Royal Feuds and the Politics of Sanctity in Anglo-Saxon England and Ottonian Saxony
Los feudos reales y la política de la santidad en la Inglaterra anglosajona y Otonia Sajonia
Feudos régios e políticas de santidade na Inglaterra Anglo-saxônica e na Saxônia otônida

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Abstract: This paper is an examination of sanctification and politics in Anglo-Saxon England and Ottonian Saxony. The evidence suggests that a feud culture and feuding behaviours were the reasons for the proliferation of sanctified murdered Anglo-Saxon kings in the late-eighth through mid-ninth centuries, a phenomenon unique to England in this time period. An investigation of the nature of royal feuds in England, in contrast to those in Saxony, further suggests that the sanctification and cults of these Anglo-Saxon murdered kings were a strategic part of feuding interactions and negotiations between families. It also supports arguments for the relationship between a feud culture and the proliferation of legislative activity by the Anglo-Saxons, and offers new possibilities for understanding the dearth of legislative activity by the Ottonians.

Resumo: Este artigo é um exame da santificação e da política na Inglaterra Anglo-Saxônica e na Saxônica Otônida. A evidencia sugere que uma cultura de feudo e comportamentos de feudo eram as razões para a proliferação de mortes santificadas de reis anglo-saxões de finais do século VIII até a metade do século IX, um fenómeno único na Inglaterra neste período. Uma investigação da natureza de feudos régios na Inglaterra, em contraste com aqueles da Saxônia, sugere que a santificação e o culto dos assassinados reis anglo-saxões era parte estratégica de

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interações de feudo e negociações entre famílias. Isto também suporta argumentos em favor da relação entre uma cultura de feudo e a proliferação de atividade legislativa dos anglo-saxões, e oferece novas possibilidades para que se compreenda a carência de atividade legislativa entre os Otônidas.

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I. Saints and Politics in Anglo-Saxon England and Ottonian Saxony

The political uses of saints in Anglo-Saxon England and Ottonian Saxony shared many similarities. Both the Anglo-Saxon and Ottonian kings held relics in high regard, using them as currency in diplomatic and formal gift-giving exchanges, carrying them into battle, and staging dramatic ceremonies to solemnise translations. Moreover, Anglo-Saxon and Ottonian royalty both used monastic foundations to further their own interests, placing family members as abbesses, abbots, or bishops; they also promoted these men and women as saints after they died, using sanctified family members as legitimising factors to help secure or enhance dynastic aspirations and political influence.

Yet, a number of differences are immediately apparent as well. First, there is just the matter of sheer numbers. One might expect more Anglo-Saxon saints simply because the Anglo-Saxons had been at it longer; but even in comparative terms the Anglo-Saxons were prodigious, producing over fifty royal saints among their kingdoms up to the point of the Conquest in 1066.[2] Looking at sanctified kings in particular, if we compare East Francia under the Ottonian dynasty (919-1024

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[2] See BLAIR, John. 'A Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Saints'. In: THACKER, Alan and SHARPE, Richard (eds.), *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 494-565.

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CE) and England from Alfred to the Conquest (871-1066 CE), the Anglo-Saxons had seven kings revered as saints, while the Ottonians had only one. Not only were there a lot of them, but many of the Anglo-Saxon royal men who were revered as saints prior to the unification of the kingdoms under Alfred were murdered. Feuding seems to have been the motivation for many of these murders and feuding custom seems to have informed the penalties that the guilty were subjected to. That many of these murders were committed by close kin over a contested or coveted crown stands in striking contrast to the Ottonians, who do not seem to have killed each other with anything approaching the frequency of the Anglo-Saxons. It is this distinction that will be examined here.

