For ‘Duda’, AC 865. PASE records three people named Duda; PASE Duda 3 witnessed an 865 charter of King Æthelberht (S. 333).

<sup>644</sup> AC 853 (Dumville, p. 12); 867 (Dumville, p. 12); 894 (Dumville, p. 14).

<sup>645</sup> AC 894 (Dumville, p. 14); 953 [MSS B, C] (Dumville, p. 18).

a back-and-forth conflict between two cousins, Hywel ap Caradog and Cynan ap Rhodri Molwynog. Hywel's father, as related in the pedigrees of Jesus College MS 20, was Caradog ap Meirion.<sup>646</sup> In 798, Caradog was killed by *Saxones*.<sup>647</sup> The use of the word *iugulatur* suggests that he was killed in some way other than battle—perhaps murdered or executed. It has been argued by David Thornton that the Mercian campaigns of 816 and 822 were directed specifically against Hywel, whose father was killed after the death of Offa, and it is plausible that Coenwulf was supporting Cynan against his cousin.<sup>648</sup> According to the genealogies, Hywel's line held power in Rhos. We know that a battle was fought at Rhuddlan the year before Caradog was killed, and we know that the Mercians destroyed Deganwy in Rhos in 822.<sup>649</sup> It seems likely then that the wider context of events in North Wales during Coenwulf's reign stemmed from competition over the region between the Dee and the Conwy, the region which would later be known as the Perfeddwlad, and constantly fought over between the English kings and the princes of Gwynedd. It would be unwise to speculate too far based on limited evidence, but it may be that this series of events represents an attempt by the Mercians to take more direct control east of the Conwy while maintaining a suitable client—in this case Cynan—in Anglesey. The Rhos dynasty of Caradog and Hywel, which had ambitions in Anglesey, may have been inimical to this.

This is well attested in other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, with varying degrees of intensity and formality: it is well known that the rulers of the Hwicce bore the title of *regulus* or *subregulus* in

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<sup>646</sup> Bartrum, *Genealogical Tracts*, p. 48.

<sup>647</sup> AC 798.

<sup>648</sup> Thornton, *Kings, Chronologies and Genealogies: Studies in the Political History of Ireland and Wales* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 75–120, esp. pp. 75–87; Kirby, 'British Dynastic History in the Pre-Viking Period', *Bulletin for the Board of Celtic Studies* 27 (1976), pp. 81–113, at pp. 96–7, discusses Merfyn's accession in Gwynedd, noting that competition between collateral lines of the Gwynedd royal dynasty was intense and rather typical in Welsh dynastic politics, and that the genealogies suggest a traditional division between patrimonies on Anglesey (Môn) and mainland Gwynedd.

<sup>649</sup> AC 822.

the beginning of Offa's reign, but by 802 they were known merely as *ealdormen*.<sup>650</sup> The Kentish royal line was apparently extinguished with the defeat of Eadberht Præn in 798,<sup>651</sup> as rule in Kent was assumed by Coenwulf's brother Cuthred. After 807, Coenwulf assumed direct rule of Kent. Sigereð of Essex witnessed two 811 charters as *rex* but is thereafter known as *subregulus* or *dux*.<sup>652</sup> In the most infamous episode of Offa's reign, Offa had the East Anglian king Æthelberht executed in 794, probably at Hereford where a later cult emerged.<sup>653</sup> Could this be the precedent for the killing of Caradog four years later?

These examples probably represent the most severe level of Mercian overlordship. Other, seemingly less codified arrangements existed: The West Saxon king, Beorhtric, married Offa's daughter Eadburh in 789, apparently ushering in a period of a rather one-sided alliance, if not complete domination, that had a significant impact on the West Saxon political consciousness.<sup>654</sup> Asser wrote that Eadburh behaved 'like a tyrant in the manner of her father—to loathe every man whom Beorhtric liked, to do all things hateful to God and men, 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 poison.'<sup>655</sup> According to Asser, it is for this reason that a century later the West Saxons did not call the consort of the king 'queen', but rather 'the king's wife'.<sup>656</sup> This suggests that Mercian overlordship, and the status of neighboring kings *vis-à-vis* their relationship with the Mercian king was fluid and it could be

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<sup>650</sup> S. 55, 56, 113; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, pp. 33–9.

<sup>651</sup> ASC 798.

<sup>652</sup> 811: S. 165, 168; afterwards: S. 170, 187.

<sup>653</sup> ASC 794.

<sup>654</sup> Keynes, 'The Kingdom of the Mercians', pp. 11–12.

<sup>655</sup> Asser 14.

<sup>656</sup> Stafford, 'The King's Wife in Wessex: 800–1066', *P&P* 91, 1 (1981), pp. 3–27; Stafford, 'Political women in Mercia, Eighth to the Early Tenth Centuries', in Brown and Farr (eds.), *Mercia*, pp. 35–49.

exercised and expressed in various ways, but was nevertheless felt by all those within the Mercian orbit, including the kings of Gwynedd.

#### 4: *Core-and Periphery: The Irish Sea Context*

We should pay attention to the wider context of these events. Coenwulf's invasions of Gwynedd and the strife between Hywel and Cynan had dramatic consequences throughout the Irish Sea world. With the deaths of Hywel and Cynan, the House of Maelgwn was extinguished. This, coupled with the Mercian crisis of the 820s must have facilitated the accession of Merfyn Frych, probably of the Isle of Man, in 825.<sup>657</sup> All this occurred as viking attacks in the Irish Sea were accelerating quite rapidly and a powerbase was being established in the Hebrides.<sup>658</sup> Conflict within the Cenél nÉogain, and the transfer of power from the northern coasts of Ailech to Mide in the midlands after the death of Áed mac Neill (d. 819) and the ascent of Conchobor mac Donnchada opened the eastern seaboard of Ireland to viking attack: raiders were to be found in Ulster in 825, attacking Downpatrick and Movilla. Further raids occurred in Brega and Leinster in 827.<sup>659</sup> If we consider affairs in the Irish Sea in conjunction with the instability in Mercia after the death of Coenwulf, then Gwynedd hardly appears peripheral; rather we see a polity in the centre of a wider region where tremendous political upheaval is underway, from eastern Ireland across the sea to Mercia.

Thus, it is crucial to see North Wales in a wider Irish Sea context that extends from Ireland in the west, to the Isles in the north, and Mercia in the east. Evidence for contact across the Irish Sea zone is suggested throughout the middle Saxon period. For instance, at the multi-phase site of

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<sup>657</sup> Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 467–79.

<sup>658</sup> J. Graham-Campbell, 'The Irish Sea Vikings: Raiders and Settlers', in T. Scott and P. Starkey (eds.), *The Middle Ages in the North West* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 59–84, at p. 67.

<sup>659</sup> Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p. 471.

Llanbedrgoch, Anglesey, a bird-headed Northumbrian-type brooch dating to the seventh century was recovered.<sup>660</sup> This might be seen alongside the discovery of eighth-century gilded pseudo-penannular Irish-type brooches excavated at Llys Awel, near Abergele, and two fine Trewhiddle-style eighth- or ninth-century silver strap-ends recovered from Llanbedrgoch and Mold.<sup>661</sup> Meanwhile, ninth-century Northumbrian *stycas* that have been found along the estuaries and inlets of the eastern shore of the Irish Sea, at sites such as Meols (Wirral), Otterspool (Mersey), Lancaster, Grange, and Carlisle in north-western England; Whithorn in Galloway; and Llanbedrgoch and Caernarfon in Wales represent the western extremities of Anglo-Saxon coin distribution.<sup>662</sup> Scandinavians plying the Irish Sea utilised these connections, as suggested by the apparent ‘viking’ grave discovered at Talacre, on the western side of the Dee estuary, where an adult male stone cist inhumation was accompanied by a Scandinavian-type socketed spearhead.<sup>663</sup> The Talacre burial has been associated with similar burials in sandy ground close to shore at Benllech, Anglesey, and Arklow, Co. Wicklow.<sup>664</sup> Textual evidence is more limited but for the famous story of Ingimund. This has been discussed in many places,<sup>665</sup> so I shall summarise it only briefly: According to the *Annals of Ulster*, the Irish expelled the Norse from Dublin in 902.<sup>666</sup> The

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<sup>660</sup> M. Redknap, *Vikings in Wales, An Archaeological Quest* (Cardiff, 2000), p. 7.

<sup>661</sup> For Llanbedrgoch, PAS: LVPL-5EAC05; the Mold strap-end (PAS: LVPL-5EAC05) dates to the refortification of Chester in the early tenth century, according to Stone: D.J.F. Stone, ‘Mutually Assured Construction: Æthelflæd’s burhs, Landscapes of Defence, and the Physical Legacy of the Unification of England, 899–1016’ (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Exeter, 2017), p. 204. For Trewhiddle strap-ends: G. Thomas, ‘A Survey of Late Anglo-Saxon and Viking-Age Strap-Ends from Britain’ (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 2000), pp. 71–88.

<sup>662</sup> Redknap, *Vikings in Wales*, p. 65; D. Griffiths, R. Philpott and G. Egan, *Meols: The Archaeology of the North Wirral Coast* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 401–2

<sup>663</sup> F.G. Smith, ‘Talacre and the Viking Grave’, *Proceedings of the Llandudno Colwyn Bay and District Field Club* 17 (1932), pp. 42–50.

<sup>664</sup> Griffiths, *Meols*, p. 402; Redknap, *Vikings in Wales*, p. 96; R. Ó Floinn, ‘The Archaeology of the Early Viking Age in Ireland’, in H.B. Clarke, M. Ní Mhaonaigh and R. Ó Floinn (eds.), *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age* (Dublin, 1998), pp. 131–65, at p. 144.

<sup>665</sup> Griffiths, ‘The North-West Frontier’, pp. 167–87; Higham, ‘Northumbria, Mercia and the Irish Sea Norse, 893–926’, in J. Graham-Campbell (ed.), *Viking Treasure from the North West: The Cuerdale Hoard in its Context* (Liverpool, 1992), pp. 21–30.

<sup>666</sup> *The Annals of Ulster*, ed. S. Mac Airt and G. Mac Niocaill (Dublin, 1983), 902.

‘Three Fragments of Irish Annals’, meanwhile, record that a Hiberno-Norse band led by Ingimund attempted to land in Wales, but were defeated.<sup>667</sup> This may relate to a 905 entry of the *Annales Cambriae*, which record a battle at *Ros Melion*, in which vikings led by ‘Ogmundr’ were routed by the Welsh.<sup>668</sup> It has been argued by Wainwright that this was the same Ingimund referenced in the ‘Three Fragments’.<sup>669</sup> According to the ‘Three Fragments’, after being defeated in Wales, Ingimund and his followers were granted land ‘near Chester’ (Griffiths suggests the Wirral) by Æthelflæd. After a short period of time, the ‘Three Fragments’ claim that Ingimund attacked Chester and were repulsed by the Mercians.<sup>670</sup> This usefully demonstrates a way in which Ireland, Wales, and north-western England were closely connected; events in one place had reverberations across the Irish Sea zone.

### 5: *Landscape and Control: Settlement and Fortifications*

A final Mercian strategy in North-eastern Wales that I would like to discuss is settlement. During the eighth century, we find a proliferation of place names bearing a *-tūn* element, signifying an estate or perhaps an enclosure or farmstead.<sup>671</sup> Some are directional (Sutton, Aston, etc.), some are indicative of local topography (Eaton, Stratton/Stretton), others represent economic functions (Milton, Drayton), and still others signify groups of people (Carlton, Walton etc.).<sup>672</sup> Another

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<sup>667</sup> ‘Three Fragments of Irish Annals’, in *Annals of Ireland: Three Fragments*, ed. J. O’Donovan and D. Mac Firbis (Dublin, 1860), p. 227.

<sup>668</sup> AC 902.

<sup>669</sup> F.T. Wainwright, ‘Cledemutha’, *EHR* 65 (1950), pp. 202–12.

<sup>670</sup> ‘Three Fragments’, pp. 227–35.

<sup>671</sup> The starting point is: A.H. Smith, *English Place-Name Elements*, English Place-Name Society, xxv–xxvi (London, 1956), pp. 188–97. Classic discussions include: Sawyer ‘The Royal *Tun* in Pre-Conquest England’, in P. Wormald *et al.* (eds.), *Ideal and Reality*, pp. 273–99; and Campbell, ‘Bede’s Words for Places’, pp. 113–15; both of whom are principally interested in the connection between *tūnas* and ‘royal villis’.

<sup>672</sup> Margaret Gelling’s work is important here; see: Gelling, *Place-Names in the Landscape* (London, 1984), p. 227; also: Cole, ‘Water Transport’, pp. 56–84, in relation to *ēa-tūn* (e.g. ‘Eton’) names; Cole, ‘Place-Names as Travellers’ Landmarks’, in N.J. Higham and M. Ryan (eds.), *Place-Names, Language and the Anglo-Saxon Landscape* (Woodbridge, 2011), for ‘functional’ place-names such as *stræt-tūn* (Stratton) or *dræg-tūn* (Drayton) and so forth, pp. 51–68; and J. Bourne, ‘An Anglo-Saxon Royal Estate *Æt Glenne* and the Murder of St Wigstan’, in J.

significant name is ‘Burton’ and variants, signifying fortification.<sup>673</sup> However, Blair’s recent work has shown that the *-tūn* places cluster around a central place, rather than signify a central place in of itself. Thus Burton, for example, would represent an estate or outpost that supported a fortress, rather than a fortress itself, demonstrating ‘central clusters, not complex centres.’<sup>674</sup> The *-tūn* element is particularly prevalent during Offa’s reign. They are rare before the 740s or so, and based on charter evidence, they are most intensively noted in the period of *c.* 760 to 790.<sup>675</sup> They are preponderantly Mercian, and are densely distributed across Shropshire and Herefordshire.<sup>676</sup> There is very little evidence for Anglo-Saxon fortifications before the eighth century; this could reflect a desire on the part of the Mercian regime to administer the West Midlands more intensively, perhaps reflecting an attempt to integrate the region more fully into the Mercian kingdom.

If place-name evidence can be read as evidence for Mercian administration, then we might be able to see some evidence of this in north-eastern Wales. Mertyn and Mostyn, in Flintshire on the Dee estuary, and Prestatyn, now in Denbighshire, six miles west of Mostyn, all preserve Cambricised versions of the *-tūn* place name element (now rendered as *-tyn*).<sup>677</sup> This has occasionally been mentioned in passing by scholars such as Lloyd, James Tait, and Eric John, but these places have not been discussed in great detail.<sup>678</sup>

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Bourne (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Landscapes in the East Midlands* (Leicester, 1996), pp. 147–63. Rosamond Faith’s suggestion that *tūn* places were perceived as being significant for their ‘built-ness’, as opposed to the more uncultivated *lēah* is worth considering; R. Faith, ‘*tūn* and *lēah* in the rural economy’, in S. Semple and R. Jones (eds.), *A Sense of Place in Anglo-Saxon England* (Donnington, 2012), pp. 238–42.

<sup>673</sup> Gelling, ‘The Place-Name Burton and Variants’, in S.C. Hawkes (ed.), *Weapons and Warfare in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 145–53.

<sup>674</sup> Blair, *Building*, pp. 193–219.

<sup>675</sup> Gelling, ‘Towards and Chronology for English Place-Names’, in D. Hooke (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Settlements* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 59–76.

<sup>676</sup> Gelling, *The West Midlands*, see chapter seven.

<sup>677</sup> H.W. Owen and K.L. Gruffydd, *Place-Names of Flintshire* (Cardiff, 2017), pp. 120–1, 125, 161.

<sup>678</sup> Lloyd, *History of Wales*, p. 201; J. Tait, ‘Flintshire in the Domesday Book’, *Flintshire Historical Society* 11 (1925), p. 1–37, at p. 1; John, *Reassessing Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester, 1996), p. 8.

Such linguistic shifting and hybridisation is not unprecedented on the Welsh border. The place-names of Trebert and Treverward lie less than two miles apart from each other on either side of Offa's Dyke, and they have a clear topographical relationship with the Iron Age hillfort of Knucklas, which overlooks the earthwork from the west. Trebert and Treverward are in fact hybrid place-names in which the Welsh element *tref-* has been replaced with the Old English *tūn*.<sup>679</sup> Thus, Trebert (*tref-burh*) is a *burh-tūn* in disguise, as Treverward (*tref-burghweard*) is of a kind with place-names such as Burwarton (Shropshire).<sup>680</sup>

Thus, the northern place-names of Mostyn, Mertyn, and Prestatyn deserve further attention. All three locations are named in Domesday.<sup>681</sup> Mostyn lies three miles west of Basingwerk Abbey, where Coenwulf may have died in 821. Half-way between Mostyn and Basingwerk and about a mile and a half to the south is Mertyn. Mostyn and Mertyn probably refer to the marshes of the Dee estuary, and in modern English we might expect Morton or Merton. Marshes were economically valuable as sources of salt, reeds, and waterfowl, so place-names suggesting economic exploitation should not be surprising.<sup>682</sup> Prestatyn is eight miles east of the important monastery of Abergele. Prestatyn (OE *prēost tūn*; cf. MnE Preston) would be 'the estate of the priests', possibly in reference to Abergele. The possibility of the assertion of Mercian ecclesiastical authority in the region is worth considering. Indeed, in support of this theory, Pickles has suggested that ecclesiastical place-names such as *prēost-tūn* had their origins in the eighth century and may be related to expansion of royal power through the expropriation of religious communities.<sup>683</sup>

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<sup>679</sup> Gelling, *The West Midlands*, pp. 122–2.

<sup>680</sup> Blair, *Building*, pp. 207–9, fig. 75.

<sup>681</sup> For Mertyn, Mostyn and Prestatyn: DB fos 269a–269b in *DB 26: Cheshire: including Lancashire, Cumbria and North Wales*.

<sup>682</sup> Cole, 'Place-Names as Travellers' Landmarks', p. 52.

<sup>683</sup> T. Pickles, 'Biscopos-tūn, muneca-tūn and prēosta-tūn: dating, significance and distribution', in E. Quinton (ed.), *The Church in English Place-Names*, English Place-Name Society Extra Series, vol. 4 (2009), pp. 39–107, at p. 42.

Finally, as noted above, Abergele has been identified as the possible source for the northern materials of the *Annales Cambriae*. The *Annales* record that in 768 the Welsh adopted the Roman Easter under the auspices of Elfoddw (d. 809), who is described in his *obit* as the *archiepiscopus Guenedotae*. It has been noted that in its framing, the early annals of the *Annales Cambriae*, those thought to have been composed at Abergele, were concerned primarily with the computation of Easter. If Abergele was under Mercian influence or direct control in 768, it is possible that Offa had some hand in the adoption of paschal conformity among the North Welsh.

In the centre of this cluster of ecclesiastical sites and Old English place-names is Rhuddlan, near the mouth of the Clwyd. Rhuddlan was later the seat of the powerful king of Gwynedd, Gruffydd ap Llywelyn (1055–63).<sup>684</sup> More famously, it is the site of an important Edwardian castle and it is where the Statutes of Rhuddlan were proclaimed in 1284, demonstrating a considerable degree of continued strategic and ideological importance.<sup>685</sup> It is also of great interest that 300 yards south of the Edwardian castle, at the site now known as Old Rhuddlan Castle, there was a Norman motte and bailey from 1073 that was historically known as Twthill, a Welsh version of the Old English place-name Toothill or Tot Hill, which refers to lookouts or beacons, and is very common in the Mercian landscape of clustered settlements described above.<sup>686</sup> Rhuddlan was also the site of a fortification of Edward the Elder. Edward had a *burh* built at Rhuddlan in 921 called *Cledemutha* (Clwydmouth), according to the Mercian Register.<sup>687</sup> It is well-known that the tenth-century *burh*

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<sup>684</sup> ASC D 1063.

<sup>685</sup> Rhuddlan Castle: H. Quinnell and M. Blockley, with P. Berridge, *Excavations at Rhuddlan, Clywd: 1969–73, Mesolithic to Medieval*, CBA Res. Rep. 95 (1994).

<sup>686</sup> Baker and Brookes, ‘Beacons, Lookouts and Military Communications’, in M. Clegg Hyer and G. Owen-Crocker (eds.), *The Material Culture of the Built Environment in the Anglo-Saxon World* (Liverpool, 2015), pp. 216–34; for Twt Hill: Quinnell *et al.*, *Rhuddlan*, p. 8, suggests that this was the sight of Llywelyn ap Seisyll’s 1015 *palatium* in order to command the Clwyd ford.

<sup>687</sup> ASC 921 (Whitelock, p. 68). Quinnell *et al.*, *Rhuddlan*, pp. 208–14; J. Manley, ‘*Cledemutha*: a late Saxon burh in North Wales’, *Medieval Archaeology* 31 (1987), pp. 13–46.

system often reused Mercian sites, and *Cledemutha* may be no different.<sup>688</sup> In light of this, it would appear that the Mercian pattern of settlement, of clustered estates bearing the *tūn* place name element, with other functional places such as lookout-hills, gathered around a central site—in this case, Rhuddlan—extended into North-east Wales, and it is possible that there was a dimension of Mercian ecclesiastical control associated with Abergele (see fig. 5).

#### 6: *Landscape and Control: Monumentality and Power*

There is one last thing that ties these strands together and must be addressed: the prominent linear earthworks that dominate the landscape.<sup>689</sup> I am chiefly concerned with Wat's Dyke here, which runs from Basingwerk in the north to Oswestry and Maesbury in the south—a distance of some forty miles. However, from Treuddyn in the north to Llanymynech in the south, near the terminus of Wat's Dyke at Maesbury—a distance of roughly twenty miles—Wat's Dyke and Offa's Dyke run parallel to each other. The two earthworks are never more than four miles apart from one another, and at their closest, the dykes are separated by less than a mile. Recent radiocarbon dating of Wat's Dyke has dated the earthwork to the early-ninth century. It is likely, then, that it is a product of the reign of Coenwulf.<sup>690</sup> Wat's Dyke should be interpreted as a powerful statement of imperial authority in the landscape. 'Wall building', in the vernacular of early medieval Britain, is associated with imperial authority. This seems to be true amongst both Britons and Anglo-Saxons. Asser, writing about Offa's Dyke, wrote that Offa built a great wall 'from sea to sea' (*de mari*

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<sup>688</sup> J. Haslam, 'Market and Fortress in England in the Reign of Offa', *World Archaeology* 19 (1987), pp. 76–93; Bassett, 'Divide and Rule?', pp. 53–85; Blair, *Building*, pp. 190–3, 232–46. The possibility for Rhuddlan is entertained in Manley, 'The Late Saxon Settlement of *Cledemutha*', in M.L. Faull (ed.), *Studies in Late Anglo-Saxon Settlement* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 55–64, at p. 57.

<sup>689</sup> The literature is of course very extensive. An overview can be found in: Tyler, 'Offa's Dyke: A Historiographical Appraisal', *Journal of Medieval History* 37, 2 (2011), pp. 145–61. The most important recent contribution is K. Ray and I. Bapty, *Offa's Dyke: Landscape and Hegemony in Eighth Century Britain* (Oxford, 2016).

<sup>690</sup> T. Malim and L. Hayes, 'The Date and Nature of Wat's Dyke: a reassessment in light of recent excavations at Gobowen, Shropshire', *ASSAH* 15 (2008), pp. 147–79.

*usque ad mari*).<sup>691</sup> This echoes Bede, who wrote that the Romans built a wall ‘from sea to sea’ (*a mari ad mari*).<sup>692</sup> Ultimately, this may come from Gildas, who wrote that the Romans commanded the Britons to build a wall ‘across the island, between the two seas’ (*inter duo mari trans insulam*).<sup>693</sup> Gildas at one point does use the exact phrase that Asser would later employ (*de mari usque ad mari*),<sup>694</sup> but in the context of Saxon invaders ravaging from sea to sea. So clearly, there is an idea in the textual sources that Romans build walls, and by the 890s Asser had made a connection between the imperial act of wall-building and the tyranny of Offa. This implication is furthered by recent research suggesting that sections of Offa’s Dyke may have been fronted with stone.<sup>695</sup> Undoubtedly, this would increase the visual impact of the Dyke, perhaps heightening its ‘Roman-ness.’ Using Roman idioms of imperial authority was certainly part the general strategy of Mercian kings. This can be seen from Offa’s request for black marble from Charlemagne, the imperious church at Brixworth, with its grandiose brick-built arches and the semi-subterranean mausoleum at Repton.<sup>696</sup> This is also evident in some of Offa’s coinage, which Rory Naismith has argued was modelled on the coinage of the Emperor Constantine;<sup>697</sup> in a charter of 798, Coenwulf adopted the title of *rector et imperator Merciorum*.<sup>698</sup> Thus, we can see that imperial display was very much on the mind of the Mercian kings, and it seems clear that the linear earthworks were a part of this strategy.

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<sup>691</sup> Asser 14.

<sup>692</sup> *HE* i.12.

<sup>693</sup> Gildas, *DEB* i.15.

<sup>694</sup> Gildas, *DEB* i.24.

<sup>695</sup> Ray and Bapty, *Offa’s Dyke*, p. 188 and figs. 5.15–18.

<sup>696</sup> See for instance D. Peacock, ‘Charlemagne’s Black Stones: The Re-use of Roman Columns in Early Medieval Europe’, *Antiquity* 71 (1997), pp. 709–15; Story, *Carolingian Connections*, pp. 169–211, 195–6; Parsons and Sutherland, *All Saints, Brixworth*; H.M. Taylor, ‘St Wystan’s Church, Repton, Derbyshire: A Reconstruction Essay’, *The Archaeological Journal*, 144, 1 (1987), pp. 205–45.

<sup>697</sup> Naismith, *Money and Power in Anglo-Saxon England: The Southern English Kingdoms, 757–865* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 58–62.

<sup>698</sup> S. 153.

Though the display of power was undoubtedly a significant factor in the construction of the Dyke—indeed, because Offa’s Dyke and Wat’s Dyke run so close to each other for about half the length of Wat’s Dyke, one suspects that the actual mustering of resources and manpower and the very building of the earthwork was the most important part of the project—it would still be useful to look at the broader landscape context to gain some insight into some of the possible practical functions of the dyke. Ostensibly, the purpose of the earthwork was to defend the Cheshire plain against attack. However, it may be that the purpose of the earthwork was altogether more aggressive. If we consider the earthwork from the ‘Welsh’ side, it is clear that in the north it stares pointedly at the Clwydian mountains, while towards the centre of the line it ‘bottles-up’ the Dee valley. In practical terms, this could potentially allow the Mercians to monitor travel and communication along the Dee valley, while separating those on the other side from the ideologically significant monastery of Bangor-is-Coed and disrupting potential transhumance patterns from the Clwydian range to the lowlands of the Cheshire plain.<sup>699</sup> When coupled with the likely presence of a Mercian fortification at Rhuddlan, a highly aggressive strategy is suggested that would essentially put the Vale of Clwyd under siege, denying access to the Irish sea as the Mercians pushed along the northern coast to Degannwy. Thus, it is possible that the earthwork could be *offensive* in nature, perhaps suggesting a prelude to further conquest or continued pressure directed against a rival.<sup>700</sup> A strategy of concerted pressure might invite comparison to the Romanising elements of Edward I’s Caernarfon castle, with its walls so reminiscent of

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<sup>699</sup> P. Squatriti, ‘Offa’s Dyke Between Nature and Culture’, *Environmental History* 9 (2004), pp. 37–56.

