

“THE KINGDOM OF THE ENGLISH IS OF GOD”: THE EFFECTS OF THE  
NORMAN CONQUEST ON THE CULT OF THE SAINTS IN ENGLAND

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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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The Roman Catholic Church today recognizes at least 2,500 saints, Christians of special holiness. The Catholic Church emphasizes that they do not “make” saints; instead, they recognize their sanctity. These 2,500 saints have all been canonized, officially recognized by the Church, but there is not a definitive list because the Church undergoes a continual process of pruning the roster. Canonization itself continually became a more complex process throughout church history, from a “spontaneous” recognition of local sanctity into a process of great bureaucratic intricacy. Moreover, although procedures became formalized and regularized, the Church is still updating them to refine the number of miracles needed for beatification and canonization. Getting the appropriate documentation and miracles to achieve official canonization can take centuries to complete, so a potential saint must sometimes maintain special devotees for a long period of time.

But these 2,500 officially canonized saints do not give the full picture of sanctity throughout Christian history. There were hundreds, even thousands, of other Christians whose sanctity was recognized by a few or a great many fellow believers, but who failed to become officially recognized by the church. This thesis looks at the process of saint-making in England in the central medieval period, looking both at new saints whose cults were accepted and at potential saints who did not succeed in becoming officially canonized. Naturally, there has been less scholarly attention on these “failed” cults than those cults that succeeded, most likely because of lack of documentation and the assumption that these cults were less relevant to the religious experience of those who frequented them. The most important questions about these failed cults are: Why did they originate? What did people recognize in them that made them subjects of special

veneration? Why did their cults fail? And do these failed cults have important information to tell us about medieval society and how saints were viewed? Did changes in society such as the political changes that followed the Conquest of England by the Normans have any impact on the veneration of saints and the process of saint-making?

A brief historiography will also place my discussion of saint-making and emphasis on the interest in continuity in the cult of the saints that the elite Normans brought in its proper context. The idea that the Normans had come over to England antagonistic to the native Anglo-Saxon saints used to be more prevalent among scholars than it is today. Frank Barlow says that the Normans had “little initial respect for the English past” and “treated roughly” the remains of English saints.<sup>1</sup> Objections to native cults by Lanfranc, Anselm, and others provided support for this claim. However, more recent scholars have noted that most of the cults contested after the arrival of the Normans attracted objections because of what the Normans felt was a lack of proper documentation and support for the cult, not because of a Norman policy antagonistic ethnically or nationally to Anglo-Saxon cults. Ann Williams says that “it would have been foolish in the extreme for the new bishops and abbots to ignore the spiritual treasures [saints/relics] of their churches” and that the desire for correct documentation “does not indicate hostility to the English cults *per se*.”<sup>2</sup>

However, I argue that Norman policy was more than just the lack of systematic procedures antagonistic to Anglo-Saxon saints. Norman elites were positively interested in the continuity of the cult of the saints. William of Normandy came to England,

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Barlow. *The Norman Conquest and Beyond* (London: Hambledon, 1983), p. 183.

<sup>2</sup> Ann Williams. *The English and the Norman Conquest* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1995), p. 138.

perceiving himself not as a usurper, but as the rightful heir of Edward the Confessor. Because Norman elites wanted to emphasize links between Anglo-Saxon kingship and Anglo-Norman kingship, they supported and appropriated important Anglo-Saxon royal cults as their own ancestry. In particular, Norman elites, both lay and ecclesiastic, saw the line of William of Normandy as a fulfillment of a prophecy Edward the Confessor was recorded as uttering on his deathbed, that God would stop punishing the English when the split halves of a green tree would be reunited again and bear fruit. To many Anglo-Normans, the split halves were Edward the Confessor and his family members, and William of Normandy and his family members. Therefore, Edward the Confessor, Margaret of Scotland, and Matilda, wife of Henry I, all played particular roles in furthering Anglo-Norman-friendly interpretations of Edward's prophecy. These interpretations required that Anglo-Saxon royalty (and other saints) be venerated as ancestors, as William was not bringing a new line to England, but merely reattaching a broken line to the old. Susan Ridyard has discussed the distinctiveness of Anglo-Saxon royal sainthood, and how royal saints were distinguished from simply good Christian royals. There was no "automatic ticket to sanctity."<sup>3</sup> Because Anglo-Saxon royal sainthood was not an "automatic ticket," Norman elites particularly cultivated those royals whose virtue seemed worthy of veneration. If Edward the Confessor was a saint, his prophecies, which Norman elites applied to William's line, carried extra weight and justified William's seizure of the English throne. As we will see, cults needed the support of Norman lay and ecclesiastic elites if they were to succeed, and Normans lent this support to a variety of new candidates, but they were particularly interested in those that

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<sup>3</sup> Susan Ridyard. *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1988), p. 76.



represented continuity between Anglo-Saxon royalty and new Anglo-Norman royalty. If the Norman Conquest is the ultimate goal of my study, we must first start with the religious practices and forms of the cult of the saints that the Normans found on their arrival in England.

In chapter one, I survey the Anglo-Saxon cult of the saints before the Norman Conquest. Although Anglo-Saxon saints were not “canonized” in the modern (or later medieval) sense of the word, there were still certain similarities in the recognition of especially pious individuals. I also discuss the three major types of Anglo-Saxon sainthood: the king, the bishop or abbot, and the abbess. While the Anglo-Saxon monastic chroniclers, such as Bede, took pains to portray the saints they described in traditional ways, often using Roman models because of their respect and veneration for early and established Roman saints, the chroniclers took pride in the English church and her saints. For example, Bede believed that English saints, such as Aethelthryth, should be included with the popular and respected Roman saints of their type. In Aethelthryth’s case, she was equal to the virgin martyrs worshiped by the universal church, such as Agnes, Margaret, and Thecla. Thus, the Anglo-Saxon cult of the saints, although anxious to appear “correct” in the Roman way, was also intensely tied to English ethnic and national identity. Most of the Anglo-Saxon saints were also of noble or royal blood, tying the Anglo-Saxon royal line before the Norman Conquest in closely with the cult of the saints in England.

In chapter two, I discuss the reaction of William of Normandy to the Anglo-Saxon cult of the saints and their roles as figures of ethnic and national English pride. Because William of Normandy came as the legitimate heir of Edward the Confessor, he was not

interested in suppressing or destroying the Anglo-Saxon saints, particularly their royal saints, because he viewed himself as heir to these Anglo-Saxon royals. While William and other Norman ecclesiastical elites viewed the English church as corrupt and weak, and largely replaced most English ecclesiastical positions with Normans, they did not conduct a large-scale suppression of English cults. I examine four pre-Conquest saints: two (Sts. Mildrith, seventh-century abbess, and Aelfheah, tenth-century Archbishop of Canterbury) whose cults were contested because of poor documentation or competing claims over relics, and two (Sts. Cuthbert, seventh-century solitary and bishop of Lindisfarne and Aethelthryth) whose cults were not contested because both were properly documented. The cults of Sts. Cuthbert and Aethelthryth also benefited William of Normandy; as heir to the Anglo-Saxon royal line, he would respect those cults important to the old Anglo-Saxon line. Allowing Anglo-Saxon cults emphasized the continuity in dynasties. His Norman ecclesiastical elite were primarily interested in the suppression of English cults whose documentation was scarce or nonexistent. There was no purge.

In chapter, three, I discuss three “new,” post-Conquest cults whose saints were venerated, and eventually officially papally canonized, in post-Conquest Anglo-Norman society: Sts. Edward the Confessor, Margaret of Scotland, and Thomas Becket. It was important to the Anglo-Norman royal line, particularly after the marriage of Henry I and Matilda, that their line be represented as the fulfillment of Edward the Confessor’s prophecy that England would only cease to be punished by God when the parts of a split green tree were miraculously joined together. Only with the fulfillment of this prophecy would the green tree flower, that is, England prosper. Edward the Confessor and Margaret of Scotland were both essential links between the “old” Anglo-Saxon line of

royals and the “new” Anglo-Norman line of royals. The cult of St. Thomas Becket, on the other hand, did not shed luster on the Anglo-Norman royal line. The death of the archbishop was an embarrassment, but Henry II would have found it politically awkward to try to suppress his growing cult. To uphold his image as the repentant royal, he did not do so. Indeed, perhaps the belief that Becket’s blood contributed to the salvation of the English people took some of the power away from the traditional Anglo-Saxon belief in the power of the English king’s piety to save the English people.

In chapter four, I discuss three “new,” post-Conquest cults who were venerated, but never officially papally canonized, in Anglo-Norman society: Waltheof, Matilda of Scotland, and William of Norwich. These three saints were embarrassing or unimportant to the Anglo-Norman royal line, and, unlike in the case of Thomas Becket, a lack of support or suppression by the Norman lay or ecclesiastical elites was able to squash local veneration of these cults. Although many local English laypeople saw Waltheof’s death at the hands of William as a martyrdom, most Norman elites did not agree, and they were not eager to encourage the cult of a man who had rebelled against William, who was so careful to identify himself as the rightful heir to the English throne. Matilda’s cult showed considerable promise at the outset, helped by belief in her son as the fulfillment of Edward the Confessor’s prophecy about the miraculous joining of the green tree’s severed parts. However, when her son died in the tragic White Ship accident, some public opinion held that an irregular and immoral marriage to Henry must have been the cause. And later, when Henry II, Matilda’s daughter Matilda’s son, became king and applied Edward the Confessor’s prophecy to *himself*, Matilda became extraneous and the doubly-applied prophecy an embarrassment. Finally, William of Norwich’s death at what many

citizens of Norwich believed to be the hands of the Jews did not particularly enhance or appeal to any Norman elites. Although other deaths blamed on Jewish blood conspiracies became more and more popular, William of Norwich did not attract enough influential Norman elite supporters to become canonized.

Therefore, we see in conclusion that the Anglo-Saxon cult of the saints did not fail after the Norman Conquest. Although William of Normandy replaced English ecclesiastical positions with Normans, he did not do the same with the cult of the saints. The cult of the saints did not fail because William and other Norman elites interested in their dynasty as the fulfillment of Edward the Confessor's prophecies and themselves as successors to the Anglo-Saxon kings, not usurpers, did not *want* them to fail.

## Chapter One

The selection and promotion of saints in Anglo-Saxon England is too often defined as chaotic and decentralized.<sup>4</sup> There were common ways to determine sanctity in England before the Norman Conquest, even though there was little to no papal oversight of cults or attempts at pursuing official canonization. Although the centralized papal bureaucracy in Rome did not exert consistent control over local cults in England until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, saint-makers<sup>5</sup> before the Norman Conquest nevertheless defined the cults they promoted in similar ways despite their different localities. There are enough of these similarities in Anglo-Saxon hagiography, the stories of the saints' lives, to indicate that certain signifiers of holiness were accepted by most of the faithful. Although the English saint-makers sometimes self-consciously modeled their hagiographies on those of prominent Roman saints, Anglo-Saxon saints were still deeply ethnically rooted in the land of England and their local communities. One of the most readily identifiable signifiers to the faithful English was Biblical models of pious behavior. Saints' cults often began before the saint had died, particularly if the saint was a prominent figure in the community and had a reputation for being full of holy power, often as expressed with wise counsel, visions, miracle-working, and extraordinary ascetic feats. The first audience for a saint's cult was usually his or her family members or monastery and the local community who knew them. Christian saints were primarily intercessors, and if a saint was known to intercede successfully in life, the saint would be

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<sup>4</sup> Aviad Kleinberg calls it a "decentralized, diffused, and erratic phenomenon." "Canonization Without a Canon." *Medieval Canonization Processes: Legal and Religious Aspects*. Ed. Gabor Klaniczay (Rome: Ecole Francaise, 2004), p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> I use the term "saint-makers" to describe those responsible for promoting a particular saint's cult.

able to do so as well after death. Effective intercession after death might lead to the reputation of the saint spreading over a farther and farther geographic area, and perhaps even to the whole of England. The selection and promotion of an Anglo-Saxon cult could include the following elements: a record of the virtuous life and/or martyr's death of the saint, miracles (mostly of healing and prophecy) before death, miracles in holy places related to the saint after death, venerated relics, an incorruptible, sweet-smelling corpse, translation of the saint's body to a more prominent location, and observation of the saint's "birthday" (day of the saint's death), and placement in the martyrology. While these elements were not all unique to England, hagiographers expressed them in locally significant ways, showing the "correctness" of English practices while still making Roman themes relevant to English localities.

Another signifier of pre-Conquest sainthood in England was the familiarity of certain types of sanctity. The majority of native Anglo-Saxon saints were from the lay and ecclesiastical elite. They fell into one of three popular categories: kings, bishops or abbots, and abbesses.<sup>6</sup> Of course, this categorization obscures the fact that non-native saints who did not fall into any these three categories were popular in England, just as they were elsewhere in Western Christendom. In particular, Anglo-Saxon calendars were full of Roman martyrs and other saints. These Roman saints were representative of self-conscious English modeling. The Venerable Bede (c. 672-735), Northumbrian monastic chronicler, acknowledged this self-conscious patterning on the Roman church: "The English people . . . have framed their religion long since after the example of the holy

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<sup>6</sup> Another way of grouping them would be as laypeople (kings/former queens) and ecclesiastics (bishops/abbots/abbesses), but the boundaries between queens and abbesses were very fluid, and many abbesses were former queens or noblewomen.

Roman and apostolic church.”<sup>7</sup> However, the similarities to Roman forms of sanctity did not mean that English saints were inferior. Bede believed that native English saints were just as holy as non-native saints and wrote his history reflecting this sentiment. Bede was an ethnically and thematically English historian, with a particular interest in English concerns,<sup>8</sup> and he argued for the inclusion of English saints in the liturgy of the church by describing the sanctity of native saints. But many prominent religious patterns ensured that the English were very familiar with non-native saints. The litany of the saints (c. eighth to eleventh centuries) “was one of the most common, and also most characteristic, liturgical forms of the Middle Ages.”<sup>9</sup> It was a way to unify the cult of the saints throughout Europe by ranking different types of saints into a hierarchy, and Bede’s argument for the inclusion of English saints in England was a way of asserting the blessings of God on the English church and the maturation of the English church. The lay public would have heard it read on many different occasions: a pastoral visit to sick and dying parishioners, as part of a religious procession, or perhaps a lay or ecclesiastical person would have used it for his or her own devotions.<sup>10</sup> The litany of the saints had a standard format that began with Mary and the archangels at the top, followed by prophets, apostles, and early martyrs of the church, then ending with confessors and virgins.<sup>11</sup> Bede used common tropes and sometimes flexibility of definition to argue for English saints as prophets, martyrs, confessors, and virgins. In addition to Bede’s consistent push to place Anglo-Saxon saints on the same footing as Roman ones, there

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<sup>7</sup> *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*. Ed. J.E. King (Cambridge: Harvard, 1930), p. 325.

<sup>8</sup> For example, he discussed the seventh-century battles between the English, Scottish, and Irish, by saying, “And after this time the hope and prowess of the dominion of the English began ‘to ebb and slide away backwards.’” *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 169.

<sup>9</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Litanies of the Saints*. Ed. Michael Lapidge (London: Henry Bradshaw Society, 1991), p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1-2.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p. 18.

are many commonalities in the Anglo-Saxon cults he and other monastic chroniclers described. Bede doubtless desired to express a unity the English church perhaps did not always enjoy. However, it is instructive to consider the ubiquity of the cult of the saints and their commonalities in pre-Conquest England.

The most basic element of any cult was the extraordinary spiritual behavior of its saint. Emperor Constantine's decriminalization of the practice of Christianity in the Roman Empire in 313 C.E. led to very few opportunities for state-sponsored martyrdom. However, some of the themes of the early martyr hagiographies, such as bravery in the face of pagan opposition, steadfastness of faith, and a willing eagerness to face death for Christ remained influential in saints' lives long after the time of state persecution was over. Even after Constantine, martyrdom was still an important aspect of Christianity. Rather than adhering to a narrow definition of martyrdom, the legalization of Christianity "led to an enlargement of the notion of sanctity."<sup>12</sup> And even after the peace of the church, there were other persecutors of the Christian faith in Anglo-Saxon England, primarily Vikings and other "pagan" (non-Christian) opponents. For example, St. Oswald, king of the Northumbrians (c. 604-642), died at the hands of pagans, and the interpretation of his death as martyrdom was probably the most important aspect of his cult. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records that in 641/2 St. Oswald was "slain by Penda, the Southumbrian," who was a leader of the pagan Mercians.<sup>13</sup> Oswald as saint was a way of the chroniclers to define Anglo-Saxon identity as specifically Christian. Another example of a royal martyrdom that had elements of pride in English ethnicity was the life

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<sup>12</sup> Andre Vauchez. *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*. Trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1997), p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Ed. Dorothy Whitelock (New Brunswick: Rutgers University), p. 19.



of St. Edmund (d. 870), who refused to submit to the Danish king, and was killed. He was representative of English courage against frequent Danish incursions. St. Edward (c. 962-978), on the other hand, was not killed by pagan forces but by Christians, and his death seemed to have little to do with his identity as a Christian. However, as a medieval king he was performing a role “instituted by divine concession,” and had special roles to perform that included ensuring the salvation of his people.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, regicide was a particularly heinous crime partially because it deposed a “rulership conferred by God” to perform a special role for the nation.<sup>15</sup> The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* merely says, “Men murdered him, but God honored him.”<sup>16</sup> Therefore, instead of seeing his death as an example of Christian persecution, Edward was portrayed as a “martyred innocent” and “the meekest of lambs going forth unsuspecting to the slaughter.”<sup>17</sup>

However, lives of ascetic denial and lives of extraordinary devotion to Christ were also forms of martyrdom. Although not every Anglo-Saxon saint had a violent death, the language of struggle and fight against the forces of sin and devilish temptations is frequently used in the lives of the saints. Anglo-Saxon hagiography was heavily influenced by the military ideals of the period. The monks in the cloister, important as they were as selectors and promoters of cults, were not immune to these social forces. “These noble young monks brought with them into the cloister the heroic songs and sagas that the aristocratic families had been bred on.”<sup>18</sup> Chroniclers and hagiographers characterized all three of the major categories of native saints in the pre-Conquest period,

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<sup>14</sup> Ridyard, p. 75.

<sup>15</sup> Ridyard, p. 81.

<sup>16</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 978/9, p. 79.

<sup>17</sup> Ridyard, p. 95.

