The Conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Laity

597-798

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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Abstract

Conversion in the middle ages was driven by many factors depending on the time and place the conversion was occurring. This is often wrongly summarized by explaining that once a king converted his subjects would follow suit. This paper explores how the conversion process took place throughout Anglo-Saxon England and shows that while a king's conversion certainly aided the process of converting the kingdom, it was not the sole deciding factor. In order to accomplish this, the study analyzes both the traditional sources, Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which focus on the royalty and kings. In addition to these traditional sources, this study also uses material such as hagiographies, poetry, arts, and human remains in order to gain a broader perspective on the conversion effort than that conveyed in the traditional written sources. By analyzing these additional sources, this paper shows that the conversion process was highly complex as it sought to adapt and adjust Christian practices and teachings to make sense within the Anglo-Saxon cultural framework.

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List of Abbreviations:

AS(s) – Anglo-Saxon(s)

ASC – Anglo-Saxon Chronicle; Ingram, James. (trans.) Alfred the Great. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. The Online Medieval and Classical Library. 1996. http://mcllibrary.org/Anglo/. (London, 1823), with additional readings from the translation of Dr. J.A. Giles (London, 1847). As published in "The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle" (Everyman Press, London, 1912).

HE – Historia Ecclesiastica; Sellar, A. M. (Trans.) Bede *Ecclesiastical History of England*. Accessed February 27, 2021. https://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/bede/index.htm.

Introduction

The term conversion means to change one's religion or beliefs or the action of persuading someone else to change their religion or beliefs.[1] Conversion to Christianity during the early Middle Ages was driven by many factors subject to the time and place at which the conversion was occurring. For many it was a personal choice based on conviction and belief in the central tenets of the faith. As Christianity gained power in political systems, however, many people were also forced to convert or chose to do so for socio-political benefits. Christianity first officially came to England under Constantine the Great (272-337), who originally legalized Christianity in the Roman Empire in 313 and reportedly underwent baptism on his deathbed decades later.[2] Subsequently, Christianity spread in popularity throughout the Roman Empire, including into Britain. In the early 5th century, the Romans evacuated their troops and abandoned the local population on the island.[3] The Britons then invited the ASs to replace the Romans' military protection from the Picts and Scots. The ASs later invaded the largely defenseless island after the Britons terminated their agreement with them. Some Britons retained their Christian practices and were pushed from their land by the invading AS tribes, while others converted to AS paganism and became assimilated into the culture and religion of the invading peoples. The Angles and Saxons eventually established their own kingdoms throughout modern England and replaced Christianity with their own pagan religion, which was likely very similar to that of other Germanic peoples of the time.[4]

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[1] Simpson and Proffitt. "Conversion," Oxford English Dictionary.
[2] Fowden, "The Last Days of Constantine" (146). Unless otherwise noted, dates given will not include the CE identifier because all of the source material used comes from the CE.
[3] For the period after the Romans left the island, I will refer to the Romano-British as Britons in order to demark clearly when the Romans were no longer directly involved in the governance of the island. Despite this, the Britons would retain Roman influence and are normally still referred to as Romano-British in academic works.
[4] Accounts of this invasion can be found in Ingram, *ASC* 418, 443, 449 455-477, 495-534, 547-577, or Sellar, *HE* Book 1 Chapter 15.

Christianity did not, however, entirely disappear from the island during this time. The Britons were forced into the territory of Wales by the ASs and began to be called 'Welsh' (ironically meaning "foreigner").[5] In Wales, Christianity survived, as is shown by the ordination of St. Patrick (fl. 5th century) there before beginning his own mission to the Irish.[6] The successful conversion of the Irish also led to an Irish missionary effort to return Christianity to the island of Britain after AS paganism had largely replaced Christianity there. There is evidence of missionary activity in modern Scotland and Wales by groups of Irish monks. It is unlikely their missionary groups had no interaction with the ASs during their travels and preaching.[7] In addition to the continuation of Welsh and Irish Christianity, the AS kingdoms certainly had trade and diplomatic relations with other Christian kingdoms in mainland Europe. The most prominent example of the influence of mainland Europe is shown through the wedding of King Ethelbert of Kent (560-616) to a Frankish Christian Princess who became known as Bertha of Kent (565-601), and who also brought her own priest with her to her new home in 680.[8] Despite clear interactions between Christians from Ireland and Wales with the ASs, as well as the known presence of a Christian royal with a bishop in one of the AS kingdoms, the introduction of Christianity to the ASs is still widely attributed to Pope St. Gregory the Great (r. 590-604),[9] because he organized and began the English Mission in 597.[10] This mission was led by St. Augustine of Canterbury (†604)[11] who was able to gain the support of King Ethelbert of Kent,

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[5] Ellis, *The Ancient World of the Celts* (178).
[6] As cited in Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom* (131-132).
[7] This can be seen most clearly through the *ASC* which describes the sending of Columba to convert the Picts in 560.
[8] The presence of the Frankish bishop Liudhard in Kent is discussed by Higham in *The Convert Kings* (87).
[9] Hereafter referred to as Pope Gregory.
[10] Ingram, *ASC* mentions Pope Gregory beginning the mission in the 596 entry while Sellar, *HE* describes the meeting with King Ethelbert of Kent in 597 in chapter 25.
[11] Hereafter referred to as St. Augustine.

and is seen as having been widely successful in converting the people because of King

Ethelbert's conversion.

This study will examine the conversion process beginning with St. Augustine's mission in

597. It is acknowledged, however, that the process had already been in motion thanks to the

Irish, who had laid the groundwork of conversion prior to this time. Nevertheless, 597 stands as

the first recorded explicit and concerted effort to convert the AS people to Christianity. While the

Irish likely had preached to some small numbers of ASs near the borders of their missionary

efforts into Pictland (modern Scotland) and Wales, they had not begun a large-scale conversion

effort of the ASs prior to the coming of the Augustinian mission. Missionary activity would

continue after 688 when the kingdom of Sussex was the final kingdom to convert in an official

capacity, because this conversion date is taken from the year of the kings' conversion and

Christianity was then made the official religion of the kingdom.[12] Between 597 and 601, two

waves of missionaries were sent by Rome before enough of the population had been converted

for missionary activity to become locally self-perpetuating, leading to the eventual conversion of

the majority of the population. There is also evidence that even after the official conversion

period, ending in 688, many of the laity had converted but were not following proper Christian

practice, or converted and committed apostasy as the ASs routinely abandoned Christianity to

return to their previous faith.[13] Due to this repeated apostasy, missionary work would continue

throughout the AS kingdoms even after the official conversion of Sussex. These continuing

missionary efforts, combined with the calls for reform by Bede (673-735), are the reason this

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[12] Missionary activity would continue after the official conversion year of the kingdom because this conversion date is based solely on the conversion of the king Caedwalla, Ingram, *ASC* 688.

[13] The call from Bede for reform is discussed in Higham, "Bede's Agenda in Book IV" (476-477), while the return to pagan practices can be found in Ingram, *ASC* 616 and is evident through repeated calls to return to Christian life in AS poetic works such as *Precepts: A Father's Instructions* translated by Williamson (463-467).

paper will use an extended conversion period ending in 798, when the Viking invasions began

with the sack of the Lindisfarne monastery. By this point, the majority of the ASs were certainly

Christian, yet the preaching and efforts to ensure conversion and proper practice had not ended.

Modern scholarship has focused almost exclusively on the conversion of the king in order to

explain the conversion of the AS kingdoms, rather than the conversion of laity as a whole.[14]

Despite the focus on the conversion of the kings, the bulk of historical evidence suggests

conversion was not so easily achieved among the ASs. This concept of the king causing his

subjects' conversion seems to come from the years of religious wars in Europe during the 16th-

18th centuries, wherein monarchs would forcibly convert their people to whichever religion they

themselves practiced. The ASs, however, lacked the structure of governance for this to be

accomplished because their kingdoms tended to be less centralized, and the kings had less direct

control over their subjects due to the power hierarchy being based on mutual bonds. Therefore,

AS kings would not be able to convert without having the support of the laity, who would in turn

need to be the targets of missionary efforts themselves. This study will explore the various means

used for the conversion of the AS laity to Christianity, since the principle that kings would

convert and the people would follow is a fallacy inspired by events that post-date the conversion

of the ASs.

In order to determine how the laity were converted, several types of written sources will be

investigated. Chapter 1 considers the histories of the ASs written soon after the events

themselves. Chapter 2 examines hagiographies of AS saints composed near to the time of the

saints' own lives; despite their tendency to focus on the supernatural achievements of their

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[14] Examples of scholars focusing on the conversion of kings can be found in Tyler, "Reluctant Kings and Christian Conversion," as well as in Higham, *The Convert Kings.*

subjects, they contain reasonable amounts of historically correct information.[15] These first two chapters will be dominated by monastic authors and thinkers because the AS people were largely illiterate and did not use writing as the primary way to record their own history. Instead, the ASs used oral story-telling traditions focused around poetry, which will be the subject of Chapter 3. Due to poetry being the main method through which AS history was passed down through generations, AS poetic works will also be examined despite being written nearer to the end of the conversion period. Several other types of sources will be examined in Chapter 4 (such as art, bones, diet, and geographic location data) to see if the written record is supported by the material culture that survives from the AS conversion period. The analysis of these sources will show that the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons peoples was a complex endeavour that required support from the church and the laity in order to be successful. These groups employed several strategies, such as coercion, bribery, and preaching in order to encourage the conversion to Christianity and generate the support necessary for a missionary effort to become self-perpetuating, ensuring the continued conversion of the Anglo-Saxon peoples over time.

The ASs were not a single homogenous group, but "ASs" is the collective term used to refer to the several groups of peoples who settled in England following the departure of the Roman administration. These peoples did not consider themselves as a single group. Each tribe had its own leadership, values, and understandings of the world. Despite these differences, this study will follow established historiographical custom in referring to as the ASs collectively because they shared common core beliefs and socio-political practices (such as the mutual bonds of gift-giving), and the changes observed in one kingdom can often also be found in others. Moreover,

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[15] More specific information on the dating and justification for the use of each of the individual primary sources will be provided within their respective chapters.

the umbrella term "ASs" will be applied because the borders of these kingdoms, while theoretically set in their time, are not always well-known today, making it not always possible to tell from which kingdom a given piece of information arose. Therefore, the use of the collective term "ASs" avoids attributing information or ideas to a single kingdom when it just as well could be found in other kingdom(s). Further, the term "England" will always refer to the area of the modern country, since it envelops all of the AS kingdoms. Laity will be used throughout this paper to refer to those members of society who are not part of the clergy. Laity can be further divided into the royalty, encapsulating the royal family of one or more AS kingdoms, the peasantry, making up the majority of the population and owed fealty to the nobility, who owed fealty to the royalty but also received the fealty of the peasantry.

Chapter 1: Histories

The idea that the kings of AS England converted to Christianity and the other nobility

and commoners followed suit comes from later scholarship. It is easy to see, however, why this

was applied to the ASs if you only consider the histories as sources. For this period, two primary

sources are applicable: the *HE* by Bede and the *ASC*, which began to be compiled at the behest

of King Alfred the Great (849-899) and is generally attributed to him.[16] There are other sources

which cover the beginning of the AS period, such as Nennius' (fl. 828) *History of Britain* (828)

and Geoffrey of Monmouth's (1095-1155) *History of the Kings of Britain* (1136), yet they do not

extend forward enough in time to cover the conversion of the ASs to Christianity since each ends

with the introduction of the Augustinian mission.[17] One reason for the number of historic sources

being so small is that the primary method of information retention for the ASs was through oral

stories, which will be discussed in later chapters. Since the ASs did not record written works

prior to their contact with Christianity, these histories were written by monks whose perspective

was based on what they wished to convey of the AS people and their own conversion efforts. It

is also important to remember that these histories often start well before the time period in

question. Only the *ASC* discusses the Irish church directly in any capacity, yet it can be shown

that the Irish and Scottish missions had great impact on the English conversion. This impact can

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[16] For Bede's *HE* I will be using the Sellar translation available on the Sacred Texts online index and for the *ASC* I will be using the 1823 Ingram edition with additions from the translation of Giles 1847, found in the Medieval and Classical Literature Library.

[17] There are other chronicles and partially complete histories which survive from this era, such as Ethelward's *Chronicle*. The four sources cited above, however, have been long established in the field of AS studies as the only sources of AS history which are consulted. Gildas' *Ruin of Britain* largely follows the AS invasions and does not cover enough of the time period under consideration to be included here. Bryan Caswell also explains why these sources are considered the main sources for AS history in "Of the Ruin and Conquest of Anglo-Britain," (43-54). I agree with Caswell that these are the most complete sources for studying the central aspects of the history of the ASs, however, I have not completed enough research on the partially complete histories to be able to determine if these would add significant information through the small amounts of added detail they may contain compared to the core histories. In addition, I also believe other sources beyond just the use of histories are important to take into consideration when studying the ASs.

be seen through the things which occurred in common, such as monasteries being the center for missionary action and religious tolerance, between the Irish church and the AS church, as well as the presence of Irish trained monks, abbots, and bishops in the early AS church.

The Irish and Scottish Missions

The importance of the Irish and Scottish missions begins to manifest when the *ASC* records that in 429, Bishop Palladius (†450) of Ireland was sent to convert the Scots, and that in 430, St. Patrick was sent to do the same. These entries mark the beginning of the Irish and Scottish missions and their mention in the *ASC* shows they were considered important for AS history at the time of writing, even if not described in detail. Following St. Patrick's preaching in Ireland, 350 bishops are known to have served 700 churches while presiding over 5,000 priests.[18] Further, in 560, it is described that when King Ethelbert took the city of the Centurions, Columba (521-597) came to the Picts and converted them while the southern Picts had already been baptized by bishop Nimia (fl. pre 560) at Hwiterne. These reports of the *ASC* also coincide with reports found in the *Life of Saint Columba* which discuss the missionary efforts from the monastery of Iona to Scotland. In addition to these written accounts, evidence from Carlisle shows that Christian practice at a church there did not stop between the end of Roman occupation in the early 5th century, and the re-Christianisation of the ASs in the 7th.[19]

In the *Life and Confessions of St. Patrick*, he is baptized and ordained by the Britons,[20] and while these were a separate group from the ASs, it does indicate that Christianity never completely left Britain in the wake of the Romans' departure. Therefore, ASs would have had

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[18] De Bhaldraithe, "Bishops and Presbyters in Early Christian Ireland" (74).
[19] Barley and Hanson, "Christianity in Britain 300-700" (93-123).
[20] As cited in Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom* (131-132).

interaction and trade with Christian people aside from the Franks.[21] Further, the churches of

Ireland that continued to exist after St. Patrick's death did not exhibit the religious intolerance of

the Roman church in Europe. Despite this, it is discussed briefly by St. Augustine that the Welsh

Christians were not willing to work with him to convert the ASs due to old grudges.[22] This

refusal to work with the Augustinian mission led to the 'rightful' killing of the Welsh by the

ASs.[23] Despite the reported refusal to aid in the conversion of the ASs, the Welsh Christians'

support of the missions to the Irish and Scots means they indirectly aided the conversion of the

ASs. This was accomplished mainly through the support they gave to St. Patrick; whose

successors then began missions back to the ASs.

The Irish monasteries spread slowly throughout Ireland following St. Patrick's death.

