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The Effects of the Conversion to Christianity on Anglo-Saxon Kingship

By Emily S. J. Day

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts, Centre of Medieval Studies, December 2018.

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Abstract

This thesis covers the change that occurred to kingship within Anglo-Saxon society after the conversion to Christianity which started in 595 Common Era. It uses an interdisciplinary approach to sources and understanding, looking at historical, archaeological and literary primary sources, as well as considering the theological understanding of Christianity at the time, to come to an understanding of what changed, and why and how it did so. In order to achieve this, it first establishes the Anglo-Saxon understanding of the institution of kingship before the concerted conversion of the people in 595 by Pope Gregory the Great. This is done through archaeological remains and the text of *Beowulf*, due to the lack of any written historical evidence. The second section covers the conversion of Kent and Northumbria, and what this can tell us about kingship at this point, using Bede as the primary historical evidence. It also covers the state of Christianity's current ideas of kingship as it would have been when during this conversion period, as this helps us develop an understanding of the difference of understanding between the Germanic Anglo-Saxon ideas of kingship and that of the clergy coming in from the continent and beyond. The last section deals with the aftermath of the conversion process and explores historical, (charters and laws etc.), archaeological (changing settlement patterns), and literary (*Beowulf*) sources of evidence to reflect upon any changes to the way kingship is enacted in Anglo-Saxon society compared to how it is established in the first section. This change reflects what was also established in the second section and demonstrates the interplay between the Anglo-Saxon kingship ideals and the Christian idea of kingship.

Dedication and Acknowledgements

I dedicate this to my Granddad, Peter M. Wickham, who has sadly passed but who inspired in me a love of learning and history and who I wish was still alive, so I could share this achievement with him. I wish to acknowledge my supervisors, whose patience and expertise guided me through this whole process and without whom this could not have done, thank you. I also want to thank my parents, for listening to my invariably long rants about the Anglo-Saxons and enduring my drafts of this work long enough to proofread it and give me feedback, and of course more generally for their guidance and assurance in life outside of this work. Lastly, to my housemates and friends, who have put up with me throughout this whole process and helped with regards to this work in many ways.

Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: DATE:.....

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Introduction

This thesis will argue that the expectations placed upon kingship by the Anglo-Saxons from 500-800 CE, undergoes a significant transformation and that the primary reason for this shift was the conversion of the population to Christianity. Pre-Christian ideas of kingship will be examined, but, this is not (primarily) a study of how Anglo-Saxon paganism saw kingship,¹ nor does it concentrate on wider Christian ideals of kingship.² This study instead highlights the essential differences between the Anglo-Saxon Germanic and Christian kingship ideals, it will consider the complex impact on Anglo-Saxon thought prompted by the new conception of kingship that came with Christianity, and how old and new worldviews melded to form a new approach to kingship, power and authority. Anglo-Saxon use of land as an expression of power was adopted and subsumed by Christianity as monasteries and churches were built at the behest of royal families, reinforcing the power of both king and church. Christianity brought with it greater potential to control the people and had a marked centralising effect on power.

With the arrival of Christianity came a new hierarchy that affected internal political decision making, in the form of the abbots and bishops. The new religion brought with it tools of governance such as writing. Furthermore, the theological concepts that come with Christianity help to place the king even more at the centre of the way the kingdoms were governed, leading to a greater degree of sophistication in the taxation system, with kings taking advantage of this shift in ideology. However, we also see little to no change in certain aspects: the basic tenets of kingship that will be established in the first section still hold true and the importance of the hall, warfare, and gift-giving, and the special significance of the land remains. In fact, in the instance of land, we see Christianity showing similarities to the Germanic way of equating land with power, and the abundance of significant aristocratic people put in charge of monastic hierarchies and

¹ See instead, for example, B. Branston, *The Lost Gods of England*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974); W. A. Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England: The transition from Paganism to Christianity*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1970), H. R. E. Davidson, *Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe: Early Scandinavian and Celtic religions*, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1988), etc.

² See instead J. C. Russel, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity: A sociohistorical approach to religious transformation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), J. W. Bernhardt, *Itinerant Kingship and Royal Monasteries in Early Medieval Germany, c. 936-1075*(Vol. 21), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., 2002), J. Nelson, 'Royal saints and early medieval kingship', *Studies in Church History*, 10, 1973, pp.39-44.

settlement types, demonstrate how the Germanic culture thrust its own ideals onto Christianity as it began putting down roots. Consequently, we will see how Christianity itself changes upon contact and insertion into this new culture, giving the kingdoms of the Anglo-Saxons a subtly distinct religious identity when compared to their continental counterparts, and this is demonstrated in the relationship between the king and the church, and the changing expectations of kingship.

The word ‘Germanic’ as used in this dissertation refers to the cultures and people that spoke a Germanic language. This usage follows the definition of Germanic in *Brill’s Encyclopaedia of the Middle Ages*.³ All artwork, law-making, literature and anything else that can be said to come from a particular group of people who spoke and/or wrote in any of the Germanic languages will, therefore, be referred to as Germanic. Many recent academics use the word in this sense, including the contributors of *English Law Before Magna Carta: Felix Liebermann and Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*⁴ and Stefan Jurasinski in *Ancient Privileges: Beowulf, Law, and the Making of Germanic Antiquity*⁵.

This thesis will look at the burial record of the south and north of England as it concerns kingship. Using material culture can be a crucial tool to understanding a society’s concept of Kingship as anything that can be connected to this unique position in the society tells us much about what was considered important. More detail as to how this thesis uses material culture and specifically artefacts found in burials can be found later in the thesis.⁶ However, in this instance archaeology alone cannot tell us much about the pre-Christian ideals of kingship, as no ‘princely burials’ can be explicitly tied to a known king. Consequently, this analysis will also draw for comparative purposes on *Beowulf*. The expectations of kingship implied in this poem will be used to gain a better understanding of burials within a possible kingly context.

³ U. Schaeffer, “Germanic Languages”, *Brill’s Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages*, accessed 10 December 2019 http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2213-2139_bema_SIM_033796, First published online: 2016.

⁴ D. Fruscione, ‘Liebermann’s Intellectual Milieu’ in *English Law Before Magna Carta: Felix Liebermann and Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, ed. Stefan Jurasinski, Lisi Oliver and Andrew Rabin, (Leiden: Brill, 2010), p. 15-27.

⁵ S. Jurasinski, *Ancient Privileges : Beowulf, Law, and the Making of Germanic Antiquity*, (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press), 2006.

⁶ See p. 15-16.

Using *Beowulf* as a source of information about Germanic kingship before the conversion is not without risks, since the poem survives in a post-Conquest manuscript. Regarding the dating of *Beowulf*, it is important to differentiate between the likely date of initial composition (in the sense of it first being written down) and the date of the only surviving manuscript. The manuscript is generally dated to the 11th century, but most scholars agree that the date of the original composition is much earlier.⁷

The date of the initial composition is pertinent to several arguments in this thesis and has recently been discussed in *The Dating of Beowulf: A Reassessment*. The title of this collection alludes to the earlier volume *The Dating of Beowulf*, which initially caused controversy by questioning the prevailing view of *Beowulf* as an 8th-century work.⁸ In *A Reassessment*, Neidorf reflects on James Earl's position as an 'agnostic' in regards to the dating of *Beowulf*, given that Earl questioned the scholastic rigour of trying to date *Beowulf* in a historical framework.⁹ Neidorf echoes Earl's reservations, stating that 'there could be no principled basis for gauging the relative probability of competing hypotheses'. However, Neidorf goes on to argue that 'chronological implications of evidence such as transliteration errors or verses requiring non-contraction for scansion',¹⁰ and other linguistic features, establish a 'productive framework' from which to draw suitably informed conclusions.

If *Beowulf* can be dated on linguistic rather than historical grounds, it avoids a problem of circular logic that comes about if one uses *Beowulf* for anything historical while using just historical evidence to date it, and frees up the underlying themes to address concepts such as kingship. It is my contention that *Beowulf* offers a glimpse into principles shared by the early Anglo-Saxons. Literature does not reflect the truth as we would understand it in a historical sense; rather, it allows insight into a cultural understanding of the ideals that underpin societal notions, such as kingship. The portrayal of kingship in *Beowulf* can be seen in the words and behaviour of certain kingly characters, such as Hrothgar, and in the narrative treatment of these people.

⁷ L. Neidorf, 'Introduction,' in *The Dating of Beowulf: A Reassessment*, ed. Leonard Neidorf, (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2014), p. 1-4.

⁸ Neidorf, 'Introduction,' in *The Dating of Beowulf Reassessment*, p. 4-5.

⁹ J. W. Earl, *Thinking About Beowulf*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 17.

¹⁰ Neidorf, 'Introduction' in *The Dating of Beowulf Reassessment*, p. 16.

Joseph Bachlechner attempted to date *Beowulf* through a linguistic framework centred on the use of the dynastic name *mere-wioing* ('Merovingian') within the text (see line 2921). Bachlechner argued it demonstrated an 8th-century date,¹¹ and this view has been more recently espoused by Tom Shippey, who argued that the use of the word 'Merovingian' declined after the 8th century, which makes its appearance in *Beowulf* especially significant.¹² Walter Goffart disagreed, pointing out Einhard's use of it, which therefore establishes its place in early historiography.¹³ Goffart, however, does not address Shippey's argument, derived from the text's use of the etymologically correct name, *mere-wioing*, that *Beowulf* reflects oral circulation at the time, and that the word would have been unlikely to have been used a considerable time after the downfall of the Merovingians in 751.¹⁴

Thomas Bredehoft, instead of looking at lexis, turns his attention the metrical evidence. And again, it is through this more linguistic framework that we have another dating tool that agrees with the 8th-century date,¹⁵ as also put forward by Niedorf,¹⁶ Shippey¹⁷ and others in *A Reassessment*. This composition date appears to have been accepted by the scholarly world *beyond* *A Reassessment*. George Jack goes into more detail, citing linguistic evidence and particularly referencing Fulk,¹⁸ both of whom place the date of initial composition at somewhere between 685-825.¹⁹ The arguments presented by many scholars are in my view cumulatively persuasive. Different tests (linguistic, metrical, lexical) all lead to a similar conclusion of the 8th or early 9th century. This thesis, therefore, follows Fulk in assuming a date of composition between 685-825.

¹¹ C. Chase, 'Opinions of the Date of Beowulf', in *The Dating of Beowulf* ed. Colin Chase, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), p. 3.

¹² T. Shippey, 'The Merov(ich)ingian Again: damnatio memoriae and the usus scholarum', in *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, ed. K. O. O'Keefe and A. Orchard, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 2005), 389–406.

¹³ W. Goffart, "The Name 'Merovingian' and the Dating of Beowulf." *Anglo-Saxon England*, 36 (2007), p. 99-101.

¹⁴ T. Shippey "The Merov(ich)ingian Again", p. 402.

¹⁵ T. A. Bredehoft, "The Date of Composition of Beowulf and the Evidence of Metrical Evolution," in *The Dating of Beowulf: A Reassessment*, ed. Leonard Neidorf, (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2014), pp. 97–111.

¹⁶ L. Neidorf, 'Germanic Legend, Scribal Errors, and Cultural Change,' in *The Dating of Beowulf: A Reassessment*, (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2014), pp. 37–57.

¹⁷ T. Shippey, 'Names in Beowulf and Anglo-Saxon England,' in *The Dating of Beowulf: A Reassessment*, (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2014), 58–78.

¹⁸ R. D. Fulk, 'Beowulf and Language History,' in *The Dating of Beowulf: A Reassessment*, (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2014), pp. 19–36.

¹⁹ J. George, *Beowulf: A Student Edition*, ed by George Jack, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

As written, *Beowulf* is markedly a post-conversion poem, and there is certainly internal evidence to show that the poet was a Christian. However, the history of which the poem tells is much older. While *Beowulf* and the fights against the monsters and the dragon have no historical foundation, the setting is semi-historical, and many of the characters of which it speaks are documented in other sources. For instance, Hygelac's raid on Frankish lands, alluded to in the poem (see 1102ff. and 2354ff.) is recorded in the *Historia Francorum* by Bishop Gregory of Tours, and is datable to 521.²⁰ The history it tells, then, is 'pagan', and it is worth noting that, with the exception of some lines where 'heathen' practices are denounced (179-80), pagan history is presented sympathetically. The poet's purpose, in short, was to represent Germanic pre-conversion history in a way that emphasised continuity, and not religious difference. Moreover, it is likely, as the poem itself suggests (1-2), that much of the story circulated in oral tradition before the *Beowulf* poet shaped it. When the poet talks of a Christian god, the notion is clearly not thought to be incompatible with pre-Christian heroic ideas. Consequently, *Beowulf* should not be viewed as a work of Christian revision, but as a poem that paints a sympathetic picture of the society and culture that existed before Christianity became dominant.

Moreover, as the poem itself suggests (1-2) much of the story appears to have come down to the poet by oral transmission. It may safely be assumed that the poem took written shape in the eighth century, but the legend probably had a long history in oral transmission. As Orchard notes, *Beowulf* is part of storytelling tradition going back to before the establishment of the Christian church in England.²¹ With *Beowulf* conveying both pre-Christian and Christian ideas of kingship, it demonstrates the potential compatibilities of warrior kings and Christian ideals.²² It is therefore not unreasonable to suppose that *Beowulf* communicates pre-Christian ideals of kingship, though we must obviously bear in mind the complex chronological layers of the poem (the manuscript: 11th-century; the written poem: 8th century; the historical legend 6th century).

This thesis will also look at the written records concerning Anglo-Saxon Kent and Northumbria, with sections on kingship during the conversion period (CE. 597-640 for Kent and

²⁰ G. Jack, 'Introduction', in *Beowulf: A Student Edition*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 1-10.

²¹ A. Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf*, (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2003), p. 99-105.

²² P. Wormald, 'Bede, *Beowulf* and the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy', *British Archaeological Reports*, 46, (1978), 32-97, p. 40.

CE. 627-642 for Northumbria); both periods encompass those years when the kings returned to paganism, before converting once more, with Christianity continuing uninterrupted from that time forward. Consequently, a look towards a theological perspective will be equally vital in order to assess what ideas and themes the traditions of Christianity espoused when they began to have an impact on the Anglo-Saxon *Weltanschauung*.

The much longer period from the mid CE. 600s to CE. 800 is examined in order to understand the impact conversion had on the attitude towards, and of, kings. The Kent and Northumbrian kingdoms, above any other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, will be analysed due to their importance in the conversion of the whole region, and because of the larger numbers of surviving written records.

Documents such as the early law code, which show the evolution of early law, land management and the actions of those in positions of power and authority, and other sources including Gregory the Great's letters and internal sources such as the works of Bede and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, will also form an integral part of my analysis. Finally, there shall be a return to archaeology and an examination of settlement change over time in a broadly north vs south comparison that will give us an example of the real-world repercussions of increased Christianisation. This will also be examined in parallel with the advent of a new type of settlement, the monastery, and nunnery which will further demonstrate the link between land and the power structure of kingship, and how Christianity co-opted this function of land within Anglo-Saxon society and was, in turn, itself shaped into a subtly different form.

Defining Kingship

Given the wide-ranging sources that will be examined, and the centrality of the concept of kingship to this thesis, it is vital that we define what kingship meant to the Anglo-Saxons at the outset. Within this broader concept of kingship, we must also define what was meant by 'king' and 'kingdom'.

Although definitions of kingship are enmeshed within an understanding of kingdom, the definition of 'kingdom' is in many ways distinct and separate from that of the ruler. Susan

Reynolds's definition of kingdoms in her book *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe* is comprehensive in this regard:

‘A kingdom was never thought of merely as the territory which happened to be ruled by a king. It comprised and corresponded to a ‘people’ (*gens*, nation, *populous*) which was assumed to a natural inherited community of tradition, custom, law and decent.’²³

According to Reynolds, kingdom makes a king and not the other way around. The kingdom, a people with a shared and inherited sense of tradition and culture often loosely tied to a land, formed the basis of and prescribed the extent of, a king's power. However, it should be noted that there are some who do not agree with this assessment. Edward James, in ‘The origins of barbarian kingdoms: the continental evidence’, argues that:

‘People did not produce kings, kings produced people. An early Medieval people [*regnes*, or kingdom] is not an ethnic or genetic, let alone racial, entity, it is a grouping brought about by political means.’²⁴

The difficulty in examining the concept of kingship separate from kingdom is thus demonstrated, and consequently, while the definition of kingship must in part refer to the fact that its power to some extent derived and originated from the concept of kingdom, it cannot be taken that this is the only way to define what it means to be a king. In particular, the debate regarding whether the king makes the kingdom or the other way around is still very much open, although in either case, one must attempt a definition of both that is, at least in part, separate and distinct from the other.

The definition this thesis will use must also be sufficiently broad to work within the various distinct disciplines of history, archaeology, and literature. Kingship then, in this broad framework, has two distinct markers. The first is that it is a position of power, though as noted earlier, it is a power tied to a concept of kingdom, specifically one in which the demonstration of this power

²³ S. Reynolds, *Kingdoms, and Communities in Western Europe, 900-1300* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 250.

²⁴ E. James, ‘The origins of barbarian kingdoms: the continental evidence’, in *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, ed. S. Basset, (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1989), 40-54, p. 47.

takes on many cultural and societal markers and images. It is through these images that power is maintained and wielded. This use of images encompasses everything from the symbolism attributed to physical artefacts, to more nebulous concepts demonstrated through literature and history, which mark out a king as a ruler of unique authority, as opposed to just someone who is merely rich and powerful.