<sup>700</sup> The tendency of ‘aggressive’ and ‘expansionist eighth-century polities to construct earthworks is noted by Squatriti, ‘Digging Ditches in Medieval Europe’, *P&P* 176 (2002), pp. 11–65, at pp. 29–30. See also the note of Davies, *Patterns of Power*, p. 67: ‘The overall tenor of the surviving written evidence is that it was the English who repeatedly launched attacks on Wales, and not the Welsh who attacked England. Despite popular belief, schoolbooks, and the mythology that surrounds the Dyke...’

Constantinople while having the ultimate strategic purpose of hemming in Gwynedd and maintaining control of the sea.<sup>701</sup>

If Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke were Romanising displays of imperial authority in the landscape, then Mercian aggression was also resisted through the invocation of Roman legitimacy. The Pillar of Eliseg, a ninth-century inscribed stone column, celebrates the victory of Elisedd of Powys over the English—probably during the mid-eighth century, possibly during the crisis at the end of Æthelbald's reign or the beginning of the reign of Offa.<sup>702</sup> It was inscribed on the orders of his grandson, Cyngen of Powys, and it must have been carved between the Mercian invasion of Powys in 822 and the death of Cyngen in 855. The context of Cyngen's reign is of crucial importance here, and the Pillar may say more about his own career than that of his grandfather's. Cyngen was probably responsible for the restoration of order in Powys after the apparent calamity of 822, and it may be that he was able to come to power during the Mercian crisis of the 820s, in the same manner as Merfyn Frych in Gwynedd.<sup>703</sup> Asser wrote that the 'midland Britons' (*mediterraneos Britones*)—this is surely Powys—struggled 'inordinately' against Burgred of Mercia, forcing Burgred to request military assistance from Æthelwulf of Wessex in 853.<sup>704</sup> The leader of these 'midland Britons' was probably Cyngen, who left for Rome in 854, where he died, according to

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<sup>701</sup> M. Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages: The English Experience* (London, 1996), p. 296.

<sup>702</sup> Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 414–19; the column has been discussed in many places recently, See: N. Edwards *et al.*, *A Corpus of Medieval Inscribed Stones and Stone Sculpture in Wales*, vol. 3: North Wales (Cardiff, 2013), pp. 322–36; Edwards, 'Rethinking the Pillar of Eliseg', *The Antiquaries Journal* 89 (2009), pp. 143–77, arguing that the Pillar was connected to assembly practices, and it represented a work of propaganda meant to legitimise the Powysian dynasty in the face of Mercian aggression; O. Wyn Jones, 'Hereditas Pouisi: The Pillar of Eliseg and the History of Early Powys', *Welsh History Review* 24, 4 (2009), pp. 41–80, argues that the Pillar was meant to portray a synthesised history of the Powysian dynasty, meant to portray a sense of continuity; most recently, P. Murrieta-Flores and H. Williams, 'Placing the Pillar of Eliseg: Movement, Visibility and Memory in the Early Medieval Landscape', *Medieval Archaeology* 61, 1 (2017), pp. 69–103, uses GIS-based and spatial methodologies to examine the view-fields and communication routes in Pillar's local landscape context.

<sup>703</sup> Wyn Jones, 'Hereditas Pouisi', p. 79. It may be both the arrival of the Merfynion and the invasion of the Mercians that provided the context for Cyngen's accession.

<sup>704</sup> Asser 7; ASC 853.

the *Annales*.<sup>705</sup> Thus, Cyngen was evidently a serious thorn in the Mercian side even after the 820s. As the Pillar indicates, Cyngen legitimised his kingship through victory in war over the Angles (taken to mean Mercians), and he framed this legitimacy through his grandfather's military successes.

However, Cyngen also used the Pillar to claim *Roman* imperial legitimacy. The Pillar of Eliseg contains a genealogy of the kings of Powys that goes back to the legendary Gwrtheyrn, who married Sevira, the daughter of the usurper Magnus Maximus (d. 388). Gildas associated Magnus Maximus with the passing of Roman legitimacy, a legitimacy to which Cyngen wished to be seen as the inheritor to.<sup>706</sup> In seeking a Roman legacy for the Pillar, one is reminded of an impish quote by Bryan Ward-Perkins, claiming that 'Gwynedd [in 1282 was] the very last part of the entire Roman Empire, east and west, to fall to the barbarians.'<sup>707</sup> Clearly, ideas articulating Roman legitimacy and authority were circulating with some alacrity in ninth-century Powys as well. Further to this, it has been suggested that the round-shaft form of the Pillar of Eliseg may intentionally suggest Roman victory columns. Indeed, there are no precedents for the monument anywhere in Wales.<sup>708</sup> In Cheshire, there are several plain round-shafted crosses that seem comparable to the Pillar of Eliseg, such as the cross of Clulow near Macclesfield (Clulow Wincle 1), but these have been traditionally dated to the tenth or eleventh centuries.<sup>709</sup> There are some early ninth-century round-shafted crosses from Anglo-Saxon England, such as Masham 1 (North Yorks.), and the fragmentary crosses of Dewsbury 1–3 (W. Yorks.) and Reculver 1 (Kent) that

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<sup>705</sup> AC 854.

<sup>706</sup> Gildas, *DEB* i.13; Dumville, 'Sub-Roman Britain: History and Legend', *History* 62, 205 (1977), pp. 173–92.

<sup>707</sup> Bryan Ward-Perkins, 'Why did the Anglo-Saxons not become more British?', *EHR* 115, 462 (2000), pp. 513–33, at p. 527.

<sup>708</sup> Edwards, *Corpus*, pp. 328–9.

<sup>709</sup> Edwards, 'Rethinking', p. 154; R. Bailey, *Cheshire and Lancashire: Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture* 9 (Oxford, 2010), p. 34.

also seem to invoke the imperial splendour of triumphal Jupiter columns—what Hawkes calls *imitatio Romae*—but as Edwards notes, these crosses are decorated with complex figural iconography, and they are without inscription.<sup>710</sup> Though stylistically unlike, the extraordinary ninth-century Sandbach crosses in Cheshire are worth considering as a statement of the authority of the Mercian church and in the west. As Hawkes notes, Sandbach lies visibly on the Cheshire plain with eyes to Wales and the Irish Sea, and the sculptors were familiar with contemporary artistic developments and iconography from both the ‘insular world’ and the Continent.<sup>711</sup> This is a potent reminder that carved stones such as the Pillar of Eliseg and the Sandbach Crosses were both part of a broad and varied discourse that could be used to make concurrent artistic, social, and political statements in the landscape itself. It further emphasises that the perceived ‘marginality’ of the northwest belies a landscape that was interconnected, socially and politically vibrant, and ideologically charged.

This becomes more significant given the Pillar of Eliseg’s landscape context: The Pillar sits just 1,000 yards from the River Dee in Llantysilio-yn-Ial, in the shadow of the southern reach of the Clwydian mountains. The Pillar is located along a turnpike road of 1811, which runs from the banks of the Dee through a pass in the mountains and into the Vale of Clwyd.<sup>712</sup> We know from antiquarian reports that the turnpike road replaced an older and steeper track.<sup>713</sup> The presence of a nearby farmstead called Bwlch-Mawr (‘Great Gap’) on Ordnance Survey maps from at least 1870 could possibly suggest a long history of use as a pass through the mountains. It is a mere twenty

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<sup>710</sup> J. Hawkes, ‘The Church Triumphant: The Figural Columns of Early Ninth-century Anglo-Saxon England’, in S. Crawford *et al.* (eds.), *Form and Order in the Anglo-Saxon World*, ASSAH 16 (Oxford, 2009), pp. 31–43, at pp. 38–41; Edwards, *Corpus*, p. 329; Edwards, ‘Rethinking’, p. 155. Murrieta-Flores and Williams, ‘Placing the Pillar of Eliseg’, p. 97, suggest that the Pillar may have been a *Mercian* monument with a provenance in the 820s, and was only *inscribed* by Cyngen later.

<sup>711</sup> Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses: Sign and Significance in Anglo-Saxon Sculpture* (Dublin, 2002), pp. 128–48.

<sup>712</sup> R. T. Pritchard, ‘Denbighshire Roads and Turnpike Trusts’, *Denbighshire Historical Society Transactions* 12 (1963), pp. 86–109.

<sup>713</sup> R. Fenton, *Tours in Wales: 1804–1813*, ed. J. Fisher (London, 1917), p. 137.

miles north through the vale to Rhuddlan. As the recent work on view fields in the immediate vicinity of the Pillar has demonstrated, the Pillar stands at the nexus of both North-South and East-West routes of communication.<sup>714</sup> Moreover, the valley itself was rather secluded; it was ‘visually disconnected’, while the highly visible points of Moel y Gamelin, Moel Morfydd, Vivod Mountain and Cefn Ucha served as optimal ‘look out’ positions guarding the approaches to the valley. Llantysilio is only a mile from the hillfort and later castle of Dinas Bran, an important site in the later history of Powys, and the approach to the pass is very visible from the castle.<sup>715</sup> More excavation would be needed to determine possible early medieval use, here and at the many other hillforts in the Clwydian range which seem to have a ‘visual relationship’ with Wat’s Dyke and Offa’s Dyke. Llantysilio is less than six miles west of the point where Offa’s Dyke and Wat’s Dyke are closest to each other. From there, it is only five miles due east to Bangor-on-Dee. This spatial relationship may not be coincidental, and the earthworks and Pillar may represent competing statements of territoriality in this region. It seems likely that as a statement of territorial intent, the Pillar is directed both east, towards the dykes, and north towards Mercians who may have been establishing themselves—or who had at one time been present—in the Clwyd Valley.

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<sup>714</sup> Murrieta-Flores and Williams, ‘Placing the Pillar of Eliseg’, p. 92.

<sup>715</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82, 87, etc.

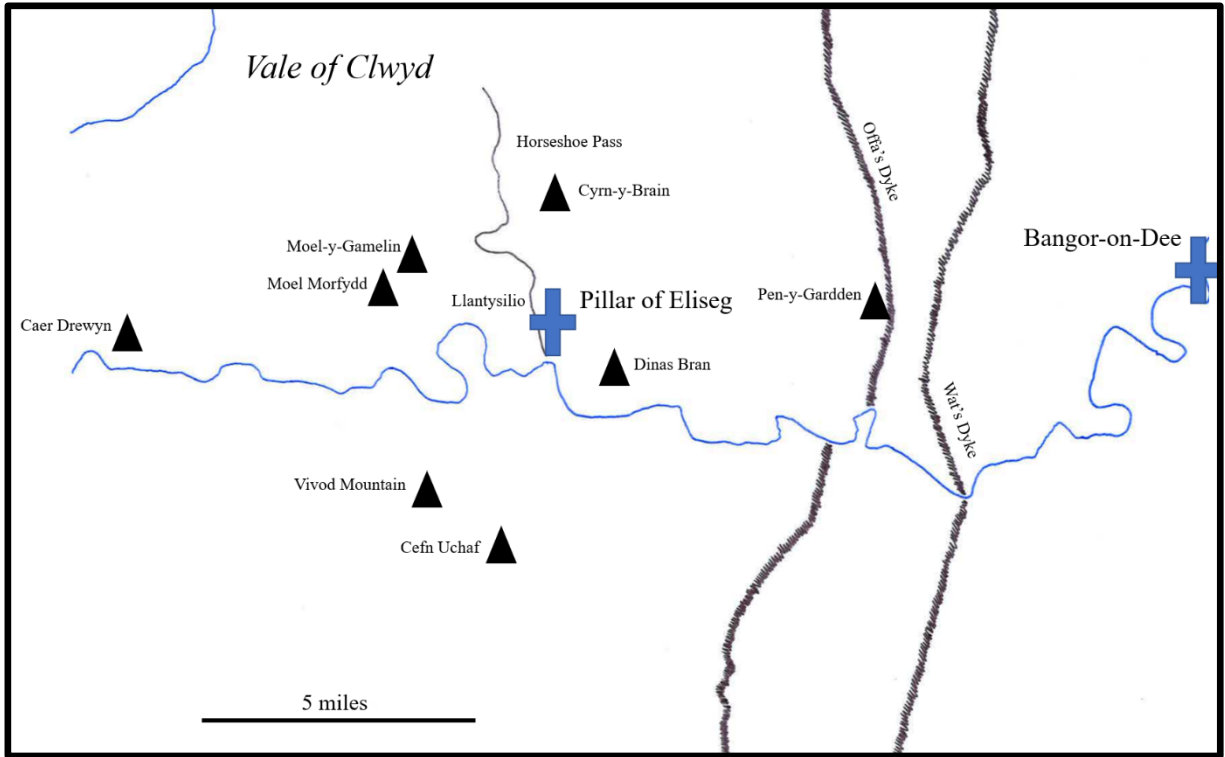


FIGURE 6: THE LANDSCAPE OF THE PILLAR OF ELISEG.

+ CONCENN FILIUS CATTELL CATTELL  
 FILIUS BROCHMAIL BROCHMAIL FILIUS  
 ELISEG ELISEG FILIUS GUOILLAUC  
 + CONCENN ITAQUE PRONEPOS ELISEG  
 EDIFICUIT HUNC LAPIDEM PROAUO  
 SUO ELISEG IPSE EST ELISEG QUI NEC(R?)  
 XIT HEREDITATEM POUOS...IPC...MORT  
 CA\|V\|TEM PER VIM E POTESTATE ANGLO  
 [RUM...] IN GLADIO SUO PARTA IN IGNE  
 [+ QUICU] MQUE RECIT[A]UERIT MANESCR[I]P  
 [TUM...] EM DET BENEDICTIONEM SUPE  
 [R ANIMA]M ELISEG + IPSE EST CONCENN  
 [.....] MANU  
 [.....] E AD REGNUM SUUM POUOS  
 [.....] ET QUOD  
*line missing*  
 [.....] MONTEM  
*one or more lines missing*  
 [.....] MONARCHAM  
 [.....]AIL MAXIMUS BRITTANNIAE  
 [CONCE]NN PASCEN[T] MAUN ANNAN  
 [+] BRITU A[U]T[E]M FILIUS GUARTHI  
 [GIRN] QUEM BENED[IXIT] GERMANUS QUEM  
 [QU]E PEPERIT EI SE[V]IRA FILIA MAXIMI  
 [RE]GIS QUI OCCIDIT REGEM ROMANO  
 RUM + CONMARCH PINXIT HOC  
 CHIROGRAFUM REGE SUO POSCENTE  
 CONCENN + BENEDICTIO DOMINI IN CON  
 CENN ET SIMILITER (?) IN TOTA FAMILIA EIUS  
 ET IN TOTA RAGIONEM POUOIS  
 USQUE IN [DIEM IUDICI AMEN (?)]

- + Cyngen son of Cadell, Cadell son of Brochfael, Brochfael son of Elise, Elise son of Gwylog.
- + Cyngen, therefore, great-grandson of Elise, erected this stone to his great-grandfather, Elise.
- + It is the same Elise who seized the inheritance of Powys *ipc... mort ca\|v\|tem* by force... from the power of the English... in the sword, [a power] born in fire.
- [+ Who]ever has read out [this stone/cross] inscribed by hand, let him give a blessing on [the soul] of Elise.
- + It is the same Cyngen [who]... with his hand... to his kingdom of Powys... and which... the mountain... the monarchy... *ail* Maximus of Briatin
- [Cyng]e[n], Pasgen... *maunannan*
- + Brydwr, however, son of Gwrtheyrn, was the one whom Germanus blessed and whom Seviria bore to him, the daughter of Maximus, [the ki]ng who killed the king of the Romans.
- + Cynfarch painted this handwriting on the order of his king, Cyngen.
- + The blessing of the Lord on Cyngen and his people, on his entire household and on the whole land of Powys until the [Day of Judgment.]

FIGURE 7: THE PILLAR OF ELISEG, TRANS. CHARLES-EDWARDS, WALES AND THE BRITONS, PP. 415–16.

## *7: Conclusion*

To conclude, north-eastern Wales was a hotly contested landscape in the eighth and ninth centuries. We can see evidence of the Mercians adopting familiar strategies to subdue their rivals in the region; namely, military campaigns and the maintenance of client kings. There is also some evidence of settlement in northern Flintshire and Denbighshire, and it is possible that Mercian expansion along the northern coast and at the mouth of the Clwyd was anchored by a fortress at Rhuddlan. All this occurred in conjunction with the linear earthworks of Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke, the latter of which is particularly prominent in this region. The earthworks were statements of imperial authority in the landscape, and they may have also had a role in 'constricting' the Welsh in the Vale of Clwyd as the Mercians established themselves at Rhuddlan. The Pillar of Eliseg also proclaims legitimacy in the region based upon a Roman inheritance, suggesting that in this contested landscape, kings in the frontier—both British and Angle—were considering the ideology of their kingship and their legitimacy very carefully and attempting to imprint this ideology on the landscape itself.

As with the previous case study, this chapter has attempted to invert traditional notions of core-and-periphery. We have seen that while the region was indeed on the periphery of the Mercian realm, it was central to the long-running interactions between the Mercian kings and their counterparts in Gwynedd and Powys. Moreover, it was connected to the wider political developments in the Irish Sea. Ostensibly, the concerns of this chapter are about 'inter-ethnic' relations more than in the previous case-study. However, there is reason to suggest a good deal of mutual understanding between the Anglo-Saxons and their Welsh counterparts. Both the Mercians and the Welsh assiduously used Roman idioms to communicate their authority in the landscape, and it may be that the Pillar of Eliseg and the Sandbach cross together represent different visual

manifestations of a shared artistic and cultural vocabulary. Furthermore, the relationships between Mercian and British kings do not seem to be fundamentally different, as far as can be seen. Perhaps this represents a permutation of the juxtaposition set up in chapter two between elite homogeneity and regional diversity. Finally, in the previous chapter it was noted that the use of minsters to communicate authority in the region of the case-study was particular to its time, and it relied upon the fervour for monasticism that gripped elite society in the conversion era. Here too we see strategies that are essentially of their time: the construction of fortresses with appurtenant supporting sites, such as the cluster around Rhuddlan, and the use of grand Romanising monuments, such as the linear earthworks and the Pillar of Eliseg, are all features of the broader eighth-century landscape, demonstrating that far from an obscure backwater, the landscape between the Clwyd and the Dee was fully integrated with wider processes in the landscape and the exercise of Mercian hegemony in the eighth and ninth centuries.

## Chapter VI

### The North Wessex Downs and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*

#### 1. *Landscape*

##### i.1: *The Character of the Downs*

The landscape of the Berkshire and Marlborough Downs, stretching from Yatesbury in the west to the Gap of Goring in the east, is marked by its indelible association with the Anglo-Saxon past. This is made clear by the region's modern name, 'The North Wessex Downs', which I shall favour here. In a recent article, the archaeologists Chris Gosden and Gary Lock emphasised the need to examine the landscape with a 'generative' approach. This is to say that landscape 'elements were put together in varying ways at different places and times, not always, or even often, laid out as single entities.'<sup>716</sup> Thus, the landscape is constantly being built upon as it is reassessed, reinterpreted, and repurposed. It is not created *ex nihilo*; rather, the landscape is used and altered according to both practical and ideological needs, and this occurs through the prism of how people in the landscape understand the past. This chapter will consider how the landscape was interpreted and utilised for the purpose of historical writing in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

The Downs form part of the cretaceous chalk formation that so significantly marks the geology of southern England.<sup>717</sup> Though the gently rolling hills are not grand, they form a significant north-south divide, broadly shaping the drainage division between the catchment of the Thames and the rivers of the south and west, significantly effecting regional transportation and communication

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<sup>716</sup> C. Gosden and G. Lock, 'The Aesthetics of the Berkshire Downs', in C. Haselgrove and R. Pope (eds.), *The Earlier Iron Age in Britain and the Near Continent* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 279–92, quoted at p. 279.

<sup>717</sup> For the geology of the downs: P. Levick, *Later Prehistoric and Roman Landscapes on the Berkshire Downs*, BAR Brit. Ser. 612 (2015), p. 4; and more generally for the character of the chalks: S. Davison, *North Wessex Downs* (London, 2013), pp. 12–17.

patterns. Essentially, this study is concerned with the valley of the River Kennet, which rises around Avebury (Wilts.) and flows west-east before joining the Thames at Reading, its tributaries—principally the rivers Og, Dun, and Lambourn—and the Pang, which rises around Compton near Ilsley before joining the Thames at Pangbourne. The chief routeway of the district is undoubtedly the prehistoric track known as the Ridgeway, which crosses the Thames around Streatley before proceeding along an east-west arc across the northern scarp of the Downs and venturing south toward Avebury and the Vale of Pewsey in Wiltshire. Of Roman roads, the Cirencester-Silchester road runs northwest-southeast across the Downs, and it is joined by the Winchester-Mildenhall-Wanborough Roman road at Wanborough. The Bath-Mildenhall road runs west-east, and there is a conjectured Roman road that progresses north from Silchester to Dorchester (see below, fig. 8).

The argument of this chapter will proceed as follows: first, I will argue that the monumental character of the Downs had a significant impact upon the West Saxon consciousness, and the landscape was specifically connected with warfare in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Many of these recorded instances of warfare were associated with prehistoric monuments and the Ridgeway. The *Chronicle's* evocation of monuments and places of battle built a historical association between the landscape itself and the West Saxon dynasty. I will argue that combining legendary and historical material in the *Chronicle's* record of warfare legitimised West Saxon authority in the region. This was particularly important as the common stock was being compiled, not only because the Downs had recently been successfully defended by Æthelred and Alfred in 871, but also because the region had only just come under definitive West Saxon control. However, it will be shown that narratives of conflict in the landscape could also be used to communicate a society under duress and criticise ineffective leadership.

### i.2: *Landscape and Monumentality*

One of the defining aspects of the Downs is its monumental character. It will be argued here that prehistoric monuments were used to ‘locate’ warfare in the landscape, and in so doing, they were instrumental to the communication of identity. The same places that were suitable for warfare were also places where assemblies gathered and where law was enacted (see above, chapter three). This is because all three processes were engines of social cohesion that reinforced a perception of collective identity; they required active participation and were rooted in the landscape. The king who led the *gens* in war, presided over assemblies, and gave laws was the bonding agent of these processes. It will be shown below that the Downs were not associated with warfare because they were ‘peripheral’, but because they were associated with royal activity.

### i.3: *Warfare and Monumentality*

The relationship between prehistoric monuments and warfare has been commented upon before.<sup>718</sup> In 1989, Guy Halsall’s analysis of twenty-eight named battles between 600 and 850 found that twelve battles were named for ancient monuments, with two further potential examples. Most of the other sites were named for rivers or river-crossings.<sup>719</sup> Halsall suggested that this was because warfare mostly happened along well-known routeways, and that monuments along such routeways were useful as tools of identification.<sup>720</sup> It should be noted, however, that battles not *named* for a monument could still have been associated with one. In the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, nine instances of warfare are recorded taking place on the Downs under entries for 556, 592, 661, 715, 825, 871 (in which there were two battles), 1006, and 1010, as can be seen on the map in figure eight. This is the densest geographical concentration of warfare in the Anglo-Saxon textual record. They have

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<sup>718</sup> Semple, *Perceptions*, pp. 83–6, table 3.2.

<sup>719</sup> Halsall, ‘Pre-Conquest Warfare and Society’, p. 166, fig. 11.4.

<sup>720</sup> Halsall, *Warfare and Society*, p. 157.

been recorded in the table below (fig. 9). It is clear from the map presented in figure eight that the prehistoric routeway known as the Ridgeway, which runs on an east-west course along the ridge of the Downs before arcing south toward the Vale of Pewsey in the west, was of central importance. Any army making a course of the Downs along the Ridgeway would pass several important monuments where battles were either explicitly recorded or thought to be fought.

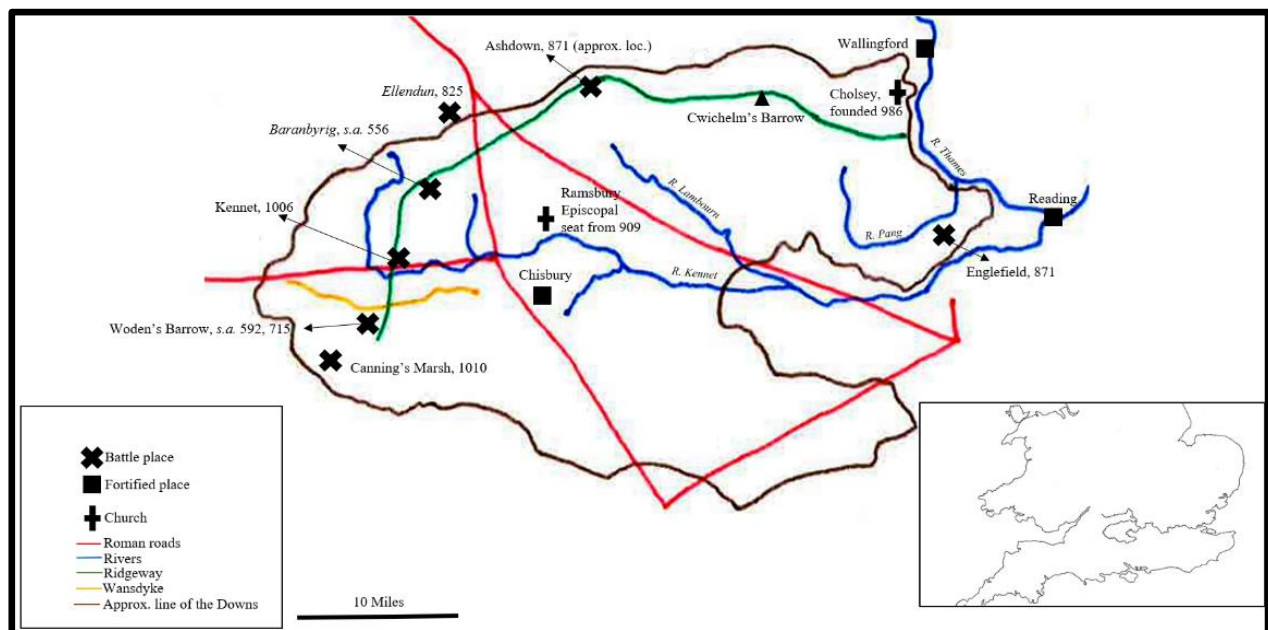


FIGURE 8: BATTLES ON THE DOWNS.

These include Barbury Castle (*Baranbyrig*), a hillfort lying on the Ridgeway just as the route turns south to descend into the Vale of Pewsey. It was here that a battle was recorded *s.a.* 556. It may be of note that weapons have been recovered from the hillfort ranging from the sixth through the eighth centuries in a rare non-funerary context.<sup>721</sup> Additionally, the hillfort of Uffington Castle,

<sup>721</sup> Semple, *Perceptions*, appendix 2, p. 251; B. Cunliffe, *Iron Age Communities in Britain* (London, 1978), p. 418 fig. 34. For the location of the Battle of *Ellendun*, which would put the battle in close proximity to the hillfort of Barbury Castle: C. Oman, *England Before the Norman Conquest* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Oxford, 1910), p. 392 n. 3.

thought to be where Æthelred and his brother Alfred defeated the Danes at the Battle of Ashdown in 871, occupies a similarly commanding position on the Ridgeway, and is in close proximity to important the estates of Wantage and Lambourn.

