

‘How medieval English rulers utilised the Christian movement within England during the years 596-1095’

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DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted for candidature for any degree

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STATEMENT

This thesis is the result of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated.

Other sources are acknowledged by explicit references and a Reference List is appended.

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Dedication

To both Professor J. Burton and H. Webster I give you my gratitude, for your dedicated and passionate guidance in the study of medieval history.

Abstract

Evaluating the conversions of the English, from the year 597 following St. Augustine's expedition, this dissertation will evaluate the progression and development of Christian identity that was introduced during the internal consolidation of England from the separate kingdoms of Mercia, East Anglia, Northumbria and Wessex. In order to analyze the Christian movement from the conversions of the late Sixth Century to that of the Eleventh Century attention will be drawn as to how kings accepted and used Christianity, addressing the question; How did rulers utilize the development of the Christian movement within England from the year 597 to 1095. Sources that span that will be included in the study is The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and Bede's *Ecclesiastical* history of the English people as well as analysis of objects such as the King Alfred Jewel.

This dissertation will discuss the use of Christianity during the early medieval period as well as the ways in which English rulers used this movement, as a tool to promote political marriages overseas; to bring legitimization and to present the dominance of medieval rulers. Other aspects that will be explored is the effect of the Roman Churches desire to reassert influence following the collapse of the empire and how this may have infringed upon the development of the Christian movement. These aspects will be analyzed through the evaluation of primary source materials as well as the aid of modern scholarship, such as historians Fletcher and Wickham.

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Introduction

The landscape of medieval England in the year 597 forms the setting of this study; England at this point was made up of several ruling kingdoms which struggled to achieve military supremacy, their success depending on the ability of their leaders.¹ Historian Wickham argues that this environment in relation to the adoption of Christianity meant that the acceptance of the Christian faith was merely the conversion of kings and their entourages.² This suggests that the formation of a Christian culture within these kingdoms, in Sixth century England was largely dictated by the ruling elite; that their adoption of Christianity formed the groundwork for conversions of the rest of English society. Additionally in consideration of this, study will primarily focus on the ruling class. Moreover, rulers and their families were far greatly documented in relation to the Christianisation of England than any other class of people within England, meaning that there is more primary material relating to this class than any other.

This study will also consider contextual factors outside of England that may have affected the uptake and use of Christianity within England during this time. For the state of religion during the end of the sixth Century had fluctuated following the retraction of Roman forces with the collapse of the empire in 410; the Roman dominion in Britain having come to an end, Christianity had started decline within in England. This vacuum of Roman influence and Christian devotion allowed Paganism to return as the prominent religion by the late 500s.³ The start resurgence of Roman influence marked in the Christian movement forms the

¹ A. Savage, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' (1997), Bramely Books, U.S, pg 38.

² C. Wickham, 'Medieval Europe' (2017), Yale university press, London, pg 80.

³ G. Moody, 'St. Augustine's first footfall' (2013), Thanet archaeology trust, Kent, pg 18.

starting point of this study, at the beginning of the Christian mission to England lead by St. Augustine and his monks who 'landed on the Kentish coast in the spring of 597.'⁴

Though pre-empting the mission of 597, it must be noted there had been previous attempts to re-establish Christianity dominion within England by individuals such as St. Patrick and St. Columba who had established a strong Christian sentiment in neighbouring countries of Scotland and Ireland.⁵ Though despite these earlier attempts to Christianise England the mission of St. Augustine is particularly noteworthy; it is through his efforts which provided a consistent movement maintaining its momentum and led to long-lasting cultural effects within England throughout the medieval period. Therefore, in order to best understand the this Christian movement begun by Augustine, it must be observed through the eyes of the civilisation for which it was so greatly affected, and how they interacted with it. It is for this reasoning that this dissertation aims to analyse the ways in which English rulers utilised the Christian movement from the years 597 to 1095.

In order to explore the ways in which English rulers used the Christian movement this dissertation will divide the span of nearly five hundred years into the initial conversion following St. Augustine's mission; how rulers further developed the sense of kingship and legitimisation using the Christian religion; and lastly how rulers used Christianity in order to inspire devotion of warriors during and after battle. Analysis of the Christian movement within England will be derived from important primary source materials such as the works of the Lindisfarne monastery, commonly know as *The Lindisfarne Gospels* as well as Anne Savage's editing of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* and Price's translation of Bede's extensive

⁴ J. Norwich, 'The Popes, a history' (2012), Chatto & Windus, London, pg 37.

⁵ A. Savage, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' (1997), pg 38.

work, the *Ecclesiastical History of the English people* for these surviving works are the closest we can ascertain of this early period and therefore form the ground work of this study.

When analysing these invaluable sources, it must be noted that although they offer a detailed glimpse into the early medieval period, they were completed by individuals who each have their own agendas, backgrounds and specific purposes; as historian Fletcher rightly states these primary materials were created by ‘professional Christians’ and therefore must be analysed with a certain distance. For the sake of credibility these sources will be cross analysed with other primary materials and scholarly opinion to ensure reliability and minimise the effects of any personal and professional agendas within these sources.

Chapter One: The initial conversion and Pagan sentiment

The initial conversion of medieval English rulers following St Augustine's mission in the late Sixth Century, can be argued as being not genuine for the most part, instead fuelled by the prosperity with which Christendom could bring their kingdoms. Additional conclusions can be drawn that these English rulers used the Roman Church's institutional desire to re-establish Christianity and their influence across England, historians such as Bede suggest as much. The extensive work of Bede's *The Ecclesial history of English people* comprises primary sources, that greatly suggest during the mission of St. Augustine, the display of gifts and political connections was a powerful incentive to English rulers.

Materialistic reward

Bede draws upon the themes of materialistic reward within the Ecclesial history of English people whilst discussing the conversion of the English, this is demonstrated in Pope Boniface V direct correspondence to both King Edwin of Northumbria (sometimes referred to as Edwin of Deira) and his queen encouraging them to adopt and allow Christianity within their kingdom. King Edwin of Northumbria who rules between the years 616 - 632/3 is an example of the treatment that English rulers received during the initial phase of the Christian movement. In these letters to King Edwin the Roman Church offers, 'a tunic with a golden ornament, and a cloak from Ancyra.'⁶ To his queen the Roman Church presents 'a silver mirror, together with a gold ivory comb.'⁷ These elaborate gifts can be seen as tokens of what the church could afford, as historian R. Fletcher expresses these diplomatic presents

⁶ Bede, trans. L. Sherley-Price, 'Ecclesial history of the English people' (1990), pg 125. Chapter 10: *Pope Boniface writes to the king Edwin,, urging him to accept the faith*. Bede, a prominent historian of the middle-age, who's works comprise primary literary sources in order to complete a narrative of the conversion of the English people.

⁷ Bede, trans. L. Sherley-Price, 'Ecclesial history of the English people' (1990), pg 125. Chapter 11: *The Pope writes to the queen, urging her to exert her influence to obtain the kings salvation*.