Secondly, our definition of kingship must acknowledge its close ties to the idea of kinship, blood ties and descent. The king was not merely a figure granted the authority to wield power but was gaining the status of kingship thanks to unique ties to a distinct group of people who were themselves above the rest of society. Almost universally across time and the geographic areas examined, the biggest commonality is an understanding of being descended from someone, or something, special, or being a part of a kinship or bloodline that is understood within its own context to have a specialness and meaning beyond itself.²⁵

It is important to bear in mind this twofold definition of kingship, given its centrality to this thesis, and its significance to any examination of Anglo-Saxon power structures as the ability to be able to interpret kingly power and kingship is essential in order to track the many developments and changes over time. The most significant change to the nature of kingship came from contact with the continent and the subsequent coming of Christianity, which brought with it ‘the triple image of the Roman Emperor, Merovingian king and Hebrew monarch’.²⁶ Establishing pre-conversion kingship will be vital in understanding the impact of this change, and one needs a definition broad enough to encompass the many nuances of kingship as it developed over time, and in different geographical areas. In addition, there is the need to establish what people understood a king to be: across different time periods and geographic and cultural boundaries, and encompassing specific individuals, including important figures such as Bede, and more generally society as a whole. This secondary objective, which is of wider scope and yet incorporates many subtle distinctions, will be only touched on here, given that the investigation into this idea is one of the main threads underpinning this whole thesis; consequently, conclusions will be discussed throughout this thesis and drawn together at the end.

²⁵ See below, p 30.

²⁶ James, ‘The origins of barbarian kingdoms’, p. 52.

A comparative understanding of British kingship, as found in contemporaneous Welsh kingdoms for example and as demonstrated early on in Gildas' *De Excidio*,²⁷ will not be covered, as it goes beyond the limits of what this thesis can cover as it is tightly focused on the continental Christian influence.

²⁷ Gildas, *de Excidio Britanniae; Or, the Ruin of Britain*, trans. H. Williams, (Gloucester: Dodo Press, 2010).

Before Conversion

In this section, there will be an attempt to establish some core aspects of what Anglo-Saxons held kingship as a system, to be. Due to the lack of direct written history of this time, without influence of outside ideas or the future writers inserting their own ideas upon the past, we will be primarily looking at archaeology and the literature of *Beowulf*. This section is not concerned with any one king, it is instead focusing on the general representation of kingship before the start of the Christian conversion process, which is why *Beowulf*, although concerned with semi-historical and mythical figures, is still of interest as it can give us an insight into the concept of their considered ideal of kingship. Archaeology has an issue with interpretation and a lack of context, however, by holding the literature up as a mirror of the archaeology, and vice versa, this section hopes to give a greater context to both pieces of evidence and further enlighten us as to what might be considered a general consensus on the Anglo-Saxon ideal of kingship.

In the late 6th and early 7th centuries, just before the introduction of Christianity and in the immediate years after its introduction, there is a change in burial practices across southern and eastern England.²⁸ This involved more above ground mortuary structures in burials, which were small but not insignificant in number, and tended to be of extremely wealthy and usually male individuals. The context of the other burials at the time makes this even more significant as the use of grave goods in the wider population outside of these elite male graves was decreasing. This has sometimes been interpreted as being linked with the formation of kingship in Anglo-Saxon society;²⁹ however, Burch in his thesis 'The Origin of Anglo-Saxon Kingship', which uses

²⁸ M. Welch, 'Mid Saxon "Final Phase"', in Hamerow, H., Hinton, D. A. and Crawford, S. E. E. (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 266-75; S. Lucy, *Anglo-Saxon Way of Death*, (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Ltd, 2000), pp. 4-5; H. Geake, 'Burial Practice in Seventh- and Eighth-Century England', in Carver, M. O. H. (ed.) *The Age of Sutton Hoo: The Seventh Century in North-Western Europe*, (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1992), pp. 84-89. Also, H. Geake, 'Persistent Problems' in Lucy, S. J., and Reynolds, A. J. (eds), *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales*, (Society for Medieval Archaeology, 2002), pp.144-46; H. Geake, *The Use of Grave-Goods in Conversion-Period England c. 600-c.850*, Vol. 251, (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1997), pp. 31-105, 123-36.

²⁹ Thacker, 'England in the Seventh Century', in Fouracre, P. (ed.) *The New Cambridge Medieval History: Volume I c.500-c.700*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 474; Hamerow, 'Earliest Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms', in Fouracre, P. (ed.) *The New Cambridge Medieval History: Volume I c.500-c.700*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 276-80; Yorke, *Kings, and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 8-9 also, Carver, 'Kingship and Material Culture in Early Anglo-Saxon East Anglia', in Bassett, S. (ed.) *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, vol. 1, (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1989). See also Hines

Halsall's idea that burial rites were a tool used to represent the transfer of power from one generation to another,³⁰ points out that this level of complexity indicates that Anglo-Saxon kings had a degree of sophistication and ideology that, combined with the immense resources buried, does not suggest the beginning of a kingship system, but rather a continuation of it.³¹

However, when considering 'elite' burials kingly status few burials can be connected to a historical identity with any certainty.³² Burials, in particular, are reflections of the people that conducted the burial, more than they are a reflection of the person buried: 'The dead do not bury themselves'.³³ Whereas, on the continent, there are several burials similar to the ones we will be looking at, which can be confirmed as kingly burials. For example, the burial discovered at Saint Brice, featuring the inscription CHILDERICI REGIS, allowed it to be identified as Childeric I.³⁴ This was further confirmed by the correlation between coin sequences and Gregory of Tour's dates given for the death of Childeric I.³⁵ Due to the similarities in wealth displayed, and the presence of some distinctly 'kingly' artefacts, such as the sceptre found at Sutton Hoo Mound One,³⁶ we can use this as a comparative framework and say with a high degree of certainty that the 'elite' burials under discussion were probably kings of some sort.

Similar in wealth to Childeric I's grave is Mound One at Sutton Hoo in Suffolk. While it is not within the Kentish, or Northumbrian, kingdoms, it holds sufficient information about kingship at the time of the coming of Christianity to make it invaluable for this study. Neither Kent nor Northumbria are known at this time to have distinctive burials that could indicate kingly burials.

and Bayliss (eds), *Anglo-Saxon Graves and Grave Goods on the 6th and 7th Centuries AD: A Chronological Framework*, Vol. 13, (New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 231-492, for their argument that this shift in burial practices was due to an emerging understanding of kingship.

³⁰ G. Halsall, *Cemeteries and Society in Merovingian Gaul: Selected Studies in History and Archaeology, 1992-2009*, pp. 242-47, 205-11, 215-24.

³¹ P. J. W. Burch, 'The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingship', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Manchester, 2015), pp. 56-58.

³² Also J. Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxon State*, (London: A&C Bloomsbury, 2000), pp. 62-83.

³³ M. Carver, 'Burial as Poetry: The Context of Treasure in Anglo-Saxon Graves', in Tyler, E. M. (ed.) *Treasure in the Medieval West*, (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2000), 25-48, p. 34.

³⁴ E. James, 'Royal Burials Among the Franks', in Carver, M. (ed.), *The Age of Sutton Hoo: The Seventh Century in North-Western Europe*, (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer Ltd, 1994), pp. 245-247.

³⁵ G. Halsall, *Cemeteries and Society in Merovingian Gaul: Selected Studies in History and Archaeology, 1992-2009*, Vol. 18, (Boston: Brill, 2010), pp. 169-73.

³⁶ M. Carver, *Sutton Hoo: Burial of Kings?* (London: The British Museum Press, 1998), pp. 27-29.

Mound One is one of around nineteen mounds in a barrow cemetery overlooking the River Deben³⁷ near to the modern county border with Essex.³⁸ It can be found near a larger early Anglo-Saxon flat-grave cemetery sited on top of a small Bronze Age cremation burial and ring ditch, with both sites overlaying prehistoric field systems and boundaries,³⁹ which puts it in a very liminal and significant space. It was one of the later burials in the site,⁴⁰ with some arguing for the date range of 615-625 due to the dating of the Merovingian coins found within it.⁴¹

Due to erosion and other factors, the original dimensions at the time of burial are not known, however further excavations in the 1960s suggest the mound would have been roughly circular in shape. Early photographs in the late 1930s suggest the mound could have been as high as 3.3m; these pictures also show it was flat on the top and was not surrounded by a ditch.⁴² Within the mound was a ship which was 27.2m long and would have been rowed by up to 40 oarsmen. It showed signs of wear and tear, and subsequent repair, suggesting it was in use before it was appropriated as a burial item.⁴³ The centre of the ship showed evidence of a later construction of a wooden chamber, at a height of 5.3m and extending to the full width of the ship (4.6m),⁴⁴ probably constructed for the purposes of the burial itself, as it is within this area that the burial goods can be found.⁴⁵ Of note to us from the burial assemblage are the two gold and garnet shoulder clasps and a belt buckle with zoomorphic interlace; a purse containing 37 Merovingian tremisses (small gold coins), 3 coin blanks and 2 ingots; a helmet, shield and mail coat; a sword, and a number of spears; a series of vessels, buckets and cauldrons, including a Byzantine silver plate; a pair of large drinking horns, with gilt silver rims and vandykes, carved from auroch horns; a 'sceptre', a wood, bone or possibly ivory rod, an axe-hammer and a metal stand; and finally, a series of maple fragments that were eventually reconstructed as a lyre. Many of these items were

³⁷ Carver, *Sutton Hoo: Burial Ground of Kings?*, pp. 2-92.

³⁸ T. Williamson, *Sutton Hoo and its Landscape: The Context of Monuments*, (Oxford: Windgather Press, 2008), p 1.

³⁹ M. Carver, and A. Evans, *Sutton Hoo: A Seventh-century Princely Burial Ground and Its Context*, Vol. 69 of Reports of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London, (London: British Museum Press, 2005), pp. 447-458.

⁴⁰ Carver, and Evans, *Sutton Hoo, A Seventh-Century Princely Burial*, pp. 307-12.

⁴¹ R. Bruce-Mitford, *Sutton Hoo Ship Burial: Volume 1, Excavations, Background, The Ship, Dating, and Inventory*, (London: British Museum Publications, 1983), pp. 588-607.

⁴² Bruce-Mitford, *Sutton Hoo Ship Burial*, vol I, pp. 144-56.

⁴³ Bruce-Mitford, *Sutton Hoo Ship Burial*, vol I, pp. 345-424.

⁴⁴ Bruce-Mitford, *Sutton Hoo Ship Burial*, vol I, pp. 176-180.

⁴⁵ Bruce-Mitford, *Sutton Hoo Ship Burial*, vol I, pp. 439-457, see for full inventory.

probably made in the Anglo-Saxon kingdom itself, but there were also a significant number of items from the continent and beyond, such as the Byzantine plates and drinking horns.⁴⁶

Similar in opulence and elite status is the chambered grave at Prittlewell in Essex. Again, this sits outside our main geographic place of interest. However, the absence of pre-conversion writings makes attitudes to kingship impossible to establish through written records alone, and thus the site is vital in the contextualisation and understanding of kings and kingship.

Similar to Sutton Hoo, this gravesite also has a close relationship with a large, flat grave cemetery, though this association is more obvious as they occupy the same space.⁴⁷ It is, however, the only mound from the site as current excavation stands. The mound was not as large as Sutton Hoo Mound One, being only 10m in diameter and of unknown height, the mound itself has completely gone by the time of excavation. Within it was a wooden chamber, 1.4m deep and covering 4m squared of space. The acidity in the soil, similar to Sutton Hoo, had destroyed most of the organic evidence.⁴⁸ The objects found within are also similar, though once again they do not quite match up to Sutton Hoo's grandeur, and are of generally less good make and quality. This is perhaps more of a testament to Sutton Hoo's unique place in the corpus of elite burials, rather than a critique of the probable kingly burial status of Prittlewell.

Artefacts of note found close to the body within Prittlewell include a triangular gold belt buckle, decorated with a similar design to the buckle from Mound One, with three embossed rivets, though it lacks the zoomorphic interlace; traces of gold braid, which were found covering the chest area and were perhaps originally woven into the clothing of the deceased; two gold foil crosses discovered by the head; and a sword and two spearheads, which were found together with the remains of a shield. Within the chamber but not directly associated with the body were a large number of vessels, containers and buckets, and, similar again to those found in Sutton Hoo, a pair of drinking horns decorated with gilded copper interlace as well as other horn and glass drinking vessels and a Byzantine flagon. Also found was a metal folding stool, a 1.33m metal stand of

⁴⁶ M. Carver, 'Sutton Hoo in Context', in *Angli e Sassoni al di qua al di là del mare*, vol 32, (Rome: Presso la sede del centro, 1986), pp. 102-8.

⁴⁷ Tyler, 'The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Prittlewell, Essex: An Analysis of the Grave-Goods', *Essex Archaeology and History*. 19 (1988): 91-116, pp. 93-100.

⁴⁸ S. Hirst, *The Prittlewell Prince: The Discovery of a Rich Anglo-Saxon Burial in Essex*, (London: Museum of London Archaeology Service), p. 23-24.

uncertain purpose, a lyre suspended from the wall, again notably similar to Sutton Hoo, as well as a set of 57 bone gaming pieces.⁴⁹ These artefacts have dated the Prittlewell Prince to within the first half of the 7th century.⁵⁰

The presence of a stool at Prittlewell is significant as there is strong evidence that they were exclusively kingly.⁵¹ Also helpful in deciding these burials are not just elite burials but of kingly origin are the metal stands found in both burial sites. Believed to be corruptions of Roman military standards, they are also perhaps analogous to references in Bede's records to *tufa* that were carried before King Edwin.⁵² The connection between this object found at Sutton Hoo, and the description of 'a type of standard which the Romans called a tufa'⁵³ demonstrates to some a connection between Edwin and Raedwald's court (if it is indeed Raedwald buried at Sutton Hoo).⁵⁴ More importantly, it demonstrates the parade of kingship as a conscious borrowing of Roman tradition, and as both the historical description and archaeology match up, both pieces of evidence can reinforce each other and prove that both are, in some way, legitimate.

With the evidence demonstrated what can we say about kingship in the early 7th century just as Christianity was starting to come to England? First, we must try and understand who this evidence is talking about and why. As mentioned previously Halsall has been researching Frankish mortuary archaeology where he has established that burial practices such as these were all about the transference of power; more specifically these practices can be linked to a relative social instability from which the need arises for a sophisticated way of demonstrating the passing of power and authority from one generation to another.⁵⁵

⁴⁹N. Higham and M. Ryan, *The Anglo-Saxon World*, (Yale: Yale University Press, 2013), pp. 120-25, and Hirst, *Prittlewell Prince*, pp. 27-37.

⁵⁰ Hirst, *Prittlewell Prince*, p. 39.

⁵¹ Hirst, *Prittlewell Prince*, p. 30.

⁵² Bede, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 4th edn, ed. Colgrave, B., and Mynors, R., (Oxford: Oxford University, 1969), II:XVI, (henceforth abbreviated to EHEP); Bruce-Mitford, *Sutton Hoo Ship Burial, vol II*, (London: British Museum Publications, 1978), pp. 403-31.

⁵³ EHEP, II:XVI, translation by the author.

⁵⁴ EHEP, p. 192 note 3.

⁵⁵ Burch, 'The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingship', p.56-7; also, Halsall, *Cemeteries and Society in Merovingian Gaul* pp. 93-106, 203-214 and pp. 175-87. See also a similar idea from Knüsel, 'Of No More Use to Men than in Ages Before?: The Investiture Contest as a Model for Funerary Interpretation', in R. Gowland, and C. Knüsel, *Social Archaeology of Funerary Remains*.

Further, if burial is seen in the light of the transference of power by the people remaining as opposed to having much to do with the intention of the one interred, then taken to its logical extent the act of a kingly burial is much more about the incoming new power and a show of inheritance and continuity as well as the power and wealth to be able to achieve these remarkable burials. This then can be linked to the religious objects interred and the complicated cultural messages being shown. The burials may not completely demonstrate the thought process or the direct political and societal process of the life that is interred, but rather the person who has now inherited the power and who subsequently demonstrates their various ties and commitments. This is also demonstrated on the continent, by the Merovingians, at a similar time.⁵⁶

Consequently, the continental origin of some of the items, and the presence of Christian symbols and artefacts becomes significant as it demonstrates that the powerful were looking to mainland Europe for trade and were subject to their cultural and religious influences. However, the pagan imagery on items such as the Sutton Hoo helmet, show that this was not their only concern. Further, artefacts in both burials, such as the presence of swords and spears and shields, as well as the mail and helmet of Sutton Hoo, show the importance of warfare. The helmet in Sutton Hoo could perhaps denote some sort of warrior leadership, given that the imagery of warfare, power, and leadership combine in this ceremonial artefact.

In the Sutton Hoo burial, in addition to the evidence of a continental outlook, there appear to be linked to the Celtic insular world. The whetstone is of Celtic design and suggests British borrowings or origins, or cultural exchange in something as significant as early Anglo-Saxon kingship.⁵⁷ However, of even more interest to us in Sutton Hoo is the presence of the axe-hammer. It is unique in the Anglo-Saxon world, and its style would suggest ritual use rather than for tool-working or warfare; indeed, it has been suggested that it was used for ritual sacrifice of animals. There is a lack of evidence for this supposition, but there are few other alternatives to its use that have been proffered by the archaeological community besides that of the purely ornamental,

⁵⁶ G. Halsall. *Settlement and social organization: the Merovingian region of Metz*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2002), pp. 250-264.

⁵⁷ M. Enright, 'The Sutton Hoo Whetstone Sceptre: A Study in Iconography and Cultural Milieu', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 11, (1982), 119-134.

consequently making it much less meaningful as an object.⁵⁸ If taken as having some sort of religious or ritual role it would add to the evidence the king played some sort of role in religious matters. However, on its own, it cannot be taken as solid proof.