<sup>18</sup> Clinton Albertson. *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes* (Fordham University Press, 1967), p. 20.

kings, bishops or abbots, and abbesses, with militaristic language. Bede described the ideal virgin martyr, a mold he argued that St. Aethelthryth fit into, as St. Agnes's brave preservation of her virginity in the face of violence: "The deadly sword with laughing look Agnes, more strong than steel, surveyed."<sup>19</sup> He saw the power of Agnes' virginity as stronger than traditional weaponry. Her weapon was her purity. Bishops and abbots often fought devilish forces and triumphed with God's help. For instance, St. Guthlac (d. c. 714) vanquished a demon host by singing the 67<sup>th</sup> psalm and banished another horde of evil spirits who came to his island, shaking the ground and appearing in the guise of terrifying animals.<sup>20</sup>

Beyond a good death and/or a good life, selecting a saint often relied on examples of miracles, and some care was taken to show that the included miracles were authentic. Although the proponents of pre-Conquest cults in England did not need to satisfy an intensive bureaucratic process for verifying the legitimacy of miracles, hagiographers were very interested in including examples of miracles with respectable persons as eyewitnesses. The anonymous author of the *Life of St. Cuthbert* (written about the seventh-century monk and bishop approximately in the early eighth century) claims to have included only those miracles that he had some intimate knowledge of, and also avows his editorial discretion with those miracles deemed less "outstanding." Immediately afterwards, he confirms the historical accuracy of Cuthbert's *vita*, saying that he includes only that which is "examined and approved."<sup>21</sup> Although the inclusion of an authorial assurance that the miracles have been properly authenticated is a literary

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<sup>19</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 115.

<sup>20</sup> "Life of St. Guthlac," *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*. pp. 193-195.

<sup>21</sup> "Life of St. Cuthbert." *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*. p. 35.

convention, it does not make it any less relevant to the hagiographer and his audience. It is clear that even in the eighth century, far before the increased legal and bureaucratic requirements of the later twelfth and thirteenth centuries, saint-makers were concerned with the credibility of their stories. Bede evidently believed that the quality of the miracles in England was on par with those in any other part of Christendom, for he said, “At this time was wrought in Britain a miracle worthy of remembrance and not unlike the miracles of times past.”<sup>22</sup> While most types of Anglo-Saxon miracles are similar to those found in the Bible and other earlier hagiographic accounts, some scholars have argued there are certain unique emphases to British or Celtic miracles.<sup>23</sup>

These saint-makers and hagiographers reported a variety of miracles during the lifetime of their saints; frequent kinds of miracles were those of healing, prophecy, and wisdom. St. Wilfrid, the seventh-century bishop, healed a young man who had fallen while working on the construction of a church at Hexham. This healing shows how miracles worked to help the local community and one way for the bishop to fulfill his duties as the shepherd to his local flock. Bede explained that Wilfrid raising the worker from the dead was in the Biblical model of Elijah and Elisha: “The bishop [Wilfrid] prayed after the manner of Elias and Eliseus [Elijah and Elisha] and gave him blessing. The breath of life returned to the boy.”<sup>24</sup> Bede recorded that St. Aethelthryth prophesied her own death, both “the pestilence whereof she should die herself, and also did openly in

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<sup>22</sup> The miracle in question was a man raised from the dead in Northumbria, who later told stories of traveling with a supernatural guide to the worlds of heaven and hell, and the limbo between. *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 253.

<sup>23</sup> For example, a preoccupation with books or the written word might be more common in Irish stories than elsewhere. For example, note St. Brigid’s famous scriptorium. For more, see *Celtic hagiography and saints’ cults*. Ed. Jane Cartwright (Cardiff: University of Wales, 2003).

<sup>24</sup> “Eddius Stephanus: Life of Wilfrid.” *The Age of Bede*. Ed. D.H. Farmer (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p. 129.

all their presence let them know the number of those that should be taken thereby from this world out of her monastery.”<sup>25</sup> Hagiographers also recorded miracles occurring after the death of the saint, which were seen as proof that the deceased was acting as an intercessor in heaven for the faithful. The locus for the miracles often became the tomb where the holy body lay, but relics that had been touched by the saint could also be taken to a Christian seeking an answer to prayer. Bede recorded that Bishop Clement of the Frisians once came to visit the monastery at Lindisfarne and was taken ill. He requested to be taken to “honor Cuthbert’s most holy body,” and when the bishop knelt down at Cuthbert’s tomb, he “felt such strength flow into him from the saint’s incorrupt body that he rose to his feet without the least effort.”<sup>26</sup>

The miracles and intercessory power of a saint might develop before a feast day was celebrated, or a feast day might be promoted by a monastery, which would lead to interest among the laity and pilgrimages. The commemoration of a saint’s “birth day” was the day he or she died and was received in heaven. The first group of the faithful was often those closest in locality to the saint, such as family members of the deceased or a group of monks or women religious maintaining veneration for their patrons or other persons important to their chapter. Depending on the stature of the saint, veneration could include saying special prayers for or to the saint or an inclusion in the liturgy or litany of the saints. For example, Bede recorded that shortly after St. Oswald’s death, a monastery that had received special blessings from him and “very many others places too” celebrated his birthday and “kept [it] holy with the saying of masses.”<sup>27</sup> The “birth day”

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<sup>25</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 105.

<sup>26</sup> “Life of Cuthbert.” *The Age of Bede*, pp. 97-98.

<sup>27</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 85.

was also significant because it afforded an opportunity on the anniversary of the death to verify the incorruptibility of the body. For example, St. Guthlac was disinterred a year after his death, on the “anniversary of his burial,” in front of an assembly, which included both monks and other ecclesiastics, showing the ceremonial importance of both anniversaries and incorruptibility.<sup>28</sup>

Martyrologies, books of saints’ feast days that often include brief biographies, are a useful tool for understanding attitudes towards the saint and the extent of his or her cult. Anglo-Saxon martyrologies were varied and complex, but with some similar characteristics. They often included Roman or Italian saints, with even lesser-known Italian figures like St. Januarius appearing in the Lindisfarne Gospels.<sup>29</sup> This inclusion shows an extensive geographic spread of the cult of the saints at Rome and the juxtaposition of Roman saints with Anglo-Saxon saints showed the interest of English promoters in placing their native saints on a similar plane. When Bede compares St. Aethelthryth to Sts. Agatha, Eulalia, Tecla, Agnes, and Cecilia, after telling her story, he is explicitly arguing for her inclusion with the virgin martyrs as a virgin whose whole life was a pious martyrdom: “So too in our days with one are blest, a noble maid to call our own.”<sup>30</sup> Inclusion in the martyrology was also an indicator of the extent to which the general population was familiar with the saint. Parish priests in England were expected to own or have access to various religious works, including a martyrology, from which they were expected to base informational and instructive sermons, and further information on

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<sup>28</sup> Felix’s “Life of St. Guthlac.” *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, p. 215.

<sup>29</sup> David Rollason. *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 65.

<sup>30</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 115

the ecclesiastical calendar.<sup>31</sup> These pastoral resources seem to indicate that most parishioners were acquainted with some details concerning the English cult of the saints, whether through sermons, local relics or tombs, iconography, or some other contact at the local level. The litany of the saints was also chanted by a bishop when dedicating a church<sup>32</sup> and the classification of saints was often represented pictorially. For example, the coffin that housed St. Cuthbert and his relics showed Christ, the Virgin, archangels, disciples, and early apostles of the church,<sup>33</sup> and the great popularity of St. Cuthbert demonstrates that many who visited his relics would have seen the hierarchy of the saints.

These visitors to the saint's tomb would view the primary *locus* of the saint as some place appropriate to the community's evaluation of the saint's sanctity. The translation of the saint's body to increasingly prominent and respected locations was an essential part of the pre-Conquest canonization process, although the *vitae* of a few saints, including Benedict Biscop, the seventh-century abbot and founder of the monasteries of Wearmouth and Jarrow, do not include it because they were already sufficiently respected upon their death to be buried in particularly holy locations. For example, Benedict's very *first* burial was next to the apostle Peter.<sup>34</sup> The process of translation was a formal exhumation of the saint's body, an examination of the saint's body to verify signifiers of holiness like incorruptibility or a sweet smell, and an elevation of the saint's body to a more religiously prominent location. Elevation represented the judgment of the community on the sanctity of an individual. If a saint was verified incorruptible, the translation of the relics to a more visible and respected location

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<sup>31</sup> Frank Barlow. *The English Church 1000-1066* (London: Longman, 1979), p. 277.

<sup>32</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Litanies of the Saints*, p. 43.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 59.

<sup>34</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 427.

represented the consensus of the community that the reliquary housed a true servant of God, and a beneficiary and dispensary of God's grace.

The new locations for saints' bodies varied, but all represented a more respected location for the saint, such as from the outside cemetery into the church sanctuary, or from a lower to a more elevated position, or nearer to holy items or other saints' bodies in the church. The translation of the body also generally indicated that there was a nascent cult interested in the verification of the saint's sanctity. St. Guthlac was re-buried by his sister, not into the earth again, but "rather in a special tomb which today we see built up and decorated by King Aethelbald with marvelous ornamented work in reverence for the divine power."<sup>35</sup> After the religious brothers devoted to St. Cuthbert's memory opened the tomb, they informed their bishop, who was living as a solitary at the time. Cuthbert's supporters understood the bishop's power over the verification of the translation procedures. So far from Rome, and so independent of Roman control over the cult of the saints, the bishop was the primary administrator and adjudicator of most English cults. The saint was wrapped in new robes and put in a new coffin above the pavement of the sanctuary, which was considered a place of increased respect.<sup>36</sup>

There were several miraculous signs that typically surrounded the body's translation. It is unclear what "incorruptible" meant to all observers of a translation, but it does seem clear, from many accounts, that the body was expected to look as though significant decomposition had not taken place. After eleven years, Cuthbert was exhumed and his body was found "all whole as if it were still alive, and the joints of the limbs

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<sup>35</sup> "The Life of St. Guthlac." *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, p. 215

<sup>36</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 189.

supple, much liker a sleeping body than a dead.”<sup>37</sup> A “sweet smell” was another signifier of sanctity. The smell symbolized the incorruptibility of the body and verified the purity or virginity of the life of the deceased and proof that the saint is still alive in heaven. St. Aethelthryth, the seventh-century queen and abbess of Ely, was raised after sixteen years, in the presence of her own physician, who attested that, although she had died with a neck wound, it had been healed in death.<sup>38</sup> The linen clothes around Aethelthryth’s body also appeared to “have been put about her chaste limbs that very day.”<sup>39</sup> The time between the initial burial and the first translation varied somewhat. St. Guthlac was uncovered after only twelve months, and the onlookers discovered that not only was his body intact, as if “sleeping,” but his clothing “still shone with their first newness and original brightness.”<sup>40</sup>

These bright, fresh clothes often functioned as conduits of the saint’s power. Relics were an essential element of any medieval cult. The geographic spread of relics indicated the geographic spread of the connected cult. Some of the many ways relics could be spread was as gifts or endowments for new churches, exchanges between collectors, and of course as stolen goods.<sup>41</sup> The acquisition of an important new relic was usually a boon to any religious institution. After St. Wilfrid was exonerated from charges of disobedience at his trial in Rome, he took a tour of the shrines of the city and “collected, as he always did, authenticated holy relics from certain trusted men.”<sup>42</sup> In such ways did the influence of the saints of Rome spread from Italy to England.

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<sup>37</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 187.

<sup>38</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 109.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> “The Life of St. Guthlac,” *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, 215.

<sup>41</sup> Rollason, p. 11. For more on stolen relics, see Patrick Geary’s *Furta sacra: thefts of relics in the central Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

<sup>42</sup> “Life of Saint Wilfrid.” *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, p. 151.



Attractive relics meant pilgrims, and pilgrims meant money, and relics also acted as a nexus for genuine religious devotion and hope for miraculous cures, many of which were witnessed by reputable members of the community and written up in the saints' lives. The most important relics, of course, were dependent on the hierarchy described in the litany: those of Jesus, Mary, and the apostles were the most prized. Thus, a religious house in England wanting to promote a native saint would have benefited from a belief that the holy one fit into one of the "accepted" Roman categories of sainthood.

There were two general methods of miraculous healing involving a relic. A relic could be brought to the site of a sick person, or a sick person could come to the site of a relic. Miracles associated with relics proved the efficacy of the saint and spread the popularity of the cult. When the brothers discovered Cuthbert's miraculously preserved body, they took "a part of the clothes that were about the holy body [to the bishop], and these for presents he both thankfully received and gladly heard of the miracles; for he also kissed with a great affection those same clothes as if they were yet about the father's body."<sup>43</sup> Bishop Eadbert's treatment of Cuthbert's clothes as relics demonstrated his support for Cuthbert's cult and his personal belief in Cuthbert's sanctity. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* reports people coming to King Edward's body to pray and ask for help: "Those who would not bow to his living body, now bend humbly on their knees to his dead bones."<sup>44</sup>

One of the most important factors overall in the recognition, promotion, and veneration of any pre-Conquest Anglo-Saxon cult was the saint's modeling of Biblical

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<sup>43</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 187.

<sup>44</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 978/9, p. 79.

figures or characteristics. As the “most studied book of the Middle Ages,”<sup>45</sup> the Bible and its allusions and references influenced art, sacred and non-sacred writings, rituals, and many other aspects of medieval culture. While it was rare for any place, even a monastery, to have a full Latin Bible, many places had access to “part-Bibles.”<sup>46</sup> The literate also had direct access to the Bible through commentaries, devotional readings, and other liturgical readings. The non-literate had access to the Bible through sermons and other liturgical readings, but perhaps the most influential mode for the non-literate was through artistic or other visual representation: “Visual aids and oral teaching would combine to give even the medieval peasant some sort of notion of Old and New Testaments.”<sup>47</sup> Benedict Biscop visited Rome several times in his career, and once brought back,

Many holy pictures of the saints to adorn the church of St. Peter he had built . . . pictures of incidents in the gospel with which he decorated the south wall, and scenes from St. John’s vision of the apocalypse for the north wall. Thus all who entered the church, even those who could not read, were able whichever way they looked, to contemplate the dear face of Christ and His saints, even if only in a picture, to put themselves more firmly in mind of the Lord’s Incarnation.<sup>48</sup>

This evidence from Bede indicates that seventh-century churchmen were concerned with making sure the non-literate Christians had sources of religious instruction besides sermons, and that the non-literate Christian might have been expected to recognize a wide variety of Biblical images.

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<sup>45</sup> Beryl Smalley. *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p. xxvii.

<sup>46</sup> C.M. Kauffman. *Biblical Imagery in Medieval England 700-1550* (London: Harvey Miller, 2003), p. 35.

<sup>47</sup> Smalley, xxxiv.

<sup>48</sup> Bede, “Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow,” pp. 190-1.

Medieval people believed that the Bible was a “universal model of human behavior.”<sup>49</sup> The evidence that the people of the Bible were seen as the definitive models of good and proper behavior is overwhelming, and can be seen in vernacular literature and law codes in addition to other explicitly religious material. Even Anglo-Saxon genealogies reflected Biblical influence, with some of the kings, such as Aethelwulf, father of Alfred, tracing their ancestry to the patriarchs in Genesis.<sup>50</sup> A few Biblical figures were used more frequently as literary and pictorial *loci* for lessons of morality. If Benedict Biscop’s trips to Rome are any indication, even non-literate Christians in England were expected to understand or allegorize the Scriptures. One of the paintings he brought back on his fifth trip consisted of “scenes, very skillfully arranged, to show how the Old Testament foreshadowed the New.”<sup>51</sup> David and Saul were used as examples of kingship, with David functioning as the ideal monarch, and Saul functioning as a failed and impious king. Esther and Jezebel were used as examples of queenship, with Esther functioning as the ideal queen, and Jezebel functioning as a wicked harlot full of evil counsel.<sup>52</sup> In addition to these well-known Biblical types, most Anglo-Saxon saints (at least those we have surviving written and physical evidence for) were from a royal family or others of the high nobility, and fall into one of three major categories: kings, bishops or abbots, and abbesses.

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<sup>49</sup> Kauffman, p. 35.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, p. 36.

<sup>51</sup> For instance, one scene showed a picture of Isaac carrying wood for his own sacrifice juxtaposed with a picture of Christ carrying his own cross. Bede, “Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow,” p. 194.

<sup>52</sup> For more on female Biblical archetypes and how they functioned in medieval society see Stacy S. Klein’s *Ruling Women: Queenship and Gender in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2006) and Lois L. Huneycutt’s “Intercession and the High-Medieval Queen: The Esther Topos.” *Power of the Weak* (Urbana & Chicago, University of Illinois, 1995).

Many of the most famous of the kingly saints hailed from the age of the early Christian kings of England, when virtues such as loyalty of followers, “large-hearted liberality,” and strength were prized.<sup>53</sup> Chroniclers and hagiographers of the warrior-kings were continually interested in the role of the kings as converters of pagans and champions of the Christian religion. Some early Anglo-Saxon warrior-king saints had flourishing cults whose strength and appeal seemed dependent on a view of the royal as a symbol of Christianity triumphing over the forces of paganism. Bede said, “Neither was there ever since the English first came to Britain, any time more happy than at that present; when they both had most valiant and Christian kings and were feared of all barbarous nations.”<sup>54</sup> In this view, to be English was to be Christian, and to be Christian set the English people against all the non-Christian peoples who were their enemies. Chroniclers viewed the baptism of kings as an important historical event symbolizing the transformation of the king into a Christian warrior.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, the conversion of an English king defined the English people, in the eyes of monastic chroniclers, as a Christian people. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records St. Edwin’s baptism in 627. Version C says “In this year King Edwin was baptized with his people at Easter.”<sup>56</sup> The proper execution of a ruler’s duties of protection and conversion of his people depended partially upon “the ruler’s own right relationship with God.”<sup>57</sup> This belief was one reason why Anglo-Saxon chroniclers were so interested in recording appropriate conversions;

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<sup>53</sup> Albertson, p. 2.

<sup>54</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 13.

<sup>55</sup> The reasons for the conversion of the warrior-kings are elusive and complex, but, in addition to the spiritual reasons given by chroniclers and hagiographers, Anglo-Saxon royalty may have adopted Christianity “because systems of authority and organization which were inherent within it offered attractive solutions to political problems confronting powerful kings.” N.J. Higham, *The Convert Kings: Power and Religious Affiliation in Early Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester: Manchester University, 1997), p. 27.

<sup>56</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 627, p. 17.

<sup>57</sup> Ridyard, pp. 75-6.

they were “proof” that temporal rulers could rule according to their God-given responsibilities and partially ensured the success and salvation of the English people.

Another important theme in the hagiography of Anglo-Saxon warrior kings was the hagiographer’s reliance on Biblical models to express the sanctity of the king. One of the most useful ways to understand how contemporary Anglo-Saxons viewed their saintly kings is how they wrote about and understood Biblical kings. One of the most enduring representations was a comparison of Saul and David. The story of Saul could be used to warn against the evils of trusting the will of the people over the will of God, the wickedness of jealousy, and the madness of disobedience, in addition to other lessons. However, comparisons to David revealed a different set of assumptions. David was primarily viewed as the ideal ruler, a king backed by miracles, battlefield prowess, defeat of pagan/heathen enemies, and expansion. Another important category of Biblical characterization was the Anglo-Saxon identification with the children of Israel. In particular, English writers saw the settlement of England and their defense against the Vikings as representative of the exodus and tribulations of the children of Israel.<sup>58</sup> The Maccabees were viewed as “the archetypes of heroic warriors.”<sup>59</sup> Biblical models of kingship were varied and flexible enough to be used in a variety of situations. Aelfric records that St. Edmund, murdered by the Danes in the ninth century, refused to fight because of his Christ-like meekness. With his meekness, he was a different type of ideal king, following in the footsteps of Jesus: “He wanted to follow Christ’s example, for he

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<sup>58</sup> Kauffman, p. 36.