‘cunningly hinted at the splendid trappings of Christian civilisation.’⁸ For undoubtedly these presents were displays of the wealth of the Roman Church and would have illustrated to the Northumbrians what they could achieve with good relations with such wealthy and well connected allies. This inviting and prosperous alliance with the Roman church can be argued as being one of the founding motivations for the conversions of the English rulers. Wickham supports this, arguing ‘a greater openness to southern European influence and political procedures was virtually the only reason why rulers changed religion.’⁹ Following Wickham’s stance, it can be argued that the medieval English rulers, such as King Edwin of Northumbria became Christian in order to obtain these greater relations with other Christianised kingdoms throughout Europe, most notably neighbouring Francia.

The desire of such alliances by Northumbria and other English kingdoms can be expressed in political alliances founded during these the initial stages of the Christian mission. The use of Christianity to aid in these political relations in kingdoms throughout England and abroad can be displayed in the frequency of conversion surrounding political marriages, when one of the uniting kingdoms was Christian.

Political relations

The conversion of several medieval English rulers can be linked with their recent marriages to Christian Brides, suggesting other than a willingness to convert, alternative motivations and influences could have shaped their decision to take up Christianity. The first of two examples whereby a Pagan ruler converted when marrying into a Christian family is that of King Ethelbert of Kent. When accepting St. Augustine’s missionary into his Kingdom in the

⁸ R. Fletcher, ‘The barbarian conversion, from Paganism to Christianity’ (1999), university of California press, Los Angeles, pg 120.

⁹ C. Wickham, ‘Medieval Europe’ (2017), Yale University press, London, pg 81.

Sixth Century King Ethelbert was married into a powerful French family. Arguably following his union to the Christian Franks and with the influence of his Queen, King Ethelbert took to Christianity.¹⁰ This conversion is expressed in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and debated through modern scholarship, as Schama states, Rome found the King of Kent, 'a strong conversion prospect since he had married a Frankish Christian Princess'.¹¹ The conversion of King Ethelbert highlights how the use of marriage and political alliance to powerful Christian families played a key role in the conversion of English rulers. Whilst this may also suggest that these conversions and public religion within England was largely based on power and influence, the conversion of King Ethelbert of Kent which was also tied to marriage, may give an early indication as to how rulers may perceive religious devotion. As well as how English rulers might later use Christianity to assist in their own political ambitions. This use of Christianity supports Wickham's statement that conversion to Christianity provided 'a greater openness',¹² suggesting that Christian conversion and marriage were but the product of these early English rulers exerting their desire to obtain the benefits of closer relations with powerful Christian trading partners.¹³

The second instance of the conversion of a pagan ruler following marriage into a Christian kingdom is that of the later conversion of Northumbria. The conversion of Northumbria occurring later in St. Augustine's mission in a generation having been born within an environment of those converted, Æthelberga the daughter of the converted Ethelbert ruler of Kent was born into Christian worship and married the Pagan ruler of Northumbria, King

¹⁰ R. Fletcher 'The conversion of Europe, from paganism to Christianity 317-1386' (1998), Harper Colin's Publishers, London, pg 110.

¹¹ S. Schama, 'A history of Britain 3000 BC – AD 1603' (2001), BBC Worldwide Ltd, London, pg 52. For further reading see: Bede, trans. L. Sherley-Price, 'Ecclesiastical history of the English people' (1990), pg 110.

¹² C. Wickham, 'Medieval Europe' (2017), pg 81.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Edwin.¹⁴ This marriage displays a re-configuring of the events of the earlier conversion of Kent, as Fletcher states, Edwin's conversion 'bore some like-ness to the circumstances surrounding the conversions of Clovis and Ethelbert.'¹⁵ This suggest that the use of conversion as a means of cementing political union was a common reason for conversion by medieval English rulers considering it is recorded as occurring multiple times.

The effect of this union between Northumbria and Kent is expressed in Bede, who describes 'the Northumbrian people's acceptance of the faith of Christ came through their king's alliance with the kings of Kent by his marriage to Ethelberga.'¹⁶ This marriage therefore highlights that successful conversion to Christianity was founded upon the desire for strengthening political relations. Fletcher supports this claim as he titles this union as 'a dynastic-marriage-alliance' therefore suggesting that Edwin's conversion may have been a way to firmly cement this transaction. Additionally Edwin's desire to convert was reinforced by the close influence of a Christian queen.¹⁷ In likeness to the conversions of Ethelbert and Edwin there are many additional examples whereby Pagan rulers or the newly converted rulers made use of Christianity as a tool to enable political marriage overseas, notably as far afield as the ruler of the Lombard's who is mention as having married a Anglo-Saxon princess.¹⁸

However, closer analysis following the King Edwin of Northumbria's conversion, contrary to Bede's misleading description the conversion date was considerably long after Edwin's marriage to Ethelberga as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle states that Edwin 'promised Paulinus that he would give his daughter to god, if he would accomplish, by praying to god, that he

¹⁴ R. Fletcher, 'The Conversion of Europe, from Paganism to Christianity 371 -1386' (1998), pg 119.

¹⁵ R. Fletcher, 'The Conversion of Europe, from Paganism to Christianity 371 -1386' (1998), pg 119.

¹⁶ Bede, trans. L. Sherley-Price, 'Ecclesial history of the English people' (1990), pg 118.

¹⁷ R. Fletcher, 'The conversion of Europe from Paganism to Christianity 371-1386' (1998), pg 3.

¹⁸ C. Wickham, 'Medieval Europe' (2017), pg. 87.

might strike down his enemy.’¹⁹ This promise was committed to in 626 following Edwin’s success whereby ‘Paulinus baptized his daughter on the holy eve of Pentecost...within twelve months the king was baptised, at Easter, with all his retainers.’²⁰ This describes a difference of two years between the union of king Edwin and Ethelberga and his conversion, this does suggest that Bede is not to be relied upon as a source of considerable accuracy, nor is to be regarded as a source free of manipulation, for he alludes that the conversion of Edwin occurred soon after or even during the union of Northumbria and Kent.

Additionally considering this lapse of time, if it is assumed that the marriage of a Christian bride was purely for materialistic gain and the conversion also as a way to achieve political stability it is odd that King Edwin would have been Christianised so late after marriage, not pre-empting the marriage of a Christian queen. For King Edwin, having married Ethelberga in the year 625, he did not convert until 627, following his promise to Paulinus, the later known bishop of York; this may suggest that contrary to the initial statement there was an alternative factor that shaped this conversion other than that of alliance with Kent. When examining the lapse in time between Edwin’s political marriage and his conversion, two conclusions may be drawn. For the conversion happened some time after marriage which could further suggest that the Christianisation was not genuine, because the Pagan king held firm against becoming Christian even in the face of politics. Alternatively, this lapse in time could suggest the King Edwin of Northumbria’s conversion was genuine, because it was completed separate from the political transaction of the Christian marriage. Therefore, Edwin converted having close insight through his queen, Ethelburga of the values and practices when they were plain and unceremonious, so that the judgement to convert was made in full.