Finally, the role of the king as not just war leader and religious leader, but also as a provider for his people, and the cultural importance of hospitality can be seen in these burial assemblages. The presence of drinking vessels and other ostentatious containers for food, as well as the presence of lyres at both sites and gaming dice at Prittlewell, show how these ideas are given equivalent importance at both sites. Hospitality and provision, combined with the martial prowess and protection of the Anglo-Saxon rulers, allows us to glimpse the relationship between the king and his people. This was the basis upon which Anglo-Saxon rulers drew their authority and power.⁵⁹

Further examples of this strong link between warfare and feasting can be found in the literature. Henry Mayr-Harting details how there was a long tradition of heroic poetry, for instance *Beowulf*, from before and then during Bede's time,⁶⁰ and he takes it as a valid and valuable source to consider when looking at the changes in the ideas of kingship. George Jack concludes through the use of linguistic and content evidence, that a date of the early eighth century is probably the most accurate.⁶¹ *Beowulf* conveys both pre-Christian and Christian ideas of kingship, depicting possible compatibilities of warrior kings and Christian ideals.⁶² One aspect of kingship which is mentioned in *Beowulf* can be found in lines 3080 and 3782, which talk about Beowulf as being the 'keeper of the kingdom'⁶³ and 'the most protective of his people',⁶⁴ respectively. This shows a deeply ingrained idea of the king as a warrior and protector of the people. This concept of kingship can also be seen obliquely referenced by Bede, as he uses several examples to demonstrate the

⁵⁸ A. S. Dobat, 'The King and his Cult: The Axe-Hammer from Sutton Hoo and Its Implications for the Concept of Sacral Leadership in Early Medieval Europe', *Antiquity*, 80, 2006, 880-893.

⁵⁹ Burch, 'The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingship', p. 60.

⁶⁰ H. Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity*, (Pennsylvania State: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), .pp. 223-224.

⁶¹ G. Jack, 'Introduction', in *Beowulf: A Student Edition*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 6.

⁶² P. Wormald, 'Bede, Beowulf and the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy', *British Archaeological Reports*, 46, (1978), 32-97, p. 40.

⁶³ *Beowulf*.

⁶⁴ *Beowulf*.

peace within Edwin's kingdom and the care he had for his people - "Tantum rex idem utilitati suae gentis consuluit" (the king cared only for the good of his nation).⁶⁵

The Old English word *Dryht* expresses the idea of 'noble, lordly', and Green talks about this word within a secular semantic field,⁶⁶ and also specifically in the military semantic field.⁶⁷ However, in the Christian poem *Caedmon's Hymn*, we have two instances of *Dryhten* being used to refer to the Christian God.⁶⁸ Green demonstrates that this word becomes common usage for referring to God,⁶⁹ and Yorke argues that this shows the willingness of the Anglo-Saxons to combine their past and secular pre-Christian ideas with the new religion.⁷⁰ Chaney goes on to demonstrate how this shows that the Anglo-Saxons had come to view kingship in light of the new Christian way of thinking, albeit in conjunction with the old ways of thinking.⁷¹ This is further evidenced by lines 455-456 of the poem *Christ*, which shows Christ as akin to a secular lord with his disciples referred to as 'thegns'.⁷² The use of a military hierarchy, with God as the lord, consequently gave power to the Anglo-Saxon kings as the enactors of God's will through martial might.

Looking back to *Beowulf* there is an interesting passage that details some of the aspects of Hrothgar's rule as king that goes as follows:

Ʒā wæs Hrōðgāre herespēd gyfen,
wīges weorðmynd Ʒæt him his winemāgas,
georne hȳrdon oððƷæt sēo geogoð gewēox,
magodriht micel. Him on mōd bearn,
Ʒæt healreced hātan wolde,
medoærn micel men gewyrcean,

⁶⁵ EHEP, II:XVI, translation by the author.

⁶⁶ D. H. Green, *The Carolingian Lord*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 275.

⁶⁷ Green, *Carolingian Lord*, pp. 277-278.

⁶⁸ *Caedmon's Hymn*, line 4 and 8.

⁶⁹ Green, *Carolingian Lord*, pp. 287-290.

⁷⁰ B. Yorke, *The Conversion of Britain: Religion, Politics and Society in Britain c. 600-800*, (Great Britain: Pearson Education Ltd, 2006), pp. 237-238.

⁷¹ W. Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 48-49.

⁷² Cynewulf, *Christ II*, ed. and trans. A. K. Hostetter, <<https://anglosaxonpoetry.camden.rutgers.edu/christ-ii/>> [accessed 14/05/17].

þone ylde bearn æfre gefrūnon,
ond þær on innan eall gedælan
geongum ond ealdum, swylc him God sealde,
būton folcscare ond feorum gumena⁷³

(Then Hrothgar was given success in war, and war glory, such that his friends and kinsmen willingly obeyed, until the young warriors increased into a great band of retainers. It came into his mind to command his men to build a great mead-hall which the children of men should hear of for all time, and to share out all that God gave him to young and old, except common land and the lives of men).⁷⁴

This section of *Beowulf* gives an insight into its portrayal of Hrothgar as a king. In the first four lines, we learn about how Hrothgar's power as a king was gained and maintained amongst the social hierarchy, specifically through war and glory, leading to a numerical increase in his direct and loyal followers. This shows evidence of a reciprocal relationship, which is further glimpsed in the lines regarding Hrothgar sharing out some of his possessions with a later line, 'hé béot ne áléh béagas daélde' ('He [Hrothgar] did not leave his vows unfulfilled, rings he shared out, treasures to his people'),⁷⁵ here demonstrating a common gift given out as rings. This demonstrates how these bonds were maintained. Throughout *Beowulf*, we are shown examples of men under Hrothgar who would have been part of this relationship.⁷⁶ Further discussion of a king's *magodriht* and other aspects of the king's immediate followers and retainers, in a more historical context but also with reference to *Beowulf*, features in a later section of this thesis.⁷⁷

Another important point is that more people, and consequently power, are concentrated around the king after his success in war, as seen in the archaeological evidence of warfare related artefacts found in burials, as has previously been discussed. The importance of these burials and the significance given to the artefacts associated with warfare, such as the Sutton Hoo helmet⁷⁸

⁷³ *Beowulf*, Line 64-73

⁷⁴ The translation is my own, but based on the glossing in *Beowulf: A Student Edition*, ed. and trans. G. Jack, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁷⁵ *Beowulf*. Line 80.

⁷⁶ For example Unferð who is a thegn of Hrothgar's and is famous for his flying with Beowulf, *Beowulf*, line 499

⁷⁷ Insert page number from within own writing when page number has settled.

⁷⁸ Carver, 'Sutton Hoo in Context', pp. 102-8.

and the sword, two spears and a shield found with the Pritwell Prince,⁷⁹ corroborate the fact that kingly power is immutably tied up with the imagery of warfare, and most likely its actual practice and success.

This passage of *Beowulf* goes on to mention the building of the hall under the command of Hrothgar ‘*him on mód bearn þæt healreced hátan wolde medoærn micel*’ (It came into his mind to command his men to build a great mead-hall)⁸⁰, and this is also within the context of how Hrothgar’s power base was established and maintained. A significant section of *Beowulf* takes place within these hall spaces, notably Hrothgar’s hall, which forms the setting for much of the first half of the narrative (1-2199). The hall itself becomes not just a backdrop to the events that unfold in the first half of the poem, but almost a character in its own right, embodying the epitome of heroic achievement before Grendel’s attack.⁸¹ This subsequent struggle between Beowulf and Grendel, which takes place directly inside Heorot, is regarded by some as a representation of the Christian idea of salvation, played out in a more familiar way to the Germanic people so as to introduce them to this concept.⁸² Alternatively, it is seen as a fight between two Germanic warrior archetypes, namely the new Christian tradition and the old Germanic pagan tradition.⁸³ There are countless other interpretations, but it is beyond the remit of this thesis to list them all here. Either way, the fact that these struggles played out within the hall, the domain of the king, and that the later struggle with Grendel’s Mother directly involves this same individual king, shows a belief that any societal struggle will have kingship at its centre.

This idea of building a hall after success in war, and the further association of martial glory with the powerful rise of the king, is not unique to Hrothgar in *Beowulf*. Sýcld, an ancestor of Hrothgar, is said to have come from overseas to do just that, consequently establishing the Danish royal house.⁸⁴ Furthermore, there is much linguistic evidence throughout the text that warfare of some kind is inextricably linked to the various kings described in *Beowulf*. Barbara Raw breaks

⁷⁹ Tyler, ‘The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Prittlewell, Essex: An Analysis of the Grave-Goods’, *Essex Archaeology and History*, 19 (1988), 91-116.

⁸⁰ *Beowulf*. Line 67-68.

⁸¹ G. Jack, ‘Introduction’, *Beowulf*, p. 8.

⁸² M. B. McNamee, ‘“Beowulf”: An Allegory of Salvation?’, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 59, No. 2 (Apr., 1960), pp. 190-207.

⁸³ D. Waytt, *Slaves and Warriors in Medieval Britain and Ireland, 800-1200*, (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 102-104.

⁸⁴ *Beowulf*, lines 4-11.

this down into a thorough list,⁸⁵ with notable examples such as *heaðorof*⁸⁶ and *niðheard*⁸⁷ used to describe various people in *Beowulf* as ‘brave in battle’ and *guðcýning*⁸⁸ meaning ‘war-king’.⁸⁹

The hall as a physical representation of the king’s power as a space is further reinforced from within the passage we are examining in the line which comments specifically that this hall was a place for command, and places this space strictly within the command structure later established between the king and his retainers. However, in other sections of *Beowulf* there are signs of important non-martial activities taking place within the hall, and consequently within the sphere of the king’s power. Songs and music were shared within the hall,⁹⁰ as were stories, including the telling of the tragedy of Hildeburh.⁹¹ The word *gomenwudu* is a kenning for a harp, and indicates the presence of music and musical instruments. There is also much evidence of feasting activities, and especially the drinking of mead and ale.⁹² Taken with the archaeology and artefacts already discussed, including the lyre found in the Prittlewell Prince burial,⁹³ we have a very clear demonstration of societal acts outside of warfare that were considered important reflections of a king’s power or were seen as tools used by kings to express their kingship.

Having established the importance of the hall structure and the affinity of the physical representation of the hall to the power of kingship in its various spheres, it is interesting to note that Raw asserts that the size of Heorot is significant precisely because it directly represents the extent of Hrothgar’s warband.⁹⁴

Lastly, there are two other significant areas to be examined within the passage chosen. First is a mention of God in the instance of ‘God gave him’, which is clearly referencing the monotheistic god of Christianity as opposed to any pagan god. This has already been discussed previously when looking at the dating of *Beowulf* and what this means in terms of using it as a tool

⁸⁵ B. Raw, ‘Royal Power and Symbols’, in *Beowulf: The Age of Sutton Hoo: The Seventh Century in North-Western Europe*, ed. M. O. H. Carver, (Woodridge: Boydell Press, 1992), p.168.

⁸⁶ *Beowulf*, line 2191.

⁸⁷ *Beowulf*, line 2417.

⁸⁸ *Beowulf*, lines 199, 1969, 2563, 2677, 3037.

⁸⁹ ‘Royal Power’, p. 168.

⁹⁰ *Beowulf*, lines 88-90 and 496-497.

⁹¹ *Beowulf*, lines 1063-1159.

⁹² *Beowulf*, lines 485-496, 624, 776, 1015, 1067 as examples.

⁹³ See previously, p. 13.

⁹⁴ ‘Royal Power’, p. 168.

to understand both the pre-Christian and post-Christian worlds. In a later section of this thesis,⁹⁵ which includes other examples taken from *Beowulf*, this idea is picked up again, specifically as a way of viewing post-Christianity kingship and how much of this is a direct carry-over from the pre-Christian pagan type of kingship. However, if this particular line from *Beowulf* ('swylc him God sealde') hints at a time before the Christian revision of the written form of the text, then this is a demonstration of a connection between the king and matters of a religious nature that predates prevalent Christianity. One interpretation of this theocratic link is commonly referred to as 'Sacral Kingship', which is the theory of the Germanic origin of descent-based authority where kings are descended from a line that was originally divine.⁹⁶ For example, the royal lineage of Northumbria is said by Bede to have descended from Woden.⁹⁷

The idea of 'Sacral Kingship' also encompassed the idea of charismatic 'luck', mediator to the divine and war leader, which William Chaney claims are behind the pre-Christian concept of kingship.⁹⁸ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill believes that the idea of 'Sacral Kingship', did not lessen with the conversion to Christianity⁹⁹ and that by the time of the 7th century this aspect of a more theocratic idea of kingship was part pre-Christian and part Christian.¹⁰⁰

However, Alexander Murray maintains that the early Germanic idea of 'Sacral Kingship' is unfounded and that there is no source that can unequivocally point to this idea.¹⁰¹ Joseph Canning also finds the evidence for this questionable, and, building on Molly Miller's assertion that having genealogies descended from Woden was merely the traditional way of establishing a royal lineage,¹⁰² states that it had no meaning beyond that.¹⁰³ Instead, the sacral elements, if they did exist, were so thoroughly transformed by the emerging Christian theocratic ideas as to be

⁹⁵ See pp. 57-59.

⁹⁶ W. A. Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 17.

⁹⁷ EHEP, II:XV.

⁹⁸ Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship*, pp. 12-16.

⁹⁹ J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 7-9.

¹⁰⁰ A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship*, pp. 55-57.

¹⁰¹ A. Murray, 'Post vocantur Merohingii: Fredegar, Merovech, and "Sacral Kingship"', in *After Rome's Fall: Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History*, ed. A. C. Murray, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 1998), p. 151.

¹⁰² M. Miller, 'Bede's use of Gildas', *English Historical Review*, 90, 241-261, p. 254.

¹⁰³ J. Canning, *A History of Medieval Political Thought: 300-1450*, (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 28.

unrecognisable.¹⁰⁴ In truth, examining the nature of the relationship between the king and his perceived role and the pagan religion that came before Christianity is almost impossible, given the lack of sources, and that the few historical accounts we do have of interaction between an Anglo-Saxon king and any sort of religious happening, is tainted by the Christian writers that wrote about it. However, while I will not go so far as Chaney and Wallace-Hadrill in their assertions about the extent and truth of the sacral kingship as they outline it, the very basic premise, that there is a strong connection between the king and the religious underpinning of the Anglo-Saxons and their paganism, is not without foundation, although its exact extent is hard to define. This is before even the conversion to Christianity, which Canning and this thesis argues, does then have a significant impact on the relationship between kingship and religion. However, despite the lack of support for sacral kingship in recent Anglo-Saxon scholarship¹⁰⁵ it does introduce the idea of the connection between kinship and kingship that shall be further explored later in the thesis.¹⁰⁶

Secondly, the line regarding the kingly distribution of gifts in *Beowulf* is followed by a clause that modifies the previous sentence by stating what is not the king's to give, namely *sealde būton folcscare ond feorum gumena*, 'common land and the lives of men'. The first half of this clause puts a provisional cap on the power of the king, in that it is not in his purview to give out common land as if it was his own.¹⁰⁷ It is therefore important to note that even within this piece of heroic poetry, kingship does not have absolute power over the land.

Lastly, the second half of this line, *feorum gumena* and its position within the context of gift-giving and land establishes that it is part of this same understanding and immediately raises the possibility that the text is referring to 'the lives of men' as property, that is slavery. This context is further compounded by the added context already discussed, namely that this is a list of things the king is not to give out as gifts to his loyal followers as rewards for fighting in wars and battles. If this is indeed the case, it then raises the question of why the king was not allowed to gift slaves as part of the maintenance of the power relationship between the king and his subjects, which

¹⁰⁴ Canning, *Medieval Political Thought*, pp. 27-29.

¹⁰⁵ Most recent scholarship on the subject seems to be mostly concerned with contemporaneous Ireland, see, M.J. Aldhouse-Green, 'Pagan Celtic iconography and the concept of sacral kingship', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, vol. 52, 2001, pp.102-117, for example.

¹⁰⁶ See page, 30-31.

¹⁰⁷ The issue of common land is complicated and covers more than just the Anglo-Saxon period. For a good archaeological and legal perspective see Susan Oosthuizen's, *Tradition and Transformation in Anglo-Saxon England: Archaeology, Common Rights and Landscape*, (Bloomsbury: London, 2013).

might fundamentally alter our understanding of kingship and, in this instance, of slavery as well. This would have important implications for the perceived understanding of the restrictions upon kingship and its ability to express power within an aspect of Anglo-Saxon society not always considered and therefore would have potential implications for this thesis.

At present, there seems to have been no direct research or analysis focused on these specific lines of *Beowulf*. Neither David Pelteret nor David Wyatt, use this as an example of slavery in the Anglo-Saxon world in their detailed books on slavery during this time period and geographical instance.¹⁰⁸ Other, more general, works on various aspects of Anglo-Saxon life and society avoid discussing slavery altogether or mention it only in passing.¹⁰⁹ Other twentieth-century historians that have dealt with the issue of slavery in Anglo-Saxon England often assert that it only happened to criminals or debtors;¹¹⁰ subsequent historians spent little time on the subject, often trying to distance the Anglo-Saxons from the practice. Douglas Fisher, for example, blamed the incoming Danes in the later Anglo-Saxon period for a revitalisation of slavery.¹¹¹ It is not until the aforementioned work by Pelteret that there is a comprehensive and unflinching look at slavery in Anglo-Saxon England. Wyatt asserts that this may be due to more recent changes in attitude to slavery, itself informed by New World slavery, which stills dominates the minds of contemporary historians.¹¹² Consequently, it is perhaps not surprising that a minor line in *Beowulf* may have been overlooked when examining the issue of slavery as only in recent years have the attentions of historians shifted, and consequently, their way of looking at the evidence has changed.