This slow spread was quite different from the rate of Christianisation that will be seen as a result

of the Augustinian mission, and there is good reason for this. There were fewer centralized

locations of power in Ireland at the time, and Christianity was practiced as a minority religion

among those who did convert. Upon their conversion, wealthy families would set up a

monastery, with the condition that a member of the family be the abbot, should one be available

to do so.[24] These abbeys eventually became similar to retirement homes as they were mainly

populated by older generations who had no interest in the religious aspect of monastic life, but

could use their position in the monastery to avoid taxes.[25] Christianity then spread slowly

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[21] The AS relations to the Franks are covered in great detail by Higham in *The Convert Kings*, particularly at 65-72, whereas Brown discusses the influence of Patrick and the evidence of the remainder of Christian churches in *The Rise of Western Christendom* (125-132). Marnell also discusses the relation of the Irish church to the English and Scottish conversions in *A Light from the West*.

[22] Ingram *ASC* 607.

[23] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom* (340-341) describes that both before and after their conversion to Christianity, the Saxons fought against the Welsh Christians many times. By contrast, Charlemagne spent over thirty years trying to successfully convert the Saxons of the continent.

[24] The practice of a family heading the Irish monasteries is discussed in Marnell, *A Light from the West* (28).

[25] This was famously done by St. Patrick's family in Britain as discussed in Barley and Hanson, "Christianity in Britain 300-700" (123-128).

between families and tribes as members intermarried. This slow conversion also occurred

because there were few large settlements and the system of rule relied on mutual gift-giving

between smaller tribes, the combination of which kept political influence relatively small

between households, whereas the AS kings were able to have influence over more people.[26] This

gift-giving required an overking to give those under him something in exchange for their service

and taxes.[27] The design of the monasteries in Ireland supports the idea that they became work

centers where the labour of the inhabitants could be exchanged for goods and assistance from the

surrounding communities or farms.[28] The largest cities at the time are described as having been

smaller than some of the monasteries, also making them smaller than the AS cities, which

themselves were quite small compared to the cities of Europe (i.e., Paris or Rome).[29] The

reported size of the monasteries means they likely also became centers of trade, making the

monastery integral to the life of those living around it, even if they were not Christian.[30] This is

particularly important because the Irish church was not religiously intolerant, like its Roman

counterpart, and so likely would allow non-Christians to participate in the mutual gift-giving and

trade with the monastery or others who would meet at the monastery. Including these non-

Christians would also serve to further their exposure to the faith.[31] In addition to these roles, the

monasteries also sent its monks and priests to travel the countryside to preach and celebrate

Masses for those who practiced the Christian faith. These preachers would be able to travel

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[26] Brown *The Rise of Western Christendom* (330).
[27] The mutuality of the gift-giving involved those under the king giving their service and taxes to him as their 'gift'.
[28] This is shown by the layout of the buildings and their contents. The buildings were often laid out like a hive, with central working buildings such as a forge being alongside the church. The brethren would not have enough need for a forge to make sense for it to be solely for their use, therefore it has been argued that they likely used the products from the forge as objects of trade with the locals. Marnell, *A Light from the West* (30-31).
[29] Brown *The Rise of Western Christendom* (330).
[30] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom* (330).
[31] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom* (132, 326-335).

between monasteries and use them as centers from which missionary activity went forth.[32]

Through the monasteries' central role in trade, familial connections, and missionary work, the

local inhabitants would be converted to Christian practice.

The familial connections of the Irish churches would also support a method which

yielded the most successful missionary efforts: the conversion of the local population as led by

prior converts from the local population. While the Roman Church could supply the initial wave

of missionaries to a region, their job would be to convert the locals and bring about a second

wave of missionaries who had grown up within the local communities. The process of generating

a second wave of missionaries can be seen in the Irish mission when St. Patrick converted the

locals, who continued the missionary work after his death. The Celtic mission was so successful

in its self-reliance and self-perpetuation that it ignored connections with the continental church

of Rome because the conversion process had become self-sufficient and self-reliant.[33]

The Irish missionaries eventually also began their own mission back into AS England and

helped to convert the ASs. This is evidenced by the mission of Cedd (620-664) which converted

Mercia and the East-Saxons, as well as several of the first bishops in AS England being Irish

monks.[34] The Irish influence is further shown through various works of Bede which called for

reform within the English churches even in his own time. These reforms included enforcing a

monastic rule, since not all monasteries followed one, and a call for abbots to be elected from

within monasteries instead of the position being held by founders' family members. Both of the

practices that Bede objected to were likely inherited from and practiced by monasteries under the

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[32] De Bhaldraithe, "Bishops and Presbyters in Early Christian Ireland" (74) and Marnell, *A Light from the West* (27-28).
[33] Godfrey, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon England* (57-58).
[34] Marnell, *A Light from the West* (60-67).

influence of the Irish mission.[35] Additionally, Book 3 of the *HE* focuses on the council of Whitby (664), which ruled in favour of following the Roman practices of dating Easter and tonsure, as opposed to following Irish practices. This debate was seen as the most intense up to this point in the English church and serves to show how much influence the Irish Christians had in AS England. It should also be noted that St. Augustine was sent from Rome following the death of St. Columba in 597. Several scholars have pointed out that this timing could hardly have been a coincidence, and that it is likely St. Augustine was sent as a way for the Roman church to regain a foothold in AS England.[36] This foothold was necessary to prevent the Irish church from continuing to gain power and influence in England and northern Europe.

Ecclesiastical History of the English People

The *HE* will be taken into consideration first because it was compiled earlier than the *ASC*. Written by Bede around 731 AD, this work begins with Caesar's (100 BCE-44 BCE) invasion of England during the late Roman Republic and ends in 731. Although this work is spread across five books, the Augustinian mission begins near the end of the first. The *HE* focuses on the church and how it spread throughout AS England, but also on English royalty in terms of their involvement in the spread of Christianity, despite them not being the central focus of Bede's work.[37]

In Book 1 Chapter 23, we see the beginning of the Augustinian mission when Pope Gregory takes office. Gregory had been divinely inspired to pursue the conversion of the ASs prior to being elected pope, but he had not been given leave to pursue the conversion of the ASs

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[35] Higham, "Bede's Agenda in Book IV" (476-477); Godfrey, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon England* (162-166).
[36] Godfrey, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon England* (57-58), and Higham, *The Convert Kings* (75).
[37] Caswell, "Of the Ruin and Conquest of Britain" (46).

until he took the throne. This inspiration came in the form of seeing Angle slaves in the market

in Rome. While at the market, he made several plays on words to describe how angelic the slaves

appeared to him, including a description of them being dazzlingly white, among other things.[38]

The expression "dazzlingly white" mirrors how angels are described in the New Testament (Acts

10:30-31) and indicates the holy virtue within them, therefore making it the future pope's

obligation to pursue their conversion.[39] Chapter 25 sees the arrival of St. Augustine in Kent,

where he was greeted by King Ethelbert. This episode can be mistaken for an attempt to convert

the king before the people, yet Augustine failed to convert the king at this meeting. In addition,

the missionaries would need the king's permission to preach in his lands, and hopefully they

would obtain the king's protection while doing so, which would necessitate this kind of meeting,

regardless of the intent to convert the king.[40] In any case, Augustine did try to convert Ethelbert

but was unsuccessful, since the king could not denounce the religion which his people had

followed for generations.[41] Ethelbert also likely already knew about Christianity through his

Christian wife and her personal bishop.[42] Instead, St. Augustine was allowed to preach within

Ethelbert's kingdom and was promised sustenance while doing so. Augustine and his party took

up residence at Canterbury and began to convert the people from there.

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[38] Elstob, Elstob, and Jermyn, *An English-Saxon Homily on the Birth-Day of St. Gregory* (11-17).
[39] Harris, "Bede and Gregory's Allusive Angles" (273-275).
[40] The need for the king's protection is evident through the account of *The Life of Saint Wilfrid* who was repeatedly attacked by nobles and mercenaries because he did not have the protection of the king, which will be discussed in more detail in the Hagiographies chapter.
[41] Sellar, *HE*, Book 1 Chapter 25.
[42] Ludhard was the bishop of Kent for 15 years prior to the beginning of the Irish mission. Being that he also acted as the personal priest to the queen, it is unclear whether he would have been pursuing the conversion of the king or his subjects. His presence certainly would have made Christianity well-known to the king; see Higham, *The Convert Kings* (72-87). North also discusses the possibility that the king was already part of a Christian sect in *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature* (314-315), since when Augustine was eventually successful, he "corrected faith in Christ" for the king.

Chapter 26 then describes how Augustine and his missionaries deployed efforts to convert the laity, and thereby King Ethelbert eventually converted, after which they were able to preach throughout the rest of the kingdom. Ethelbert did not, however, force conversion on his people after his own conversion. Instead, he "showed more affection to the believers."[43] This exchange is of interest for two reasons: firstly, it is made clear that the king did not convert first, therefore the king did not convert and have the people follow, though his conversion certainly helped with increasing the rate of conversion among the people; secondly, the king did not force conversion, instead bribing people by offering them preferential treatment. The bribing of the people by the king reflects a letter addressed to King Ethelbert by Pope Gregory in chapter 32 which describes the transmission of gifts from the Church to the king following his own conversion. These gifts were considered "small in the eyes of the church, but not in the eyes of the king."[44] In essence, both the gift-giving to King Ethelbert and from him to his people show that the act of gift-giving was used as a form of bribery which was a large part of the conversion method used by the Church which was further copied and propagated by the king, so as to convert the other members of the nobility. It is possible this bribery through gift giving would have then been passed down through the laity who also converted, since reciprocal gift-giving was still a large part of AS society at the time.[45]

Despite a mission to the ASs being established with the aid of the king, there were several groups practicing paganism alongside Christianity.[46] In response to this circumstance, Pope Gregory would create parameters for the missionaries to convert the remaining pagan laity.

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[43] Sellar, *HE*, Book 1 Chapter 26.
[44] Sellar, *HE,* Book 1 Chapter 32.
[45] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom* (330-335).
[46] Such parallel practice is discussed in *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature* by North (320-340).

The framework for how to approach the conversion of the laity was made clear in a letter from

Pope Gregory to Abbot Mellitus (†624), recorded in Chapter 30, which indicates:

> That the temples of the idols in that nation ought not to be destroyed; but those
>
> idols that are in them should be destroyed; let Holy Water be made, let it be
>
> sprinkled in those same temples, let altars be erected, and relics placed therein.
>
> For those temples are well built, it is necessary in order that the worship of
>
> devils be changed to the service of the true God.[47]

There are several archeological sites which indicate that religious sites were rededicated and

continued to be used by Christians for worship and burial.[48] Such practices were perhaps most

famously followed by King Redwaeld (560-624), who built a Christian altar within the same

temple that housed his pagan altar, and would regularly use both.[49] The practice of rededicating

pagan temples was not new by this time, as it had previously been used in the Eastern Empire as

well as in Rome itself.[50] Further, in a letter Pope Gregory described that the Roman way of

creating relics was to take a relic and put it in contact with an item which was not a relic. This

secondary item would absorb some of the divine grace and so also become a relic. This process

would also serve to help justify the rededication of temples.[51] The temples would be placed in

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[47] "uidelicet, quia fana idolorum destrui in eadem gente minime debeant; sed ipsa, quae in eis sunt, idola destruantur; aqua benedicta fiat, in eisdem fanis aspergatur, altaria construantur, reliquiae ponantur. Quia, si fana eadem bene constructa sunt, necesse est, ut a cultu daemonum in obsequio ueri Dei debeant commutari;" Latin taken from thelatinlibrary.com/bede.html. The English translation provided is my own based on the above Latin quote.

[48] This will be discussed further in the Archeology section of the Chapter 4. See the burial site of the Trammer House Cemetery and the Buckland AS Cemetery where early graves indicate grave goods and cremations, which transitions over time to inhumation with grave goods (mixed Christian and pagan practice) and ends with inhumation with no grave goods (solely Christian practice). One such example is discussed in *Christianity in Britain 300-700* by Barley and Hanson (177-193): a burial at Sycamore Terrace, York, has a mixture of grave goods showing both pagan and Christian burial practices.

[49] Higham, *The Convert Kings* (103). Unfortunately, the twin altars do not survive.

[50] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom* (346); Church, "Paganism in Conversion-Age Anglo-Saxon England" (164-167).

[51] Crook, *English Medieval Shrines* (17).

contact with the Holy Spirit through Christian ceremonies being conducted on the premises, as well as through the presence of saints' relics being brought in. The pagan temple would thereby absorb the holiness and become a Christian holy site. It has been argued that this is why some Christian holidays and practices reflect earlier pagan rituals, most notably the name of Easter in the English language.[52]

The conversion effort seems to have progressed well to the end of the first book. In Book 2 Chapter 5, however, Ethelbert dies and Eadbald (†640) becomes the king. Despite being Ethelbert's son, Eadbald does not continue Christian practice as king, instead turning back to traditional pagan practices, with large parts of the court and country reportedly following suit.[53] Around the same time, the East Saxon king dies and his three pagan sons also return their kingdom to idolatry.[54] This quick return to paganism begins to show the failings of Augustine's missionary work. In the kingdoms where they were able to establish a presence for Christianity, after the death of a ruler, those kingdoms often reverted to paganism along with most of their subjects.[55] These passages also show that there was still strong support for pagan practice within the nobility at the time since those who were inheriting the throne would not have the political power to force conversion on the nobles at the beginning of their reign. In fact, it is more likely that the nobles forced the return to paganism upon the incumbent king. The king's inability to convert people forcibly is also shown in chapter six, where Eadbald tries to convert to

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[52] Swift discusses the specific case for Easter's relation to Eostre in "Why Don't we use the P-Word".
[53] Sellar, *HE*, Book 2 Chapter 6 and Ingram, *ASC* 616, and is discussed by Higham, *The Convert Kings* (133).
[54] Sellar, *HE*, Book 2 Chapter 5.
[55] It is questionable whether the subjects truly converted back to paganism or whether those who had continued the practice anyway simply became the favoured group again, drawing more attention from Bede. That said, however, it is likely that some would have converted back to paganism in order to begin receiving the benefits of practicing the same religion as their king.

Christianity, but he cannot convert everyone since the people of London elect to continue following an "idolatrous priest."[56]

In Book 2 Chapter 9, we also begin to see conversion by coercion and by conquest. The role that women had in spreading Christianity among the kings and elites is also given some attention. Conversion by coercion is seen when King Edwin (586-633) marries Ethelbert's daughter, who was Christian. Part of this marriage required the king to allow the maiden to continue practicing her faith, allow it to be preached throughout his kingdom, and to consider converting himself if he was advised to do so by a council of his own wise men. In agreeing to these marriage terms, Edwin is coerced into following all their requirements. While this council failed to advise him to convert, after he survived an assassination attempt during Easter, he promised to convert if he were able to defeat the neighbour who sent the assassin. When the king did proceed to kill his neighbour, it demonstrated that Christianity was more powerful than his old gods, thereby resulting in his conversion by power and conquest. Following the conversion of Edwin, the pope also sent him lavish gifts of gold and a cloak from Ancyra (Asia Minor), which confirms the use of gift-giving as a form of bribery in the conversion of these kings.[57] Additionally, the queen received gifts for converting her husband, showing that the bribery was not used just to convert the king himself, but also to encourage the Christian queens to convert their husbands.[58] A final example of conversion through coercion can be found in chapter twelve when king Sigeberht (†636) repeatedly tried to convince king Oswy (612-670) to convert, eventually pressuring him enough times to bring it about.

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[56] Sellar, *HE*, Book 2 Chapter 6.
[57] The conversion of Edwin and the Northumbrians is covered in Sellar, *HE*, Book 2 Chapter 9-14.
[58] Sellar, *HE* Chapter 11.