Scholars such as David Rollason, Catherine Cubitt, and Alan Thacker have dealt extensively with the subjects of royal saints, murdered saints, and the politics of sanctity.[3] Anglo-Saxon law, and feud in particular, is ground that has been at least as well trodden, by scholars such as Patrick Wormald and Paul Hyams.[4] This paper is intended to be a part of the dialogues initiated by these scholars, among

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[3] The extensive contributions of these scholars to this field of inquiry are exemplified by such studies as ROLLASON, David. *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England*. Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1989, especially Chapter 5, 'The Politics of Sainthood'; ROLLASON, David. 'The Cults of Murdered Royal Saints in Anglo-Saxon England'. In: *Anglo-Saxon England*, 11, 1983, pp. 1-22; ROLLASON, David. 'Relic-Cults as an Important Instrument of Royal Policy, c. 900-1050'. In: *Anglo-Saxon England*, 15, 1986, pp. 91-103; CUBITT, Catherine. 'Sites and Sanctity: Revisiting the Cult of Murdered and Martyred Anglo-Saxon Royal Saints'. In: *Early Medieval Europe*, 9, 2000, pp. 53-83; CUBITT, Catherine. 'Universal and Local Saints in Anglo-Saxon England'. In: THACKER, Alan and SHARPE, Richard (eds.), *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, pp. 424-53; THACKER, Alan. 'Kings, Saints, and Monasteries in Pre-Viking Mercia'. In: *Midland History*, 10, 1985, pp. 1-20; and THACKER, Alan. '*Membra Disjecta*: The Division of the Body and the Diffusion of the Cult'. In: STANCLIFFE, Clare and CAMBRIDGE, Eric (eds.), *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint*. Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1995, pp. 97-127.

[4] From Patrick Wormald's extensive bibliography, his most important work is: WORMALD, Patrick. *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century. Vol. 1*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1999. For examples of Paul Hyams' contributions to our understanding of feud see HYAMS, Paul. 'Feud and the State in Late Anglo-Saxon England'. In: *Journal of British Studies*, 40, 2001, pp. 1-43; and HYAMS, Paul. *Rancor and Reconciliation in Medieval England*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003.

others. Additionally, there is the added complication of the problems inherent in the very word 'feud' itself. Engaging in the debates about the legitimacy of feud as a practice, whether it was an institution, and whether or not the Anglo-Saxon '*faida*' actually can be translated as 'feud' is not the intention of this paper. But for lack of a better term, 'feud' will be used in this study to indicate the various and overlapping formal and informal obligations which might arise requiring those with political affiliations or friendship and kinship ties to use violence on behalf of one another.

II. Feud Culture and Sanctified Anglo-Saxon Kings

Murdered Anglo-Saxon royalty were not unusual. Nor were Anglo-Saxon royal saints. In fact, if we look at Anglo-Saxon murdered royals who were also venerated as saints we come up with a neat and concise list of twelve saints from the seventh-century Kentish princes to Edward the Martyr who was killed in 978. There are a few things that are immediately striking about the list. First, there is a tight cluster of six saints in the middle, separated by well over a century on each end from those of the seventh century and Edward in the tenth century. These six were all murdered within about a sixty-year time span, from Ælfwald of Northumbria in 788 to Wigstan of Mercia in 849.

Second, this cluster of royal murdered saints follows close on the heels of the visit to England by Pope Hadrian's emissaries George and Theophylact, who in their synodal decree of 786 specifically condemn royal murder in Anglo-Saxon England.[5] An additional element of note is with regard to hagiography. When these cults of the late eighth and ninth centuries were initiated and developing, they coincided with a hiatus in hagiographical writing in England.[6] This hiatus embraced nearly two hundred years in England, from the eighth century to the

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[5] GEORGE, Bishop of Ostia. To Pope Hadrian I, 'Epistola ad Hadrianum. Alcuini sive Albini epistolae'. In: DÜMMLER, Ernst (ed.), *MGH Epistolae Karolini Aevi II*. Berlin: Wiedmann, 1895, p. 24 (no. 3).
[6] FELL, Christine E. 'Edward King and Martyr and the Anglo-Saxon Hagiographic Tradition'. In: HILL, David (ed.), *Ethelred the Unready: Papers from the Millenary Conference*. Oxford: B.A.R., 1978, p. 3.

late tenth and early eleventh century when hagiographical writing picks up again. This period, 'though not filled with hagiographical writing, was apparently filled with the development of saintly cults. Suddenly in the eleventh century *Vitae* and *Passiones* of known, unknown, and semi-known Anglo-Saxon saints abound.'[7] The hiatus is attributable to the Danish invasions, relevant here because these invasions also likely contributed to regnal instability in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.[8] It is additionally of import to note that prior to 786, the only sainted murdered royalty were all from the seventh century, and four of them were murdered children. Of our cluster from the eighth and ninth centuries, all of them were kings or adult princes.[9]