¹⁰⁸ D. Pelteret, *Slavery in Early Medieval England*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995), and D. Wyatt, *Slaves and Warriors in Medieval Britain and Ireland, 800-1200*, (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

¹⁰⁹ W. Patrick, "The emergence of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms." In *The Making of Britain*, (London: Palgrave, 1984), pp. 49-62; J. Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxon State*, (London: A&C Black, 2000); C. Oman, 'The social organisations of the early English kingdoms', in *England before the Norman Conquest: Being a History of the Celtic, Roman and Anglo-Saxon Periods Down to the Year A.D. 1066, Part 1066*, (London: Creative Media Partners LLC, 2018); F. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), mentions slavery four times; R. Arnold, *A Social History of England, 55 BC to AD 1215*, (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1967).

¹¹⁰ Freeman, E., *History of the Norman Conquest*, (New York: Clarendon Press, 1873), p.292, and E. Wingfield-Stratford, *The History of British Civilisation*, vol. i, (London: Routledge, 1928), p.34 and D. Whitlock, *The Beginnings of English Society*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1952), p.112.

¹¹¹ D. Fisher, *The Anglo-Saxon Age c. 400-1042*, (New York: Barnes and Nobel, 1992), p. 333. A more detailed breakdown of the historiography of slavery in this period can be found in, *Slaves and Warriors in Medieval Britain and Ireland*, pp. 1-5.

¹¹² Wyatt, *Slaves and Warriors*, pp. 1-2 and 5-10, see also, 10-23 for a close look at how and why slavery has been explained away and glossed over in history in the medieval period.

Before we can use these lines to talk about slavery, and what it can tell us about kingship given its greater context in the passage we are analysing, we must first address the glaring issue as to whether this is, in fact, talking about slavery at all. Upon first glance, at least linguistically, there is not a strong case. In all the lists of words used to describe various types of slavery – and there are extensive words for this phenomenon due to the importance and commonality of it in Anglo-Saxon society throughout the whole period – the words *feorum* or *gumena* do not feature, nor are they used as a phrase together to denote slavery.¹¹³ Nor does it appear to be a phrase translated from Old Norse or Latin into Old English and subsequently taken into some sort of common parlance, despite both languages' attested impact on Old English, specifically in the language denoting slavery.¹¹⁴ Therefore, outside of the context of this phrase, it is possible to argue that this has nothing to do with slavery. However, the context is just as important as the choice of words, with 'the lives of men' appearing within the context of gift-giving and land distribution. The precedent for land and slavery being dealt with via similar language and in similar circumstances, including land charters,¹¹⁵ indicates that there are grounds for further research into the possibility that this may indeed be an allusion to slavery.

Wyatt draws clear lines of relationship between the concepts of violence, identity and political cohesion in the warrior fraternities that were integral to medieval societies, and specifically, in this case, the Anglo-Saxons, and establishes how slavery, and the raiding of slaves, was important to this particular aspect of the community.¹¹⁶ This thesis has already partially examined the archaeological evidence, and now textual evidence, for the relationship between the king and his followers, many of whom were part of these warrior fraternities. This relationship can be seen in the shared use of violence towards others, and the shared use of the hall; the presence of slavery, as suggested by these lines, would appear to add an additional dynamic to these relationships and might imply shared violence in the pursuit of slavery.¹¹⁷ Wyatt observes an interesting phenomenon that develops between the post-conversion kings and the dedicated warriors of the society: laws from King Ine's code to Alfred's show their attempt to moderate and

¹¹³Pelteret, *Slavery*, pp. 41-45.

¹¹⁴ Pelteret, *Slavery*, pp. 46-48.

¹¹⁵ Pelteret, *Slavery*, pp.47-48.

¹¹⁶ Wyatt, *Slaves and Warriors*, pp. 101-110 and 123-130.

¹¹⁷ Wyatt, *Slaves and Warriors*, p. 123-130.

control the warriors' raiding and enslaving propensities.¹¹⁸ Perhaps then, and bearing in mind the later Christian oversight given to *Beowulf* as the oral pagan story was written down by Christians, this is evidence that this tension was already evident before Christianization. Alternatively, these words could be read as implying that slaves and the act of obtaining them are a right of the warbands that cannot be imposed upon by the king. However, any speculation about this is problematic for several reasons. This is one line in *Beowulf* that, even if it concerns the relationship between kings and potential slaves, does so in an indirect way. Other instances of an intersection between kingly power and slavery seem not to appear until post-Christianization, when laws, including laws on slaves, were written under the direction of kings, but also under the influence of Christianity. Otherwise, there seems to be little to no consequential interaction or management of the slave trade or slavery as an endeavour or a business. This is perhaps not surprising but does mean with regards to this line that we are left with more questions than answers. Can this neglected clause tell us about the status of slaves directly owned by the king? Does the implication that they could not be given as gifts demonstrate that their ownership by the king made them more valuable or important, which might have implications for our understanding of the influence the king had in his immediate circle? Or does it tell us more about the relationship between the king and the people he would be gifting to – that they could place constraints on royal power? Perhaps, given the ambiguous wording of the whole passage, we might be witnessing something unique to Hrothgar, and that the other kings were free to gift 'the lives of men' to whomever they chose. Further analysis of this idea is beyond the scope of this thesis; however, drawing attention to the potential behind this concept within these short lines of *Beowulf* begins to give us a glimpse of the further complexities of kingship as imaged by the Anglo-Saxons.

The last important aspect of pre-conversion kingship to be examined is the centrality of kinship, with its deep ties to the land. As has been previously discussed in the section on 'Sacral Kingship', the idea of descent and being related to a line of power was important to the Anglo-Saxons. Further evidence of kinship being an important factor for Anglo-Saxon society is found in the law codes, as we will see later in this work. How this kin-based idea of society factored into the importance of land is discussed below.

¹¹⁸ *Slaves and Warriors*, pp. 104-108.

Edward Thompson's scholarship on the early Germanic tribes attributed the move from a relatively equal society in terms of gender and class, to the more patriarchal society found in the latter half of the fifth century, to the inheritance of a property that favoured men. This brought about a 'hereditary nobility' and led to a centralisation of power, which in turn initiated more formal law-making and a more centralised system of justice.¹¹⁹ Thompson, reflecting on the writings of Tacitus and how he implicitly draws a connection between wealth and the rule of an autocratic leader ('Wealth, too, is held in high honour; and so a single monarch rules'),¹²⁰ also establishes a strong connection between increasing importance of land ownership and the growing centralisation of royal power.¹²¹ The use of Tacitus to establish an understanding of the Germanic people is not unproblematic, as it is a second-hand account with its own biases and lack of context. However, along with the archaeology, this is some of the only evidence we have of the structures designed to facilitate the elite wielding power in society on the eve of the cultural conversion of Britannia, which turned it from a Romano-British civilisation into an Anglo-Saxon society.

The change in early Germanic and Celtic societies from a kin-based system to a more recognisable 'civil society' has been discussed by Viana Muller. She ascribes this change to the evolution of the extra-kin and hierarchical patron/client bonds. These patron/client bonds can be seen in *Beowulf* in the form of gift-giving, as seen previously in this dissertation, and show how power was transferred and maintained beyond strict kinship bonds. Within Muller's Marxist emphasis on the means of production, she also establishes how the inequality inherent in society's ideas of reproduction can explain the creation of social relationships and culture, which inevitably led to the formation of an 'elite' and the beginnings of inequality. The importance of land, and the management of it, led to a more centralised form of protection and security.¹²² The cycle of violence that resulted from the need to protect, but also to gain land, increased the strength of the emerging tribal bonds, and the need for centralisation of an elite, and later formed the basis for the emergence of social classes, can be seen in both the Celtic and Germanic peoples.¹²³ Consequently,

¹¹⁹ E. Thompson, *The Early Germans*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. 60-61.

¹²⁰ Tacitus, *On Britain and Germany*, ed. and trans. H. Mattingly, in *A Translation of the 'Agricola' and the 'Germania'*, (London: Penguin Books, 2010), p. 138.

¹²¹ Thompson, *The Early Germans*, p. 69.

¹²² V. Muller, 'Origins of Class and Gender Hierarchy in Northwest Europe' *Dialectical Anthropology*, 10:1 (1985): 93-105, p. 94.

¹²³ Muller, 'Origins of Class and Gender Hierarchy in Northwest Europe', p. 95.

how the Anglo-Saxons approached, and interpreted, Christianity was largely shaped by their tribal pagan culture,¹²⁴ which tied the use and control of land to the control and expression of power.

It should be said that what exactly is understood by the terms ‘kin’ and ‘kinship’ in much existing scholarship needs further interrogation. David M. Schneider, in *A Critique of the Study of Kinship*, reevaluates much established thought about kinship from the late 9th to early 11th centuries, and especially its tendency to attempt to impose relatively modern cultural ideas of what a kinship group might look like. The tendency has been to take for granted 18th- and 19th-century concepts of genealogy and lineage,¹²⁵ and to impose a separation of the secular and the religious that would have been alien to the peoples of the early medieval period.¹²⁶ I will briefly return to Schneider’s approach later in the thesis (see below, p. 44). At the time of writing there has been no thorough study of Anglo-Saxon kinship using Schneider’s ideas, especially where the early pre-Christian period is concerned. It would be beyond the scope of this dissertation to take up Schneider’s challenge here, but his points are clearly relevant to my arguments. For instance, his argument that the ‘religious’ cannot be separated from the ‘secular’ in this period strengthens the premise that the Christian conversion must have impacted on ideas of kingship: a change of religion must, on Schneider’s analysis, have ramifications in all areas of cultural thought.

Another example of the expression of power we can find in pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon culture is that of the theocratic tribal leader. This would ultimately manifest itself through the foundation of ecclesiastical places by royalty: a sign of their power and control,¹²⁷ enabled by the idea of power being expressed through the management of land, and this concept will be explored further in the later sections on the early building of ecclesiastical sites.

Two of the ‘princely’ grave burials of the late sixth and early seventh centuries were the first things to be examined in this section, both had extensive grave goods that enlightened us to some aspects of kingship before the coming of Christianity. By examining their grave goods in conjunction with the basic definition of kingship developed for this thesis, and with the evidence taken from *Beowulf*, we were able to establish the burials as kingly and from there used what they

¹²⁴Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship*, p. 1.

¹²⁵ D. M. Schneider, *A Critique of the Study of Kinship*, (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1984).

¹²⁶ H. Hummer, *Visions of Kinship in Medieval Europe*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

¹²⁷Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship*, p. 74.

had to give us this starting idea of Anglo-Saxon kingship. The material associations with war, along with the pronouncements examined in *Beowulf* pointed out warfare, and the glory gained through it, as an essential facet of kingship. Other artefacts such as the gaming pieces found in Prittlewell and the lyres and drinking vessels found in both Sutton Hoo and Prittlewell also point to hospitality, song, story and feasting as being another important element, this was again backed up by evidence found in *Beowulf*. The ideologically sophisticated artefacts such as the Byzantine bowl, the pagan Germanic zoomorphic art found on the Sutton Hoo helmet and the gold crosses, pointed towards a kingship that had to deal with international politics and affairs, as well as internal factions to get a correct balance, and points to the importance of kingship in relation to religion. Meanwhile, the important aspects of kinship as demonstrated by *Beowulf* also add to the other three characteristics, giving us a well-defined idea of what pre-Christian kingship looks like.

The fact that these kingly burials only took place in specific areas in the south has been touched upon, and along with the broad use of *Beowulf*, which also cannot be applied to just one part of Anglo-Saxon England but is at best a representation of broader ideas of kings, we must take the idea we gained from kingship here within a broad understanding of how this might reflect kingship at the time, with not enough evidence to give us subtlety of examples of variations across geography and slight cultural difference of Northumbria vs Kent. However, it is not unreasonable to use the picture that has been built up as a broad understanding of kingship before the conversions happened in the early seventh century.

However, before we move on to the next section it is important to note the idea of kingship as established here did not form in a vacuum. Peter Burch, who explores the creation of kingship within Anglo-Saxon England, by examining such works as St. Patrick's *Epistola* and other continental writing that mention England in passing, such as the *Vita Germani*, establishes that the Germanic Anglo-Saxon kingship was not formed in England in isolation, with Northumbria in particular, taking example from the insular, and Kent from the continental.¹²⁸ The archaeological evidence of the burials examined have already pointed to a link to the Celtic British world and the post-Roman continental world. Further parallels and influence of continental and insular traditions of Kingship from before the conversion to Christianity is not covered here, due to the limits of this

¹²⁸ Burch, 'The Origins of the Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms', p. 219.

thesis.¹²⁹ Equally, the fact that *Beowulf*, though Old English in composition and firmly in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, is based on events and in the geography of Scandinavia, consequently, speaks to a long-term dialogue with these outside influences. This should all be considered when looking at kingship going forward, as the conversion to Christianity occurs, and beyond.

During the Conversion

In this section, the conversion of Kent and Northumbria will be examined, specifically regarding how this reflects upon the kings at the time and the incoming influences that this brought to the established kingdoms and kingship. Archaeology will not be looked at in this section as the impact of conversion and the conversion effort will be looked at in the next section and that is where the archaeological evidence really comes through. Here the work of Bede and his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* will be the main source as there are few other historical accounts of this time that can compare. We will also be initially looking at what Christianity was bringing with it in with regards to kingship, as it is these differences and their interaction with the Anglo-Saxon idea of kingship that will be examined in detail in the third section, and an understanding of how Christianity saw kings will be vital in identifying the effects of conversion upon the institution of kingship.

However, Christianity even its early years, was not a monolith of ideas, and Northumbria was initially mostly converted through the efforts of Celtic Christianity, as seen to be on a different ‘branch’ of distinct theology in some areas. O’Loughlin, however, argues that what the Celtic church represents is instead a ‘local theology’, in which each local iteration produces different temperaments and ‘schools of thought’.¹³⁰ It is not necessarily bound by geography, but by sharing the same belief system, cultural norms and variances in a religious form. Consequently, the Celtic church exists not as a truly distinctive theology but instead is largely defined by shared linguistic and cultural ties. This is not to imply that there were no differences in some theological practices

¹²⁹ See Burch, ‘*The Origins of the Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*’, for more detail of this nature.

¹³⁰ T. O’Loughlin, *Celtic Theology: Humanity, World and God in Early Irish Writings*, (London: 2005), p. 18.

compared to the Roman church; however, they are nuanced and affect certain areas of theological thinking more than others. However, Crehan argues that the Celtic Irish world used the concept of the Trinity in the priesthood, kingship and prophecy to shape their understanding of kingship.¹³¹ This was a concept familiar to Irenaeus¹³² who will be discussed later, which does indeed suggest that the same concepts which underpin the Roman-Christian idea of kingship were at least familiar to the Celtic insular world. However, little research has been done on the theological standpoint of Celtic Christianity and kingship, and this could be an area for further study. However, because of this, this thesis assumes that the concepts of Christianity and kingship are broadly the same within Celtic and the continental Roman Christianities.

Ante-Nicaean Christianity, the Rome-centred Christianity that started the conversions in Kent, was based on a foundation of human equality, as opposed to the ‘natural inequality’ that could be found in the hierarchical systems of the Germanic social structure. Sidentop establishes that Pauline theology challenged even the very basic idea of ‘fate’,¹³³ a core belief for the Germanic peoples. This Christianity also had within it, Sidentop argues, a basic understanding of the ‘individual’ as separate or even superseding the group.¹³⁴ This too was in opposition to the very group-orientated idea of the kinship groups and began to establish a concept of free will,¹³⁵ which reached its apotheosis under Augustine.¹³⁶ However, despite this radical departure from the more established forms of contemporary belief, the true extent of Pauline thought did not manifest immediately in the ancient world. Sidentop instead argues that while these lines of thought did influence the writing of Irenaeus and Augustine,¹³⁷ it would take a long time for Paul’s radical theology to engender the highly individualised society seen in the West¹³⁸.

¹³¹ J. Crehan, ‘Priesthood, Kingship, and Prophecy’, *Theological Studies*; Jun 1, 1981; 42, 2; Periodicals Archive Online pp. 216-231. P. 223.

¹³² Crehan, ‘Priesthood, Kingship’, pp. 217-219.

¹³³ L. Sidentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism* (London: Penguin Random House, 2015), pp. 60-61.

¹³⁴ Sidentop, *Inventing the Individual*, p. 63.

¹³⁵ Sidentop, *Inventing the Individual*, p. 65.

¹³⁶ Sidentop, *Inventing the Individual*, p. 101.

¹³⁷ Sidentop, *Inventing the Individual*, p. 77.

¹³⁸ Sidentop, *Inventing the Individual*, p. 114.