In Book 2 Chapter 13, we see the council advising king Edwin on whether or not to accept the new religion. While it is unlikely that the words reported are exactly what was said at the council, it is not unreasonable that such councils occurred.[59] Although this council meeting is the only one Bede records in detail, it is likely such meetings would be common for kings considering conversion. Further, the names Bede cited – Coifi, the pagan priest, and Goodmanham, the village – have been shown to have likely been the names of an actual person and place at the time.[60] Additionally, while the reported proceedings of the council cannot be taken as fact, its over-arching conclusions can. So, the conversion of Coifi should be taken to represent the conversion of pagan peoples, and his subsequent actions of going forth to destroy the idols at the pagan temples demonstrate that these people followed the instructions Bede had reported when he discussed the letter from Pope Gregory to Mellitus in Book 1 Chapter 30.

This history continues to show kingdoms oscillating between Christian and pagan practices throughout the rest of the second book. Book 3, however, shows a much stronger Christian presence in AS England through the relations of the church with the kings. The strength of Christianity is shown particularly well when king Eorconbert of Kent (†664) commanded all the idols in his realm to be destroyed, something that certainly would not have been possible had Christianity not been a strong political force at the time. Additionally, we hear of several royal maidens being sent to abbeys and becoming saintly abbesses. In the remaining

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[59] This is due to the inventional rhetoric which Bede followed. This is detailed in Church, *Paganism in Conversion Age Anglo-Saxon England* (168-173). Inventional rhetoric is defined as when a rhetorician fabricates detailed information that they could not possibly know, like Bede quoting Coifi in a meeting where Bede was not present and thus could not have known the exact wording of what was said.
[60] Barrow, "How Coifi Pierced Christ's Side" (706).

books and chapters of the *HE* the conversion of the ASs had been largely completed and the final two books focus on the passing and consecration of prominent members of the AS church.[61]

The *HE* shows that kings could not convert without the support of the laity beforehand. In order to gain this support, the kings then bribed and coerced people to conversion, in a similar way to how the Church bribed the kings, and in later years forced conversion on conquered peoples. In addition to the role of these kings, Bede also made evident that various queens played a large role in converting their husbands, as did the influence of political relations with other Christian kingdoms.

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

The *ASC* is a collection of records which chronicle the history of the ASs. Thought to be compiled during the reign of Alfred the Great (r. 871-899), the *ASC* provides arguably one of the most historically accurate primary sources of AS history due to its short entries which avoid the addition of inventional rhetoric like that found in Bede's work.[62] There are nine surviving MSS which were written in Worcester, Peterborough, Abingdon, Canterbury, and Winchester. Each one is a supplemented copy of an original, and as such it has been argued that some alterations have been made to the accounts.[63] The alterations and additions in each of these MSS tend to focus on events local to the area where the copy was made.[64] Following this line of thought, it has been shown to be likely that the *ASC* was centrally created in or around the royal court of

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[61] Higham "Bede's Agenda in Book IV" (483-486) discusses how the kings by this point, roughly 669, had been firmly converted but were not following Christian teaching strictly enough for Bede's liking. Additionally, these kings were having to send missionaries into the countryside to recall people to the religion, indicating that some apostasy was also likely taking place. The discussion of the consecration and passing of important members of the Anglo-Saxon church can be found in Sellar, *HE* Book 4, Chapter 1 – Book 5, Chapter 22.

[62] Caswell, "Of the Ruin and Conquest of Britain" (47).

[63] Brooks, "Why is the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle About Kings?" (43-70).

[64] I.e., those made at Canterbury tend to have lots of additional information on the happenings at the monastery in Canterbury, whereas the one written at Abingdon tends to have additional information on the practices of Oxford.

Alfred the Great and distributed to monasteries to be copied. Entries in the *ASC* begin in 60AD, with updates being completed into 1154, with the entries prior to Alfred's initiation of the *ASC* thought to have been gathered from oral sources and written records.

The first entry of interest for us is for the year 596, where it is recorded that Pope Gregory sent St. Augustine to Britain with very many monks to preach the word of God to the English people. This entry is followed by one for 601, where Pope Gregory sends an archbishop's pall to Augustine with many learned doctors to assist him, and Bishop Paulinus of York (†644) converted Edwin of Northumbria. In 604, Augustine consecrates two more bishops, one of whom is Mellitus, who then preaches to the East-Saxons. This first set of entries shows several important factors in the process of conversion. The entry of 596 mentions that Augustine travelled with many monks in order to spread the word. The inclusion of these monks supports the idea that monks were the primary vehicle for the spread of the faith, as they acted as missionaries with the monasteries acting as bases from which they could travel during their missionary activities.[65] The inclusion of many monks with Augustine also shows that it was likely planned for the king not to be the sole focus of the conversion effort, since only one person would be needed to preach to the king, which would convert the whole kingdom if the king had the power to do so. Therefore, the presence of the additional monks indicates that the church knew that there would be a need to send missionaries beyond one to preach to the king, in order to convert the kingdom. While it is likely that the leader of the mission, Augustine, was sent to focus specifically on converting the king because it would make the conversion of the rest of the country easier, the unnamed monks likely would have been tasked with converting the laity, not

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[65] Marnell, *A Light from the West* (27-28); Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England* (242-243).

the king.[66] The fact that Augustine was an archbishop by 601 shows that the mission was successful and that there were now multiple bishops. The presence of multiple bishops is not uncommon for areas under conversion, especially since the missionaries consisted mainly of monks. The bishops would then be needed to conduct the sacraments, which is likely why there was also a multitude of church officials being sent to aid the mission. The 604 entry indicates that Mellitus was not sent to convert King Seabert (†616), but the people under him, although by naming Seabert but not his kingdom, the author suggests that the king's conversion was the ultimate goal.

Hereafter, the entries, while still coinciding with those of the *HE*, downplay the apostasy of the various kingdoms. In 616, the entry describes Eadbald inheriting the kingdom of Kent and returning to pagan practices, but it is also noted that in 626, Archbishop Laurentius reconverted Eadbald to Christianity. Between 626-634, it is described that king Edwin survived an assassination attempt then converted following the conquest of those who had tried to kill him, reflecting the story in the *HE* which shows conversion through conquest. From this point forward, Bishop Birinius (600-650) converts the West Saxons in 634, Bishop Felix (†648) the East-Angles in 636, Paeda converts in 653 before being slain in 655, after which the Mercians converted, and in 661 the Isle of Wight is converted. The entry for 675 shows the ultimate completion of the conversion as it is decreed that pilgrimage to Hampstead is equivalent to pilgrimage to Rome for those who cannot, for any reason, make the longer journey. Overall, this second set of entries also mirrors the *HE* in that it does not provide a lot of detail on the events

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[66] Higham *Convert Kings* (54-55).

that led to the conversion, but each focuses on the conversion of the kings by naming them specifically instead of naming their kingdoms or their tribal subjects.

Discussion and Conclusions

In both the *HE* and the *ASC*, we see hear of kings who cannot convert immediately to the new religion. Ethelbert takes time to convert as the missionaries gain more success throughout his kingdom. His son returns to paganism during his ascension to the throne but is later rebaptized into the Christian faith. Along with these two is King Penda of Mercia who promises to convert if doing so is advised by his council. In each case, the king must wait for the support of others in order to enact his conversion. It has been argued by Higham that the kings were reluctant to convert because the nobility would oppose it. Christianity offered the kings greater power and supported a hierarchical structure which offered the king more control and power over his retainers.[67] Additionally, the church was not seen by these nobles as offering them as much as the kings could in return for their conversion, particularly when it came to land. The churches were often donated large amounts of land in order for monasteries to be built, run, and sustained, and this land necessarily would be taken from land the nobles had either previously held or may have been vying to obtain on grant from the king. This loss of land was doubly negative for the nobility since the churches could not be taxed, so not only was the lord losing land, but also losing the income attached to it. In particular, the lost land and tax revenues could cause problems for new kings who would be looking to consolidate power quickly in order to ensure a smooth ascension to the throne. It is likely that Eadbald, Ethelbert's son, returned the kingdom to paganism because it allowed him more freedom to give away lands and incomes, which had

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[67] The idea that a king could gain more power through the hierarchical setup of Christianity is discussed by Higham in *The Convert Kings* (133), where the king's retainers converted as a matter of policy, not religious conviction, likely because they would now need to fit into the hierarchical structure of the kings' new religion.

previously been given to the Church, to his father's retainers in order to consolidate his power. Over time, however, with the preferential treatment given to those who did convert, particularly under Ethelbert, the benefits to the nobility would outweigh the drawbacks, which would lead to the conversion of the nobility and allow the king to convert.

It has been shown that the Irish missions to AS England impacted how Christianity was practiced by the ASs. Further, the Augustinian mission was sent in order to reduce the influence of the Irish mission. In order to convert the AS people, the missionaries did not solely focus on the conversion of the king. The sources which survive focus on the conversion of kings because of the influence they had in furthering the spread of Christianity. These sources also show that in order to convert the kings, the laity of the area had to convert first, since they would otherwise oppose these changes.[68] These same sources also allude, and sometimes outright name, other methods, and aspects of the conversion process. These include the conversion of pagan temples to Christian use, encouraged by Pope Gregory, and the use of monasteries as central locations from which missionaries would venture forth to the countryside to convert the laity.[69] Royalty also seems to have been a focus of these accounts since the nobility, particularly women, would often run these monasteries, which saw to the majority of the conversion effort. It was also shown that the kings often would bribe people with preferential treatment should they convert to Christianity, something the Roman See offered to these kings as well. Overall, the king could not convert then simply force his people to follow. Instead, the king would support the conversion of

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[68] In Bede *HE* Book 2 Chapter 6, it is described that the people of London refuse to return to Christianity even though their king had returned the kingdom to Christianity. The refusal of Ethelbert to disregard the religion of his people in Book 1 Chapter 25 also indicates a fear that his people would not support this change.
[69] As discussed on pages 14, and 8-9, of this chapter, respectively.

his followers, then when enough had converted he would follow suit, normally resulting in a wave of further conversion among his vassals.

Chapter 2: Hagiographies

Chapter 1 on Histories has shown that the conversion of the AS people was indeed heavily influenced by the nobility in the various AS kingdoms, as indicated by the royalty whose lives are told through the various histories. Many kings and queens were made into saints because of their conversion to Christianity and the aid they provided to the conversion of their people. These kings and queens are referred to as royal saints because they served their entire lives as royalty, not clergy. Of utmost importance to this study is the idea that the conversion did not take only a top-down approach, even though they gained the support of the royalty. The royalty was accepting of this new religion because of the power, both temporal and spiritual, that it could convey. The Christian Church's hierarchical structure lent its temporal support to the monarchy, while the spiritual support was reflected through victories in battle under various kings who would then adopt the religion for its success in military conquest. In addition, the "Histories" chapter showed that the monasteries may have become heavily involved in their surrounding communities once they had royal support and became the centre from which Christianity spread. This chapter will move beyond narrative histories and into hagiographies in order to provide a clearer understanding of the preaching methods used by the non-royal saints and further explore the use of monasteries as centres for conversion.

Hagiographies were generally written by monks and read to the brothers as well as to visitors. Saints' lives were made for the purpose of commemorating events and people that could serve as good examples to Christians.[70] This chapter focuses on non-royal saints because the

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[70] Niles, *Pagan Survivals and Popular Belief* (6). This is also true historically, as Meaney shows in her article "Felix's Life of St. Guthlac" (30). There, she explains that the life of St. Antony of Egypt, composed in 375, was written for readers as a model to imitate. Lapidge, "The Saintly Life" (11) explains that in the preface of St. Willibrord, the metrical "Life" was an accompaniment to prose "Lives", since the prose Lives were made to be read aloud publicly to inform people, while the metrical version was meant for private meditation.

majority of the royal saints converted people through affiliation and are discussed in the "Histories" chapter. Conversion through affiliation required a connection to a noble family, which most of the peasantry would not have enjoyed. By investigating the lives of non-royal saints, we can see the methods by which lay people were converted. Non-royal saints are those who did not serve as noblemen or use their noble connections to coerce the conversion of others. Instead, non-royal saints – whether noble or peasant at birth – are those who decide to serve the Church, usually as monks or hermits, and forego any claim to nobility. Beyond displaying how the conversion of the AS people was sought, these lives of saints also provided formulaic examples for the ASs to follow so as to be good Christians.[71] While the expectation was not necessarily to follow these lives verbatim, they did provide examples of how to live a holy life and the miracles within them conveyed moral messages to the people which would further enforce the Christian way of life. This chapter will examine seven hagiographies: *The Life of Saint Columba, The Life of Saint Cuthbert of Lindisfarne, The Holy Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow, The Life of Saint Fursey the Venerable, The Life of Saint Guthlac,* and *The Life of Saint Wilfrid*.

These have been selected from 138 known AS saints who lived between the sixth and eighth century based on two criteria.[72] Primarily, the hagiography in question had to be written within living memory of the person it was written about, roughly 80-100 years from the time of their death. This criterion is based on several theories of oral story-transmission and the understanding that once a story has moved beyond living memory, the changes to it become much greater than those that occur when the audience members would still be able to remember

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[71] Lapidge, "The Saintly Life" (11).
[72] The lists of saints consulted come from "A Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Saints" by Blair, *Oxford Dictionary of Anglo-Saxon Saints* by Farmer, and the *List of Saints' Resting Places* by Rollason.

the events first-hand.[73] The time period of 80-100 years allows for a writer to be writing a

hagiography with only one generation between the two parties who would still be alive to hear

the hagiography and recall the saint in question.[74] Although these lives still contain the generic

tropes of hagiographies, there will be fewer stories that have been completely fictionalized. The

second criterion was that the text be written explicitly as a hagiography. Hagiography is its own

genre with its own tropes which were used to express meaning and lessons as well as show the

literary circle to which the stories belonged.[75] Many of the stories contained in hagiographies

have intertextual reference to other stories. This trend, however, seems to stem from the

significant role which the *Life of Saint Antony* and *Life of Saint Martin* played as the nascent

writings of the genre that were later used as the basis for all later hagiographies.[76] Michael

Lapidge describes the framework which hagiographies follow.[77] They begin with birth into

nobility accompanied by a miraculous portent; in youth the saint excels at learning, which

indicates a saintly destiny; in later youth/early adulthood the saint turns to the holy life

completely, often forsaking family to do so. Once in the Church, the saint progresses through the

various ecclesiastical ranks while performing miracles. Eventually the saint, foreseeing their

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[73] This is briefly discussed at the beginning of *The Life and Miracles of Saint Fursa the Pious* by Groves to explain why this life, written fifty years from the saint's death, was likely still historically accurate. For more information on oral transmission theory, see Thompson, "St. Aethelthryth: The Making of History from Hagiography" (476), where it is discussed that Bede and similar sources were obliged to present their lives accurately when the events were within living memory. In the case of St. Aethelthryth, it was shown that her "Life" was fairly accurate until after the conquest period, several hundred years after her death.

[74] Think of it like stories of WWII. A child whose father served in the war would have some understanding of the events and be able to pass the information to their own child who would also have been able to interact with the grandparent. If the child then wrote a biography about the grandparent after their passing, the child's work would need to be truthful enough that the parent would not baulk at the tales being wildly fantastical. A more thorough treatment of the AS oral tradition can be found in Orchard, "Looking for an Echo" (225-227).

[75] Agley in "Studies of Historical Hagiographies" goes through these tropes in great detail and is able to trace these back to the earliest hagiographies including the Life of St. Antony of Egypt.