<sup>59</sup> Jean Dunbabin. “The Maccabees as Exemplars in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries.” *The Bible in the Medieval World*. Ed. Katherine Walsh and Diana Wood (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985). p. 31.

forbade Peter to take up arms against the bloodthirsty Jews.”<sup>60</sup> St. Edmund was even portrayed as suffering a Christ-like passion; he too was tied to a tree and scourged with whips.

Another theme found in the lives of kings was the king who left his lands to take holy vows and enter a monastery. St. Sebbi, the seventh-century king of Essex, was a “devout and godly” king who esteemed the “solitary and monastery life before all the riches and honors of a kingdom.”<sup>61</sup> St. Sebbi had long desired to take up a monastic life, but his wife would not let him. Finally, after he nearly died of an illness, she allowed him to take the holy vows. As a monk, St. Sebbi brought a large amount of money to donate to the monastery and to the poor. Bede recorded other kings who became monks, but never saints, including Cenred and Offa. Cenred, king of the Marchmen, and Offa, king of the East Saxons, both eighth-century royalty, went to Rome, took their vows, received tonsures, and became monks. Offa “moved with like devoutness of mind, forsook his lady, his lands, his kinsfolk and country for Christ’s sake and the Gospel’s, that in this life he might receive an hundredfold, and in the world to come life everlasting.”<sup>62</sup> This theme showed the reverence English holy men had for Roman ways and customs, but it also emphasized the holiness and piety of English kings.

Just as the English expected “their kings to enjoy a portfolio of divine assistance and good fortune,”<sup>63</sup> they expected the cults of the warrior-kings to act as a conduit for the blessings of God to their patrons. The big-hearted liberality of the warrior-king would

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<sup>60</sup> Aelfric’s “Life of St. Edmund, King and Martyr.” *Medieval Saints: A Reader*. Ed. Mary-Ann Stouk (Peterborough: Broadview, 1999), p. 270.

<sup>61</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 61.

<sup>62</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 299.

<sup>63</sup> Higham, p. 205.

benefit his loyal followers after death. For example, because of his ability to “nobly govern . . . both with the authority of the temporal kingdom and the devoutness of Christian piety,” St. Oswald’s death acted as an intercession against further deaths from the plague in a monastery and its surrounding area.<sup>64</sup> Thus we see that the success of Anglo-Saxon cults was deeply rooted in their effectiveness in their local communities. St. Oswald’s cult was one of the most popular of the saintly warrior-kings’. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records that after his burial at Bardney in 641/2, “his holiness and miracles were afterwards made known in manifold ways throughout this island and his hands are undecayed.”<sup>65</sup> St. Oswald’s cult was “already well-established” before Bede’s time, and his sanctity was “obviously given a head start by the circumstances in which he first demonstrated the efficacy of his God through victory in battle in the heartland of his own kingdom against a brutal aggressor.”<sup>66</sup> St. Oswald was also a political and religious unifier, and Bede was interested in presenting those English who promoted Christianity, in order to emphasize his view of the English as Christian nation.

Bishops and abbots were another important category of sainthood. While these saints were categorized by their religious calling, it is important to remember that they were almost all of royal or noble birth, and from the same social background as the kings. Bede expected English abbots and bishops to uphold the traditions of the early apostolic church, including in his history portions of a letter from Pope Gregory that said, “You ought in the Church of England, which is of late by the work of God brought unto the faith, to establish the manner of life which our fathers used in the beginning of the

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<sup>64</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 83.

<sup>65</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 641/2, p. 19.

<sup>66</sup> Higham, p. 222.

Church at its first rising.”<sup>67</sup> By including this letter, Bede emphasized the duties of English churchmen, and the expectation that, although the English people had been evangelized much later than the Roman people, they were still able to perform traditional Roman pieties such as apostolic poverty and holding all goods in common. It is sometimes difficult to say which kind of saints would have been the most popular or visible to the general public, because bishops and abbots had a natural group of supporters dedicated to their memory with the religious members of their own monasteries or dioceses. However, the ability of cults like Cuthbert’s to endure and spread supports the idea that some ecclesiastical saints were well-known outside of their own monasteries. Probably three of the most well-documented cults were those of Cuthbert, seventh-century solitary and bishop, Ceolfrith, seventh-century abbot, and Aidan, seventh-century bishop. These well-documented cults were supported by their *vitae*, with similar themes recurring throughout the lives of the bishop-abbots. A few of these themes are the importance of the solitary man of God in exile, an initial unwillingness or reluctance to serve in a higher ecclesiastical office, power over nature, and a focus on miracles of prophecy and healing. It is important to remember that one or more of these themes are found in the stories of those holy men for whom no evidence for a cult has been found. Some of these themes are common in the other two major categories of sanctity (miracles of healing were common to all saints), whereas some themes are uncommon in the other two major categories of sanctity (the solitary exile is mostly found in ecclesiastical *vitae*).

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<sup>67</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 173.



The first recurring theme is that of exile, or living life as a solitary before God. Often, the abbot or bishop is described as seeking a holy life outside either his monastery or a higher ecclesiastical office. Sometimes the abbot or bishop sought the life of a solitary after having tried life in a monastery or as a higher ecclesiastic. In these cases, the life of the solitary outside the confines of the monastery or an office is described as the ideal in ascetic holiness. In Cuthbert's case, his extended exile is described as a result of desire to avoid "worldly honors" and to live a life closer to Biblical holiness.<sup>68</sup> Bede describes the life of a successful solitary as a sign of strong piety and devotion: "After this Cuthbert increasing in the merit of religious devotion came also to the secret silence of an anchoret's life of contemplation."<sup>69</sup> As a solitary, Cuthbert is described as being happy and content, but not because of those who "marveled at his manner of life."<sup>70</sup>

The theme of an unwillingness to serve in a higher ecclesiastical office would remain a powerful one well into the twelfth century (Anselm was famously "reluctant" to take the office of Bishop of Canterbury). Although St. Guthlac was "unwilling" to refuse a plea by his bishop to ordain him, Guthlac had to be "begged" to accept the higher office, and the later celebratory dinner he attended is noted as being "contrary to his custom."<sup>71</sup> St. Ceolfrith was burdened by the office of prior and had fallen into conflict with the local nobility over matters of religious observance, so he left to pursue what was apparently a simpler life at his old monastery at Ripon. However, when Benedict "followed and pleaded with him to come back," Ceolfrith agreed, and returned to his

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<sup>68</sup> Anonymous, "Life of St. Cuthbert." *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, p. 52-53.

<sup>69</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 173.

<sup>70</sup> Anonymous, "Life of St. Cuthbert." *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, p. 62.

<sup>71</sup> "The Life of St. Guthlac." *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, p. 208.

duties.<sup>72</sup> St. Cuthbert reacted with protestations and tears to the announcement that he was selected for a bishopric, and his first anonymous hagiographer makes it clear that he remained the same humble, simple man he was before while performing his duties as bishop.<sup>73</sup> The significance of this theme was that displaying a lack of interest in accepting a bishopric represented a lack of interest in the temporal power and benefits that came with the office. It would have been foolish for any hagiographer to minimize the power a bishop had, but successfully canonized saints were characterized as only willing to accept a higher office because they were convinced acceptance was a godly duty.

Another common element in the hagiography of bishops/abbots was the theme of holy mastery over demonic or natural elements. Bishops/abbots mastered evil demons, animals, bodies of water and storms, and could raise the dead to life. St. Guthlac's hagiographer described an incident in which the saint was accosted in his cell by a flock of demons. The demons pulled him out of his cell and into a hellish nightmare where they beat him continually with harsh whips. St. Guthlac refused to leave his life of solitude, and St. Bartholomew came to rescue him, forcing the demons to take Guthlac back to his home "with the utmost gentleness."<sup>74</sup> This incident represented St. Guthlac's strength even in the face of demonic torture. St. Wilfrid is recorded as raising from death to life a child and baptizing him. Although the child's father later led the mother to direct the child into wicked ways before the child died of the plague, Guthlac's hagiographer praised the deed because the child could now "live for an everlasting life of happiness to

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<sup>72</sup> Anonymous, "Life of Ceolfrith, Abbot of Jarrow." *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, pp. 251-252.

<sup>73</sup> Anonymous, "Life of St. Cuthbert." *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, pp. 62-64.

<sup>74</sup> "The Life of St. Guthlac." *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, p. 192.

come.”<sup>75</sup> The significance of this theme is a reference to the power that Biblical figures had over demons and natural elements. The foremost examples of power over demons and natural elements came from Jesus himself: “Jesus said sternly, ‘Come out of him!’ Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him” (Luke 4:35, NIV). The power to command demons was a standard trope in hagiography. In another instance, Jesus showed his power over the weather: “Then he [Jesus] got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm” (Matthew 8: 26, NIV).

The final theme is the prophetic abilities of the bishops/abbots. The exercise of prophetic power functioned in the texts as proof to counteract doubters and as part of the roles of the bishops/abbots as “shepherds” of their flock, ready with advice and guidance. An example of prophecy as a pastoral function was when St. Cuthbert said that the devil would deceive those listening to him. He counseled, “[I]f any temptation should suddenly spring up outside, be steadfast and don’t be deluded into running out, thus interrupting and even preventing the hearing of the word of God.” Sure enough, immediately afterward, as he was preaching, his listeners heard the sound of a fire, and rushed out to see, but there was no fire, and Cuthbert used it as a lesson in not ignoring the preaching of God.<sup>76</sup> St. Guthlac also used his prophetic gift, not just to save his own life by foreknowledge of the murderous intent of one cleric who had dealings with the devil, but to convict the cleric of the wickedness of his ways and turn him again to good.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> “The Life of St. Wilfrid.” *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, p. 117.

<sup>76</sup> “Life of St. Cuthbert.” *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, p. 49.

<sup>77</sup> “The Life of St. Guthlac.” *Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes*, p. 194.

The final category of Anglo-Saxon sanctity to be examined here is that of the abbess. Like bishops and abbots, abbesses were almost always of royal/noble blood. Sometimes, like Aethelthryth, they were both: a former queen who had renounced her royal duties to take vows as a woman religious. Both queens and abbesses played important roles in Anglo-Saxon society: “We can be absolutely sure that royal women did have a certain degree of power in Anglo-Saxon society, since other political actors of their own time behaved as if they were influential.”<sup>78</sup> As administrative heads of double monasteries, early Anglo-Saxon abbesses ruled over both the women religious under them and the monks and priests who were responsible for the sacramental and manual tasks required by the monastery.<sup>79</sup> Some of the themes commonly found in the *vitae* of the abbesses, in addition to the standard hagiographic tropes of aesthetic rigors, virtuous deeds, and miracles, were an ability to listen to and give wise counsel and heroic preservation of virginity. The most popular pre-Conquest Anglo-Saxon abbesses venerated as saints seem to have been Hild, seventh-century founding abbess at Whitby, Aethelthryth, seventh-century East Anglian queen and abbess of Ely, and Mildrith, a probably seventh-century princess of Mercia and abbess of Minster-in-Thanel, and they were all women of noble background.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Dick Harrison, *The Age of Abbesses and Queens: Gender and Political Culture in Early Medieval Europe* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 1998), p. 254.

<sup>79</sup> C.H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism* (Harlow: Longman, 2001), p. 49.

<sup>80</sup> Increased attention has been paid in recent years to the study of queenship (and other ruling women) in the medieval period. Hild has perhaps been overlooked, but Sts. Aethelthryth and Mildrith now have book-length studies on their cults: Virginia Blanton’s *Signs of Devotion: The Cult of St. Aethelthryth in Medieval England, 695-1615*. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2007) and D.W. Rollason’s *The Mildrith Legend: A Study in Early Medieval Hagiography in England* (Leicester: Leicester University, 1982). For a general overview, see Dick Harrison’s *The Age of Abbesses and Queens: Gender and Political Culture in Early Medieval Europe*. Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 1998.

The first theme is the wisdom of the abbess and her ability to take the good counsel of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, with the resulting good management of those under her care. St. Hild, the seventh-century abbess of Whitby, is depicted as a woman who both gave and listened to wise counsel, and is praised by Bede for her management of the men under her rule. She taught those under her to “keep righteousness, godliness, chastity, and all other virtues, but specially peace and charity.”<sup>81</sup> In particular, the monks under her rule were set to read the Holy Scriptures so diligently that Bede says many of them could have held high religious ranks. Indeed, at least five of them became bishops, and Bede affirmed that they were men of “singular worth and holiness.”<sup>82</sup> St. Hild was anxious to be instructed by wise ecclesiastics, and she used that knowledge to instruct the kings and princes who came to her for counsel. In particular, she hosted the Synod of Whitby at her abbey in 664 that decided all Northumbrian churches would keep the Roman reckoning of the Easter date. This issue was important to Bede, who recorded it, and he used it to emphasize the religious correctness of the English church and the role that such synods played toward the unification of the English church. As usual, Bede was at pains to show the English church as guided by a long line of holy men and women who fulfilled the special work of God in England. Another famous event in Hild’s monastery that demonstrated her ethnic role as an Anglo-Saxon saint was a miracle when the cowherd Caedmon given the gift of singing, which was so sweet that it encouraged those listening to contemplate heavenly things. Bede again underlay the Englishness of St. Hild’s monastery by noting that the singing monk sang “in his own, that is to say, the

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<sup>81</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 131.

<sup>82</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 131.

English tongue.”<sup>83</sup> That this miraculous gift was given in the English tongue could be seen as evidence that their native language was worthy of participation in God’s gifts and could be used to show God’s greatness.

The second theme was a special care for virginity. Of course, while bishops and abbots, and sometimes kings, were all expected to be virginal, Bede and other chroniclers tended to compare only women religious to older Roman martyrs known for their virginity such as St. Agnes. This care for virginity was often accompanied by bodily suffering, a type of lifelong martyrdom that fit English political circumstances better. St. Aethelthryth “long and earnestly besought the king,” her husband, that “she might have leave to forsake the cares of the world and in a monastery serve only Christ the true king.”<sup>84</sup> The theme of a saint anxious for release from the bonds of matrimony, and a reluctant spouse, is not unique to women religious. St. Aethelthryth, like St. Sebbi, sought religious vows for a long time before her spouse would agree to the separation. And after St. Aethelthryth became the abbess at Ely, she suffered from a wound in her neck. The suffering gave her great joy because, as her physician reported, “the heavenly pity hath therefore willed me to be grieved with the pain in my neck, that so I may be acquitted from the guilt of superfluous vanity.”<sup>85</sup> Tortgyth, a woman religious under the seventh-century abbess Ethelburga, founder of Barking, experienced bodily torment to perfect her virtue: “she was suddenly taken with a very grievous sickness of body, and was therewith sore tormented by the space of nine years through the merciful provision of

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<sup>83</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 141.

<sup>84</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 102.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, p. 111.

our Redeemer.”<sup>86</sup> Later, as Tordyth was so ill that her “skin and bones did scant cleave together,” she was rewarded with a vision of Ethelburga who came to lead her into the “joys of eternal salvation.”<sup>87</sup>

In conclusion, the promoters of Anglo-Saxon saints, particularly Bede, stressed the equality of native saints with the Roman and Biblical saints they were most familiar with. By 1066, England had a full complement of recognized local and national saints. The English cult of the saints was expressed by pious lives of virtue, holy virginity, miracles in the community, pilgrimages to tombs and relics, and miraculous intercession. In some cases, such as Cuthbert’s, English saints were even venerated in other places besides England. But without the papal oversight of cults that would become prominent later in the medieval period, the Anglo-Saxon cult of the saints developed, despite self-conscious attempts to unify English practices with those of the Roman church, through the hagiographic writings of Anglo-Saxons like Bede, proud of their distinct English heritage and English saints. What would the Normans think when they arrived in England of these ethnic Anglo-Saxon saints, with their sanctity so dependent on cults in different Anglo-Saxon localities and whose devotees were primarily the Anglo-Saxon community they came from? What effect would the incoming, conquering Normans have on the native English cult of the saints, with its distinctive Anglo-Saxon ethnicity?

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<sup>86</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 53.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 57.

## Chapter Two

When William of Normandy conquered England in 1066, he came believing himself to be the rightful heir to the throne. He saw his own dynasty as uniquely Anglo-Norman, and himself as the legitimate successor to the long line of Anglo-Saxon royals. He also came under a papal banner, and with an avowed intention to reform the English church. To understand how the Norman Conquest affected the existing cult of the saints in England, it is necessary to understand how the Norman Conquest affected the English church as a whole. While William was genuinely interested in church reform, and there *were* clear irregularities in the English church, such as Stigand holding two sees, it is likely that reports of the debauchery of English churchmen were greatly exaggerated. The most important changes William and the Normans made to the English church was the gradual replacement of the native Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical elite with a native Norman ecclesiastical elite and the reduction of saints' lives and other religious works in the vernacular. The Norman ecclesiastical elite did express skepticism toward some Anglo-Saxon cults, but probably not for ethnic reasons. These objections to Anglo-Saxon saints primarily resulted from Norman observation of cults with insufficient documentary evidence or cults with a confusing profusion of relics. The majority of cults in England, both of native saints and of non-native saints, were not suppressed by the Normans. The Norman lay elite also did not feel threatened by the Anglo-Saxon saints, even though those saints defined the religious experience of the English people and were intensely tied to their ethnic self-identity, because Norman elites believed themselves to be the legitimate successors to the Anglo-Saxon holy royals who venerated native saints and sometimes became saints themselves. The Normans followed a general policy of



acceptance and even promotion of native English cults whose saints' veracity was vigorously asserted with miracles and convincing *vitae*.<sup>88</sup> One reason for some Norman acceptance was that both the conquering Normans and the native English accepted the authority of Biblical models in defining sanctity. Many Norman authorities evaluated native cults with a set of common assumptions, and attempts at suppression were mostly for administrative/bureaucratic reasons, not ethnic ones.

To understand the effects of the Norman Conquest on the English church and the cult of the saints, it is important to briefly narrate the events of the Conquest itself. After King Edward (c. 1003-1066) died, three different men claimed the English throne: Harald Hardrada, Harold Godwinson, and William of Normandy, and there were others waiting in the wings to make a claim. King Edward and his wife, Queen Edith, had no children, and therefore Edward had no direct royal descendants. In the case of each of the three men, the blood relationship to Edward was either tenuous or imaginary. Harald Hardrada (1015-1066), who was the king of Norway, claimed the throne through Magnus, his nephew and onetime co-ruler of Norway. Harald's sketchy claim lay in King Canute's temporary possession of Norway. He was supported by Harold Godwinson's own brother, Tostig, and regarded the country of England as a "rich prize."<sup>89</sup> Harald claimed England from his powerful military and political position. Harold Godwinson (c. 1022-1066), the Earl of Wessex and one of the most prominent magnates in England, claimed that King Edward had appointed him as his heir to the throne. The author of the *Vita Aedwardi Regis*, an anonymous work--commissioned by Queen Edith--chronicling the

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<sup>88</sup> The promotion of native saints did not usually extend to interest in their vernacular *vitae*.