In Christian thought, sovereignty became reliant on the idea of imperial power as a means for spiritual fulfilment from the 4th century onward.¹³⁹ The main originator of this connection between sovereignty and religious fulfilment, and consequently the wider church's relationship with power, was Eusebius. He presented God's power as that of an imperial sovereign, which was then utilised and mimicked by such emperors as Constantine. This was the first step which saw the secular power and religious power becoming increasingly entwined. This ontological shift, along with Eusebius's further connection of the idea of *Pax Romana* in relation to the successful conversion of Constantine, created an origin myth for western Christianity, rooted in its connection to secular power and the violence that maintains it.¹⁴⁰ As a consequence, Mitchell argues, in the inception of the medieval there can be found the basic understanding of society based on the idea of hierarchical domination by the few as a means of establishing a peaceful and just society. In turn, there is a strong connection between sovereignty as an expression of imperial power, and the fulfilment of the eschatological aim of the church, namely the bringing about of the second coming of Christ and/or the establishment of heaven on earth. All this was encapsulated within the Roman conception of the imperial system.¹⁴¹ The more theocratic form of kingship established sovereign power as an extension of divine will and consequently saw law, which Ullmann argued was the embodiment of sovereign will, as coming from a higher morality above the king and which consequently had to be obeyed.¹⁴² The two seemingly contradictory ideas – Paul's equality of the individual, Eusebius's absolute hierarchy – would coalesce as the sovereign subjugation of the individual, as opposed to the family, or kinship, unit.¹⁴³ The nature of the law codes showed that by Germanic and Roman tradition the king should also follow the rule of law, Gregory the Great and Isidore also write about this.¹⁴⁴ This seems to run counter to a truly theocratic kingship and is something we will return to in the sections about laws.

Eusebius is thought to be a big influence on Bede and his writing of *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*,¹⁴⁵ and consequently Eusebius is very important in understanding

¹³⁹ R. Mitchell, *Church, Gospel, and Empire*, (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2011), p. 8.

¹⁴⁰ Mitchell, *Church, Gospel, and Empire*, pp. 8-9.

¹⁴¹ Mitchell, *Church, Gospel, and Empire*, pp. 16-17.

¹⁴² W. Ullmann, *Law and Politics in the Middle Ages* (London: Sources of History, 1975), p. 36.

¹⁴³ Sidenton, *Inventing the Individual*, p. 92.

¹⁴⁴ Canning, *A History of Medieval Political Thought*, p. 23.

¹⁴⁵ R. Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe from Paganism to Christianity 371-1386*, (London: Harper Collins, 1997), p. 24.

the new idea of Christian kingship. The relationship between Augustinian theology and Eusebius theology is beyond this dissertation, but it is important to note that there was a powerful influence of Eusebius on Augustine's ideas.¹⁴⁶ In turn, these ideas came through to Gregory the Great who, 'owes more to Augustine than any other writer'.¹⁴⁷

Other than Gregory the Great, Isidore of Seville is also an important writer on kingship in his work the *Sententiae*. His work on theocratic forms of kingship is very pervasive in early medieval political thought in Europe, though his work seems less well known in Anglo-Saxon England.¹⁴⁸ Bede is known to have accessed and possibly to have used his work.¹⁴⁹ Copies of Isidore's writings were also found in libraries of the missionary area of Germany. Significantly Isidore's *Sententiae*¹⁵⁰ maintains that the foundational edict of rule for a Christian king was the duty of care to the wellbeing of his subjects. The Germanic people had a similar concept, called the *Munt*, which entrusted the protection of its populace into the hands of the king, and it worked well alongside the more theocratic form of kingship derived from the Christian monarchical ideal. This concept appears throughout Anglo-Saxon law,¹⁵¹ and specifically in the laws of Aethelbert,¹⁵² as will be examined in more detail in the section on laws.

Here now follows a brief summary and understanding of the event that took place during the conversion, followed by a more detailed look at the historical documents, and specifically Bede's account in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*.

Early Anglo-Saxon kings were not rulers of a centralized state following a singular political creed, and their power was not total. Christianity would have initially had more incentive for kings to convert, rather than the other members of the elite who initially might have missed out.¹⁵³ This

¹⁴⁶ A. Hunter, 'Eusebius of Caesarea to St. Augustine of Hippo: relations between Church and state in historical perspective', *Masters Thesis, Durham University*, (1970).

¹⁴⁷ C. Straw, 'Gregory I', in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. A. Fitzgerald, J. C. Cavadini, (Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), p. 404.

¹⁴⁸ Canning, *A History of Medieval Political Thought*, p. 20.

¹⁴⁹ M. Cameron, "The sources of medical knowledge in Anglo-Saxon England." *Anglo-Saxon England*, 11, (1982), 135-155, p. 12.

¹⁵⁰ M. Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 83.

¹⁵¹ C. Hough, *An Ald Reht*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), p. 78.

¹⁵² King Aethelbert's Laws, in 'The Kentish Laws'. In F. Attenborough ed. and trans, *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 15.

¹⁵³ D. Tyler, 'Reluctant Kings and Christian Conversion in Seventh-Century England', *History* 92.306 (2007): 144-161, p. 160.

tension between the king who wanted to convert, and the other elites of the Anglo-Saxons, can give us an insight into the limits of power, and how the king wielded power, on the cusp of a wholesale national conversion to Christianity. Indeed, the length of time it took for the conversion to happen and not be subsequently undone points to this.

Kings had more to gain from conversion than simply the greater political stability offered by Christianity's apparent idea of kingship. It also seemed to promise a way of maintaining social and economic networks. As a result, conversion to a different religion seemed more than a reasonable proposition.¹⁵⁴ In the book *Acts of Faith*, the sociologists Stark and Finke outline the idea that conversion happens along the lines of social networks and trade.¹⁵⁵ For example, at Sutton Hoo, there was found a set of ten silver bowls, which probably had its origin in Byzantine, as well as two silver spoons containing the names of the Apostles.¹⁵⁶ The Anglo-Saxons start to see increased connections with professing Christians in their social and economic networks, as a result of commercial and other dealings with the continent, and marriage, such as Bertha, the Frankish Christian wife of Aethelbert, 'Some knowledge about the Christian religion had already reached him because he had a Christian wife of the Frankish royal family whose name was Bertha'.¹⁵⁷ This clearly demonstrates that Christianity was in some way familiar to the Kentish king, and the fact that this knowledge came with the political marriage, it already links the idea of power and Christianity into the mind of Aethelbert.

K. Cooper does not think that the wives of Anglo-Saxon kings had any *de facto* power, and therefore were not important in the conversion of the monarchs;¹⁵⁸ Tyler, however, asserts that there is some reason to believe they had influence.¹⁵⁹ He argues that the political circumstances, that is in the instance of Aethelbert the politics behind his marriage to a princess from the continent,

¹⁵⁴ R. Stark and R. Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 118-119.

¹⁵⁵ Stark and Finke *Acts of Faith*, pp. 114-139.

¹⁵⁶ R. Bruce-Mitford, *The Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial, Volume 3: Late Roman and Byzantine silver, hanging-bowls, drinking vessels, cauldrons and other containers, textiles, the lyre, pottery bottle and other items. I.* (London: British Museum Publications, 1983), pp. 69-146.

¹⁵⁷ EHEP, I:XXV.

¹⁵⁸ K. Cooper, 'Insinuations of Womanly Influence: An Aspect of the Christianizing of the Roman Aristocracy', *Journal of Roman Studies*, lxxxii (1992), pp. 150-64.

¹⁵⁹ D. Tyler, 'Reluctant Kings', p. 155.

of the time meant that the kings may, at least to some degree, have had to take into account their wives' position on religion.¹⁶⁰

Another reason the Anglo-Saxon kings may have considered Christianity was that they sometimes saw themselves as 'heirs' of Rome; archaeological evidence shows the use of Roman symbols of power,¹⁶¹ and Gregory the Great wrote to King Aethelbert of following in the footsteps of Roman and Byzantine empires.¹⁶² As seen previously there was an awareness of the greatness of the Byzantine Empire back to the time of the Sutton Hoo burial. The tendency to look at the past Roman empire as a demonstration and articulation of power made Christianity, deeply embedded within the imperial ideologies that now came with the Roman ideal, a natural choice.¹⁶³

New ideologies such as that of a hierarchically organised universe, with the king at the top of the earthly pyramid,¹⁶⁴ coincided with the more practical effects of centralisation and a stronger hierarchical principle evident in society. Literacy and basic bureaucracy were vital to accelerating the centralisation of power, which in turn led to an increased monopolisation of kingly power,¹⁶⁵ as shall be seen in the law codes and charters, and use of land in settlement organisation and building of monasteries in the next section.

Reading Bede, it can be easy to over-emphasise the role of missionaries on individual kings, such as Aethelbert. The attitude of the royal circle would also have been crucial for the success of the conversion effort.¹⁶⁶ Even so, it is easy for scholars to imply that converting to Christianity was the most beneficial and straightforward option open to the Anglo-Saxon kings.¹⁶⁷

However, ideological and organisational clashes between Christianity and the pre-Christian Anglo-Saxons did occur,¹⁶⁸ and, given the reliance of kings on other politically powerful people, any one ruler could not afford to needlessly alienate anyone.¹⁶⁹ The Anglo-Saxon rule was based

¹⁶⁰ D. Tyler, 'Reluctant Kings', pp. 156-157.

¹⁶¹ B. Yorke 'The Reception of Christianity at the Anglo-Saxon Royal Courts', in *St Augustine and the Conversion of England*, Ed. R. Gameson, (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999) p. 157.

¹⁶² EHEP, II:XXXII.

¹⁶³ D. Tyler, 'Reluctant Kings', p. 146.

¹⁶⁴ D. Tyler, 'Reluctant Kings', p. 146.

¹⁶⁵ D. Tyler, 'Reluctant Kings', p. 146.

¹⁶⁶ B. Yorke 'The Reception of Christianity', p. 152.

¹⁶⁷ D. Tyler, 'Reluctant Kings', p. 145.

¹⁶⁸ D. Tyler, 'Reluctant Kings', p. 146.

¹⁶⁹ D. Tyler, 'Reluctant Kings', p.146.

on a network of ‘alliances’ and oaths to the king from the free people, and consequently, any king would have to tread carefully for fear of being usurped.¹⁷⁰ Kings had to make decisions with the agreement of the elite, an example of this is King Sigebert, who took the advice of his councillors: ‘having taken counsel with his follower... when they all approved and assented to his faith he was baptized...’.¹⁷¹

Tyler does not ascribe to the orthodox view that the Christian conversion of Anglo-Saxon kings was unambiguously helpful, and instead thinks it could even be seen as an undesirable thing to do. Christianity was perhaps even a threat to the elite of the Anglo-Saxon world.¹⁷² Tyler points to the long gap between the arrival of Augustine and most kings being recognised as Christian as evidence that the conversion was not always inevitable despite the apparent advantages of imperial Christianity to a king.¹⁷³

In Scandinavia for example, there is little evidence of a priestly class; instead, rituals were carried out by local leaders.¹⁷⁴

While it would be an advantage for kings to have religious power wielded by an entire class of people, the clergy, who were entirely reliant on royal favour and patronage, the fact that Aethelbert, and the other early kings, refused outright to forbid traditional ritual practice speaks to how sensitive they were to the freedoms enjoyed by other politically powerful people in their realm. This was despite urging from Pope Gregory (originally to King Aethelbert but then presumably repeated by the clergy across England to most of the kings), to expedite the eradication of these practices.¹⁷⁵ Even when a king converted there was no guarantee that the next king would be Christian. It was common for a baptised king to be followed by an unbaptised son.¹⁷⁶ In ‘The Conversion of the Anglo-Saxons considered against the background of the Early Medieval Mission’, which was a study of this phenomenon, Angenendt concluded that unbaptised offspring was a hint of the complexities that arose from the royal conversion to Christianity coming up

¹⁷⁰ D. Tyler, ‘Reluctant Kings’, p. 147.

¹⁷¹ EHEP, III:XXII.

¹⁷² D. Tyler, ‘Reluctant Kings’, p. 144.

¹⁷³ D. Tyler, ‘Reluctant Kings’, p. 145.

¹⁷⁴ B. Yorke ‘The Reception of Christianity’, p. 153.

¹⁷⁵ EHEP, I:XXXII.

¹⁷⁶ D. Tyler, ‘Reluctant Kings’, p. 157.

against powerful opposing factions in the court. As a consequence, the unbaptised sons were a precaution against these powerful opposing factions feeling slighted.¹⁷⁷ Tyler argues that due to the fluid situation regarding the inheritance of kingship, father and sons could often be in opposition, and consequently their pagan views could be seen to show a directly oppositional view to Christianity in the royal courts and should be seen as ‘intra-dynastic competition’.¹⁷⁸

What the conversion process also shows is how much, and in what way, power was wielded by kings from the early 7th century up to the mid-8th century. They did not wield absolute power and had to accommodate the views of the other elites in Anglo-Saxon England. The consequential benefits of Christianity, which have already been briefly mentioned, and the effect it had on the very concept of kingship, will be examined in the next section.

Having examined the conversion of Kent in some detail, and the conversion tactics of Gregory the Great, we return to look at the conversion of Northumbria in more detail. This episode in history as written by Bede gives us a good look at the social structure in place at the time, partly due to the different conversion tactics used by Paulinus, and gives us an interesting comparison to the Kentish conversion that has been discussed so far. In chapter thirteen of book two of Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History* we see evidence of the kings need to ‘his principal friends and his advisors’ (“amicis principibus et consiliariis suis sese”), which included the chief priest Cofi.¹⁷⁹ This was after a vision given to Edwin that foresaw his victory in battle and coming out of exile and consequently prompted Edwin to seek out the conversion of his people.¹⁸⁰ As in Kent, the conversion as recounted by Bede started with the king. However, by contrast with Kent, it required a vision and victory in battle for conversion to become an acceptable idea in the king’s mind. This very brief glimpse of the mutual agreement that needed to be met between the king and his counsel is important as it shows us clearly that at this time a king’s power was limited by the influence wielded by their ‘principal friends and advisors’.

In this section, the theological grounding of kingship has been established, and the underpinning for the thought behind the conversion effort. The former ideas will be explored to

¹⁷⁷ A. Angenendt, ‘The Conversion of the Anglo-Saxons considered against the Background of the Early Medieval Mission’, *Settimane di studio del centro Italiano di studi sull’ alto medioevo*, 32, (1986), pp. 747–92.

¹⁷⁸ D. Tyler, ‘Reluctant Kings’, pp. 158-9.

¹⁷⁹ EHEP, II:XIII, translated by author.

¹⁸⁰ EHEP, II:XII.

the full extent of their impact in the coming section, and the later theological underpinning of the conversion tactics have been seen in evidence in this section. The struggles of converting Kent and Northumbria to Christianity have given us more evidence as to the character of kingship. The internal politics at play show us what kingship meant as sovereigns of people, and how that is balanced out by that of his advisors. Aethelbert's conversion went hand in hand with steps taken to make peace with the Anglo-Saxons pagan past and to attempt to maintain close ties even as the kingdom nominally became Christian. This is seen as even more evident when Aethelbert is succeeded by his son who temporarily renounces Christianity and goes back to the previous way of doing things. This also demonstrates the fragility of kingship, as the power of one king to the next is not without its limitations.

From the Northumbrian conversion story, we get an even clearer understanding of the relationship between the king and his advisors, and how significant their say was on important matters. We also get a continuation of ideas we established in the previous section, that of warfare being a vital part of the king's ability to govern and have the authority to make important choices, as seen by the success in war as being an important aspect in the conversion of Edwin.

Aftermath of the Conversion

This section will cover the hundred or so years after the conversion to Christianity had become established and a permanent entity in Kent and Northumbria. We will first be returning to the importance of land, and its connection to kingship, as previously established in the first section. This will have significance regarding religious sites, such as nunneries, and settlements, where we start to see growing organisational power and centralising of power as shown in the landscape. This will then be followed by a discussion of charters, and their importance due to the connection to the land and its representation of power within the concept of kingship. Lastly, the charters will be followed by a discussion on the law codes, and general discussion about the new importance of writing, with a return to *Beowulf*, and how this reflected kingship through the new prism of Christianity that had subsequently carved a niche out for itself in the social hierarchy of the Anglo-Saxons, and had a consequential effect on the expression of kingship in this society.

The prevalence of royal nunneries in Anglo-Saxon England, from the late 7th to late 8th centuries, is a tangible and temporal expression of the spiritual power of royal kinship groups in the different Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.¹⁸¹ Hans Hummer, using Schneider's approach to studying kinship,¹⁸² analyses Medieval kinship (with a primary focus on the continent) and comes to a number of interesting conclusions when applying this different understanding of kinship to the Merovingians (the closest contemporaries to the early Anglo-Saxons that he covers). Kinship groups are 'inextricably linked with divine kinship',¹⁸³ the close relationship between the two is shown in the monasteries and nunneries in Frankish rural strongholds.¹⁸⁴

Some illustrative examples of this close relationship can be found in those regions of Merovingian and early Carolingian Europe (mostly Francia) that had particularly strong ties with Anglo-Saxon England, particularly in the context of the early Anglo-Saxon missions to the Continent. Within Francia's 'Anglo-Saxon Cultural Province', we must only look to Fulda,

¹⁸¹ B. Yorke, *The Conversion of Britain: Religion, Politics and Society in Britain c. 600-800*, (Great Britain: Pearson Education Ltd, 2006), p. 167.

¹⁸² See page 30-31 of this thesis, and the works of D. M. Schneider, *A Critique of the Study of Kinship*, (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press), 1984 and H. Hummer, *Visions of Kinship in Medieval Europe*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2018, p1-10.