¹⁹ A.Savage, ‘The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle’ (1997), pg 40

²⁰ *Ibid.*

Moreover, when regarding the conversion of King Edwin, in light of the promise he made to Paulinus this presents an alternative factor. The event cited in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, King Edwin of Northumbria is described as promising Paulinus ‘that he would give his daughter to god, if he would accomplish...that he might strike down his enemy.’²¹ This suggests politics and warfare were the central aspects that framed part of Edwin’s conversion. This also demonstrates that English rulers were able to use Christianity in aspects of warfare as well as suggest the conversion by King Edwin was not genuine acceptance of faith, but for personal gain.

When examining the use of Christian movement in the Ninth Century, the Christianity was further used as tool by English rulers to greater enable political relations with overseas powers such as Francia. This is demonstrated through Merican diplomacy, for Wickham describes that by 800, England (or at least Mercia) was much more like Francia than it had been previously.²² Wickham attributes this as the result of Mercian borrowing from these overseas powers, which was greatly facilitated by Christianisation.²³ This occurrence suggests close political relations brought on development within England and that this was allowed because of the Christianisation of Pagan kingdoms, therefore supporting the argument that Christianity was used as a tool in order to bring support and improve forien policy both within England and its many kingdoms, as well as overseas.

Pagan sentiment

In further argument that the conversion of the English rulers and their subjects was not made in full genuine acceptance of the Christian faith, but fringed on the desires and needs of their kingdom can be expressed in the turbulent rise and fall of the Christian movement. For

²¹ A. Savage, ‘The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle’ (1997), pg 40.

²² C. Wickham, ‘Medieval Europe’ (2017), pg 87.

²³ *Ibid.*

Fletcher states, the situation of England in the early years of the conversion was made up of many different kingdoms, by 600 there were a number of petty kingdoms under Anglo-Saxon princely dynasties; these different pockets of Christianity emerged slowly under different leaders and repressed from time to time back into Pagan worship.²⁴ In one kingdom in particular where the rulership remained somewhat unstable during the early Seventh Century is the kingdom of East Anglia. Bede describes the instability within East-Anglia following their ruler, Earpwald's death, 'not long after Earpwald's acceptance of Christianity, he was killed by a pagan named Ricbert, and for three years the province relapsed into heathendom.'²⁵ The kingdom of East Anglia highlights that during political turmoil, Christianity was somewhat diminished as both subjects and ruler were stated to have reverted back to Paganism. This suggests that the initial conversion to Christianity was flimsy. Even when allowing for Bede's statement to be greatly exaggerated and considering that pockets of Christianity still remained present within East Anglia and other kingdoms across England during turbulent event, such as the death of Earpwald. The statement itself is enough to warrant some truth, suggesting that even if the reality was slightly warped the perception that Paganism remained rooted within English society suggests that Christian conversion was fragmented and underpinned by the sentiments of the earlier religion.

Moreover, there are additional examples, whereby the presence of strong pagan leaders such as Penda of Mercia 'presented a problem'²⁶ as Fletcher states in the momentum of the Christian movement. This applies none the least to the death of the Christian King Edwin in 633 and later his successor king Oswald during the battle of Manserfeld in 641, both of which were killed by Pagan forces.²⁷ Although during the course of the Seventh Century there

²⁴ R. Fletcher, 'The conversion of Europe from Paganism to Christianity 371-1386' (1998), pg 3.

²⁵ Bede, trans. L. Sherley-Price, 'Ecclesial history of the English people' (1990), pg 133.

²⁶ R. Fletcher, 'The conversion of Europe from Paganism to Christianity 371-1386' (1998), pg 120.

²⁷ A. Savage, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles' (1997), pg 41-44.

seems to be a shift in the dynamic of Christian and Pagan strength, this shift is greatest displayed with the death of strong Pagan leaders such as King Penda which created a vacuum within his ruling kingdom, Mercia. Wickham hints that following the death of the Pagan leader Penda by the Christian ruler Oswiu of Bernicia, Mercia 'went Christian too.'²⁸ This shift highlights not only was Christianity conversion flimsy, arguably religious devotion in general, with the unsteady of Pagan sentiment. The weakening of Pagan dominion in Mercia despite a history of Pagan worship suggests that within English culture during the Sixth and Seventh centuries, devotion was founded on something other than tradition, but on more current factors, such as which religion had the greatest display of power, which is displayed in the victory by the Christian Bernicia's.

During these early stages of the Christian movement within England, the nature of religious devotion can be great displayed through the ruling elite, for both the Christian Ethelbert of Kent's family and the Pagan ruler Penda of Mercia both had offspring who divert from the course of the religion of their father's.²⁹ This suggests that the very nature of religious devotion was shaken by current events; contrary to popular belief that religion was based upon tradition; in reality religion was quite interchangeable and not determined by family values.

Religion and reward

Furthermore, in greater argument that the conversion of medieval English rulers and their subjects was founded on materialistic desire and individual success, this can be expressed through the existence of individuals who practiced both their traditional belief of Paganism as well as practicing Christianity alongside each other. King Rædwald of East Anglia is an

²⁸ C. Wickham, 'Medieval Europe' (2017), pg 86.

²⁹ R. Fletcher, 'The conversion of Europe, from Paganism to Christianity, 371 -1386 AD' (1998), Harper Colin's publishers, London, pg 124.

example of this use of dual faith, for during the late Sixth and Early Seventh Centuries under the influence of the Bretwalda (who was currently Edwin of Northumbria)³⁰ Rædwald of East Anglia converted to Christianity, yet still retained his Pagan practices. Bede describes, ‘he [Rædwald] tried to serve both Christ and the ancient gods and he had the same shrine an alter for the holy Sacrifice of Christ side by side with a small alter on which victims were offered to devils.’³¹ This example of preserving the old Pagan faith and welcoming in another faith suggests the importance of adopted faiths such as Christianity was largely in the form of materialistic gain, or they must serve some didactic purpose. The instance of King Rædwald’s conversion can be seen as a partaking of Christianity in order to retain the support of another ruler, whilst still maintaining Paganism. Wickham suggests Paganism of the North was ‘as variegated as that of the Roman Empire, with it seems- pantheons of gods in some places.’³² From this statement it can be argued that conversion to Christianity was in many ways a statement of acceptance by Rædwald to allow Christianity to become part of a remit of other religions within his kingdom. Therefore in this example Christianity was used by English rulers to maintain good political relations.

Furthermore, there is a culture of English rulers partaking in both Christianity whilst holding onto their Pagan identity, for prior to Rædwald’s less than whole conversion, Edwin the ruler of Northumbria can be displayed as facilitating both religions at the same time. Fletcher describes Edwin did indeed convert however; ‘he did not yet publicly declare himself a Christian’ this displays a clear divide between public religious image and private worship. Here Edwin of Northumbria can be placed in likeness to Rædwald for retaining an image of Paganism despite being baptized. This suggests that similarly to that of Roman practice, in

³⁰ Bede, trans. L. Sherley-Price, ‘Ecclesial history of the English people’ (1990), Pg 133. Chapter 15, the province of the East Angle’s accepts the Christian faith, year 627.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² C. Wickham, ‘Medieval Europe’ (2017), pg 82.