Year	Battle	Location	Participants	Victor	Monuments	Routeway
556	<i>Baranbyrig</i>	Barbury Castle, Wilts.	Cynric and Ceawlin with Britons	Unknown	Barbury Castle (hillfort)	Ridgeway
592	<i>Wodnesbeorge</i>	Adam's Grave, Alton Priors, Wilts.	Ceawlin (?)	Unknown	Adam's Grave/Woden's Barrow (Neolithic long barrow); Wansdyke (Middle Saxon linear earthwork)	Ridgeway
661	Wulfhere ravages <i>Æscesdune</i>	N/A	Wulfhere of Mercia and Cenwalh (?)	Mercians	N/A	Ridgeway (presumed)
715	<i>Wodnesbeorge</i>	Adam's Grave, Alton Priors, Wilts.	Ine of Wessex and Ceolred of Mercia	Unknown	Adam's Grave/Woden's Barrow; Wansdyke	Ridgeway
825	<i>Ellendun</i>	Wroughton (possibly Elcombe), Wilts.	Ecgbert of Wessex and Beornwulf of Mercia	West Saxons	Not certain; several hillforts (Bicknoll, Barbury, Liddington) in the vicinity	Ridgeway
871	Englefield	Englefield, Berks.	Ealdorman Æthelwulf and the Danes	Æthelwulf	Not certain	Crossing of the Thames at Basilford; Roman Silchester-Dorchester road
871	Ashdown	Traditionally associated with Uffington Castle, Berks.	Æthelred and Alfred of Wessex and the Danes	Æthelred and Alfred	Possible Uffington Castle; antiquarian association with Alfred's Castle (hillforts)	Ridgeway

1006	Kennet	Overton Hill, East Kennet, Wilts.	The West Saxon <i>fyrd</i> and the Danes	Danes	Overton Hill stone circle; Adam's Grave/Woden's Barrow; Wansdyke; <i>Cwichelmeshlæwe</i> /Cwichelm's Barrow/Scutchamer Knob (Iron Age barrow)	Ridgeway, Roman London-Bath road
1010	Cannings Marsh	All Cannings, Wilts.	Danes	Danes	Possibly Bourton above Bishop's Cannings; about three miles from Adam's Grave/Woden's Barrow and the Wansdyke	London-Bath Road; Ridgeway

**FIGURE 9: RECORD OF CONFLICT ON THE NORTH WESSEX DOWNS IN THE *ANGLO-SAXON CHRONICLE*, S.A. 556–1010**

Also of great prominence were the barrows known as Cwichelm's Barrow / Skutchamer Knob (*Cwichelmeshlæwe*) and Woden's Barrow (*Wodnesbeorge*). The Iron Age round barrow of *Cwichelmeshlæwe* will be discussed at further length below (pp. 244–7), but for now suffice to say that the barrow was referenced and named as such in a charter of 990 x 992, where it is recorded as a shire-meeting place. It is later mentioned in an entry of the *Chronicle* for 1006, where it is associated with military activity and a viking campaign through Hampshire and Berkshire.<sup>722</sup> The barrow is prominently sited upon the Ridgeway, where it rises on the scarp of the downs above the royal estates of Wantage and Lockinge.

Though the barrow is named for the semi-legendary seventh-century West Saxon king Cwichelm, recent excavation has not uncovered any evidence of Anglo-Saxon secondary burial.<sup>723</sup> As with the other monuments, Woden's Barrow lies in proximity to the Ridgeway. It was remembered as a place of battle in the *Chronicle* in entries for 592 and 715. It is a Neolithic longbarrow, and though there is not strong evidence for Anglo-Saxon secondary burial, a seventh-century silver gilt pyramidal sword-fitting with a niello inlay found near Adam's Grave may suggest a 'sentinel

<sup>722</sup> S. 1454; ASC C 1006.

<sup>723</sup> Sanmark and Semple, 'Places of Assembly', pp. 245–59.

burial'.<sup>724</sup> It is also referenced in two charters from 825 and 900.<sup>725</sup> The barrow is part of a remarkable assembly of theophoric place-names along the Ridgeway. As demonstrated by Reynolds and Langlands, the course of the Ridgeway traverses a valley known in a charter of 939 as *Wodnes dene* (Woden's Valley).<sup>726</sup> It then passes through a gap in the linear earthwork known as *Wansdyke* (Woden's Dyke); the gap is referred to in an 825 charter as *Woddes geat* (Woden's Gate).<sup>727</sup> After Woden's Gate, a traveller moving south would proceed to the causewayed Neolithic enclosure of Knap Hill, before finally arriving at Woden's Barrow, which overlooks the Vale of Pewsey—a region of great significance to the West Saxon dynasty.<sup>728</sup> Reynolds and Langlands have recently postulated an Anglo-Saxon provenance for Wansdyke, which had long been thought to be prehistoric.<sup>729</sup> Thus, we see the way in which prehistoric monuments and later Anglo-Saxon monuments interacted with each other and were oriented along the Ridgeway.

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<sup>724</sup> A. Reynolds and A. Langlands, 'Social Identity on the Macro Scale: A Maximum View of Wansdyke', in W. Davies, G. Halsall and A. Reynolds (eds.), *People and Space in Early Medieval Europe* (Turnhout, 2006), pp. 13–44, p. 33; P. Robinson, 'The Treasure Act', *Trilithon* 46 (2002), p. 3.

<sup>725</sup> S. 272, 1513.

<sup>726</sup> S. 449.

<sup>727</sup> S. 272

<sup>728</sup> Reynolds and Langlands, 'Travel as communication: a consideration of overland journeys in Anglo-Saxon England', *World Archaeology* 43 (2011), pp. 410–27, esp. pp. 413–14; for Knap Hill, where an unusual sixth-century iron sword was recovered from a non-funerary context: Semple, *Perceptions*, p. 78–9

<sup>729</sup> Reynolds and Langlands, 'Social Identity'.

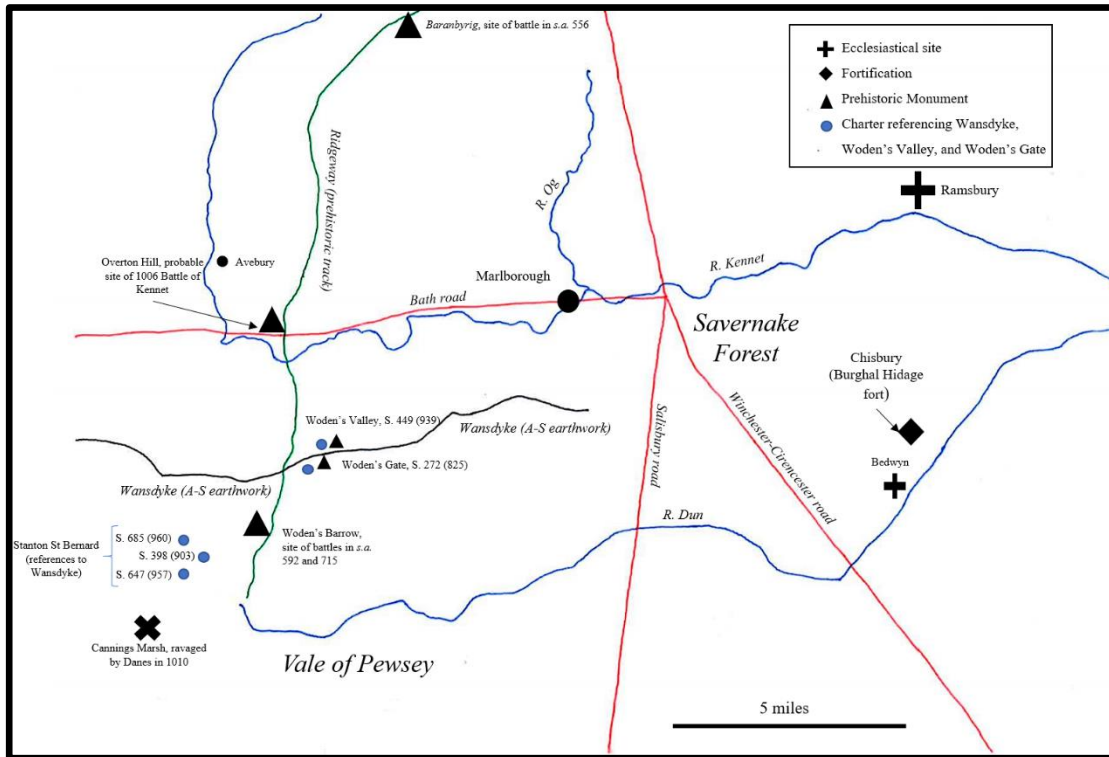


FIGURE 10: WANSDYKE AND THE RIDGEWAY.

## 2: Warfare in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

We can interpret the role of warfare within this dynamic region because of the way the Downs were perceived and the ways that battles were reported and utilised in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. The following argument will suggest that entries reporting warfare in the Downs were attempting to use these battles to build an association between the landscape and the West Saxon dynasty. The sources for the ‘common stock’ of the *Chronicle*, and thus the sources for the first seven instances of warfare under discussion, are mostly obscure, but as Yorke notes, it is unlikely that all of the material in the early entries of *Chronicle* were created by the Alfredian court wholesale, and the text must have been curated, edited, manipulated, or otherwise altered.<sup>730</sup> The *Chronicle* is full of

<sup>730</sup> Yorke, ‘The Representation of Early West Saxon History in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle’, in Jorgensen (ed.), *Reading the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, pp. 141–60, at p. 159; cf. also Keynes, ‘Manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*’, in R. Gameson (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 537–52.

battles, and yet it reports only a few of the battles that must have been fought. The entry for 757, for instance, states that ‘Cynewulf fought many great battles against the Britons’, yet none of these ‘great battles’ are specifically mentioned.<sup>731</sup> Likewise, the 871 entry claims that nine ‘public battles’ (*folcgefeht*) were fought that year, admitting that other battles in which ‘the king’s brother Alfred and [singular] ealdormen and king’s thegns often rode on’ were omitted. Despite this, the annal only lists six battles (Englefield, Reading, Ashdown, Basing, *Meretun*, Wilton). Adding to the confusion, Asser claims that eight battles were fought, instead of nine, but he only specifically records five battles, omitting the Battle of *Meretun* which is referenced in the *Chronicle*.<sup>732</sup> Furthermore, the entry is rife with contradiction: the chronicler celebrates the battles of 871, but the Danes won four of the six battles that are described. Sometimes the events are obscured; for instance, of the Battle of Wilton it is written ‘Alfred fought with a small force against the whole army at Wilton and put it to flight far on into the day; *and the Danes had possession of the battlefield.*’ It seems likely that this entry was meant to smooth over the dire threat faced by the royal family in the wake of Alfred’s accession in April of that year, and to recast the campaigning of 871 as a stout and ultimately successful defence of ‘the kingdom south of the Thames’.<sup>733</sup> Therefore it is reasonable to conclude that the reporting of warfare was not consistent or comprehensive in Anglo-Saxon sources.

This suggests that when warfare *is* reported, it should be taken seriously. The recording of war in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* was not random. Battles, and the memory of battles, were a means by which identity could be asserted. They could anchor a society in time, and they are therefore an

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<sup>731</sup> Halsall, *Warfare and Society*, p. 142; *ASC* 757.

<sup>732</sup> *ASC* 871; Asser 42; see also Æthelweard, *Chronicon*. 871; cf. Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred*, p. 81 n. 78.

<sup>733</sup> Keynes, ‘A Tale of Two Kings: Alfred the Great and Æthelred the Unready’, *TRHS* 36 (1986), pp. 195–217, at p. 198; cf. Davis, ‘Alfred the Great: propaganda and truth’; Æthelweard, *Chronicon*. 871, expands on this, claiming that the Danes rallied after their English pursuers wearied.

essential part of early medieval history writing. For example, Æthelweard contextualises Alfred's accession by commenting that he came to the throne 'forty-seven years [*recte* forty-eight] since the Mercians and West Saxons waged civil war (*ciuilia bella*) at the place called *Ellendun*... furthermore, the years were twenty-six from when a battle was fought at the Parret [against the Danes in Somerset; cf. *ASC* 845]; twenty from the fight which took place by the forest called *Acleah*, and from the arrival of the pagans in the territory of the East Angles five years.'<sup>734</sup> Not only does this provide a chronological framework, but it also projects identity. Æthelweard begins the passage by describing the battle of *Ellendun* as a 'civil war' (thereby back-projecting the unification of Wessex and Mercia) and he ends with the arrival of the pagans—the ultimate 'others'—in East Anglia. The *Chronicle* provides a chronology for events within the context of the deeds of the West Saxon kings, thereby binding the audience of the annals to the royal dynasty. Writing about warfare is, at its core, part of a discourse on identity, and by association, kingship. In part, it is an aspect of a wider spectrum of public performance; it is for this reason that the 871 entry of the *Chronicle* uses the word *folcgefeht* to describe the great campaigns of that year, emphasising the public nature of these battles in contrast to the military activities of singular ealdormen and thegns. Gaimar best encapsulated the essence of the *Chronicle* in his *L'Estorie des Engles*, writing of Alfred that 'He caused a book to be written in English / Of adventures and laws, / And of battles in the land, / And of kings who made war,' thereby demonstrating the way in which the *Chronicle*, which synthesises many different traditions into a collective narrative of West Saxon (and to a certain extent Anglo-Saxon) history, is framed through the deeds of kings and their primacy in law and in war.<sup>735</sup>

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<sup>734</sup> Æthelweard, *Chronicon*. 871.

<sup>735</sup> Gaimar, *L'Estorie*, lines 3451–5.

By making note of the battles in the Downs, both historical and legendary, the chronicler associates the landscape with the West Saxons and the kings who led them. References to monuments reinforced this association. Through this, the *Chronicle* evoked themes of kingship and protection in the landscape. Thus, *Wodnesbeorge* recalled the genealogies of the West Saxon kings, while *Cwichelmshlæwe* provided a heroic ancestor who may have buttressed the courage of the West Saxons, but who also served as a foil against poor leadership, as shall be demonstrated below. This can be seen alongside other monuments, such as the Wansdyke, and through other *Chronicle* entries, such as the peculiar entry for 648 which asserts that ‘in this year Cenwalh gave his relation Cuthred three-thousand hides of land on Ashdown [*Æscesdune*; the Anglo-Saxon name for the Downs]. Cuthred was the son of Cwichelm, the son of Cynegils.’<sup>736</sup>

ii.1: *Warfare as Rhetoric in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: Three Strategies*

I: *Ancient Legitimacy*

The earliest entries that discuss warfare on the Downs, the battles recorded at *Baranbyrig* for 556 and *Wodnesbeorge* under the annal for 592, should be seen in conjunction with other annals that use narrative to establish the significance of a place within the territorial construction of the West Saxon kingdom. Entries such as those for 495, which claims that ‘Cerdic and Cynric came with five ships to Britain at the place which is called *Cerdicesora*, and they fought the Britons on the same day’, or that of 508, which records that ‘In this year Cerdic and Cynric killed a British king, whose name was Natanleod and 5,000 men with him; and the land right up to Charford was called Netley after him’ legitimise the Cerdicings through conquest and war with the Britons while beginning to give the West Saxon kingdom territorial definition. Likewise, other entries bind

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<sup>736</sup> ASC 648.

people, or perhaps kin groups, to the Cerdicing dynasty. The entry for 530 records that Cerdic and Cynric fought on the Isle of Wight, and the next entry claims that Cerdic and Cynric gave the Isle of Wight to their ‘kinsmen’ Stuf and Wihtgar.<sup>737</sup> In this cobbling together of early West Saxon and Wightish tradition, the kings of Wight owed their legitimacy and territory to the Cerdicings. Furthermore, there is an intersection between monuments, dynastic progenitors, and warfare: in 530 Cerdic and Cynric were said to have fought at *Wihtgarabyrig*, where the eponymous Wihtgar, was said to have been buried in 544.<sup>738</sup> By using this narrative technique, the *Chronicle* grounds the connection between the Cerdicings and the Isle of Wight in the landscape itself. Such demarcation does not seem to have been uncommon. Bede, for example, claimed that a monument to Horsa could still be seen in East Kent.<sup>739</sup> A later Continental example is even more instructive: Adam of Bremen’s *Gesta* includes a ‘description of the Saxon frontier’ (*limitem Saxoniae*), as allegedly set down by Charlemagne. According to Adam, the *limes* proceed to a ford over a river where a hero named Burwido defeated a Slavic champion in a duel and a stone was set up in commemoration of the combat (*ubi et Burwido fecit duellum contra campionem Sclavorum, interfecitque eum; et lapis in eodem loco positus est in memoriam*).<sup>740</sup> These examples, together with the instances of warfare on the Downs, demonstrate the complex ways in which territoriality could be articulated. The memory of warfare and the reception of monuments created a mythologised landscape that invoked ancient heroes and dynastic progenitors in order to project a collective West Saxon identity that was anchored in the landscape, and which worked *through* the

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<sup>737</sup> *ASC s.a.* 530, 534.

<sup>738</sup> *ASC s.a.* 530, 544. Note that the *Wihtgarabyrig*, already has its name before Wihtgar was supposed to have died—a sure sign that the compiler of the common stock was synthesising contradictory material.

<sup>739</sup> *HE* i.15.

<sup>740</sup> Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, ed. G.H. Pertz (Hanover, 1846), ii.18, p. 73; and see: M. Hardt, ‘The *Limes Saxoniae* as Part of the Eastern Borderlands of the Frankish and Ottonian-Salian Empire’, in F. Curta (ed.), *Border, Barriers, and Ethnogenesis: Frontiers in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2005), pp. 35–49, at p. 39.

narrative of the *Chronicle*. Taken as a whole, the entries make an argument that associates these places with the West Saxon kings, and they begin to ‘sketch out’ the landscape of Wessex through the memory of battles that legitimised the West Saxon dynasty and tied them to the landscape.

## II: *Contemporary Claims in a Contested Landscape*

Many of the subsequent battles described in the region were fought between the West Saxons and the Mercians, and it is fair to say that until the Battle of *Ellendun*, the dynamics of power seem to have favoured the Mercians. The relevant entries here are the 661 annal recording Wulfhere of Mercia’s ravaging of *Æscesdune*; the 715 annal reporting a battle between Ine of Wessex and Ceolred of Mercia at *Wodnesbeorge*; and the 825 annal recording Ecgberht of Wessex’s triumph over Beornwulf of Mercia at *Ellendun*.

In addition to these battles, the landscape itself was manipulated in response to Mercian aggression and political dominance between the late-seventh and early-ninth centuries. As mentioned above, the linear earthwork known as the Wansdyke was probably built during the middle Saxon period. It was perhaps partly built out of emulation of Mercian practice and partly out of fear. Additionally, it is plausible that the *burh*-type place-names of Bourton (near Bishops Canning) and Burghfield (near Englefield) originated at this point in time.<sup>741</sup> There is no archaeological reason that the Burghal Hidage hillfort of Chisbury could not have come into use in this period; the site’s association with the Roman road running southeast from Cunetio (Mildenhall) toward Winchester, and its apparent integration with the so-called ‘Bedwyn Dykes’ (which may in turn be related to the Wansdyke) and the estate of Great Bedwyn is as relevant to the political landscape of the eighth

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<sup>741</sup> For *burh-tuns*: Blair, *Building*, chapter six.

century as to the late-ninth or early-tenth centuries.<sup>742</sup> This should be seen alongside conjectured beacon relays of Yatesbury and the string of *burh*-type place-names from Yeovil to Bishops Cannings which seem to relate to increasing evidence for a Mercian presence along the Fosse Way, from which they might exert pressure on the mines of the Mendips and the area around Bath and Glastonbury.<sup>743</sup>

This suggests that in both the Downs and elsewhere in Wessex, Mercian defensive practices were being adopted; this is also indicative of the cultural influence that the powerful Mercian kingdom projected. Even as the West Saxons altered the landscape after the Mercian fashion, they emulated their rivals in other ways, as suggested by the Mercian-style basilica at Wareham and the Mercian influence evident in two of Beorhtric's charters.<sup>744</sup> According to Asser, the marriage between Beorhtric and Eadburh was remembered traumatically at the Alfredian court as an imposition of Mercian tyranny, but it is also indicative that there were at least some in Wessex who favoured a Mercian alliance.<sup>745</sup>

However, the political history of the region was not one of complete Mercian dominance, and the Downs remained a politically contested landscape. In the seventh century, Mercian pressure against the *Gewisse* in the Upper Thames Valley forced the abandonment of the Upper Thames, leading to a geographical reorientation in the Hampshire basin, Dorset, and southern Wiltshire and

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<sup>742</sup> cf. Baker and Brookes, 'From Frontier to Border'; Baker and Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage*, pp. 227–30. For the 'Bedwyn Dykes', see: Reynolds and Langlands, 'Social Identities', p. 21; O.G.S. Crawford, 'The Anglo-Saxon Bounds of Bedwyn and Burbage', *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* 131 (1942), pp. 280–301.

<sup>743</sup> For Yatesbury beacons: Brookes, 'Mapping Anglo-Saxon Civil Defence', in Baker, Brookes and Reynolds (eds.), *Landscapes of Defence*, pp. 39–63; and see J. Pollard and A. Reynolds, *Avebury: The Biography of a Landscape* (Stroud, 2002), pp. 183–238, at pp. 224–8; for the Mercian presence on the Bath-Glastonbury axis: Blair, *Building*, p. 224; Burghart, 'The Mercian Polity', pp. 192–203; Cramp *et al.*, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, vol. VII: South West England* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 153–8; for the importance of tin and silver in the Mendips: Maddicott, 'Trade, Industry, and the Wealth of King Alfred', *P&P* 123 (1989), pp. 3–51, esp. at pp. 45–7.

<sup>744</sup> S. 267, 268; Blair, *Building*, p. 223.

<sup>745</sup> Asser 14–15.

Somerset, though the process of incorporating these regions is rather obscure.<sup>746</sup> It has been recognised by several commentators that the Downs were part of a broad contested landscape between West Saxon and Mercian power in the late-seventh and eighth centuries that encompassed Berkshire and northern Wiltshire.<sup>747</sup> Thus, Malmesbury, beyond the area of this study on the eastern slope of the Cotswolds, received patronage from both West Saxon and Mercian kings, while a bull of Pope Sergius confirmed by both Æthelred of Mercia and Ine of Wessex guaranteed the safety and privileges of the house in the event of discord between the Mercians and West Saxons.<sup>748</sup> This ‘frontier’ character may also be suggested for Bradfield minster, on the south-eastern scarp of the Downs. A charter of Ine’s dated to 687 pertaining to the early history of Bradfield bears the subscription of both Ine and Æthelred of Mercia, much like the Malmesbury bull.<sup>749</sup> While it is clear that in its current form the charter is not authentic, it has been argued that it is a very early forgery, possibly drawn up at Bradfield.<sup>750</sup> If the document preserves Bradfield’s foundation traditions, it may be that the minster wished to remember the patronage of both the Mercian and West Saxon dynasties; by including both subscriptions, perhaps the composer of the document was hedging his bet in a contested landscape.

Thus, we see the way in which the landscape was affected by the fluctuating relations of West Saxon and Mercian kings, and their policies against each other. As such, warfare in the Downs should not be seen as isolated battles, but as events that accentuated the broader manoeuvrings

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<sup>746</sup> Yorke, ‘The Jutes of Hampshire and the Origins of Wessex’, in Bassett (ed.), *Origins*, pp. 84–96; Bede’s tale, probably gained from Daniel of Winchester, of Cenwalh expelling his bishop at Dorchester because his English was poor and establishing a see at Winchester is fanciful, but it probably represents the process of abandoning the Upper Thames: *HE* iii.7; for Daniel of Winchester, see: Kirby, ‘Bede’s Native Sources’, pp. 364–6; Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People: A Historical Commentary* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 97–8.

<sup>747</sup> Yorke, *Wessex*, pp. 62–3; Blair, *Oxfordshire*, pp. 43–56; Baker and Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage*, pp. 215–67.

<sup>748</sup> Edwards, ‘Two Documents’, pp. 1–19.

<sup>749</sup> S. 239.

<sup>750</sup> Kelly, *Abingdon*, no. 2.

between the West Saxon and Mercian kings and their associates. Wulfhere's policies toward Sussex, and his influence in the southeast of the country seem to have been part of a wider effort to constrict the West Saxons and assail them from both the north and east: the 661 campaign was not an isolated bout of violence, but a political tool that sharply accented a diverse repertoire of measures, including the mobilisation of allies and clients in Surrey, Middlesex, Sussex, Essex, and the Hwicce.<sup>751</sup> Likewise, the activities of the West Saxon kings Cædwalla and Ine in Sussex, Middlesex and Surrey seem to reflect an attempt to break apart this Mercian-led alliance.<sup>752</sup>

The pressure being put on the West Saxons from multiple directions in the seventh century was echoed by Mercian policy in the eighth century. Mercian activity around Bath and Glastonbury and the Mendips should be seen in concert with Offa's attacks in Sussex.<sup>753</sup> Similar pressure explains Offa's conduct in the middle Thames: in the famous agreement concluded between Archbishop Æthelheard and Offa's widow Cynethryth at Clofesho in 798, it is said that *Offa regem Merciorum qui uidelicet sepe memoratum cenobium, Cocham, et alias urbes quamplurimus, Cenulfo rege abstulit et imperio Merciorum subegit.*<sup>754</sup> This is plausibly related to Offa's victory over Cynewulf at the Battle of Benson in 779.<sup>755</sup> If so, it may be that Offa was seeking to capture crossings of the Thames so as to use the river as a corridor by which the West Saxons could be threatened from the east.<sup>756</sup>

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<sup>751</sup> Yorke, *Wessex*, p. 59.

<sup>752</sup> *HE* iv.15; *ASC* C 686–7; *ASC* 694.

<sup>753</sup> Blair, *Building*, p. 220. The evidence for Offa's activity in Sussex is limited to the report of Symeon, *Historia Regum*, 47. However, the Arun Valley *burh*-type place-names of Bury/Westburton, which are oriented around the later Burghal Hidage earthwork of Burpham and the minster of Peppering, might be related to Offa's campaigns in the region.

<sup>754</sup> S. 1258: 'Offa, king of the Mercians, who seized the oft-mentioned monastery of Cookham, along with many other towns, from King Cynewulf [of Wessex], and subjected them to Mercian rule.'

<sup>755</sup> *ASC* 779.

<sup>756</sup> Blair, *Oxfordshire*, p. 55. A major question about Offa's power in Berkshire depends on whether his Farnborough charter in the Abingdon archive (S. 225) refers to Farborough, Berks., as argued by Stenton, *The Early History of the Abbey of Abingdon* (Reading, 1913), p. 24, or Farnborough, Warwicks., as suggested by Kelly, *Abingdon*, no.

