View metadata, citation and similar papers at core.ac.uk
brought to you by CORE
provided by Winchester Research Repository

Ryan Lavelle

Perceiving and Personifying Status and Submission in Pre-Viking England: Some Observations on a Few Early Hostages

Preliminary version of a paper in M. Bennett and K. Weikert (eds), *Hostage-Taking and Hostage Situations: The Medieval Precursor to a Modern Phenomenon* (London: Routledge, forthcoming)

Recent studies on the use of hostages in the middle ages, including the papers published elsewhere in this volume, show a range of issues to be addressed when we try to understand why one or more human beings might be handed over to others: the nature of the political relationships entailed in the giving or taking of hostages, including those across perceived ethnic boundaries; the value of hostages as a symbolic currency, including in cases where the gender of the hostages (or indeed that of their recipient) made a difference; the norms and expectations of norms of behaviour, including how hostages were treated—or at least how they might expect to be treated—including whether an explicit or implicit threat is of major significance or just a passing detail. I hope to show in the following discussion that these are all issues which are relevant to the study of the Anglo-Saxon policies prior to the Viking *adventus* of the ninth century.

In common with many of my fellow contributors' approaches, this paper begins with Adam Kosto's recent monograph on medieval hostageship. Covering the 'medieval millennium', Kosto displays an understandable interest in change across time—he notes a difference in practice from modern hostageship, not least in the fact that although the modern hostage shares some similarities in theory, the medieval hostage differs somewhat markedly, not least because of the apparent liberty with which they were given by comparison with modern hostages. Kosto observes changes in practice through the middle ages, too. Commenting on the increase in the use of female hostages in from around the eleventh century, Kosto notes a shift out of a 'framework of family and alliance' into something that 'was at once more de-individualized, commercialized, and bureaucratic'.[1] This essay is not concerned with commerce and bureaucracy. Kosto's approach is useful, however, as is with that 'framework

[1] A. J. Kosto, *Hostages in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 21.

of family and alliance' that the *few* pre-Viking Age hostages on which the essay focuses come in.

My own work on later Anglo-Saxon hostages, published around a decade ago, broadly addressed the ninth to the eleventh centuries, concentrating on the practical elements of the personified guarantee.[2] Though finding the arguments of Kosto, as well as those of Paul Kershaw,[3] to be persuasive in making a case for the underlying sense of authority and status in early medieval hostage-taking and in the bestowing of hostages, I tended toward an interpretation of an underlying threat of violence. There is perhaps an eminent practicality in the use of hostages in an Anglo-Saxon political scene on which the Viking *adventus* had made a lasting impact, in a society where groups holding different expectations needed to make agreements.[4] Indeed, justifying the upper time limit of his 2003 article on Carolingian hostages, Kosto notes a similar phenomenon in Francia, with Frankish hostage 'importers' becoming hostage 'exporters' (to Vikings) after 840.[5]

Such an interpretation need not mean that the hostage should be seen as having suddenly become a tool of brutal reality because of the circumstances of the Viking Age; the status of hostages gave them inherent value. In what follows, though, I wish to make a case for the inherent status of hostages in an earlier political society which, in many ways was not too dissimilar from that laid out in the *Críth Gablach* ('Branched Purchase') lawcode of Ireland, dating from around the turn of the eighth century, by which the status of rulers could be determined by the hostages who they held and indeed where they kept them.[6] In some ways my discussion here supplements my recent work on chapter 70.1 of the lawcode of Ine of Wessex, in which I make a case for the receipt of renders—enumerated in a long and apparently rather arbitrary list—being associated with tributary (i.e. British) subjects.[7] As Thomas Charles-

---

[2] R. Lavelle, "The Use and Abuse of Hostages in Later Anglo-Saxon England," *Early Medieval Europe* 14 (2006): 269-96.

[3] P. Kershaw, *Peaceful Kings: Peace, Power and the Early Medieval Political Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 15-22.

[4] Lavelle, "Use and Abuse of Hostages," 286-92.

[5] A. J. Kosto, "Hostages in the Carolingian World," *Early Medieval Europe* 11 (2002): 126, n. 11.

[6] *Crith Gablach*, §§32 and 46: D. A. Binchy (ed.), *Críth Gablach* (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1941), 18 and 23; trans. E. MacNeill, "Ancient Irish Law: the Law of Status or Franchise," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy, Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature* 36 (1921-4): 301 and 306.

[7] R. Lavelle, "Ine 70.1 and Royal Provision in Anglo-Saxon Wessex," in *Kingship, Legislation and Power in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. G. R. Owen-Crocker and B. W. Schneider (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2013), 259-74.

Edwards, amongst others, has noted, such tributary renders were part of the expectations of Insular kingship.[8] It is appropriate to consider that if Anglo-Saxon kings were like other Insular rulers in operating on a model of the receipt of render from subject kings, the receipt of hostages played a part in the milieu of this kingship. The Insular evidence outside England is rich with examples, such as the Welsh *Historia Brittonum*'s portrayal of Roman emperors as receivers of hostages ('obsides') and tributes ('censum', lit. 'tax') from the Britons.[9] Basing a reading of Welsh kingship on Irish clientship, Charles-Edwards notes the demand of 'sureties, *meichiau,* to guarantee the payment of [an overlord's] tribute, *mechteyrnged*.'[10] The other Welsh term for a personal surety is *gwystl* (see below), and it may be demonstrative of the sophistication of such systems of clientship that more than word exists to denote it. Similarly, in pre-ninth-century Irish legal practice, the *aitire*, 'between-man', was distinguished from a *gíall*, a party more clearly identifiable as a hostage, in that what mattered from a legal perspective was the *potential* hostageship of the *aitire*, which could be claimed for ten days by a *muire/muiredach* (the Irish equivalent of the Welsh *mechteyrn*?) in cases of non-payment of compensation following a dispute.[11]

While Anglo-Saxon sources may not reveal such customary links between hostage-payment mechanisms and tribute or legal compensation payments,[12] it is still appropriate to start from the position that, just as elsewhere in the Insular world, the hostages reported in early and middle Anglo-Saxon sources are linked in some way to the status of rulers. The hostages can thus reveal something of that royal status.

The structure of this paper is empirically determined by the few examples of hostages for whom evidence survives from early and middle Anglo-Saxon England. Taking each of these examples in turn, the political, social and cultural context of the presentation of each of the

---

[8] T. M. Charles-Edwards, "Early Medieval Kingships in the British Isles," in *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, ed. S. Bassett (London: Leicester University Press, 1989), 28-33; *Wales and the Britons, 350 -1064* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 295-6 and 513-14.

[9] *Historia Brittonum*, ch. 19, in *British History and the Welsh Annals*, ed. and trans. John Morris (Chichester: Phillimore, 1980), 22 and 63. For discussion of this as a portrayal 'in early medieval terms' and the interpretation of *censum* as tribute, see Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 323.

[10] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 322.

[11] B. Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), 103-4.