England there was a difference between the diplomatic public spheres of religion, being placed separate from that of personal devotion.³³

Additionally the value of Christianity within England as public tool to enable greater political advantage can be greatly illustrated within the exchanges between King Edwin of Northumbria and his counsel around the year 627. This source is highly telling of the sentiment within his court, that religion must yield results. For in these exchanges they discuss the use of Christianity in Northumbria. During these discussions one of Edwin's Pagan priests draws out the idea of religion and reward, that for despite his life of strict dedication to Paganism, this religion in his eyes held little value for he states 'I frankly admit that, in my experience, the religion that we have hitherto professed seems valueless and powerless.'³⁴ This exchange suggests that within Northumbrian culture religious dedication fed into direct material reward, for from this extract, it is described by Bede that the ruler of Northumbria and his closet confidants adopted Christianity for they believed it held possible value. Therefore taking this example to understand part of the basis of Northumbrian culture and religious intrigue it clearly displays religion as part of a process of action and reward. From this it can be argued that medieval rulers within England converted and practiced religion, for the basis of obtaining strategic advantage.

Tolerance of the Church

Arguably in order for the Christian church to be adapted by the English peoples in the Sixth Century, there was need for tolerance, this can be considered as a direct instigator that allowed these medieval rulers to use these allowances in order to shape Christianity for their

³³ R. Fletcher, 'The conversion of Europe, from Paganism to Christianity, 371 -1386 AD' (1998), pg 4.

³⁴ Bede, trans. L. Sherley-Price, 'Ecclesial history of the English people' (1990), pg 129, Chapter 13: Edwin holds a council with his chief men about accepting the faith of Christ. The high priest destroys his own alters, the year 627.

own aims. This tolerance by the church can be displayed in the written correspondence between Pope Gregory I and St. Augustine, whereby Gregory directs Augustine with the words:

*'If you have found any customs, whether in the church of Rome or of Gaul or any other that may be more acceptable to God, I wish you to make careful selection of them...whatever thing are devout, religious and right; and when you have bound them as it were in a sheaf, let the minds of the English grow accustomed to it'*³⁵

From this expression of leniency, Pope Gregory I is dutifully aware that there was more development to be gained within the church whilst allowing missionaries to accept some English customs to be incorporated in to the Christian faith, within the boundaries of what could be acceptable and considered righteous. From this surprising passage of tolerance by the Rome church, Fletcher offers an insightful explanation, he questions, 'how did missionaries rendered key Christian concepts into the Vernacular?'³⁶ With complex Christian ideas of sin and regeneration such tolerance in conveying them to the English was necessary. For in translation as Fletcher suggests things may have become misinterpreted or gained an additional meaning, therefore the initial conversion of the English needed to be dealt with a soft hand; this goes some way in explaining how English rulers were able to utilise the Christian movement.³⁷

Additionally, in the initial stages of the conversions of the English, Christianity was fragmented and unstable and therefore the movement relied heavily on the acceptance of Pagan rulers. This dependency of the church is highlighted by the shifting between Christian and Pagan sentiment during the initial stages of the Christian movement which can be

³⁵ Bede, trans. L. Sherley-Price, 'Ecclesial history of the English people' (1990), pg 79.

³⁶ Fletcher .R, 'The conversion of Europe, from paganism to Christianity 317-1386' (1998), pg7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

attributed to the Sixth, Seventh and even Eighth Centuries. It is from this fragile state that the movement was used as a tool by English rulers in order to obtain legitimacy, devotion of their subjects and ultimately power.

Chapter Two: Assisting in legitimisation, Royal prestige and Blood Feuds

Following the initial conversion by English rulers, Christianity or Christian belief proved a valuable tool that was used widely across the early kingdoms of Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia and especially Wessex in order to bolster legitimisation and add additional powers on which they could subject their kingdoms. This manipulation of the Christian faith can be seen to develop from the late Sixth Century at the start of the mission to convert and continue into the reigns of King William I and his heirs, in the Eleventh Century.

Legitimation

From the latter part of the Sixth Century the English church can be prescribed as a tool that assisted the legitimisation of rulers evidence for which can be found within the correspondence of letters between Pope Boniface V to Edwin of Northumbria within the scholarship of Bede, 'to him are subject all imperial power and authority; for it is by him that kingship is conferred.'³⁸ This passage demonstrates an early sentiment of Christian authority which suggests conversion gave weight to the nature of rulership; therefore highlighting how England rulers could obtain a type of legitimacy through conversion. This passage greater suggests that within the mindset of the Roman church there was already a strong link between rulership and God's divine favour.

Throughout medieval England the Church was used by rulers as a method to retain greater rulership over their subjects, as Simon Schama argues 'for the church in Anglo-Saxon England was a natural extension of the aristocracy and dominated by men and women of high

³⁸ Bede, trans. L. Sherley-Price, 'Ecclesial history of the English people' (1990), Pg 121.

birth.’³⁹ In the reign of William I the church can be seen to have been used to greater extend the kings powers in terms of adding legitimacy and dominion. For following William I victory in 1066, he ordered the foundation of a church on the site, ‘on the very spot where the enemy had fallen and the victory had been won.’⁴⁰ This act suggests that symbolic importance featured highly in the location of religious sites, as well as suggesting how English monarchs used Christianity in order to finalise their victories and legitimise their claims to throne. For the placing of church at the site of the battle that won William I England reiterates that he had divine right to rule because he succeeded in gaining god’s favour, evident in the victorious outcome of the battle. This culture of cementing victory after battle with the building of churches feature frequently within early medieval English culture pre-empting the reign of William I; this displayed in literary works such as the Ælfric’s Life of saints. In the particular poem of the life of King Oswald, suggests warfare and Christianity was already instilled within English culture, in the lines, ‘afterwards was built a very famous church in honour of god who lives forever in eternity.’⁴¹ This passage states a clear relationship of Christian devotion, church building and warfare within English culture; it is arguably through this sentiment which developed and fostered the idea of legitimisation to be associated with Christian worship. Alternatively, another prospective that links Church building and warfare, is in the argument of historians such as Greene that state the building of churches such as battle abbey can be considered ‘as an act of penitence’⁴² in response to the violence of battles, such as 1066.⁴³ Though despite this argument by Greene, in light of William I ability to use the church as a religious icon to display William’s divine right to rule,

³⁹ S. Schama, ‘A history of Britain 3000 BC- AD 1603’ (2001), pg 52.

⁴⁰ J. Greene, ‘Medieval Monasteries’ (1992), Leicester University Press, pg 12.

⁴¹ W. Walter, ‘Aelfric’s life of saints’ (1912), Early English text society, London, pg 26. Aelfric life of king Oswald, lines 20-23.

⁴² J. Greene, ‘Medieval Monasteries’ (1992), pg 4.

⁴³ J. Sweetman, ‘A dictionary of European land battles (1984), Robert Hale, London, pg 77.

this can be further supported by his relentless church building scheme throughout England. For every Cathedral and major abbey in England had been rebuilt in Romanesque style.⁴⁴ This mass generation of churches under William I suggests Christianity was also used as an implement to instil Norman dominion over the conquered English subjects.