<sup>89</sup> Hugh M. Thomas. *The Norman Conquest: England After William the Conqueror* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), p. 34.

noble history of Edith's relations and Edward's sanctity, records Edward on his deathbed saying to Harold, "I commend this woman [Queen Edith] and all the kingdom to your protection."<sup>90</sup> William (c. 1028-1087) was the Duke of Normandy and "related" to Edward only through the marriage of his great-aunt Emma to Edward's father. William of Malmesbury, the twelfth-century monk and chronicler, says that William decided to invade England and take the throne because of Harold Godwinson's faithlessness in fulfilling his oaths as a vassal and that "God would decide between him and the earl."<sup>91</sup> Writers sympathetic to the Normans claimed that Edward had earlier designated William, not Harold, as his heir and "stress[ed] the ties of obligation between Edward and the ducal line."<sup>92</sup>

Harold Godwinson quickly capitalized on his initial advantage in receiving Edward's blessing from his death bed and arranged to be crowned king. William of Malmesbury says that England was divided, "uncertain to which ruler she should commit herself."<sup>93</sup> Harald Hardrada and Tostig Godwinson joined forces to attack the crowned King Harold in the late summer of 1066. King Harold marched swiftly to meet Harald and his brother, benefiting from the element of surprise. The joint forces of Harald and Tostig were defeated at the Battle of Stamford Bridge on September 25<sup>th</sup>, and both were killed. Orderic Vitalis, the twelfth century chronicler and monk, writes about the Battle of Stamford Bridge, saying that it was so bloody that "a great mountain of dead men's bones

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<sup>90</sup> *Vita Aedwardi Regis*. Ed Frank Barlow (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962), p. 79.

<sup>91</sup> William of Malmesbury's *Chronicle of the Kings of England* Ed. J.A. Giles (London: George Bell and Sons, 1904), p. 275.

<sup>92</sup> Emma Mason. *The House of Godwine: The History of a Dynasty* (London: Hambledon and London, 2004), p. 110.

<sup>93</sup> *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, p. 271.

still lies there and bears witness to the terrible slaughter on both sides.”<sup>94</sup> Both Harald and Tostig died, leaving William of Normandy as the primary threat to Harold’s kingship. However, King Harold had suffered terrible losses in the Battle of Stamford Bridge, which depleted his resources available to meet an attack from William and the Normans.

William of Normandy landed in England to face the badly depleted English forces. Orderic Vitalis says that William and his forces considered their conquest a religious duty. They prayed and made vows to God before leaving, taking the body of St. Valery with them at least part of the way to “secure a favorable wind.”<sup>95</sup> They met what was left of Harold Godwinson’s forces at the Battle of Hastings in October of 1066. Accounts of the decisive battle are of necessity fragmentary and confusing. William of Malmesbury claims that the Normans used the “stratagem” of retreating to defeat the English. He says that both generals distinguished themselves on the battlefield, with Harold so brave that “none could approach him with impunity.”<sup>96</sup> Eadmer, the twelfth-century chronicler, monk, and biographer of St. Anselm, does not give Harold any credit for nobility of spirit, remembering his supposed faithlessness in oath-giving, and saying that God had “by so punishing Harold’s wicked perjury shewed that He is not a God that hath any pleasure in wickedness.”<sup>97</sup> After the death of Harald and Harold, and once he had put down the powerful nobles, including Stigand, Archbishop of Canterbury, who put forth the young Edgar Atheling, as the rightful heir to the throne, William of Normandy stood as the last surviving claimant on English soil to the English throne.

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<sup>94</sup> *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis* Vol II., Ed. Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), p. 169.

<sup>95</sup> *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis* Vol II, p. 171.

<sup>96</sup> *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, p. 277.

<sup>97</sup> *Eadmer’s History of Recent Events in England*. Ed. Geoffrey Bosanquet (Philadelphia: Dufour, 1965), p. 9.

Eventually a group of prominent magnates and bishops officially offered William the throne; “they were aware that national resistance under a generally-accepted leader was no longer feasible.”<sup>98</sup> William was crowned king on Christmas Day at Westminster in 1066, the place where the former King Edward was buried. The location emphasized the continuity of succession between Edward and William, and William’s desire to continue the laws and ways of Edward’s reign. Notably, William was crowned by Archbishop Ealdred of York, not Archbishop Stigand of Canterbury. William of Malmesbury says that this was because “[Stigand] was not canonically an archbishop,”<sup>99</sup> not because Stigand was a political rival. The choice not to be crowned by Stigand was an important one, because it signaled William of Normandy’s attitude towards his campaign. He viewed his campaign not as a land grab, but England as his rightful inheritance. It was also a godly mission, and a big part of his godly mission was correcting the faults of the English church, including dealing with the notorious simoniac, Stigand.

It is difficult to get an accurate picture of the true state of the English church before the Norman Conquest since remaining accounts are heavily biased by those sympathetic to Norman criticism. William’s belief in the corruption of the church and of ecclesiastical officials like Stigand justified his conquest of England to Pope Alexander II. Alexander II gave William his approval, sending the “standard of St. Peter the Apostle, by whose merits he might be defended from every danger”<sup>100</sup> to accompany William to England. William of Malmesbury describes the state of the English church

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<sup>98</sup> Frank Barlow. *William I and the Norman Conquest* (London: English Universities, 1965), p. 81.

<sup>99</sup> *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, p. 281.

<sup>100</sup> *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis* Vol II., p. 143.

before the Norman Conquest as flawed and in need of reform, but not without its genuinely pious and good bishops and other churchmen. He accuses the majority of clergy of being uneducated, saying that they “could scarcely stammer out the words of the sacraments.”<sup>101</sup> William of Malmesbury also claims the English church was plagued with problems of decadence in food and clothing. Although Norman writers might have had a vested interest in exaggerating problems in the English church, some leading scholars, such as Frank Barlow, believe that, “even if we discount the prejudice of newcomers and the self-interest of those seeking to justify expropriation, there remains some justice in the Norman charges.”<sup>102</sup> Stigand’s administration of two sees was clearly non-canonical. However, other scholars such as H.R. Loyn disagree, pointing to some vibrant works in the vernacular, among other points, and arguing that “a more balanced view would suggest that there was still much strength in the structure [of the English church], in the administrative expertise . . . and . . . traditions of homiletic teaching and instruction inherited from an earlier generation.”<sup>103</sup>

Although modern historians cannot agree on the state of the pre-Conquest English church and if it could fairly be characterized as spiritually corrupt, it is more important to understand that many contemporary Normans and Anglo-Saxon historians viewed the English church as flawed. For example, the anonymous author of the *Vita Aedwardi Regis*, writing before 1070, said that at the deathbed of King Edward the queen and other wise persons interpreted Edward’s prophecies to refer in part to the deplorable state of the English church: “For these knew that the Christian religion was chiefly dishonored by

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<sup>101</sup> *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, p. 279.

<sup>102</sup> Barlow, *William I and the Norman Conquest*, p. 54.

<sup>103</sup> H.R. Loyn. *The English Church 940-1154* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), p. 65.

men in Holy Orders, and that both the Pope of Rome by means of legates and letters and the king and queen by frequent admonition had often proclaimed this.”<sup>104</sup> Edward’s deathbed scenes appear to have been written after the Conquest, and carefully absolve King Edward and Queen Edith (who commissioned the text) of any responsibility for the church’s corruption. The anonymous author also criticizes Archbishop Stigand for saying that Edward’s prophecies were the result of “age and disease” and that he “knew not what he said.”<sup>105</sup> Although the text was written post-Conquest, it is still an indication that an Anglo-Saxon affiliated writer might also agree with Norman opinions on the need for reform amongst the monastic orders and important ecclesiastical officials in the church.

William the Conqueror agreed with Anglo-Saxon, Norman, and papal views that the English church needed reform. William’s policy towards higher religious offices was similar to his policy towards higher lay offices and the old Anglo-Saxon aristocracy. “Positions of power and wealth were given to foreign ecclesiastics at the expense of natives, either by deposition or on the death of the incumbents.”<sup>106</sup> The most famous case of the deposition of a leading ecclesiastic was that of Stigand, Archbishop of Canterbury, arguably the most powerful religious man in England at the time. Stigand was a “close associate of Earl Godwin’s,” who was appointed to the see at Canterbury after Godwin was reconciled with King Edward, which was “irregular and uncanonical.”<sup>107</sup> Although Stigand was one of the first magnates to submit to William the Conqueror, William carefully chose to be crowned by Archbishop Ealdred of York. Later William “permitted Stigand, the pretended and false archbishop, to be deposed by the Roman cardinals and

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<sup>104</sup> *Vita Aedwardi Regis*, p. 78.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> Ann Williams. *The English and the Norman Conquest* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1995), p. 126.

<sup>107</sup> R. Allen Brown. *The Normans and the Norman Conquest* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1985), p. 108.

by Ermanfred bishop of Sion.”<sup>108</sup> Although Stigand was not the only member of the ecclesiastical elite removed from his position, William the Conqueror favored a gradual turnover in power. By 1070 he had only directly deposed three bishops and a few abbots; however, by 1089 sixteen out of the eighteen bishops appointed were “of Norman birth or training.”<sup>109</sup>

The effects of the Norman Conquest on the ecclesiastical elite were measurable, if gradual, but the effects of the Norman Conquest on the laity and priests at the local level are less clear. For the most part, the local clergy remained English. The language divide probably “increase[d] the gulf between the great magnates of the church and the local parish clergy.”<sup>110</sup> However, reform movements among elites of the time sought to end priestly marriages, among other “everyday” laxities in practice. Another important change was that the Normans “raised the level of Latinity in England, partly by substantially reducing the English option for reading and writing.”<sup>111</sup> Writing in the local vernacular had increased the availability of Christian teachings, because the laity could “benefit when books or sermons in their own language were read out loud.”<sup>112</sup> This change supports William of Malmesbury’s complaint that most priests were illiterate (i.e., did not know Latin) and explains that to the Normans religious instruction in English was seen as effectively illiterate. In general, daily parish life probably went on much as before the Conquest. However, devotees to a particular cult or set of relics discouraged by the Normans would probably have noticed a direct change in their daily religious practices.

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<sup>108</sup> *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, p. 302.

<sup>109</sup> Brown, pp. 216-217.

<sup>110</sup> Williams, pp. 130-131.

<sup>111</sup> Thomas, p. 127.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, p. 126.

The effects of the Norman Conquest on the English cult of the saints differed depending on the locality of the cult, the backers of the cult, and the saint in question. Frank Barlow suggests that the Norman attempts at reforming the English church, including the replacement of abbots and renovation projects at monasteries, led to widespread “resentment,” and that the English accused the Normans of “contempt . . . for indigenous traditions and culture. Their [English] saints were derided, their ancient customs condemned, and their vernacular learning despised.”<sup>113</sup> However, Ann Williams disagrees with this earlier scholarly interpretation of the sources and believes that instead of ethnic and cultural derision, the suppression of certain cults was due more to a policy of authentication and documentation of relics that “does not indicate hostility to the English cults *per se*.”<sup>114</sup> Although a few of the apparatuses of a cult were indeed suppressed, such as a particular set of relics, the suppression did not indicate an overall policy against ethnically English saints.

In addition to pre-Conquest saints, Normans and English together negotiated the sanctity of post-Conquest saints. Robert Bartlett estimates that only twenty people living in England from 1075-1225 were acknowledged as saints, with five of them officially canonized.<sup>115</sup> He includes no female saints in this list, specifically leaving out Christina of Markyate and Queen Margaret of Scotland (whose canonization proceedings fell slightly outside the time frame he specified). However, these few numbers are not the full picture of the cult of saints in England post-Conquest. The cult of the saints flourished in England, and it is important to remember that many of the cults venerated were non-

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<sup>113</sup> Frank Barlow. *William I and the Norman Conquest*, p. 153-4.

<sup>114</sup> Williams, p. 138.

<sup>115</sup> Robert Bartlett. *England Under the Norman and Angevin Kings 1075-1225* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), p. 461.



native. The English church had enthusiastically welcomed saints of Roman or non-British origin even before the age of Bede (d. 735), the Northumbrian chronicler and monk. In his hymn to St. Aethelthryth, Bede mentioned Sts. Agatha, Eulalia, Thecla, Euphemia, Agnes, and Cecilia, showing a respect for and familiarity with non-native saints.<sup>116</sup> Moreover, there is significant evidence that the Normans were interested in promoting and supporting, not suppressing, the cults of such well-regarded native saints such as Cuthbert or Aethelthryth.

To understand the effect of the Norman Conquest on the cult of the saints, it is important to discuss the cults of native English saints. Because of the complex and individual nature of each cult, it is impossible to satisfactorily split the native English cults into those helped by the Norman Conquest and those hurt by the Norman Conquest. The main reason is because while some cults encountered Norman ecclesiastical objections, such as the case of Lanfranc of Bec objecting to the cult of St. Aelfheah, often the reasons for the objection were an inadequate *vita* or a confusing profusion of relics. The English and the Normans shared belief in the authority of Biblical models in determining sanctity. However, although many Anglo-Saxon religious practices had been regularized to match those of their Roman counterparts, in many places (particularly Scotland) differing versions of Easter calculation were still used. Also, Anglo-Saxon saints were an expression of ethnic and national pride, so it is doubtful how friendly the Normans would have looked on them if not for the fact that Norman elites viewed themselves as successors, not usurpers or destroyers. It is most useful to analyze the

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<sup>116</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 115.

native cults in the two categories of those whose status was heavily contested, and those whose status was not as heavily contested.

An example of one whose cult was contested for administrative reasons, St. Mildrith was an eighth-century abbess of Minster-in-Thanel, whose cult was connected with other Kentish, East Anglian, and Midland saints.<sup>117</sup> In the earliest versions of her story, such as the *Historia Regum* text, perhaps written in the eighth century, she performed miracles as an abbess and was especially protected by God. Minster-in-Thanel was a “focus of royal interest and generosity,” and was prosperous enough to have commissioned early hagiographies of Mildrith.<sup>118</sup> St. Mildrith was translated to St. Augustine’s Abbey at Canterbury in 1035, joining other prominent relics and bodies of other saints. The move shows that shortly before the Norman Conquest she was an important enough figure of veneration to merit a translation to an increasingly powerful ecclesiastical center. The change occurred as Canterbury was acquiring the land of Minster-in-Thanel.<sup>119</sup> Canterbury’s translation delocalized Mildrith’s cult from its original place of veneration, and was probably another concrete symbol of the transition of power between Canterbury and Minster-in-Thanel.

After the Norman Conquest, St. Mildrith’s cult was plagued by controversy surrounding the profusion and veracity of her relics and the battle between the competing sites of St. Augustine’s and St. Gregory’s over the “rights” to her cult. “It was not only St. [Mildrith’s] sanctity that made possession of her remains desirable; her property also

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<sup>117</sup> D.W. Rollason. *The Mildrith Legend: A Study in Early Medieval Hagiography in England* (Leicester: Leicester University, 1982), p. 3.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 35-6.

<sup>119</sup> Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend: A Study in Early Medieval Hagiography in England*, p. 36.

passed to the holder of her relics.”<sup>120</sup> Both St. Augustine’s and St. Gregory’s composed new versions of Mildrith’s hagiography. Goscelin of St. Bertin composed the *vita* for St. Augustine’s, and it was probably so important because it could be used in the liturgy, because it was a writing of “stylistic excellent and scholarly acumen,” and because his adaptation narrowed the focus of Mildrith’s life from the associated East Anglian saints to her own healing powers.<sup>121</sup> Archbishop Lanfranc initially tried to stop the monks from St. Gregory’s from claiming Mildrith’s relics, but was unsuccessful in wholly extricating St. Mildrith’s cult from intra-religious factionalism. St. Augustine’s Abbey had undergone some instability after the Norman Conquest, including unhappiness amongst the monks over Lanfranc’s appointment of Wido, a new Norman abbot. Wido organized a “splendid translation” of St. Mildrith’s relics into the new church in 1091.<sup>122</sup> This translation was probably a way to improve relations between the primarily Anglo-Saxon monks and the new Norman abbot. It was also a way for Abbot Wido to emphasize his appreciation for the old Anglo-Saxon saints. While the rights to St. Mildrith’s cult were hotly debated, the Norman elite did little but encourage the superiority of the “original” claim to her relics. Also, besides attempting to maintain St. Augustine’s claim to St. Mildrith, the Norman elite were most interested in using their acceptance of local Anglo-Saxon cults to create common ground with the English. Abbot Wido’s respect for St. Mildrith demonstrated his acceptance of the models of sanctity that characterized her cult, and showed that Normans and English could both venerate English saints.

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<sup>120</sup> Williams, p. 139.

<sup>121</sup> Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend: A Study in Early Medieval Hagiography in England*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, p. 65.

The second contested cult is from a period in English history much closer to the Norman Conquest. St. Aelfheah (954-1012) was a bishop of Canterbury who was captured and killed by the Danes. Promoters of his cult reported that he was killed because he refused to allow himself to be ransomed. His death was viewed as a martyrdom. He was originally buried at St. Paul's Cathedral, but later moved by King Canute to Canterbury Cathedral in 1023. This translation demonstrates that the remains of Aelfheah were considered sufficiently important to merit a ceremonial move over ten years after his death. Writing later in the eleventh century, Osbern of Canterbury said that Aelfheah's translation reaffirmed his sanctity: "they saw the former instrument of the Holy Spirit lying uncorrupted, nor was there any sign of decay in the entire body."<sup>123</sup> An uncorrupted body was seen as a definitive signifier of sainthood. Osbern also reports the joy of many lay people who viewed St. Aelfheah: "One might believe that the children of Israel rejoiced in the same way either when Moses, the prophet of God, had led them with dry feet out of the middle of the Red Sea or when King David bore the Ark of the Lord into his city from the house of Aminadab."<sup>124</sup>

After the Norman Conquest, St. Aelfheah's cult was initially greeted with skepticism by Bishop Lanfranc. Lanfranc was "unsure of the basis of St. Aelfheah's canonization,"<sup>125</sup> probably because Aelfheah's cult was poorly documented. So Lanfranc commissioned Osbern of Canterbury to produce some support for the cult, and Osbern composed a passion, hymn, and the account of the translation of St. Aelfheah.<sup>126</sup> It seems

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<sup>123</sup> Osbern's "Translatio Sancti Aelfegi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi et martyris." Trans. Rosemary Morris and Alexander R. Rumble. *The Reign of Cnut: King of England, Denmark, and Norway*. Ed. Alexander R. Rumble (London: Leicester University, 1994), p. 307.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 311.

<sup>125</sup> Williams, p. 137.