By thinking about the Downs in a broader context, these relatively isolated and apparently sparsely populated uplands are revealed to be the keystone of a complex network of landscapes, forming the interface between the Upper Thames Valley and Hampshire on its north-south axis, and between the Middle Thames Valley and the Malmesbury-Bath-Glastonbury corridor on its east-west axis. The routeways of the Downs were crucial in connecting these regions. Therefore, when Simon Keynes wrote of the Battle of *Ellendun*, after which Ecgberht of Wessex conquered much of the south-east, that ‘it is appropriately symbolic of the nature of Mercian control in the south-east [*i.e.* the heavy-handedness of Mercian rule in Kent] that the process of its undoing should have begun as a consequence of a battle fought far away in Wiltshire’, that is to underestimate the way in which these zones were closely interconnected.<sup>757</sup> Indeed, the broad geographic scope of the rivalry between the West Saxon and Mercian kings seems to have been a defining characteristic since the mid-seventh century, and the Mercian kings in particular attempted to gather support against the West Saxons to threaten them from many directions. Therefore, in this context, it is not very surprising then that a battle associated with a major routeway in the west of the region should develop an opening for Ecgberht to the south-east.

Of all the skirmishing that took place between the Mercians and West Saxons, why should the record of battles in the Downs be of particular importance? Associating the region with the West Saxon dynasty may have been particularly important to the compiler of the common stock because there is considerable evidence to suggest that the Downs had only come under definitive West Saxon control in the second half of the ninth century. Mercian kings were still making grants in the Downs as late as 844, when the bishop of Leicester granted Pangbourne to Behrtwulf in

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20. Interestingly, Coates, ‘Æthelflæd’s Fortification of Weardburh’, *Notes and Queries* 243 (1998), pp. 8–12 identifies Weardburh with Gwespyr, Flints., very near to the proposed Mercian cluster at Mostyn-Prestatyn-Rhuddlan.

<sup>757</sup> Keynes, ‘The Control of Kent’, p. 120.

exchange for the freedom of certain minsters; in turn, Berhtwulf granted the estate to his *minister* Æthelwulf. This is the same Æthelwulf *Bearroccensis pagae comes* who fought on behalf of the West Saxons at Englefield and Reading in 871.<sup>758</sup> Recall that Alfred of Wessex was born in Wantage in 849, only five years after Behrtwulf's charter. Thus, it may be that when Alfred was born the region had only recently come under West Saxon control, if it was even a coherent territorial unit.

Ealdorman Æthelwulf emerged as an important figure at both the Mercian and West Saxon courts between 836 and his death in 871. He was in receipt of three grants of land between 844 and 868: the Pangbourne grant from Berhtwulf in 844, a grant of lands in Gloucestershire and Worcestershire from Bishop Alhwine of Worcester in 855, and a grant at Little Wittenham (Berks.) from Æthelred of Wessex in 862.<sup>759</sup> Besides these grants, he also witnessed both Mercian and West Saxon charters.<sup>760</sup> In 860, he is known to have fought successfully against the Danes with ealdorman Osric of Hampshire, suggesting that Æthelbeht of Wessex was able to count upon him for some capacity of military service.<sup>761</sup> However, his obligations at the Mercian court do not seem to have abated, since he witnessed a charter of Burgred in 866.<sup>762</sup> Æthelwulf's Mercian connections may have been even more significant than the diplomatic record suggests. According

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<sup>758</sup> S.1271. PASE Æthelwulf 16.

<sup>759</sup> S. 1271, 1273, 335.

<sup>760</sup> Mercian: S. 190 (836), 192 (840), 198 (844), 206 (855), 208 (857), 212 (866). West Saxon: S. 294 (844, but probably spurious), 290 (840), 303 (854, questionable), 336 (863), 338a (868). A charter for Lockinge (S. 1201; 868 and see below) pertains to both courts. West Saxon charters concerning lands in Kent, namely S. 1438 (838); 280 (838), 287 (838), 289 (841), 291 (841), 293 (843), 327 (?860), 1204 (?868), and 1439 (844), are troublesome, as there was a high-ranking Æthelwulf witnessing charters in Kent during this period, and it is not clear if these were the same man. For instance, S. 280 (838), is attested not only by Æthelwulf *rex*, but two separate Æthelwulf *duces* who attest one after the other. For more on this, see Burghart, 'The Mercian Polity', pp. 206–11, table 20.

<sup>761</sup> Asser 18.

<sup>762</sup> S. 212.

to Æthelweard, after Æthelwulf was killed at Reading in 871, his body was taken to Mercia, ‘to the place called *Northworthig*, but in the Danish language *Deoraby* [Derby].’<sup>763</sup>

A significant charter of 868 that Ealdorman Æthelwulf attested was made by Æthelswith, daughter of King Æthelwulf of Wessex and wife of Burgred of Mercia. The charter granted fifteen hides at Lockinge, adjacent to Wantage and on the northern scarp of the Downs, to a certain Cuthwulf *minister*.<sup>764</sup> Æthelswith made the grant in her own name as Queen of Mercia (*Regina Deo largiente Merciorum*), but the grant was confirmed by both her brother King Æthelred of Wessex and her husband Burgred, along with other worthies such as the Æthelred Mucel of the *Gaini*, who witnessed several Mercian charters between 836 and 868, but who is more notable for becoming Alfred of Wessex’s father-in-law in the very same year as the Lockinge charter.<sup>765</sup> That the grant should be made at Lockinge is significant because it suggests that the Downs remained ‘liminal’ to the Mercian and the West Saxon kingdoms and control of the region may have been ambiguous or fragmented.

It is significant in this regard that the Mercian queen should hold an estate at Lockinge that was adjacent to the estate at Wantage, the birthplace of the West Saxon king’s brother, which presumably had been (and possibly still was) held by Osburh, the consort of Æthelwulf of Wessex. It may be that the liminality of this region made it useful as a place for diplomacy. The assembly of dignitaries and notables gathered for a grant of fifteen hides to a *minister* who is otherwise unattested seems excessive.<sup>766</sup> Perhaps, as Burghart suggests, the negotiations were underway for

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<sup>763</sup> Æthelweard, *Chronicon*. 871; see Burghart, ‘The Mercian Polity’, p. 208, for the suggestion that this might be related to the stipulations of S. 1273.

<sup>764</sup> S. 1201.

<sup>765</sup> Asser 29; Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, p. 77 n. 57. See also S. 340 (868), issued by Æthelred of Wessex at Dorchester and witnessed by Mucel. Perhaps Mucel was on a diplomatic mission to the West Saxon court? See also Burghart, ‘The Mercian Polity’, pp. 223–4.

<sup>766</sup> PASE Cuthwulf 6.

Alfred's marriage to Eahlswith.<sup>767</sup> This is reminiscent of the conditions of Æthelswith's own marriage to Burgred in 853, which took place at Chippenham, in the gap between the Downs and the Cotswolds, a similarly ambiguous landscape between West Saxon and Mercian control.<sup>768</sup> If royal control in the Downs was distant and fragmented in the ninth century, then ealdormen such as Æthelwulf may have been figures of great stature who negotiated authority in the region with the West Saxon and Mercian kings. Æthelwulf might be compared to Eanwulf of Somerset in this regard. Eanwulf received a grant of land in Somerset from Burgred at Binegar in Somerset (852 x 874), and in 864 Eanwulf witnessed a charter of Burgred and Æthelswith at Bath.<sup>769</sup> This is probably the same man whom Asser described as the *Summurtunensis pagae comes* who conspired against King Æthelwulf of Wessex in 855.<sup>770</sup> This is not dissimilar to the way abbots of 'frontier minsters' such as Aldhelm of Malmesbury or Hean of Bradfield behaved in the seventh century. It is clear that kings needed to negotiate with other interests in the region which were deeply entrenched in the landscape. Thus, the politics of the region were complex and fragmented, but this is elided in the *Chronicle*, which never suggests that Æthelwulf was anything other than a loyal servant of the West Saxon kings. If the *Chronicle* emphasises royal West Saxon associations in the Downs, then it simultaneously de-emphasises aristocratic and Mercian connections with the same region.

### III: *Criticism of the King*

Long and detailed entries of the *Chronicle* for 871 emphasise the heroic defence of the Downs by Ealdorman Æthelwulf of Berkshire at the Battle of Englefield and the great victory of Alfred and

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<sup>767</sup> Burghart, 'The Mercian Polity', p. 223–4. It does not seem likely that this is where preparations were made for the allied campaign against the Danes at Nottingham. Asser is quite clear that Burgred 'sent messengers' to Æthelred: Asser 30.

<sup>768</sup> Asser 9.

<sup>769</sup> S. 1701, 210.

<sup>770</sup> Asser 12; Burghart, 'The Mercian Polity', p. 198.

his brother at *Æscesdune*. These battles celebrate West Saxon victories over the Danes, and if the argument presented above is correct, they also emphasise the legitimacy of West Saxon rule over the landscape of the Downs and their annexation of the region after a long period of contestation with the Mercians. To speculate, it may be that the death of Ealdorman Æthelwulf in battle at Reading in 871, who had ties to both the Mercian and West Saxon courts, enabled the West Saxon dynasty to bring the region more firmly under royal control.

The final two instances of warfare, however, in 1006 and 1010 are entirely different in that they use warfare and landscape as a means to criticise the king and condemn Æthelred's ineffectual leadership. The Chronicler's lengthy account of the 1006 Battle of Kennet is justly famous. To summarise it briefly, after Midsummer a large fleet (*micla flota*) landed at Sandwich and marched through Kent 'harrying, burning, and slaying as they went' (*heregodon 7 bærndon 7 slogon swa swa hi ferdon*). Despite the mustering of men from Wessex and Mercia, 'the [Danish] army went about as it pleased' (*se here ferde swa he sylf wolde*). After Martinmas the Danes withdrew to the Isle of Wight, described in the *Chronicle* as a *friðstol* ('sanctuary'). At Christmas, they marched to Reading, where they were to be supplied with provisions (*feorme*). It is specifically stated that while *en route* the Danes lit beacons, 'observing their ancient custom' (*ealdan gewunan*). The explicit military context of the beacons is suggested by the use of the word '*here-beacen*'. The beacon-systems of Hampshire have been examined in a 1997 paper by Hill and Sharpe.<sup>771</sup>

However, the Danes apparently broke terms and attacked the *burh* of Wallingford before ascending the Downs and camping at Cholsey for one night. Subsequently, they followed the Ridgeway to *Cwichelmshlawe*, and here the *Chronicle* records that: 'And then they [the Danes] turned along

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<sup>771</sup> D. Hill and S. Sharpe, 'An Anglo-Saxon Beacon System', in Rumble and Mills (eds.), *Names, Places and People*, pp. 157–65.

Ashdown to *Cwichelmeshlæwe*, and there they awaited what had proudly been threatened: for it had often been said that if they sought *Cwichelmeshlæwe* they would never reach the sea.<sup>772</sup>

The battle was not fought at *Cwicehlmeshlæwe*, however, but *æt Cynetan* ('at [the River] Kennet'). Williams has analysed the way in which toponomy and topography can be used to identify the site of the battle, and he suggests that the likely site of the battle was Overton Hill, where there was substantial prehistoric activity, including a stone circle known colloquially as 'The Sanctuary'.<sup>773</sup> Overton Hill provides a wide field of view northwest to the prehistoric mound known as Silbury Hill, numerous Bronze Age round barrows to the northeast, with single outlying barrows on either side of the Ridgeway, immediately south of the stone circle. This funerary landscape seems to be referred to in a 972 charter of Edgar as *seofan beorgas* (seven barrows).<sup>774</sup> The East and West Kennet long barrows are also visible, and there may have been a prehistoric avenue connecting 'The Sanctuary' to the assemblage of monuments at Avebury. In a wider landscape, Overton Hill rises on a shallow gradient above the crossroads of the Roman London-Bath road, running east-west, and the Ridgeway, running north-south, just before the Ridgeway crosses the River Kennet from the north.<sup>775</sup> It is three miles north of Woden's Barrow and the Wansdyke (see above, fig. 10). The wider prehistoric context is important in contextualising the battle, and it seems that it was the assembly of the Danes at the *Cwichelmeshlæwe* initiated the mustering of the *fyrð*, suggesting that, as Williams writes, 'the Danish visit to Cwichehm's Barrow may have acted as a trigger: the challenge activated a network of conceptual, spatial and narrative associations that may have brought, alongside the practical military deployment, an expectation of supernatural

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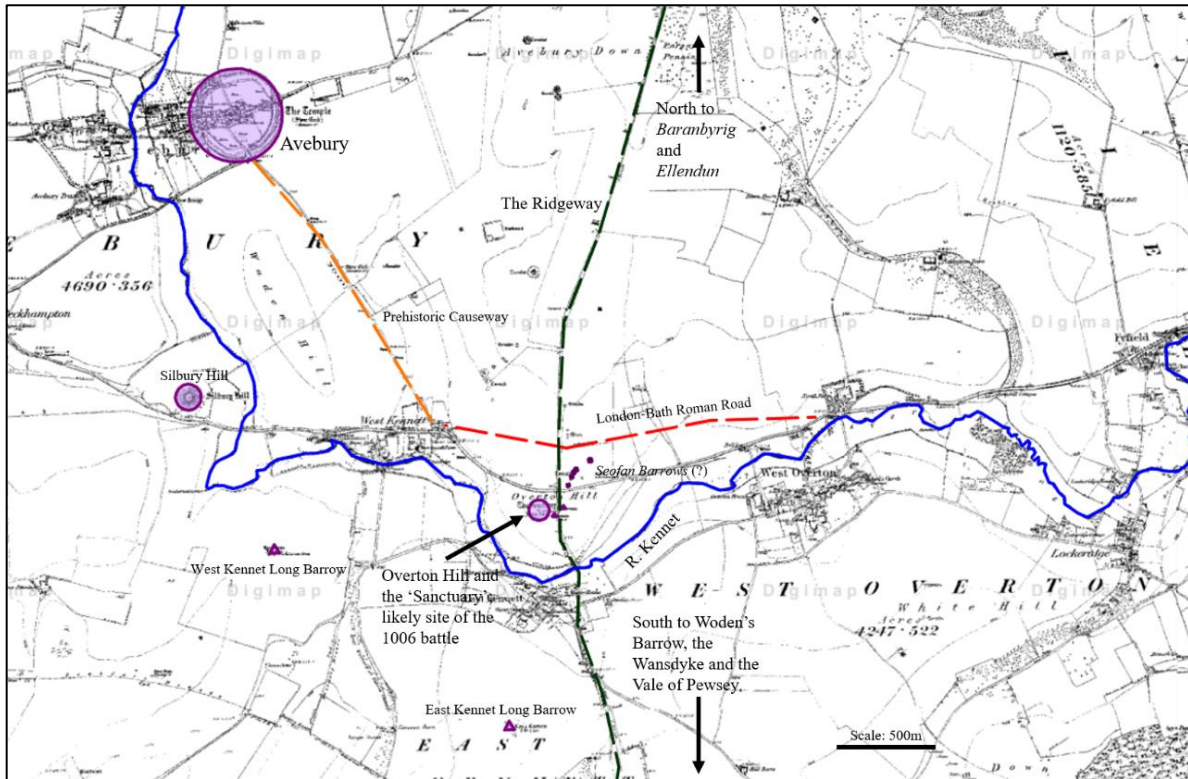
<sup>772</sup> ASC C 1006: *7 wendon him þa andlang Æscedune to Cwicelmeshlæw gesohton, 7 þær onbidedon beotra gylpa, forðon oft man cwæð, gif hi Cwicelmeshlæw gesohton, þæt hi næfre to sæ gan ne scoldon.*

<sup>773</sup> T.J.T. Williams, 'Landscape and warfare in Anglo-Saxon England and the Viking campaign of 1006', *EME* 23 (2015), pp. 329–59.

<sup>774</sup> Williams, 'Landscape and warfare', p. 344; S. 784.

<sup>775</sup> Williams, 'Landscape and warfare', pp. 344–5.

assistance that could be assumed to act with juridical authority and royal legitimacy.’<sup>776</sup> The *Chronicle* ends its report dismally: the Danes carried their plunder to the sea, marching proudly past the gates of Winchester, having ‘fetched themselves food and treasures from more than fifty miles from the sea.’



**FIGURE 11: THE BATTLE OF KENNET, 1006. SOURCE: ORDINANCE SURVEY [HTTPS://DIGIMAP.EDINA.AC.UK/ROAM/MAP/HISTORIC] WITH ADDITIONS MADE BY AUTHOR**

One of the chief complaints in the *Chronicle* in the early-eleventh century is that the Danes were able to march where they would unimpeded. Variations on the phrase ‘they went as they pleased’ recur again and again in the narrative of Æthelred’s ineffectual resistance.<sup>777</sup> Ultimately, this is the point of the Kennet narrative. The threat made at *Cwichelmslæwe* is that the Danes will not complete their circuit and return to their ships, and the Danes revel in their triumph by doing just

<sup>776</sup> Williams, ‘Landscape and warfare’, pp. 354–5.

<sup>777</sup> e.g. ASC C 1006; 1008; 1010; etc.

that: they pass by the gates of Winchester with treasure and food from the whole district. This is also the essential purpose of the entry for our final record of war on the Downs, the destruction of Cannings Marsh. For 1010, the Chronicler writes: ‘before St Andrew’s Day the army came to Northampton and burnt that town and as much round about it as they pleased, and from there went across the Thames into Wessex, and so towards Cannings Marsh, and burnt it all. When they had thus gone as far as they pleased they came at Midwinter to their ships.’<sup>778</sup> The essential criticism of the *Chronicle* is that the Danes were not prevented from marching. The Chronicler writes ‘when they [the Danes] were in the east, the English army was in the west, and when they were in the south, our army was in the north’. This concern cuts to the very heart of the Kennet entry, in which the Danish triumph is accentuated by the noted absence of the king, who ‘went across the Thames, into Shropshire, and received his food-rents for the midwinter.’<sup>779</sup> When one considers the threat made at *Cwichelmslæwe*—that the Danes would never reach the sea after coming to the barrow—and the repeated complaint of the Chronicler that the Danes were marching across the landscape at will, it becomes apparent that one should consider the importance of the *route itself* as being ideologically and socially significant, and that by marching along the route, the superiority of the aggressor and the impotence of the defender was emphasised. The 1006 entry in particular throws the seriousness of the king’s obligation to defend this route into high relief.

Chapter seven will demonstrate how important maintaining the peace of the road was in Anglo-Saxon law. For now, suffice to say that if the peace of the road was expected of a good king, then the failure to maintain it was the sign of a bad king who was unable to control violence within the

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<sup>778</sup> ASC C 1010: *Ɔa ætforan Sanctus Andreas mæssan þa come se here to Hamtune [Northampton] 7 þæt port sona forbærndon, 7 ðær abutan swa mycel swa hi sylfe woldon, 7 þanon wendon ofer Temese into Wesseaxum, 7 swa wið Caneganmersces 7 þæt eall forbærndon. Ɔa hi swa feor gegan hæfdon swa hi ða woldon, comon þa to ðam middan wintra hiora scipon*

<sup>779</sup> ASC C 1006: *se cyning gewend ofer Temese into Scrobbesbyrigscire 7 nam þær his feorme in þære middes wintres tide.*

kingdom. This cuts right to the heart of the *Chronicle* entries for the 1006 Battle of Kennet and the 1010 incident at Cannings Marsh: Æthelred's kingship in the Downs had simply become ineffective, particularly when compared to his legendary ancestor Cwichelm and his more recent forebear, Alfred, who successfully defended the region—and the Ridgeway in particular—in 871. By reorienting our study of warfare to concentrate on routeways, a clear picture can be seen of the ways in which landscape, warfare, and society intersect. The 1006 entry of the *Chronicle* expresses this vividly, and the route that the Danish army took through the Downs provides a rather comprehensive tour of the Anglo-Saxon landscape in the eleventh century, passing beacon-systems, the royal vill at Reading, the *burh* at Wallingford, a reformed minster at Cholsey, an assembly site at *Cwichelmshlæwe*, several prehistoric monuments, and the gates of Winchester itself as they made their circuit.

### 3: Warfare in a Changing Landscape

The previous section was concerned with how the landscape of the Downs was interpreted and used by the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. It was suggested that the *Chronicle* was actively seeking to forge a connection between the landscape and the West Saxon royal dynasty by writing about warfare in the region. The following section will determine *why* the Downs were important to the *Chronicle* and why they were important as a place of warfare by considering the landscape within broader social processes.

In 2010, Ryan Lavelle made the connection between royal estates and warfare during Alfred's Edington campaign of 878.<sup>780</sup> Lavelle determined that there was a high degree of correspondence between the location of battles and Domesday estates rendering a 'farm of one night', and that the

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<sup>780</sup> Lavelle, 'Geographies of Power', pp. 187–219.

object of early medieval warfare was the capture of estate centres that were related to food renders and itineraries. As Lavelle writes, by carrying out his itinerary, Alfred was actively asserting his kingship. Before the Battle of Edington, Alfred spent Easter at Athelney, which based on the place-name *Æðelingæigge*, may have been associated with *æthelings*.<sup>781</sup> He then proceeded in the seventh week after Easter (Pentecost) to *Ecgbryhtes stane* (Ecgeberht's Stone) 'east of Selwood' and there assembled the men of western Hampshire, Wiltshire and Somerset; then a night at Iley Oak, thence to the estate of Edington where he put the Danes to flight 'and stayed there a fortnight.'<sup>782</sup> The 'Edington landscape' demonstrates some similarities to that of the Downs, most significantly through the invocation of monuments associated with past West Saxon kings—in this case Ecgeberht—in relation to assembly and warfare.

Warfare happened where there was royal activity, and the practice of warfare intersected with the apparatus of kingship. This chapter suggests that the Ridgeway may have represented part of a royal circuit, but what does this mean? Lavelle is certainly correct that the provisioning of the royal household was important, as demonstrated by the 1006 entry of the *Chronicle*, but the wider utility of the landscape should also be considered. What was the land of the Downs used for? Ramsbury, a high-status site that was elevated to an episcopal seat in *c.* 905, was significant for iron smelting.<sup>783</sup> It seems likely that sheep were significant, as is common in chalk downlands less suitable for cattle.<sup>784</sup> The historical prominence of shepherding might be suggested by place-names such as Great Shefford (DB *Siford*) and the steep linear ridges on the northern scarp-slope known

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<sup>781</sup> Dumville, 'The Ætheling: A Study in Anglo-Saxon Constitutional History', *ASE* 8 (1979), pp. 1–33, at pp. 5–6.

<sup>782</sup> *ASC* 878. Lavelle, 'Geographies', p. 204 n. 79 suggests that Rogation—the fortnight before Pentecost—may have been associated with a military muster: cf. *II As.* 13; see also Davis, 'Alfred the Great', p. 170.

<sup>783</sup> Haslam *et al.*, 'A Middle Saxon Iron Smelting Site at Ramsbury, Wiltshire', *Medieval Archaeology* 24 (1980), pp. 1–68.

<sup>784</sup> Williamson, *Shaping Medieval Landscapes: Settlement, Society, Environment* (Macclesfield, 2003), pp. 79–80, 125.

locally as ‘sheep tracks’ (e.g. in the vicinity of Bishopstone and Ashbury).<sup>785</sup> Recently McKerracher has suggested that Wantage, on the north-facing scarp of the Lambourn downs, demonstrates evidence of droveways and paddock-complexes from the middle-Saxon period, and in support of this, excavations at Wantage have recovered twelve annular loomweights, suggesting some evidence of wool production from the late-seventh century or later.<sup>786</sup>

Moving away from economic concerns, there is evidence for several assembly sites in the region, most notably at Wantage (978 x 1008, possibly 997),<sup>787</sup> Chirton (977 x 982),<sup>788</sup> and Enham (1006 x 1011, probably 1008).<sup>789</sup> The possibility of a ‘meeting-place’ context for Bradfield (‘Broad Field’) / Englefield (‘Field of the Angles’) also seems likely. It should also be noted that there was a shire meeting-place at the oft-mentioned *Cwichelmeshlæwe* (990 x 992), demonstrating the way monumental sites connected with ancient kings and war, could intersect with legal and assembly practices.<sup>790</sup>

The open downs of the north scarp and ridge give way today to wooded downland in the south, and it seems likely that the forested nature of the Downs was intrinsic to its medieval character. Indeed, Petra Dark has argued that pollen sequences of the fourth and fifth centuries suggest that the Downs may be one of the very few places in southern England that witnessed woodland regeneration in the immediate post-Roman period.<sup>791</sup> At various points throughout the Middle

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<sup>785</sup> For ‘sheep tracks’, Davison, *North Wessex Downs*, p. 15.

<sup>786</sup> McKerracher ‘Agricultural Development’, pp. 165–8, 432; N. Holbrook and A. Thomas, ‘The Roman and Early Anglo-Saxon Settlement at Wantage, Oxfordshire’, *Oxoniensia* 61 (1996), pp. 109–79.

<sup>787</sup> S. 891; III Atr.

<sup>788</sup> S. 1498.

<sup>789</sup> V Atr. and VI Atr. with ASC CDE 1008; see: Keynes, ‘Church Councils, Royal Assemblies, and Anglo-Saxon Royal Diplomas, Appendix I: Meeting-Places of Royal Assemblies’, in G. Owen-Crocker and B.W. Schneider (eds.), *Kingship, Legislation and Power in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2013), pp. 17–182, at p. 145; and see also: Lavelle, ‘Why Grateley?’.

<sup>790</sup> S. 1454.

<sup>791</sup> P. Dark, *The Environment of Britain in the First Millennium AD* (London, 2000), pp. 150–4, for the evidence of Snelsmore Common near Newbury. This should not be seen as typical; most evidence of the post-Roman period

Ages, the whole of Berkshire was subject to forest laws. By 1221, Windsor Forest occupied all of eastern Berkshire; the vicinity of Eddington (Berks.) was part of Savernake Forest; and the rest of the county was occupied by the Forest of Berkshire. Significant parts of west, north, and central Berkshire were disafforested in 1227, after which parks were established—of which there were at least forty-two by 1485.<sup>792</sup> In Wiltshire, the aforementioned Savernake forest occupied the western downlands of this study, between Marlborough and Great Bedwyn.<sup>793</sup> Savernake is first mentioned as a significant forest in a 934x935 charter of Æthelstan which refers to the *siluam que appellatur Safernoc*.<sup>794</sup> Della Hooke has shown the prominence of pre-Conquest charters and (more occasional) place-names with the element *haga* ('enclosure') in the vicinity of Savernake.<sup>795</sup> While the word *haga* has a broad semantic range, Hooke suggests that in these instances, it refers to enclosures for game, noting the correlation between the incidence of the term in charter bounds and later medieval forests.<sup>796</sup> The generally forested character of the downs might be suggested by the entry in the Berkshire Domesday which specifies that upon his death, a *tain uel miles* was obliged to offer the king his falcons and hounds 'if he wished to have them.'<sup>797</sup> Furthermore, place-names such as the north Hampshire Domesday hundreds of Ashley and Chuteley, and the parish of Chute in Wiltshire are all suggestive of a forest landscape. This probably reflects something of the general perception of the region during the Anglo-Saxon period. It is a matter of debate as to

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suggests that there was no widespread woodland regeneration. Generally, regions that were well-wooded in the medieval period, such as the New Forest, were similarly wooded in the Roman period: Rippon *et al.*, *Fields of Britannia*, pp. 140–1.