[12] Though a hostage perhaps blurred with a personal surety in clause 5 of the later Anglo-Saxon *Alfred-Guthrum* lawcode (*Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, ed. F. Liebermann, 3 vols (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1903-16), I, 128 (text); trans. *English Historical Documents, Vol. 1: 500 -1042*, ed. D. Whitelock (London: Routledge, 2nd edn, 1979) [hereafter *EHD 1*], 417). See Lavelle, "Use and Abuse of Hostages," 291-2.

hostages (or sets of hostages) will be addressed, in order to consider the significance of their status. Thereafter, the implications of that status are explored in terms of the possible evidence for hostageship in the early medieval landscape. However, a discussion of the early medieval terminology is first appropriate.

As Thomas Charles-Edwards has pointed out, the fact that the term for base clientship in Irish law, *gíallnae*, was the same as that for hostageship emphasises the status of a king's relationship to his subject kings.[13] There is etymological similarity of the Old English term for hostage, *gīsl*, to the Irish *gíall* and the Welsh *gwystl*, terms which all included broader senses of the surety/ pledge; the same Latin term, *obses*, is used by Insular Latin writers as by other European Latin sources, so some common ground in the range of conditions of usage can reasonably be expected.[14] Although obviously common terminology cannot mean absolute comparability, the manner in which hostages appear, with some regularity, in circumstances in which peace was made or submission sought in Anglo-Saxon England suggests that the potential effectiveness of hostages was understood by Anglo-Saxons as much as by their Celtic and Frankish contemporaries. This made hostages a tool which could operate across ethnic boundaries but perhaps in the process of investigation, something may yet be revealed of the Insular roots of Anglo-Saxon kingship.

The available corpus of examples is not large. Four pre-ninth century references to hostageship are identified through the vernacular word *gīsl* or the Latin *obses*: (i) A letter from Bishop Wealdhere of London to Archbishop Berhtwold of Canterbury;[15] (ii) Hostages held by Queen Cynewise of the Mercians in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*;[16] (iii) The 'Titus' or

---

[13] T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 341-3.

[14] Lavelle, "Use and Abuse of Hostages," 270. For *gisl*, see the *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus* <http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/dict/indices/headwordsindexg.html > (accessed 13 May 2015); for *gíall*, *Dictionary of the Irish Language: Based mainly on Old and Middle Irish Materials*, ed. C. J. Sverdrup Marstrander *et al.* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1913-1976), available in a corrected edition as the *Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language*, ed. G. Toner *et al.*, <http://www.dil.ie/>, G, column 78 (accessed 13 May 2015); *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru: A Dictionary of the Welsh Language*, ed. R. J. Thomas, 4 vols (Cardiff: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1950-2002), II, 1789; for the synonym *mechiau* (noted above, 00), see III, 2407.

[15] P. Chaplais, "The Letter from Bishop Wealdhere of London to Archbishop Brihtwold of Canterbury: The Earliest Original 'Letter Close' extant in the West," in *Medieval Scribes, Manuscripts and Libraries: Essays Presented to N. R. Ker*, ed. M. Parkes and A. Watson (London, 1978), 22-3; *EHD 1*, 792 -3.

[16] Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum: Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. ed. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), III.24, 288-95.

'Jerusalem' scene on the Franks Casket;[17] and (iv) The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*'s 757 entry detailing the fight between Cyneheard and Cynewulf.[18] A further set of evidence is considered at the end of this paper, (v) the evidence for hostageship recorded in place-names and occasional charter bounds, which might have an early- to mid-Saxon context.

Although examples i–iv vary in terms of both the details of the hostage situation and in terms of the geographical context, with two related to Southumbria and two to Northumbria, some initial points can be drawn from them. For one matter, they demonstrate that as in Ireland and Wales, hostageship was (logically) used in interactions between those who shared the same cultural values and was not a tool whose utility lay in dealing with outside groups. Secondly, when considered collectively, they help us to understand the association of hostages with the status of their holder.

i) *Bishop Wealdhere's Letter*

The earliest known reference to hostageship in the Anglo-Saxon period is probably less a reference to a real 'hostage situation' than an indication that such circumstances existed and that the author was familiar enough with them to allude to them. The reference is in a Latin letter of 704 or 705 from Bishop Wealdhere of London to Berhtwald, Archbishop of Canterbury, stating the bishop's position as a temporal arbitrator for the East Saxons and West Saxons. The bishop's words (probably his own autographed words, as Pierre Chaplais observed) are thus:

> I can by no means reconcile them, and become, as it were [*quasi*], a hostage of peace [*obses pacis*], unless a very great amount of intercourse takes place between us, and this I will not and dare not do unless you wish it and give us permission.[19]

[17] London, British Museum: Britain, Prehistory and Europe 1867,0120.1. L. Webster, "The Franks Casket," [catalogue no.70] in *The Making of England: Anglo-Saxon Art and Culture, AD 600-900*, ed. L. Webster and J. Backhouse (London, 1991), 101-3, and *The Franks Casket*, British Museum Objects in Focus (London: The British Museum Press, 2012).

[18] *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* s.a. 755 (= 757): *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel with Supplementary Extracts from the Others*, ed. C. Plummer, 2 vols (Oxford, 1892-9), I, 46-9; trans. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: a Revised Translation*, ed. D. Whitelock, with D. C. Douglas and S. I. Tucker (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1961; rev. 1965), 30-1.

[19] 'Debeam q[uia] nullo modo possum inter illos reconciliare et quasi obses pacis fieri nisi maximum communionis consortium inter nos misceatur q[uod] nec uolo nec ausus sum agree nisi tue licentie uoluntas adnuerit'. Chaplais, 'Letter', 22 (text); *EHD 1*, 793 (trans.).

The letter shows, as Paul Kershaw has recently noted, a wish to arbitrate, and recognition of the need that negotiation should take place prior to formal peace agreements.[20] There is precedent here: Berhtwald's immediate predecessor, Archbishop Theodore, had made peace between the Mercians and Northumbrians in 679 under circumstances suggestive of feud,[21] so the notion of a bishop standing as a peacemaker could hardly have been beyond the interests of Archbishop Berhtwald. However, Wealdhere was at odds with his archbishop's prohibition of communion with the West Saxons, who had not yet agreed with an archiepiscopal decree on the ordination of bishops.[22]

The use of *quasi* may suggest that here *obses* was figurative, consciously echoing Late Antique texts, perhaps St Jerome's fourth-century *Life* of Paul of Thebes, the first hermit (a figure not unknown in pre-Viking England),[23] a text which treats fruit from palm trees offered by a curious desert creature as 'quasi pacis obsides'.[24] Although an object here is a *pledge* of peace,[25] the notion of *obses* as a person is not lost. Wealdhere was evidently aware of this metaphor and probably is not averse to the irony of relating earthly rulers to creatures of the desert—perhaps a little wink to his archbishop? Wealdhere's celebrated contemporary, Abbot Aldhelm of Malmesbury (a figure discussed elsewhere in this volume by Katherine Barker), also made literary allusions to Jerome's *Life* of Paul of Thebes,[26] and it may not be coincidental

[20] Kershaw, *Peaceful Kings*, 243-4.

[21] Bede, *HE*, IV.21, 400-1.

[22] N. P. Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury: Christ Church from 597 to 1066* (Leicester, 1984), 80; C. Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils c.650–c.850* (London, 1995), 14 and 260; Chaplais, "Letter," 3-5.