[76] The influence of the earlier lives as well as that of pagan traditions is discussed in Bullough, "Columba, Adomnan and the Achievement of Iona Part 1" (127). It is brought up also in Meaney's "Felix's Life of St. Guthlac" (30) where the author explains that most saints' lives included copies and adaptations from earlier works, dating back to the original two of St. Antony and St. Martin.

[77] Lapidge "The Saintly Life" (7).

death, gives final instructions to their followers before dying calmly. After death, various

miracles occur at the saint's tomb.

The requirement that the hagiographies meet these criteria rules out the vast majority of

AS saints' hagiographies due to their being written several hundred years later, or as a part of a

history. All seven of the hagiographies which meet the requirements were written about monks

who were canonized for their deeds in life, and all are credited with successfully converting

various groups to Christianity, aside from St. Guthlac, who lived out his life as a hermit.[78] These

hagiographies will be analyzed not for what they had in common with other hagiographies, but

rather for what they show about the broader environment surrounding the saint whose life was

being recorded. Some of them provide examples to live by, others show how different groups

interacted. These details show how these saints were involved in the conversion of ASs to

Christianity and how the monasteries were used to aid in this endeavour.

Life of Saint Columba

The *Life of Saint Columba*[79] is the earliest of the hagiographies which meets the criteria

stated above. Columba was born in 521 and founded several monasteries, including the one

located at Iona in modern Scotland. While he did not deal explicitly with the Anglo-Saxons, who

were located further south, he was trained as an Irish monk and was part of the Irish missions to

the British Isles. The Irish training would influence the methods which he sought to use in

converting the Picts of Scotland and likely would reflect those methods used by other Irish

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[78] Instances of preaching and baptism can be found in the *Life of St. Columba* Book 1 Chapter 1, 27, Book 2 Chapter 9, 33, Book 3 Chapter 15, the *Life of St. Cuthbert*, Chapter 9, 12, 13, 29, 32, the *Lives of the Holy Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarorw*, 2, 3, the *Life of St. Fursey*, 26, and the *Life of St. Wilfrid*, Chapter 8 (18-19).
[79] For this study I will be using the translation of Adomnan's work by William Reeves (1874) that has been published via the Fordham Internet History Sourcebooks with markup by Seth Seyfrid. All references to the *Life of Saint Columba* come from this edition. https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/columba-e.asp.

missionaries who traveled into AS England. St. Columba died on June 9th 597 and his

hagiography was written roughly eighty years later by Adomnan, the ninth abbot of that same

monastery. His position gave him unparalleled access to monks who had experienced the life of

St. Columba as he transferred to the monastery sometime after 640 and likely within 50 years of

the saint's passing.[80] The *Life of Saint Columba* is divided into three books which cover his

prophecies, his miracles, and his interactions with angels.

The first book begins with a miracle which sees Prince Oswald given instruction by

Columba on how to defeat a more potent enemy force. The positioning of this event in the

narrative serves to emphasize its importance and shows a clear understanding that the powers of

Christianity were superior to those of other religions, as proven through success in conquest.[81]

This is later reflected in Book 1 Chapter 39, when Columba travels near the fortress of King

Brute, which is located near Inverness. Columba and his party chant hymns outside the fortress

and the druidic priests try to stop him. In response to this, he sings Psalm 44 and strikes fear into

those priests as his voice booms like thunder. The stories of Columba overcoming the druidic

priest in Book 2 Chapters 34 and 35 serve to support the understanding that Christianity offered

greater divine power than paganism. In Chapter 34, a druidic priest refuses to release a slave in

defiance of Columba. The druid nearly dies due to his refusal and is only healed through a

miracle by Columba when he capitulates and releases the slave. Chapter 35 sees this druid

attempt to force Columba to remain by sending winds contrary to his sailing. Columba boards his

boat and through the power of Christianity is able to sail directly against the wind with ease. All

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[80] Seth Seyfrid, introduction to Reeves, *The Life of Saint Columba*. https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/columba-e.asp.
[81] See "Histories" chapter, 15-16.

of these episodes serve to show how Christianity should be considered more powerful than other faiths, such as druidism.

The *Life of Saint Columba* also portrays the role of the monastery in communities at the time. In Book 1 Chapter 3, Columba visits St. Ceran's monastery and "all flocked [from] their little grange farms near the monastery."[82] This passage indicates that the monastery was open to, and used by, the surrounding community for religious practice. Further, this story indicates that the coming of a new preacher was cause for the entire surrounding area to attend the monastery, though the second point should be taken with a grain of salt as it may have been an embellishment. This idea that the monastery was the center of Christian practice is reflected through several additional chapters in Book 1 as Chapters 10-28 focus on miracles whereby Saint Columba acquired information he could not have reasonably known otherwise. Chapter 12 goes over a prophecy in which a man will join a ship that sailed under Columba's protection, and join the monastery upon his return. The interaction between the ship master and St. Columba at the beginning of this chapter indicates Columba was familiar with the people setting sail, and therefore with the community. Chapters 20 and 21 further show people coming to the monastery. Chapter 20 shows a minister arriving, breaking the day of fasting for the brothers, and Chapter 21 shows a sick man arrive and leave when he is told the only cure for him now is to repent his sins before his death. Each of these chapters further indicate the role of the monastery as a place of retreat for the clergy through the appearance of the minister, and as a place from which to seek aid through the appearance of the dying man. Chapter 23 is possibly the best example of the monks working within the community as it is described that several of the monks of St. Columba's monastery are working on building a house for a man named Laisran. This chapter

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[82] Reeves, *The Life of Saint Columba*, Book 1 Chapter 3. https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/columba-e.asp.

therefore provides further evidence of the role of the monks within the wider community, not only as preachers but as members of that community who could aid it through physical labour. The miracles of St. Columba continue into Book 2 which highlights Columba's role in aiding the community which surrounds his monastery through healing various members of the surrounding communities in Chapters 4-6, blessings for food in chapters 2, 3, 18, and 22 which produced better quality food and more abundant food for those people who needed it, and even blessing a fountain which would then cure diseases in the lands of the Picts in Chapter 10, showing his influence extended beyond simply the Island of Iona. All of these stories combine to show that the monastery was heavily involved in the surrounding community, which in turn lends further credence to the idea that the monasteries were centres from which conversion would take place.

Overall, the *Life of Saint Columba* indicates a strong presence of churchmen within the surrounding non-monastic communities, which would encourage conversion. This observation supports the understanding of a pre-chapel-based church, found in the histories, which was centered on monasteries spreading the faith. In addition, there are multiple examples which show that Christianity was more powerful than druidic paganism through the miracles where Columba opposes druidic priests.[83] By showing Christianity as more powerful than the more widespread pagan practice at the time, the *Life of Saint Columba* is showing that one reason for people to convert was the power that Christianity offered its adherents.

Life of Saint Cuthbert

The *Life of Saint Cuthbert* survives in three versions, one anonymous, one in verse by Bede, and a prose version also by Bede. Saint Cuthbert was born in 634, died in 687, and in 700

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[83] Reeves, *The Life of Saint Columba*, Book 1 Chapter 39, Book 2 Chapter 34-35. https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/columba-e.asp.

the anonymous version of his hagiography was written. Ten years later, Bede wrote his own version of the life while relying heavily on the anonymous author's text. Bede also completed a prose version in 721.[84] In this chapter, I am analyzing only Bede's prose version for three reasons: 1) Bede relied heavily on the anonymous account of the life and so has much of the same information, so analysis of the anonymous life here would largely be repetitive; 2) In addition to consulting the anonymous account, Bede also incorporated more source material found in Herefrith[85] for the prose version which he did not include in his earlier edition in verse, resulting in an analysis of Bede's second version providing an analysis which can be directly applied to Bede's first version and Herefrith's version as each are found within this second version;[86] 3) Bede's prose version also underwent much scrutiny by those who had known Cuthbert during his life, as is explained in Bede's own Prologue, theoretically resulting in a more historically accurate recount of Cutherbert's life while still maintaining the generic tropes of hagiography.

The *Life of Saint Cuthbert* begins by showing that he was not a Christian in his youth, as Cuthbert "knew not yet the Lord, neither had the voice of the Lord been revealed to him."[87] This story omits the miracle at birth trope which Lapidge pointed out. Another element that makes the story of Cuthbert exceptional is that he was not a noble. This detail emerges in the episode from Chapter 4 that relates his conversion, which occurs while he is shepherding sheep.[88] Cuthbert's

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[84] Giles, Prologue; Relics, in Bede, *Life and Miracles of St. Cuthbert*, in a volume entitled *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*, trans. J.A. Giles from the Fordham Internet History Sourcebooks. This is the translation and source used for all references to *The Life of Saint Cuthbert* in this study.
https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/bede-cuthbert.asp.
[85] The author of another version of *The Life of Saint Cuthbert* prior to Bede's version used in this study.
[86] Giles, Prologue; Saint, in *The life of Saint Cuthbert*. https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/bede-cuthbert.asp.
[87] Giles, *Life of Saint Cuthbert*, Chapter 1. https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/bede-cuthbert.asp.
[88] Giles, *Life of Saint Cuthbert*, Chapter 4. https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/bede-cuthbert.asp. The shepherding of sheep identifies Cuthbert firmly as a low-born individual, but it also foreshadows his role as a shepherd of the Church.

conversion occurs while he is quite young, and from that point, the story begins to follow the framework put forth by Lapidge, as Cuthbert turns fully to the monastery, shows his intelligence, and beings to ascend through the clerical ranks. In Chapter 9, Bede begins to show how Cuthbert influenced the community around him. Here, it is said that Cuthbert

> sought to lead the minds of the neighbouring people to the love of heavenly
> things. Many of them, indeed, disgraced the faith which they professed, by
> unholy deeds; and some of them, in the time of mortality, neglecting the
> sacrament of their creed, had recourse to idolatrous remedies, as if by charms
> or amulets, or any other mysteries of the magical art, they were able to avert a
> stroke inflicted upon them by the Lord... Now Cuthbert was so skilful in
> teaching, and so zealous in what he undertook, that none dared to conceal from
> him their thoughts, but all acknowledged what they had done amiss; for they
> supposed that it was impossible to escape his notice, and they hoped to merit
> forgiveness by an honest confession. [89]

By describing that Cuthbert "sought to lead the minds of neighbours",[90] we are shown again that the monasteries were centres of religious practice that sought to influence the local population. Generating such influence would require the active involvement of monks in, and travel to, the surrounding communities. Further, the neglect of sacraments and continued use of charms, amulets, and other magics point towards a coexistence of Christian and pagan religious practice, which is rarely mentioned in the hagiographies but is supported by archeological data.[91] The

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[89] Giles, *Life of Saint Cuthbert*, Chapter 9. https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/bede-cuthbert.asp.
[90] Giles, *Life of Saint Cuthbert*, Chapter 9. https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/bede-cuthbert.asp.
[91] Evidence shows that burials started to be Christianized between 680-720, beginning prior to Cuthbert's death and continuing afterwards until just before the writing of his prose life. It is therefore reasonable that the writer, Bede,

evidence from material culture is of further note since it seems to indicate both religions were practised at the same time by the same people, as opposed to simply different people practicing different religions in the same place.[92] In addition, St. Cuthbert is shown as being successful in his endeavour to correct the religious practices of his neighbours by the description of the laity acknowledging what wrongs they had done and seeking forgiveness through a truthful confession.[93] Several other chapters of Cuthbert's *Life* also describe his journeying to spread Christianity, further supporting the concept of the monastery as a centre from which missionaries ventured forth. In Chapter 12, he visits and preaches at a certain village; in Chapter 15, it is described that there is a certain prefect whose house he always stops at on his various travels; and in Chapter 30, he is again described as travelling to a town where he cures a sick abbess. Chapter 32 also describes Cuthbert travelling into mountains and places where no good church existed, drawing the faithful from surrounding areas to meet him there to hear his preaching, which allowed him to spread the word of his faith to several smaller locales at a time. All of these examples show that Cuthbert was a very mobile saint who travelled between various locations to preach. In so doing, he achieved some degree of success, and he often made his stops at monasteries and abbeys.[94]

Saint Cuthbert was also heavily involved with the nobility. In Chapter 10, Ebbe, the sister of King Oswy, invites him to her monastery, an invitation which he could not refuse. Cuthbert's inability to refuse meeting Ebbe indicates that she still retained a higher socio-political status than Cuthbert despite now being a nun instead of a lay royal, and likely meant that she still

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would have good knowledge of this practice occurring. This is discussed at length in Delvaux, "Sanctity and Monasticism in Two Lives of Cuthbert" (233-234).

[92] This concept of co-practiced religions is discussed at length in the "Archeology" section of Chapter 4 below.

[93] Giles, *Life of Saint Cuthbert*, Chapter 9. https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/bede-cuthbert.asp.

[94] St. Cuthbert is shown to have converted people in Chapter 9, 12, 13, 29, 32. https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/bede-cuthbert.asp.

represented her royal family. Beyond his inability to refuse the invitation, it is also made clear that Cuthbert stayed for several days in order to confirm with Ebbe the truth of what he taught. This shows that the royal house, through Ebbe, was working to ensure that all preachers were spreading the proper religion, not going against the teachings of the Christianity which was being supported by the royal household. Later Elefled, sister of king Egfrid, approached Cuthbert in order for him to portend the future of England and of her brother.[95] This idea that Cuthbert would be approached to portend the future reflects the role that pagan priests had in noble courts, as they would try to advise the king based on their ability to know the future – placing a Christian bishop in the role of the pagan priest. The interactions of Cuthbert with the sisters of kings give important insights into how the ASs saw the function of the bishops.

Therefore, the *Life of Saint Cuthbert* shows that monasteries were certainly centres from which Christianity spread and shows that the monks and abbots of this time could spend great amounts of time travelling to convert people. It is also shown that known holy men were being approached to fulfill the role of AS pagan priests, regardless of their links with royalty from birth.

The *Lives of the Holy Abbotts of Wearmouth and Jarrow*

Bede's *Lives of the Holy Abbotts of Wearmouth and Jarrow*[96] follows the lives of Benedict Biscop (628-690), Ceolfrid (642-716), Easterwine (650-686), Sigfrid (†698), and Huetberht (†740s). Written sometime after 716, twenty-six years after the death of the first of

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[95] Giles*, Life of Saint Cuthbert*, Chapter 24 https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/bede-cuthbert.asp.
[96] Bede, *The Lives of the Holy Abbots of Weremouth and Jarrow*, in a volume entitled *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*, trans. J.A. Giles will be used as the translation for this section. The full text is available online on the Fordham Internet History Sourcebooks. https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/bede-jarrow.asp. I have chosen to use the Wearmouth and Jarrow spelling. An alternative spelling exists in some of the source materials as Weremouth and Jarrow.

these abbots, Benedict Biscop, the story focuses predominantly inward on the life of the abbey

and its abbots. Despite focusing on the lives of the abbots, the *Lives of the Holy Abbotts of*

Wearmouth and Jarrow also includes some useful indications of how successful the conversion

process was, as the original monastery was split into two monasteries to accommodate the

growing number of brothers, as well as how monasteries were funded and supported by the

monarchy and nobility.

The abbey was founded by Benedict Biscop following a land grant by King Ecgfrid.