<sup>126</sup> Osbern's "Translatio Sancti Aelfegi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi et martyris," p. 284.

that when Osbern did not know the specific details, he supported the cult with commonly accepted Biblical references, such as his description of the miracles worked by Aelfheah: “invalids were restored to health, the blind clearly perceived the light, the deaf were given the gift of hearing, the lame walked a straight path.”<sup>127</sup> The use of accepted Biblical models for an English saint demonstrated that these models would be recognizable to the English as well as to the Normans. St. Aelfheah was officially canonized by Gregory VII in 1078. In the case of Aelfheah, while Lanfranc was initially skeptical of the cult, Anselm, his friend and former pupil under Lanfranc at the Abbey of Bec, apparently convinced him of its authenticity,<sup>128</sup> so it is incorrect to view the case of St. Aelfheah as an example of Norman suppression. Lanfranc’s primary objection also seems to have been that Aelfheah’s cult lacked authoritative sources, a problem that was solved with Osbern of Canterbury’s documentation and use of accepted Biblical tropes.

Many native cults were embraced by the Normans. St. Cuthbert of Lindisfarne was a seventh-century bishop who was known for his miracles, power over evil spirits, preaching, and ascetic rigors as a hermit. Bede says that he “first in his own doing gave example of the things which he taught should be done.”<sup>129</sup> Bede based his account of St. Cuthbert’s life (written c. 700) on an earlier anonymous account of a monk from Lindisfarne. Moreover, St. Cuthbert was well known not just all over England, but “widely known and commemorated, if not culted, in ninth-to-eleventh century Europe.”<sup>130</sup> One support for the spread of his cult into continental Europe is the number of continental copies of his *vita* that survive, with seven out of eight copies of his earliest

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid, pp. 296-7.

<sup>128</sup> Williams, p. 137

<sup>129</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 179.

<sup>130</sup> Gretsch, p. 73.

anonymous *vita* found in non-English libraries.<sup>131</sup> When Aelfric later updated St. Cuthbert's *vita* into a vernacular account, Aelfric removed the geographic specifics of Cuthbert's story, emphasizing Cuthbert's status as a "pan-English saint."<sup>132</sup> Aelfric and his mentor Aethelwold were representative of a national regard for Cuthbert as one of the most prominent and widely venerated Anglo-Saxon saints. By the time of the Norman Conquest, Cuthbert had long ceased to be merely a local Northumbrian saint, but had become a figure of veneration even outside English borders.

Despite the overwhelming pre-Conquest belief in St. Cuthbert as one of the most important Anglo-Saxon saints, the post-Conquest Norman ecclesiastical elite did not attempt to suppress his cult. Once again, Normans were not interested in a policy of the suppression of characteristically "Anglo-Saxon" saints or the suppression of saints for purely political reasons involving differences in ethnicity. As Edward the Confessor's heir, William supported those saints who would have been accepted by his Anglo-Saxon "ancestors." Their saints were his saints. Also, by 1066 Cuthbert's cult was big, popular, and widespread, and its suppression would have been a daunting task. Nevertheless, Cuthbert's case still supports the thesis that Norman lay elites accepted Anglo-Saxon saints as important to the new Anglo-Norman dynasty, and Norman ecclesiastical elites were primarily interested in weeding out saints whose cults were not supported by a satisfactory *vita* or whose cults had other insufficient evidence for sanctity. Cuthbert's cult was supported by a healthy documentation of sanctity, including Bede's account, and his cult had been respected and stable for a long time. Cuthbert's body was again examined post-Conquest and translated to a prominent new location at the new cathedral

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<sup>131</sup> Gretsch, p. 73.

<sup>132</sup> Gretsch, p. 126.

of Durham. William of Malmesbury supports the account of St. Cuthbert by Bede (he does not mention Aelfric's account), marveling at the many incorruptible bodies in England, reporting a speech Cuthbert made to King Alfred in a vision, saying, "Since England has already largely paid the penalty of her crimes, God now, through the merits of her native saints, looks upon her with an eye of mercy."<sup>133</sup> Although Cuthbert was a nationally-venerated English saint, the evidence demonstrates that the Normans did not suppress cults solely based on ethnic differences.

St. Aethelthryth was a seventh-century queen of Northumbria and the abbess of Ely. She was also a twice-married virgin spouse. Aethelthryth's husband King Ecgrith finally allowed her to take holy orders, after many attempts to persuade her to consummate the marriage, and later on she founded a double monastery at Ely and presided over it as abbess. After her death, during one of her initial translations, her physician testified that a wound on her neck had healed, her uncorrupted body proving that in life she had remained a virgin. Bede says, "The buried flesh of the same woman could not be putrefied, doth well shew that she continued uncorrupted and untouched by any man."<sup>134</sup> The evidence of a widespread cult beyond Ely increased in the late tenth century. The date of Aethelthryth's deposition is found in 21 out of 25 Anglo-Saxon calendars or calendar fragments, and the date of Aethelthryth's translation is found in 12 out of 26 calendars.<sup>135</sup> Because of an increase in promotion and interest in the late tenth century of her cult, Aethelthryth's dates are not found at all in some important earlier

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<sup>133</sup> *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, p. 114, p. 236.

<sup>134</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, pp. 104-105.

<sup>135</sup> Gretsch, p. 163.

calendars.<sup>136</sup> Aethelthryth is also commemorated in mass books and litanies.<sup>137</sup> Before the Norman Conquest, Aethelthryth's cult had spread significantly through England, and she was widely recognized as a saint.

After the Norman Conquest, St. Aethelthryth became an even more important figure to Ely, as new versions of her *vita* emphasized her historical role in Ely's founding and Ely's contemporary resistance to royal control and determination to remain autonomous. Aethelthryth's example is unique in post-Conquest England, because her cult was tied so closely to rebellion against William the Conqueror, and "no other Anglo-Saxon institution describes a resistance to Norman control."<sup>138</sup> In 1071, the monks of Ely claimed freedom from ecclesiastical authority based on their original foundation by a queen of Northumbria. The *Liber Eliensis*, written by an anonymous chronicler in the later twelfth century, records that "The monks of Ely . . . became deeply grieved both that a general takeover was happening where the resources of churches were concerned, and that the encroachment was being brought about by a foreign nation."<sup>139</sup>

Despite the close identification of St. Aethelthryth with Ely and the use of Aethelthryth's *vita* as a weapon in the fight for ecclesiastical independence, William the Conqueror did not attempt to suppress her cult. The king was here faced with a tricky political situation. William the Conqueror had to put down any rebellion against his authority, but William, Edward the Confessor's heir, had to respect the Anglo-Saxon saints of his ancestors, the dead Anglo-Saxon royalty. Instead of iconoclasm, William

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, p.167.

<sup>138</sup> Virginia Blanton. *Signs of Devotion: The Cult of St. Aethelthryth in Medieval England, 695-1615* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2007), p. 144.

<sup>139</sup> *Liber Eliensis*. Ed. Janet Fairweather (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), p. 223.



treated Aethelthryth's cult with veneration. As the *Liber Eliensis* chronicler reports, "Standing a long way from the holy body of the virgin [William] threw a gold mark on to the altar, not daring to approach closer: he was afraid of having judgment passed on him by God for the evils which his men perpetrated in the place."<sup>140</sup> According to the Ely chronicler, speculating about William's motivations, and feeling injured by the king's intrusion into Ely, William feared that the great power of the English saint would be awakened in response to what the Ely monks saw as an outrage. However, it is more likely, considering William's careful portrayal of himself as the rightful heir to the English throne, and self-conscious role as the "descendant" of Anglo-Saxon royals, that he was showing what he believed to be appropriate veneration to a saint he considered his own by virtue of his ancestry. Although William did force other punitive measures on the rebellious monks, such as a heavy fine, and subjected them to royal control, Aethelthryth's cult was officially not to blame.<sup>141</sup>

In conclusion, the cases of four pre-Conquest Anglo-Saxon saints and the effect the Norman Conquest had on their cults shows that the Norman ecclesiastical elite did not suppress saints primarily because of ethnic reasons. In the case of St. Cuthbert, his cult had been identified for several centuries as a characteristically "English" one, and Bede already called him a national saint of the English people. If the Normans had been interested in suppressing cults that were ethnically Anglo-Saxon, then the cult of St. Cuthbert above all would have been susceptible to critique. However, chroniclers and other sources show another translation after the Norman Conquest, and his cult continued

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid, p. 229.

<sup>141</sup> For more on the personal piety of William the Conqueror, including his favorite saints, St. Mary at Cherbourg and St. Martin of Tours, and his most-favored English abbey (Westminster), see Jason Wyeth Evans, *On His Own Terms: Ecclesiastical Reform, Kingship, and the Personal Piety of William the Conqueror*. Master's Thesis (Columbia: University of Missouri, 2003).

to flourish, as it had pre-Conquest. In this case, the Normans did not significantly aid or harm the development of Cuthbert's cult. In the case of St. Aethelthryth, William the Conqueror had some compelling political reasons to suppress her cult. Her story was being used by the monks of Ely as a support for their complete independence from William's control. But instead of suppressing this potent symbol of Anglo-Saxon rebellion, William seems to have appropriated the veneration of the monks of Ely for his own purposes, and treated Aethelthryth with as much respect as they did. His message must have at least partially been that he was fully the rightful king of the English people, behaving and venerating as an English king would, and therefore the monks of Ely owed him allegiance.

If the Normans did not judge cults solely based on ethnic or political reasons, what were the criteria they used to determine whether a cult should be contested or not? The Norman ecclesiastical elite was interested in cults that had well-articulated and sophisticated *vitae*, and a healthy tradition of veneration. In the case of St. Aelfheah, Lanfranc of Bec was initially unconvinced of the saint's sanctity. The solution was to commission Osbern of Canterbury to update or compose a *vita* for St. Aelfheah, a process that would probably have included some research into the saint's cult. Also, Anselm of Canterbury's own belief in St. Aelfheah influenced Lanfranc to drop his objections, showing that it is incorrect to speak of the "Norman ecclesiastical elite" as having one mind in regards to any individual saint's cult. In the case of St. Mildrith, interchurch wrangling led to contesting the locus of her sanctity. It is possible that the monks of St. Gregory's might have thought their founder, Lanfranc, would support them in claiming St. Mildrith's remains. However, Lanfranc and other Norman ecclesiastical elite

supported the “original” claims of St. Augustine’s, showing that the Normans were generally in favor of the older, more established claims to holy relics.

The Normans were not just “tolerant” of local English cults. The Normans were enthusiastic about the English saints they viewed as efficacious. The Normans saw the English cult of the saints as common ground between both the native English and the Normans and the Anglo-Saxon line and the Anglo-Norman line. Both the English and Normans venerated many of the same apostles, martyrs, confessors, and virgins. Also, the presence of saints like Cuthbert on the continent probably contributed to a feeling of continuity before and after the Conquest for the cult of the saints. William of Malmesbury expressed pride in the English cult of the saints after the Norman Conquest, saying, “And although almost every corner of [St. Augustine’s] is filled with the bodies of saints of great name and merit, any one of which would be of itself sufficient to irradiate all of England, yet no one is there more revered, more loved, or more gratefully remembered [than St. Mildrith].”<sup>142</sup> St. Mildrith might also have been used by Abbot Wido, a Norman, to show his English monks that, despite other difficulties they had had in the past, their abbot venerated the same saints that his monks did.

Another reason that the English and Normans were able to use the cult of the saints as a common ground is that the cult of the saints was heavily dependent on the same Biblical models that both the English and the Normans shared. Orderic Vitalis expressed his admiration of Bede, saying, “He broke the saving bread of the Old and New Testaments among the children of the Church, illuminating and explaining the mysteries in more than sixty commentaries; and by so doing earned undying fame both at

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<sup>142</sup> *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, p. 243.

home and abroad.”<sup>143</sup> This quotation supports the deep importance medieval scholars, clergy, and laymen alike placed on Biblical stories, people, and truths. Because the sanctity of saints was determined by successful identification with Biblical models, the Normans generally adapted and accepted English saints. There is no compelling evidence that they instituted a large-scale “purge” of the English calendar because of ethnic or political reasons. Those in the Norman ecclesiastical elite who objected to English cults generally did so on the grounds of insufficient evidence for their sanctity. As in the case of St. Aelfheah, when sufficient evidence for sanctity was compiled, Lanfranc’s objections were satisfied.

The four examples have shown that Norman lay elites viewed Anglo-Saxon saints as an essential cultural link between the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman royal lines. Therefore, these restorers were not interested in suppressing or destroying these cults who expressed the English national image so prominently. Norman ecclesiastical elites were also not interested in a large-scale purge of the Anglo-Saxon cult of the saints. What suppression or contesting of native cults they did was motivated primarily by administrative and bureaucratic concerns about proper documentation. And what of the long twelfth century following the Conquest? New candidates for sainthood in the long twelfth century sometimes reacted against the enforced changes of the new Anglo-Norman society, but all reflected new Anglo-Norman concerns and needs.

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<sup>143</sup> *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis* Vol II., p. 247.

### Chapter Three

After the Norman Conquest, contemporary English saints had to fill the religious needs of a merged Anglo-Norman society. I chose the cases of Edward the Confessor (1003-1066), Queen Margaret of Scotland (c. 1046-1093), and Thomas Becket (1120-1170), as representative examples of saint-making in the long twelfth century (1066-1215).<sup>144</sup> I chose these three saints partly because they show the continuing interest in post-Conquest society with the types familiar to pre-Conquest society: the king, the queen, and the bishop. Two of the saints were Anglo-Saxon royalty, and a popular view of the third held that he was martyred by a Norman king, so these saints all had a specifically “English” component to them. Also, these three saints show that a successful cult needed the backing of powerful ecclesiastical and lay patrons if it was going to thrive and its saint eventually to become officially canonized.<sup>145</sup> Despite the role of the ecclesiastical elites as the judges and administrators of cults, “even the most enthusiastic clerical support, however, was sterile without the concurrence of the laity.”<sup>146</sup> And the Norman laity was disposed to look particularly kindly on English saints who could be connected to the Anglo-Saxon royal family. Although miracle collections usually include recipients from a variety of social backgrounds, the miracles reported by a powerful, wealthy member of the laity or ranking member of the clergy were regarded as more important than miracles reported by the popular laity. For instance, as an example of the

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<sup>144</sup> The long twelfth century is bracketed by the Norman Conquest and the Fourth Lateran Council (1066-1215). This unit is significant as a discrete historical unit because we can analyze saint-making from one dramatic event to the time when the Roman ecclesiastical hierarchy tried to exert more control over the cult of the saints by curbing the “excesses” of the cult of the saints.

<sup>145</sup> Pre-Conquest English lay and ecclesiastical elites were also essential to the success of Anglo-Saxon cults, but it is particularly important to note the importance of Norman lay and ecclesiastical elite to the success of post-Conquest English cults.

<sup>146</sup> Ronald C. Finucane. *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1977).

importance of elite lay devotion, King Edward's cult appears to have lain stagnant during most of the eleventh century until William of Normandy's lineage met and married the strands of the old Anglo-Saxon royal line with the marriage of Henry I and Matilda of Scotland. This marriage solidified even further the argument that the descendants of William of Normandy were the rightful successors to Edward the Confessor's throne and the old Anglo-Saxon royal line. The general lack of interest the popular laity had in Edward's cult was unimportant compared to the devotion of influential members of the elite laity. Also, Edward's body resided at Westminster Abbey, which had become one of the most powerful churches in England. Therefore, the devotion of Edward's powerful lay and ecclesiastical supporters provided impetus to prepare the saint for official canonization. The other two saints will also demonstrate the importance of elite lay devotion. There is so much information on all three saints that it seems most beneficial to arrange their case studies with a very brief chronology of their lives, the virtues that cultic proponents listed as proof of sanctity, miracles in their early cults, cultural/Biblical models each saint was placed in, canonization attempts, and conclusions we can draw about saint-making in the long twelfth century.

First, it is important to recognize significant changes in canonization procedures during the "long" twelfth century (1066-1215) in Western Christendom. While local ecclesiastical authorities, such as bishops and abbots, were still instrumental in promoting or discouraging a local cult and then preparing the necessary legal documents for the canonization, the papacy and its centralized bureaucracy began to exert increasing control over *all* presumptive canonizations. The letter Pope Alexander III (c. 1100-1181) sent to King Kol of Sweden (c. 1171) is an important document asserting the power of the

papacy over local canonizations. Alexander III wrote to prohibit the cult of St. Eric of the Swedes, who had “died in a drunken state,” saying, “even if prodigies and miracles were produced through his intermediary, you would not be permitted to venerate him publicly as a saint without the authorization of the Roman church.”<sup>147</sup> Despite Pope Alexander’s suppression of a Swedish saint whose cult had seen a moderate amount of popular interest, such micromanaging did not signal total impotence amongst the local ecclesiastical authorities. The letter probably reflected struggles between papal and royal power, in addition to papal concerns about the efficacy of the particular saint. As before the Norman Conquest, in order to secure official papal canonization ecclesiastical authorities first investigated candidates they viewed as promising within their dioceses,<sup>148</sup> and prepared the correct documentation for the canonization proceedings. These proceedings were likely to go nowhere without the support of the local bishop. Later, Innocent III (d. 1216) proclaimed that “the pope alone had the right to canonize.”<sup>149</sup> During the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, in response to a relic trade that seemed out of control, the sixty-second canon “ordered that old relics were only to be exposed in a reliquary and were not to be sold, and that no new relics were to be venerated unless they had first been approved by the pope.”<sup>150</sup> While not judging relics “grandfathered” into the community of the faithful, the order explicitly prohibited the veneration of new relics. Since relics were such an important component of any cult, a tightening of restrictions on relics represented a tightening of restrictions on the cult of the saints as a whole.

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<sup>147</sup> Andre Vauchez. *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1997), p. 25.

<sup>148</sup> Promising candidates often included local saints with a long history of local veneration, saints who had been consistently celebrated in the liturgy, or saints whose cults had politically powerful backers.

<sup>149</sup> Eric Waldram Kemp. *Canonization and Authority in the Western Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 104.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

Another significant change in canonization procedures during the long twelfth century was a process of refining the definition and acceptance of the miraculous. Although church officials acknowledged that true miracles were signs from God to identify a saint and convince the unbeliever, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries there was a “growing tendency to limit the number of phenomena classified as miraculous and to divert the believer’s attention from the fantastic to the moral message of miracle.”<sup>151</sup> Even Satan and his devils could work signs and wonders. For example, the story of King Saul visiting the Witch of Endor and asking to speak to the spirit of the dead prophet Samuel was an oft-cited example of Satan’s power to deceive and the dangers of communicating with Satanic forces. In the story, King Saul goes to the Witch of Endor; “‘Consult a spirit for me,’ he said, ‘and bring up for me the one I name’” (I Samuel 28:8, NIV). The manifestation of Samuel tells Saul, “The Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hands and given it to one of your neighbors—to David” (I Samuel 28: 17, NIV).<sup>152</sup> Medieval diabolology held that Satan continually tempts humans and that he “enjoys blurring our understanding so that we do not even grasp that we are being tempted.”<sup>153</sup> Canonization attempts reflected the narrowing of the scope of the miraculous. With the examples of the three representative saints, we can see the increasing importance of the approval of the pope, who read the appropriate paperwork that demonstrated the efficacy of the cult, and how the moral object lessons of the cults were supported by their miracles.

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<sup>151</sup> Michael Goodich. *Miracles and Wonders: The Development of the Concept of Miracle, 1150-1350* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 21.