[23] As well as the appearance in Aldhelm's work, discussed here Paul is depicted in Northumbria on the Ruthwell Cross. See F. Orton and I. Wood, with C. A. Lees, *Fragments of History: Rethinking the Ruthwell and Bewcastle Monuments* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 183-90.

[24] Cf. Jerome, *Vita Sancti Pauli*, in *Patrilogia Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne, 217 vols (Paris, 1844-64), XXIII, ch. 6: 'palmarum fructus eidem ad uiaticum, quasi pacis obsides, offerebat' (I am grateful to Adam Kosto for this reference).

[25] For later Anglo-Saxon references to hostageship as metaphorical guarantee, see Mary's appointment by God 'as a surety in this world' (*to gisle on middangearde*) in R. Morris (ed.), *The Blickling Homilies*, Early English Text Society Old Ser. 58 (Oxford, 1874), 8-9, and William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum: The Deeds of the English Kings*, I, ed. R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), ch. 141, 228-9.

[26] Aldhelm, *De Virginitate*, in prose, ch. XXVIII, and verse, lines 774-96, in *Aldhelmi Opera*, ed. R. Ehwald, MGH Auctores antiquissimi 15 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1919), 265 and 385-7; trans. M. Lapidge and M. Herren, *Aldhelm: the Prose Works* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1979), 87-8 and M. Lapidge and J. L. Rosier, *Aldhelm: the Poetic Works* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985), 120; for further

that Chaplais comments on the similarities between Wealdhere's accentual rhythm and that of Aldhelm. While Chaplais notes that Wealdhere's Latin 'is not faultless', his 'vocabulary is none the worse for being more sober than that of his contemporary Aldhelm'.[27] Such allusions as that to the *obses pacis* could hardly have been without value in the meta-textual games which evidently developed in early Christian correspondence in England. A further layer of meaning may be apparent in the allusion, if Wealdhere's name was deliberately an Old English rendering of the Continental *Waltharius*, a legendary hostage in the court of Attila in the fifth century, and the subject of European poems of the early middle ages, including in a *c.*1000 manuscript fragment of Old English.[28] Given Alcuin's slightly later rebuking of those in the church who paid more attention to heroic tales than those of Christ, if Wealdhere's alluded to a heroic namesake whose reputation circulated around Europe, it would not have been out of place in the early eighth-century episcopal office.

We need not expect the two possible allusions, one pious, the other seemingly secular, to have been mutually exclusive. Neither should the fact that they are allusions lead to a minimalist reading of hostageship in this period, attributing an understanding of hostageship to the world of Late Antiquity alone, thus leading to a conclusion the state of hostageship which Wealdhere refers to may not be taken as evidence for its existence in early eighth-century England. But of course we know that hostages were used at other points in the pre-Viking period, and a specific vernacular reference to 'peace hostages', *friðgislas*, albeit outside our period, in the tenth-century (or possibly eleventh-century) *Ordinance of the Dunsæte*, again in a reference to cross-border communication,[29] suggests that the allusion to Late Antiquity was incidental to the circumstances that Wealdhere evoked rather than central to the message that he evidently intended to convey. Notwithstanding whether he slipped in a reference to heroic

---

discussion of Aldhelm, see Katherine Barker, this volume, 000.

[27] Chaplais, "Letter from Bishop Wealdhere," 19 and 18 (cited in order of quotation).

[28] Waldere, in *Old English Minor Heroic Poems*, ed. J. Hill, Durham Medieval and Renaissance Texts 2 (Durham and Toronto: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies; 3rd edn, 2009), 39–41; Peter S. Baker, *Honour, Exchange and Violence in Beowulf* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2011), 35–7, addresses the reputation of honour of the protagonist in the more extensive Continental Latin version of the poem.

[29] *Ordinance of the Dunsæte*, ch. 9: Liebermann (ed.), *Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, I, 378; trans. F. Noble, *Offa's Dyke Reviewed*, ed. M. Gelling, British Archaeological Reports British Ser. 114 (Oxford, 1983), 109. A recent review of the tenth-century context of the treaty is M. Fordham, 'Peacekeeping and Order on the Anglo-Welsh Frontier in the Early Tenth Century', *Midland History* 32 (2007): 1-18; George Molyneaux suggests a later date in "The Ordinance Concerning the *Dunsæte* and the Anglo-Welsh Frontier in the Late Tenth and Eleventh Centuries," *Anglo-Saxon England* 40 (2011): 249–72.

poetry, an eighth-century bishop of London may have been expected to throw out Latin phrases from Late Antique texts to supplement the more common Biblical allusions, but Wealdhere may just as easily have been thinking in the vernacular, of a *frið-gisl*, when he composed that part of his letter to his superior.[30] Whatever the case, even if Wealdhere did not envisage himself taking the formal role of a hostage, the 'peace hostage' was at least a familiar enough motif for Wealdhere to invoke in communication with his archbishop.

ii) A Northumbrian as hostage in Bede's Historia ecclesiastica

The reasonable certainty with which we can talk of Wealdhere's familiarity with the use of hostages is provided by the fact that although the second Anglo-Saxon reference to hostages dates from 731 and is thus later than Wealdhere's letter, it refers to the use of hostages in political circumstances in the mid seventh century. In his *Historia ecclesiastica*, Bede refers to Ecgfrith, son of King Oswiu of Northumbria, as a hostage (*obses*) in the court of the Mercian queen, Cynewise, in 655, at the time of the Battle of the *Winwæd*.[31] As well as helping to show the odds stacked against Oswiu, Ecgfrith's hostageship is indicative of the Mercian king Penda's political superiority and of the Mercian queen's independent (or at least quasi-independent) political position, perhaps even as the party who had received Ecgfrith as the hostage in the first place.[32] Bede does not give any indication that the Northumbrians held any hostages given by Penda, although of course if a state of peace had existed prior to Penda's aggression, an exchange of hostages is a plausible scenario, which might help to explain why Bede gives no hint that Ecgfrith had been harmed as a result of his father's actions.

However, any practicality of a lack of *mutual* harm as a result of a guarantee backed up by hostages does not appear to have been the main issue related to the interaction, and it is probably not what piqued Bede's interest in his account of the affair. Oswiu's offer of tribute to Penda in the face of Penda's bellicosity would have made him into a subordinate of the pagan ruler and the subsequent resistance against Penda and his thirty *duces* by Oswiu is thus shown by Bede in the context of overlordship, perhaps demonstrating that Oswiu's defiance against

[30] I am grateful to Catherine Cubitt for this suggestion.

[31] *HE* III.24, 290-1.