<sup>792</sup> J.M. Hatherly and L.M. Cantor, 'The Medieval Parks of Berkshire', *Berkshire Archaeological Journal* 70 (1979), pp. 67–80.

<sup>793</sup> 'Royal Forests', in E. Crittall (ed.), *A History of the County of Wiltshire*, Victoria County History, vol. 4 (London, 1959), pp. 399–433.

<sup>794</sup> S. 424.

<sup>795</sup> Hooke, 'Parks and Forests in Medieval England', in C. Watkins (ed.), *European Woods and Forests: Studies in Cultural History* (Wallingford, 1998), pp.19–32, at pp. 21–3.

<sup>796</sup> Hooke, 'Parks and forests', p. 22. fig. 2.1.

<sup>797</sup> G. Jones, 'A Common of Hunting? Forests, Lordship and Community Before and After the Conquest', in J. Langton and G. Jones (eds.), *Forests and Chases of Medieval England and Wales, c. 1000–c. 1500* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 36–67, at p. 63.

whether the *æsc* of *Æscesdune* refers to ash-trees—though this etymology has been supported by Gelling—while Asser seemed to consider the boxwood to be of special significance, claiming (incorrectly) that Berkshire was so-called for its abundance of box-trees.<sup>798</sup> This may be reflected in a 968 charter of Edgar granting ten hides at *Boxoran* (Boxford).<sup>799</sup>

Cumulatively, the evidence for the significance of the Downs as a hunting landscape seems persuasive, and hunting landscapes intersect with royal landscapes. As mentioned above in chapter three, Rollason's recent work has emphasised the way in which royal centres were often found on liminal fringes between cultivated and uncultivated land. Likewise, many of the sites under discussion in this chapter occupy the liminal fringe between upland and lowland: Basing, Englefield, Cholsey, Lockinge, Wantage, and Wroughton/*Ellendun* are all situated in such a manner.

Rollason also notes the significance of hunting to the ideology of kingship, with particular emphasis on the military symbolism of the hunt. In support of this, he cites Walafrid Strabo's poem in praise of Louis the Pious: 'Just as the bear, boar, timid hare and swift stags... fear your bow in the lovely glades, / So the Bulgar and the cur of Sarah, bad guest of the Spaniards, / The brutish Breton, shrewd Dane and dreadful Moor / Bow their necks in terror before your venerable hands.'<sup>800</sup> In an Anglo-Saxon context, we might recall Asser's comment on Alfred's skill as a huntsman.<sup>801</sup> The connection between Alfred's skill in war and his reputation as a peerless hunter is strengthened in Asser's description of the Battle of Ashdown, in which Alfred is said to have

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<sup>798</sup> Asser 1: *Berroc silva, ubi buxus abundantissime nascitur*. cf. *P-Ns Berks.*, pp. 1–2.

<sup>799</sup> S 761: *in loco qui antecessores ruricole imposuerunt nomen Boxoran*; *P-Ns Berks.*, pp. 658 and 669–70 for the boundary clause.

<sup>800</sup> Rollason, *The Power of Place*, pp. 157–8, citing 'De Imagine Tetrici of Walafrid Strabo: Edition and Translation', ed. and trans. M. Herren, *Journal of Medieval Latin*, 1 (1991), pp. 118–39, lines 250–5, pp. 138–9.

<sup>801</sup> Asser 22.

fought ‘like a wild boar.’<sup>802</sup> Though Keynes and Lapidge, citing Ifor Williams, suggested that this was a particularly Welsh poetic impulse on the part of Asser, one need only recall the boar-crest on the Benty Grange helmet, or Hrothgar’s lament on the death of his councillor Æschere, ever at his side ‘when hosts clashed, struck against boar-crests (*þonne hniton feþan, / eoferas cnysedan*)’ to see that this had extensive cultural resonance in Anglo-Saxon society.<sup>803</sup> When Asser commented upon Alfred’s hunting-prowess, he noted that this was something that he had often seen for himself. This is an important reminder that hunting was an act of social cohesion for kings, their councillors, and their companions. Therefore, the Downs represent a topography of royal power in an Anglo-Saxon context, in which the kingly activities of hunting, war and assembly come together in a mythologised landscape.

Finally, the landscape was a source of patronage. The flexibility of the landscape and how it was used is worth emphasising. As Burghart wrote of the Mercian kingdom, kings managed an economy of land, and what made them powerful was not the hoarding of lands and the creation of territorial blocs, but the ability to redistribute assets and re-appropriate them as necessary. It is the ‘give and take’ that was the essential practice of kingship.<sup>804</sup> To this I would note the *persistence of place* even if the function of places could shift. Caution is needed before rigidly assigning a place as being a ‘royal’ or ‘ecclesiastical’ estate. The nature of a place’s function could change several times over the course of its documented history, or it could serve multiple functions simultaneously. Furthermore, given the diverse and complex mechanisms of patronage available

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<sup>802</sup> Asser 38.

<sup>803</sup> Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, p. 79 n. 70, citing *Armes Prydein: The Prophecy of Britain from the Book of Taliesin*, ed. I. Williams with R. Bromwich (Dublin, 1972), p. xxix n. 2; *Beowulf*, xx.1326–7; note that the use of the verb ‘*hniton*’ which here means ‘to clash [pertaining to armies]’, can also specifically mean ‘to gore [as in a boar’s tusk]’; see: Bosworth-Toller, s.v. *Hnitan*; references to boar-crests in *Beowulf* can also be found at lines xvi.1110–12 and xix.1286.

<sup>804</sup> Burghart, ‘The Mercian Polity’, pp. 263–4.

to Anglo-Saxon kings, the ways in which land could be dispensed without being booked should be remembered: the charters only ever give an incomplete picture of the complexity of territorial arrangements in the landscape.<sup>805</sup>

The estates of royal women on the Downs provides an excellent example of both the flexibility of land use and the way in which social processes intersect with the landscape. It may be that the region of this case-study was ‘earmarked’ for royal women.

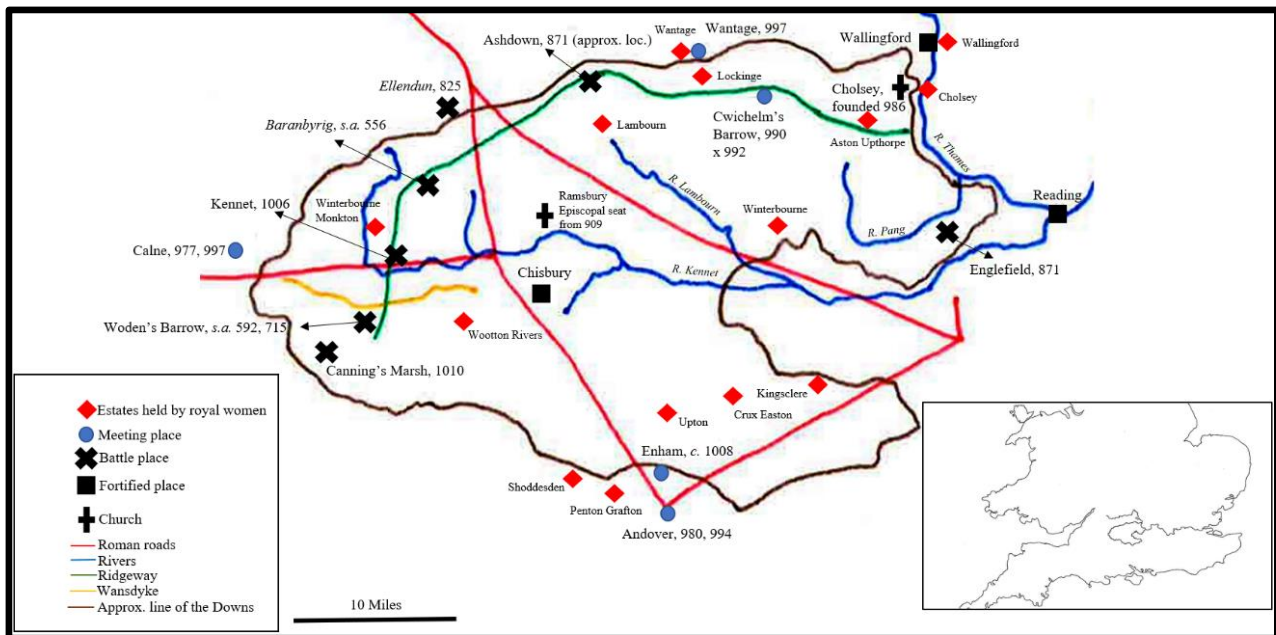


FIGURE 12: ESTATES HELD BY ROYAL WOMEN AND MEETING PLACES

Wantage is the most notable: Alfred was born there, so we might suggest that it was in the hands of his mother, Osburh. In Alfred’s will, he bequeathed the estate to his wife, Ealhswith. The estate next appears in the will of Eadred, where it was left to his mother, Eadgifu of Kent, the widow of Edward the Elder. Even if Eadred’s successor, Eadwig, did implement his predecessor’s will (which may be unlikely), Eadwig infamously dispossessed Eadgifu of her lands after his

<sup>805</sup> S. Baxter and J. Blair, ‘Land Tenure and Royal Patronage in the Early English Kingdom: A Model and A Case Study’, *Anglo-Norman Studies* 28 (2005), pp. 18–46, for the case of Bampton, Oxon. I think we can see a similar—though more poorly documented—case for the Bedwyns, Wilts., within the area of this case-study. See: Dumville, ‘The Royal Estate at Bedwyn (Wiltshire)’, in his *Wessex and England*, pp. 107–12.

succession in Wessex due to her support of his brother, Edgar.<sup>806</sup> This seems to mark the end of Wantage as a queenly estate, and it would seem that the estate came into royal hands, as there is a record of a royal council at Wantage in 997, as noted above.<sup>807</sup>

Other estates held by multiple royal women include Cholsey, which is first referenced in a grant of Alfred's, in which land at Chiseldon (Wilts.) and Hurstbourne Priors (Hants.) was granted to Denewulf of Winchester in exchange for 100 hides at Cholsey, Basildon, and Hagbourne.<sup>808</sup> Subsequently, Cholsey was held by Æthelflæd of Damerham, who bequeathed Cholsey to the king in her will,<sup>809</sup> and Ælfhryth, who held the estate during her dowagership (at least; that would be the period between 975 and 1000).<sup>810</sup> Lambourn (Berks.) was also bequeathed to Ealhswith in Alfred's will, and it was subsequently held by Æthelflæd of Damerham.<sup>811</sup> Finally, Kingsclere (Hants.), near Basing in the southeast of the Downs was bequeathed to Alfred's middle daughter Æthelgifu in his will. Later, the estate was held by Queen Edith.<sup>812</sup>

Other estates that were known to be held by singular royal ladies may flesh-out the picture. Winterbourne Monkton (Wilts.), just north of Avebury, was granted by Æthelstan in 928 to Ælfflæd, Edward the Elder's widow.<sup>813</sup> The aforementioned estate of Lockinge was known to be held by Æthelswith of Mercia until 868. Aston Upthorpe (Berks.) and Crux Easton (Hants.) were

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<sup>806</sup> Molyneaux, *Formation*, p. 71; Stafford, 'The King's Wife', pp. 25–6; Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 199–204.

<sup>807</sup> S. 891: *ad uillam quae ab indigenis Wanetincg agnominatur*. See also: Sawyer, 'The Royal Tun', p. 297. Wantage is further referenced in boundary clauses in S. 650 (Eadwig to his *minister* Eadwold), 682, 724, 759 (Edgar to Abingdon), and in the tenth-century will of a certain Wynnflæd (S. 1539; PASE Wynnflæd 1).

<sup>808</sup> Wormald, 'On *Þa Wæpnedhæealfe*: Kingship and Royal Property From Æthelwulf to Edward the Elder', in Higham and Hill (eds.), *Edward the Elder*, pp. 264–79, at p. 274.

<sup>809</sup> S. 1494.

<sup>810</sup> S. 877.

<sup>811</sup> See Alfred's will for Ealhswith: S. 1507; Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, p. 177; for Æthelflæd of Damerham: S. 1494—again, it is a bequest to the king in her will.

<sup>812</sup> S. 1507; DB Berks. i.58.

<sup>813</sup> S. 399; see *The Great Cartulary of Glastonbury*, ed. A. Watkin, Somerset Record Society, 3 vols (1947–1956), vol. iii, p. ccxxiv (no. 1235) for identification with Winterborne Monkton.

held by Ælfthryth.<sup>814</sup> Finally, Queen Edith held several estates in the Downs *TRE*. These were Winterbourne and properties in Wallingford (both Berks.), Penton Grafton, Shoddesden, and Upton (all Hants.), and Wootton Rivers (Wilts.).<sup>815</sup>

Many of these estates have a direct relationship with the Ridgeway, and some suggest a relationship with prehistoric monuments: *Cwichelmeshlæwe* lies about halfway between Aston Upthorpe and Wantage along the Ridgeway, and it is possible that there is some relationship between the drove roads leading out from Lambourn towards the Ridgeway and the Iron Age hillfort at Segsbury camp, which rises above Wantage.<sup>816</sup>

These estates demonstrate the flexibility suggested above: they appear in the royal gift and can be turned to different purposes as necessary. Cholsey and Lambourn both had monastic contexts in the tenth and eleventh centuries.<sup>817</sup> Meanwhile, there is some indication of a monastic community at Wantage and Winterbourne Monkton was held by Glastonbury Abbey *TRE*.<sup>818</sup> Thus, we see that the same locations where there is evidence for royal activity such as assemblies was also suitable for the endowment of a royal lady or the foundation of a minster, and they might revert to royal control. Once again, a hard distinction between ‘secular’ and ‘religious’ is to be resisted.

It is plausible that such estates were favoured in the tenth century for both the endowment of women and the establishment of minsters because of their liminality. It has been shown that the Downs were contested between the Mercians and the West Saxons throughout much of the ninth

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<sup>814</sup> S. 725; For Crux Easton: *Chronicon monasterii de Abingdon* 1, ed. Stevenson (2 vols., London, 1858), pp. 286–7.

<sup>815</sup> DB Berks. i.58, 60; Hants. i.38b, 43–43b, 50; Wilts. i.65.

<sup>816</sup> N.B. charters describing the neighbouring estates at Boxton (S. 577, 761) and Welford (S. 552, 622) may describe a *herepað* and other landscape features of potential significance.

<sup>817</sup> For Cholsey, see: Stafford, *Unification and Conquest*, pp. 57–9; Blair, ‘Secular Minster Churches in Domesday’ in Sawyer (ed.), *Domesday Book: A Reassessment* (London, 1985), pp. 104–42, at p. 120; for Lambourn: Blair, *Church in Society*, p. 301 n. 47.

<sup>818</sup> The evidence for Wantage is slight, but see: S. 1539; Whitelock, *Wills* 10.

century. Indeed, the issue may not have been settled until the final throes of the Mercian kingdom. Thus, when Wantage was bequeathed to Alfred's Mercian widow, or when Lockinge was held by the West Saxon wife of Burgred of Mercia, the matter may have been diplomatic, perhaps providing a buffer between rivals.

In the tenth century, the granting of land to women and the establishment of minsters may have been intended to strengthen connections between the royal dynasty and a hitherto peripheral landscape that had only recently been acquired. The role of women in preserving dynastic memory has often been discussed, and it is plausible that granting estates in the Downs was an instrument of this phenomenon.<sup>819</sup> Likewise, the role of monastic houses in supporting dynasties has also been understood, and this may explain the fleeting references to small houses such as those at Bedwyn—a significant estate which seems to have had a monastic community in the tenth century that drew part of the tithe from Lambourn—and possibly Wantage, as well as to more significant minsters such as Cholsey, which was one of the leading houses in the last decade Æthelred II's reign.<sup>820</sup> Thus, by granting land to royal women and establishing major foundations such as Cholsey, a previously peripheral landscape can operate as a royal core as the concern becomes familial and dynastic. The role of the king as *protector* should also be emphasised here. Kings had a responsibility to protect the church and royal women. For example, Coenwulf of Mercia's daughter and heir, Cwoenthryth, sought the aid of her 'protector', Coenwulf's successor Beornwulf, in her dispute with Archbishop Wulfred of Canterbury.<sup>821</sup> There is a logic to associating people under

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<sup>819</sup> E. Van Houts, *Memory and Gender in Medieval Europe, 900–1200* (Basingstoke, 1999), pp. 65–120; Hadley, 'Negotiating gender in Anglo-Saxon burial', in L. Brubaker and J.M.H. Smith (eds.), *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300–900* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 301–23, p. 321; J. Crick, 'Women, Posthumous Benefaction and Family Strategies in Pre-Conquest England', *Journal of British Studies* 38 (1999), pp. 399–42.

<sup>820</sup> Keynes, 'An Abbot, an Archbishop, and the Viking Raids of 1006–7 and 1009–12', *ASE* 36 (2007), pp. 151–220, at p. 169.

<sup>821</sup> S. 1436: *quia hereditas et heres eius ad intercessorem et ad patronem eum expetiuit* ('for his [Coenwulf's] inheritor and heiress [Cwoenthryth] invoked his [Beornwulf's] intercession and protection').

royal protection with royal circuits. It would reinforce their connection with the king, and he could both ‘check in’ on them and enjoy their hospitality. Both actions would reaffirm their interpersonal relationship.<sup>822</sup> We see then that in 1006, when Æthelred’s late mother’s minster was occupied by a Danish army, he was also failing in his role as royal patron and protector.

#### 4: *Conclusion*

This chapter has been concerned with the way in which the landscape of the North Wessex Downs was interpreted and used in Anglo-Saxon society. It has been argued that as perceptions of prehistoric monuments were changing, they were utilised in textual sources as an instrument for projecting identity and assigning meaning to the landscape. As monuments came to be associated with violence and fear, they were also associated with war and kingship. The Downs seem to have been particularly associated with warfare, and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records nine battles in the region of this case-study. This is the densest concentration of known battles in Anglo-Saxon history. Some of these battles, such as the *s.a.* 556 Battle of *Baranbyrig* and *s.a.* 592 Battle of *Wodnesbeorge*, were probably legendary, but they are recorded alongside historical battles, strengthening the notion that the Downs were an arena for warfare. An analysis of the context of the historical battles has demonstrated the significance of routeways, particularly the prehistoric track known as the Ridgeway, and the significance of the region as a nexus between the upper and lower Thames, northern Wiltshire and Hampshire has been emphasised. Despite fluctuating political circumstances, as the region was contested between the Mercians and West Saxons, attacked by the Great Army in 871, and incorporated into the tenth-century English kingdom, and

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<sup>822</sup> But see Blair, *Building*, pp. 184–5 for the more sinister side of this.

despite a changing built environment, there was a remarkable persistence of place and continuity of practice.

However, our understanding of warfare in the region is almost entirely reliant on the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. I have argued that the *Chronicle* used warfare—both legendary and historical accounts of battles—to build an association between the landscape and the West Saxon dynasty. Warfare intersects with other ‘public’ performances that project identity (above, chapter three); and associating battles with monuments grounds this in the landscape. Thus, the battles in the *Chronicle* are used to give ‘Wessex’ territorial definition through the interpretation of battles and the deeds of legendary and historical kings of the past. This may have been particularly important in the late-ninth century because the region seems to have only recently come under the control of the West Saxon dynasty. However, by the early-eleventh century, when the last two instances of warfare are reported, the region had been firmly incorporated into the English kingdom, so the memory of previous battles serve as a foil to the campaigns of 1006 and 1010 and become a means to condemn the ineffectual leadership of Æthelred II.

This is only meaningful when considered in relation to the wider role of the Downs in society. It is not accurate to see the region as an ‘exclusionary zone’ for the performance of warfare. Instead, it seems that the Ridgeway, and the Downs more widely, may have formed part of a royal circuit. The region was used for varied economic purposes, such as iron smelting and the pasturage of sheep, and it is likely that the Downs were particularly important for hunting. Royal power was enacted in the landscape through assembly practices, for which there is evidence in the Downs in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Moreover, the landscape was a source of patronage, and it has been argued that the Downs may have been particularly valuable for the endowment of royal ladies. Once again, the persistence of these places is notable, and they tend to bear a relationship to the

Ridgeway. The royal circuit, then, suggests the king's progress through the landscape, along a well-known route, as he collects food-renders, oversees assemblies, hunts, dispenses patronage, and utilises the land available to him as best he sees fit. In the Downs, this intersects with the practice of warfare—an activity that is also intimately associated with kingship. This makes the 1006 entry of the *Chronicle* particularly significant. In 1006, the Danes appropriated a royal route, and in so doing they subverted Æthelred's kingship and attacked his legitimacy. By collecting tribute and food and camping at a prehistoric monument associated with assembly practices and ancient kings, Æthelred's kingship in the area is essentially rendered defunct. While it may be that the Danes knew this, it is also plausible that this was a deliberate strategy of the Chronicler, who was starkly contrasting Æthelred's failure with the legendary kings and battles of the past and the heroic defence of the Downs in 871.

## Chapter VII

### Conflict and the Communication of Collective Identity in the Anglo-Saxon

#### Landscape

Chapter one offered a critique of medieval frontier historiography, and it was argued that there has been a tendency to emphasise ‘ethnic frontiers’ at the expense of so-called ‘internal frontiers.’ It was suggested that the processes and interactions associated with frontiers, such as conflict, negotiation, and acculturation, were at play everywhere in the heterogenous and diverse societies of the early middle ages. Related to this is the concept of ‘core-and-periphery’, which is a geographical framework that has important cultural, economic, and political implications. Here it was argued that notions of core-and-periphery are essential to the complex (and sometimes contradictory) ways people perceived themselves and their place in the wider world. It is a theme that can be applied to broad geopolitical and cultural regions and to more local arrangements. It was emphasised that core-and-periphery is a relative concept, and that places could be both of a ‘core’ and a ‘periphery’ at the same time, depending on context and perspective.

Chapter two focussed on the theme of regionalism. Before the formation of the tenth-century kingdom, Anglo-Saxon society was marked by notable political fragmentation. Even after the eventual consolidation of the English kingdom, regionalism and regional identities continued to manifest themselves, and that this was embedded in the way tenth-century kings interacted with the localities. This can be seen on a so-called ‘periphery’ of the kingdom in the *Dunsate Ordinance* as well as in a ‘core’ region such as Wiltshire, as demonstrated by the *Fonthill Letter*. Meanwhile, this must be balanced against a consistent degree of cultural homogeneity: final-phase grave goods, the adoption of a remarkably uniform great hall model, the rapid success of the conversion and the

proliferation of minsters in the seventh century all provide examples of how elite Anglo-Saxon society was becoming increasingly homogenous in the early part of our period, and they fostered extensive interpersonal connections. It may even be the case that inter-regional and fragmentary or dispersed landholding patterns were already in existence as early as the seventh century. This is to say that landholding across regions did not require a unified *regnum Anglorum*.

Chapter three followed this with a question: in the context of such regionalism and heterogeneity, how was collective identity asserted and maintained? It was argued that conflict was a useful way of communicating collective identity that could encompass the heterogeneity of Anglo-Saxon society, particularly by framing the king or royal dynasty as the leaders of their people in war and defenders of both people and land, and by emphasising the interpersonal relationships between the king and his leading subjects. It was argued that conflict should be seen on a spectrum of interactions and activities ranging from legal dispute to what a historian might conventionally understand as ‘war’, and that the types of violence within this spectrum shared a common register and vocabulary; just as conflict and reconciliation shared a common vocabulary and register, they also shared a common landscape context. This provides a link between collective identity and the landscape itself. Furthermore, it was shown that regions traditionally considered ‘peripheral’ in the geography of Anglo-Saxon England, such as moors and forests, were essential places for these processes to unfold, subverting the dichotomy of ‘core-and-periphery’.

These thematic chapters were followed by three case studies that sought to examine the communication of collective identity and royal authority in specific regions at specific points in Anglo-Saxon history: the eastern lowland zone in the seventh century, north-eastern Wales in the eighth and early ninth centuries, and the North Wessex Downs in the late-ninth through eleventh

centuries. This chapter will form a conclusion by offering some points of comparison and contrast in regard to the means by which authority was communicated in these regions.

### 1: *Regional Variation and the Changing Landscape*

In some ways, all the case studies suggest different means of communicating authority and collective identity in the landscape, and many of the methods demonstrated in this thesis were unique to their time and location, as well as to the specific concerns and contexts of individual sources. The techniques employed also reflect changes and developments in the landscape itself.

Chapter four, which analysed the ‘eastern lowland zone’ in the seventh century, argued that identity was communicated through minsters. This is not to say that there were *only* minsters in the east, or that only minsters in eastern Britain had connections with royal dynasties. There were minsters throughout Britain, and many of them had demonstrable links with royal dynasties. Furthermore, this tradition was not limited to the seventh century. Kings maintained connections with important minsters throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, choosing to favour them with their patronage, or selecting them for their resting places.<sup>823</sup> It must be the case that there was always a territorial element to this: the decision of the House of Wessex to favour the community of St Cuthbert in the tenth century, for example, was surely related to their political interests in Northumbria.<sup>824</sup> Thus, it is hardly surprising that expansive royal dynasties competing over the fens and the east midlands should patronise Ely, *Medeshamstede*, and other houses.

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<sup>823</sup> N. Marafioti, *The King's Body: Burial and Succession in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto, 2014).

<sup>824</sup> *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*, ed. T.J. South (Cambridge, 2002); Foot, *Æthelstan*, pp. 88, 119–20; Rollason, ‘St Cuthbert and Wessex, the Evidence of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 183’, in G. Bonner, *et al.* (eds.), *St Cuthbert, his Cult and his Community to AD 1200* (Woodbridge, 1989), pp. 413–24; N. McGuigan, ‘Neither Scotland nor England: Middle Britain, c. 850–1150’ (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of St Andrews, 2015), pp. 184–5.

As has been demonstrated, the region was of particular interest to Bede in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*. This may speak to the interconnectedness of eastern Britain, and the cultural values that he shared with his contacts and informants who related to him the histories of the eastern minsters. Bede's references to the founding of minsters in the eastern zone give us precious insight into the process and communication of political identity and territorial control, but they were also in aid of his chief objective: the history of the English church and the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons. For Bede, the conversion of royal dynasties and the dedication of land for the founding of minsters was proof of the mission's success.

Furthermore, the founding of minsters was a phenomenon of its time. As the Mercian, Bernician and East Anglian kings competed over the eastern zone, a great flourishing of monastic fervour thoroughly gripped Anglo-Saxon elite society.<sup>825</sup> The endowment of minsters in the seventh century was not just political or devotional, it was also fashionable. It is important to remember that members of royal dynasties were the most prominent members of the culturally homogenous elite of the seventh century described above. So too was Bede; the *Historia Ecclesiastica* was both a product of this elite culture, and in some ways, the final breath of the 'monastic boom' of c. 670–740. In many ways, the *Historia* documents the remarkable, but in fact relatively brief, surge of a new and exciting political and devotional custom, and the text plots this in an interconnected landscape.