¹⁸³ Hummer, *Visions of Kinship*, p. 187-208

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.* p. 181.

founded by the Anglo-Saxon missionary St Boniface in the early eight century and, under Boniface's guidance, turned into a 'double monastery' that, at least initially, appears to have allowed male and female cohabitation, and which might have been modelled on, or at least inspired by, the Anglo-Saxon double monastery of Wimborne in East Dorset.¹⁸⁵ Though the two monastic communities at Fulda were subsequently separated, the Benedictine nun Leoba who had herself been trained and educated at Wimborne and accompanied Boniface on his mission continued to play a major role in the relationship between the Church and the Frankish rulers. As abbess to Tauberbischofsheim, Leoba with Boniface's support founded a series of additional nunneries with close ties to the Frankish royal Family (including that at Kitzingen),¹⁸⁶ and over the course of the following years she became a powerful political player within the region's kinship networks and even a counsellor to Charlemagne himself; upon her death, Leoba's body was buried next to that of Boniface in Fulda's cathedral – a prominent position in one of the greatest and most important abbey churches north of the Alps that, also under Charlemagne, became exempted from episcopal power and turned into what scholars consider a 'royal monastery'.¹⁸⁷

While there is limited comparable material and no equivalent study for early medieval England, Barbara Yorke, while not focussing directly on early Anglo-Saxon kinship, has done extensive work on early Anglo-Saxon nunneries and their use of the symbolic authority of kings¹⁸⁸ that offers a suitable case for comparison with the situation at Fulda and elsewhere on the Continent.

The application of Schneider's model of understanding kinship to the early Anglo-Saxons, in much the same way as Hummer has done with the Franks, could be a whole topic of its own. However, the early adoptions of nunneries and double monasteries suggests that we are dealing, at least in part, with a direct incorporation of previous societal ideas surrounding kingship and kinship from before Christianisation. There is a strong pattern that we see forming around the

¹⁸⁵ See S. Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church: Sharing a Common Fate* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1992), p. 272-4. Also cf. J. Raaijmakers, *The Making of the Monastic Community of Fulda, c.744-c.900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 19-40.

¹⁸⁶ F. Lifshitz, *Religious Women in Early Carolingian Francia: A Study of Manuscript Transmission and Monastic Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), p. 5-14.

¹⁸⁷ D. Watt, *Women, Writing and Religion in England and Beyond, 650–1100* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), p. 112-14. On Fulda's status as a royal abbey, see Raaijmakers, *Making of the Monastic Community*, p. 50-54.

¹⁸⁸ B. Yorke 'The Reception of Christianity', p. 168.

establishment of nunneries, led by a close female family member of the current reigning king or royal kinship group, in that they are almost all direct blood ties, often, though not always, of previously married women who after being widowed, and returning to their country of birth would become either a nun or abbess. As Stephanie Hollis has shown, these women were often highly educated and involved in the creation of a literary culture that connected their communities to the royal courts.¹⁸⁹ This was especially true of Northumbria, which saw the former Queen Iurminbruh and her sister return to Carlisle as abbesses¹⁹⁰ and King Oswiu's sister Aebbe at Coldingham.¹⁹¹

Perhaps the most famous example of this is Hild of Whitby, who was part of Edwin's royal family and grew up in his court, and according to Bede became an abbess of land granted by royal order, "monasterium quod nuncupatur heruteu... cui tunc Hild abbatissa praefuit" – 'a monastery called Heruteu... [which] at the time [was] ruled by abbess Hild'.¹⁹² This maintained the power of the land, at least symbolically, within the royal family, but also would be seen as an act of pious giving to the church, thus giving the king further legitimacy and religious political clout.

Yorke also points to strong ties between this practice and a similar one on the continent and suggests that the early adoption of royal nunneries was as a result of the stronger influence from the continent due to the close ties being established by shared Christianity and contacts.¹⁹³ However, David Rollason does not believe Yorke interrogates this idea fully, or explores to the full extent the implications of why this practice was adopted so early,¹⁹⁴ often within the first generation of conversion.¹⁹⁵ This is sometimes despite the direct opposition of the bishop, with

¹⁸⁹ S. Hollis, 'The Literary Culture of the Anglo-Saxon Royal Nunneries: Romsey and London, British Library, MS Lansdowne 436', in *Nuns' Literacies in Medieval Europe: The Hull Dialogue*, ed. by V. Blanton, V. O'Mara and P. Stoop (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), p. 169-84.

¹⁹⁰ Bede, 'Life of Cuthbert' in, *The Age of Bede, Life of Cuthbert: Eddius Stephanus, Life of Wilfrid: Bede, Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow: The Anonymous History of Abbot Ceolfrith with The Voyage of St Brendan*, trans. J.F. Webb, ed with an introduction by D.H. Farmer; *Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow and The Anonymous History of Abbot Ceolfrith*, trans D. H. Farmer, (London: Penguin Classics, 2004), cha 27-8; *Eddius Stephanus, Life of Wilfrid*, in, *The Age of Bede, Life of Cuthbert: Eddius Stephanus, Life of Wilfrid: Bede, Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow: The Anonymous History of Abbot Ceolfrith with The Voyage of St Brendan*, trans. J.F. Webb, ed with an introduction by D.H. Farmer; *Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow and The Anonymous History of Abbot Ceolfrith*, trans D. H. Farmer, (London: Penguin Classics, 2004), ch 24.

¹⁹¹ *EHEP*, IV:XIV and XXVI.

¹⁹² *EHEP*, III:XXIV, translated by author.

¹⁹³ B. Yorke, *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses*, (London: Continuum, 2003), p. 23-4.

¹⁹⁴ D. Rollason, 'Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses', *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 121, 2006, pp. 505–507.

¹⁹⁵ Yorke, *Nunneries and Royal Houses*, p. 189.

Archbishop Theodore being known to actually disagree with the practice.¹⁹⁶ It is also very uniquely a kingly thing to do, as there is almost no evidence of any other heads of families gifting land to the church with a view to establishing a nunnery by someone within the family.¹⁹⁷ Consequently an alternative explanation to being influenced by the continent is that gifting land was an easy way to control women with blood ties from coming back into the court. Both ultimately greatly benefited the king and his power and standing.

Potential evidence of this is that Wessex very notably, and unlike the rest of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, did not ever particularly take part in this practice. This has been pointed to the fact that Wessex in particular among its fellow Anglo-Saxons, did not hold the queen in a position of power in the same way or at all.¹⁹⁸ As the women were not being seen as an extension of kingly power in Wessex, there is no establishment of nunneries, and areas where queens and women are seen as having closer ties to kingly power. The fact that Wessex did not have nunneries ruled by royal women, strongly suggests that one of the major benefits of the establishment of nunneries was to further kingly power within the new sphere of Christianity.

It is important to bear in mind that the giving of land to the church may have been an additional worry to the elites, just below in power to that of the king, as they too were expecting land to be given to them because of their service, especially as land was often given in perpetuity.¹⁹⁹ Bede's letter to Ecgbert demonstrates this tension between the church and the secular powers. Bede speaks of the 'carelessness of previous kings',²⁰⁰ at the amount of land given out to the church early on, and indefinitely, and this now makes it difficult for 'sons of nobles or veteran soldiers to receive an estate',²⁰¹ Bede shows sympathy to the secular side of things, probably in part due to his own initial upbringing with his father but also due to the fact he is an aristocrat himself.²⁰² While the rest of the context of the letter prompts the idea that Bede is more aggrieved

¹⁹⁶ Theodore, *Penitential*, II: vi, 8; J. T. McNeill and H. A. Gamer (eds), *Medieval Handbooks of Penance* (New York: Columbia, 1979), p. 204.

¹⁹⁷ Yorke, *Nunneries and Royal Houses*, pp. 17-23.

¹⁹⁸ Yorke, *Nunneries and Royal Houses*, pp. 130-2.

¹⁹⁹ D. Tyler, 'Reluctant Kings', p. 149.

²⁰⁰ Bede, 'Bede's Letter to Ecgbert', in *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. D. Farmer (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 343.

²⁰¹ Bede, 'Bede's Letter to Ecgbert', p. 345.

²⁰² J. Campbell, 'Secular and Political Contexts', in *A Cambridge Companion to Bede*, ed. S. DeGregorio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 24.

at the lack of discipline in many of the other monastic sites rather than the volume of land presented to the church.

It wasn't just a continued sense of kinship and its importance to extending the influence of kingly power that is seen in the use and founding of nunneries. It also takes place in the form of land management and gifting which is joined with the early use of land charters that were used as a new way of maintaining and expanding the idea of power and land. This links back to how important land was to kingship, as established earlier in this thesis, before the conversion. This relationship, and the changes happening in the newly Christian Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, is explored in the next section as we look at charters as not just administrative documents, but also a potential ritualistic one, tying kingship and land together.

The downfall and replacement of these nunneries – often into minsters run by priests and therefore back into the control of the bishops²⁰³ – is perhaps a direct consequence of this new tension between the people with power under the king, the king and his family, and the new hierarchy of the clergy and bishops trying to rein in and regain more power and control over religious establishments. By the late ninth century we see a massive decline in royal run nunneries²⁰⁴ and this perhaps further reinforces the idea that the nunneries were built according to the Anglo-Saxons' understanding of kingship from before they converted, and then the subsequent attempts by kings to adjust in the aftermath. The third and fourth generations of kings, who no longer had a direct tie to the time before Christianisation, were now less interested in maintaining these ties. This change in attitude has also been linked to the change in which families these new kings coming from,²⁰⁵ however, the fact that these new kings did not replace whoever oversaw these nunneries with members of their own perhaps suggests they did not see it as relevant to their kingship any longer.

This link between the building of monasteries and the manipulations of kingly power to further benefit the kings themselves is just one part of a pattern of land use to demonstrate kingly power. In a world where the secular and the religious are not separate, the change in religion to

²⁰³ B. Yorke, 'The Adaption of the Anglo-Saxon Courts to Christianity', in *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300*, ed. Martin Carver, (York: York Medieval Press, 2003), p. 250

²⁰⁴ Yorke, 'Adaption of Anglo-Saxon Courts', p. 257.

²⁰⁵ Yorke, *Nunneries and Royal Houses*, p. 62.

that of Christianity affected the way that land was used by kings. Another example of this change in land use, and its correlation to kingship and its demonstration of power can be seen in changing settlement patterns.

In Anglo-Saxon societies from 400-600, shows of wealth and power were predominantly performed through burial practices and displayed through portable wealth. The settlements themselves, their character, organization and the types of buildings used, show no differences between family groups and their comparative wealth and power. This section will analyse a shift from this usual display of power to one where settlement becomes more important, and how this changed in the hundred years between 600-700. Where land organization and control of it, and the types of buildings used, became a more prominent feature by which the powerful could express themselves in the landscape.

Mucking, Essex is a very early site sometimes even thought of as a 'pioneer' site for the early Anglo-Saxons²⁰⁶ and has mostly been the focus of a debate about whether shifting settlement patterns or *Wandersiedlung*, is a viable model for Anglo-Saxon settlement patterns.²⁰⁷ However, Mucking is also a good example of the phenomenon found in the years 400-550; it lacks settlement differentiation between those of wealth and power and those lower down in the hierarchy. Within Mucking itself there is little organization and an absence of large or obviously central buildings. There is however a surplus of expensive and fine burial goods, including a silver inlaid bronze belt set, found in some of the burials in cemeteries with a close link to the settlement.²⁰⁸ If we were to just examine the burial goods found at Mucking, there is the potential to then extrapolate that there was a distinct social structure based on, or displayed by, connection and control of trade and skilled craftsmen. However, looking at just the settlement diaspora including the general lack of any organization this suggests an absence of overall or unifying authority.²⁰⁹ Also, the absence of any obviously grandiose buildings could be interpreted as pointing to a much more egalitarian society. Putting the two together in their context, a slightly different picture of the society emerges.

²⁰⁶ H. Hamerow, 'Settlement mobility and the "Middle Saxon Shift": rural settlements and settlement patterns in Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England*, Vol. 20, 1991, p. 8.

²⁰⁷ Hamerow, 'Settlement mobility', p. 5.

²⁰⁸ Hamerow, 'Settlement mobility', p. 8 and footnote 22.

²⁰⁹ Hamerow, 'Settlement mobility', p. 9.

Final phase burials, the last of their kind but also the grandest, also took place between 500-700, and more specifically 650s onwards. Sutton Hoo and Prittlewell Prince are prime examples of this and have previously been discussed in this thesis. Their disappearance and the expression of social rank and wealth through control of land coincides with the advent of the conversion to Christianity; this is believed by this thesis to be significant and will be discussed here.

Other sites like the extensively excavated site of West Stow, Suffolk,⁵ show this pattern: a seemingly egalitarian society if one looks at settlement structure and character, but a more structured hierarchical society if one looks at burial goods. The archaeology at West Stow shows a lack of restrictive property boundaries, and buildings of any importance over others,²¹⁰ which demonstrates a similarity to Mucking in the character of the settlement itself. It is also similar when contrasting the cemeteries, where burial goods of wealth, such as those with swords, delineate a social hierarchical structure not reflected by settlement evidence. These burials have been tenuously linked to Hall 2 in West Stow by archaeologists, where there are some differences with other halls on the site, such as its more central position and internal divisions. However, this status is not reflected in the material composition of the hall, or of anything material found within.²¹¹

Higham Ferras, Northamptonshire, is one of the best examples of a site shifting from a general lack of social differentiation as exhibited by the settlements, to increasing use of land to represent status. In the early years of the settlement, the 'ownership of land did not represent status or identity; status derived from the portable wealth of personal adornments and livestock, and identity was derived from kin or tribal group.'²¹² There was no focus or organization of the early settlements at Higham, with only a possible distinction between sleeping/living quarters and workshop area.²¹³ However, this is a problematic interpretation as it is not very well backed up by artefactual evidence. There is an absence of halls in the early phase, there no clear instance of hall

²¹⁰ S. E. West, 'West Stow: The Anglo-Saxon Village' East Anglian Archaeology, (Ipswich: Suffolk County Planning Department, 1985), pp. 168-9.

²¹¹ West, 'West Stow', p. 169.

²¹² A. Hardy et al. *The archaeology of a Middle Saxon estate Centre at Higham Ferras, Northamptonshire*, (Oxford: Oxford Archaeology, 2007), p. 187.

²¹³ Hardy et al. *Middle Saxon*, p. 187.

type buildings being contemporary with the sunken feature buildings.²¹⁴ Helen Hamerow suggests that there may not have been the time and man-power for halls, or the need for one.²¹⁵ There was some degree of organization of space. Site 1 had little to no cereal remains unlike site 4 which did, suggesting either that preparation for consumption happened at different parts of the site either due to divisions of labour, or distinct roles for different family groups, or just variations in domestic practice over time, but from 400-600 this appears to be the only example of variation with the settlement structure.

However, when you get to the 7th and into the 8th centuries, you begin to see changes in Higham. The ditches and earthworks become more highly organized, creating more controlled and exclusive spaces, which also become more visually impressive to outsiders.²¹⁶ This timing happens alongside the creation of Offa's Dyke, an expression of power and control over the land in the middle Saxon period.²¹⁷ This new settlement layout in Higham is probably influenced by an increasing need to show power and status by control of the land, and proceeds to resemble the beginnings of nucleated settlements.²¹⁸ This is datable to the 7th and early 8th centuries, as it was preceded by a gap in occupation,²¹⁹ which probably allowed for this re-structuring, and suggests a clear plan and design from a higher authority.

This change in the settlement's plan also went alongside a new horseshoe-shaped ditch, which became an important part of the site.²²⁰ This was probably used as an enclosure for the stockpile, though it was too big for a settlement of this size.²²¹ This also gives it close parallel ties to Yeavinger, Northumberland, which also had a large enclosure for stock. However, unlike at Yeavinger, there is little evidence of high-status inhabitation, and it is suggested that Higham Ferras was instead part of a royal centre including, Irthlingborough, situated directly across the river Nene. Both functioned as collection centres for tribute and taxation from the surrounding

²¹⁴ A. Bayliss, and G. Hey. "Scientific dating." *Yarnton Saxon and Medieval Settlement and Landscape. Thames Valley Landscape Monograph 20* (2004).

²¹⁵ H. Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements: The Archaeology of Rural Communities in North-West Europe 400-900*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

²¹⁶ Hardy et al. *Archaeology of Middle Saxon*, p. 192.

²¹⁷ Hardy et al. *Archaeology of Middle Saxon*, p. 192.

²¹⁸ Hardy et al. *Archaeology of Middle Saxon*, p. 192.

²¹⁹ Hardy et al. *Archaeology of Middle Saxon*, p. 193.

²²⁰ Hardy et al. *Archaeology of Middle Saxon*, p. 194.

²²¹ Hardy et al. *Archaeology of Middle Saxon*, p. 203.

areas, as demonstrated by the presence of cattle, sheep, and pigs, shown in bone assemblages from 600-700, and the large storage capabilities that exceed what would be required for the size of the settlements.²²² All this suggests an increased focus on the use of land and shows important evidence for the implementation of taxation, or at minimum illustrates organisation and control from a larger power structure that would have controlled vast areas outside of this settlement.

However, things are different when looking further north and towards areas controlled by the Benicia and Deria, and later the larger Northumbrian kingdom. West Heselton, North Yorkshire, is an early site. Powlesland argues it is probably a continuation of an earlier Roman site,²²³ however, it is different from early Higham Ferras, due to the organization that went into the settlement construction from a much earlier time as there are signs of distinct 'zones'. Powlesland argues it is a much more stable settlement, with evidence that the same geographical area was used over a long period of time.²²⁴ It is still similar to Higham in respect of the character of the buildings and their use and comparable in the dissimilarity between the wealth of artefactual evidence found in the settlements and in the cemeteries.²²⁵

Yeavinger is a royal site and being even further north than West Heselton gives this settlement an even more marked regionalism and heavier influence from the native British population.²²⁶ Yeavinger's heavy use of cattle ranches and use of land and high-status buildings as a show of power,²²⁷ even as early as 550, is important in understanding the changes that affect settlements further south. The kingdom of Bernicia, as it would have been at the time, is particularly connected to the Celtic Christian world, as evidenced by their history.²²⁸ Yeavinger follows this closeness by using the same design as Celtic settlement types rather than the Anglo-Saxon settlement types of the time. The longstanding tie between Northumbria and the Christianised world of the Celtic insular, which shows not just in their history but also in settlement structure, as demonstrated here, is significant for how we try to understand settlement change in

²²² Hardy et al. *Archaeology of Middle Saxon*, p. 203.