<sup>152</sup> Interpretations of the story differ. One primary interpretation is that “the woman had contact with an evil spirit in the form of Samuel by whom she was deceived and controlled.” *New International Version Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), p. 420.

<sup>153</sup> Jeffrey Burton Russell. *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1984), p. 100.



Edward the Confessor: “quem in collegio sanctorum regum”

Edward the Confessor (1003-1066) came from a family rich with saints, including his half-uncle Edward the Martyr, but the circumstances of his life, interpretations of his life, and eventual canonization after political maneuvering are a product of a new era, and illustrative of a “new” kind of saint whose cult successfully navigated changes in canonization procedures. After his death, the first audience for his cult seems to have been his wife Edith and other family members with the commission of an account of his life, the *Vita Aedwardi Regis*, written pre-1070.<sup>154</sup> Although his cult at Westminster Abbey initially did not attract popular lay veneration, Edward had powerful royal patrons who supported the Confessor as a link between the old Anglo-Saxon line of kings and the new Norman line. Osbert of Clare (d. c. 1158), a monk (and briefly abbot) of Westminster, and other promoters at Westminster Abbey drew heavily on the anonymous author of the early *Vita Aedwardi Regis*, who claimed that Edward had correctly predicted the Norman Conquest. Edward’s promotion as a Solomonic king of peace and an organizer of laws also assisted his cult. Of course, essential to the success of Edward’s cult was William of Normandy’s belief that he was the rightful heir to Edward’s throne. Edward’s prophecies were interpreted by those friendly to the new Anglo-Norman line as foretelling William’s progeny as bringing peace and prosperity to England. When the freshly joined Anglo-Norman royal house, particularly Henry II, decided to promote the

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<sup>154</sup> The issues in dating the *Vita Aedwardi Regis* are too complex to thoroughly explain in this project. Frank Barlow posits a date for 1065-66 for Book I, and a 1067 date for Book II. However, because of the portions of the work that are clearly hagiographic, Marc Bloch and others have suggested that the *Vita Aedwardi Regis* was composed “between 1103-1120” and only made to appear as if it was written earlier. *Vita Aedwardi Regis* Ed. Frank Barlow (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962), p. xxv-xxx.

Anglo-Saxon king as a way to represent continuity in England, Edward was eventually canonized in 1161.

Edward the Confessor was king of England from 1042-1066. It can be difficult to properly understand his reign by looking backwards, either from the time of the Norman Conquest or from the portrayal of Edward as an old man in the anonymous *vita*. Frank Barlow calls his reign mediocre, saying, “nearly all of his characteristics are commonplace,” and pointing to Edward’s alleged lack of interest in religious patronage or improving the church.<sup>155</sup> It is difficult to see signs of any special sanctity in the accounts of Edward written during his lifetime. On the other hand, Barlow also acknowledges that “when his problems are considered, the twenty-two-and-a-half years of peace that England enjoyed under his rule will, perhaps, be considered no small achievement.”<sup>156</sup> The first forty years of Edward’s life are sparsely documented. According to the *Vita Aedwardi Regis*, Edward’s future countrymen took an oath while his mother, Queen Emma, was pregnant that they would “await in him their lord and king who would rule over the whole race of the English.”<sup>157</sup> Although the story that Edward was hidden at the monastery of Ely as a young boy for safe-keeping from Danish incursions was circulated, Barlow calls it “improbable in substance.”<sup>158</sup> After a period in exile on the continent, Edward took the throne in 1042 and in 1045 solidified his alliance with the powerful Godwine family when he married Earl Godwine’s daughter Edith. However, the alliance with the Godwines fell apart when Godwine was expelled from the country in 1051. “The downfall of the house of Godwine opened the way for changes in

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<sup>155</sup> Frank Barlow. *Edward the Confessor* (Berkeley: University of California, 1984), p. 134.

<sup>156</sup> Frank Barlow. *The Feudal Kingdom of England 1042-1216* (London: Longmans, 1961), p. 55.

<sup>157</sup> *Vita Aedwardi Regis*, p. 8.

<sup>158</sup> Frank Barlow. *The Norman Conquest and Beyond* (London: Hambledon Press, 1983), p. 61.

key positions,” and possibly led to William of Normandy visiting England and formulating a claim to the throne.<sup>159</sup> Because Edward and Edith had no children, when Edward died, both Harold Godwineson and William of Normandy claimed the throne of England. Writing in the twelfth century, the native English monk Eadmer (b.c. 1060) is representative of other near-contemporary chroniclers with his lack of interest in Edward’s reign and his total lack of knowledge about or interest in Edward’s cult. Eadmer does not even interpret Edward’s reign as peaceful, mentioning the “wholesale destruction of monasteries.”<sup>160</sup> The best interpretation for Eadmer’s lack of interest in Edward’s reign is that a cult at Westminster, where Edward’s bones resided, was either not continuous enough to attract notice or non-existent in the late eleventh century.

Because Edward did not die a martyr’s death, it was important that the promoters of his saintliness, both the earlier anonymous writer, and the later promoters of his cult at Westminster, including the abbot, showed his life as virtuous. One of the main arguments for Edward’s sanctity was his allegedly chaste marriage with his wife. Later versions of his life reworked Edward and Edith’s relationship into that of two pious virgin spouses. The *Vita Aedwardi Regis*, his earliest life, written at the behest of his wife Edith, says that Edith called Edward her father, and Edward called Edith his child.<sup>161</sup> The *Vita Aedwardi Regis* does not specifically claim virginity for either the king or his queen, but it shows a modest and respectful relationship between them, saying that Edith sat frequently with his feet in her lap or at his feet, in opposition to custom.<sup>162</sup> Orderic Vitalis (c. 1075-1142),

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<sup>159</sup> Emma Mason. *The House of Godwine: The History of a Dynasty* (London: Hambledon Press, 2004), p. 67.

<sup>160</sup> Eadmer’s, *Historia Novorum in Anglia*. Ed. Geoffrey Bosanquet (Philadelphia: Dufour, 1965), p. 5.

<sup>161</sup> *Vita Aedwardi Regis*, p. 60.

<sup>162</sup> *Vita Aedwardi Regis*, pp. 42 and 76.

in his portions of the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* (written c. 1141), wrote about Edward and Edith that “it is said that both always remained virgin.”<sup>163</sup> This is the first written support specifically identifying Edward and Edith with the traditions of virgin spouses.<sup>164</sup> In Aelred of Rievaulx’s (1110-1167) *vita*, written by the abbot and chronicler to commemorate Edward’s canonization in 1161, the ambiguity about Edward and Edith’s relationship is gone, and they are proclaimed chaste and virtuous.<sup>165</sup> The identification of Edward and Edith as virgin spouses provides an acceptable cultural ‘model’ for Edward’s life. To absolve Edward from any responsibilities for the dynastic confusion resulting in the war of the succession to the English throne after his death, it was necessary for proponents of his cult to be able to fit him in a model of sanctity that explained his lack of progeny to carry on the royal line. The reworking also emphasized his extraordinary sanctity.

Despite the acceptability of the virgin spouse trope in other hagiographic works, the anonymous author and the promoters of Edward’s cult at Westminster were also interested in shaping Edward’s life in accordance with Biblical models of sanctity. From the earliest audience of his widow Queen Edith to preparing documentation for the official canonization, the anonymous author and the promoters at Westminster emphasized that Edward’s life fit accepted Scriptural tropes. The author of the *Vita Aedwardi Regis* patterned Edward’s life after two major Biblical figures: Daniel and

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<sup>163</sup> *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum*. Vol. II. Books V-VIII. Elisabeth M.C Van Houts, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), p. 109.

<sup>164</sup> Unlike St. Aethelthryth, however, *both* Edward and Edith were satisfied with a chaste marriage. For more on the Anglo-Saxon tradition of virgin spouses, see Aelfric’s *Lives of the Virgin Spouses*. Ed. Robert K. Upchurch (Exeter: University of Exeter, 2007).

<sup>165</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, “Life of St. Edward, King and Confessor.” *Aelred of Rievaulx: The Historical Works*. Trans. Jane Patricia Freeland. Ed. Marsha L. Dutton (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2005), p. 145.

Solomon. The identification with Solomon is particularly interesting, because King David was seen as the ideal in medieval kingship. King Solomon represented peace and safety, and the anonymous author says that King Edward, like “Solomon [had] . . . a rule of peace, so that . . . he lived in mercy, ruled his people with kindness, and overflowed more abundantly in the general glory and riches of the world than all the other kings of the earth.”<sup>166</sup> The prototypical parallel with King David was given not to Edward, but to Edith’s father, Earl Godwine, for the peaceful settlement of a dispute with King Edward. For not forcing a fight with Edward, Earl Godwin is praised, like David, for sparing a rightfully elected monarch. Like David, who was “strong and spared a king” when he had the advantage over Saul, Earl Godwin “abhorred the snares of regicide.”<sup>167</sup> Because the *Vita Aedwardi Regis* was commissioned by Edith, it is clear that the first book of the two about Edward was meant to glorify the Godwine family as much as it was meant to glorify Edward.

Although the anonymous writer gives special prominence to the kingly virtues of men who were not the king (and perhaps superior virtues, as Earl Godwin is depicted as blameless in the dispute, whereas King Edward listened to wicked counsel that poisoned his mind towards Godwin), Edward’s most influential Biblical model related to his prophecies, which were depicted as reminiscent of the career of Daniel, who also foretold divine punishment for sins and “fire and the sword.” The author of the *Vita Aedwardi Regis* recorded Edward as saying, “God has delivered all this kingdom, cursed by him, into the hands of the enemy, and devils shall come through all this land with fire and

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<sup>166</sup> *Vita Aedwardi Regis*, p. 12.

<sup>167</sup> *Vita Aedwardi Regis*, pp. 28-30.

sword and the havoc of war.”<sup>168</sup> This apocalyptic vision of the capture and subjugation of God’s people is an echo of the prophecies of Daniel, who spoke about the deliverance of the saints<sup>169</sup> into the hands of their enemies. “The saints will be handed over to [the king] for a time, times, and half a time” (Daniel 7: 25). The phrase “fire and the sword” (here: *igne, ferro*) is frequently found in the Bible as shorthand for divine punishment or an outcome of the judgment of the Lord.<sup>170</sup> Sometimes historians dismiss Edward’s visions as generously interpreted in view of later events or later additions.<sup>171</sup> But it is more instructive to understand the Biblical allusions the author of the *Vita Aedwardi Regis* referenced and the extent to which the Norman Conquest and the future Anglo-Norman line was viewed in some circles as a fulfillment of Edward’s prophecies. According to his *vita*, the old king prophesied that the time of tribulation would end when part of a green tree cut down would join itself again to the trunk. Then, Edward said, the green tree would bear fruit. William’s descendants, particularly Henry I’s son, were anxious to cast themselves as that part of the green tree which joined again after the marriage of Henry I and Matilda. As the fulfillment of prophecy, Matilda’s son would then represent a new era of prosperity for the English people.

Initially, the audience for a view of Edward as a saint may just have been his wife Edith. The anonymous author of the *Vita Aedwardi Regis*, with its early pre-1070 composition date, repeatedly emphasized Edith as the intended audience, saying, “Let us

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<sup>168</sup> *Vita Aedwardi Regis*, p. 75.

<sup>169</sup> In the Old Testament, the saints seem to be defined as the people who follow God. Our survey of Anglo-Saxon religion found that the English considered themselves to be God’s people.

<sup>170</sup> Just a few examples: Daniel 11:33, Esther 16:24, Isaias 66:16, II Machabees 12:6, Ezechiel 23:25, et cetera.

<sup>171</sup> “We can see that [the author of the *Vita Aedwardi Regis*’s] whole presentation of the death-bed scene is controlled by his awareness of what came after.” Barlow, Frank. *Edward the Confessor* (Berkeley: University of California, 1984), p. 250.

turn again to King Edward and his royal consort Edith—the illustrious mistress whom we chiefly serve in this present account.”<sup>172</sup> Before his death, Edward had spent a significant amount of money renovating Westminster in preparation for his final resting place. Sulcard, a Benedictine monk and first chronicler of Westminster Abbey, in *The History of Westminster* (written c. 1080) calls it “such a great building” and “a famous church to Christ.”<sup>173</sup> It is difficult to judge Edward’s early cult. It was certainly never continuous in popularity. In fact, it is unclear at what point a cult would have been visible. Sometime between 1076 and 1085, Westminster circulated a story that Edward had had a vision from St. Peter and the saint instructed him to dedicate an abbey. In return, St. Peter would “be a guide and helper for him in all adversity.”<sup>174</sup> Although the two books of the anonymous author’s *Vita Aedwardi Regis* were composed pre-1070, he included only miracles from before Edward’s death. It seems that some interest in Edward was sustained through his inclusion in the liturgy at Westminster, which at least kept his name and identity before the people who would be instrumental in furthering his cult: future royals and the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Most likely the anniversary of his death was “continuously commemorated” at Westminster and specific prayers for the king were offered.<sup>175</sup> It is also possible that Edward benefited from an association with other saintly members of his family: “it was not so much the nobility of the individual which counted as the membership of a family group which enjoyed particular popular prestige.”<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> *Vita Aedwardi Regis*, pp. 43-44.

<sup>173</sup> Quoted in a compilation of documents related to Edward in the *Vita Aedwardi Regis*, p. 71.

<sup>174</sup> Edina Bozoky. “The Sanctity and Canonisation of Edward the Confessor.” *Edward the Confessor: The Man and the Legend*. Ed. Richard Mortimer (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2009), p. 176.

<sup>175</sup> Frank Barlow. *Edward the Confessor* (Berkeley: University of California, 1984), p. 265.

<sup>176</sup> Andre Vauchez. *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 177.

By 1100, only seven of a sample eighteen Benedictine calendars included Edward's January festival day.<sup>177</sup> But Edward's cult attracted some very powerful ecclesiastical and lay backers. When the old Anglo-Saxon and the Norman royal lines definitively converged with the marriage of Henry I and Matilda of Scotland, the new Anglo-Norman line viewed Edward the Confessor as the essential link to the old Anglo-Saxon kings. For example, in Margaret of Scotland's first *vita*, commissioned (c. bf. 1105) by her daughter Matilda, Turgot elevates Edward as a "pious and gentle king" who "protected the kingdom more by peace than by arms."<sup>178</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, writing c. 1153, in his *Genealogia regum Anglorum*, said about Henry II that the "tree [of Edward's prophecy] returned to its root" after the marriage of Henry I and Matilda, and when Henry II (the son of Henry I and Matilda's daughter "Empress" Matilda) came to the throne, "joining the two peoples like a cornerstone. Now certainly England has a king from English stock."<sup>179</sup> As we shall see later, Henry II was not the only one of the new Anglo-Norman line to be identified as the fulfillment of Edward's Green Tree prophecy. Henry I and Matilda's son William was also believed to fulfill the Green Tree prophecy until his death in the tragic White Ship incident. King Edward's inclusion in the liturgy demonstrated that Westminster was interested in the promotion of their saint. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* includes a reverential poem emphasizing Edward's rightful place in heaven on the event of Edward's death, saying, "Angels led/His righteous soul to heaven's radiance."<sup>180</sup> William of Malmesbury and Osbert of Clare both wrote new

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<sup>177</sup> These seven calendars were from Crowland, Abingdon, Canterbury, Chertsey, Malmesbury, and Westminster. *Vita Aedwardi Regis*, p. 133.

<sup>178</sup> Lois Huneycutt. *Matilda of Scotland: A Study in Medieval Queenship* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2003), p. 164.

<sup>179</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, pp. 10, 209.

<sup>180</sup> *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 1066, p. 139.



hagiographies of St. Edward in the early-to-mid twelfth century, both using the *Vita Aedwardi Regis* as a source. William of Malmesbury and Osbert of Clare included the same miracle stories, and were heavily dependent on the earliest *vita*, which is an indication that Edward's cult had not been able to attract a steady stream of new petitioners each year. In fact, William of Malmesbury depends so heavily on the *Vita Aedwardi Regis* that the most important change is his assertion that King Edward "gave the succession of England to William earl of Normandy."<sup>181</sup> The first attempt at canonization, spearheaded by Osbert of Clare, prior and hagiographer at Westminster (c. 1138), failed. Osbert reported that he himself had experienced a miraculous cure. Lying "sick of a quartan fever," he begged the saint for succor, and was healed.<sup>182</sup> Afterwards, he promoted Edward's cult and collected old and new miracles for a reworking of his *vita*. The abbot of Westminster supervising this first attempt at canonization was Gervase of Blois, a relative of King Stephen, and "possibly this political alignment . . . blighted the cause."<sup>183</sup> King Stephen's arrest of the bishops and seizure of their castles to remove their control over royal government could have led to an unfriendly attitude in Rome towards the English church and any saint recommended by the English monarchy. B.W. Scholz argued that there was a lack of precedent for officially canonizing a king. Also, the disorder of Westminster itself, including a faction of monks who may not have supported the canonization attempt, probably worked against Edward proponents: "the abbey in which the relics of the saint were preserved was torn by internal strife."<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, p. 253.

<sup>182</sup> Quoted in a compilation of documents related to Edward in the *Vita Aedwardi Regis*, p. 125.

<sup>183</sup> *Vita Aedwardi Regis*, p. 129.

<sup>184</sup> Scholz, Bernhard W. "The Canonization of Edward the Confessor." *Speculum*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Jan., 1961), p. 48.

Osbert of Clare went to Rome personally, but returned to Westminster without official papal approval for the cult.

After a period of nearly twenty years of quiet, during which there was very little activity, no miracles, and no geographic spread of his cult,<sup>185</sup> three interests, those of Westminster Abbey, King Henry II, and Pope Alexander III converged in 1161.<sup>186</sup> Henry II was interested in how the cult of the old Anglo-Saxon royal family could “glorify his dynasty” and the king believed that Edward’s canonization would give “a special brilliance to the Plantagenet dynasty”<sup>187</sup> because Edward was the link between Anglo-Saxon and Norman royal families.<sup>188</sup> Because he had supported Pope Alexander III against Victor IV, Henry was in a better position than Stephen had been to request the canonization of an English king. When Aelred of Rievaulx wrote a new *vita* commemorating Edward’s canonization, he acknowledged Henry’s role as a patron of the cult: “[The *vita*] is, I believe, to be directed to you, most glorious King Henry, so that you may know how great are his merits before God, with whom he now reigns in heaven.”<sup>189</sup> Edward’s canonization reveals several insights about saint-making in the long twelfth century. Although procedures were beginning to be increasingly regularized and centralized, ostensibly to eliminate disreputable candidates for sanctity, canonization still included a political element. Henry II wanted a saint to increase the prestige of his dynasty, not because there was an upswelling of popular devotion to Edward. Also, William of Normandy’s patronage of Westminster, and the increasing influence of

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<sup>185</sup> Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*, p. 277.

<sup>186</sup> Bozoky, Edina. “The Sanctity and Canonisation of Edward the Confessor.” *Edward the Confessor: The Man and the Legend*. Ed. Richard Mortimer (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2009), p. 173.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid*, 182.