Therefore, the particular circumstances of the seventh century, and the particular nature of the sources available for the region need to be acknowledged to understand the use of minsters to communicate authority in the eastern zone. It is probably not coincidental that the next time there is any sort of narrative for the region, the Edwardian conquest as described in the *Chronicle*,

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<sup>825</sup> Blair, *Church in Society*, pp. 84–91, 121–34.

authority is almost entirely communicated through fortresses. There is no evidence that Edward ever founded new minsters in the eastern zone or patronised old ones. This seems curious: even though Edward and his father had a reputation for stinginess, Edward was a monastic patron in Wessex; he founded the New Minster of Winchester in 901, and he must have given his approval for the translation of the relics of St Oswald from Bardney to Gloucester, since the expedition that undertook the mission included both West Saxons and Mercians.<sup>826</sup> It may be that Edward was not in a position to make large enough grants in the eastern zone to sustain large royal minsters; perhaps the political situation was too precarious to defend a minster and its scattered estates. To make a broader point, however, conditions in Anglo-Saxon society had changed dramatically between *c.* 740 and *c.* 900, as minsters had been expropriated by aggressive royal authority in the context of widening markets and intensifying production.<sup>827</sup> There may have been some political ideology at work as well: perhaps asserting territorial control through large, powerful royal minsters was specifically associated with Mercian hegemony by this point, and it is possible that the Cwenthryth debacle may have made such arrangements unpalatable (some at the West Saxon court had long memories: think of Asser's comments on the tyranny of Offa). This may have also been a tenth-century holdover that reflected the idiosyncrasies of the West Saxon dynasty. Dynastic cults seem to have been relatively rare in Wessex compared to the other kingdoms; the veneration of Ine's sisters Cuthburh and Cwoenburh at Wimbourne seems to have been quite exceptional, and the minster may have been suppressed for the community's role in supporting Edward's rival Æthelwold after the death of Alfred.<sup>828</sup>

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<sup>826</sup> ASC 909; MR 909.

<sup>827</sup> Blair, *Church in Society*, p. 290 n. 199.

<sup>828</sup> Yorke, 'Origin of Wessex', p. 104.

We have seen that royal women serving as abbesses were instrumental to the process in the other kingdoms from the seventh century through the tenure of Cwenthryth at Minster-in-Thanel and the resolution of that conflict in *c.* 827. The failure of such cults in Wessex may be due to the effective suppression of dynastic cults in periods of dynastic upheaval (say, the reign of Ecgberht), but perhaps the apparent irrelevance of this method of communicating authority among the West Saxon dynasty is related to the relatively depressed status of West Saxon royal women in the period.<sup>829</sup> To this end, while Alfred established Shaftesbury Abbey for Edward's sister Æthelgifu, as Thacker notes the scale of the foundation was relatively small, and it never emerged as the site of a family mausoleum or a dynastic cult.<sup>830</sup> It would seem, then, that the strategies demonstrated in chapter four were not particularly prominent in the repertoire of the West Saxon house when Edward campaigned in the region. In the mid-tenth century, however, excitement for reformed monasticism took root among the royal family and the aristocracy, and it is at this point that fenland houses once again emerge at the forefront of the historical record, as material related to Ramsey, Ely, and Thorney demonstrate the connections between the houses, the king, and the aristocracy. The strategies employed in chapter four also reflect the changing landscape of the mid to late seventh century. It was argued that the minsters of *Medeshamstede*/Peterborough and Ely divided the territory of the *Gyrwas*, and the minsters themselves then became cores in the landscape. Indeed, some places mentioned in chapter four, such as Bedford, Northampton and Ely came to define administrative districts in both secular and monastic contexts. It is true that royal estates were given over for the founding of minsters and that minsters were important stations on royal itineraries; this, together with the aristocratic disposition of such communities, suggests that

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<sup>829</sup> Above, p. 206 n. 656.

<sup>830</sup> Thacker, 'Dynastic Monasteries and Family Cults', pp. 252–3.

minsters required resources and provisions similar to the extensive lordships from which their initial territories sometimes derived. However, the permanence of minsters and their communities was an important contrast to the more ephemeral royal villas and the itinerant mode of Anglo-Saxon kings.<sup>831</sup> Furthermore, it allowed kings to take advantage of the extraordinary productive and commercial capacities of minsters in the later seventh century.<sup>832</sup>

Chapter five is also as suggestive of time as it is of place, and it reflects the way the landscape of Anglo-Saxon society was changing during the eighth and early ninth centuries. Namely, the construction of fortifications with appurtenant *-tun* place-names clustered around them. In crucial ways, then, the landscape between the Dee and Conwy shared much with other landscapes throughout the Mercian hegemony, and thus the means of communicating authority in the landscape were contemporary to the methods of the eighth and ninth centuries.<sup>833</sup> The monumentality evident in the region can also be seen elsewhere. Linear earthworks were a common feature throughout Anglo-Saxon landscape, and some—such as the Wansdyke—achieved a monumental scale reminiscent of Offa’s Dyke and Wat’s Dyke.<sup>834</sup> Romanising imperial display has long-since been recognised as an important aspect of Mercian kingship. Someone in the west of Coenwulf’s realm, contemplating the imperial power communicated by the linear earthworks, could travel along Watling Street to the assemblage of sites at Northampton and Brixworth and be greeted with similarly imposing and self-consciously Roman displays of royal power conveyed in the landscape. The fortress at Rhuddlan and the linear earthworks were remarkably current symbols of eighth and ninth-century power. Patrick Wormald memorably

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<sup>831</sup> Faith, *Peasantry*, pp. 15–16.

<sup>832</sup> Blair, *Church in Society*, pp. 251–61; K. Ulmschneider, *Markets, Minsters and Metal-Detectors: The Archaeology of Middle Saxon Lincolnshire and Hampshire Compared*, BAR Brit. Ser. 307 (Oxford, 2000).

<sup>833</sup> For which see Blair, *Building*, chapters six and seven.

<sup>834</sup> E. Grigg, ‘Early Medieval Dykes (400 to 850 AD)’ (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 2015), which re-emphasises the military functionality of linear earthworks.

wrote that Offa's Dyke was 'not the first great public work of English government, but the last great prehistoric achievement of the inhabitants of Britain, in a tradition stretching back thousands of years,' but this is only one part of the earthwork's impact.<sup>835</sup> It was also an intimidating, contemporary, and powerful symbol of the reigning order that cast back to Rome for its visual inspiration.

Chapter six relies on the perception of the landscape of the North Wessex downs in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and a major aspect of this is the way in which the compilers of the *Chronicle* perceived prehistoric monuments. While prehistoric monuments can be found throughout Britain, it is the *Chronicle* itself that makes them so prominent in the region of the downs. This is similar to the way in which the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and later texts such as the *Liber Eliensis* and other monastic chronicles make the minsters of the eastern zone stand out so dominantly. In part, this reflects the nature of the *Chronicle* as a 'generative' text: it is a narrative that builds on what has come before it, and as the pen was taken up by subsequent composers, they read and perceived the annals up to the point of their own stint, and understood the landscape they wrote about based on, among other things, the entries of the *Chronicle* that came before. Therefore, the downlands were imbued with a sense of historical significance in the chief narrative source for the landscape. It was this very sense of history that made the monuments in that particular landscape important. In this way, the perception of the landscape was a product of its time, as both past and contemporary events deemed to be of great significance were interpreted and contextualised.<sup>836</sup>

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<sup>835</sup> Wormald, 'The Age of Offa and Alcuin', p. 121.

<sup>836</sup> J. Stodnick, 'What (and Where) is the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* About?: Spatial History', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 86, 2 (2004), pp. 87–104; Smith, 'Marking Boundaries: Charters and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', in Jorgensen (ed.), *Reading the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, pp. 167–185.

The region of case-study underwent a major shift between the seventh and eleventh centuries, and it appears that in the later ninth century it transitioned from a contested landscape between the Mercian and West Saxon kingdoms into a segment of a royal itinerary. Even as it was incorporated into a royal ‘core’, the region was still contested and used to challenge the legitimacy of the West Saxon dynasty, as suggested by the *Chronicle* entries for 1006 and 1010. The record and proceedings of a shire meeting at *Cwichelmeshlæwe* in 990 x 992 demonstrates the operation of significant changes in the administrative landscape of Anglo-Saxon England through the demarcation of shires and hundreds, which greatly intensified the powers of the king. At the same time, this suggests a constant interplay between the contemporary landscape and the past: Berkshire itself was a territory of some antiquity, and it is notable that this territory was not renamed for a shire seat (so it did not become something like ‘Wallingfordshire’), as was often the case with Mercian regions incorporated into the tenth-century kingdom. This in itself may have been an admission of some lingering regional particularism and, perhaps, its long history as a contested region between the West Saxons and Mercians. The use of a barrow named for the West Saxon ancestor-king Cwichelm suggests a means to connect the landscape (both the immediate landscape of the downs and the shire more broadly) to the West Saxon dynasty. As noted above, Cwichelm is associated with the downs in an entry of the *Chronicle* for 648. To speculate, it may be that when the common stock was being compiled, some notables of the region may have considered themselves to be descendants of Cwichelm in particular and actively fostered such an ancestry, thereby retaining a distinct identity while tying them to the West Saxon dynasty. This would parallel the strategies employed by the *Chronicle* for integrating the Isle of Wight into the narrative of West Saxon history. In this way, royal authority worked through an inter-relation between the landscape and textual sources, winding its way into regional consciousness, thereby

*using* regional identity rather than fighting against it; this recalls the themes discussed in chapter two concerning *Fonthill* and *Dunsæte*. One further point: the significance of Cholsey minster, prominently sited in the east of the region, demonstrates the cyclicity described above: as a reform minster associated with the royal family, Cholsey can be seen in conjunction with the reformed minsters in the eastern zone and the wider network of reformed houses with royal connections throughout the tenth- and early eleventh-century landscape.

Therefore, while the techniques of communication described in each case-study were not necessarily unique to the specific landscape, their relative prominence was dependent upon the sources available to each region, the specific concerns of those sources, and wider social, political, and economic trends. In each case, the techniques by which royal authority and collective identity was asserted responded to the changing landscape of Anglo-Saxon society.

Thus, the communication of identity in the landscape was not static: in addition to regional variation, strategies of communication reflected changes in both society and the landscape more broadly. The methods used to communicate authority in the landscape could be cyclical, or at least their relative prominence could wax and wane. No doubt in part this is due to the inconsistent nature of our sources, but surely both actual practice and the relative influence given to individual strategies in written sources must reflect wider societal trends.

## *2: Shifting Loci within a Region*

It is also the case that the *locus* for communicating authority in a region could shift. For example, in the introduction it was noted that Bede understood Chester as a place of interface between Anglo-Saxons and Britons that had distinctly militarised Roman resonance (*ad ciuitatem Legionem, quae a gente Anglorum Legacaestir, a Brettonibus autem rectius Carlegion appellatur*). However, while chapter five argued that the Mercians of the eighth and early ninth century were

highly conscious of the power of Roman forms, Chester seems to have played little role in Mercian arrangements. There is a later tradition ascribing the foundation of the minster of St John the Baptist to Æthelred in 689, but this is derived from the thirteenth-century *Annales Cestrienses*, which claims to have derived this from Gerald of Wales; however, no information concerning St John's is to be found in any surviving works of Gerald.<sup>837</sup> Instead, Mercian efforts in the region during the eighth and ninth centuries were focused on the stretch between Basingwerk and Rhuddlan and south along the dykes. It seems that it was not until the translation of St Werburgh's relics to Chester that the city emerged as a place with royal significance. While Ranulph Higden's fourteenth-century *Polychronicon* dates the translation to 874, this seems to be a guess based on the Great Army's attack on Repton in that year, and recent commentators have suggested that the reign of Æthelred and Æthelflæd provides a more likely context for the translation. The Mercian Register entry for 907, which notes the 'renewal' (*geedniwod*) of Chester seems particularly appropriate, and a comparison can clearly be drawn to the removal of St Oswald's relics from Bardney to Gloucester in 909. It is probably not a coincidence, therefore, that there was also a strong connection between St Oswald and St Werburgh's.<sup>838</sup>

Similarly, in chapter four we argued that the communication of political control in the eastern zone during the seventh century was communicated through minsters such as *Medeshamstede*, Peterborough, and Ely. While some minsters such as Peterborough continued to be patronised during the Mercian period, the older houses were superseded in the eighth and early ninth centuries

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<sup>837</sup> *Annales Cestrienses*, in *The Chronicle of the Abbey of S. Werburg at Chester*, ed. R.C. Christie (London, 1887), p. 10; and see also *The Cartulary or Register of the Abbey of St Werburgh, Chester*, part 1, ed. J. Tait (Chetham Soc., 1920), p. xv n. 1; cf. Thacker, 'Chester and Gloucester: Early Ecclesiastical Organization in Two Mercian Burhs', *Northern History*, 18, 1 (1982), pp. 199–211, at pp. 199–206. Thacker considers the possibility of a seventh-century foundation by Æthelred credible and notes a potentially longstanding link between St John's and the bishop of Lichfield (indeed in 1075 St John's became the cathedral church of the diocese). It is certainly plausible that St John's was an Æthelredian foundation that became an episcopal minster associated with the see of Lichfield, but this does not show the *continued* importance of the minster as a centre of royal authority.

<sup>838</sup> Love, *Goscelin*, p. xvi; Thacker, 'Chester and Gloucester', pp. 203–4.

by Crowland, Bedford, Brixworth and Northampton. It was suggested above that this may have reflected a desire on the part of the new dynasty to disassociate themselves with places connected to the House of Penda. However, the establishment of Northampton and Brixworth and the building of their monumental structures re-centred Mercian authority in the region closer to Watling Street (and thus the land-route to London) and the interface between the upland wolds of Northamptonshire and the lowlands to the east. Another re-centring in the eastern zone occurred in the tenth century, and once again we see a familiar pattern: some new places came to prominence, such as Thorney and Ramsey; some were re-founded and ‘renewed’, such as Ely, Peterborough, and Crowland; and the character of others changed, as Northampton and Bedford lost their dynastic and (potential) monastic significance, but became centres of defence and administration, ultimately emerging as shire seats. It is possible that it is precisely because of their association with Offa and the Mercian kingdom of the late eighth century that they lost their dynastic significance in the Cerdicing dominion.

### *3: Continuity and Points of Comparison*

#### *iii.1: Shared Cultural Vocabulary*

At the same time, there was a certain amount of continuity—a persistence of place and practice even in the wake of significant change—and there was much in common across all three case studies. All three case studies rely upon a shared cultural vocabulary. The way in which identity was communicated needed to make sense to everyone, after all. Thus, the proliferation of royal minsters required a shared aristocratic culture that was interested in founding minsters. The prestige of houses such as Ely and *Medeshamstede* and their abbesses and abbots relied upon universal acknowledgement of their prestige and sanctity, as well as a general agreement in the seventh century that endowing minsters was a ‘good thing’ to do. This may have also been

important for their security. Bede's story of Æthelfrith's slaughter of the monks of Bangor may suggest an example of what could occur if social values were not shared between rivals. The rarity of attacks on minsters by Christians in surviving sources suggests how important these social norms were.<sup>839</sup> It may be that in addition to serving as outposts of dynastic interests, the minsters of the eastern zone may also have served as buffers between rival actors that were—for a time—relatively secure.

Likewise, the use of Roman idioms to communicate authority and collective identity was shared between the Mercians and the Britons in the landscape of chapter five. It is reasonable to assume that both the kings of Mercia and their counterparts in Powys expected their subjects and clients to understand their imperial display, but it is also probable that they expected *each other* to understand their claims to Roman legitimacy as well. Finally, in chapter six it was suggested that the *Chronicle* used the importance of the landscape to make successive rhetorical arguments both legitimising and criticising the West Saxon dynasty. Once again, for this to have had any great effect, the importance of the landscape of the downs would need to have been broadly accepted by the chronicler's audience. In the example given for 1006, it was argued that the Danish army was appropriating part of a royal itinerary, and thereby subverting and delegitimising the authority of the king. Did the Danes themselves understand the significance of the route and the places they visited? It is certainly possible—many in the army must have had long experience in Britain at this point.<sup>840</sup> However, as a mechanism to criticise the king, it was arguably more important that the chronicler's audience perceived the significance of the events described. Therefore, the success by

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<sup>839</sup> *HE* ii.2; examples of attacks of ecclesiastical sites include Æthelred's ravaging of Rochester in 676 (*HE* iv.12); Berht's campaign in Ireland (*HE* iv.26); and the destruction of Oundle by arsonists: *VSW* 67. Halsall reflects upon this in a different context in 'Playing by Whose Rules? A Further Look at Viking Atrocity in the Ninth Century', *Medieval History* 2, 2 (1992), pp. 3–12.

<sup>840</sup> Keynes, 'An abbot, an Archbishop', pp. 151–9.

which collective identity could be communicated and turned to rhetorical effect was incumbent upon a degree of mutual intelligibility between the communicator and the recipient. This speaks to the elite homogeneity discussed in chapter two and demonstrates a way in which this could be manifested in regard to the communication of collective identity in the landscape.

### iii.2: *Conflict*

Furthermore, conflict and warfare play a significant role in all three case-studies. In the eastern lowland zone, it was argued that warfare between the Mercian, Bernician, and East Anglian dynasties was a dominant undercurrent of Bede's narrative; chapter five emphasised warfare between the Mercians and the Welsh in the eighth and ninth centuries, and chapter six demonstrated the way in which the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* used warfare and the recording of battles to communicate West Saxon authority in the landscape. In his review of Richard Abels' *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England*, Simon Keynes wrote in favour of Abels' work that 'only rarely does his vision of the Anglo-Saxons verge on unduly militaristic, as if everything hinged on the organization of society for war.'<sup>841</sup> The point that Keynes is making is well-taken as a reaction against medieval history as a list of 'great battles', but perhaps his comment goes too far.<sup>842</sup> Anglo-Saxon society certainly perceived itself as being warlike, and the language of warfare is pervasive in Anglo-Saxon writing. In c. 730, Felix wrote the following of St Guthlac: *Deinde praecinctus spiritalibus armis aduersus teterrimi hostis insidias scutum fidei, loricae spei, galeae castitatis, arcum patientiae, sagittas psalmodiae sese in firmans, arripuit.*

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<sup>841</sup> Keynes, 'Review of Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation*' [1988], *Albion* 21, 3 (1989), pp. 477–9.

<sup>842</sup> Such as described in Halsall, *Warfare and Society*, pp. 10–11, with particularly withering commentary reserved in nn. 42–4.

*Tantae enim fiduciae erat, ut inter torridas tartari turmas sese contemto hoste iniecerit.*<sup>843</sup> The military imagery of this should be seen in its entire context. The description clearly comes from Ephesians 6:11–17,<sup>844</sup> but it reflects a development in Christian attitudes towards warfare which had been gestating throughout the Late Antique and Early Medieval West, in which the oppositional relationship between warriors and clergy had become much less significant by the seventh century.<sup>845</sup> The author of the *Passio* of Leudegar of Autun (d. 679), for example, uses the same imagery from Ephesians employed by Felix.<sup>846</sup> In practical terms, the *détente* between secular and clerical attitudes towards war is demonstrated by Bede’s letter to Ecgberht, in which Bede professed his concern that land in Northumbria had been given over to false monasteries, useful neither to God nor to ‘thegns or gesiths of the secular power who defend our people from the barbarians.’<sup>847</sup> This was thoroughly bound up in models of kingship, and kings were described through the lens of victorious Roman emperors, and increasingly, Old Testament warrior kings.<sup>848</sup> The concord between secular power and the church in regard to warfare can be seen in some of the examples cited above, such as in the strikingly martial imagery through which Oswiu’s endowment for twelve minsters after his victory over Penda was described, or the vigil undertaken

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<sup>843</sup> VSG 27: ‘Then, girding himself with spiritual arms against the wiles of the foul foe, he took up the shield of faith, the breastplate of hope, the helmet of chastity, the bow of patience, the arrows of psalmody, making himself strong for the fight. So great in fact was his confidence that, despising the foe, he hurled himself against the torrid troops of Tartarus.’

<sup>844</sup> Ephesians 6:11–17: ‘Stand, therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; besides all these, taking the shield of faith [...] and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.’

<sup>845</sup> Sarti, *Perceiving War*, pp. 307–14; for Felix’s influences, A. Meaney, ‘Felix’s *Life of Guthlac*: History or Hagiography?’, in Hill and Worthington (eds.), *Æthelbald and Offa*, pp. 75–84.

<sup>846</sup> *Passio Leudegarii*, in *Late Merovingian France: History and Hagiography, 640–720*, ed. and trans. Fouracre and Gerberding (Manchester, 1996), 8.290, pp. 224–5.

<sup>847</sup> Letter of Bede to Ecgberht, Archbishop of York, ed. Plummer, *Venerabilis Bedae Opera Historica* I (London, 1896), pp. 405–23.

<sup>848</sup> M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge, 1990); S. Muhlberger, ‘War, Warlords, and Christian Historians from the Fifth to the Seventh Century’, in A. Callander Murray (ed.), *After Rome’s Fall: Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History* (Toronto, 1998), pp. 83–98; Halsall, *Warfare and Society*, p. 26; Y. Hen, ‘The Uses of the Bible and the Perception of Kingship in Merovingian Gaul’, *EME* 7 (2003), pp. 277–89, esp. pp. 255–89.

by the monks of Hexham in remembrance of Oswald's defeat of Cadwallon.<sup>849</sup> It can also be seen in the role that minsters played in the process of reconciliation and peace-making, as discussed in chapters three and four.

### iii.3: *Kingship and Conflict in a Landscape Context*

Each region also asserts royal authority and collective identity through the invocation of historical or legendary kings, though in different ways that were appropriate to the time and place. The significance of the relationship between kingship, conflict, and landscape is undeniable. In the preface to the Old English *Pastoral Care*, it is recalled when *ða cyningas ðe ðone onwald hæfdon ðæs folces [on ðam dagum] Gode 7 his ærendwrecum hersumedon; 7 hie ægðer ge hiora sibbe ge hiora siodo ge hiora onweald innanbordes gehioldon, 7 eac ut hiora eðel gerymdon.*<sup>850</sup> Here, the text explicitly outlines a conception of kingship: a good king maintains the peace, upholds moral behaviour, and obeys the teachings and precepts of the church. This is the text's vision of a well-ordered society, and kings who ruled in such a way were to be rewarded with new conquests. The latter could not happen if the house was not first set in order; the emphasis here is on stewardship over the *anweald*, which Kretzschmar has shown was understood to derive from God.<sup>851</sup> In Old English poetry, *Widsith* describes the legendary Offa of Angle. The poet celebrates his victories in war: *Nænig efeneald him eorlscipe maran on orette. Ane sweorde merce gemærde wið Myrgingum*

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<sup>849</sup> Above, pp. 145–6; and see M. McCormick, 'The Liturgy of War in the Early Middle Ages: Crisis, Litanies, and the Carolingian Monarchy', *Viator* 15 (1984), pp. 1–23; L. Pezzarossa, 'The Ideology of War in Early Medieval England: Three Case Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of York, 2013), pp. 108–21.

<sup>850</sup> *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, 2 parts, ed. H. Sweet, EETS, OS 45, 50 (London, 1871, repr. Oxford, 1996), i, 3: 'the kings who had power over the people in days gone by obeyed God and his messengers and they both upheld peace and morality and authority within their borders, and they also expanded their homeland outwards.'

<sup>851</sup> W. Kretzschmar, 'Adaptation and "anweald" in the Old English Orosius', *ASE* 16 (1987), pp. 127–45.

*bi Fifeldore. Heoldon forð sibpan Engle ond Swæfe, swa hit Offa geslog* ('None of his age achieved more nobility. With a single sword he set the march with the Myrgings by the River Eider. Henceforth this was held between Angle and Swæfe where Offa struck it'). Imagery of the king as defender of the land is common throughout Old English poetry. For instance, in *The Battle of Brunanburh* Æthelstan and Edmund are celebrated as defenders of 'their land, their treasure, and their homes.'<sup>852</sup> We see here that kings are not just defenders of their people, but they also defenders of land, and they *set* and *keep* their marches.

In a landscape context, this is demonstrated through an association with places of conflict *and* (just as importantly) reconciliation that are specifically tied to royal dynasties and the invocation of historical or legendary ancestors. In the eastern zone, the region of chapter four, this is primarily mediated through monasteries and sites of dynastic cults. It was demonstrated that the minsters of Bardney, Gilling, and the minsters dedicated by Oswiu in Deira after his defeat of Penda commemorated the processes of conflict and reconciliation that located dynastic authority in the landscape. There is later evidence that Peterborough may have served a similar function. In chapter five, it is mediated through monuments such as the Pillar of Eliseg and Offa's Dyke.<sup>853</sup> Is it possible that Offa's peers and descendants found some resonance between the legendary march-setting Offa of Angle and the hegemonic earthwork-builder Offa of Mercia? The perception of Offa of Mercia as a 'border-setting king' seems to be confirmed by Asser's interpretation of the earthwork. In chapter six, this can be seen through prehistoric sites associated with the battles of the past fought by members of the West Saxon dynasty. Through such diverse media and strategies,

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<sup>852</sup> ASC C 937.

<sup>853</sup> Wat's Dyke is apparently named for the legendary Wade, the father of Wayland, but see the interpretation of Ray and Bapty, *Offa's Dyke*, p. 359.

dynastic authority was imprinted in the landscape and memorialised, creating a durable connection between dynasty and land.

#### iii.4: *Communicating Collective Identity*

I have argued throughout this thesis that the process of conflict and reconciliation, and the memory of conflict as it is recorded in textual sources, imprinted in the landscape through monuments, place-names, and the establishment of minsters, as well as through liturgical activities such as those Bede described at Hexham, gave collective identity a landscape context invoked through an understanding of a shared past. The act of conflict was perhaps less significant than the collective memory of it. Furthermore, this was intertwined with the language and places of law and assembly. The ‘public’ activities where people of status gathered and communicated their collective identity, and the activities that confirmed membership (law, assembly, etc.) were vested in the vocabulary and symbolism of warfare. Moreover, this was a way of communicating identity that was not necessarily ethnic. It was important in Anglo-Saxon England—and I daresay many other early medieval societies—because it played on class solidarities (emphasising the significance of proximity to the king, participation in public life, bearing arms, and so forth) more so than specifically ethnic solidarities. This was important in a society that was both ethnically diverse and regionally heterogenous.