²²³ D. Powlesland, 'West Heselton Settlement Mobility: a case of static development' in H. Geake and J. Kenny (ed.) *Early Deira : archaeological studies of the East Riding in the fourth to ninth centuries AD*, (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2000).

²²⁴ Powlesland, 'West Heselton', p. 22.

²²⁵ Powlesland, 'West Heselton', p. 25.

²²⁶ B. Hope-Taylor, *Yeavinger: An Anglo-British centre of early Northumbria*, (London: English Heritage, 1977).

²²⁷ Hope-Taylor, *Yeavinger*.

²²⁸ EHEP, III:III, sees King Oswald request Ireland for bishop and receiving Bishop Aiden.

the southern parts of Anglo-Saxon England. Later Anglo-Saxon settlements change and become more akin to the organised settlements as first seen in Yeavering; this suggests the commonality between the later southern Anglo-Saxon settlements and these northern examples have closer ties to Christianity than just a strong causal link.

There is a potential link between the shift towards Christianity in the non-Northumbrian settlements precipitating a change towards more organised settlement types, and greater visible control of land and power. This happens at the same time as a powerful new type of religious, organised settlement type, the monastic and episcopal sites. The first to appear are again in the north Monkwearmouth and Jarrow Abbey, Sunderland. These are two early monastic sites that come up in our archaeological and written records, they are built on land that had been given over from royal land.²²⁹ These communities were organized by someone in a position of power, with careful thought put into the use of the land and the position and types of buildings.²³⁰ Other examples of monastic sites appearing in the late 7th century occur in Hartlepool, County Durham, where a similar settlement structure and use of land appears.²³¹

However, in the south, we also start seeing episcopal sites, such as Christ Church, Canterbury, appearing in the late 7th century.²³² Like other sites, they similarly show a very different way of handling land and demonstrating power through the use and position of buildings. The appearance of these Christian sites, the increased differentiation within the Anglo-Saxon culture, and the control of land as a demonstration of power points to the relationship between the increasing need for obvious control over land and use of more spectacular buildings to show power, with the coming of Christianity. This also has powerful implications for kingship in the Anglo-Saxon world, as the way they demonstrate their power shifts, no longer through burials and portable wealth, but through the organisation and control of the land. It is very strongly linked with the coming of Christianity, and the closer ties to the Celtic and continental worlds. The advent of the land charter, a legalistic written document demonstrates this link between power and land; and

²²⁹ R. Cramp, *Wearmouth and Jarrow Monastic Sites Volume 1*, (London: English Heritage, 2005), p. 29.

²³⁰ Cramp, *Wearmouth and Jarrow*, p. 348.

²³¹ C. Loveluck, 'Anglo-Saxon Hartlepool and the foundations of English Christian identity: the wider context and importance of the monastery', in Daniels & Loveluck eds. *Anglo-Saxon Hartlepool and the foundations of English Christianity File*, (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2007).

²³² B. Nicholas, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury: Christ Church from 597 to 1066*, (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1984).

the link between power, land, and Christianity, it also directly ties it to kingship. Other historical accounts of this nature include land being given by kings to Christian power structures, such as the first instance of land being given to building a church in Canterbury, as previously mentioned, but also outside of Kent such as the giving of land to Bishops by the King of Sussex in 705-717.²³³ This relationship has been further examined in earlier parts of this thesis with regard to the gifting of land to monasteries and nunneries, and their close ties to royal households and kingship. To conclude, the settlement's shift in organisation and structure demonstrates, alongside the introduction of monastic sites and land being used and controlled much more readily by the king, both in his gifting as seen with the nunneries, but also possibly through more controlled taxation, we can see a striking correlation that warrants further research, beyond the scope of this current thesis, but nonetheless points towards further change to kingship due to the conversion.

This link between the land and kings can also be seen in the subsequent legalism brought in by the conversion to Christianity. The more theocratic rule of kingship can be as seen glimpsed in charters,²³⁴ where we have examples of grants of land being given out by kings: 'In the name of God and of Jesus Christ, I Lothar, king of Kent...'.²³⁵ This demonstrates an early understanding of kings acting out their power through the concept of divine right from Christianity, wedded to a concern for the land and the ownership of land that has been previously established. Scott Smith explores the early development, and long-standing consequences, of the Anglo-Saxon need to legitimise land through writing.²³⁶ While his emphasis is on the mid and late Anglo-Saxon era, he neatly demonstrates throughout the need to determine and maintain possession of property through the medium of writing. And, at risk of taking a rather grand look at history, Smith draws a line from the earliest of charters to the creation of the Domesday book²³⁷ throughout which the power and significance of kingship within Anglo-Saxon society has only increased. Christianity was the

²³³ S 43, *The Electronic Sawyer*, <<http://www.esawyer.org.uk>> [accessed 13 February 2018], ed. S. E. Kelly, R. Rushforth and others.

²³⁴ Ullmann, *Law and Politics*, p. 200.

²³⁵ S7, *The Electronic Sawyer*, <<http://www.esawyer.org.uk>> [accessed 23 March 2018], by S. E. Kelly, R. Rushforth and others, translation by the author.

²³⁶ S. Smith, 'Writing, Land in Anglo-Saxon England.', Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, *University of Notre Dame*, found in *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, (2007), {<https://search-proquest-com.bris.idm.oclc.org/docview/304830205/fulltextPDF/297BD103C8B347E7PQ/1?accountid=9730>} [accessed, 17 April 2018], see also his book, S. Smith, *Land and book: Literature and Land Tenure in Anglo-Saxon England*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press: 2012).

²³⁷ Smith, "Writing Land", p. 270.

constant companion and driving force, as the conversion not only began to give kings more power individually but also opened the potential of a strong connection between the concepts of power and land, as seen by the previous section on settlement changes.

What we do know is that in comparison to much of the continent, the charters produced in England a predominantly curious and eccentric style²³⁸ and that they were either introduced by Theodore of Tarsus, when he arrived from Rome, in 668 or by St Augustine seven decades before.²³⁹ Either way, it appears that their use was spread due to the influence of church councils, at which many of the agreements were made that these documents recorded in writing.²⁴⁰ More so than the law codes, which I will later examine, the charters tend to be predominantly in Latin, the language of the church, while the law codes were more prominently in the vernacular. Moreover, until the second half of the eighth century, there are no examples of charters recording gifts that were not issued expressly for a religious purpose,²⁴¹ which firmly sets the introduction of this new form of legality and governance in the hands of the new church.

However, caution should be used with regards to overemphasising ‘English exceptionalism’. Much scholarship has ‘foreground[ed] the structures of state power and, moreover, sees the strength and cohesion of the state as something uniquely English in an early medieval context.’²⁴² It has argued that England’s *Sonderweg* was a distinctly bureaucratic one, compared to Germany’s decentralised and more ritualised polity.²⁴³ Such large assumptions must be challenged.

How can we look at charters differently? Simply put, we must not view charters as just bureaucratic tools of land governance, though undoubtedly they had this function too, we must also regard them as ritualistic conveyors of societal significance. With this and kingship in mind, there is now a duality to the importance of charters. They reveal the importance of land, but also

²³⁸ B. Snook, *The Anglo-Saxon Chancery: The History, Language and Production of Anglo-Saxon Charters from Alfred to Edgar*, (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2015), p. 2-3.

²³⁹ F. Stenton, *The Latin Charters of the Anglo-Saxon Period*, (London: Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 31; P. Chaplais, ‘Who introduced charters into England? The case for Augustine.’, *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, Vol. 3, (1969), pp. 88–107.

²⁴⁰ S. Keynes, ‘Church councils, royal assemblies, and Anglo-Saxon royal diplomas’, in *Kingship, Legislation and Power in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. G. Owen-Crocker and B. Schneider (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2013), pp. 17–182.

²⁴¹ C. Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils c.650–c.850*, (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1995), p. 71.

²⁴² C. Insley, ‘“Ottonians with Pipe Rolls?” Political Culture and Performance in the Kingdom of the English, c.900–c.1050’, *History*, (2017), 102: 772-786, p. 6.

²⁴³ Insley, ‘“Ottonian’s with Pipe Rolls?”’, pp. 5-6.

the very act of making the charter was of ritualistic importance outside of its bureaucratic legalistic function. The act of gathering the king's advisors, from the secular to the religious, and his important close relatives and retainers, was probably just as important to maintaining the kingship system within Anglo-Saxon society as asserting control over the land itself. Insley goes into detail about the use of charters as artefacts in political performance for a later period than is covered here,²⁴⁴ but this way of looking at it offers significant research potential.

Pierre Chaplais in several of his publications from the 1960s²⁴⁵ also explores the political performance behind the creation and use of the charters, far removed from the dry written documents as we now see them. Levi Roach, in his book *Kingship and Consent in Anglo-Saxon England, 871–978* (which primarily focuses on a slightly later period than that which this thesis covers), acknowledges that Chaplais's approach to this performative aspect of the power of charters works particularly well for the earliest of charters.²⁴⁶ As we shall see in the next section, the use of charters as public demonstrations of kingly power is evident throughout this period.

The issue of charters is complicated in the 7th and early 8th centuries, however, due to the fact that few survive, and the ones that do survive only in later copies, with a considerable number of these containing sections that are likely to be interpolations by later copyists.²⁴⁷ It is much more their presence and form that is of interest to this thesis. Their introduction by the church, and seemingly initially only for the church, yet tied directly to kingly power, is yet a further demonstration of the new and stronger ties between the land and kingship that has been brought to light and endorsed by the coming of Christianity. A representative example is the charter of King Aethelbert, dated A.D. 604, granting land at Rochester to St. Andrew, in which the land is clearly conceptualised as territory belonging to the king on the understanding that it is subject to higher religious claims:

²⁴⁴ Insley, "'Ottonian's with Pipe Rolls?'" , pp. 7, 10-13.

²⁴⁵ P. Chaplais, 'The Authenticity of the Royal Anglo-Saxon Diplomas of Exeter', *Historical Research*, vol. 39, (1966), pp. 1-34, 'The Anglo-Saxon chancery: From the diploma to the writ', *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, vol. 3, (1966), pp. 160-174.

²⁴⁶ L. Roach, *Kingship and Consent in Anglo-Saxon England, 871–978*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 78-9.

²⁴⁷ R. Gallagher, 'The vernacular in Anglo-Saxon charters: expansion and innovation in ninth-century England', *Institute of Historical Research*, vol. 14, 205-235, (2018).

Nobis est aptum semper inquirere ... aliquid de portione terre nostre in subsidiis seruorum dei deuotissimam uoluntatem debeamus offerre.²⁴⁸

(‘It is proper that we [Aethlbert] should always examine whether there is some portion of our land that we ought to offer in support of the most loyal servants of God’).

The charter speaks very strongly to several of the effects we have thus far touched upon: as an administrative document it is clearly fulfilling the purpose of detail the giving of land to the church from the king, but as a ritual document it also is demonstrating a new, supportive relationship between the king and the church which is being expressed through the giving of land and this new operation of governance, a charter. The king consequently emerges as a beneficent Christian patron, not a ‘ring-giver’ as in *Beowulf*, but as land-giver to the Church.

As we have seen the advent of Christianity brought with it the tradition of writing, as evidenced in the charters and the law codes.²⁴⁹ Law, from a biblical point of view, was a force that regulated society and was independent of, rather than subject to, the law-giver.²⁵⁰ Chaney acknowledges the influence of Old Testament law in some of the early law codes; however, he sees the main influence on the development of law as being from the Roman and the Christian tradition,²⁵¹ Roman law having become integral to early Church doctrine.²⁵² Consequently, the application of the law can be seen as an expression of kings being given power by the Christian religion, while simultaneously being under the power of it. However, because they were taken as an important bridge between God and the (earthly) kingdom, as discussed earlier, this ultimately led to the king being given sufficient authority to set down laws. This fusion of Roman and Christian ideas also led to the ‘ready acceptance of the monarchic theme’ in the early Christian matrix of ideas,²⁵³ which Chaney argues saw its fulfilment in the Anglo-Saxon kings as an embodiment of the state that can be seen throughout the law codes.²⁵⁴

²⁴⁸ S 1, *The Electronic Sawyer*, <<http://www.esawyer.org.uk>> [accessed 31 March 2017], by S. E. Kelly, R. Rushforth and others; my translation.

²⁴⁹ Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship*, p. 175.

²⁵⁰ Ullmann, *Law and Politics*, p. 46.

²⁵¹ Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship*, p. 174.

²⁵² Ullmann, *Law and Politics*, p. 32.

²⁵³ Ullmann, *Law and Politics*, p. 34.

²⁵⁴ Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship*, p. 177.

However, Stenton, standing in opposition to Chaney and Ullmann, believes that there is little evidence of specifically Roman influence in Aethelbert's laws, contrary to Bede's assertion that they were written 'according to the example of the Roman courts of justice'.²⁵⁵ Instead, Stenton believes the *Lex Salica* was a much greater influence.²⁵⁶ It was written down following Aethelbert's acceptance of Christianity, and one reason for the existence of the laws was that it could provide an understanding of the new hierarchy of Christianity within the pre-existing Anglo-Saxon society. However, as established throughout, especially when dealing with Roman Christianity in Kent, the influence of Christianity always necessitates a degree of Roman influence as it affects the very nature of Christianity itself, moving it far beyond that which was established by the patristic fathers.

The elevation of the church in the law codes seemed to create a 'duality of powers'.²⁵⁷ The apparent lessening of the royal authority in this 'duality' is balanced out by the fact that these laws make the king's word incontrovertible; his *thegns* and servants directly under him have extra privileges and the king's peace is double that of everyone else.²⁵⁸ Going against religious laws is seen as going against the king.²⁵⁹

One of the aims of the laws was to integrate Christianity into the older traditions and customs already in place, which may explain why they are written in the native language, as Latin did not have the ability to deal with the tribal concepts.²⁶⁰ Laws written in the vernacular are an exception to the norm of writing in Latin on the Continent, but the laws are still thought to be an expression of Christian monarchy.²⁶¹

Mentioned by Bede,²⁶² Aethelbert's *Laws* can be dated to between the adoption of Christianity in 597 and the king's death in 616.²⁶³ The first thing that is written in Aethelbert's *Laws*, its prominence showing its great importance, is a law about the 'property of God and the

²⁵⁵ Bede, EHEP, II:V, see p. 63 of this thesis for more on this and a more detailed translation.

²⁵⁶ F. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 60.

²⁵⁷ Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship*, p. 183.

²⁵⁸ Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship*, p. 184.

²⁵⁹ Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship*, p. 189.

²⁶⁰ Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship*, p. 176.

²⁶¹ Canning, *Medieval Political Thought*, p. 23.

²⁶² Bede, EHEP, II.V.

²⁶³ D. Whitelock, 'From the laws of Ethelbert, king of Kent (602-602?)', *English Historical Documents*, (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1955), p. 357.

Church'²⁶⁴. Laws II to VIII deal directly with the king²⁶⁵ and make it clear that the king himself is the one who will be paid. However, this also means that the perpetrator of any of these offences, for instance, 'If a freeman robs the king, he shall pay back a nine-fold amount',²⁶⁶ is instead brought to the direct attention of the king. Ultimately this shows an already strong example of kingship and its use of the client-patron relationship, as those under the king's direct protection are also those under his direct legal overview. This power relationship between the king and those under his control shows that it is one that can go both ways; although the power is overwhelmingly in favour of the king, it still requires that the king himself reciprocate in the form of legal protection.

Hlothhere and Eadric's (late 7th century²⁶⁷) laws show little of the king as being all-powerful, and Chaney dismisses these statutes as having any relevance as to the relationship between kingship and religious power.²⁶⁸ Hlothhere and Eadric's laws show little evidence of the growth of royal power, and instead, like Aethelbert's laws, give an impression of the ongoing Germanic tribal way of living and interacting as a form of government.²⁶⁹ However, although oath-swearing appears in the laws of Hlothhere and Eadric,²⁷⁰ they 'reveal that trustworthiness was understood to be connected with Christian belief...' This is particularly significant as it presents an understanding of how Christian belief affected the legal process'.²⁷¹

Further evidence of the development of the status of the king can be found in Aethelbert, in law code III: 'If the king is feasting at anyone's house, and any sort of offence is committed there, twofold compensation shall be paid.'²⁷² Ullmann argues that this is the start of the change prompted by the interaction of the Anglo-Saxons and Christianity and the subsequent increasing power and status of kings.²⁷³

²⁶⁴ Aethelbert, I, p. 5.

²⁶⁵ Aethelbert, p. 5.

²⁶⁶ Aethelbert, IV, p. 5.

²⁶⁷ L. Oliver. *The Beginnings of English Law*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), p. 120

²⁶⁸ Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship*, p. 178.

²⁶⁹ Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 62.

²⁷⁰ H. F. Forbes, 'Searching for conversion in the early English laws', in

<https://www.academia.edu/15419075/Searching_for_conversion_in_the_early_English_laws> [accessed 05 November 2017], p. 15.

²⁷¹ Forbes, 'Conversion in the early English laws', p. 17.

²⁷² Whitelock, D. 'From the Laws of Ethelbert, king of Kent (602-602?)', *English Historical Documents*, (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1955), III, p. 5.

²⁷³ Ullmann, *Law and Politics*, p. 198.