Focusing on these six murdered kings and princes – Ælfwald, King of Northumbria (d. 788); Æthelberht, King of East Anglia (d. 794); Ealchmund, Prince of Northumbria (d. *ca* 800); Eardwulf, King of Northumbria, (d. *ca* 810); Cynehelm, King of Mercia (d. after 811); and Wigstan, Prince of Mercia (d. 849) – the first thing of note is that all six of these murdered royals were at the heart of some sort of succession crisis or contest. For example, take Ealchmund and Eardwulf. Ealchmund was a son of Alcred, King of Northumbria, who was deposed in 744. After years in exile among the Picts, he returned to challenge Eardwulf's kingship. According to the *Historia Regum*, around the year 800 King Eardwulf ordered his *tutores* to kill Ealchmund.[10]

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[7] *Ibid.*

[8] TEMPLE, Elzbieta. *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts 900-1066*. London: Harvey Miller, 1976, p. 11.

[9] When the last murdered Anglo-Saxon royal saint, Edward the Martyr, was killed in 978, he was part of a very different political scene than that of a hundred years prior. This suggests a very different kind of political motivation behind the veneration of the six eighth- and ninth-century royal murdered saints, regardless of whether this veneration was initially instigated by lay devotion or by the conscious promotion of the victims' families.

[10] SYMEON OF DURHAM. *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia, Volume 2: Historia Regum*, para. 61. Edited by Thomas Arnold. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1885. It is believed that although it was compiled in the late eleventh or early twelfth century, the early sections of the *Historia Regum* were probably drawn from a tenth-century source. See BLAIR, Peter Hunter. 'Some Observations on the "Historia Regum" attributed to Symeon of Durham'. In: CHADWICK, Nora K. (ed.), *Celt and Saxon: Studies in the Early British Border*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963, pp. 117-118. Also see LAPIDGE, Michael. 'Byrhtferth of

Eardwulf himself, despite having ordered the murders of Ealchmund and a nobleman identified in the *Historia Regum* as Moll, who likely was related to a previous usurping king of Northumbria, was also venerated as a saint.[11] In 790 he miraculously survived an assassination attempt thinly disguised as judicial murder when Æthelred ordered his arrest and execution. The monks who recovered his body are reported by the *Historia Regum* to have carried it to a tent near the church while singing Gregorian chant, and in the morning, he was found to be alive.[12] Alcuin himself refers to the miraculous nature of this resuscitation in a letter to Eardwulf of 796, reminding him that he should 'know with certainty, that none other is able to preserve your life than he who has liberated you from present death'.[13]

For another example, consider Ælfwald, who became King of Northumbria in 788 when then-king Æthelred was deposed, and who was killed in the same year by one of his own noblemen.[14] After his death, he was succeeded by his kinsman, who lasted only a year before being ousted by Æthelred, who reclaimed the throne.[15] Shortly after his return to power, in 791, Æthelred ordered the murders of Ælfwald's two sons.[16] There is nothing really unusual about this story, even down to the murder of the usurper's sons to prevent any potential challenge from them or Ælfwald's supporters. However, there is also little to suggest any reason for Ælfwald's sanctity, except that, according to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, 'a heavenly light was frequently seen where he was killed'.[17] Like

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Ramsey and the early sections of the *Historia Regum* attributed to Symeon of Durham'. In: *Anglo-Saxon England*, 10, 1981, pp. 97-122.

[11] SYMEON. *Historia Regum*, para. 61.

[12] SYMEON. *Historia Regum*, para. 55.

[13] ALCUIN. 'Alcuini sive Albini epistolae'. In: *MGH Epistolae Karolini Aevi II*, p. 155 (no. 108): 'Scito certissime, quod nullus alius tuam vitam conservare potest nisi ille, qui te de morte liberavit praesenti'.

[14] SYMEON. *Historia Regum*, para. 54.

[15] *Ibid.*, para. 54-55.

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Anno 789 [788], SWANTON, Michael (ed. and trans.). London and New York: Routledge, 1998, p. 54.

Ælfwald, many of the murdered Anglo-Saxon kings had very short *curricula vitae* when it came to the sanctity that they were nonetheless awarded.