This is demonstrated in the three case-studies, each of which emphasise dynastic identity and the projection of dynastic authority over ethnicity. Ethnicity was important, but it seems to me of secondary concern. For example, the Pillar of Eliseg, which forms a central piece of evidence in chapter five, is ostensibly about ethnic animosity, but one might suggest that the inscription is more about dynastic legitimacy and Cyngen’s claim over the kingdom of Powys through his ancient inheritance. The Angles are—much like the viking army in the *Battle of Maldon*—a ‘vague

inimical force' deployed in the inscription for rhetorical effect, serving to legitimise the dynasty of Cyngen.<sup>854</sup> The same is true of the *Chronicle* entries discussed in chapter six. The focus is squarely on the West Saxon dynasty, their historical association with the landscape, and their defence of the landscape; ethnicity is deployed to serve as a foil. Similarly, in chapter four, the emphasis is on individual dynasties, not necessarily on 'the Mercians' or the 'Northumbrians' (except insofar as the royal dynasty represented the kingdom as a whole). Thus, when the dynasty of Penda went defunct after the death of Ceolred in 716, Æthelbald and Offa patronised some of the seventh-century minsters in the region, but it would seem that it was also necessary for them to endow new minsters: Crowland, and then possibly Brixworth, Northampton and Bedford. The foundations of the reign of Offa in particular re-centred dynastic interest in the region further up the Nene and closer to the Ouse. The establishment of new minsters by new dynasties is a reminder that this is not an examination of static borders, but of the relationship between royal dynasties and specific places in the landscape and their communities; and this needed to be constantly renewed, reasserted, maintained and communicated. This is not to say that ethnicity did not exist, nor that the processes under discussion here did not contribute to the process of ethnogenesis. Indeed, as the constant reassertion of collective identity became more 'reflexive', the more reason there is to suggest that ethnicities were consolidating themselves. Ethnogenesis is a long process, and it is something that can probably only be recognised in hindsight. I have sought here to illustrate some of the contemporary mechanisms that underpinned the historical process.

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<sup>854</sup> The quote is from F.C. Robinson, 'Some Aspects of the *Maldon* Poet's Artistry', *JEGP* 75 (1976), pp. 25–40, at p. 27.

### iii.5: *The Significance of Routeways*

A further point of continuity across the case-studies is the persistent importance of the control of routeways and watersheds. Chapter four considered the drainage-basin of the Wash and Humber and the particular importance of royal minsters within the catchment; many of which also interacted with Roman roads, such as *Medeshamstede* and *Castor*, situated at the juncture of Ermine Street and the Nene, or the possible minster at Flixborough, near the juncture of Ermine Street and the confluence of the Trent and Humber. Northampton and Brixworth, meanwhile, were located near the juncture of the Nene and the Roman road of Watling Street.

Perhaps more importantly, Northampton/Brixworth lies close to the nexus of Watling Street—the principal north-west-south-east land route—the catchment of the Wash, which flowed east into the North Sea, the catchment of the Warwickshire Avon and river-systems flowing west into the Irish Sea, and the headwater of the Cherwell, which flowed into the Thames (see fig. 13, below). Where better to imprint dynastic authority in the landscape on an imperial scale? Above, it was mentioned that minsters may have been the favoured means of communicating identity in the eastern province because it was *à la mode* in the late seventh century, and because Bede chose to focus his attentions on minsters. This is probably true, but there is another reason. Strategically sited places such as potential minsters at Northampton and Flixborough, with all of their productive potential, were well-placed to take advantage of (and contribute to) the economic acceleration of the late seventh and eighth centuries. Indeed, the relative permanence of minsters compared to the markedly mobile lifestyle of seventh-century royal courts gave kings very clear reasons to establish minsters in the dynastic interest (and then to expropriate minsters after the abeyance of the monastic boom).

Chapter five focused on the routeways of the coastal road between Basingwerk and Deganwy, and the route from Llantysilio in the valley of the Dee north into the Vale of Clwyd. It was argued that

both the fortress at Rhuddlan and the construction of Wat's Dyke and this sector of Offa's Dyke were intended to be used offensively, to constrict movement and overawe the Britons. Once again, control of routeways, particularly as they relate to rivers—in this case the Dee and the Clwyd—were of great importance, and strategic control was augmented with potent ideological symbolism. Here, the earthworks would have separated Llantysilio from Bangor-on-Dee, a meaningful place in the history of Powys. The earthworks may have also served to sever transhumance routes in the Clwydian range, the significance of which should not be underestimated. Rhuddlan, meanwhile, controlled the mouth of the river Clwyd and approaches south into the vale: one of the most agriculturally fertile parts of North Wales. Once again, the emphasis is on specific places and their spatial relationships with each other and with the routeways in the landscape.

Finally, chapter six examined the prehistoric track known as the Ridgeway and its course across the downs of Berkshire and north-eastern Wiltshire. As with chapter four, the downlands marked the drainage divide between river catchments, in this case those of the Thames and the smaller rivers of the west and south. It may be that the linear earthwork known as the Wansdyke was designed to counter threats to the north, but perhaps in a more subtle way, to defend the watershed of the Thames catchment and that of the Bristol Avon to the north-west. The route of the Ridgeway seems to have developed in the tenth century into part of a royal route, perhaps a hunting region favoured by the kings. All of the places discussed in chapter six were oriented around the Ridgeway, and as such the route itself and the prehistoric monuments along the route came to be laden with royal associations and ideological significance.

### *I: The Ideological Significance of Routeways*

The significance of routeways is something that can be glimpsed throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. Already in the laws of Æthelberht, punishment is stipulated for *wegreaf* ('highway

robbery'), while the law codes of Wihtred of Kent (c. 695) and Ine of Wessex (c. 705) both stipulate that if a 'foreigner' should go off the road without making his presence known, either by shouting or blowing his horn, 'he is to be assumed to be a thief, either to be killed or redeemed.'<sup>855</sup> Alfred's laws are slightly different, but the emphasis on control remains. Clause thirty-four states that traders wishing to travel 'up-country' must be accompanied 'by men whom they can afterwards bring to justice' and brought before the king's reeve in a 'public meeting'.<sup>856</sup> *VI Æthelstan* refers to a fine of 120 shillings for attempting to rescue a thief along the road (*stræt*); paired with this is a penalty for seeking vengeance against those who apprehended the thief—*i.e.* those who were maintaining the king's peace.<sup>857</sup> In *II Cnut*, it is stipulated that people on the way to an assembly were specifically under the king's protection.<sup>858</sup> It has also been argued that the crime of *forsteal* in *II Cnut* suggests a 'sudden assault upon the road,' and that this crime is essentially an injunction against feuding on the road, and similar to the associated crimes of *mundbryce* (a sudden assault against someone specifically under royal protection) and *hamsocn* (a sudden assault upon a homestead), hinting that the roads should be seen as extensions of the royal *mund*. Indeed, *II Cnut* reserves justice for any of these crimes specifically to the king.<sup>859</sup> In any case, there is a considerable amount of evidence to suggest that the roads were within the interest of the king's justice throughout the corpus of Anglo-Saxon law.

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<sup>855</sup> Abt. 19, 89; Wi. 28; Ine 20.

<sup>856</sup> Af. 34.

<sup>857</sup> VI As. 1.5; see also II As. 6.3. Does the use of *stræt* rather than *weg* suggest the use of a major road?

<sup>858</sup> II Cn. 82.

<sup>859</sup> II Cn. 12; cf. V Æthelred 31; A. Cooper, 'The Rise and Fall of the Anglo-Saxon Law of the Highway', *The Haskins Society Journal* 12 (2002), pp. 39–69, at pp. 54–5, 58. However, it must be said that Cooper's argument relies upon both the *Leges Henrici Primi* and IV Atr. 4, 4.1, which only survives in a Latin translation of *Quadripartitus*. This is tacitly supported in Lambert, *Law and Order*, suggesting that 'it is probably reasonable to assume that royal protection of major roads was established at some point between the reigns of Edmund and Cnut', pp. 187–8, 233–4, quoted on p. 188.

The subject receives further attention in non-legal texts. The safety of the roads is integral to Bede's description of Edwin's *pax*. Bede claimed that wherever the *imperium* of Edwin was felt, 'a woman and a new-born child could walk across the island from sea to sea and take no harm', and that Edwin had bronze vessels attached to stakes set up by springs along the 'public roads' for the refreshment of travellers. According to Bede, none dared to steal the vessels for their fear of the king, and none wished to for their love of him. However, the king's perambulation of the roads is just as significant to Bede's depiction of the peace of Edwin's dominion. Bede describes the majesty of the king's banners as he rode in peace between his *ciuitates, siue villas aut prouincias suas cum ministris*, and that he would have carried before him a *genus vexilli, quod Romani tufam, Angli appellant thuuf*.<sup>860</sup> As J.M. Wallace-Hadrill demonstrated, Alcuin used the term *via regia* in his discussion of righteous kingship, and as Cooper has noted, *via regia* and *via publica* appear to be synonymous in the Vulgate, where the terms are used to refer to the unsuccessful appeals of the Israelites to the kings of the Amorites and the Edomites to travel through their kingdoms.<sup>861</sup>

Royal control over comings-and-goings is also hinted at in other instances: the lookout in *Beowulf* and the unfortunate reeve who attempted to bring recently-alighted Danes to the *Cyninges-tune* in 789 suggest that coastal landing-places at the very least were sometimes monitored.<sup>862</sup> As Jill Bourne has shown, 'Kingston' type place-names do not refer to estate centres, but were organised along routeways and may have functioned as 'check-points'.<sup>863</sup> In support of this, along the

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<sup>860</sup> *HE* ii.16, p. 192. And note Blackmore, *et al.*, *The Prittlewell Princely Burial: Excavations at Priory Crescent, Southend-on-Sea, Essex, 2003* (London, 2019), pp. 220–29, which discusses the 'stand', and its possible relationship to Roman battle standards, and the relationship between such banners and liturgical processional banners or candelabra; cf. also the 'stand' recovered from Sutton Hoo mound 1: R. Bruce-Mitford, *The Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial*, 3 vols. (London, 1975–83), pp. 403–31, fig. 291.

<sup>861</sup> J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, 'The *Via Regia* of the Carolingian Age', in B. Smalley (ed.), *Trends in Medieval Political Thought* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 22–41, at pp. 22–3, 40 n. 1; Numbers 20:17, 21:22; Cooper, 'The Rise and Fall', pp. 62–3.

<sup>862</sup> *Beowulf*, ed. and trans. M. Swanton (Manchester, 1978), 229–329; *ASC* 789.

<sup>863</sup> Bourne, *The Place-Name Kingston and Royal Power in Middle Anglo-Saxon England*, BAR Brit. Ser. 630 (Oxford, 2017), now superseding previous debate on the topic: see above, p. 209 n. 671.

prehistoric track of the Ridgeway in Berkshire, there is triangle of Kingston place-names: Kingston Winslow, Kingston Warren, and Kingston Lisle. In the centre of this triangle stands the hillfort of Uffington Castle. This may suggest royal interest in monitoring the Ridgeway in the vicinity of Uffington Castle. Royal preoccupation with surveillance of the roads was not limited to the Anglo-Saxons. The laws of the Lombard kings Ratchis and Aistulf provide an example that verges upon paranoia: ‘routes and passes were secured by *clusae* (fortified border-posts) guarded by specialised *clusarii* under the command of a city-based *iudex*. Anyone entering the kingdom was interviewed by the *clusarii*, who then issued a wax tablet with a provisional document carrying their seal. Later a royal *missus* added a formal letter of approval (*epistola*) to the same wax tablet, which was validated upon the return journey with a royal seal.’<sup>864</sup> The association between kings and the safety of the roads survived the Conquest, and Bede’s proverb about walking the breadth of the kingdom in safety is repeated in the *Chronicle*’s obituaries for both William I and Henry I.<sup>865</sup> This tradition culminated in the c. 1115 *Leges Henrici Primi*, which states first that ‘all *herestrete* pertain wholly to the king,’ and second that ‘the royal road (*via regia*) is that which is always open, and which no one can close or divert with his walls and which leads to a city, a borough, a castle, or a royal town,’ before being distilled in the twelfth-century tradition of the King’s Four Highways *via* the influence of Henry of Huntingdon.<sup>866</sup>

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<sup>864</sup> Ratchis 13; Aistulf 5, in Katherine Fischer Drew (ed. and trans.), *The Lombard Laws* (Philadelphia, PA, 1973), pp. 223–4, 229; for the quote: Pohl, ‘Frontiers in Lombard Italy: The Laws of Ratchis and Aistulf’, in Pohl, Wood and Reimitz (eds.), *The Transformation of Frontiers*, pp. 117–39, at p. 118.

<sup>865</sup> ASC E 1087, 1135.

<sup>866</sup> *Leges Henrici Primi*, ed. L.J. Downer (Oxford, 1972), 10.2, 80.3a; Cooper, ‘The Rise and Fall’, esp. pp. 49–58 for the relationship between Anglo-Saxon law and the *Leges Henrici Primi*; and Cooper, ‘The King’s Four Highways: legal fiction meets fictional law’, *Journal of Medieval History* 26, 4 (2000), pp. 351–70.

## II: *Routeways, Bridges and Fortifications: Royal Control and the Nexus of Communications*

As discussed in chapter three, Mercian kings began to issue charters that reserved to the king service for the army and the maintenance of bridges and fortresses.<sup>867</sup> This is to say that the military potential of the landscape delineated by charter is vested in the king, both through the organisation for the defence *via* the maintenance of fortresses and through military service, while the necessity of maintaining bridges contextualizes the landscape in question within the wider network of communication and transportation throughout the kingdom. Ideologically, all three burdens come back to the king and tie otherwise alienated parcels of land within the wider ideological, military and communication infrastructure of the kingdom, contributing to its shared collective identity.

Meanwhile, bridges create a nexus in the transportation network, marking the point of intersection between the road and river networks. For example, the bridge over the Medway at Rochester, which lay upon the Roman road from London to Canterbury, has received a considerable amount of attention.<sup>868</sup> Blair has recently suggested that the bridge may have been rebuilt in *c.* 800, perhaps in the aftermath of Coenwulf's suppression of Eadberht Præn's revolt, in order to support the movement of troops into Kent. Moreover, as Coenwulf established mints in Rochester and Canterbury to facilitate the diffusion of Mercian coinage, the bridge may have been necessary for coins moving inland to London, perhaps under guard—this may have been more necessary in the early ninth century as accelerating viking raids made seaborne transportation along the east coast more dangerous, especially for precious cargo. Blair links the reconstruction of the bridge to charter references to the *regiones suburbanae* of the *oppida regis* at Rainham and Faversham, and the digging of a canal to channel boats from the coast through the Graveney marshes to Faversham

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<sup>867</sup> See above, pp. 121–6.

<sup>868</sup> S. 1481d; Brooks, 'Rochester Bridge AD 43–1381', in N. Yates and J.M. Gibson (eds.), *Traffic and Politics* (Woodbridge, 1994), pp. 1–40.

and the Roman road.<sup>869</sup> Thus, the reconstruction of the bridge is linked to infrastructural and economic development, but it is contextualised by the reassertion of royal power after a period of rebellion, and the communication of royal power is explicitly connected to routeways, and furthermore, the rebuilding of the Roman bridge may have been perceived as monumental.

Bridges and fortifications often went hand-in-hand. Many fortifications were constructed at notable fording-sites, but this association is articulated in more detail in the narrative accounts of the reign of Edward the Elder. Between 912 and 917, Edward campaigned nearly constantly in the east midlands to capture, restore, and build fortifications to control the nexus of transportation and communication in the catchment of the Wash, particularly in the valleys of the Nene, Ouse and Welland. Edward consistently seems to have oriented the expansion of his *anweald* around the network of roads and rivers. In 913, the armies from Leicester and Northampton ravaged in the area of Hook Norton, in northern Oxfordshire, they then returned ‘home’ (*ham comon*), gathered reinforcements, and attacked Luton, beneath the Chilterns.<sup>870</sup> The next annal reports that Edward gathered his army and built two fortresses, one on either side of the River Ouse at Buckingham, and received the submission of Earl Thurcotel and ‘the earls (MS A: *holds*) and principal men who belonged to Bedford, and also many of those who belonged to Northampton.’<sup>871</sup> Meanwhile, the Mercian Register reports that in the same year Æthelflæd had a fortress constructed on the Avon at Warwick, thirty miles west of Buckingham.<sup>872</sup>

Let us consider the context of fortifications at Buckingham and Warwick. The fortification at Buckingham would have served to check an army following the Ouse into northern Oxfordshire

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<sup>869</sup> Eadberht Præn was defeated by Coenwulf in 798: ASC 798. Blair, *Building*, pp. 189–90, 221–22; Blair (ed.), *Waterways and Canal Building in Medieval England* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 4, 7; and V. Fenwick, *The Graveney Boat*, BAR Brit. Ser. 53 (1978). The relevant charters are S. 168–70, 177, 178, 1414.

<sup>870</sup> ASC 913

<sup>871</sup> ASC 914

<sup>872</sup> ASC 914.

and the upper reaches of the Cherwell around Banbury, which may have been an early minster site, and which possessed a substantial ditch-enclosure near the banks of the Cherwell and small timber building inside the enclosure that has yielded finds of charred grain.<sup>873</sup> Buckingham was supported by further fortresses at Towcester, on the Tove (a tributary of the Ouse), which was attacked by the armies from Leicester and Northampton in 917, and was subsequently reinforced with a stone wall while Edward's army was encamped at Passenham, eight miles to the southeast along Watling Street and on the Ouse (adjacent to Stony Stratford).<sup>874</sup> It was also possibly supported by *Wigingamere*, which cannot be identified for certain, but may be located in the parish of Wing. *Wigingamere* was also constructed in 917, and it came under attack in the same year by the army from East Anglia. Wing—about thirteen miles southeast of Buckingham—is adjacent to Linslade, where Edward established peace with the northerners in 906 (Tiddingford in the *Chronicle*).<sup>875</sup> Æthelflæd's fortification at Warwick, while also guarding the headwaters of the Warwickshire Avon and the approach to the trading centre at Bidford-on-Avon, may have aided in monitoring the Fosse Way against an army marching south, either into Oxfordshire, or toward the important centres of Winchcombe and Worcester. In support of this, a string of *burh-tun* place-names run in a south-eastern course from just north of Warwick to Banbury.<sup>876</sup> All of them are located in front (as to a traveller approaching from the east) of the salt roads from Droitwich to the Thames.<sup>877</sup> This seems to suggest that here Edward and Æthelflæd were *restoring* a pre-existing Mercian defensive infrastructure designed to support economic activity around Bidford and Droitwich and

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<sup>873</sup> Blair, *Building*, pp. 211–12

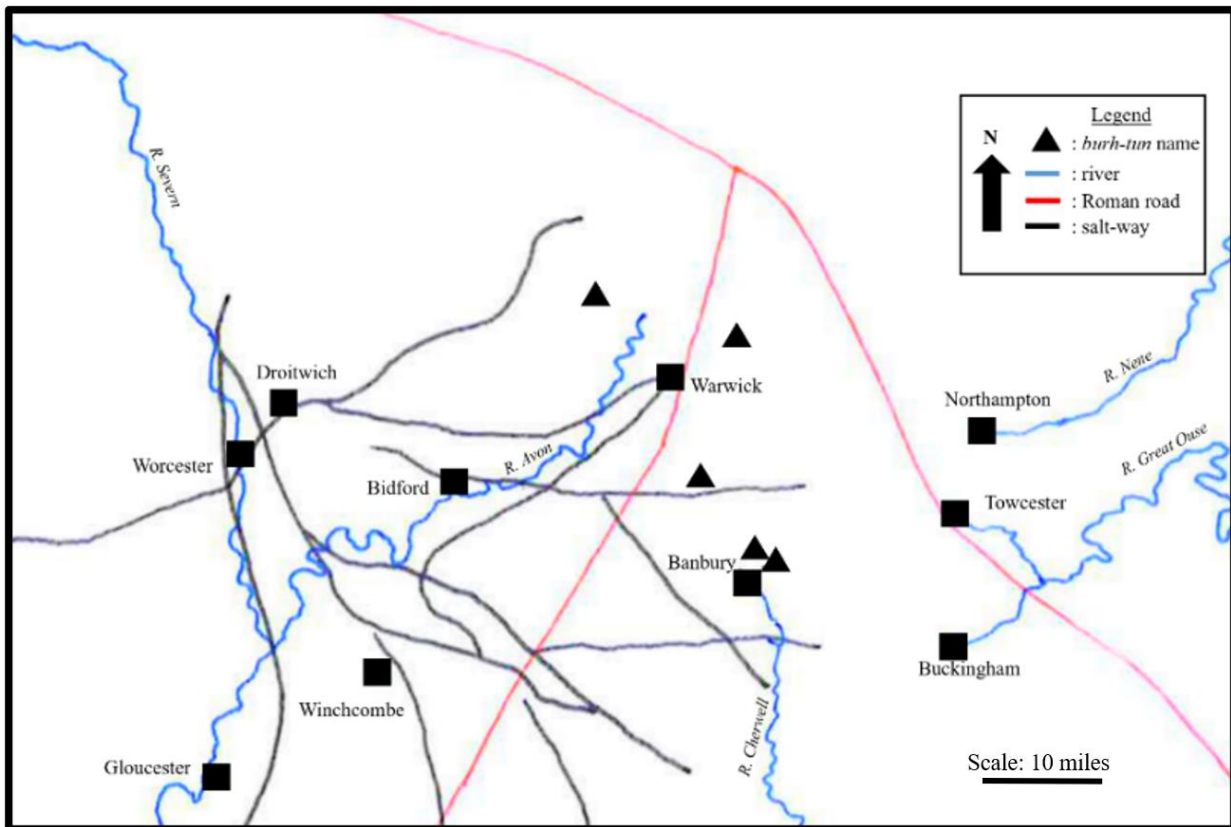
<sup>874</sup> ASC A 917.

<sup>875</sup> ASC A 917; Haslam, 'Location of the Burh of *Wigingamere*'; the other possibility for the fortress in northern Essex, on this, see Haslam, 'The *Burh* of *Wigingamere*', *Landscape History* 10 (1988), pp. 25–36.

<sup>876</sup> Blair, *Building*, p. 181 fig. 60.

<sup>877</sup> Maddicott, 'London and Droitwich'; Hooke, 'The Droitwich Salt Industry', *ASSAH* 2, BAR Brit. Ser. 92 (Oxford, 1981), pp. 122–69; F.T.S. Houghton, 'Salt Ways', *Transactions of the Birmingham and Warwickshire Archaeological Society* 54 (1932), pp. 1–17.

organised around routeways, particularly Watling Street, the Fosse Way, and the Droitwich salt roads; but also the drainage divides between the region's river systems—the Warwickshire Avon, the Ouse and the Cherwell.



**FIGURE 13: FORTIFICATIONS AT THE NEXUS OF DRAINAGE BASINS (SALT-WAYS AFTER HOOKE, *THE KINGDOM OF THE HWICCE*).**

The significance of fortifications to transportation and communication is suggested by the chronicler's specific reference to the construction of forts on *either* side of the river, not only in 914 at Buckingham, as noted, but also at Stamford, where Edward received the submission of the

people pertaining to the fortress on the north side of the Welland while constructing a new fortification on the south bank in 918.<sup>878</sup> In 919, the *Chronicle* is even more explicit, recording that ‘Edward went with the army to Nottingham, and ordered to be built the *burh* on the south side of the river, opposite the other, and the bridge over the Trent between the two *burhs*.’<sup>879</sup>

There is a Continental parallel to this, as Charles the Bald commanded ‘fortified bridges’ to be constructed in the basin of the Seine in 862–4.<sup>880</sup> Commentary on the Edict of Pîtres often neglects to note that the capitulary is really about asserting broad royal control in the region. In 864, Pippin II of Aquitaine, who had long been in rebellion against Charles, was captured and deposed at the very same council where the Edict was issued.<sup>881</sup> Other clauses require the destruction of private fortifications, the cessation of private warfare, injunctions against those who fail to perform military service, and injunctions against trading horses and weapons with Norsemen—this is perhaps a direct reference to Pippin, who allied himself with viking bands ravaging in the west and joined them in an attack on Toulouse earlier that year.<sup>882</sup> In addition to this, demands are made for the maintenance of bridges, fortresses, and ‘swamp crossings’ (*transitus paludium*).<sup>883</sup> All of this is to say that Charles’ concern was wider than simply preventing viking raids up-river: it was about asserting royal authority in the aftermath of pernicious rebellion, and part of the way in which this was done was to re-emphasise control over routeways. Coupland’s analysis of the Edict determined that there were likely only two instances in which new fortified bridges were constructed, those at Pont-de-l’Arche and Les Pont-de-Cé, and that in other places bridges were

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<sup>878</sup> ASC A 918.

<sup>879</sup> ASC A 919.

<sup>880</sup> *Annales Bertiniani* [AB], in J.L. Nelson (ed.), *The Annals of St-Bertin* (Manchester, 1991), 862, 864; *Edictum Pistense* 864 [EP], in A. Boretius and V. Krause (eds.), *MGH, Capitularia regum Francorum* 2 (Hannover, 1897), no. 273, pp. 310–28.

<sup>881</sup> J. Martindale, ‘Charles the Bald and the Government of the Kingdom of Aquitaine’, in M.T. Gibson and J.L. Nelson (eds.), *Charles the Bald: Court and Kingdom* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 3–14; for his deposition: AB 864.

<sup>882</sup> AB 857; he also allied with the Bretons against Charles in AB 859.

<sup>883</sup> EP 27.

repaired or temporary bridges were built to meet immediate needs.<sup>884</sup> When this is seen in conjunction with the king's other measures to assert royal authority over networks of communication and transportation, we see that fortifying bridges was but one tool in a wider ideological repertoire.

### III: *Routeways, Fortresses, and Territorial Formation*

In the preceding discussion, the campaigns of Edward the Elder were considered, and it was noted that Edward's campaigns were oriented around the construction, restoration and defence of fortifications and receiving submissions from those who were understood to 'pertain' to a specific settlement, and these tended to be settlements that occupied significant fording-places: in the East Midlands, Hertford (the Lea), Leicester (the Soar), Northampton (the Nene), Bedford (the Ouse), Cambridge (the Cam), Huntingdon (the Ouse), Buckingham (the Ouse), Stamford (the Welland), Tempsford (the Ouse), and Towcester (the Tove) were particularly important. Some of these fording-places were also oriented along major roads, such as Leicester, on the junction of the Fosse Way and Watling Street; Huntingdon and Stamford on Ermine Street; and Towcester on Watling Street. Northampton is less than three miles east of Watling Street, and Buckingham is about seven miles west of Watling Street. Elsewhere we see a similar pattern during Edward's reign. In Essex, Maldon was fortified by the mouth of the Chelmer; Colchester on the Colne was captured and restored; and Witham was fortified on the River Brain, which flowed into the Blackwater before flowing into the sea. Witham and Colchester also lie on the Roman road leading from London to East Anglia. In the west, Æthelflæd restored Tamworth on the Thame and lying upon Watling Street, and constructed fortresses at Bridgnorth on the Severn, Stafford on the Trent, Warwick on the Avon, and captured Derby on the Derwent. In the northwest, Æthelflæd restored Chester on

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<sup>884</sup> Simon Coupland, 'The Fortified Bridges of Charles the Bald', *Journal of Medieval History* 17 (1991), pp. 1–12.

the Dee, and fortified Runcorn on the Mersey, as well as the hillfort of Eddisbury on the Roman road from Chester to Manchester. After Æthelflæd's death, Edward received the submission of Tamworth and built fortresses at Nottingham, one on either side of the Trent. In the northwest, he fortified Thelwall on the Mersey, Manchester on the Roman road from Chester to York, Rhuddlan on the mouth of the Clwyd, and Bakewell on the Wye, a tributary of the Derwent (fig. 14).