Biscop then travelled extensively throughout western Europe, using his own wealth as well as

donations from wealthy patrons to amass a vast library as well as large amounts of relics and

finery which were left as an endowment to the monastery.[97] This also could become problematic

for the monastery, however, since noblemen could choose to attack the monastery should they no

longer feel the monastery represented their best interests. Such an attack is shown through the

Life of St. Wilfrid who was targeted and forced to flee from executions and assassination parties

for much of his lifetime, because the saint lost the support of the nobles who had previously

supported him.[98] Biscop named Ceolfrid abbot of the monastery at Jarrow when it was founded

and also named the Venerable Easterwine abbot of Wearmouth at the same time. This dual

appointment was justified because of the amount of traveling which Benedict did.[99] The two

abbeys were thus overseen by separate people but considered one house and body legally, with

Benedict as the overseer of the two. Easterwine was also one of Biscop's cousins, which means

Easterwine would have been accustomed to maintaining relationships with the affluent members

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[97] Giles, *The Lives of the Holy Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow.* https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/bede-jarrow.asp. While it is possible that some merchants may have been benefactors, at this period the people with sufficient wealth to pay for the extravagant things which Biscop collected would have been from the nobility.

[98] Coates, "Ceolfrid: Hisotry, Hagiography, and Memory in Seventh and Eighth Century Wearmouth-Jarrow" (76).

[99] Giles, *Lives of the Holy Abbots of Weremouth and* Jarrow, 7. https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/bede-jarrow.asp.

of AS society. In addition, Ceolfrid had served several years as Biscop's assistant, whereby he would have gained plenty of relevant experience as well.

Bede made a point of justifying Easterwine's appointment despite him being Biscop's cousin. Such an appointment followed the Irish practice of family-run monasteries, wherein the successors were appointed and generally related to the current abbot, instead of being voted in by and from the current members of the monastery. This inward use of Irish practices indicates that the monastery likely followed the customs of Irish monasteries in general, which also put a large emphasis on converting the surrounding community by sending forth monks from the monastery. The success of both abbeys at Wearmouth and Jarrow throughout this work implies the success in converting the surrounding ASs as Wearmouth grew to the point that after seven years the abbey was split, and Jarrow was founded. After this split both abbeys are implied to have continued to steadily grow in adherents over time while still being considered one house, simply split into two buildings.[100] Additionally, although Biscop was not often discussed as having converted people, the amount of travel he did was often noted, showing he further followed this element of Irish monastic life.

Despite this apparent reliance on Irish tradition being common practice at the time, Bede took careful pains to point out that Easterwine entered the monastery with no expectation of favourable treatment, and Biscop afforded him none. Easterwine instead earned his position honestly and was often the hardest working of all the brothers in his adherence to monastic discipline. From here, the story follows the internal management of the abbey, and describes the passing of the various abbots until Ceolfrid's death, whereupon he leaves the brothers with

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[100] Biscop received the grant of land upon which Wearmouth was built in 674, and the land grant to build Jarrow was given in 681, "History of St Paul's Monastery, Jarrow." https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/st-pauls-monastery-jarrow/history/.

instructions to choose for themselves a successor, resulting in Heutberht being elected abbot.[101] This election shows a final departure from the Irish tradition at the two monasteries, as up to this point, the successor had been named by at least one of the other abbots, even if they had not been a member of the predecessor's family.

Overall, the *Lives of the Holy Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow* is quite short for a hagiography and does not quite fit the model proposed by Lapidge. It does, however, provide insight into the transition between abbots, and how having powerful allies could result in an abbey amassing great temporal and spiritual wealth through their lands and relics. Additionally, the appointment of Easterwine begins to show a transition away from Irish practice toward adherence to Roman practices, with the election of the abbot by the brethren that is described at the end of the hagiography.

The *Life of Saint Fursey*[102]

Saint Fursey's *Life*[103] was written about fifty years after his death and details his various miracles. Fursey was an Irish-trained monk and spent ten years preaching within Ireland before travelling to the "Saxon lands by way of the British ones."[104] He was received by King Sigeberht and began converting the ASs. Fursey preached to the ASs for roughly a full year before his death. During this time, he was also given lands upon which to build a monastery by King Anna. The two kings' involvement in the life of Fursey points again to the conversion strategy of beginning with the nobility then converting those serving under them. Chapter 28 has a long

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[101] Giles, *Lives of the Holy Abbots of Weremouth and Jarrow*, 18. https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/bede-jarrow.asp.
[102] This is the common spelling for St. Furrsey, however he may also be found referred to as St. Fursei, St. Furrsa, St. Furseus, or St. Furrus.
[103] For this study we will be using the translation of the *Life and Miracles of Saint Furrsa the Pious* by Groves. Fursey lived 597-650.
[104] Groves, *The Life and Miracles of Saint Fursa the Pious*, 30.

discussion on the inclusion of Fursey' family at the monastery with four family members also being prominent there. This is reflective of Fursey' Irish training, and shows how this practice was spread into AS England as the Irish missionaries began to settle and convert local areas. While this is the shortest of the saints' lives under consideration, it does again show the importance of the Irish mission to England which the histories mostly neglect.

The *Life of Saint Wilfrid*

The *Life of Saint Wilfrid*[105] from the outset details his involvement with various royals through his education and upbringing in a noble household, eventually receiving the gift of speaking in tongues, allowing him to preach to various peoples.[106] This miracle mirrors the gift of tongues given to the Apostles who began spreading the new faith through the middle east in their day, but also points to Wilfrid's intelligence by indicating that he learned several languages, likely beyond the normal number for a monk to know, particularly at a young age. Wilfrid eventually is given land at Ripon to build a monastery by king Ahlfrith of Northumbria (†705). This gift was explicitly bestowed because Ahlfrith wanted Wilfrid to preach to his people, so the monastery was essentially created in order to supply the missionaries with a centre from which to operate.[107]

Eventually Wilfrid was elected Archbishop of York and travelled to France to become anointed, thereby moving away from the Irish tradition which was losing prominence in England as shown by the adoption of Roman Christian practices at the Council of Whitby. During this time, his party became stuck on the beach in a pagan area. The pagans in this place sought to kill

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[105] St. Wilfrid lived 633-709. The translation of the *Life of Saint Wilfrid* is taken from the Eddius Stephanus edition available on the Internet Archive translated by Bertram Colgrave.
[106] Colgrave, *Life of Saint Wilfrid*, Chapter 5.
[107] Colgrave, *Life of Saint Wilfrid*, Chapter 8.

the saint and his party, but, through Wilfrid's saintly powers they were able to push back the pagan attacks three times before they managed to board their boat and escape.[108] Upon returning to Ripon, both the kings of Mercia and Kent supported Wilfrid, since a rival archbishop named Chad had been elected into Wilfrid's position while he was away. Eventually, Chad was transferred to the bishopric of Mercia, and Wilfrid was reinstated at York.[109]

While Wilfrid was archbishop, the victories of King Ecgfrith over the Picts were attributed to his faith in Christ, which supports the idea that Christianity was able to be spread through the royalty as a religion of conquest. The success of Wilfrid with the nobility would not, however, last long. Chapters 25-60 of his hagiography focus on his travels through various lands after losing the support of Ecgfrith.[110] Wilfrid does have a brief reprieve from exile when he converts the king and queen of Sussex, which led to him being given a second monastery from which he was able to convert the people of Sussex to Christianity.[111] Wilfrid made several trips between England and Rome in the hope of regaining his monastery at Ripon. Shortly before his death, he was successful in doing so. Chapter 63 of the hagiography focuses on his plans for his monastery after his death. He instructed that the lands be divided in three, with one third being split between his monasteries so they "may be able to purchase the friendship of kings and bishops" who had betrayed him.[112]

The *Life of Saint Wilfrid* supports the arguments for the use of monasteries as bases for missionary efforts. The most striking feature of this text, however, is the focus on why the support of the nobility was of such importance at the time. Wilfrid lost the support of the nobles,

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[108] Colgrave, *Life of Saint Wilfrid*, Chapter 13.
[109] Colgrave, *Life of Saint Wilfrid*, Chapters 12-19.
[110] Colgrave, *Life of Saint Wilfrid*, Chapters 25-60.
[111] Colgrave, *Life of Saint Wilfrid*, Chapter 41.
[112] Colgrave, *Life of Saint Wilfrid*, Chapter 63.

and although they remained Christian, he was forced into hiding, exile, and long travels for a large part of his lifetime. It was so impactful for Wilfrid that the hagiographer makes it clear that he intended for parts of his land to be used to prevent this from happening to the members of his monasteries after his death.

The *Life of Saint Guthlac*

St. Guthlac's hagiography is of special interest here because it also appears in verse and is believed to have been quite popular in both forms. Like its poetic equivalents, the prose *Life of Saint Guthlac*[113] shows him converting to Christianity after leading a mercenary group for several years. He turns first to life in a monastery before secluding himself as a hermit.[114] Unlike the other lives discussed so far, Guthlac's does not focus on conversions or monastic life. Instead, the story of his life seems to be an exemplar for other people to follow as they seek to be good Christians, particularly those who lived as soldiers before their conversion.[115] Guthlac is doubtful he will be able to be absolved of all the sins from his soldiering, but comes to the realization that he does not need to live a perfect life, what will absolve him is living as good a life as he can.[116] This means that anybody could live a Christian life even if limitations were placed upon them by their position in society. The life of St. Guthlac therefore creates the precedent for those living in the ASs warrior culture to be able to convert to Christianity and still maintain a place within their warrior culture as well as having a place within Christianity. Through the *Life of St. Guthlac*, the AS warriors are shown that by consciously trying to live a

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[113] The Felix of Crowland, *Life of Saint Guthlac*, trans. by Charles Goodwin and available on the Internet Archive. This version will be used as the translation for this study. St. Guthlac lived 673-714.

[114] The *Life of Saint Guthlac* has been found to be historically accurate by Meaney in "Felix's Life of St. Guthlac."

[115] The idea of lives being used as exemplars is discussed by Niles in the article "Pagan Survivals and Popular Belief" (6) wherein it is explained that these proved the human capacity for sanctity and God's willingness to aid in human affairs.

[116] Goodwin ¸*Life of Saint Guthlac*, Chapter 4.

holy life they will be forgiven, even if they cannot be perfect or had committed previous sins. One example of how trying to live a holy life occurs when demons try to convince Guthlac to imitate God by fasting for six days. Guthlac, however, understood that this was beyond his capabilities, and that it would be blasphemous to try to make himself equal to God in this manner.[117] Instead, Guthlac remained within the bounds of what he was able to do to be a good Christian, and fasted for shorter periods of time when he did fast. Guthlac routinely interacted with demons but was always able to overcome them through reason or through the "weapons of Christ's cross, and the shield of the holy faith."[118] Although Guthlac was tempted by these demons, through his faith he was then able to overcome them and continue his religious life.

Conclusions

These lives of saints support the understanding that monasteries were centres of conversion and missionary activity in AS England. This, however, is not surprising since such success in conversion is expected amongst hagiographic texts which were created with the intention of showing successful Christian lives. In addition, we are shown the continuation of Irish practices in these monasteries until after Council of Whitby, when we see a shift to more Roman practices. The nobility was usually the first point of religious conversion in order for the missionaries to gain access to the land and support for a broader conversion of the laity. It has also been shown what could happen to a monastery and its abbot when they lost the support of the local nobility, which could destroy a Christian mission.[119]

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[117] Goodwin ˏ *Life of Saint Guthlac*, Chapter 5.
[118] Goodwin, *Life of Saint Guthlac*, Chapter 8.
[119] While the Christian mission of St. Wilfrid was not destroyed in this case, since the Christian faith was already spread through the laity at the time, it would be beneficial to review the life of St. Willibrord, who was an AS monk who preached in Friesland. When he lost the support of the nobles, his mission completely collapsed, and the people reverted to their previous practices quite quickly. Willibrord's *Life* can be found on the Fordham internet sourcebook at https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/alcuin-willbrord.asp.

Chapter 3: Evidence of Conversion in Anglo-Saxon Poetry

As has been demonstrated in previous chapters, the histories of AS conversion do not

cover the entire complexities of converting a group of people *en masse* from their traditional

religion to a new one. By looking at principally Christian sources so far, it has been

demonstrated that the histories and hagiographies each provide a different image of the process

of conversion, where the histories show a homogenous change from paganism to Christianity,

while the hagiographies show a broader oral-preaching tradition which relied on a top-down

conversion of the people. In this chapter, AS poetry will be the focus of inquiry. This is a more

traditionally AS literary genre which was a central part of the oral tradition and therefore likely

to have been more accessible to the common people.[120] While many of these sources have been

written down and clearly Christianised, the underlying pagan traditions form the foundation upon

which the Christianised poems were built.[121] The four main sources of AS poetry consist of the

Junius, Exeter, Vercelli, and Nowell Codices.[122] Of these, the first three will be examined

directly while the Nowell will be discussed in comparison with the others. The comparison with

the Nowell Codex will occur within each of the other manuscript parts because it is the pinnacle

of the AS poetry and incorporates aspects of all three other works in it, as well as the *Beowulf*

epic. All four of these books were written around the same time, from the late 10th to the early

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[120] Frank discusses the 'unanimous opinion of scholars that short, narrative songs, or lays, were the most important instrument for transmitting Germanic legend' in "Germanic Legend in Old English Literature" (84). Orchard discusses the oral-formulaic theory in his 2003 article "Looking for an Echo". This is also why there is a clear focus in these poems on listening, with the first line of Beowulf, the most prominent AS poem, literally being a call to listen to the story as if being told orally to a group of people.

[121] Cherniss discusses the success of Roman Christianity's assimilation of other cultures in "The Cross as Christ's Weapon" (251). Here, Cherniss makes it clear that whenever practical, the Christians advocated for fusions of culture from various paganisms into their own teachings and customs.

[122] The shelf marks for these works are as follows: Junius: MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 11; Exeter: MS Exeter, Cathedral Library, 3051; Vercelli: MS Vercelli, Biblioteca Capitolare, CXVII; Nowell: MS London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A VX. Translations of these works are all taken from Williamson's *Complete Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (2017).

11th centuries.[123] While this is shortly after the end of the conversion period – roughly 597-798 –

all of the codices record stories and concepts which certainly originate as oral stories during the

Christian conversion period or earlier. A careful analysis of these texts shows underlying pagan

influence and also highlights Christian concerns about the recent conversion of the AS peoples.

Further, the Christianisation of these poems can help shed light on how the poetic practices of

the AS culture were adopted into the conversion process.[124] The Junius, Vercelli, and Exeter

codices will all be analysed both for overarching themes present in each text as well as some

textual analysis. The themes are all reflected in the *Beowulf* epic found in the Nowell codex,

which will be touched upon where appropriate.