The element of tit-for-tat that typifies feud-type activity is evident in these examples, and appears throughout the stories of saintly murdered royals from this eighth and ninth-century cluster. Additionally throughout these stories, we see forms of redress that suggest attempts at reconciliation. Looking at the list of murdered royal saints in its entirety, we see *wergilds* paid in the form of monastic endowments, and translations intended as redress.[18]

We should not assume that the legends or histories which do *not* specify a wergild are not feud-driven. After all, they derived out of a society that had feuding behaviours and norms as part of its *mentalité*. Paul Hyams has noted that 'feud culture was something that pre-Alfredian kings shared with their nobility,' that 'kings and would-be supplanters shared the noble feuding culture of their day,' and I would argue that these royal murdered saints illustrate that pattern.[19]

If a *wergild* was inadequate, or not forthcoming, vengeance was the appropriate next step in a feuding culture, and it cannot be coincidental that vengeance miracles are a stock feature of the legends surrounding Anglo-Saxon royal saints who died violently.[20] Revenge might be attributed to God when a murdered

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[18] Oswiu provided the land for Gilling as a way to atone for the murder of Oswine, paid to Oswine's relative Eanfled: 'castigandi hujus facinoris gratia, monasterium constructum est' (making reparation for this deed, a monastery was built): BEDE. *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, STEVENSON, Joseph (ed.). London: The English Historical Society, 1838, 3. 14. Minster in Thanet was founded by Egbert as a negotiated settlement for the murder of the Kentish princes in the seventh century with their sister: ROLLASON. 'The Cults of Murdered Royal Saints', p. 19. Wulfhere founded Stone as a wergild for Wulflad and Ruffinus: *Ibid.*, p. 15. Aelfhere's insufficient wergild for the killing of Edward is noted in the *Vita Oswaldi*; while Aelfhere staged a translation of his relics, this was not enough and God 'wreaked a terrible vengeance on the guilty men: ROLLASON. 'The Cults of Murdered Royal Saints', p. 19.

[19] HYAMS. *Rancor and Reconciliation*, p. 77.

[20] While vengeance miracles were a common type for murdered and martyred royal Anglo-Saxon saints, they are 'otherwise rare in Anglo-Saxon hagiography'. CUBITT. 'Saints and Sanctity', pp. 57-58.

prince's family failed to seek vengeance on their own initiative, as when Beorhtwulf, the kinsman who murdered the Mercian prince Wigstan, was driven to madness.[21] Or, consider Cynehelm, another Mercian prince whose murder was orchestrated by his sister, Cwoenthryth. According to the 11th-century *Vita et Miraculi Sancti Kenelmi*, when, despite her best efforts to hide the body, Cynehelm was discovered, Cwoenthryth tried to sing Psalm 108 backwards to curse him further. However, as she read, both of her eyes fell out of her head and landed on the pages of her psalter.[22]

For those who might find this story doubtful, the *Vita* assures us that 'that same psalter, adorned with silver, still shows the proof of this chastisement, stained on the same sentence with the blood of the fallen eyeballs'.[23] The hagiographer reports that Cwoenthryth died shortly after, but no sanctified ground would hold her body, and she was finally thrown into a ditch.

It is worth pointing out that these cults that developed around murdered royalty were a feature unique to Anglo-Saxon England in this time period.[24] And perhaps the sheer number of murdered royalty was as well. It is likely that the formation of cults surrounding murdered royalty was political, especially given the succession issues that surrounded the murders. This is potentially why there was papal interest in these feuds. After all, having the Anglo-Saxon royals continuously killing each other was disruptive, both for society at large and ecclesiastical interests in particular, and the strongly-worded condemnation of this practice by Pope Hadrian's legates cannot have been accidental. It is probable that Carolingian interests were a driver of this condemnation as well.[25]

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[21] ROLLASON. 'The Cults of Murdered Royal Saints', p. 20.

[22] *Vita et Miraculi Sancti Kenelmi*. In: LOVE, Rosalind C. (ed. and trans.), *Three Eleventh-Century Anglo-Saxon Saints' Lives*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, pp. 70-72.

[23] *Vita et Miraculi Sancti Kenelmi*, p. 72.

[24] ROLLASON. 'The Cults of Murdered Royal Saints', p. 14.