Moreover, when analysing the use of Church building schemes like that of William's battle abbey, much earlier English rulers can be considered as using this same technique as a means to demonstrate dominance of their victories. This method can be seen in the rule of King Alfred the great, in his victory at the battle of Edington in 878, this victory was also considered cemented by the building of a church at the site.⁴⁵ Other examples include King Canute who adopted a scheme of re-building monastic houses following the damages of earlier Viking raids as well as the later support of King Edward the confessor at Winchester abbey.⁴⁶ The formation of the numerous examples throughout the medieval period that demonstrate rulers using Christianity as a weapon to enact dominion or legitimacy through the building of churches, is from the very onset of the Sixth Century conversion which developed and continued into the Twelfth Century. These examples highlight how well English medieval rulers were able to use the church to further their own ambitions.

Additionally, besides the physical presence of churches as a form of legitimisation and dominion over England, Wickham argues Christianity offered a structure of rulership 'that enabled kings to introduce at least some of the techniques of ruling, which were used by the two great European powers of the early middle ages, Francia and Byzantium.'⁴⁷ These techniques within Christianity provided rulers with additional weight allowing ideas of

⁴⁴ J. Greene, 'Medieval Monasteries' (1992), pg 4.

⁴⁵ C. Wickham, 'Medieval Europe' (2017), pg 87.

⁴⁶ F. Barlow, 'Edward the Confessor' (1997) Yale University Press. Details of King Edward the confessor's effort, commissioning Winchester abbey; for further reading of King Canute's Monastic rebuilding project see, M. Lawson, 'Canute: England's Viking King' (2011), The History Press, Gloucestershire pg 111.

⁴⁷ C. Wickham, 'Medieval Europe' (2017), pg 80.

sovereignty to take greater bearing; examples of this can be found within the mid-Tenth Century, with the canonisation of Saint Ælfgifu, the wife to King Edmund I.⁴⁸ In this period there was a second stage of Christianisation within England, which followed the initial conversions of rulers and their subjects; this phase was royal assertion over the church, which provided rulers with greater powers, including the idea of “divine right to rule.” It can be argued that the canonisation of members of the ruling elite, such as Ælfgifu were clear markers for the beginning of this sentiment.

The canonisation of royal members can be displayed as early on as Seventh Century, notably transgressing not only to ruling family members, but also to the rulers themselves, with those such as St. Oswald ruler of Northumbria and St. Oswine ruler of Deira.⁴⁹ This greatly increased across the Tenth and Eleventh centuries most notably among these is Edward the Confessor. The linking of ruler and the divine through canonisation was not a sudden occurrence in England, but as steady cultural process that developed from as early on as the death of Edmund the Martyr ruler of East Anglia when killed by invading Norsemen.⁵⁰ The ceremony surrounding Edmund’s death illustrated in the works of Abbo of Fleury's *Life of St. Edmund*, suggests canonisation provided the individual with a greater sense of legacy and regard, this would have undoubtedly affected the prestige surrounding current rulers during the time of Edmund’s canonisation.⁵¹ This use of Christianity in this way greatly elevated the status of rulers, for this linked English rulers with the divine allowing them to govern their subjects with additional powers and confidence. The canonisation of past rulers now elevated current rulers so they were less able to be questioned or defiled. From this it can be deduced

⁴⁸ E. Norton, ‘Elfrida, the first crowned queen of England’ (2014), Amberley Publishing, Gloucestershire, pg 49.

⁴⁹ E. Cambridge et al, ‘Oswald: Northumbrian king to European saint’ (1995), Paul Watkins publishers, Stamford, pg 97.

⁵⁰ E. Norton, ‘Elfrida, the first crowned queen of England’ (2014) pg 138.

⁵¹ H. Sweets, ‘Anglo-Saxon primer’ (1961), Oxford university press, Oxford, p81-87 Cited *Abbo Fleury’s, Life of St. Edmund, King of East Anglia (870)*. Fordham University: Medieval sourcebook, 1998, (accessed 03.05.2018), <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/870abbo-edmund.asp>

that the canonisation of individual kings or royal family members created greater prestige that was used to legitimise later rulers of England, this is therefore another way in which rulers were able to utilise the Christian movement.

Royal prestige

An additional use of Christianity by English rulers is through literary text, rulers in commissioning or personally working these religious texts suggests that Christianity was used as a tool to display both wealth and prestige; examples of this include Elfreda's vestment for the church at Wilton.⁵² Historian Norton describes the piece, 'Sidonian shellfish, and twice dipped scarlet were interwoven with gold; chrysolite, topaz, onyx and beryl, and precious stones were intertwined with gold.'⁵³ This description creates emphasis of how complex the design was as well as the great elaborates expense of this vestment. Further suggesting that the great dedication and craftsmanship to make the object as well as the effort to obtain these primary materials in the first place. Christian works such as Elfreda's vestment adorned with expensive materials expresses the wealth of the individual, when considering this was a religious work presented to a church; it endowed Elfreda as a figure of prestige as well as highlighting her piety, crafting by hand such a delicate and ornate object. Elfrida's vestment displays that literary Christian works presented rulers and their family members with an opportunity to showcase their enormous funds as well as elevate their status by linking themselves with the divine.

Additionally, the translation of Christian texts is a technique consistently used by rulers across England in the medieval period, the act of ordering translations or part-taking in them

⁵² E. Norton, 'Elfrida, the first crowned queen of England' (2014), pg 69.

⁵³ Ibid.

allowed rulers to monitor and control the use of the Christian message in their kingdoms. Examples of this technique can be found with Elfrida in the later part of the Tenth Century when she, herself 'later jointly commissioned a translation of the rule of St. Benedict into English with her husband, King Edgar',⁵⁴ copying the laid-out practice by Edgar's ancestor, King Alfred the great.⁵⁵ When analysing King Alfred's motivations in the use of Christian text it can be ascertained through the commissioned jewelled pointers that accompany the text. For these pointers are highly telling because they were not drawn with biblical figures, but as modern scholarship suggests with Alfred's own alongside the inscription 'Alfred made me' this ascertains that whoever read these Christian texts would do so with the image of their ruler, therefore supplanting the face of rulership with the divine.⁵⁶

Blood feuds

It can be argued that Christianity assisted in mobilising political relations with ordinarily difficult kingdoms, this use of Christianity allowed English rulers to renew troubled political relations and enable the benefits of a more secure and less hostile environment; this is illustrated by the use of Christianity to end blood feuds. Most notably whereby Christianity is used to mend an unstable relationship can be expressed in the blood-feud started by Penda ruler of Mercia and Oswald of Northumbria. Instead of Penda's son, Wulfhere taking the life of the brother of Oswald and his kin, in return for Oswiu taking revenge and killing Penda, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle states they build the monastery named Medeshamstede to honour both of their losses.⁵⁷ This therefore somewhat resolved the injustice and allowed for greater relations between the two kingdoms. This resolution was undoubtedly facilitated because both Penda's son Wulfhere and Oswiu were both Christian, allowing for reconciliation

⁵⁴ E. Norton, 'Elfrida, the first crowned queen of England' (2014), pg 11.