Whitred's laws (695AD²⁷⁴), however, are a different matter. His pronounced theocratic tone turned Christian precepts into enforceable law²⁷⁵ and enshrined royal jurisdiction over ecclesiastical matters. The power the church had gained since the time of Aethlbert²⁷⁶ culminated in Alfred's laws, which show an even clearer example of Christian monarchy and its control and influence in both the secular and ecclesiastical worlds.²⁷⁷ Whitred's laws, on the other hand, are solely concerned with ecclesiastical matters, and in that sense differ greatly from the much more secular law-making of Hlothere and Eadric. It gives huge privileges to the church, such as tax breaks and establishes that the oath of a bishop has the same status as that of a king, 'The word of a Bishop and the King without an oath is to be incontrovertible'.²⁷⁸ Ninety years on from Aethelbert we see the church being given equivalent status to the king.²⁷⁹

Ine's law code seems to, in part, be implicated in the advance of Christianity within Wessex. It is an attempt to reconcile the complication of previous pre-Christian laws and customs with the insertion of new hierarchical concerns that came with Christianity. Through this, we see the genesis of a 'new conception of kingship' that would go on to influence the laws of Alfred.²⁸⁰

The increasing influence of Christian morality can also be seen in this law code. The preface to King Ine's *Law Code*²⁸¹ is notable in its attempts to address violence and put an emphasis on peace. It also specifically mentions the bishops Haedde and Eorcenwald as having a contribution. Yorke believes the relatively humane treatment of the Britons in the law code could be due to this ecclesiastical influence.²⁸²

The Anglo-Saxons were accustomed to endogamous, and the renewal of political or economic links through exogamous, marriages.²⁸³ An example is Eadbald's marriage to his

²⁷⁴ Oliver, *Beginnings of English Law*, p. 148.

²⁷⁵ Ullmann, *Law and Politics*, p. 198.

²⁷⁶ Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship*, p. 178.

²⁷⁷ Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship*, p. 179.

²⁷⁸ Whitred, 'The Laws of Whitred King of Kent', ed. and trans. D. Whitlock, in *English Historical Documents*, (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1955), p. 363, XVI.

²⁷⁹ Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 62.

²⁸⁰ Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 72.

²⁸¹ Ine, 'Laws of King Ine', ed. and trans. D. Whitlock, *English Historical Documents*, (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1955), p. 364.

²⁸² B. Yorke, *The Conversion of Britain*, p. 235.

²⁸³ D. Tyler, 'Reluctant Kings', p. 151.

stepmother,²⁸⁴ probably as a way of keeping land in the family. Gregory the Great criticises these types of marriages in response to a question from Augustine,²⁸⁵ indicating that they were probably common outside of the royal families as well, as churchmen became increasingly involved in the affairs of the royal families.²⁸⁶ This could be seen as a possible cause of the frequent ‘relapses’ back into paganism that were common,²⁸⁷ such as Eadbald who, on the death of his father Aethelbert, did not accept the faith of Christ.²⁸⁸ This also shows that marriage was seen as coming under secular jurisprudence in pre-Christian times²⁸⁹ as the idea of the religion telling them who they can marry did not seem to be part of the jurisdiction of religious affairs.

Christianity also represented an exclusionary new division between the laity and the clergy, given that only certain people could perform rituals and that ecclesiastical buildings were the main bridge between the secular and the divine worlds. This seems to have been less clear cut in the previous religion, as laws XII and XIII in King Whitred’s Laws would probably indicate,²⁹⁰ and consequently, this expression of Christianity would have led to a lot of important people in the Anglo-Saxons kingdoms having diminishing political power.²⁹¹

So far the laws seem to have been established in a Christian vein, albeit also taking heavily from the previous Germanic idea of laws before they were written down. However, Patrick Wormald, when looking at the law codes across the continent as well as in Britain, sees a different pattern. He compares the law codes of the Franks and the Visigoths etc. but also looks at English laws written in this continental context too. Even more importantly he places it within a wider ethnic context and tries to untangle the complicated web that is kingdom and ethnicity as it is shown in law. A very important law code Wormald intensively looks at is the *Lex Salica*. Wormald asserts that the *Lex Salica* is not a professedly royal text, the primary authors were ‘chosen from

²⁸⁴ EHEP, II:V.

²⁸⁵ EHEP, I:XVI, question V.

²⁸⁶ B. Yorke, *The Conversion of Britain*, p. 242.

²⁸⁷ D. Tyler, ‘Reluctant Kings’, p. 151.

²⁸⁸ EHEP, II:V.

²⁸⁹ B. Yorke ‘The Reception of Christianity’, p. 165.

²⁹⁰ King Whitred’s Laws, in ‘The Kentish Laws’. In F. Attenborough ed. trans, *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 27.

²⁹¹ D. Tyler, ‘Reluctant Kings’, p. 152.

many' who 'assembling in three courts... carefully debat[ed] the sources of litigation give[ing] judgment on each]'.²⁹²

Clovis is given credit for amending the law code but it continues to be a reflection of the code as deriving from a remote, "pre-invasion" Frankish past. The contents of the original code seemingly support this idea, as it is singularly devoid of Christian traces and it is repeatedly glossed by vernacular and presumably Frankish words.²⁹³

There are two reasons for supposing that these laws are more specifically Frankish than Latin in origin:

Firstly, compensation was paid for injury, which points to the idea of blood-feud, different from the empire where the peacekeeping initiative lay with the government, whereas now *Lex Salica* is a last resort. While its addition to the law code could in part be put down to this idea of feud infiltrating into Roman provincial justice, it is also such a ubiquitous feature in Germanic literature as to make it most likely to come from their culture, feud also does not appear in "The Farmer's Law" (a Byzantine law code that was probably influenced by Slavic traditions.)

Secondly, the law code makes it clear that the law applies differently to Franks and Romans and consequently is careful to show that whatever a Frank is it is not Roman.²⁹⁴ The implication of this is that we have an example of "ethnic engineering" and a distillation of Frankish identity. This is an idea that can also be found in legislation by King Ine.²⁹⁵ It is explored further by Bryan Ward-Perkins who used the law code of Ine to help understand why the British did not leave much of an impact on Anglo-Saxon society. Ward-Perkins arrives at a similar conclusion²⁹⁶ as does Wormald: the laws were given to 'ethnic engineering'.

Lex Salica encapsulates the law of the Franks, who are a mishmash of peoples previously garrisoning the Rhine frontier. The people they protected were very much the "rank and file" free

²⁹² P. Wormald, 'The *Leges Barbarorum*: Law and Ethnicity in the Post-Roman West', in *Regna and Gentes: the Relationship between late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World* (Vol. 13). Brill. eds., Goetz, H.W., Jarnut, J. and Pohl, W, 2003, p. 28.

²⁹³ Wormald, '*Leges Barbarorum*', p. 29.

²⁹⁴ Wormald, '*Leges Barbarorum*', pp. 30-32.

²⁹⁵ Wormald, '*Leges Barbarorum*', p. 32.

²⁹⁶ B. Ward-Perkins, "Why did the Anglo-Saxons not become more British?." *The English Historical Review* 115.462 (2000): 513-533. Alex Woolf explores similar ideas, but through the lens of a more economical approach, Woolf, Alex. "Apartheid and economics in Anglo-Saxon England.' *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England* (2007): 115-129.

men rather than a warrior "elite". The composition of the last generations of the garrison at the border illustrates that they considered themselves as "barbarian" and would try to distinguish their law from Rome. What they wanted to do, starting with Clovis, was to establish the respectability of their traditions and law against not just the empire, but also the Visigoths and Burgundians to the south with whom they were fighting for the control of Gaul. This is not a case of Salic Franks carrying on where the emperors left off, but a reaction to what was already there and a need to register the presence of the Salic Franks, or legitimise them in some way. Consequently, it went mostly unchanged through the centuries despite social development, as it was a vehicle of tradition and not forward-thinking law.²⁹⁷ There might be more similarity between the Salic Frankish law-making process and the English one than first appears.²⁹⁸ This suggests that the Frankish example may well have influenced Aethelberht of Kent.²⁹⁹

We also have Bede reporting that Aethelberht wrote in accordance with the *consilio sapientium* ('the advice of his wise men') and that the laws were *conscripta anglorum sermone* ('written in the language of the English'), and *hactenus habentur et obseruantur* ('are still kept and observed') after Aethelberht's death, and finally that he acted *illi iudiciorum iuxta exempla romanorum* ('according to the example of the Roman courts of justice').³⁰⁰ This demonstrates the influence of secular law alongside any religious influences.

Wormald believes that the fact that the law code was written in the vernacular, as opposed to Latin as we find on the continent, is proof of its fundamentally 'Germanic' Character.³⁰¹ I think it is also due to the fact that the written codes that were brought in were a new cultural phenomenon at this point with no internal comparisons. This must have given kings of this time the flexibility to put even more of their own stamp of influence upon the work, thus potentially making it even more of a genuine extension of kingship and less of an effect influenced by outside ideas, at least compared to the Franks.

²⁹⁷ Wormald, 'Leges Barbarorum', pp. 32-33.

²⁹⁸ A. Murray, *Studies in Law and Society in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1983), pp. 117-225, and, P. Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century, Vol. 1: Legislation and Its Limits*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 44-45.

²⁹⁹ Wormald, Patrick. 'Inter Cetera Bona Genti Suae' in *Legal culture in the early Medieval West*. (A&C Black, 1999), pp. 182-6, and P. Wormald, 'Making of English Law', pp. 93-101.

³⁰⁰ EHEP, II:V, my translation.

³⁰¹ Wormald, 'Leges Barbarorum', pp. 33-34.

Despite all the transformations happening due to the conversion, much of the power structures that made kingship, and the ideals behind it, stayed relatively unchanged. Kings at this time co-opted the tools of Christianity and used them as new ways to impose royal authority on their kingdoms.

Returning to the literature, and this time looking at the broader force of the poetry rather than individual passages, some scholars interpret *Beowulf* as a post-Christian piece of literature. Alfred Siewers makes the argument that in *Beowulf* we can see the Augustinian ‘emphasis on the corruption of nature... promoting political hegemony’³⁰² reflected in the ‘establishment of the autonomy of the individual hero’.³⁰³ Siewers (and other scholars) view *Beowulf* and other heroic poems as being important when looking at the emergence of monarchical systems in the Anglo-Saxon world.³⁰⁴ He also argues that political centralization was partly the result of the Anglo-Saxon culture harnessing the influence of the church and its doctrine. In opposition to the indigenous Irish Christian culture,³⁰⁵ there was a need to create a new unified and ethnic identity that was also ecclesiastical at heart,³⁰⁶ and a drive to ‘articulate a simpler new cultural landscape to legitimise [the kings’] expanding regional dynasties’.³⁰⁷ This, Siewers believes, was part of the reason behind the appropriation of previous pre-Anglo-Saxon places of worship, such as the old Romano-British site in Kent, as a consolidation of the new and intertwined royal and ecclesiastical powers.³⁰⁸

This then is an example of an alternative way of viewing *Beowulf* through a much more post-conversion lens, with the idea that much more of its composition was taken from a more heavily Christian culture than might first appear.³⁰⁹ Walter Beverly, Jr, however, refutes the idea that the kingship demonstrated is of a particularly Christian nature and emphasises the connections the

³⁰² A. K. Siewers, ‘Landscapes of Conversion: Guthlac’s Mound and Grendel’s Mere as Expressions of Anglo-Saxon Nation Building.’, *Viator*, 34, (2003), p. 39.

³⁰³ A. K. Siewers, ‘Landscapes of Conversion’, pp. 36-37.

³⁰⁴ A. K. Siewers, ‘Landscapes of Conversion’, pp. 36-37.

³⁰⁵ A. K. Siewers, ‘Landscapes of Conversion’ p. 17.

³⁰⁶ A. K. Siewers, ‘Landscapes of Conversion’ p. 15.

³⁰⁷ A. K. Siewers, ‘Landscapes of Conversion’ p. 7.

³⁰⁸ A. K. Siewers, ‘Landscapes of Conversion’, p. 21.

³⁰⁹ In this Siewers is of course not alone, see M. Goldsmith, ‘The Christian Theme of *Beowulf*’, *Medium Aevum*, vol. 29, 81-102, (1960); M. Bloomfield, ‘*Beowulf* and Christian Allegory: An Interpretation Of Unferth’, *Traditio*, vol. 7, (1949), 410-15; C. Donahue, ‘*Beowulf* And Christian Tradition: A Reconsideration From A Celtic Stance.’ *Traditio*, vol. 21, (1965), 55–116; etc.

poet establishes between Beowulf and legendary Germanic kings. Beowulf has more in common with Scyld and the Volsung family.³¹⁰ The connection with Scyld is indeed particularly close. Both Beowulf and Scyld are presented as model kings, and the poet is not afraid to make this explicit in the case of Scyld: '*Pæt was god cyning!*'.³¹¹ Scyld and Beowulf thus have more in common than not, and the exemplary traits the poet sees in both 'indicat[e] continued rather than changed criteria for a model king'.³¹²

Beowulf on this analysis points to a continuity between pre-Christian and post-conversion ideals of kingship.

³¹⁰ W. Beverly Jr., 'The Beowulf Poet's Accommodation of Pre-Christian Germanic Culture', (unpublished Masters Thesis, The University of Mississippi, 2014), p. 45.

³¹¹ *Beowulf*. Line 11.

³¹² Beverly Jr., 'Beowulf Poet's Accommodation Of Pre-Christian', p. 45.

Conclusion

Having established a definition of kingship, the first section went on to look at what we can glean from the Germanic and pagan form of kingship that would have been practised before the start of the conversion to Christianity. The thesis was able to establish four key concepts of kingship: warfare, hospitality (entertainment and the provision of food more generally), kinship (specifically the descent from a highly regarded bloodline) and religion. These four parameters gave us a strong framework to look out for during and after the conversion and how it may have altered.

The next section, centred very strictly on the conversion years, gave us an insight into the power balance between the king and his society, and specifically those powerful individuals who were closest to him. This gave us a different idea of how kingship operates away from the strictly performative aspects previously established and into the more practical aspects of governance. It showed how the conversion was very much a ‘top-down’ process, but that kings still had to seek the advice of others, including religious figures.

Lastly, the aftermath of the conversion illustrated how society was changing due to the presence of the new religion, and using the previously established ideas of kingship, was able to identify how various aspects of kingship had changed. Warfare remains an important factor, while that of hospitality becomes neglected. Though it is important to remember that this could in part be due to new types of evidence, that of the written word, and different evidence surviving. Kinship and descent retain their importance, seemingly even though the claims are still that they are descended from previously pagan gods. Religion and its concerns, and the increase in ritual and morality, seemingly become an increasingly important aspect of kingship. However, as before, the nature of the surviving evidence compared to other forms should be considered. What really demonstrates the change in kingship and within Anglo-Saxon society, is the increasingly strong relationship between kingship, land and Christianity. This upward spiral of self-perpetuating importance and power is perhaps the strongest example of a shift in the nature of kingship within the Anglo-Saxon world. Almost as important is that writing, which is also closely tied to ascendant Christianity, gives rise to a form of greater centralisation and kingly control while also giving rise to a new power in the form of a clergy who could read and write. These religious figures exerted an influence on the land in a way in which only secular lords previously seem to have done.

The study of numismatics is a complex one, and an analysis of early Anglo-Saxon coinage, and what it might tell us about early Anglo-Saxon kingship, is made even more difficult because of the sporadic nature of coins in the earliest years of production within this country.³¹³ There are some academics who assert that the production of early coins was primarily under royal control and that consequently, coins were an addition to the kinship system that had not been previously used before.³¹⁴ Others believe coinage was more directly under the control of the new and emerging clergy.³¹⁵ However, given that any useful evidence for coins and their potential to tell us more about kingship falls just beyond the established parameters of this thesis, this topic of research has not been pursued.

This study has detailed the essential differences between Germanic and Christian kingship ideals and has analysed the complex impact on Anglo-Saxon thought prompted by the new conception of kingship that came with Christianity. It demonstrates how the old and new worldviews melded to form a new approach to kingship, power and authority. The Anglo-Saxon use of land as an expression of power was adopted and subsumed by Christianity, which led to monasteries and churches being built at the behest of royal families, which reinforced the power of both the king and the church. Christianity brought with it greater potential control of the people and had a marked tendency to centralise power. We can see the beginnings of this change in the first couple hundred years immediately after 597 in the law codes and in Bede's writing. *Beowulf* shows us how the idea of kingship had changed even beyond bureaucracy and politics, and how this change was affecting and shaping the way the Anglo-Saxon peoples viewed themselves. The insertion of a whole new hierarchy into a pre-existing tribal system did cause tensions, but the new relationship between church and state had a profound effect on the king and on the wielding of kingly power, as seen in the creation of the law codes. These law codes illustrated the power of this new religion but also gave more authority to the king. Charters also were a strong signal, demonstrating a change in how kings wielded and showcased their power and authority in a way which did not happen before the conversion to Christianity. The result of this change in attitude

³¹³ R. Naismith, *Money and Power in Anglo-Saxon England: The Southern English Kingdoms, 757–865*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought: Fourth Series. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 90.

³¹⁴ D. Metcalf, *Thrymsas and Sceattas in the Ashmolean Museum*, (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum 1994), pp. 10-25.

³¹⁵ A. Gannon. *The Iconography of Early Anglo-Saxon Coinage: Sixth to Eighth Centuries*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 189-91.

can be seen clearly in the anointing of Offa's son Ecgfrith during the legatine synod in 787³¹⁶ – which was the first instance of a king being anointed by the church and under God, forever formalising this idea of a Christian monarchy. Providing an interesting glimpse at the further changes to kingship, and a continuation of changes that have been noted in this thesis. A country that started as a Germanic pagan nation was transformed under the increasing influence of Christianity as a state religion.

³¹⁶ D. Dumville, 'The ætheling: A study in Anglo-Saxon constitutional history', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 8, pp. 19-20, (1979).

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