[25] See STORY, Joanna. 'Bishop George and the Legates' Mission to England'. In: *Carolingian Connections: Anglo-Saxon England and Carolingian Francia, c. 750-870*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003, pp. 55-92.

Bishop George of Ostia, one of the legates, whose report to the pope still survives, wrote that the trip he and Bishop Theophylact made to England was the first official mission sent from the papacy in nearly two hundred years. Their primary mission was reform; but in the course of their visit, they learned of 'not insignificant vices which had to be corrected'.[26] These included the violence and regicide that plagued interactions among and within the Anglo-Saxon royal houses.[27] Despite their exhortation to the Anglo-Saxons to stop killing their royalty, there was not necessarily a change in behaviours – they continued to kill each other. But what we do see is an increase in *sanctification* of murdered royalty.

This sudden burst of sanctified royal murder victims that occurs almost immediately after the legates' condemnation of the practice is unlikely to be coincidental. It is possible, as one scholar has suggested, that the church actively encouraged these cults of murdered royal saints in an attempt to discourage further murders, but it is also possible that the devotional activity surrounding these murdered kings and princes, who were generally far less than saintly in their daily lives, was one way of augmenting the perception of harm to a family's honour.[28]

The condemnation against royal murders offered that opportunity. In a feuding society, this could up the ante for redress or reprisal considerably. If, for example, a murder victim could be portrayed as a martyr, the stakes became significantly higher for those who had initiated the violence. The murder of a king or a prince was a terrible thing, but if that murder was violent or treacherous and could effectively be framed as martyrdom, it could motivate an injured family to seek a level of revenge that they felt was appropriate vengeance for a royal saint. As an alternative to revenge, it could also provide an aggrieved family with the opportunity and incentive to press for a more elaborate or grand gesture from the perpetrators as an act to publicly restore their honour.

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[26] LYNCH, Joseph H. *Christianizing Kinship: Ritual Sponsorship in Anglo-Saxon England.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998, p. 178. Quoting GEORGE, Bishop of Ostia.
[27] LYNCH. *Christianizing Kinship*, p. 180.
[28] ROLLASON. 'The Cults of Murdered Royal Saints', p. 16.

III. Feuding Behaviour in Ottonian Saxony

The situation in eighth and ninth-century England has some key elements in common with tenth-century East Francia that make a comparison of the two regions worth consideration, not the least of which were challenges concerning succession. The Saxons in East Francia certainly had their succession crises and contested kingships, as well as one deadly feud. According to contemporary chroniclers, Henry the Fowler was at the heart of the only blood-feud-type behaviour I have found reported in which the family of the Saxon kings were participants.

This was a longstanding altercation with its origins dating back to the reign of Louis the Child. Widukind of Corvey, in his tenth-century *Rerum Gestarum Saxonicarum*, relates a rather dizzying overview of events. Conrad, father of King Conrad, and Adalbert, the nephew of Henry through his sister, were at war with each other. Adalbert's brother was killed. In retribution, Adalbert killed Conrad. As the feud waged on, according to Widukind, 'not any of the kings could lay to rest the violent warfare between these outstanding men'.[29] In 906, as a last resort, Archbishop Hatto of Mainz conspired to capture Adalbert by trickery, and he was then turned over to King Louis, condemned, and executed. Widukind's next remark is telling: 'Could any perfidy be greater than this? Yet by the death of one man, many lives were saved. And what better judgment is there than that by which discord is dissolved and peace re-established?'.[30]

Peace, however, was not to last. Widukind further describes how King Conrad was afraid to grant Henry the Fowler the same breadth of power his father Otto had had as duke of Saxony, a slight which was perceived as a grave injustice by Henry and the Saxons. Aware of the festering resentment, Conrad decided his best option was to try to kill Henry by treachery, again with the help of the loyal

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[29] WIDUKIND OF CORVEY. *Widukindi Monachi Corbiensis Rerum Gestarum Saxonicarum Libri Tres*, HIRSCH, Paul and LOHMANN, H.-E. (eds.). Hannover: Hahn, 1935, I. 22: 'Nec ullus regum tam ingens bellum inter eminentes viros potuit sedare'.

[30] *Ibid.*: 'Hac igitur perfida quid nequans? Attamen uno capite caeso multorum capita populorum salvantur. Et quid melius eo consilio, quo discordia dissolveretur et pax redderetur?'