⁵⁵ T. Hughes, 'Alfred the Great' (1898), Macmillan & Co, London, pg 201

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ A. Savage, 'Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' (1997) pg 48.

through the building of a monastery to take place, therefore displaying how both rulers were able to stabilise their kingdoms and their own grievances through Christianity, this is but another example whereby Christianity was used as a tool to benefit English rulers.

Another example is through the death of Oswine ruler of Deira, which was commanded by Oswiu of Bernicia (sometimes referred to as Northumbria), his wife being related to Oswine created a difficult blood feud. Though Christianity, this situation is resolved in the building of a church in honour of Oswine. From this use of Christianity Oswiu is able to resolve a Blood feud and therefore is able to insure stability within the kingdom, highlighting how Christianity was able to be used by rulers in order produce a more stable rulership.

Sanctuary for ruling families

Moreover another use of the Christian movement by English rulers is that of sanctuary, this is best displayed through times of instability in England such as at the death of a ruler. An early example of this use of the church as a form of sanctuary is in the death of Edwin of Northumbria according to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle the church offers security following the Edwin's in 633 at Hatfield Chase.⁵⁸ The church during this time of instability provided a valuable asset to rulers and their families in the offering safety to those who needed security, for the resurgence of Penda of Mercia's forces following Edwin's death resulted in great instability and threatened the lives of Edwin's possible successors.⁵⁹ With Ethelburga, Edwin's queen and her chaplain both taking solace in a monastery, this is an instance where the use of monastic houses can be displayed as providing both a physical sanctuary as well as security from the unstable politics of England.⁶⁰ Another example form in which the church

⁵⁸ Savage .A, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' (1997), pg 41.

⁵⁹ J. Sweetman .J, 'A dictionary of European land battles (1984), pg 77.

⁶⁰ R. Fletcher, 'The conversion of Europe, from Paganism to Christianity, 371 -1386 AD' (1998), pg 161.

provided sanctuary for former queens is Eanflæd former queen of King Oswiu of Bernicia who found retirement in the monastery at Whitby following Oswiu's death in 670.

Chapter Three: Divine protection and accommodation of the church

The use of the Christian movement by medieval English rulers as a tool in warfare, to inspire devotion before, during and after battle can be demonstrated to have been developed across the period by various rulers. From the initial conversions of the late Sixth Century through the reigns of king Edwin of Northumbria, Alfred of Wessex, Canute and William I and into the calling of the First Crusade, these rulers all utilised Christianity for strategic advantage. From simply using the idea of divine protection to aid in their cause or to have direct financial backing from Rome and other Christian settlements, all these rulers feature for their use of the Christianity in this way.

Accommodation of the Church

It can be argued that the accommodation by the church allowed for ideas of warfare and religion to take hold, for a culture of violence and conquest was already ingrained within these English kingdoms as illustrated by the existence of the Bretwalda: a temporary supremacy bequeathed to the recognised leading individual, who maintained an enduring strength against the other kingdoms.⁶¹ The church having allowed some leniency during the initial conversions as highlighted by the correspondence from Pope Gregory I to the missionaries in England, 'for in spiritual matters we may often with advantage follow the customs of the world, so that we may arrange things carefully and wisely.'⁶² Fletcher describes these incidences of tolerance as 'accommodating tendencies'⁶³ which allowed medieval English culture to manipulate the Christian message. This can be seen in the

⁶¹ C. Knight, 'Half hours of English history: from the Roman period to the death of Elizabeth' (1866), Fredrick Warne & Co, London, pg 50.

⁶² Bede, trans. L. Sherley-Price, 'Ecclesial history of the English people' (1990), pg 79: Source 3: Augustine is consecrated bishop: he sends to inform Pope Gregory what has been achieved, and receives replies to his questions.

⁶³ R. Fletcher, 'The conversion of Europe, from Paganism to Christianity' (1998), pg 120.

example of King Edwin of Northumbria who promised to convert his daughter if God would present him victory in battle, ‘the king promised Paulinus that he would give his daughter to god, if he accomplish by praying to God, that he might strike down his enemy.’⁶⁴ The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle states in the year 627 having succeeded in his battle, Edwin made good on his promise. Therefore the weight of this promise can be seen as Edwin already altering the sentiment surrounding the Christian movement towards a remit of warfare, before even committing his family to the Christian religion.⁶⁵

Furthermore when discussing the nature of the relationship between the Roman Church and the rulers of England there can be found great discrepancy, for Pope Gregory I when addressing Abbot Mellitus in the year 601 goes on to discuss ‘the temples of the idols among that people should on no account be destroyed.’⁶⁶ In the same year Pope Gregory I when addressing King Ethelbert of Kent ‘make conversion your first concern; suppress the worship of idols, and destroy their shrines.’⁶⁷ Both letters are in correspondence to influential figures within in England discussing the existing temples of pagan shrines; however they discuss two very different approaches towards the conversion; one with a leniency, another with swift contempt towards Paganism. This complicates how the conversion should be perceived for it places into question which approach did the church truly take, or was even it a combination of the two. If the first approach is to be believed it would suggest that the conversion of the English was taken with accommodation to the traditions and beliefs that were already instilled within society, allowing rulers to alter and manipulate the Christian movement towards areas of society they deemed integral to their culture such as warfare. However, the

⁶⁴ A. Savage, ‘Anglo-Saxon Chronicle’ (1997), pg 40.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Bede, trans. L. Sherley-Price, ‘Ecclesial history of the English people’ (1990), pg 92; Pope Gregory I addressing Abbot Mellitus, year 601.

⁶⁷ Bede, trans. L. Sherley-Price, ‘Ecclesial history of the English people’ (1990), pg 94; Pope Gregory I persuading Ethelbert of Kent to adopt Christianity, year 601.

second approach, determines that such notions would have been stamped out, and that the conversion was more of a military style operation to re-establish Roman influence. Though despite which stance was in truth taken by the Roman Church, both would have instilled warfare within the remit of the Christian movement.

A Roman re-conquest

It can be understood that the conversion of the English peoples was a re-conquest of Roman influence, bringing with them a culture established by Romans which was shaped by warfare and religion. This re-establishing movement would have left an imprint on these early English kingdoms and undoubtedly led to the development of a remit of warfare and Christianity. This is illustrated best through Bede, in the correspondence from Pope Gregory the great to King Ethelbert of Kent, 'therefore, my illustrious son, zealously foster the grace that god has given you, and press on with the task of extending the Christian faith.'⁶⁸ This extract displays an active condemning towards the Pagan religion whilst highlighting that the Christianisation of England was a mission in Pope Gregory's eyes, similar to that of empire expansion. The Roman Church in placing the very nature at which Christianity was introduced to the English with that of a military presence suggests that from the very onset, Christianity was mixed with warfare; therefore it can be understood that the use of Christianity by rulers in battle was a smooth transition that occurred through the initial conversions of rulers and their successive heirs. However, what also must be taken into account is the nature of Bede's work, which retains a fundamental collection of primary source material which includes these exchanges between Pope Gregory I and King Ethelbert. Whilst throughout Bede's work he can be noted as citing Roman geographer's such as Pliny,

⁶⁸ Bede, trans. L. Sherley-Price, 'Ecclesiastical history of the English people' (1990), pg 119: Pope Gregory I send letters and gifts to King Ethelbert.

as historian Vincent points out, stating Bede reiterates Pliny in the words 'Britain is an island of the furthest west.'⁶⁹ This highlights Bede's stance as aligning the conversion of the English with that of Roman influence and conceptions, therefore when analysing the true nature of the connection between Rome and English rulers through Bede's work it must be done so with a degree of scepticism.