Of these fortifications, most of which ford rivers and lie on significant routeways, some fall out of the historical narrative: Towcester, which Edward fortified with a stone wall—suggesting significant strategic and possibly ideological importance—was destined to become a coaching town, and Tempsford is now a village of less than 600 people;<sup>885</sup> *Wigingamere* remains officially unidentified. Many of the others, however, became county towns and lend their name to the wider administrative district. Later legal material discusses the way in which people 'pertain' to fortresses. For instance, in Æthelstan's Grateley decree, the property of thieves and those who failed to attend meetings was to be seized by 'all the senior people pertaining to the *burh*.'<sup>886</sup> However, the narrative evidence of Edward's reign suggests that in regard to performing military service and the way in which people interacted with royal authority, people already 'pertained' to fortresses during his reign. We can see this in 914, when the men of Hereford and Gloucester repelled raiders along the Severn, or, perhaps more interestingly in 910, when the *Chronicle* records that 'Edward succeeded to London and Oxford and to all the lands [and so presumably people] which belonged to them.'<sup>887</sup> This echoes the comments made by Asser in the 890s regarding the men of the hinterlands of Somerton, *Hamton*, and Wilton who rallied to Alfred's

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<sup>885</sup> Tempsford excavations have discovered a tenth-century enclosure: A. Maull and A. Chapman, *A Medieval Moated Enclosure in Tempsford Park*, Bedford Archaeology Monograph 5 (2005), pp. 21–32.

<sup>886</sup> II As. 20.1.

<sup>887</sup> ASC 914, 910.

army before the battle of Edington.<sup>888</sup> There is nothing to suggest that the way in which Edward interacted with the people of the East Midlands was different from how he interacted with people in Wessex or how his sister operated in western Mercia, nor that what he was doing was particularly new. Though Edward did build new fortifications in the East Midlands, he also needed to restore and compel the surrender of fortresses that were there before ever his army arrived. Thus, it is likely that Edward and Æthelflæd were interacting with a landscape of fortifications oriented around important routeways and river crossings that had hinterlands, and which was *already in place by the early tenth century* (and obviously the *burhs* of the east midlands cannot have been built by Alfred). I am not arguing that, for instance, Bedford commanded a territory analogous to Domesday Bedfordshire, but it does seem likely that the process by which territorial units came to be defined in terms of a fortified place along the communication and transportation network, often in relation to a prominent fording place, was already underway by the early-tenth century, if not before.

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<sup>888</sup> Above, p. 35 n. 99.



1. 902/903: Edward's army ravages between 'the dykes [Fleam Ditch and Devil's Dyke] and the Ouse as far as the fens.'
2. 903: Battle of Holme
3. 906: Edward establishes peace with the Northumbrians and East Angles at Tiddingford (approx. location)
4. 907 MR: Æthelflæd restores the burh at Chester
5. 910: Danes ravage around the Severn; Battle of Tettenhall; construction of the burh at *Bremesbyrig* (MR, unidentified)
6. 912 MR: Æthelflæd orders the construction of a burh at Bridgnorth and *Scergeat* (unidentified)
7. 912: Edward fortifies Hertford; camps at Maldon and constructs a burh at Witham
8. 913 MR: Æthelflæd restores Tamworth and constructs a burh at Stafford
9. 913: The *here* of Leicester and Northampton ravages around Hook Norton; they regroup and are repelled after attacking Luton
10. 914 MR: Æthelflæd orders the construction of burhs at Warwick and Eddisbury
11. 914: Raiders on both sides of the Severn repelled by the men of Hereford and Gloucester
12. 914: Edward constructs a burh at Buckingham; receives the submission of Bedford and Northampton
13. 915 MR: Æthelflæd orders the construction of burhs at Runcorn, Chirbury and *Weardbyrig* (unidentified)
14. 915: Edward orders the construction of a burh at Bedford
15. 916 MR: Æthelflæd sends an army to Brecon and captures the king's wife and other hostages
16. 917 MR: Æthelflæd captures Derby
17. 917: The *here* from Leicester and Northampton attacks Towcester and raids around Bernwood Forest and into the vale of Ayelsbury; the armies from Huntingdon and E. Anglia occupy Tempsford and unsuccessfully attack Bedford; an army from East Anglia attacks the recently constructed burh of *Wigingamere* [unidentified]; Edward's army besieges Tempsford and captures it; Edward goes with the army to Passenham and has a stone wall constructed at Towcester; Northampton and all the people up to the Wellend submit to him; Edward captures and restores Huntingdon; the army belonging to Cambridge submits to Edward
18. 917: Edward's army captures Colchester; an army from East Anglia besieges Maldon; Edward comes to Colchester and restores the burh; the East Angles and East Saxons submit.
19. 918 MR: Æthelflæd obtains Leicester
20. 918: Edward builds a burh at Stamford
21. 918: Edward occupies Tamworth; constructs a fortress at Nottingham
22. 919: Edward fortifies Thelwall and Manchester
23. 920: Edward fortifies Nottingham
24. 920: Edward goes into the Peak District and constructs a fortress at Bakewell; receives the submission of the northerners
25. 921: Edward constructs a burh at *Cledemutha* (Rhuddlan)
26. 924: Edward dies at Farndon

**FIGURE 15: TIMELINE OF MILITARY ACTIVITY BETWEEN THE THAMES AND THE HUMBER, 900–924**

#### IV: *Routeways, Interconnected Landscapes, Economics and Hegemony*

The kingdoms that emerged and solidified in the seventh century were not nestled in a single coherent landscape, but rather they spanned across diverse landscapes, incorporating both upland and lowland zones and were strung together along the network of rivers and roads, which I have argued were focal points of royal authority. This is seen, like so much else in Anglo-Saxon history, on a monumental scale during the ‘long eighth century’. Simon Keynes, paraphrasing and amending the comments of the poet Geoffrey Hill, once remarked that Offa was the overlord of the A5 motorway, or in other words, ‘the overlord of Watling Street.’<sup>889</sup> This is only part of the story. Offa was lord of many roads and crossings. At its furthest extent, Offa’s *imperium* encompassed Watling Street, the Fosse Way (perhaps as far south as Glastonbury),<sup>890</sup> Ermine Street (as far north as the Humber), and the Ickniel Way. He also controlled the rivers Trent, Dee, Severn, and the rivers of the Wash, as well as parts of the Thames. One suspects that Mercian activity at Oxford, Benson, and Cookham, and many of the manoeuvres of late-seventh and eighth-century Mercian kings toward Wessex, Surrey, and Kent were aimed at securing the Thames.

The ‘Mercian Supremacy’, then, might be seen as the extension of royal control over these rivers and roads; I suggest that the ascendancy of the Mercian kings and the economic boom of the long eighth century went hand-in-hand. An influential 2005 paper by John Maddicott demonstrated the importance of the Droitwich brine-pits, the rising importance of London and their significance to the development of Mercian power.<sup>891</sup> In addition to Droitwich (and Nantwich) salt, the Mercian kings had the unprecedented ability to bring lead from the Peak District (and perhaps at times the

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<sup>889</sup> Simon Keynes, ‘The Kingdom of the Mercians in the Eighth Century’, in D. Hill and M. Worthington (eds.), *Æthelbald and Offa: Two Eighth-Century Kings of Mercia*, BAR Brit. Ser. 383 (2005), pp. 1–21, at p. 10; commenting on Geoffrey Hill, *Mercian Hymns* (London, 1971), no. 1.

<sup>890</sup> Burghart, ‘The Mercian Polity’, pp. 193–7.

<sup>891</sup> Maddicott, ‘London and Droitwich’.

Mendips), iron from the Forest of Dean, as well as other resources such as spoils from campaigns against the Welsh (slaves, horses, cattle), and bring these resources to market—either the *emporium* (especially London) or interior sites such as Bidford-on-Avon—where they were either exported or, perhaps more frequently, refined and sent back to the interior. This picture allows us to sidestep the vexed question of royal involvement in the foundation of the *emporium* by suggesting that the process was largely symbiotic; royal control over routeways and the construction of fortifications to defend these routeways created conditions for trade to thrive, and kings became rich by levying tolls and exploiting their own considerable landed assets and resources. While Maddicott mostly considers Mercian power and lordship in regard to tolls and their remittance, royal protection over the routes between extraction, refinement, and trading sites would create a compelling context for Mercian hegemony that does not rely entirely on sheer domination; it suggests a hegemony that some might enter into willingly in order to gain access to expanding markets.

So perhaps we should see the Mercian Supremacy as a great Anglo-Saxon ‘customs union’, as the Mercian kings presided over expanding markets by guaranteeing the safety of the routeways and allowing the movement of goods between the east and west. Surely, though, the ability of the Mercian kings to ‘turn off the taps’ and prevent their rivals from participating in this network was a key element in the way in which subordinates were coerced or persuaded to throw in their lot with the Mercian kings. Their ability to do this must have varied, and Offa’s execution of Æthelberht of East Anglia in 794 must have been the most extreme example of someone running up against Mercian sanctions.

The ways in which kings and merchants interacted is also closely related to the themes of royal control as articulated above in respect to routeways. The Laws of Hlothere and Eadric decree, for instance, that if a trader crosses the *mearc*, he must be sworn for by his host, who is to bring the

trader to justice in the case of wrong-doing.<sup>892</sup> The laws also make mention of the king's 'town reeve' (*wicgerefan*) in London, who must have looked after the king's interests at the port, as well as to the *cyngæs sele*, or the king's hall, which may have served as a sort of customs house.<sup>893</sup> The early-eighth century Laws of Ine state that if merchants buy goods 'up country' (*uppe on folce*), then they are to do so before witnesses.<sup>894</sup> Likewise, the Laws of Alfred state that merchants were to establish with the king's reeve who and how many men they would take with them 'up into the country' who would be able to swear oaths before the reeve in a public meeting, if necessary.<sup>895</sup> This suggests that kings were attempting to monitor merchants in their kingdoms, if not control them outright. The key here is that there is provision in the law codes for merchants to enter into formalised relationships with the king through the mediation of an agent such as a reeve; this seems to have granted them access to the hinterlands of the kingdom and given them permission to trade. In the *Voyage of Ohthere*, Ohthere of Halgoland, a Scandinavian merchant, calls Alfred 'his lord' (*his hlaforde*), and he told Alfred of a journey to the land of the Bjarmians and how they could not sail along their coastline because they had not made a treaty with them and would be perceived as enemies (*þa cirðon hie up in on þa ea, for þæm hie ne dorston forþ bi þære ea siglan for unfriþe*).<sup>896</sup> The obverse of a general anxiety towards foreign merchants was the offer of protection to those welcomed into the kingdom. This may be implied by Ohthere calling Alfred his *hlaforde*, and it is also suggested in the Laws of Ine, in which it is stated that 'if a foreigner is slain, the king has two-

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<sup>892</sup> HIE 15.

<sup>893</sup> HIE 16–16.3

<sup>894</sup> Ine 25.

<sup>895</sup> Af. 34.

<sup>896</sup> Lund *et al.*, ed. and trans., *Two Voyagers*: 'Then they turned up into the river, because they dared not sail forward across the river because of *unfriþ*'. The best translation for *unfriþ* in this case is probably 'lack of a treaty'; see: Lund, 'Peace and Non-Peace'; C. Fell, '*Unfrið*: An Approach to a Definition', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society for Northern Research* 21 (1982/3), pp. 85–100; R. Lavelle, 'Towards a Political Contextualization of Peacemaking and Peace Agreements in Anglo-Saxon England', in D. Wolfthal (ed.), *Peace and Negotiation: Strategies for Coexistence in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Turhout, 2000), pp. 39–55.

thirds of the *wergild*, his son or kinsmen the third part.’<sup>897</sup> This is in marked contrast to foreigners who are traveling off the road unannounced who may be taken and killed as thieves.<sup>898</sup> It may be that this protection may have extended to a merchant’s goods or ships as they ventured into the interior to trade in exchange for a toll and/or rights of pre-emption.<sup>899</sup> This is suggestive of the spatial relationship between kings and merchants, the estuarine and coastal trading-sites, and the interior. We see here the sinews of the kingdom, and the means of binding hinterland and coast via routes of communication and exchange. This was bolstered through the interpersonal relationships formed between the king (perhaps via his agents or factors) and the merchants (who may in turn have been acting as factors for someone else, such as a bishop or abbot: remission of tolls for minsters, for example, is surely one way in which the relationship between king and minster was nurtured). Thus, we can see that mercantile contacts, far from existing autonomously, utilised the patronage and support of royal figures with whom merchants entered into formal relationships. It would seem that much of this was predicated upon the king’s territorial supremacy over the hinterlands of the kingdom, leading to his ability to offer protection, and his ensuing right of pre-emption and ability to take (and remit) tolls.

When this is taken into account, the political developments of the late-seventh century become inseparable from economic developments, and the growth of exchange networks, and—perhaps—the rise of the *emporia* should be seen as by-products that were facilitated by increasingly powerful kings whose remit extended across multiple economic and topographic zones and who were able

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<sup>897</sup> Ine 23.

<sup>898</sup> Ine 20.

<sup>899</sup> Kelly, ‘Trading Privileges from Eighth-Century England’, *EME* 1, 1 (1992), pp. 3–28; N. Middleton, ‘Early Medieval Port Customs, Tolls and Controls on Foreign Trade’, *EME* 13, 4 (2005), pp. 313–58; Sawyer, ‘Kings and Merchants’, in P.H. Sawyer and I.N. Wood (eds.), *Early Medieval Kingship* (Leeds, 1977), pp. 139–58.

to facilitate and preside over the movement of people and goods through the networks of their interpersonal connections.

One final example will demonstrate the relationship between control over communication networks, economic connections, and royal power. The monumental Mercian sites at Brixworth and Northampton, those great symbols of Mercian power and ambition in the eighth and ninth centuries, lie on the nexus of the Nene and Watling Street. As the Nene flows upriver through Northamptonshire, it passes Raunds and Higham Ferrers, where there is evidence of intensified agricultural processing in the form of a late eighth-century malting oven that McKerracher has described as being monumental and deliberately Romanising, as well as a large assemblage of Ipswich ware and fragments of lava querns.<sup>900</sup> Across the river from Raunds is the hillfort of Irthlingborough, which is referenced in a confirmation of Offa's dated 787x796.<sup>901</sup> Sixteen miles upriver are the sites at Northampton and Brixworth, two of the principal evocations of 'imperial' Mercia. Brixworth possessed an extraordinary basilican church—probably from the mid-eighth century—that recalled both Roman and Carolingian monumentality.<sup>902</sup> Six miles to the south is Northampton on a promontory over the River Nene, which boasted a large eighth-century timber structure that was replaced in the early-ninth century by a stone structure. Originally, the excavators considered the function of the hall to be domestic, and it was suggested that the hall

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<sup>900</sup> Higham Ferrers: A. Hardy, *et al*, *Death and Taxes: The Archaeology of a Middle Saxon Estate Centre at Higham Ferrers, Northamptonshire* (Oxford, 2007); McKerracher, 'Agricultural Development', pp. 302–15; M. Audouy, *Raunds: the origin and growth of a midland village, AD 450–1500: excavations in north Raunds, Northamptonshire 1977–87* (Oxford, 2009); P. Blinkhorn *et al.*, *The Ipswich Ware Project: Ceramics, Trade and Society in Middle Saxon England* (London, 2012), p. 83.

<sup>901</sup> S. 1184; Blair, *Building*, pp. 209–10.

<sup>902</sup> R. Gem, 'Architecture of the Anglo-Saxon Church, 735 to 870: From Archbishop Ecgberht to Archbishop Ceolnoth', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 146 (1993), pp. 29–66. Also D. Parsons and D.S. Sutherland, *The Anglo-Saxon Church of All Saints Brixworth Northamptonshire: Survey, Excavation and Analysis, 1972–2010* (Oxford, 2013).

served as a Carolingian-inspired royal palace.<sup>903</sup> Blair, however, has argued for a likely monastic context at Northampton.<sup>904</sup> It seems that the cluster at Northampton/Brixworth, Raunds and Irthlingborough represented an important junction of river and road transportation and exchange, where eastern goods, represented by the Ipswich ware recovered from Raunds, as well as materials produced or refined at Higham Ferrers or Raunds, left the river systems of the North Sea province to travel along Watling Street, either to London in the southeast or the Mercian heartlands of the upper Trent in the northwest; it is also possible that goods could pass Northampton *en route* to Droitwich and Bidford or the valley of the Cherwell. The imperial structures at Brixworth and Northampton would serve as monumental reminders of Mercian authority over this important crossroads. As a whole, this demonstrates the connection between Mercian Supremacy, the economic intensification of the ‘long eighth century’, and the way in which this symbiotic development was enabled by control over routeways and communicated through powerful ideological symbols of royal power. Thus, we see the importance of political hegemonies spanning topographical and ecological regions and the diverse landscapes of Anglo-Saxon England. The imperative of kings to defend the routeways that brought resources to refineries and markets and men to assemblies is an important aspect of Anglo-Saxon kingship throughout the period, and this speaks to the ideological significance associated with both the routeways themselves and prominent sites along their course, be they minsters, fortresses, royal vills, meeting-places or barrows associated with royal dynasties. It is this context that makes Æthelred’s failure to be defend routeways, as described in chapter six, so consequential in the eyes of his detractors.

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<sup>903</sup> Williams *et al.*, *Middle Saxon Palaces at Northampton* (Northampton, 1985), pp. 31–6; Gem, ‘Architecture of the Anglo-Saxon Church’, at pp. 39–40.

<sup>904</sup> Blair, ‘Palaces or Minsters? Northampton and Cheddar reconsidered’, *ASE* 25 (1996), pp. 97–121, at p. 104.

## Conclusion: Final Thoughts and Directions for Further Study

By emphasising routeways and specific places in the landscape, this thesis has brought into question the traditional distinction between ‘core-and-periphery’. Chapter three discussed the significance of seemingly peripheral places such as moors, forests or islands, and ‘liminal’ places such as fords and river-crossings and noted that these were precisely the places where the active processes that communicated collective identity took place. In this way, the heaths and moors and fens were just as significant as the fertile valleys. What was discussed generally in chapter three can be seen in specific landscapes in chapters four through six. All three landscapes under study were in some ways ‘peripheral’: the eastern lowland zone was far from the royal courts that competed over the region; the very character of the fenlands that made up much of the core of the region were described by contemporaries in terms of waste and desert. At the same time, we have seen the economic productivity of the region and its integration with significant routes of communication, both by land and river. Furthermore, it has been shown that the region was central to Bede’s narrative in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Moreover, the centrality that powerful minsters in the region could themselves exert has also been demonstrated. Far from peripheral, the minsters of the eastern lowland zone were at the very heart of a wider North Sea economic zone and a monastic network that extended all the way to Faremoutiers-en-Brie.<sup>905</sup>

Chapter five showed that the region between the Dee and Conwy, while ‘peripheral’ to the heartland of the Mercian kingdom in the upper Trent, the Venedotians in Gwynedd-proper, and the Powysians south of the Dee, was full of ideological significance and was fully abreast of wider changes taking place in the eighth- and ninth-century landscape. Furthermore, it was at the ‘centre’

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<sup>905</sup> Thomas, ‘Rivers of Gold?’, pp. 97–118; Yorke, *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses* (London, 2003), pp. 27–8.

of a wider Irish Sea zone. The significance of the region in providing Mercian kings a conduit to the Irish Sea should not be underestimated; and this almost certainly was the driving impetus behind the restoration or construction of the fortresses in the vicinity during the time of Æthelflæd and Edward the Elder, and it must also have played a significant part in the machinations of Edgar's court in 973.

Finally, the landscape of chapter six, a sparsely populated upland contested between the Mercian and West Saxon dynasties between the seventh and ninth centuries, developed significant ideological connections with the West Saxon dynasty—perhaps *because* it was so intensely contested. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, it seems to have been incorporated into a royal itinerary, where its upland forested situation may have led to the landscape being particularly valued for its hunting.

It is clear that the question of 'core-and-periphery' is entirely relative. Individual landscapes need to be examined in political, ideological, economic, and social terms so that the question of 'peripheral in relation to whom?' can be addressed in each circumstance. This is not to say that all landscapes were equal. From the little we know of the itineraries of tenth- and eleventh-century kings, it seems that they rarely ventured north, and they surely had more relationships which were easier to reassert and maintain in Hampshire, Dorset and Wiltshire than they did in, say, Northumbria, but perhaps the mechanisms by which their authority was asserted and those relationships were maintained were not so different. This would benefit from further study.

*Rethinking Early Medieval Frontiers: A Suggestion for Further Study*

Emphasising routeways and connections between specific places, or clusters of places, and the ideology surrounding the defence of routeways makes it difficult to determine static cores and peripheries. The result is more 'nodal', perhaps. In the early ninth century, the cluster of

Tamworth-Repton-Lichfield was clearly a Mercian core, but so was the cluster of Brixworth-Northampton-Irthlingborough. They were linked to each other via Watling Street. Keynes memorably compared the Mercian kingdom to a grasping octopus with its ‘head’ as the valley of the upper Trent, but perhaps a better analogy is the many-headed hydra (indeed, the emergence of a new ‘head’ around Gloucester and Winchcombe as a later Mercian core suggests the possibility of extending the analogy further).<sup>906</sup> Each nodal cluster defines its own core and periphery, both in economic terms (*e.g.* its pasturage, forest, and so forth), and in social terms (*e.g.* if it preserved a local identity), and kings interacted with them by asserting and reasserting an interpersonal relationship. An example might be the *Ordinance Concerning the Dunsæte*, as discussed in chapter two. In those parts of the country where charters proliferated, the confirmation of charters may have had much the same effect. Furthermore, one of the chief problems is the tendency to see the ‘core’ as homogenous and undifferentiated, in opposition to dynamic peripheries, rather than seeing all of society as an interconnected web of multiple cores, each with their own periphery. I believe that this is the long legacy of medieval frontier studies, which in itself reflects a tendency to view questions of early medieval territory and ‘state formation’ through the lens of the nation state and its institutions.<sup>907</sup>

Thus, I would suggest a reading that is predicated more by relationships than by institutions, and in which the dynamics of core-and-periphery can be teased out *everywhere*. This makes sense in a society that demonstrated a high degree of local heterogeneity and regional particularism, but in which population density was low, transhumance was of pivotal economic importance, and royal courts were peripatetic. I believe this is why routeways were of such paramount significance, and

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<sup>906</sup> Keynes, ‘Changing Faces: Offa, King of Mercia’, *History Today*, 14, 11 (1990), pp. 14–19, at p. 17.

<sup>907</sup> For frontiers as an interpretive ‘lens’: Kulikowski, above, p. 25 n. 61.

one might perhaps say that the king's *frið*—in itself articulated in terms of personal relationships—did not emanate out from a static centre, but it travelled by means of the king and his agents along the rivers and roads, constantly being reasserted to ensure its proper maintenance lest it flicker and go dark.<sup>908</sup> This provides the means to rethink our understanding of medieval frontiers by adopting a more amorphous structure of power and authority in the landscape that was not equal everywhere: the intensity, consistency, and visibility of political control could vary and wax and wane. Thus, it is not so much a polity with equally distributed authority up to an established border, but nor is it a polity that gradually fades away at the margins. It is more like a constellation.

This thesis has been in no way exhaustive. This provides an avenue for further study that examines the relative cores and peripheries of territorial entities at different scales, such as tenurial units, *pays*, administrative units, polities, and cultural regions. How were their relative cores and peripheries defined, and how did they relate to wider territorial, economic, social, and political structures? Furthermore, other regions could have been studied, for instance the area between Bath and Glastonbury in the eighth and ninth centuries; the region of Hertfordshire, Middlesex and London, and Surrey also would have made compelling case-studies. The landscapes that were examined could be followed through into later periods: the eastern zone in the tenth and eleventh century in particular would have been interesting. Indeed, an examination of the way in which twelfth-century historians perceived the landscape based on their understanding of the Anglo-Saxon past would also be of great interest. Furthermore, comparative elements could have been introduced: the means of communicating identity elsewhere in Britain, but also in Scandinavia and on the Continent.<sup>909</sup> This provides considerable scope for further research. Perhaps most

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<sup>908</sup> The imagery I borrow from J. Allen, *Lost Geographies of Power* (Oxford, 2003).

<sup>909</sup> A good starting point here would be Wormald, 'Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship: Some further thoughts', in P.E. Szarmach (ed.), *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture* (Kalamazoo, MI, 1986), pp. 151–83; Reuter, 'The Making of

significantly, taking a holistic view of the landscape, focusing on how the landscape was perceived, and emphasising interpersonal relationships over a model predicated upon states and their jurisdictions and institutions, may provide a useful way to rethink the concept of frontiers in early medieval society.

This thesis, then, is not the final word, but a starting point. This work has sought to demonstrate that in Anglo-Saxon society practice and perception were entwined, and the landscape was both a stage and medium in its own right. The evocation and memorialisation of places asserted and maintained collective identity. Conflict—and the perception of conflict—was a potent way to mobilise such sentiment, forming solidarities and locating ‘others.’ One might recall Ernest Renan, who determined that *la nation est une grande solidarité constituée par le sentiment des sacrifices qu’on a faits et de ceux qu’on est disposé de faire encore*.<sup>910</sup> Renan has a controversial legacy, but it is notable that his understanding of ‘the nation’ was not ethnic; he argued that a nation was defined not through its common descent and ethnicity, but through collective action and the perception of solidarity, writing that a nation was composed of people united through the memory of the past and the anticipation of the future: *avoir fait de grandes choses ensemble, vouloir en faire encore*.<sup>911</sup> The landscape provided a *locus* for this: a set of places where historical narratives converged, were vested with meaning, and contextualised the interactions that asserted and

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England and Germany, 850–1050: Points of Comparison and Difference’, in *Medieval Politics and Modern Mentalities*, pp. 284–99; Campbell, ‘Archipelagic Thoughts: Comparing Early Medieval Politics in Britain and Ireland’, in Baxter *et al.* (eds.), *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald* (Farnham, 2009), pp. 47–63; Charles-Edwards, ‘Early medieval kingships’, pp. 28–39; Molyneux, *Formation*, pp. 231–49; the papers in Griffiths (ed.), *The Making of Kingdoms, ASSAH 10* (1999).

<sup>910</sup> E. Renan, *Qu’est-ce qu’une Nation?* (Paris, 1882): ‘The nation is a great solidarity constituted by the sense of the sacrifices we have made and those which we are prepared to make again.’

<sup>911</sup> Renan, *Qu’est-ce qu’une Nation?*: ‘Having done great things together and wishing to do more.’ Or as Karl Deutsch, *Nationalism and its Alternatives* (New York, NY, 1969) memorably put it: ‘a group of people united by a mistaken view about the past and a hatred of their neighbours.’ cf. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1991), pp. 199–201.

maintained collective identity. Thus, through both practice and perception, the memory of a common past and the vision of a shared future was articulated in the landscape.

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