Bishop Hatto. But the plot unravelled, and Henry gathered an army and began to occupy lands throughout Saxony and Thuringia, seizing any properties that were held by the bishopric, and expelling the king's supporters.[31]

This story is repeated by Thietmar of Merseberg, and wide scale disruption is hinted at when he glosses over the details of the many armed encounters between the two men:

> But on to other things, as it would take me a long time to tell, how often having engaged with each other they [i.e. the king and Duke Henry] were defeated or victorious, and how, finally, at the instigation of good men they came together as friends.[32]

The story of Henry and Conrad in Liudprand of Cremona's tenth-century *Antapodosis* is deliberately downplayed, and the focus of the incident between Bishop Hatto and Adalbert becomes the justice exacted by the king for treason.[33] There are other stories about feuding kings and magnates in Liudprand of Cremona's writings. But the bulk of this behaviour was pursued in Italy, by Italians against each other or the Germanic magnates who were unfortunate enough to get drawn into Italian politics by marriage, conquest, or invitation.

Liudprand is explicit that this is not how legitimate kings conduct themselves, and was expressly attempting to contrast the corrupt and chaotic political situation of Italy with the ordered, consensual, and thus, *legitimate* rule of the Ottonians. This agenda most certainly would have caused him to downplay any Ottonian feud-type behaviours. These chroniclers, however, regardless of their different approaches to the same events, all emphasise the destructive chaos of retributive violence and the importance of reconciliation.

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[31] *Ibid.*

[32] THIETMAR OF MERSEBERG. 'Thietmari Chronicon'. In: PERTZ, George Heinrich (ed.), *MGH Scriptores III*. Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1839, I. 4: 'Sed mihi ad alia properanti longum est enarrare, quocies congressi mutuo cederent vel vincerent, et quod postremo bonorum instinctu in amiciciam convenirent'.

[33] LIUDPRAND OF CREMONA. 'Antapodosis'. In: CHIESA, P. (ed.), *Liudprandi Cremonensis Opera Omnia*. Turnhout: Brepols, 1998, II. 19.

Succession crises among the Saxons had the potential to erupt in violence, but tended to be resolved by negotiation. Henry the Fowler, who had rebelled against King Conrad, was nonetheless designated by Conrad to be his successor.[34] But the transition was not smooth; Henry had to deal with Arnulf of Bavaria who felt he had a legitimate claim to the crown. They each mustered their armies and rode to confront each other, but according to Liudprand ultimately reached an agreement through negotiation without engaging in battle.[35] Even in the minority of Otto III, the fourth Saxon king by direct descent in the Ottonian dynasty, we see his safety threatened when his father Otto II died unexpectedly.

Young Otto was held hostage by his uncle Henry the Wrangler, who had by that time several attempted coups to his credit. While Henry tried to press his advantage by various strategies before agreeing to his nephew's safe return, an outcome that was negotiated by his mother and grandmother, the obvious question, especially after looking at the Anglo-Saxons, is why didn't Henry just kill his nephew and be done with it?[36] For some reason, the Ottonians seemed to balk at killing family. They would raise armies against each other, imprison each other, and send recalcitrant sons or brothers into exile, but murdering each other – and even murdering troublesome magnates – while it did happen in rare circumstances, did not seem to be within the norms of acceptable political manoeuvring.

IV. The Role of Murdered Anglo-Saxon Kings' Cults in Feud Negotiation

This discrepancy between the Anglo-Saxons in the West and the Ottonian Saxons in the East raises some important questions. The murdered Anglo-Saxon royals who were *not* venerated as saints also fit into the pattern of feuding behaviour. So what was the purpose of these cults? I suggest that while both Anglo-Saxon royal families and the Ottonians actively promoted saints from their own families, the local cults that evolved from the murdered Anglo-Saxon king-saints (which the Ottonians just did not have) provided a way of mitigating

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[34] LIUDPRAND. 'Antapodosis', II. 19, II. 20.
[35] LIUDPRAND. 'Antapodosis', II. 21-23.
[36] THIETMAR. 'Chronicon', IV. 1-6.

violence. That is, these royal saints served as tools for negotiating conflict among the Anglo-Saxon nobility.