Divine protection

Moreover, the Christian movement can be said to have fostered the idea of God as protector and an overseer, examples of this can be found in Pope Gregory I letters to his own clergymen, St. Augustine. Throughout this passage it has a distinctive flavour of placing Christian expansion together with god's protection, 'may almighty god protect you with his grace' and the passage ending with 'God keep you safe my dearest sons.'⁷⁰ These expressions highlight that within the Roman church there was already a sentiment of Gods protection gifted to those who were converted, suggesting that warfare and religion were linked during the conversion of the English. There is further evidence that the Roman church linked god's protection in warfare within Britain that pre-dates the mission of St. Augustine to England, for within the life of St. Columba, written by Adamnan he discusses the battle of Miathi within Scotland, describing Cuthbert, 'he began, on bended knees, to say to them, "Let us pray now earnestly to the Lord for this people and King Aidan, for they are engaging in battle at this moment." Then after a short time he went out of the oratory, and, looking up to heaven, said, "The barbarians are fleeing now, and to Aidan is given the victory."⁷¹ This early example

⁶⁹ N. Vincent, 'A brief history of 1066- 1485 Britain' (2011), pg 4.

⁷⁰ Bede, trans. L. Sherley-Price, 'Ecclesial history of the English people' (1990), pg 73.

⁷¹ W. Reeves, 'Medieval Sourcebook: Adamnan: Life of St. Columba' (1874), Edmonstin and Douglas, Edingburgh, Citing Adamnan, '*Life of Saint Columba, Founder of Hy' Written by Adamnan, Ninth Abbot of that Monastery*. Fordam university 'Internet medieval source book' 1998, (accessed 03/05/18), <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/columba-e.asp>

demonstrates that the Church did endorse the use of Christianity in battle as a form of aid before St. Augustine's mission. Arguably this sentiment allowed for a culture of religion and warfare to exist and develop within the church and within Scottish culture. Arguably Scotland being so close geographically to England, the use of Christianity in this way in Scotland would have undoubtedly been acknowledged and influenced English culture too.

From these examples of the churches early integration within warfare, it can be argued as developing alongside the conversion of the English. This development can be highlighted in the idea of Divine protection, which extend the connection of religion and reward which Fletcher names 'empirical religiosity.'⁷² This sentiment applied not only to current Christians, but even to prospective ones as well, as Bede suggests in his description of King Edwin of Northumbria, that his successive campaigns as evidence he would convert, 'as a sign that he would come to faith and the heavenly kingdom, King Edwin received wide additions to his earthly realm, and brought under his sway all the territories inhabited either by English or by Britons.'⁷³ This presents the reward of expanding territory in align with conversion, therefore Bede displays that the Christian movement linked conversion with territorial success suggesting that during the initial conversions, Christianity was already shaped to exist alongside warfare.

The development of religion and warfare within the Christian movement is hardly surprising, for warfare was already ingrained within English culture. This is supported by Fletcher who states that 'for a king like Edwin and for his heroic aristocracy the cult of God or Gods of War was of central importance.'⁷⁴ Fletcher is suggesting that warfare was at the forefront of Northumbrian culture; if this is to be believed, it was necessary that religion needed to

⁷² R. Fletcher, 'The conversion of Europe, from Paganism to Christianity, 371 -1386 AD' (1998), pg 7.

⁷³ Bede, trans. L. Sherley-Price, 'Ecclesial history of the English people' (1990), pg 119.

⁷⁴ R. Fletcher, 'The conversion of Europe, from Paganism to Christianity, 371 -1386 AD' (1998), pg 4.

survive within this context of violence, in order to gain support. This acceptance of warfare within Christianity resulted in the idea of divine protection in battle, meaning god's favour was evident in the success of warfare. This sentiment of divine protection can be found within early medieval literature with the poem Aelfric's life of saints, with particular interest to the life of King Oswald. This source provides great insight into early medieval English culture because of its creative nature when describing the scene of a battle, considering it is referring to a historical battle this poem can also be used as a direct source of an event. The poem describes the battle of the Christian Oswald against the pagan Cadwalla, who is described as a tyrant who, 'slew and shamefully ill-treated the Northumbrian people after their lords death.'⁷⁵ During this battle Oswald can demonstrated as practicing Christian worship and the erecting of a cross as a mark of god's divine favour, 'they advanced in battle and achieved a victory there just as the Almighty granted them because of Oswald's faith.'⁷⁶ This literary works suggest warfare was integral to medieval English culture but also the idea of divine protection had become ingrained alongside that of victory. Additional in the same way William I in chapter two under the legitimisation arguably used Christianity in order to demonstrate divine favour, dominance and legitimacy through church building scheme, Oswald in this poem is described as using the symbol of Christian the faith to demonstrate and finalise his victory, 'that same cross was which Oswald raised up to honour God, stood in that place afterwards...afterwards was built a very famous church in honour of God who lives forever in eternity.'⁷⁷

Christianity in battle

⁷⁵ Walter .W, 'Aelfric's life of saints' (1912), Early English text society, London, pg 26.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Furthermore, the use of Christianity in warfare can be seen during battle itself with the use of papal support this use of Christianity and papal authority can be demonstrated in as early as King Alfred's reign in the late Ninth Century;⁷⁸ as well as in the reign of William I during the battle of Hastings, with the presence of the papal banner debated with the Bayeux tapestry.⁷⁹ Therefore, the use of the Roman church in supporting the invasion suggest, that during the Eleventh Century, Christianity had a supporting role within warfare. Additionally in the years before the reigns of William I and Alfred the great, it is evident that Christianity had become incorporated within the scene of battle. This is evident because of the vast amount of examples, from those such as Edwin of Northumbria who manipulate key figures of the church to produce victory in battle, demonstrated in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle with Edwin's promise to Paulinus. This also displayed by the sons of Æthelfrith, Oswald and Oswiu who when seeking asylum and converted to Christianity in the diocese of Ireland's rulership in order to foster support during battle.⁸⁰ There are multiple examples that span the entirety of the early medieval period in England, which develop the Christian movement arguably towards the idea of warfare that is later produced in the form of Crusading. This development can be seen in the early promises of Pope Gregory I and St. Augustine to rulers such as Ethelbert in the late Sixth Century, these promises incorporate eternal longevity, rulership and a place in heaven, hinting at the removal of sin in exchange for baptism and the expansion of Christianity; this can be considered the starting point of this development. Other points where the development of religion and warfare is evident is in the contesting of the English throne by Canute and Ethelred and later with Harold Godwinson and William I where papal authority is granted or given.

Overview

⁷⁸ For further details see, J. Pollard, 'Alfred the Great' (2006), John Murray Publishers, London.