<u>The Junius Manuscript</u>

This study into AS poetry begins with the Junius manuscript because it is the most

biblically-oriented of the poetic collections. Containing the versified AS *Genesis*, *Exodus*, and

Daniel, as well as a poem entitled *Christ and Satan*. This manuscript clearly originated within a

Christian context and was adapted to fit the AS culture. In the case of *Genesis*, the Junius

manuscript follows the biblical version reasonably closely, with a little more detail added in the

account of Lucifer's fall, and the temptation of Adam and Eve being done by one of Lucifer's

allied fallen angels instead of by the archangel himself. The extra detail of Lucifer's fall coupled

with the use of the term "*thane*" to describe angels lays the foundation for the overall theme of

this book: that of fall and redemption. By casting the angels as *thanes* – members of the AS

warrior class which should be loyal their king or leader – Lucifer is made into a bad thane

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[123] Saltzman, "Junius Manuscript" in the *Encyclopedia of British Medieval Literature* (1-3).
[124] Clearly the poetic practice was prevalent enough that the English monks brought it with them to the monasteries. Caedmon (fl. 657-684), a revered saint, is very well known due to his ability to create Christian scriptural poetry in AS poetic verse and language (as opposed to using Latin).

because he does not follow their warrior code and is instead disloyal. Lucifer wants to be "a god / and command an army of warrior-angels, / Fierce troops who will not fail [Lucifer] in battle."[125] As the angels are made equivalent to thanes, God would be their king, and therefore this statement would read as a thane who wants to gather support from other thanes and establish himself as a king in his own right. This clearly goes against AS culture which values loyalty toward their king, particularly from within the warrior class. A prominent example of how AS society valued loyalty is also displayed in *Beowulf*, where Beowulf is showered with gifts from King Hrothgar for his work, and he continues to act as a good retainer, promising aid should Hrothgar's people ever need him.[126] Beowulf clearly could well have gathered his troops, and probably some of Hrothgar's, and challenged Hrothgar's right to rule, but he did not do this since it was not culturally appropriate. Instead, Beowulf offers Hrothgar future aid should the king need it, as befitted a thane who had received gifts from a king. The ideal relationship between a thane and king is reinforced later when Beowulf enters his final battle with the dragon and only one of his thanes remains. This thane is rewarded for his service and loyalty.[127] Lucifer's downfall is then coupled with the downfall of mankind: the temptation of Adam and Eve.[128] In the AS version it is one of Lucifer's demons who tempts the couple rather than Lucifer himself, in parallel to the role of the snake in the canonical passage. The importance here, however, is that the downfall happens as a reinforcement of the central concept of falling from grace. This theme fits into the narrative of AS conversions through the redemption of those who have fallen. As

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[125] Williamson, Junius MS: Genesis, 292-294. See Isaiah 14:12-17 in the Vulgate Bible for the related Latin biblical passage.

[126] Beowulf receives rewards for his feats in Williamson, *Beowulf*, lines 1019-1059 and promises aid in lines 1818-1821.

[127] As described in Williamson, *Beowulf*, lines 2595-2598, "His noble companions did not keep courage- / They crept from the cave, fled to the wood, / deserting their prince, protecting their loves. / Only one stayed-his heart was true," and the reward is given in 2808-2811, where Beowulf gives Wiglaf the gifts Hrothgar had previously given to him.

[128] Genesis 3:1-7.

humans, the ASs have also fallen from grace, and the fact they did not practice Christianity would be seen as them simply not yet having achieved the redemption that those other nations who turned to Christianity had attained.

As the theme of the fall is found in the AS *Genesis* story, the redemption is found in the following poem, the *Exodus*. Just as the other poems of this manuscript, it is based on the biblical story of *Exodus* and follows the Jewish people's flight from Egypt and turn to God. The Israelites in this story, however, clearly represent ASs, since the writer introduces seafaring themes throughout the poem which are reminiscent of *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*, both being known points of reference for the audience.[129] This poem also includes common tropes of AS poetry in its descriptions of the Israelites who are described as sailors, thanes, and fighting in a shield wall.[130] The poem even describes the Egyptians in a way which would be understandable to the AS people as their king and his men have helmets, rattling mail shirts, and a sword, all of which are used to distinguish soldiers and military ranking in the *Beowulf* poem.[131] By the end of the poem the Israelites, who have been set up as a quasi-AS group, have turned to God, made their journey through the desert, and thus been redeemed from their sins.

The AS version of *Daniel* is set immediately following the Jews' flight from Egypt recorded in *Exodus*, actually including a quick summary of this flight at the beginning of the

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[129] While these references are made throughout the Williamson AS *Exodus*, 134 clearly describes the men of Israel as soldiers and sailors.

[130] Williamson, *Exodus*, 134, 246, and 249. The shield wall was one of the battle formations which the AS used. It is similar in structure to a phalanx and this may be what the term was meant to represent though to my knowledge there is no evidence or biblical description in which the Jews actually fought the Egyptians in a phalanx formation.

[131] For the related canonical text see the Vulgate Bible Exodus 14:7-31. The description of different armour on the people in Williamson, *Beowulf* 369-399 would indicate to the listeners which military position each person had. In the Williamson Junius MS *Exodus*, lines 185-186 provide the description of the entire army being equipped, thus showing that they were a war-ready force of elite soldiers since all the people had items which would identify them as prolific warriors in the AS culture. How such weapons and arms are used in AS poetry to show peoples' ranks is discussed in more detail in Meter, "The Ritualized Presentation of Weapons and the Ideology of Nobility in Beowulf."

poem. It focuses on the hardships which the Jews underwent during their travels, in particular

during their time in Babylon. Here the lines 286-370 overlap with the first 80 lines of the *Three*

Youths, a poem that is found in the Exeter book, and is discussed in more detail later.[132]

Throughout the story, the Jews struggle against the immorality of the Babylonians, who even go

so far as to build an idol, contrary to God's warning.[133] The Babylonians further punish the Jews

on several occasions, and the poem ends with a final punishment of the Babylonians as they have

become too prideful, so God gives power to the Persians and Medes to conquer them.[134] God

saves the Jews here due to their faith, since they were redeemed when they fled Egypt and they

continued to be faithful thereafter. The end of the poem serves as a clear warning of what the

punishments would be for falling away from Christianity; God's patience, however, is also

emphasized as he waits "three generations" before punishing the descendants of the

Chaldeans.[135] This poem also shares an important link with *Exodus* through the use of virtue, or

"*maegen*," which occurs throughout both texts. In *Daniel*, "*maegen*" is used to show spiritual

power and virtue which is beyond human capacity, and links this Christian concept of spiritual

power with a pre-Christian form of spiritual power. This concept of Christian spiritual power

which is available to pre-Christian people connects again to *Beowulf* where the hero is described

as having *maegen* throughout the text, likening him to a pre-Christian holy man because of the

maegen which he possesses. Importantly the two poems, *Exodus* and *Daniel,* also focus on the

Jews who have a similar history to the AS people in that they too continually fell into irreligious

practices before being sent a prophet who would reform and redeem them.[136]

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[132] Full title of the poem: *Azarias: The Suffering and Songs of the Three Youths*.
[133] Williamson, *Daniel*, 168-172. Daniel 3:1-100.
[134] The punishment of the youths is the punishment for the Jews, covering lines 218-270, and the power given to the Persians and Medes appears on line 705.
[135] Williamson, *Daniel*, 700.
[136] See Kears, "Old English Maegen," where the author highlights the connection between the two poems.

The next poem is entitled *Christ and Satan* and contains evidence of both fall and redemption narratives. This poem is centered around the punishment of the devil and the redemption of humankind in the final judgement. As such it has strong ties with the *Judgement Day* poems and *Christ III: Judgement*; in order to understand the *Christ and Satan* poem, one must take into account its intertextual links between the three texts.[137] In this poem Lucifer laments about his lost place in Heaven and Earth, describing how he misses the "hall-joy" of heaven, and claims he wanted to be "the gift-giver" in the place of God.[138] This lamentation reinforces the ideas from the *Genesis* story that Lucifer was being set up as a deceitful retainer to God. As we will see in the Vercelli manuscript, God was considered the ultimate gift-giver, therefore all should be loyal to him if they follow AS cultural values.[139] This idea that he misses the hall-joy also brings to mind the hall-joy found in *Beowulf*, where after the defeat of Grendel, Heorot rejoices and the hall is full of joy, drinking, and gift-giving. All of this is part of the initial section of *Christ and Satan* which emphasizes how bad the loss and punishment were for Lucifer's rebellion, extending from line 1 to line 386 out of the total 793 lines.

All of these themes reflect the main concerns the Church had for the AS people: apostasy and redemption. The presence of apostasy and redemption in biblical passages is not surprising as they are themes found within the bible itself. It is the inclusion of only stories which concern themselves with apostasy and redemption in the AS poetic version of biblical passages that shows that redemption and apostasy was of concern. This is particularly important as poetry was the main way in which AS society communicated their own history and stories, so by including these passages in poetic verse they are likely to have also been shared by AS communities

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[137] These can be found in the Exeter MS, pages 554-560 and 341-364 respectively in Williamson's translation.
[138] Williamson, *Christ and Satan*, 106 and 189.
[139] A thorough explanation of the role of the gift-giver in AS communal ties can be found in Clemoes' *Interaction of Thought and Language in Old English Poetry* (1995).

beyond those already converted. Throughout the conversion period, the AS people apostatized

several times before returning to the faith. This would understandably create a concern among

Christian preachers that these lay converts would continue to turn to apostasy and so created a

need to highlight the importance of returning to the faith. Thus, in response to this concern

surrounding apostasy, it made sense to highlight the continual struggle to maintain faith, and the

redeeming power of Christ. Through this emphasis the benefits of returning to Christianity

through the power of redemption, even for an apostate, were made clear to the AS audience of

these poems.

<u>The Vercelli Codex</u>

The Vercelli Codex contains the *Life of Saint Andrew in the Country of the Cannibals*, *Soul

and Body, the Fates of the Apostles, Homiletic Fragment: On Human Deceit, The Dream of the

Rood,* and *Helena's Discovery of the True Cross*, all written in verse. Much like the Junius

manuscript, all these stories hold centrally to Christian doctrine, but with strong evidence of

pagan influence. This strong pagan influence provides a central theme for the codex, that of

Christians as spiritual warriors, befitting a place in a warrior culture. In addition to this theme,

there is also evidence of the clergy's concern for further apostasy of the ASs and reflections of

Irish missionary practices which were discussed previously in Chapter 1.[140]

The Vercelli manuscript begins with the story of *St. Andrew among the Cannibals*. While

there is no known direct Latin source for this story, it is believed that a Greek source heavily

influenced by the *Beowulf* story resulted in this version of St. Andrew's life.[141] The beginning of

the story focuses on Andrew being afraid. He does not wish to go to the land of the cannibals,

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[140] See Chapter 1 "The Irish and Scottish Missions" (7-11).
[141] As discussed in Williamson's preface to the poem in his *The Complete Old English Poems* (188-189).

but his fear of God drives him to obey God's command and make the journey, leading him to

free the Apostle Mathew and some 289 prisoners.[142] The rest of this story hinges on his

conversion of the cannibals, as Andrew already tried to convert the captain of the ship that had

brought him to the cannibals' island. In order to convert the captain, Andrew offers to preach to

him of God's grace and mercy. Unbeknownst to Andrew, however, the captain is in fact God,

and thus is already faithful. In his attempts to convert the cannibals, Andrew again offers

heavenly rewards and preaches them the word of God. Although this at first garners him no

favours, Andrew then saves the cannibals from a flood, causing them to convert quickly and

follow his teachings. Further, when Andrew tries to leave the island, he makes it a small distance

into the ocean before he is told by God to return since his flock is young and will easily revert to

their former ways if they do not receive further instruction.[143] Andrew obeys this instruction,

returns to the cannibals and remains there for seven days, ensuring that they will remain devout

Christians before he leaves again. This episode reflects Irish missionary practices which saw

preachers converting and training the locals enough that they would be able to continue the

missionary practice, ensuring the success of the mission through it becoming self-sustaining.

Baptism by itself was not enough for true conversion, since more instruction was required.[144]

Throughout this story, both Matthew and Andrew are also routinely described as warriors, and

the missionary work is described as a battle or battlefield.[145] The sheer abundance of these

references to warrior culture show that Christianity was in a continuous fight; therefore, the

pursuit of absolute faith could be a respectable activity within the AS's warrior culture.

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[142] Williamson, *Andreas*, 1062-1065.
[143] Reading, "Baptism, Conversion and Selfhood" (8).
[144] The missionary practices of the Irish have been discussed in the Irish Missionaries section of Chapter 1 of this thesis or can be found in Godfrey, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon England* (57-58).
[145] These descriptions can be found throughout the poem, specific examples can be found on lines 4, 929, 950, and 1322 of the Williamson text. This list, however, is not exhaustive.

Following the story of St. Andrew is the *Fates of the Apostles* and the *Soul and Body* fragment. The latter is a short text which highlights the effects of the current life on the afterlife. Here it is made clear that heavenly rewards are great for those who practice their faith as good Christians, and the punishment is severe for those who do not. This poem emphasizes the importance of conversion and the value of the rewards for leading a Christian life. This emphasis on rewards relates to the AS practice of gift exchange, which is how they maintained their social hierarchy. So, by demonstrating the clear value of the gift that these preachers were providing, the poem opened a position for these preachers within the social hierarchy.[146] *Soul and Body* also pairs well with the preceding poem, the *Fates of the Apostles*. Here the apostles are again described throughout as warriors on the battleground of faith, travelling the world and converting people.[147] Conversion, however, is not the focus of this poem; instead, it is the deaths of the apostles. In each case they are shown to die heroically, without crying out in pain and without complaint when they are all killed in the battle of faith. In the next short poem, the *Homiletic Fragment on Human Deceit*, there is a clear call, again, for the listeners to be truthful, not deceitful, if they are to be considered good Christians. Overall, these three poems together provide examples of why being a Christian is a good thing and appropriate for a warrior culture, which is in keeping with the overall theme of the Vercelli Codex.

The final two poems are heavily interconnected, that of the *Dream of the Rood* and *Helena's Discovery of the True Cross*. In the *Dream of the Rood* Jesus is routinely described as a warrior and shares several descriptors with Beowulf. As Beowulf strips off his weapons before battle with Grendel so as to fight him with a supernaturally strong hand grip, so too does Jesus not use

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[146] This exchange of goods for service or fealty is in Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom* (330-335).
[147] Apostles are described as "Noble heroes who showed great courage" and "battle-bold warrior" Williamson, *Fates of the Apostles,* lines 4 and 24 respectively, among other passages throughout the poem.

weapons in his spiritual fight which begins on the cross.[148] In addition, the cross trembles at

Christ's embrace in a similar capacity to how Grendel trembles at Beowulf's handgrip.[149] Other

shared aspects here are the resurrection, as Christ's rise from the dead mirrors that of Beowulf's

rise from the lair of Grendel's mother.[150] In addition to this obvious comparison between Christ

and the pinnacle of AS heroism, the poem also confirms Christ's crucifixion, ascent to heaven,

redemption of sins, and return for the final judgement. Through this poem, there is a transition

from fear when the author reports seeing the rood for the first time, to sorrow as the poet

understands what he is seeing and recalls Christ's death, to the hope of everlasting life which the

crucifixion brings. This pattern is repeated in *Helena's Discovery* with the conversion of Judas

who fears telling the truth of the cross because it will cause the downfall of his religion, then

feels sorrow for keeping the secret, and finally comes to hope when he does convert to

Christianity. In each case, these stages of fear, sorrow, and hope can also represent the

conversion process, as people would fear losing their worldly ties and their relationships with

their family if they converted. Then, during their catechumenate, they may feel sorry for leaving

their families' religion, abandoning their ancestors, or various other impacts of changing religion

in a time and place where one's religious affiliation was socially important. Finally, they would

come to hope in their new religion as their faith would grant them everlasting life.[151] This turn

from fear to sorrow to hope would reflect the conversion experience of many ASs. The people

may fear converting because it would ostracize them from their family or culture, they may feel

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[148] Williamson, *Dream of the Rood*, 42-43 and Williamson, *Beowulf*, 675-687. The hand grip being supernaturally strong implies that it is enabled by Christian virtue and in fact uses a double-entendre in order to portray this through the use of the *maegan* discussed in Kears, "Old English Maegen".
[149] Williamson, *Dream of the Rood*, 46 and *Beowulf*, 749-754.
[150] See Williamson, *Beowulf*, lines 1590-1617 where, while Beowulf is under the water it is stained with blood, leading people to believe he is dead. Despite this his retainers remain, willing their lord to be alive. When he eventually surfaces, those who stayed behind rejoice.
[151] Burrow, "An Approach to the *Dream of the Rood*" (133).

sorrow for the actions they took before converting, or for having lost connection with their family, but finally they would also have the hope granted to them through Christianity that their afterlife would be saved.