The feuding behaviours among the Anglo-Saxon nobility was sufficiently violent, especially with regard to contested successions or attempts at usurpation, that the saints served, of course, to advance a family's political or social agenda, but they also served to mediate a kind of conciliation. Simon Walker has noted the importance of cults of political saints in late medieval England, both as a way to safely show opposition to a king and as a means of reconciliation. While it was not possible, of course, for saints to prevent rebellion in late medieval England, what they *could* do was help 'to restore a measure of harmony after the strife was over and in making reconciliation, even on unfavourable terms, easier for the losers by offering a higher, and more objective constraint to which all could submit without dishonour'.[37]

To this end, saints initially venerated for their resistance to a given ruler or royal house were often co-opted by that same royal house to express the 'aspirations and concerns articulated in the set of beliefs that grew up around the powers of the monarch in the later Middle Ages, satisfying the desire for reconciliation and re-integration'.[38] Walker has gestured to one important purpose of the cults of murdered royal saints in Anglo-Saxon England. These saints and their cults acted as means for negotiating conflict among the nobility. In his remarks about fifteenth-century English society, Walker notes that, 'if the conflicting claims embodied in the death of a political saint continued to be fought out in symbolic fashion, the subsequent cult nevertheless canalised and contained the most immediate destructive effects of the struggle'.[39]

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[37] WALKER, Simon. 'Politcal Saints in Later Medieval England'. In: BRITNELL, R. H. and POLLARD, A. J. (eds.), *The Mcfarlane Legacy: Studies in Late Medieval Politics and Society*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995, pp. 90-91.
[38] WALKER. 'Politcal Saints in Later Medieval England', p. 90.
[39] WALKER. 'Politcal Saints in Later Medieval England', p. 98.

Feuds, and feuding societies, depend ultimately on an end to hostilities through a negotiated peace settlement that publicly ends the conflict and restores relationships between the feuding parties.[40]

Because, in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, a feuding culture was ubiquitous, these cults of murdered Anglo-Saxon kings and princes may have provided a way to contain or constrain out-and-out chaos.[41] The cults mitigated retributive violence that might otherwise have been perpetuated. They allowed for a public way to express dissatisfaction with a political outcome, whether by lay non-nobles or through royal sponsorship, to not only honour the deceased but to also point an incriminating finger at those responsible for his demise. It could also allow a guilty prince or king a public way to restore honour to the family he had wronged. These cults provided opportunities for mediated peace, with the cooperation or active involvement of church officials, in a public, symbolic way. Oswine of Deira, murdered in 651 by Oswiu of Bernicia, provides perhaps the clearest example of how this might have worked.

According to Bede, the blame for the enmity between Oswine and Oswiu lies firmly with the latter, who could not live peaceably with Oswine and ultimately felt compelled to do away with him. According to Bede, 'the causes of dissention being so burdensome, [Oswiu] viciously procured his death'.[42] Oswine had raised an army against Oswiu, but realising he was outmatched, disbanded it and went with one of his *thegns* to hide in the home of a *gesith* who, he thought, was a loyal friend.

This *gesith* betrayed him to Oswiu who then orchestrated his murder, along with the murder of his *thegn*. Bede goes on to specify that it was at the instigation of King Oswiu's wife, Queen Eanflaed, who was a kinsman of Oswine, that Oswiu made recompense by granting Truhere, another close relative of Oswine, a site on which to build a monastery where prayers would continually be said for

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[40] HYAMS, *Rancor and Reconciliation*, p. 12.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 77.

[42] BEDE. *Historia Ecclesiastica*, III. 14: 'Sed nec cum eo ille […] habere pacem potuit; quin potius, ingravescentibus causis dissensionum, miserrima hunc caede peremit'.

eternal welfare of both kings, the one who was murdered and the one who planned the murder.[43] Recompense for the murder of Oswine was thus resolved by a negotiated settlement for a grand public gesture, which honoured the murdered king's family, and included the public reconciliatory gesture of *both* kings' souls being perpetually honoured.