[32] Although Cynewise's own family is unidentifiable, Pauline Stafford notes her evident importance in "Political Women in Mercia, Eighth to Early Tenth Centuries," in *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, ed. M. P. Brown and C. Farr (London: Continuum, 2001), 36.

the pagan king was only possible through Christ's support.[33] Bede shows that a pact made with God by Oswiu allowed him to avoid submission to Penda, who was, according to Bede, subjecting Oswiu to 'savage and intolerable attacks' (*acerbas atque intolerabiles … inruptiones*) and who refused any tribute offered by Oswiu. The gift—the *offering*—of his daughter to a nunnery is presented as operating in the same political norms as a personified gift given in the form of a hostage. The pagan's overlordship is thus replaced by that of God.[34] The figure of the hostage in Bede's narrative thus serves to remind his readers, whose interests probably lay in the Northumbrian court,[35] of the expectations of overlordship, perhaps also reminding them—however unpleasant the task may have been for Bede—of their kingdom's earlier subjection to a pagan king.

Considering the fact that Bede gives no indication that Ecgfrith suffered any retribution (and indeed remained alive to take the Northumbrian throne in 670), it is tempting to suggest that hostages were too important as part of a political ritual for such crucial assets as a be-hostaged Ecgfrith held by Penda to be squandered by mutilation or execution but we should not necessarily presume *physical* violence to have been part of the game. In Ireland, as Bart Jaski noted, a party given as surety for tribute payment may lose his social status, his honour price, rather than his life. This was presumably as much a social death as actual execution, and if there is a parallel to be drawn with Oswiu (who had, after all, spent part of his early career in exile in Ireland and/or Scotland[36]), it may be a reason why Bede wished to emphasise Penda's refusal of tribute in his account, which would have meant that Ecgfrith retained his social capital in spite of his father's apparent reneging on the agreement which had led to his son's hostageship.

Moreover, the context and sheer practicality of the situation should be noted, which could also explain Ecgfrith's survival: Penda may simply have perished in battle before he

---

[33] N. J. Higham, *The Convert Kings: Power and Religious Affiliation in Early Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester, 1997), 240-1.

[34] A useful statement of Penda's overlordship is D. Tyler, "An Early Mercian Hegemony: Penda and Overkingship in the Seventh Century," *Midland History* 30 (2005): 1-19. Tyler notes (10) that the Oswiu/Ecgfrith episode indicates the 'possibility' of 'hostage taking as a routine part of Penda's overkingship'; it may be apparent here that I read the occasion as a probability. The link between tribute and overlordship is discussed in R. Lavelle, "Towards a Political Contextualization of Peacemaking in Anglo-Saxon England," in *Peace and Negotiation: Strategies for Coexistence in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. D. Wolfthal (Turnhout, 2000), 47.

[35] See here N. J. Higham, *(Re-)Reading Bede: the Ecclesiastical History in Context* (London: Routledge, 2006), especially 187-212.

[36] Bede, *HE*, III.1, 212-13.

could give orders for harm to be done to any hostages.[37] In any case, the court of the queen and that of her husband may have been at such a distance from each other that an order of harm to Ecgfrith could not have been implemented. Perhaps most importantly (and a little less speculatively), given that Oswiu's nephew, Æthelwald, son of Oswiu's brother Oswald, was fighting on Penda's side, the political situation had inherent complications which may have determined the survival of Ecgfrith. Penda's daughter, Cyneburh, was married to Oswiu's other son and co-ruler, Ealhfrith, prior to the battle,[38] a matter which presumably ensured a complex set of family relations. This female dimension to the network of political relationships may shed light, albeit dimly, on why Ecgfrith had been sent to the queen's court rather than that of the king—or indeed, given the early eighth-century significance of questions of succession to Ecgfrith, why it mattered to record where Ecgfrith had been at this crucial time in the mid seventh century.[39]

iii) The Franks Casket

The portrayal of the sack of Jerusalem on the eighth-century Franks Casket usefully indicates another northern perception of hostages. On this occasion it is a representation of Antiquity.[40] A group of characters exiting the bottom-right panel of the 'Titus' scene on the casket's rear are in close proximity to the runic inscription *GISL* ('hostage'—the use of the singular noun may or may not be significant), presenting us with the earliest vernacular reference to hostageship. Although a number of Late Antique sources could have provided an eighth-century Northumbrian audience with an account of Roman triumph in the portrayal of the sack of Jerusalem upon the Franks Casket, the hostages seem to be an interpretation of the high status captives led off for the Emperor's triumph in Rome and to the circus arena recorded by the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus.[41] However, as Carol Neuman de Vegvar has observed, in a

[37] For discussion of such harm, see Alice Hicklin, this volume, as well as my own "Use and Abuse of Hostages," 292-5.

[38] Bede *HE* III.21, 150-1.

[39] See T. Charles-Edwards, "Anglo-Saxon Kinship Revisited," in *The Anglo-Saxons From the Migration Period to the Eighth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. J. Hines (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1998): 182-4, and B. Yorke, *Rex Doctissumus: Bede and King Aldfrith of Northumbria*, Jarrow Lecture 2009 (Jarrow: Parish of Jarrow, 2009).

[40] Webster, 'Franks Casket', 101-3.

[41] Josephus, *The Jewish War, Books IV -VII*, ed. and trans. H. St. J. Thackeray, Loebs Classical Library (London: Loeb, 1928), VI.5, 496 -7. For knowledge of Josephus' work by Bede (though of course this does not mean that Bede was the Casket artist's intermediary), see A. P. Scheil, *The*

short paper published in *Old English Newsletter* (one of the first publications to specifically focus on Anglo-Saxon hostages), there are no hostages in Josephus's original account of the rebellion's suppression, so the Roman triumph depicted on the Casket was probably perceived in the manner of a Northumbrian ruler asserting overlordship over a subject people.[42] Enslavement, as Matthew Strickland argued, was the fate of the lower classes of society in pre-Conquest warfare, whereas high status warriors faced death—at least in terms of literary expectations—rather than enslavement.[43]

[FIG 1: Image of Franks Casket]

The crux of Neuman de Vegvar's short discussion of the 'Titus' scene was her argument that women were amongst the captives portrayed on the Casket.[44] Although when first researching Anglo-Saxon hostages some twenty years ago, my reading of the ambiguity of the image and the masculinity of other hostages in an Anglo-Saxon context made me rather sceptical of her claim of female hostageship on the Casket,[45] I now appreciate where the identification stemmed from. There is clear positioning of a brooch in a central position on the clothing of the

---

Footsteps of Israel: Understanding Jews in Anglo-Saxon England (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 74. I am grateful to Elton O. S. Medeiros for this reference, and for discussion of this section of the paper.

[42] C. Neuman de Vegvar, "Images of Women in Anglo-Saxon Art: I. Hostages: Women in the 'Titus' Scene on the Franks Casket," *Old English Newsletter* 24:1 (1990): 44-5.

[43] *HE* IV.22, 400-5; M. Strickland, "Slaughter, Slavery or Ransom? The Impact of the Conquest on Conduct in Warfare," in *England in the Eleventh Century: Proceedings of the 1990 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. C. Hicks (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1992), 41-59. See also D. A. E. Pelteret, *Slavery in Early Mediaeval England: From the Reign of King Alfred until the Twelfth Century* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1995), 70-4.

[44] Neuman De Vegvar, "Images of Women." However, Neuman de Vegvar's more recent paper, "Reading the Franks Casket: Contexts and Audiences," in *Intertexts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture Presented to Paul E. Szarmach*, ed. V. Blanton and H. Scheck (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2008), 141-59, makes no reference to female hostageship on the Casket.