<sup>188</sup> Later, Henry I and Henry I’s son were both seen as fulfillments of Edward’s deathbed prophecies.

<sup>189</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, “The Life of Saint Edward, King and Confessor,” p. 126.

Westminster's ecclesiastical elite, enabled Westminster's support of Edward to be generally persuasive. The lack of compelling new miracle stories between 1070 and the early-to-mid twelfth century when Osbert of Clare wrote his hagiography may show that Edward's cult was not particularly relevant to the popular laity, but he was certainly important to the elite laity.

Margaret of Scotland: "altera Esther"

Margaret of Scotland (c. 1046-1093) is a saint whose martyrdom was one of daily piety and self-sacrifice, running her court like an abbess might her nunnery. She was a successful matriarch of a royal family, a type of sainthood rarely found. Mention of her pious deeds can be found in multiple relatively contemporary sources, including the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, saying that she "performed many useful acts in that country to the glory of God."<sup>190</sup> Her cult became a model of female non-monastic sainthood. Margaret was described as a "second Esther," a powerful medieval trope that was frequently used in medieval writing.<sup>191</sup> The first audience for her hagiography was her own daughter, Matilda, who commissioned Bishop Turgot (d. 1115), confessor of Margaret herself, bishop of St. Andrews, and former prior of Durham Convent, to write an account of her mother's life for didactic purposes. Matilda's role as a link between the Norman line and the old Anglo-Saxon royal line meant that her own ancestors, including her mother, were also important to the new Anglo-Norman line. According to the miracle collections compiled by the Dunfermline monks, her cult remained important to the monks and townspeople of Dunfermline. Around 150 years after her death, the monks at

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<sup>190</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 1067, p. 147.

<sup>191</sup> The prototypical example of a "wicked queen" was of course Jezebel. See Klein, Stacy S. *Ruling Women: Queenship and Gender in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2006).

Dunfermline put together two different attempts at an official canonization. The 1249-1250 attempt was successful.

Margaret was the daughter of Edward ‘the Exile’ and his wife, who was probably named Agatha. She and her siblings were the last descendants of Alfred the Great. Eadmer says that Margaret was “known to have been descended from the old Kings of the English.”<sup>192</sup> While Bishop Turgot praises her ancestry on her father’s side, he is less forthcoming about her mother’s side. Modern scholars cannot agree on Agatha’s ancestry, either. Edgar Aetheling, Margaret’s brother, was proclaimed king of England after her uncle Edward the Confessor died. After his claim failed, Margaret and her family left England and went to Scotland. Margaret later married King Malcolm III of Scotland (d. 1093) and had at least eight children with him. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* recorded that Margaret was reluctant to marry and preferred to remain a virgin: “[Margaret] also refused, saying that she would have neither him nor any other if the heavenly mercy would graciously grant it to her to please in virginity with human heart the mighty Lord in pure continence through this short life.”<sup>193</sup> This reluctance showed Margaret’s piety and her natural, godly desire for chastity. However, the chronicler recorded that it was God’s will that she marry Malcolm to “set the king right from the path of error” and “put down the evil customs that this nation [Scotland] had practiced.”<sup>194</sup> God blessed her obedience with many children. William of Malmesbury says they were “blessed with a numerous offspring.”<sup>195</sup> Three of her sons, Edgar, David, and Alexander, became kings of Scotland and her daughter Matilda married Henry I of

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<sup>192</sup> Eadmer’s *History of Recent Events in England* (Philadelphia: Dufour, 1965), p. 126.

<sup>193</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 1067, p. 146-7.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, p. 253.

England. Margaret died within days of the death of her husband, leaving a line of politically powerful children behind her.

Because Margaret married and bore children, her maternal attributes were one of the primary ways in which she was categorized. As the wife of the king of England, Matilda was proof that Margaret's children were powerful and successful, and that Margaret was capable of carrying a royal dynasty. In her day, Margaret bearing eight children who survived infancy "would have been impressive."<sup>196</sup> In addition to her successful progeny, Bishop Turgot described Margaret's many sterling maternal virtues. She is described as educating her children in pious works from a young age, enforcing corporal punishment, and nurturing them. The children also learned respect for hierarchy and authority: "[The children] never fought among themselves, and the younger children always displayed respect to the older ones. For this reason, during solemn mass, when they followed their parents up to the altar, the younger never tried to outdo the elder but went up by age, oldest first."<sup>197</sup> Margaret's maternal virtues were also revealed in her pieties towards the poor. The "warm, human vignettes," such as her sneaking gold coins away from King Malcolm and giving them to impoverished beggars,<sup>198</sup> were widely known. Turgot describes the large numbers of the poor and suffering who would come to her for charity. In addition to these explicitly maternal virtues, Margaret's ascetic rigors were recorded. She spent long days in prayer and disciplined her body with fasting: "In

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<sup>196</sup> Alan J. Wilson. *St. Margaret: Queen of Scotland* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1993), p. 77.

<sup>197</sup> "The Life of Saint Margaret of Scotland." Trans. Lois L. Huneycutt. *Matilda of Scotland: A Study in Medieval Queenship* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003), p. 166.

<sup>198</sup> Eileen Dunlop. *Queen Margaret of Scotland* (Edinburgh: National Museums of Scotland, 2005).

the forty days before Easter and Christ's birth she would weaken herself with incredible abstinence."<sup>199</sup>

In addition to her maternal and ascetic virtues, one of the major arguments Bishop Turgot and later promoters of her cult at Dunfermline made for Margaret's sanctity was her identification with Biblical models. Because she was not a virgin, but she was a queen consort, Margaret was identified with Esther. Esther was a commonly used Biblical model of a pious queen in the medieval period.<sup>200</sup> Aelfric of Eynsham (c. 955-c. 1010) was an influential English hagiographer and homilist, and his portrayal of Esther in one of his Biblical commentaries downplayed Esther's power over secular matters and emphasized her power in spiritual matters.<sup>201</sup> Margaret was also shown as wielding spiritual power in her devout zeal for regularizing the religious practices of the Scottish church. Turgot describes Margaret as staunchly orthodox. She disapproved of the aspects of the Scottish church that diverged from Roman practices. According to Turgot, "many things in Scotland were done contrary to the rule of faith and the holy custom of the universal church."<sup>202</sup> Turgot gives Margaret credit for her spiritual influence in convincing the Scottish ecclesiastical hierarchy to adopt the "correct" practices. He says that she managed councils herself and argued with Scripture against those who championed the unorthodox practices.<sup>203</sup> One of the practices she disapproved of included issues in differences of the length and timing of the Lenten fast. She also thought the Eucharist should be consumed on Easter. Her arguments for the orthodox

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<sup>199</sup> "The Life of Saint Margaret of Scotland," p. 174.

<sup>200</sup> Lois L. Huneycutt. "Intercession and the High-Medieval Queen: The Esther Topos." *Power of the Weak* (Urbana & Chicago, University of Illinois, 1995), pps. 126-146.

<sup>201</sup> Klein, p. 170.

<sup>202</sup> "The Life of Saint Margaret of Scotland," p. 169.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

view on the observances of Lent and Easter were persuasive, and according to Turgot the Scottish church adjusted their views to suit the universal tradition.

Margaret died in 1093. Bishop Turgot says that “she became a participant with those whose examples of true virtues she had always followed” and that she was buried “as befitted a queen” in the church she herself had ordered built.<sup>204</sup> She was initially buried beside the altar, a place of honor. Location of a body often signaled a corporate opinion of its sanctity, and placing Margaret’s body beside the altar indicated that she was regarded as worthy and honorable. Margaret’s family was the first audience for her *vita*. Bishop Turgot’s life of St. Margaret must have been completed during her daughter Matilda’s lifetime, probably before 1105. He argues for Margaret’s piety and the sanctity of her martyrdom to virtue: “For signs are common to both good and evil people, but works of true piety and charity are exclusive to the good.”<sup>205</sup> During her lifetime, Margaret often carried a beautiful gospel book with her as she traveled. On one occasion, one of her retinue dropped it into a stream. When it was recovered, it had miraculously been preserved. This miracle during her lifetime showed the importance elites of her class placed on written words and also Margaret’s personal piety in keeping the copy of the gospel book with her. By the time William of Malmesbury wrote his *Chronicle of the Kings of England* (c. 1125), Margaret’s reputation for sanctity was strong. William of Malmesbury calls her “distinguished for alms-giving and for chastity” and says she was “more especially . . . remarkable for piety.”<sup>206</sup> Matilda was William of Malmesbury’s patron, so his inclusion of Margaret may indicate that the view of the queen mother as a

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<sup>204</sup> “The Life of Saint Margaret of Scotland,” p. 178.

<sup>205</sup> “The Life of Saint Margaret of Scotland,” p. 174.

<sup>206</sup> *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, pp. 333-334.

saint was still strong in her own family. Aelred of Rievaulx, writing his *Genealogy of the Kings of the English* c. 1153, wrote about Margaret, saying that she “set sanctity of life above the luster of her name.”<sup>207</sup> A Dunfermline *vita* was probably written before 1154 and functioned partially as a support for the claims of Margaret and Malcolm’s descendants as “the legitimate heirs to a Scoto-Northumbrian realm not only in terms of their well-documented blood kinship with the House of Wessex but also through the inherited characteristics and historical territorial claims of Anglo-Saxon kings.”<sup>208</sup>

Margaret’s most detailed miracle collection is difficult to date, making an analysis of the strength of her cult difficult. Robert Bartlett speculates that this miracle collection was probably composed c. 1240-1260, about 150 years after her death. It was probably prepared for one of her canonization attempts by compilers at her monastery of Dunfermline, and it provides a helpful breakdown of the miracles associated with Margaret’s tomb. Her miracles benefited more men than women; she particularly aided many of her own monks at Dunfermline. Her cult also included a variety of social classes, from sailors to merchants. The geographic reach of Margaret’s cult also argued for her acceptance as a “national” saint, extending as far away as three hundred miles.<sup>209</sup> Because of her aid to her own monks, they were the primary ethnic recipient of her miracles. Her cult seems to have been attractive to those suffering from diverse problems. There were many physical cures, including one woman with a tumor on her belly, who

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<sup>207</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx. “The Genealogy of the Kings of the English.” *Aelred of Rievaulx: The Historical Works*. Trans. Jane Patricia Freeland. Ed. Marsha L. Dutton (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2005), p. 72.

<sup>208</sup> Catherine Keene. “The Dunfermline *Vita* of St. Margaret of Scotland: Hagiography as an Articulation of Hereditary Rights.” *Arthuriana*. 19:3, 2009.

<sup>209</sup> *The Miracles of Saint Aebbe of Coldingham and Saint Margaret of Scotland*. Ed. Robert Bartlett. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), p. xli.



was healed and eventually “discharged some huge black bones.”<sup>210</sup> However, a few people, men and women, were also freed from demons after Margaret’s intercession. One monk of Dunfermline, contemplating a return to the world, was beaten in vision by his father, who claimed to be sent by Margaret to stop the monk’s wicked ways. He awoke with “his whole body covered in blood and all his bedclothes soaked in blood” and decided to stay a monk.<sup>211</sup> These miracle stories also attest to the continuation of Margaret’s cult at Dunfermline. In one miracle story, involving a man called Mutinus (who could not speak for thirty-two years), the compiler mentioned that the feast of St. Margaret had been celebrated each year with “psalms and hymns” on the anniversary of the translation of her body to the high altar.<sup>212</sup>

Margaret was officially canonized in 1250 after one unsuccessful attempt in the 1240s. The documentation of the first attempt was unsatisfactory, and so the monks at Dunfermline compiled increased support. This bulk of this support seems to have been the updated miracle collection. During the long period between her death and official canonization, the monks at Dunfermline contended that her cult had flourished consistently. Her body was probably translated or at least placed in three different locations between her death in 1093 and 1250. Her initial position opposite the altar was prestigious, but as a new church was constructed, Margaret’s body had to be moved to a new location. Despite the pragmatic concerns of the translations, the care the monks of Dunfermline took to keep Margaret in places of prominence shows that respect for her cult was probably consistent. Each translation further expressed the community’s

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid, p. 83.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid, p. 125.

<sup>212</sup> *The Miracles of Saint Aebbe of Coldingham and Saint Margaret of Scotland*, p. 82.

consensus that her cult was efficacious. Alan Wilson says that Margaret's canonization was "one of the series of papal favors granted to Scotland in return for the nation's support of the crusades in the Holy Land."<sup>213</sup> But the most important factor in the promotion of Margaret's cult was her role as "the dynastic link between the royal families of Scotland and England."<sup>214</sup> As we have seen in the case of Edward the Confessor, the new Anglo-Norman line that increasingly solidified its identity as the rightful heirs to the Anglo-Saxon royal line with the marriage of Henry I and Matilda, was particularly interested in promoting Anglo-Saxon royals as links in their genealogy. The length of time between both Edward the Confessor's and Margaret of Scotland's deaths and their canonizations and the increased interest in their cults by those Anglo-Normans who most stood to profit from them support the thesis that these cults were essential to Anglo-Norman Angevin identity. The political use of the Dunfermline *vita*, possibly a source for Aelred of Rievaulx's *Genealogy of the Kings of the English*, demonstrated that Margaret's role as a link between Scotland and England could be used to validate the claims of her descendants.

#### Thomas Becket:

While Edward and Margaret's cults both had elements of a lifelong martyrdom, Thomas Becket's murder instantly defined his cult. Becket was neither a royal nor a noble, and belief in the power of his non-royal blood to save the people of England flew directly in the face of old Anglo-Saxon sentiments about the importance of the *king's*

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<sup>213</sup> Wilson, p. 114.

<sup>214</sup> Keene, p. 43.

personal piety in bringing salvation to the people of England.<sup>215</sup> Unlike Edward's cult, which was thoroughly managed by his powerful ecclesiastical and lay patrons because of its importance to the Anglo-Norman royal line, and lacked much concrete evidence of an organically-grown cult, Becket's cult was initially patronized by women and other poor laity. However, his "shrine may have begun by attracting the lower classes and women . . . but it quickly moved into higher social circles."<sup>216</sup> It was the latter group of powerful ecclesiastical and lay elites of Canterbury whose devotion actually drove Becket's cult to a quick canonization.<sup>217</sup> While his status as a saint became sanctioned by the church hierarchy when he was officially canonized, his cult was initially largely promoted by the visceral popular response of devotees who dipped their fingers in his blood and carried it away with them in vials. He may not have been any more beloved to his community than either Edward or Margaret, but the fact that the power and attraction of his blood drove his cult, before any elites chose to promote it, means that his cult developed differently than Edward's or Margaret's. However, it is unwise to say that his successful canonization was fully the result of the popular appeal of his cult. Although Becket's cult did not shed luster on the Anglo-Norman royal line, Becket was supported by plenty of powerful ecclesiastical and lay elites, particularly the monks at Canterbury and his personal companions, who managed the veneration of his body, told his story, and

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<sup>215</sup> Weinstein and Bell show a decrease in the number of new royal saints between the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and an increase in those from a "good family" or those who were "urban patricians" or "other burghers." However, it is important to remember that this data does not take into account the continuing popularity of other royal/noble saints who did not die in the twelfth century. But it is seems significant enough that the numbers of saints from urban areas would only increase and hold steady at higher levels in the next several centuries. Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell. *Saints & Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982), p. 197.

<sup>216</sup> Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England*, p. 126.

<sup>217</sup> William, a Canterbury monk, recorded 438 miracles from 1172-1179 and grouped them by "social class of pilgrim," showing that those who administrated Becket's cult were interested in knowing who came to his shrine and what class they were of. Those miracles experienced by the upper-class were seen as more important and convincing than those experienced by the lower classes.

dispensed his relics. The clerical hierarchy at Canterbury decided not to discourage the cult but instead to encourage its growth and benefit from it, and a repentant Henry II could not stand in the way of the cult without jeopardizing his official contrition for the events in 1170.

Thomas Becket (1120-1170) was born to a prosperous merchant family and started a career with several natural advantages. He was attractive, intelligent, and perceptive. Becket went to a school attached to the priory at Merton. He also made friends with some minor nobles, who taught him the “skills and tastes of the landed aristocracy.”<sup>218</sup> He seems to have been particularly skilled at cultivating friends who could help his social and career advancement. Historian Anne Duggan also calls him a “social climber.”<sup>219</sup> Becket rose rapidly through the lower ecclesiastical ranks and into the office of royal chancellor. “Men of importance were pleased to hold out a hand, and Thomas responded eagerly.”<sup>220</sup> He did not have a noble background, but he had excellent connections. As chancellor, Becket and the young king Henry II became close friends. However, their relationship did not maintain its cordiality after Becket became the Archbishop of Canterbury. Becket fought with Henry II over the extent of each man’s jurisdiction in England. After extensive negotiations and acrimonious disputes with the king and other royal officials, Becket was murdered in his own cathedral at Canterbury by an enthusiastic but disorganized group of men who believed that they were doing the king a favor. After his death, townspeople and monks of Canterbury frenziedly collected

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<sup>218</sup> Anne Duggan. *Thomas Becket* (London: Arnold, 2004), p. 11.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>220</sup> Frank Barlow. *Thomas Becket* (Berkeley: University of California, 1986), p. 24.

relics from the bloody mass of his body, indicating their acceptance of Becket as a martyr whose soul had ascended immediately to heaven.

Even though locally Becket was regarded almost immediately as a saint (at the end of 1170), it was necessary for his supporters, a group that included his close personal companions and eventually the monks of Canterbury, to produce documentation avowing his virtuous life. This proved somewhat difficult, since many of his contemporaries believed he was pigheaded and arrogant. During his lifetime, “there were no obvious signs of piety and much of his behavior appeared far distant from that of a saint.”<sup>221</sup> Nevertheless, his ardent supporters wrote lovingly about his virtues. According to these supporters, Becket’s life of virtue began with a blessed childhood. Edward Grim, who wrote one of the earliest lives and was actually in the cathedral with the Archbishop when he was murdered, began his story with miraculous visions to Becket’s mother, including one in which her “womb swelled to such an extent” that she could not enter the church at Canterbury.<sup>222</sup> Grim also reported a dream given to Becket’s mother in which she saw the nurse covering baby Becket with a robe of purple cloth. Grim helpfully added that this purple robe “signifies the blood of the martyr innocently killed.”<sup>223</sup> Becket’s comportment during his conflicts with Henry I was also a major source of support for his virtuous behavior, according to his friends and companions. In addition to including parts of one of Becket’s speeches about safeguarding the rights and dignities of the church, William FitzStephen, who was a clerk of Becket’s and also present during his murder, made explicit comparisons between Becket’s difficulties with the king and royal officials

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<sup>221</sup> Michael Staunton. *Thomas Becket and His Biographers* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), p. 12.