⁷⁹ L. Musset, trans. R. Rex, 'The Bayeux Tapestry' (2005), Boydell Press, Suffolk, pg 53.

⁸⁰ R. Fletcher, 'The conversion of Europe, from Paganism to Christianity, 371 -1386 AD' (1998), pg 162.

In overview when making conclusions surrounding the movement of Christianity within England, it can be divided into three segments, the first phase of the initial conversion in the late Sixth and Seventh Centuries with the fragmented state of England. The kingdoms of Mercia, East Anglia, Wessex and Northumbria, it is during this time that key figures such as Ethelred of Kent and Edwin of Northumbria become prime examples that use the Christian movement for their own aims. King Edwin and Ethelred both use Christianity in order to cement relationships in their foreign policy, detailed in their political marriages, in doing so they would gain in areas of trade and financial backing, in terms of loaning. Additionally during times of political instability the church offers sanctuary for those reduced to seek exile, such as Edwin of Northumbria's widow after the confrontation with Penda of Mercia.

The Second phase having established Christianity within England in areas such as Wessex, Æthelred and later his successor King Alfred in the latter half of the Ninth Century, both use the Christian movement. From this point in the conversion there is clear manipulation of the Christian message to endorse the idea of divine protection within warfare. Christianity having taken a hit by a succession of Norse invaders, with the interference of Swein Folkbeard that distorts the Christian movement. This displays the fragile nature of the conversion and how it depended on the ruling elite for support. Additionally the use of Christianity during the turbulence of this period as a means of sanctuary and safety for the conquered Christian leaders is highlighted through King Edwin's widow, who seeks refuge in a nunnery.

The third phase of the Christian movement centres around the last area of study the reigns of King Edward the confessor, the brief leadership of Harold Godwinson and the start of house of Normandy with the reigns of William I and his successor Henry I. Here there is a simulation of the use Christian authority to instil William with legitimisation as well as the canonisation of rulers and their families.

Conclusion

Following the analysis of how Medieval English rulers utilised the Christian movement within England during the years 597-1095 it can be ascertained through the collection of primary and secondary material. The use of scholarly opinion such as J. Fletcher, Wickham and Schama help to fuel the debate. A through grounding in medieval sources which include the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and Bede's Collaboration of sources bring light to this darkened chapter of Britain's history. It is through this research that an answer can be drawn. From the first phase of St. Augustine and Pope Gregory I mission to convert the English peoples, there was ample opportunity for the rulers of these kingdoms to make use of the vulnerability in the Christian movement. Most notably among those who use the Christian movement are the early rulers Ethelbert ruler of Kent and Edwin ruler of Northumbria in the Sixth Century. In the second phase of the Christian movement when the Christian faith had become more established, King Alfred of Wessex can be seen to use Christianity in his efforts to combat Norse invaders. Later examples King Canute and William I can both be seen to use Christian authority to add weight to their rulership. King Canute through his ties to Rome can be seen as a way to legitimise his take over; King William I through papal consent, with the use of the papal banner arguably displayed in the Beaux tapestry can be seen to do the same.⁸¹ In summary the use of Christianity by English rulers and their families from the year 597- 1095 was in order to greater enable foreign policy with the benefits of trade; to aid in legitimisation and sanctuary in times of political turmoil, as well as to demonstrate divine power and authority over their subjects.

⁸¹ L. Musset, trans. R. Rex, 'The Bayeux Tapestry' (2005), pg 53.

Criticisms

Following the depth of this study there can be discussed a range of critical analysis upon the primary materials used, first being that of Bede. He does provide a substantial history upon the middle Ages and is credited for his composition of invaluable sources. Historian Fletcher praises him as ‘an exceptionally careful and honest historian.’⁸² However, this analysis is misleading, for Bede does have his own agenda, and research gained from his sources can be considered tainted. Although discounting Bede’s work would have left very little in the way of research material in an already limited scope of sources, therefore this dissertation has the resolve of containing his work with the incorporation of others.⁸³

When following the background of this medieval historian, Bede having been brought up into an environment of Romanticised Roman culture, then later as a monk of Jarrow; Bede forms a group of ‘professional Christians’ that comprise part of the narrative of the conversion of the English to Christianity.⁸⁴ As historian Vincent states ‘Such men wrote not so much to illuminate the broader stage...but for quite other purposes, above all to demonstrate the unfolding of God’s plan for mankind’ in support of Vincent’s statement this study takes into consideration these Christian sources in their authorship as well as their agendas, whilst retaining that these sources hold integrity in their own right as windows into these key pinpoints into the history of the English; such as the integration of the Christian faith and its role within rulership through the Sixth, Seventh and through to the late Eleventh Century.⁸⁵

Other sources that must be considered problematic include the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for this there are multiple editions that have been known to have survived, they were

⁸² R. Fletcher, ‘The conversion of Europe, from Paganism to Christianity, 371 -1386 AD’ (1998), pg 5.

⁸³ N. Vincent, ‘A brief history of 1066- 1485 Britain’ (2011), Constable and Robinson Ltd, pg 3.

⁸⁴ R. Fletcher, ‘The conversion of Europe, from Paganism to Christianity, 371 -1386 AD’ (1998), pg 5.

⁸⁵ N. Vincent, ‘A brief history of 1066- 1485 Britain’ (2011), pg 3.

commissioned with the set purpose as a tool for later generations, when considering this purpose of the source, despite the format being detailed and attached with an annual date, the information within was created for the inspection of other therefore it cannot be presented as a text innocent of manipulation.⁸⁶ For the narrative of medieval source varied in the length and even inclusion of details, with some editions specifying events where others fail to include them, these discrepancies, highlight that the Chronicles were crafted by their authors, and therefore information drawn from them must be taken with due consideration.

Another key source is that of the Beaux-tapestry which can be criticised for their publication dates, for the tapestry is clearly a piece of Norman justification for their invasion as well as a legitimising William I and his kin as rightful heirs, therefore this must be assessed and analysed with a degree of scepticism and allowance for this is a piece of Norman propaganda.

Additionally, the literary work of Aelfric, in Aelfric's life of saints with particular note to Aelfric's life of King Oswald is a source that provides insight into early medieval English culture because of its creative nature as a piece of literature whilst referring to actual events in history. It provides a sense of depth that official materials such as the Beaux-tapestry and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle cannot, for it is not constricted in the same way as a commissioned official document or piece of propaganda is. It allows for the greater analysis into the textual background of the source as well as the inspiration behind it. For the source describes the Christian Oswald's fight against the Pagan King Cadwalla with great vigour and passion describing Oswald's faith as his guidance 'his belief sustained him, and Christ helped him in the slaying of his enemies.'⁸⁷ This passion and depth is invaluable in displaying the sense of connection between Oswald's action and faith. Though despite the detail of this source, because it is a literary creative piece it does remove itself as a source of accuracy

⁸⁶ M. Swanton, 'An Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' (1998), Routledge Publishers, New York, pg 20.

⁸⁷ Walter .W, 'Aelfric's life of saints' (1912), pg 26.

therefore discrediting some of the sources worth, however Aelfric's life of Saints still offers itself as a source unlike many others, it is for this reason that it has been retain within this research.

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