[45] R. Lavelle, "Hostages and Peacemaking in Anglo-Saxon England" (University of York, Unpublished MA dissertation, 1997), 46. My "Use and Abuse of Hostages" does not go as far as to establish hostageship as something entirely masculine, though I draw attention to the distinction from marriage as a state of hostageship at 272. It should be noted that as well as the poetic appearance of a female hostage in *Waldere* suggesting that the notion of female hostageship, even if as a love interest in a story, was not culturally alien (above, p. 00), there is later evidence for female hostageship in an Insular context, perhaps even a Cambro-Saxon context if the 'country of strange speech' from which a female hostage might return, was England: see *The Law of Hywel Dda: Law Texts from Medieval Wales*, ed. and trans. D. Jenkins (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1986), 58. How much 'later' than our 'pre-Viking' period is difficult to discern, however, but as the legal compilation dates from the late middle ages rather than from the tenth-century it purports to be linked, any link with pre-Viking practice is not taken beyond this footnote.

person depicted stage left, suggesting that she was female (see figure 1);[46] three of the group, at stage right, all wearing brooches in a right-hand position, are male; the gender of the remaining four is unclear.[47] So far, the single female would tie in with the use of the singular noun *GISL* on the casket's inscription, at the bottom right. But there are other indications of the gendering of the 'Titus' scene which suggest that the identifiably female figures of the scene are not hostages but one or more others may be, and they fit squarely in a milieu of *male* hostageship as an indication of conquest and subordination. It is striking that two parties are identifiably different. One is what Leslie Webster calls a 'muffled' figure, whose face is obscured by a horizontal bar, who Webster identifies with the hostage of the runic inscription.[48] The bar might represent something akin to a slave collar and in that sense might parallel the captivity of a certain class of hostages in contemporary Ireland.[49] Unfortunately the image is a little too ambiguous, as indeed is the figure's gender. Another relevant party is a group of three who are unlikely to be guards, as they carry what look like walking sticks rather than weapons, but they are still well-dressed, and they are nearest to the inscription *GISL*. It could be said, as Neuman De Vegvar argued, that the women in the panel are linked with this group, representing the peace-weaver figures going into enforced marriage, but they may not, *strictu sensu*, be people considered *as* hostages.

In this context, Adam Kosto's interpretation negative reading of pre-eleventh-century female hostageship noted at the start of this paper holds some weight: such a presentation of women in a political context was not hostageship *per se*. It is entirely logical for an Anglo-Saxon audience to include women in this context but there is one further detail that would probably explain why women are significant for this interpretation, which does not require us to consider them as hostages. In Josephus' account, Titus, having killed the feeble and infirm, drew together the rest, who were 'in the prime of life and serviceable' in the 'Court of the Women' in the Temple, a place beyond which only men were permitted to go.[50] While Josephus does not specify whether these captives were male or female, it is a fair bet that the group was *interpreted* as including both. It does not seem unlikely that the eighth-century Northumbrian interpreter of

[46] For the central positioning of brooches on open-fronted cloaks in the eighth and ninth centuries, including in other scenes on the Franks Casket, see G. R. Owen-Crocker, *Dress in Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester: University Press, 1986; revised and enlarged edn, Woodbridge: Boydell, 2004), 148-50.

[47] See Owen-Crocker, *Dress in Anglo-Saxon England*, 169 (fig. 126).

[48] L. E. Webster, "The Iconographic Programme of the Franks Casket," in *Northumbria's Golden Age*, ed. J. Hawkes and S. Mills (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), 227–46.

[49] For discussion of these, see below, 000.

[50] Josephus, *Jewish War*, VI.5, 496 -7.

the events, depicting women on the Franks Casket, knew the strictures of first-century Jewish conduct at the Temple, but my reading of the Casket does not depend on this. It seems likely that the indirect reference to women in the 'Court of the Women' in the original text (or at least the artist's—presumably Latin—intermediary) prompted the depiction of women on the Casket.

This specific gendering may also have stemmed from a reading of Josephus' original account, in which Titus' lieutenant

> …selected the tallest and most handsome of the youths and reserved them for the triumph; of the rest, those over seventeen years of age he sent in chains to the works in Egypt, while multitudes were presented by Titus to the various provinces, to be destroyed in the theatres by the sword or by wild beasts; those under seventeen were sold.[51]

Josephus is not exactly uncategorical but here he has neither hostages *or* women in his account. It is the (male) youths sent to the triumph who appear as the most important people. In the Casket's Anglo-Saxon interpretation of the Capture of Jerusalem, the hostages are not portrayed as being sent to a triumph. For an audience in eighth-century Northumbria the details of a Roman triumph presumably needed to be portrayed in a more comprehensible context. This did not mean that the Roman triumph was entirely alien but the receipt of hostages from a subject people meant something real, tangible even, if these were the personified representations of submission in such a context.[52] Those others who were sent to the circuses or simply enslaved evidently did not need to be portrayed by the artist of the Casket but high-status men and women, with the men as hostages, and the women as captives, to be married off against their will in a forced fashion,[53] fit entirely logically in an Anglo-Saxon context. Both groups of people

---

[51] Josephus, *Jewish War,* VI.5, 496-7.

[52] Compare the *Old English Orosius*' pithy account of Titus and Vespasian's post-Jerusalem triumph (*The Old English Orosius*, ed. J. Bately, Early English Text Society Supplementary Ser. 6 (London, 1980), VI.7, 138) with the Latin original's more detailed version (*Pauli Orosii Historiarum adversum Paganos libri VII*, ed. C. F. W. Zangemeister (Leipzig: Teubner, 1889), VII.9; trans. A. T. Fear, *Orosius, Seven Books of History against the Pagans* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 339), though it should be noted that the Old English author had a lot of triumphal depictions to work with! For the Continental uses of hostages in triumph, see Kosto, "Hostages," 137, citing M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 376.

[53] See generally S. Kalifa, "Singularités matrimoniales chez les anciens germains: le rapt et le droit de

help to convey a notion of a captured city, a place under the control of a new overlord, a notion that Anglo-Saxon elites would understand in a temporal context, which would make its understanding in a theological context that much easier.

The enigmatic runic inscriptions, for which the Franks Casket is justly famous, must be noted here. Although inscriptions, including Latin characters, surround the scene depicting the sack of Jerusalem, a second runic word precedes *GISL* in the hostages scene, *DŌM*, 'judgement', an inscription of equal length to *GISL*, in a position mirroring almost exactly the bottom-right position of *GISL*. It has been suggested that the two inscriptions could be taken together, with 'Domgisl' used here as a reference to a Frankish personal name,[54] and indeed, given the hostageship puns noted elsewhere in this paper and by Katherine Barker above, this is not impossible. If it is a compound word, *dōmgisl*, 'judgement hostage' is more likely to mirror the later attested *friðgisl*, 'peace hostage' or *foregisl*, '?preliminary hostage' compounds.[55] Nonetheless, the context of the 'judgement' and the position of Israel after AD 70 suggests that '*gisl*' here may have been a noun used to indicate a concept, 'hostage*hood*', rather than a specific hostage or hostages. as God's judgement on the Jews of Jerusalem was part of the narrative of the Christian reading of Titus' sack of the city. Thus, notwithstanding whether the runic *gisl* was an abbreviation of rare Old English terms to indicate hostageship, *gīslhād* or *gīslþu*,[56] the hostageship of the Jews, perhaps as guarantors for the Christian redemption of those who would see themselves as the heirs of the covenant with God,[57] may have been personified by one or more of the figures on the Casket.

iv) The Cynewulf-Cyneheard episode in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

Our fourth and final example is in another account of a loss of political power, this time more contemporary (though not necessarily entirely so) with pre-Viking kingship. Reference is made to a hostage in the long *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* entry for 757, which details the twenty-nine-year

---

la femme à disposer d'elle-même," *Revue historique de droit français*, 48 (1970): 199–225.