The tale of *Helena's Discovery of the True Cross* follows Constantine as he conquers Rome under the Christian symbol and sends his mother, Helena, to find the true cross. The story of Constantine's vision of the rood seems to reflect the preceding poem, but it only takes up thirty lines of the 1,321 total lines in the poem. In this account, Constantine sees the rood and conquers under its sign. The use of the rood here reflects the AS practice seen in Chapter 1, where a king would not adopt the new religion until it had been proven more powerful than his traditional gods, usually in the context of a battle. As such, there are several accounts of AS kings going to war under the sign of the cross in a very similar way to what Constantine did at the Milvian Bridge.[152] This story also focuses on the importance of a queen, Helena, who is integral to the conversion process. As Helena is searching for the true cross, she is able to convert the Jew who had been tasked with its concealment. This episode reflects the missionary call from the Church to its people as Helena herself becomes a missionary, and the Jews are a non-Christian group that struggles to admit the truth of the Christian faith and convert. Throughout the conversion of Judas, the Jew charged with hiding the cross, he undergoes intense spiritual battles as he struggles internally with a change in faith while receiving instruction from Helena, which can be interpreted as representing the catechumenate journey that a new Christian would undergo.[153] She is then credited with retrieving the cross and returning it to her son, which reflects the historic fact that Helena was a Christian and likely would have taught her son something about

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[152] See Harris, "Constantine's Dream," where the battle of the Milvian Bridge is described.
[153] For a more detailed account of the conversion process and how this is reflected in the story of Helena, see Regan, "Evangelicism as the Informing Principle."

Christianity before his vision at the Milvian Bridge or his deathbed baptism. The episode also reflects the importance of AS women, in particular queens, in the conversion of the AS people.[154] This poem also ends with the gifting of the nails from the cross to be made into bits for Constantine's war horse, which again serves to emphasize the idea of Christianity as a warrior cult.

Overall, the Vercelli Codex clearly emphasizes a warrior background which is being appended to Christianity through the stories which the manuscript contains. This is done through the heroic exploits of saints and apostles who were willing to die trying to bring others to their faith. In the end, it is shown that Christianity clearly has the strongest God as the emperor Constantine conquers under the sign of the rood, which is also reflected in the AS histories. Some importance is also placed on the role of women in the conversion of the kingdoms through the story of Helena, which shows how a mother may be important in the conversion of her son and the propagation of the faith in the face of opposition. The poems in the Vercelli manuscript show that the church was concerned with providing a place within Christianity which reflected the values of the AS lay warrior class, providing them a place within AS Christian practice. This manuscript clearly tries to show that Christianity in fact was the hardest warrior lifestyle one could strive for, as maintaining the faith and converting others was a constant battle.

The Exeter Manuscript

Finally, the Exeter manuscript is the largest of the AS poetic collections, comprising 130 folios of poetry that cover 300 pages in Williamson's translation.[155] With 37 stories and 91

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[154] See Chapter 2 for examples of the AS women who converted many people through monasteries or Chapter 1 for more details on the roles of queens in converting their husbands.
[155] Williamson, *The Complete Old English Poems* (299-599).

riddles, it is roughly the same length as the other three poetic anthologies combined. This being

said, there are very few long poems in this work, with the two versions of the life of St. Guthlac,

titled *Guthlac A* and *B*, *The Phoenix*, and the *Life of Juliana* being the only poems which exceed

a handful of pages. The Exeter manuscript focuses on the rewards of converting to Christianity

by portraying God as the ultimate gift-giver, making him greater than any king.[156] In addition,

the Exeter manuscript emphasizes finding Christianity as a way to lead a more fulfilling life and

a way to escape from the dread of dying.

Two poetic versions of the hagiography of the popular saint Guthlac begin the Exeter Codex.

Guthlac, born to a noble Mercian family, spent several years as a successful Mercian warrior.

Eventually, he turned to Christianity and made his way into the forest in order to live a more

holy life.[157] During his time in the forest, he routinely battled with demons, who were unable to

deter him from a righteous path. These episodes reflect the lives of monks, particularly hermit

monks like the early preachers from Ireland who were known to have sought isolation even from

their own monasteries at times.[158] Further, this fight with demons reflects Guthlac's status as a

warrior and shows that despite his turning to Christianity, he was still a warrior, but with demons

as new enemies. Guthlac never explicitly won this fight against the demons, instead they

continued to try to turn him away from Christianity for the remainder of his life. Ultimately, the

demons were unsuccessful and Guthlac received his rewards. The rewarding of the just and

righteous is described in detail from line 796 to the end of the poem, a little shy of a hundred

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[156] This section follows the ideas of Clemoes, *Interactions of Thought and Language in Old English Poetry* (3-68).
Clemoes makes it clear that the highest-ranking kings were the ones who gave the most to other people. By
portraying God as having gifted everyone with various things, both spiritually and physically, he becomes the best
gift-giver. The idea that they would accept spiritual gifts as legitimate gifts comes through the Irish missionary
traditions as found in Marnell, *A Light from the West* (14-27).
[157] As discussed in the introduction to the poem by Williamson, *The Complete Old English Poetry* (364).
[158] De Bhaldraithe, "Bishops and Presbyters in Early Christian Ireland" (74); Marnell, *Light from the West* (14-27);
Hill, "Christianity in Britain, 300–700" (123-151).

lines later, in *Guthlac A*, representing one tenth of the entire poem. This substantial proportion, along with its prominent position at the end of the story, serves to emphasize the importance of the episode, as well as to aid in its retention by the audience. Therefore, it is understood that showing the reward, the gift given by God, for remaining devout was of great importance to the poet. This gift then also shows that Guthlac, and subsequently other devout Christians, have nothing to fear in death as their reward is greater than anything they could receive in life. While the promise of the reward to a good Christian life being a good afterlife is a common trope to hagiographies, it does not detract from this example but explains why it would be so useful in evangelizing the ASs, since it reflects the concepts of mutual gift-giving and provides a place for the AS warrior culture within good Christian practice. This example shows that a warrior can convert to Christianity and still be both loved by God and considered a successful warrior for the rest of his days, encouraging other warriors to convert, even if they cannot be quite as devout as Guthlac.[159]

These concepts carry forward into the story of *Azarias: The Suffering and Songs of the Three Youths*, and well as that of *The Phoenix*. Azarias focuses on the worship of God as the bestower of gifts upon humankind, with particular emphasis between lines 18 to 21 where the three youths reveal that their ancestors were heathens, but they have now turned to God and exhort Him for protection that He provides the faithful.[160] This is clearly analogous to the conversion of the pagan AS peoples to Christianity. The story shows that those who come from pagan families, if they convert, will still be rewarded by God despite their forebearers' religion. The concept that a convert would not be doomed due to coming from a pagan family highlights the AS concern for

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[159] Reichardt, "*Guthlac A* and the Landscape of Spiritual Perfection." (337).
[160] The exhortation for protection can be found on lines 1-156.

their forefathers' actions as well as the idea that those who lived prior to Christianity, if they led a holy life even without knowledge of God, could still receive heavenly rewards. This second concept is also found in the *Beowulf* epic through the Christian virtues being shown. *Beowulf* is clearly set in a pre-Christian time, yet the warrior gives credit to God, shows parallels to the story of Christ, and overall represents good Christian values throughout.[161] Beyond *Beowulf*, Christians also accepted the idea that enlightened pre-Christian people had existed, as there were people who were thought to have come to an understanding of God without being Christian, among whom stand Plato.[162] *The Phoenix* poem ties in well with this idea of conversion as it is an allegory for the process of conversion which new Christians would undergo.[163]

Following these poems is the story of *Juliana*. Here is the second story in which we are shown the importance of women in the conversion of the ASs. The poem begins by having *Juliana* demand the conversion of her husband if she is to marry him, something that the AS queens did not do, though they likely did play a role in pressuring their husbands into the new faith.[164] Juliana shows different values from those of a traditional hero who would fight in a physical battle. The actions she does take, however, are also worthy of heroic praise as she does not falter in faith, fighting a spiritual battle, even to her death.[165] Though the values displayed by Juliana seem to step away from the themes of this codex, it is in fact in keeping with the values

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[161] Robinson, "The Language of Paganism" discusses the religion of the monk who wrote *Beowulf* and compares the religious practices being shown in order to explain how the previous AS pagan religion was understood and how it was being portrayed in a way which incorporated Christian values and practices.

[162] See St. Augustine of Hippo's *Confessions* 7, 13 for information on the influence of Greek philosophers on his thought.

[163] Garde, *Old English Poetry in Medieval Christian Perspective* (196).

[164] In Williamson, *Juliana*, 45-55, she refuses to marry unless he converts. We have discussed the female nobility who ran monasteries in Chapter 2, which shows the role of some women in promoting the conversion of more people. In Chapter 1, however, we also took note of those Christian queens who married pagan kings and were exhorted by the pope to convert their husbands. This reflects the idea that if a Christian woman were to be betrothed to a pagan, she should try to convert him to Christianity.

[165] Schneider, "Cynewulf's Devaluation of Heroic Tradition in Juliana." describes the use of heroic diction in the *Juliana* poem to also convey her role as a heroic figure.

of a heroic lifestyle being available to Christians, as she dies as an heroic martyr for her faith. Furthermore, God is shown as a gift-giver, for he grants Juliana the death of her husband for his refusal to convert. He gifts her a reprieve from death by saving her from the fire before finally giving her a swift death via beheading to receive her reward in heaven.

Following the *Juliana*, the remaining thirty AS poems in this book all center around the same themes of God being the greatest gift-giver, and a good Christian life resulting in a good afterlife. The concepts of loss and grief can be found in several poems, most readily *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, each of which focuses on an exile who is able to find solace in turning to Christianity. God as the greatest gift-giver can be found in several poems, but most abundantly in the *Gift of Men*. The *Gift of Men* is a 121-line poem which explains how all of mankind's abilities are gifts from God. Finally, several poems, such as *Precepts: A Father's Instructions*, mix in familiar calls to proper Christian practice. Overall, the message from the Exeter manuscript is clear: God has gifted everything mankind has and is able to do; loss and grief can be replaced with faith, as faith provides for the soul what worldly goods cannot; and that there is still a concern for apostasy among the ASs.

Overall, the AS poetic works of the Junius, Vercelli, and Exeter manuscripts all connect with the Nowell manuscript's *Beowulf* poem in various ways to show how the AS could convert and still uphold their societies' values. By showing God as the ultimate gift-giver, the Exeter manuscript sets Christianity up as the correct faith according to the AS custom of gift-giving in return for service and submission. The Vercelli shows the idea that Christianity is a warrior cult, not so far removed from the pagan warrior culture which the AS upheld beforehand. The Junius manuscript shows that the history of the Jews mirrors that of the ASs and that under God a people can fall and yet still be redeemed for their sins. All these themes interconnect with the

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Beowulf story of the Nowell Codex which acts as the ultimate culmination of the process of

fusion between Christianity and AS paganism. All of the above demonstrates that there was an

acceptance among the AS church of AS poetic practice as a form of storytelling which could be

recorded and used to convey the AS church's message to the laity.[166]

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[166] I use the term recorded because these poems certainly existed in an oral form for several generations, often dating into the conversion period, before they were eventually written down by churchmen. How much change these poems underwent prior to emerging in their current form cannot, however, be known as they are the only surviving forms of the poems in AS. It should also be noted that the act of adopting and adapting different religions to gain adherents was not unique to the ASs nor to Christianity, as various Roman religions are known to have adopted and adapted many aspects of other religions, such as gods, philosophies, and symbols, into their own, such as the use of Apollo in the cult worship of Sol Invictus, or in the conflation of Sol Invictus and Christ under Constantine the Great. See Pritchard, "The Sun the Moon and the Zodiacal Stars: The Microcosmic Caves of the Mithraic Cult" and Pritchard, "Pagan Polytheism Hidden in the Christian Canon: The Surprising Origins of Christian Traditions" for more information on absorption of religious practices and beliefs between religions in antiquity.

Chapter 4: Other Sources

Thus far, the focus has been on written sources which survive from the period 600-1000.

There is, however, a particular problem with using solely written sources when discussing the

ASs due to the lack of writing among them prior to the introduction of Christianity. Since writing

was spread and popularized by Christianity, all of the writings which survive, particularly from

the earliest periods, are recorded by Christian writers.[167] In this chapter, we will investigate

primarily archaeological sources such as burials, human remains, grave goods, as well as diet,[168]

in order to determine further how conversion occurred by examining the lifestyle and culture of

the ASs because a large religious shift should affect both these areas of life.[169] In addition to AS

archeology, the special legal status of priests will also be explored briefly. These other sources

will be compared with the events described in narrative sources to corroborate the findings of the

other chapters.

Burials

Changes in religious practice can be seen through the changing burial customs of the AS

people throughout the conversion period. Changes in burial practice are historically and

anthropologically linked with changes in religious practice, or with great environmental change.

As there were no great environmental changes during the beginning of the conversion period,[170]

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[167] The historical unreliability of Bede's *HE* is brought up in Higham, "Bede's Agenda in Book IV," while the veracity of the *ASC* is discussed in Brooks, "Why is the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle about Kings?"

[168] Diet was reviewed as part of this study, but the findings in dietary change (via analysis of isotopic data as well as butchered bones) show no significant difference across the period of christianization. For more information on dietary changes see Hanah, McLaughlan, Keaveny, Hackenbeck, "Anglo-Saxon Diet in the Conversion Period" and Poole "Horses for Courses" (321).

[169] Such changes can be found in changes to food consumption across Europe throughout the Middle Ages as discussed by Hoffman in "Frontier Foods for Late Medieval Consumers: Culture, Economy, Ecology."

[170] There is some overlap in the end of the conversion period with the beginning of the medieval warm period, however the grave sites and cemeteries included in this study were all in use well before the warm period, with the period 650-750AD as the starting point of when these cemeteries were in use. Burial practices do change over time, but no correlation has been shown between these changes and the medieval warm period.

the former option is the one which remains.[171] In AS England, there were three burial types: ship

burials, mound or barrow burials, and Christian burials. We will begin by looking at the ship

burials because the practice predates the AS invasions of England. Thus, the few ship burials

within AS England which survive are thought by modern scholars to be a way of connecting the

people to their ancestral past as well as a way of uniting the different peoples who served under a

nobleman rich enough to perform such burials.[172] In total there are five ship burials dating to the

AS period: Ashby Dell, Catfield, Caister-on-Sea, Snape, and Sutton Hoo.[173] Unfortunately, only

Sutton Hoo has been found intact. The other four have received significantly less scholarly

attention due to ambiguity in the nature of the sites as well as the locations having been disturbed

and/or robbed.[174] There is, however, a description of a ship burial within the *Beowulf* poem,

where the body of a deceased king is described as being sent to sea in a ship laden with

treasure.[175] This description reflects the findings of the Sutton Hoo burial, wherein the ship was

filled with extravagant items which indicate the wealth of the individual buried there, although it

was not intended to be set to sea.[176] These ship burials were very rare, as the limited number of

them would suggest – likely because of the costs involved. The majority of AS burials occurred

in barrows or mounds. These are also described in *Beowulf*, as Beowulf himself was burned and

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[171] Classen, *Death in the Middle Ages* (59-79).