The intensely violent and endemic feuding culture of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms was also potentially the source of the prolific legislative activity that occurred in the tenth century and after. Paul Hyams has suggested that the centrality of royal authority in Anglo-Saxon England is not incongruous with the existence of a feud mentality. Feud culture, with its inherent violence and potential for political and social disruption, was a culture shared by pre-Alfredian kings and their nobility alike.[44] Nevertheless, its potential to undermine royal authority was also recognised. If indeed the proliferation of vernacular *leges* proves that 'Anglo-Saxon personal vengeance operated in a context that ostentatiously included public, royal courts willing to exert pressure against the private acts they deemed illegitimate,' we have the possibility of drawing some interesting conclusions.[45]

From the beginning of the tenth century, we see this intensification of royal action against behaviour unacceptable to the crown, and it does indeed suggest 'a new level of royal interest in violence and disorder committed outside the royal circle'.[46] We also see this interest in controlling and constraining the most disruptive elements of unrestrained feud coinciding with the unification of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Karl Shoemaker has linked the efforts of Anglo-Saxon royal authority to govern sanctuary by integrating it with law regulating feud, though they achieved mixed results. However, the key point is that the blood feud laws and norms were indeed the norms, thus reinforcing the connection

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[43] *Ibid.*, III. 24: 'Nam regina Æanfled propinqua illius, ob castigationem necis ejus injustae, postulavit a rege Osuio, ut donaret ibi locum monasterium construendi praefato Dei famulo Trumheri, quia propinquus et ipse erat regis occisi; in quo, videlicet, monasterio orationes assiduae pro utriusque regis, (id est, et occisi, et ejus, qui occidere jussit,) salute aeterna fierent.'

[44] HYAMS. *Rancor and Reconciliation*, p. 77.

[45] *Ibid.*, p. 73.

[46] *Ibid.*, p. 80.

between legislation and feud.[47] The question that arises is, if the royal *leges* of the Anglo-Saxons were created out of attempts to control a feuding culture, is it possible that in a society in which such feuds among the nobility do *not* cause the same degree of disruption, not to mention outright threats to the crown, that we would not necessarily see the same emphasis on legislative activity?

The Ottonians, whose succession crises were far less deadly, and whose nobility were less of a threat to their kingdom as a whole, were able to depend more on traditional feud and negotiation as part of their legal structure, since it was far less disruptive to order in their realm. The almost complete lack of legislative activity by the Ottonians has long puzzled historians, especially in light of their success as rulers. The smaller principalities and kingdoms that made up the Ottonian Empire were essentially similar to the kingdoms incorporated under Wessex. Because family feuds were a much more lethal sport among the Anglo-Saxon royal and noble families than among the Ottonians and East Francian magnates, there was no compulsion to create highly centralised, top-down control over minor courts and a highly developed legal ideology around the idea of a king's peace.

V. Conclusion

Let us return to the cults of murdered Anglo-Saxon royalty. The feuding behaviours themselves potentially gave rise to the cults of murdered royal Anglo-Saxon saints, as a response to pressures from the church to limit these killings and the political disruption that accompanied them. This constant deadly conflict between and among the nobility and the various monarchs might suggest the English efforts toward a strong centralised system and legislative tradition, versus the Ottonians who were happy to delegate or give away jurisdictional authority and legislated very little. Once the kingdoms were united under Wessex, the creation of new murdered royal saints ceased. When, nearly a century and a half later, the murder of Edward the Martyr spawned a cult as a result of the general shock and outrage at his death, he was a notable exception, an outlier, hearkening back to what was by then a much older tradition.

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[47] SHOEMAKER, Karl. *Sanctuary and Crime in the Middle Ages, 400-1500*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2011, p. 78.

It seems a very likely possibility that the Anglo-Saxon tendency to venerate murdered kings as saints was a part of feud negotiations, made necessary by the ease and frequency by which kings and their potential successors were killed. This suggests that it was feuding behaviour that created the need for the written legislation that is such a distinctive feature of Anglo-Saxon law. Lastly, it suggests the possibility that the lack of written legislation by the Ottonian kings is indicative of their reliance on traditional methods of conflict resolution and jurisdictions delegated to local authorities. There was no compulsion to legislate regarding feud, because it was not perceived to be a threat to their realm. The one place the Ottonians *did* legislate was Italy – and feud remained part of *that* law for centuries after.[48]

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[48] WICKHAM, Chris. *Early Medieval Italy: Central Power and Local Society 400-1000*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989, p. 128.