[54] D. H. Haigh, "Yorkshire Runic Monuments," *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* 2 (1873): 264–5, (albeit with a mistaken sixth-century attribution); the possibility is noted by Webster, *Franks Casket*, 23.

[55] For *friðgisl*, see above, 00; the appearance of *foregislas* in the ninth century is discussed in Lavelle, "Use and Abuse of Hostages," 287.

[56] *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus* <http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/dict/indices/headwordsindexg.html > (accessed 13 May 2015)

[57] Scheil, *Footsteps of Israel*, 19.

reign of the West Saxon King Cynewulf.[58] Although recorded in the ninth century for reasons associated with the dynastic authority of King Alfred's family, the entry may stem from oral poetic tradition.[59] A British hostage is portrayed as part of the 'small following' (*lytle werode*) which went with Cynewulf to the *byrig* of *Meretun*, where the king was visiting his mistress:

> Then by the woman's outcry, the king's thegns became aware of the disturbance and ran to the spot, each as he got ready and as quickly as possible. And the *aetheling* [i.e. Cyneheard] made an offer to each of money and life; and not one of them would accept it. But they continued to fight until they all lay dead except for one British hostage, and he was severely wounded [*swiþe gewundad*].

The motif of the British hostage, with wounds which imply he had fought on behalf of Cynewulf, may have been interpreted by the ninth-century audience of the *Chronicle* as personifying the fact that Cynewulf had 'often fought great battles against the Britons' (*oft miclum gefeohtum feaht uuiþ Bretwalum*).[60] Presumably a hostage who went as far as to fight for his guardian—presumably following, as Peter S. Baker notes, a narrative formula[61]—represented victories in such battles and, as a survivor in circumstances where the survival of anyone *but* the hostage would have been shameful for that survivor (at least in terms of literary expectations—perhaps like the hostage in the *Battle of Maldon*),[62] the British hostage may have

---

[58] *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* 755 (= 757): *Two Chronicles*, ed. Plummer, I, 46-9 (text); *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. Whitelock *et al.*, 30-1 (trans.).

[59] See J. Bately, "The Compilation of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 60 B.C. to A.D. 890: Vocabulary as Evidence," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 64 (1978), 93-129. The Alfredian significance of this episode is much-discussed but see especially D. G. Scragg, "*Wifcyþþe* and the Morality of the Cynewulf and Cyneheard Episode in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle," in *Alfred the Wise: Studies in Honour of Janet Bately*, ed. J. Roberts and J. L. Nelson (Cambridge, 1997), 179-85, B. Yorke, "The Representation of Early West Saxon History in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle," in *Reading the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: Language, Literature, History*, ed. A. Jorgensen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 141-59, and C. Konshuh, "Fighting with a *Lytle Werode*: a Ninth-Century Formula in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle," *The Medieval Chronicle* 10 (Forthcoming, 2015).

[60] Lavelle, 'Use and Abuse of Hostages', 284.

[61] Baker, *Honour, Exchange and Violence in Beowulf*, 36, noting the appearance of the Germanic hero Waltharius in this context.

[62] For the Maldon hostage, see M. A. L. Locherbie-Cameron, "The Men Named in the Poem," in *The Battle of Maldon AD 991*, ed. D. Scragg (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 242, who, like Baker above, notes the literary nature of a hostage fighting for his guardian.

served as a witness to the account, giving it a sense of veracity, however contrived that sense of veracity may have been in reality.

There may also have been some symmetry seen between the wounded hostage in King Cynewulf's retinue and the unnamed man in the *ætheling* Cyneheard's retinue, who was godson of Osric, one of Cynewulf's ealdormen. The unnamed godson was wounded in the reprisal raid launched by Cynewulf's men upon Cyneheard's (or rather his mistress's) enclosure. Given godparenthood's similarities with hostageship as a means of maintaining relations between groups,[63] both tragedies poetically demonstrated the ideal of a precedence of lordship over kinship.[64] These values are arguably significant in terms of the Anglo-Saxon, even Germanic, cultural context but the hostage here may also drive us back to an Insular context of kingship. In Ireland, the *Crith Gablach* lawcode distinguishes lesser hostages, kept in fetters, from those who were close to the king in the physical space of the royal household. In Cyneheard's retinue the notion of the hostage fighting for the king may not have been such a dramatic oddity—as we have seen, the hostage fighting for a captor was evidently used enough as a literary motif for it to have been relatively normal. What strikes me as noteworthy in this context is that the physical space occupied by the household—including high-status hostages—was thereby reflected in the functions of the group which was with the king in battle.

v) Hostages in the Landscape?

In three of these four instances discussed so far (Wealdhere's letter being the exception), hostages appear to reflect the holder's status, whether that holder were the Roman commander—later emperor—Titus, the West Saxon King Cynewulf, or, however much an eighth-century Northumbrian may have resented acknowledging it, the pagan overlord Penda. Nonetheless, we should not necessarily dismiss any 'practical' functions fulfilled by the above hostages (none of the relevant sources provide much information on the circumstances under which these hostages

[63] I am grateful to Guy Halsall for discussion on this point.

[64] Cf. J. Lynch, *Christianizing Kinship: Ritual Sponsorship in Anglo-Saxon England* (Ithaca, NY, 1998), 194-6, who reflects that the godson's survival may have resulted from his protection by his godfather, Ealdorman Osric. For the issue of lordship, see R. Woolf, "The Ideal of Men Dying with their Lord in the *Germania* and in *The Battle of Maldon*," *Anglo-Saxon England* 5 (1976), 63-81; cf. R. Frank, "The Ideal of Men Dying with their Lord in *The Battle of Maldon*: Anachronism or *Nouvelle Vague*?," in *People and Places in Northern Europe 500-1600: Essays in Honour of Peter Hayes Sawyer*, ed. I. N. Wood and N. Lund (Woodbridge, 1991), 95-106.

were given, after all), and the balance between the practicality of a threat and the status of holding a hostage, indeed being seen to hold a hostage, is an important one.