[172] The origins of ship burials are discussed in Pitt, "The Enigmatic Sutton Hoo Ship Burial" (9-20) and the idea of these connecting the people to their past is discussed in Tyler, "Offa's Dyke" and in Pearson, Van De Noort, and Woolf, "Three Men and a Boat."

[173] Pearson, Van De Noort, and Woolf "Three Men and a Boat" (41).

[174] According to the Norfolk Heritage website, the ship found at Caister-on-Sea in 1882, could have been a ship burial or part of a Roman boatyard; see http://www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk/record-details?MNF8675-Caister-on-Sea-Late-Roman. The 1830 find at Ashby Dell had the research papers burned by the researcher's landlady after his passing, according to heritage Suffolk, https://heritage.suffolk.gov.uk/Monument/MSF12522. The ship burial at Snape was found in 1862 but records of the find remain sketchy and looting left little behind aside from the shell of the ship as described at www.medievalists.net/2014/06/anglo-saxon-viking-ship-burial-british-museum. The only mention of the burial at Catfield that I have been able to gain access to is in "Three Men and a Boat" by Pearson, Van De Noort, and Woolf.

[175] Williamson, *Beowulf*, 30-40.

[176] Hamerow, Hinton, and Crawford, *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology* (279).

buried within a barrow in a prominent location near the sea with various treasures from his lifetime.[177] Within the barrow burials, the AS people included mementos of their lifetime, such as weapons, and grave goods which seem to have been decorative and/or useful in the afterlife, such as bowls, clothing, clips, and pendants.[178]

The identifiers for a non-pagan AS grave are complex and inconsistent across studies because the graves tend to have a mixture of markers of both Christian and pagan practices.[179] While these inconsistencies are problematic, they also support the argument that a combination of paganism and Christianity were practiced contemporaneously at various locations throughout England. The contemporary practice of the two religions shows that the kings were not able to force mass conversion, and also that those kings who did convert maintained a level of religious tolerance which allowed multiple forms of burial to be carried out. The transition from traditional AS burials to Christian burials is also different between rural and urban settings. Outside of monasteries, throughout the period of conversion, the most common method of burial involved bodies being inhumated while dressed in clothing. Within cities, however, burial was largely limited to designated areas which normally came under the control of a monastery or church. In these urban cemeteries of the early conversion period, burials were still accompanied by the traditional markers of occupation and military status through clothing and weaponry. Yet these burials also began to include specifically Christian artefacts, such as crosses. Around the middle of the 7th century, about 50 years after the start of St. Augustine's mission, it became common for nobles to be buried within a church, or in closely adjacent cemetery plots. These burials followed much more strictly the Christian practices of the time, particularly with the body

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[177] Williamson, *Beowulf*, 3135-3145.

[178] Hamerow, Hinton, and Crawford, *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology* (221-288).

[179] See Hamerow, Hinton, and Crawford, *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology* (221-288, 727-764, 779-824).

being buried in a shroud instead of wearing clothing.[180] It is of particular interest that this

occurred 50 years after St. Augustine's mission in 597, since that would put those being buried

as likely the ones who were children during the mission, and therefore would have grown up

almost entirely as Christians, probably unable to remember attending or partaking in pagan rites.

This lifetime of Christian practice may be the reason why a major shift in burial practices can be

observed around this time. Those who were buried prior to 650 spent a large part of their life

practicing the traditional AS pagan religion and would likely have witnessed traditional burials

and may still have wanted to be buried in a similar fashion to show they still had familial ties to

those who had died prior to conversion. In contrast, those being buried after 650 would have

spent most of their lifetime as Christians and likely would have been more accepting of having a

Christian burial.

Along with the changes in burial type, an evaluation of the type of artefacts found among

the grave goods and their decoration can also show the changes from the period of conversion.

The Staffordshire Hoard contains several examples, among which the Falcon ring is the most

prominent.[181] On the ring are images of interlaced birds, traditionally AS in design, as well as a

large cross held by an anthropomorphic figure who also holds a raptor bird in the other hand. The

cross represents Christianity, and the raptor is thought to represent a pagan god, likely Odin, with

the figure in the middle being a person who practices both faiths.[182] The hoard also contains a

sword pommel with two stallions thought to be representatives of Odin,[183] while a large golden

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[180] The different kinds of burial methods, locations, and artefacts can be found in Hamerow, Hinton, and Crawford, *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology* (221-288).

[181] For further information on the hoard as a whole, including artefacts, images, conservation methods and more, the reader should consult the Staffordshire Hoard organization whose website can be found at www.staffordshirehoard.org.uk.

[182] A full discussion of the Falcon ring in its context within the Staffordshire Hoard can be found in Wallis, *Northwest Essex Anglo-Saxon Ring* (414-419).

[183] Due to the importance of the horse in AS culture, it was considered a symbol of the king of the gods, Odin.

cross with animal interlace decoration is also present.[184] Since the hoard was assembled at a

single point in time means these items indicate that the two religions were both practiced

together within a small geographic area, and the ring shows them both being practiced by the

same person. A comparison of grave goods with other AS material artefacts has shown overlaps

in decorative style. A major aspect of AS artwork is the complexity of the images being woven

together: the more complex the decoration, the harder it was to see the detail on the item. This

makes the item a status symbol, as those nearer the wearer could make out more detail, and thus

they were recognized as having higher status than those farther away.[185] Wormald has suggested

that this is the reason the ASs decorated their gospels in intricate patterns, in order to show

visually the value of the work even to an illiterate population by imitating the decorative style

found on traditional artefacts which would reflect their value.[186]

Religious Sites

Some attention should also be paid to the location of Christian religious sites in relation

to AS pagan sites. Several churches dating to the conversion period have been found sharing a

location with pagan sites, or being in close proximity to them. These sites include henge

monuments, standing stones, earlier Roman buildings, as well as groves and marshes, all of

which were also traditional places of religious importance to the AS pagans.[187] It is thought that

the proximity of churches, such as Rudston in Yorkshire, to these locations is a result of Pope

Gregory's order to reuse the former pagan worship sites.[188] The existence of these physical sites

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[184] Objects 539 and 427.
[185] A discussion on the intricacy of AS design, as well as how these designs would indicate personal standing and status can be found in Pollington, "The Mead Hall Community." (23).
[186] Wormald, "Anglo-Saxon Society and its Literature" (3).
[187] Hamerow, Hinton, and Crawford, *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology* (751).
[188] Bede *HE*, Book 1 Chapter 30.

supports the idea proposed by modern scholars that the sites were purified through Christian presence on top of or within the previously pagan site. This modern notion stems from the idea that these sites were positioned near each other to follow the instruction for the integration or reuse of these sites in Pope Gregory's letter to Mellitus.[189] Sacred groves appear several times in Old English literature, such as the home of Grendel in *Beowulf*. Grendel emerges from within a grove or marsh where he and his mother lived.[190] In the prose *Life of St. Guthlac*, as well as in his poetic lives, we see the saint travel to one such marsh, knowing that it is rumored to be inhabited by demons. While living within the marsh, Guthlac faces these demons and survives. All of these cases show the trope of supernatural beings present in groves and marshes commonly found in AS writings. The *Life of St. Guthlac* shows us the concept that a pagan site could be purified through the presence of a Christian site being formed within or on top of it. The demons in Guthlac's life are representative of the AS monsters, and his conquest of these demons purifies the area metaphorically of the previous AS religious presence in the marsh. Groves appear in various other Old English works, namely *The Phoenix* where the phoenix seeks a grove in which it will die and be reborn, as well as *The Seafarer* and *St. Andreas* which both also describe the grove as a positive location, free of the demonic or monstrous inhabitation common to AS paganism.[191]

Laws

The Anglo-Saxon Dooms, or laws, written during the life of King Ethelbert of Kent are the first indication that the ASs included the priesthood as an explicit function within their

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[189] John Crook, *English Medieval Shrines* (17).
[190] Williamson, *Beowulf*, 103-104.
[191] Hooke, "Groves in Anglo-Saxon England" (8-10).

society. There is only one law written under Ethelbert which refers to the Church, which is also the first law in his law code and reads as follows:

> The property of God and of the church, twelvefold; a bishop's property, elevenfold; a priest's property, ninefold; a deacon's property, sixfold; a clerk's property, threefold; *churchfrith*,[192] twofold.[193]

At first glance, the inclusion of only a single law outlining the role of priests in AS society may seem to identify them as a marginal group. The detail, however, of all the different roles from bishop to a clerk indicates that these roles would have been reasonably common in order to justify their inclusion in this law code. This law clearly places the different rankings in the Church within the context of the AS legal system, where the penalty for any crime was a set fee multiplied by a set amount based on the rank of the victim. Therefore, if the fine was one shilling but was done against a *churchfrith*, the offender would pay two shillings, or three if against a clerk's property, six against a deacon's property, and so on. By defining the role of priests within this law code it has been posited that the ASs did not have an explicitly priestly class prior to this time in Kent. While this is the earliest surviving law code, prior to this there are no records of priests being mentioned within the legal system from court cases aside from being witnesses.[194]

The Laws of King Withread of Kent, written in 690-725, added to the existing laws and specified that men may clear themselves of crimes by swearing by Christ to tell the truth upon

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[192] The peace of a church, generally broken by attacking someone on church grounds or who had been given sanctuary by the Church at the house of a church member, such as a bishop, priest, or deacon.
[193] All laws are taken from the Fordham Internet History Sourcebook which uses Oliver J. Thatcher's edition in *The Library of Primary Sources* (NP). Laws of Aethlebehrt: 1.
[194] The inclusion of the priestly class is also unique among the Salic, Burgundian, and Lombard laws. It is understood that the Lombard laws do not mention a weregild for the church or churchmen because they fell under the rules of Roman law according to Drew, *The Lombard Laws*, (36). See also Drew, *The Burgundian Code* and Drew, *The Laws of the Salian Franks*, for additional information on the contemporary law codes.

the altar of the church, with various other conditions depending on the rank of the accused.[195]

This addition to the laws demonstrates that the Church within Kent had gained enough political

power between the years 616-690 that the churchmen now became part of the legal processing

system, not simply defined within it.

Conclusions

Through analysis of these additional sources, the changes in religious practice observed

in previous chapters can be corroborated by burials, the location of sacred sites, as well as the

prevailing laws. Diet, however, has shown no significant changes during the relevant time

period. Burials and religious sites show that the countryside took longer to convert than the

cities, and within cities there was a time when burial rites reflecting Christian and pagan

practices coexisted simultaneously. In addition, the decoration appearing on grave goods also

indicates the coexistence of both religions, as well as the adoption of pagan artistic motifs in

order to show value on Christian artefacts. The diet of the ASs has been determined to give

inconclusive evidence on their conversion. The religious sites do, however, show that Pope

Gregory's letter to Mellitus seems to have been followed with Christian sites and buildings built

near, or overtop of, traditional pagan sites. Finally, the law codes of Kent indicate a steadily

growing Christian power within the kingdom of Kent, and that the conversions had already been

taking place before these laws came into effect, since there would be no need for the laws if no

conversion had occurred.

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[195] Thatcher, Laws of Whithread, (18-21).

Conclusion

This study has looked over several sources in order to answer the question, how were the laity in AS England converted to Christianity? The answer to this question has been shown to be far more complex than the simplified version that most are familiar with, that the king would convert, and his people would follow. Through an analysis of the AS histories, we have seen that the kings were certainly the primary target of missionary efforts. The kings were likely targeted because of the societal structure of the ASs encouraging those with mutual bonds to follow the same religion. So, if the king did convert, those who sought to maintain their relationship and the mutual bond they had with the king would be more likely also to convert. The histories, however, also show that the king's protection was required for the missionaries to operate safely in the places where they sought to preach, as well as providing the worldly resources – mainly land – that they needed to pursue their missions. In addition, the kings could not convert without the support of their people, mainly the nobility but also the commoners, and therefore missionary efforts were directed toward the laity in order to convert them prior to the kings' conversion. These missionaries were heavily influenced by the Irish missionaries who had already begun converting the people of Scotland and Wales prior to the mission of Pope Gregory the Great led by St. Augustine.

While the histories remain a good source of information, they can be supplemented by examining hagiographies produced at the time in order to understand more fully how the conversion process took place. While these stories contain various unbelievable tales which are surely the work of fiction, they are based on the lives of actual people and contain details which convey historical reality. From these sources, it is clear that the activities of the church were centered around monasteries during the early period of conversion, with the missionaries moving

between monasteries during their preaching. The hagiographies also provide stories of Christian missionaries competing against both Celtic druids and AS polytheistic priests in order to prove the power of the Christian God was greater than that of the traditional pagan gods. While these tales are clearly fanciful, the point remains that some people would not convert without proof of the Christian God's superiority. The role of the nobility is mentioned throughout the hagiographies in order to show how important it was for the abbeys to maintain favour with the kings and nobility who would provide them with protection. Finally, the hagiographies show that the practice suggested in Pope Gregory's letter to Mellitus – that the pagan places of worship be reused and sanctified for use in Christian worship – was upheld by the monastic missionaries. This is particularly shown through the *Life of St. Guthlac*, which takes place in a traditionally pagan location where demons and monsters dwelled, and Guthlac's presence and activities within the marsh defeat the demons and spiritually purify the area.

Despite the importance of histories and hagiographies penned by Christians, they were not the main form of documentation for the ASs themselves, who maintained an oral tradition heavily focused on poetry. The poetic tradition of the ASs is considered pagan because it comes from a time prior to when they practiced Christianity. This poetic tradition was recorded in four MSS which further show how the religions of AS paganism and Christianity were combined in literature in order to aid in the conversion of the masses. Due to these poems being transcribed by Christian writers drawing on AS pagan ideas, there is ample evidence for how the stories were manipulated to align with Christian teachings and ideology while still maintaining their traditional AS core. Beginning with the Junius MS, it can be seen that supernatural Christian beings were given AS descriptors, with angels referred to as thanes and Lucifer equivocated to a spiteful thane who had betrayed his Lord. These adaptations make the point of the text clearer to

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readers: that of redemption. The entire Junius MS is a long tale of fall and redemption which reflects the historical reality that the ASs did commit apostasy on several occasions in various kingdoms, but by returning to the faith they were still good Christians. The Vercelli MS continues in a similar vein as it seeks to legitimize the role of soldiers within Christianity. The Vercelli MS makes Christians into soldiers of faith, and through its teachings shows that conversion is a valid option for someone who wants to be a soldier. These soldiers of faith fight on a spiritual battlefield, with a dedication and respectability equivalent to warriors within AS culture. The Exeter MS, similar to the Junius MS, took to showing Christianity in a more understandable way for the AS people. Here, God is made out to be the ultimate gift-giver, a central role within AS society at the time, as well as providing calls for proper Christian practice. The Nowell Codex overlaps with all of these manuscripts and shows all of these values in its central tale, the epic of Beowulf. Overall, the poems, though written after the period of conversion, still reflect many themes and motifs which shed light on the concerns of the conversion era.

This study has chosen to include only a brief section of the material culture, burial practices, laws, locations of holy sites, and dietary evidence available in order to explore the non-literary sources of conversion. From these it has been shown that the Christian Church gained power in Kent steadily over time, eventually becoming a central part of the legal system. In addition, it has been shown that material evidence, burial practices, and location of holy sites have all supported the claims based on written evidence made elsewhere in this thesis. This research has culminated with the understanding that while it is true that a king's conversion would aid the mission of converting the people, it was not the sole deciding factor. In order for the conversion efforts to be effective at converting the laity, a much more nuanced approach was

undertaken by the missionaries. This involved adopting and adapting the traditional values,

locations, and roles of the various AS peoples into the Christianity which the missionaries were

preaching to them.

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