This paper began with the tribute lists of West Saxon rulers and the context of other forms of Insular kingship. The development of 'kingship' in a range of different forms provides us with models for an understanding of the transformation of political elites in the post-Imperial West, as expectations grew through the resources, indeed the wealth, that these elites controlled.[65] Seen through this lens, the varying scales within which Insular forms of kingship operated may have had more in common than they had differences in the early middle ages,[66] and while even if archaeologists of Anglo-Saxon England have not found the equivalent of one of what are sometimes seen as 'diagnostic' finds of Irish royal sites, 'hostage chains',[67] a final observation may be made regarding the granting of hostages. In early medieval Ireland, it had more than symbolic meaning: it was part of the ritual of kingship and the holding of hostages was, as Charles-Edwards has it, 'the mark of a king'.[68] As *Recholl Breth* declares, '[h]e is not a king who does not have hostages (*géill*) in fetters, and to whom no royal tribute (*cís flatha*) is rendered, and to whom no fines for breach of promulgated law (*feich cána*) are paid'.[69] While hostages might have been seen in 'semi-private' and controlled-access spaces of the royal household, open to the privileged few, as we see in the spatial conditioning of the *Crith Gablach*

---

[65] A useful discussion of the novelty of Anglo-Saxon kingship in the sixth century, linked to the control of resources, is provided by N. J. Higham, "From Tribal Kingdoms to Christian Kings," in N. J. Higham and M. J. Ryan, *The Anglo-Saxon World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), esp. 143-4. See also C. Scull, "Social Archaeology and Anglo-Saxon Kingdom Origins," *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 10 (1999), 17-24, and, taking a wide perspective on a discussion of social competition, J. A. W. Nicolay, *The Splendour of Power: Early Medieval Kingship and the use of Gold and Silver in the Southern North Sea Area (5th to 7th Century AD)* (Groningen: Barkhuis Publishing and University of Groningen Library, 2014), 353–9.

[66] Useful studies here are A. Woolf, "Community, Identity and Kingship in Early England," in *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain*, ed. W. O. Frazer and A. Tyrell (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), 91-109, and P. Wormald, "Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship: Some Further Thoughts," in *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture*, ed. P. E. Szarmach and V. Darrow Oggins (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1986), 151-83. G. Halsall, *Worlds of Arthur* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 270-4 makes a case for the early existence of large-scale kingdoms in England in the fifth and sixth centuries, though also places some stress on the notion that the size of kingdoms could fluctuate significantly.

[67] See, e.g. discussion of 'hostage chains' found at the royal site of Lagore, Co. Meath, in H. Mytum, *The Origins of Early Christian Ireland* (London: Routledge, 1992), 114-15.

[68] Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, 342.

[69] *Corpus iuris hibernici : ad fidem codicum manuscriptorum recognovit*, ed. D. A. Binchy, 6 vols (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies), I, 219, cited by Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, 104.

of Ireland and perhaps the hostage in Cynewulf's retinue at *Mertun*,[70] this controlled visibility was also part of a public dimension of hostageship. The act of the receipt of hostages represented the status of kings and their base of clientship (however small that may have been), and with the hostage's value lying in the personal, in the recognisable identity, it made sense for this transaction to be public and witnessed by those who recognised a ruler's authority.[71]

A comment on the 'Mound of the Hostages' at Tara, a Neolithic tomb, associated in later medieval lore with the memory of the early Irish high king Cormac Mac Airt's construction of Tara itself, is worthwhile.[72] As Patrick Gleeson has recently shown, such monuments as Tara—important also for small-scale rulers as for the high kings themselves—played an important role in the demonstration of power in a performative fashion which linked the prehistoric past with the early medieval present.[73] Although 'hostage mounds' are not directly evidenced in Anglo-Saxon England, could *gisl*- place-name elements in the English landscape have had a meaning which was related to hostages rather than- as a number of *English Place-Names Society* volumes tend to interpret them-the personal names *Gisla* (Old English) or *Gisli* (Old Norse)? It is an intriguing possibility and a small handful of examples, identified through an unscientific trawl of the various indexes of the *English Place-Names Society* volumes,[74] contain some sites of

---

[70] In this respect there may have been similarities with the material accoutrements of early kingship. B. Yorke, "The Oliver's Battery Hanging-Bowl Burial from Winchester, and its Place in the Early History of Wessex," in *Intersections: The Archaeology and History of Christianity in England, 400 - 1200. Papers in Honour of Martin Biddle and Birthe Kjølbye-Biddle*, ed. M. Henig and N. Ramsay, British Archaeological Reports International Ser. 1610 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2007), 85, notes the articulation of the authority of 'locally-based nobles' (equivalents of the Irish *rí* of a *tuath*?) in the display of hanging bowls in spaces where access was controlled by such nobles. Given the propensity of personal characteristics to be attributed to inanimate objects in early medieval culture, perhaps there is not so much difference between such objects and hostages.

[71] The demonstration of the handover of hostages as part of the demonstration of kingship, albeit in a later 'Viking' period, but very much within the norms of earlier practice, as the demonstrates, is discussed by Seán Duffy in *Brian Boru and the Battle of Clontarf* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2013), *passim* (see e.g. the receipt by Brian and later cession of Leinster hostages at 123). I gratefully acknowledge Charles Insley for this reference.

[72] The report on the excavation of the megalithic tomb known as the 'Mound of the Hostages' is M. O'Sullivan, *Duma na nGiall = the Mound of the Hostages, Tara* (Dublin: University College Dublin School of Archaeology).

[73] See P. Gleeson, "Constructing Kingship in Early Medieval Ireland: Power, Place and Ideology," *Medieval Archaeology* 56 (2012): 1-33; see also N. B. Aitchison, *Armagh and the Royal Centres in Early Medieval Ireland: Monuments, Cosmology, and the Past* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer for Cruithne Press, 1994), esp. 50–130.

[74]This was supplemented by a search on the *Survey of English Place-Names* website, <http://epns.nottingham.ac.uk>, which brings together the paper text, though at the time of the search (4 Sept. 2015), was only available in an incomplete beta version, thus justifying the 'unscientific' trawl through paper indexes. I am grateful to Jayne Carroll for advice on this.

landscape significance, which may indicate a 'setting' for the handover or display of hostages. *Gisls Bæc*, in Brightwell Baldwin, Oxfordshire,[75] and Guiseley, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, which the editor attributes—through its record in a tenth-century charter--to an otherwise unrecorded personal name *Gīslic*[76] (thus a diminutive 'Wee Gisla'?), are natural landscape features linked to a word which *could* mean 'hostage'. In the case of Guiseley, the natural feature is a clearing or glade (Old English *lēah*). *Gisles Bæce*, recorded in a ninth-century charter for Brightwell Baldwin, is likely to be a ridge (i.e. 'back').[77] We have seen elsewhere in this volume how the personal name and the state of hostageship might blur into one another in the early medieval imagination, but the genitive *gisles* rather than *gislan*, may be indicative of 'the hostage's *bæc*' in this case, though Margaret Gelling and Doris Mary Stenton assumed it to be 'used as a personal name'. Given that other boundary marks in this particular charter are personal names, they were sensible in making this assumption, especially given the lack of a definite article in the charter's reference, but the next charter boundary point on from *gisles bæce*, a certain *ceolulfes treope*, 'Ceolwulf's Tree', a boundary marker which recalls West Saxon and Mercian royal names. As Stuart Brooks and Stephen Mileson note, it may have been an assembly place for an Anglo-Saxon site at Ewelme, an important 'productive site' associated with the royal estate of Benson.[78]

While other places contain *gisl* in some form as an element in their historical place-name[79] and perhaps there are more yet to be discovered among the field names to be included in

---

[75] *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography*, ed. P. H. Sawyer, Royal Historical Society Guides and Handbooks 8 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1968) [revised online version, *The Electronic Sawyer*, at <www.esawyer.org.uk>], no. 217 (A.D. 887).

[76] Sawyer, *Charters*, no. 1453 (A.D. 972×92). Discussed by A. H. Smith, *The Place-Names of the West Riding of Yorkshire Part 4*, English Place-Name Society 33 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 147

[77] M. Gelling and D. M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Oxfordshire Part 1*, English Place-Name Society 23 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 122. Although *bæce* is not an unlikely textual variant of *bēce*, beech-tree, it would be rendered *bæcan* in the dative form for a charter boundary. *Dictionary of Old English Plant-Names*, under 'bēce', <http://oldenglish-plantnames.org/index#> (accessed 22 June 2015).

[78] S. Mileson and S. Brooks, with J. Kershaw, "A Multi-Phase Anglo-Saxon Site in Ewelme," *Oxoniensia* 79 (2014): 5 and (with discussion of the name implications) 22. I am grateful to John Baker and Stephen Mileson for discussion of this site.

[79] Gisburn (Yorks.), Guilsborough (Northants), Guise Cliff (Yorks.), Isleham (Cambs.) are possible examples, though most likely linked to the personal names Gisla or Gisli, returned from a search on the beta-version of the online *Survey of English Place-Names* <http://epns.nottingham.ac.uk> (4 Sept. 2015), as is the now-lost *Giselkirke* in Nottinghamshire: J. E. B. Gover, A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Nottinghamshire*, English Place-Name Society 17 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), xxiii.

future *English Place-Name Society* volumes or missed by early editors, two places in Middlesex are worth mention: Islington and Isleworth. Isleworth's placename, attested in an 'early' charter for the nunnery of Barking,[80] is read by its editors as linked to the personal name *Giselhere* (a variation of *Gisla*?). This may be unremarkable but for the possible connection with the assembly sites linked to the administrative landscape of hundreds characteristic of mid- and later Anglo-Saxon England. What was known as 'Isleworth Hundred', in the twelfth century had been 'Hounslow Hundred' in Domesday Book in the eleventh, indicating that a 'mound or barrow … once must have existed at this place' (hence the place-name *hundes-hlæw*).[81] Hounslow and Isleworth are not the same place, of course, and any link must be made with reservations, especially as mounds presumably did not mean the same thing to all people, but the possibility of Isleworth's connection with the hundred meeting place lingers.

Islington, some 11 miles to the east, and in the neighbouring hundred of Ossulstone in Domesday Book, is recorded in a charter of *c.*1000 as *Gislandune*.[82] Naturally, the genitive form here links it to a personal name, Gisla, rather than Gisl (hostage), and thus *Gislandune* is 'Gisla's Hill/ Down',[83] as opposed to the Old English *Gislesdun*, 'Hostage's Hill/ Down', but when the two settlements of Isleworth and Islington are taken together as two places with similar name origins in two different hundreds, the evidence is intriguing. The Thames provided a boundary between the kingdoms of the Middle Saxons and those of Kent and Surrey, and was only two miles to the south of Islington (admittedly with the old Roman city of London between Islington and the river), and Isleworth lay on the Thames' banks. Could these sites have defined the territorial authority of a nascent kingdom? Keith Bailey sensibly interpreted these place-names as linked to (legendary?) twin founder-figures of the former Middle Saxon kingdom, Gisla and Gislhere,[84] and the balance of evidence is, admittedly, much in favour of this. But if the study of hostages is in part the study of the possibilities of circumstances, it may be appropriate to remark that Bailey's hypothesis should not rule out the possibility that in a landscape of authority these were also sites associated with—or interpreted as—hostages.

---

[80] Sawyer, *Charters*, 1246 (A.D. 677 for 687×8).

[81] J. E. B. Gover, A. Mawer, and F. M. Stenton, with S. J. Madge, *The Place-Names of Middlesex, apart from the City of London Part 2*, English Place-Name Society 18 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1942), 24.

[82] Sawyer, *Charters*, no. 1458a.

[83] As interpreted by Mawer et al., *Place Names of Middlesex Part 2*, 124.

[84] K. Bailey, "The Middle Saxons," in *Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, ed. Bassett, 108–22, logically interprets the place-name element as seen as representing founder figures of Middle Saxon territories.

Conclusions

The reflection on place-names in the landscape remains, at best, speculative and indeed the link with observations on hostages is tentative but we should not lose sight of the fact that these people mattered—the symbolism was itself a demonstration of both actual and potential power. Hostageship, in its practical and symbolic forms, seems entirely fitting for the context of what was effectively a new world of the emergence of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, in which clientship (to borrow from the Irish terminology) needed to be demonstrated in a recognisable fashion. Hostages represented the continuing reminder, whether at the court or in the public arena, of the moments of demonstrative power that allowed early medieval kingship to be fashioned in a way that created stories and personal links. It is interesting that of the early Anglo-Saxon hostages dealt with above, three – Bishop Wealdhere, the Franks Casket figure/s, and the unnamed Briton in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* – are linked directly with a known 'moment' of transfer (albeit theoretical in Wealdhere's case) and indeed the reason for Oswiu's hostageship in Mercia looks to have been quite close to the surface to a contemporary audience. Hostages therefore represented something to an audience, linking the present to a perceived moment in time that necessitated the hostage-donation.

Although drawing from a small sample is frustrating, it forces us to think of the possible pasts of Anglo-Saxon kingship in which hostages were part of the material culture of kingship, visible symbols of power displayed alongside high-status gold and silver items (which, we ought to remember, could also be imbued with personal characteristics, lest we assume that the objectification of hostages dehumanised them entirely). Such symbolic paraphernalia were received and bestowed at moments of a kingdom's history[85] and thus represented that history when retold in a royal setting. The Irish *Críth Gablach*'s layout of the royal household might give us a sense of this in that it placed free and chained hostages, along with the king and his closest aides, almost directly opposite the king's entertainers, including poets and harpists.[86] Did such parties make use of hostages as props—humiliated props, perhaps—in performances which helped to shape the royal dignity? While hostages appear to have been used as a meaningful tool

[85] For discussion of the control and distribution of high-status objects among elites, see Nicolay, *Splendour of Power*, 264–94.

[86] *Críth Gablach* §46, ed. Binchy, 23 (trans. MacNeill, 'Ancient Irish Law', p. 306). See A. J. Fletcher, *Drama and the Performing Arts in Pre-Cromwellian Ireland: a Repertory of Sources and Documents from the Earliest Times until* c.*1642* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000), 6–7.

that could be readily understood in many ways by a range of people who wished to make some form of agreement, perhaps what may have made them valuable at court was their ability to remind an audience of just what they represented. To that end, they help to shine a light, however dimly, on the personal element of early political power.