<sup>222</sup> *The Lives of Thomas Becket* Ed. Michael Staunton (Manchester: Manchester University, 2001), p. 41.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid*, 41.

and the sufferings of the earliest martyr-apostles, because, like Paul, Silas, and other early Christian apostles who sang hymns in jail, he suffered persecution with joy.<sup>224</sup> “O what a martyrdom in spirit he bore that day! But he returned more happily from that council, because he was held worthy there to suffer insult for Jesus’ name.”<sup>225</sup>

In addition to Becket’s work to protect the church’s interests, his companions recorded that his other virtues were many. He performed strict ascetic feats, such as eating very simple foods and staying for a length of time in a very cold river (which resulted in an ulcer).<sup>226</sup> William of Canterbury, whom Becket ordained as a deacon, claimed that Becket had worn a hairshirt hidden from the rest of the world.<sup>227</sup> He also gave generously to the poor. Several of the lives mention virtues of humility and wisdom, emphasizing that it was amazing how a man of so many obvious merits was able to be so humble. Becket is also described with the customary reluctance to serve in a higher office, protesting, just as many ecclesiastical saints before and after him, such as St. Cuthbert and St. Anselm,<sup>228</sup> would, that more power was the last thing on earth he wanted: “So . . . he did not reject this prize, but with the clergy pleading and the king urging he accepted, albeit unwillingly.”<sup>229</sup>

If the list of his virtues was sometimes greeted with skepticism by his detractors, it was difficult to argue with the visceral power the public shedding of Becket’s blood

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<sup>224</sup> See Acts 16: 25 for Paul and Silas’ joyful singing and miraculous escape from jail.

<sup>225</sup> *The Lives of Thomas Becket*, p. 115.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid*, p. 138.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid*, p. 67.

<sup>228</sup> For more on the political benefits of expressing a reluctance to serve, see Lanfranc’s canny use of a letter of resignation to the pope over his see at Canterbury, and how Lanfranc used the letter to construct and confirm his identity as a devout monk first and an administrator second in Marylou Ruud’s “Episcopal Reluctance: Lanfranc’s Resignation Reconsidered.” *Albion*. Vol. 19: No. 2 (Summer, 1987), pp. 163-175.

<sup>229</sup> *The Lives of Thomas Becket*, p. 61.

had over many people. At the time of the murder, Becket was encouraged to flee into the church and hide from the king's men and had to be dragged into the cathedral by a group of monks into what they thought was the protection of the church:<sup>230</sup> “The monks seized him unwilling and resisting, dragged, carried and pushed him, not heeding with how much protest he tried to get them to let him go.”<sup>231</sup> But the knights followed Becket into the church. Edward Grim describes Becket as standing unafraid before his murderers in the cathedral and responded to the group of knights, “I am prepared to die for my Lord so that in my blood the Church may find liberty and peace.”<sup>232</sup> The murder itself was a disorganized affair. The knights were initially unwilling to kill Becket in the church and tried to drag him outside to kill or imprison him there. However, Becket attached himself to one of the pillars in the church and they could not move him. Becket's bravery inflamed the knights into a great rage, and one of the knights struck the first blow, and the rest joined in the frenetic attack. One of the blows tore through the Archbishop's skull. Becket was left in a torn mass of flesh on the floor of his own church. Belief in the power of a martyr's blood and body was visceral and immediate. The cathedral was crowded and ill-lit when the attack occurred, and the monks were not successful in keeping the townspeople away from the body. Benedict of Peterborough records that, as Thomas's body lay on the ground, “some daubed their eyes with blood, others who had brought little vessels made away with as much as they could, while others eagerly dipped in parts of their clothes they had cut off. Later no one seemed happy with themselves unless they had taken something away.”<sup>233</sup> The quick distribution of his intimate bodily

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid, p. 199.

<sup>231</sup> *The Lives of Thomas Becket*, p. 199.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid, p. 201.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid, p. 204.

relics indicates that immediately after his death many ordinary people from Canterbury and the surrounding areas already believed that the blood of this martyred non-royal had real power.

The locals who collected Becket's bodily relics were primarily women and the poor; as "news spread, miracles followed."<sup>234</sup> As news spread, Becket's tomb began to attract more influential visitors, some even from outside of England. Becket's companions, including monks and others at Canterbury, began to collect material for the canonization proceedings very shortly after his death in 1170. By 1173, Pope Alexander III, probably anxious to further chastise Henry and curtail the prerogatives his line were gradually insisting on for themselves, had sanctioned the cult and the typical annual feast day to be held commemorating Becket. However, the proceedings were not as uniformly simple as the short period between his death and his canonization might lead one to believe. Some of the Canterbury monks were not immediately enthusiastic, and royal officials forbade the nascent cult and threatened to punish anybody paying homage to Becket.<sup>235</sup> Naturally, the cult would have primarily been an embarrassment to Henry and the Anglo-Norman royal line, and he was not anxious to support any cult whose veneration might hold an anti-royalist element. Caesarius of Heisterbach, in his *Dialogus Miraculorum*, written in the early thirteenth century long after Becket had been canonized, wrote about the contesting of the cult shortly after Becket's death: "After his death there was much disagreement about him. Some said that he was a damnable traitor to his kingdom; others that as a defender of the Church he was a martyr."<sup>236</sup> But stories of

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<sup>234</sup> Finucane, p. 122.

<sup>235</sup> Frank Barlow. *Thomas Becket*, p. 265.

<sup>236</sup> *The Lives of Thomas Becket*, p. 238.



Becket's miracles had already begun to spread to a very geographically diverse area; an Irish boy named Colonus mysteriously grew a tumor on his neck, which was removed only when he returned a phial of Becket's blood that he had stolen.<sup>237</sup> Becket was also able to help those of more modest means with economic success, such as a shoemaker from Dover who found a golden coin on Becket's advice.<sup>238</sup> It was not very long before the miracles convinced the monks at Canterbury that they were dealing with a genuine cult, and the pressure of the amount of pilgrims visiting his tomb forced the monks to organize administrative duties to keep the cult running smoothly. It is likely that Becket's cult also depended upon the sermons of medieval preachers for its rapid spread. Medieval sermons emphasized his "personal piety," martyrdom, and role as a shepherd for his flock.<sup>239</sup> His feast day of 29 December was continuously celebrated, with the liturgy again emphasizing his Christ-like intercessory role: "The noble shepherd gives himself on behalf of the flock."<sup>240</sup>

Becket's companions and the monks at Canterbury emphasized a view of the Archbishop as a Christ-like intercessor, a man whose blood had healing power. The importance of Becket's blood, although built on the history of Anglo-Saxon belief in martyrs and relics, differed in that Becket was neither royal nor noble. Traditionally, the English king's piety led the nation toward salvation. But *if* the king was not so pious, then Becket's blood might suffice. Like Christ, Becket predicted his own death, with Herbert of Bosham reporting, "He predicted that the time of his death was at hand, and that he

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid, p. 209.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid, p. 207.

<sup>239</sup> Beverly Mayne Kienzle. *Models of Holiness in Medieval Sermons* (Louvain-La-Neuve: Federation Internationale des Instituts d'Etudes Medievales, 1996), p. 7.

<sup>240</sup> "Se pro grege dat pastor nobilis." Kay Brainerd Slocum. *Liturgies in Honour of Thomas Becket* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2004), p. 180.

would soon leave his people.”<sup>241</sup> He was characterized as fulfilling the medieval symbol of a bishop as a shepherd for his flock. Repeated references to Becket as a good shepherd also reinforced his Christ-like characterization: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11, NIV). Edward Grim wrote that Becket did not attempt to evade his death because “satiated with the blood of the shepherd, the fury of the wolves might be kept away from the sheep.”<sup>242</sup> The wolves, of course, represented the murderers who dared to profane a church with the blood of a holy man. The power of his innocent blood, shed in a holy church, for his children, resonated powerfully with those of Canterbury and others far away, so that a general agreement grew that he was a “martyr who in [all] other things had imitated Christ.”<sup>243</sup>

In a period in which contemporary preachers put increased emphasis in their sermons on the virtuous lives of saints, not just their gruesome deaths, Becket rose to immediate cultic prominence after his death. Although some observers, including the Anglo-Norman line, which, as we have seen, was probably the most important group driving canonizations at this time, balked at describing his life as virtuous and saintly, the faithful at Canterbury expressed their devotion by flocking to his tomb for healing and seeking his bodily relics. Of these faithful, Becket’s cult “claimed a high proportion of the upper social levels among the laity, precisely those elements in medieval society with greatest wealth, mobility, and influence outside the church.”<sup>244</sup> To these faithful, both lay and clergy alike, Becket’s blood had Christ-like healing and intercessory power.

Agreement with this Biblical characterization is shown by the immediate veneration of

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<sup>241</sup> *The Lives of Thomas Becket*, p. 192.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid*, p.199.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid*, p. 203.

<sup>244</sup> Finucane, p. 164.

his body and relics, the sermons preached, and the testimony of his companions. And sharp initial royal attempts to suppress the veneration were ultimately ineffective, particularly once the monks of Canterbury decided to promote and manage Becket's cult, showing that, while the influence of the Anglo-Norman line over canonizations was important, it was not complete. Of course, Henry himself publicly did penance at Becket's tomb after his official canonization; while it might have been embarrassing, the public penance did attempt to reinforce Henry's relationship with the papacy and emphasize his genuine contrition. So Becket's cult was not without its uses for the Anglo-Normans, after all. Becket's canonization became a model for future saint-makers to follow, not because it was without dissenting voices or obstructions, but because of the speed with which the cult traveled and the speed with which the cult, politically attractive to Rome, was granted papal acceptance, in an age in which papal acceptance was becoming required and not just encouraged. But what of those saints during the long twelfth century who were *not* ever officially papally canonized? Seeing the important role the Anglo-Norman line played in encouraging the canonizations of Edward and Margaret, while confronting and trying to stop the embarrassing cult of Thomas Becket (even though they eventually may have profited from it) we know that they were anxious to control the cult of the saints in England. We might also speculate that some other saints who were never canonized but who had a large popular following might also have been handicapped by a lack of Anglo-Norman elite support.

## Chapter Four

While the cults of Edward, Margaret, and Thomas all gained papal recognition and “official” canonization before end of the thirteenth century, other cults that originated in the post-Conquest period in England did not. Any cult successful in achieving official canonization needed the support of the ecclesiastical authorities, but both ecclesiastical and lay veneration was also necessary. Often disagreements about a local figure’s sanctity pitted locals against non-locals, instead of simply local elites versus the local laity. The occupational realities of post-Conquest England also meant that Normans and Anglo-Saxons sometimes had different ideas about which local cults were worthy of veneration. Just as the Anglo-Norman royal line supported Edward the Confessor and Margaret of Scotland as links between the old Anglo-Saxon royals and the line of William of Normandy, they did not support cults that could be seen as anti-royal, or cults that could be used as a symbol of Anglo-Saxon rebellion or resistance to their new overlords. I chose three cults to illustrate the process by which a contested cult failed to secure ultimate papal approval. Chronologically, these three are Earl Waltheof of Northumbria (1050-1076), Matilda of Scotland, queen consort in England from 1100-1118 (1080-1118), and William of Norwich (c. 1132-1144). All three figures had a strong cult following, but failed to attract or keep the support of powerful patrons who might have agitated for their canonizations. Insufficient elite veneration of these cults, both lay and ecclesiastical, ultimately sabotaged them. Two of these cults were an embarrassment to the Anglo-Norman royal family, while the promotion of the third would not have added to the reputation of the Anglo-Norman royal family. As we have seen, the Anglo-Norman royal family during this period played a crucial and often decisive role in

canonizations. While the evidence points to genuine lay devotion towards these three cults, particularly the devotion of many of the non-elite popular laity, and, although each cult was supported by some Anglo-Saxon and Norman elites, insufficient numbers of powerful supporters, and the antagonism or lack of interest in the Anglo-Norman royal family, meant that Waltheof, Matilda, and William remained uncanonized.

Much has been written on the medieval saints who later became officially canonized by the papacy, but very little has been written on contested cults with strong early or local traditions of veneration that ultimately died out. Living in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Earl Waltheof, Queen Matilda, and William of Norwich never became canonized during a period in which canonization processes were becoming more and more complex. The power to evaluate the veracity of all local cults resided increasingly with the papacy, rather than with local bishops. Of course, bishops and abbots were still responsible for the promotion of a fledgling cult, and compiling a collection of miracles that would pass inspection, so, in reality, the real initial power in saint-making still resided with the local authorities well into the thirteenth century and beyond. In addition, the devotion of the lay elite could influence which local cults were promoted and could provide the financial backing for a cult, often in the form of gifts to a monastery or gifts designed to increase the prestige of the saint. The following candidates for sanctity have been studied more often for reasons other than their possible sainthood. The cult of William of Norwich is studied as an example of medieval anti-Semitism. Matilda is studied as an example of medieval queenship. Earl Waltheof is studied as an example of Anglo-Saxon resistance to William the Conqueror. It is time to study an overlooked

aspect of these historical figures' lives—why they never became officially recognized by the church at large for the sanctity that at least some contemporaries attributed to them.

### Earl Waltheof of Northumbria: Martyred David?

Earl Waltheof of Northumbria (c. 1050-1076) was a prominent Anglo-Saxon magnate executed for treason during the reign of William the Conqueror (c. 1027-1087). His execution was an “exceptional act in William’s long career,”<sup>245</sup> and provoked an emotional response from many of the native English, who believed Waltheof to be innocent. The concern in William’s administration about a popular uprising leading to civil unrest meant that Waltheof had to be executed in secrecy at night. After his death, a cult grew up at his gravesite at Crowland, and petitioners began to ask him for intercessory benefits. Initial adherence to the cult functioned at least partially as a resistance against the ruling Normans, and elite Anglo-Normans repeatedly tried to suppress Waltheof’s veneration. Anglo-Normans were not anxious to romanticize or promote a cult whose martyr had been executed for treason against the king. But local support at Crowland remained strong. The abbot of Crowland commissioned Orderic Vitalis, the monastic chronicler of St. Evroul, to write an epitaph for Waltheof around 1119 when Orderic visited Crowland. Orderic’s epitaph, written in heroic verse, was probably the first attempt at writing Waltheof’s hagiography.<sup>246</sup> A brief narrative of Earl Waltheof’s life will show that local veneration of Earl Waltheof’s cult, even while supported by a few of the local Norman ecclesiastical elites and many of the Anglo-Saxon laity, failed to attract the support of the predominantly Norman lay elite and most

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<sup>245</sup> David Crouch. “God and the Normans.” *History Today*. Oct. 2002, Vol. 52, Issue 10.

<sup>246</sup> An Anglo-Danish account praising Waltheof’s virtues was probably composed earlier.

of the Norman ecclesiastical elite because of Waltheof's role as an Anglo-Saxon rebel. Allowing Waltheof's death to be romanticized as a martyrdom instead of a legal punishment would have portrayed William in the role of a usurper instead of the role of the legitimate successor to Edward the Confessor's throne that he proclaimed himself to be.

After the death of Waltheof's father, Siward, the Earl of Northumbria, King Edward the Confessor (1003-1066) appointed one of his wife's brothers, Tostig Godwineson, as the Earl of Northumbria because Waltheof was too young for the earldom. Despite the fact that William the Conqueror's general policy towards previously-held Anglo-Saxon holdings was to give them to his fellow Normans, William restored Waltheof's ancestral title to him after Tostig was defeated. William may have wanted to emphasize the wickedness of the Godwinesons by restoring lands they had "usurped," or he may have wanted to show his continuity with at least one of the ruling families of Edward the Confessor's reign. The restoration of Waltheof's titles demonstrated an alliance between William and Waltheof that could have been mutually beneficial. William also gave his niece Judith to Waltheof to "strengthen the bonds of friendship between them."<sup>247</sup> This marriage alliance between a long-established Anglo-Saxon family and the most powerful new Norman ruling family demonstrated William's commitment to pacifying the earldom of Northumbria and possibly a desire to neutralize any resistance in the area. It is unclear how other Norman elites viewed King William's patronage of Earl Waltheof, but it became apparent after Waltheof was accused of treason

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<sup>247</sup> *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, Vol. II., p. 263.

that he had no friends among the ranks of the predominantly Norman nobility willing to defend him.

Despite his alliance with William the Conqueror, Waltheof was involved with two different conspiracies against the king. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records that Waltheof and Edgar Atheling joined with Danish forces and destroyed the city of York. However, in 1070/1, “Earl Waltheof made peace with the king,”<sup>248</sup> and shortly thereafter married William’s daughter Judith. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* identified Waltheof as a full participant in both conspiracies. “There they plotted to expel the king from the realm of England.”<sup>249</sup> Orderic, on the other hand, reports Waltheof’s role in the second conspiracy as a listener, not an instigator. In Orderic’s *Ecclesiastical History*, Waltheof gives a speech to Ralph the Breton and Roger, the other conspirators, refusing to participate in the rebellion because of his oath of fealty to William. But when William put down the rebellion, Earl Waltheof was implicated in the conspiracy. William’s star witness for Waltheof’s complicity was Waltheof’s own wife, Judith.<sup>250</sup> She testified to witnessing Waltheof communicating with the conspirators. Orderic speculated that political maneuvering was the primary reason for Waltheof’s downfall, claiming that Waltheof’s Norman enemies were scheming to seize his lands while Waltheof was imprisoned. Orderic’s explanation for the reason behind Waltheof’s death could only have solidified a belief in the Normans as greedy and underhanded and emphasized existing tensions between the Norman elite and the native English who felt disenfranchised. After a year of imprisonment, in 1076 Waltheof was taken out at night by the king’s men and beheaded.

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<sup>248</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 1070/1, p. 150.

<sup>249</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 1075, p. 157.

<sup>250</sup> Although Judith testified against her husband, she later asked that Waltheof’s dismembered corpse be removed from the ditch into which he was first thrown.



It was a strategic move to avoid civil unrest and a possibly violent uprising. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* says, “Earl Waltheof was beheaded at Winchester on St. Petronella’s Day; and his body was taken to Crowland, and he is buried there.”<sup>251</sup> Clearly, worry about an uprising was specific enough and discontent was widespread enough that the Norman elite had cause for concern. Writing in the twelfth century, Orderic records that “the severed head [of the earl] was heard by all present to say in a clear voice, ‘But deliver us from evil. Amen.’”<sup>252</sup> The king granted his niece’s request and Waltheof’s body was moved from a ditch at Winchester, where it had first been dumped, into the chapter-house at Crowland by Ulfketel, its abbot.

Earl Waltheof’s case is beneficial to consider because it represents a cult that was clearly dependent on popular support through the length of its local veneration. Initial Norman fear over the power Waltheof’s death might have in motivating local resistance to become violent caused royal officials to try to minimize the impact of his death, but it did not stop popular regard for Waltheof as a martyr. In 1092, Waltheof’s veneration was strong enough to merit a translation of his body from the chapter-house at Crowland into the church. Abbot Ingulf, an Englishman by birth but trained in an abbey in Normandy, and friend to William, ordered the translation and examination of Waltheof’s incorrupt body. After the abbot arranged to have Waltheof’s coffin opened, Waltheof’s severed head was miraculously found reattached to his body, whereupon “many miracles were wrought [near his new gravesite].”<sup>253</sup> The translation, and the signifier of sainthood it represented, indicated that Crowland Abbey was still “committed to promoting his

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<sup>251</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 1076, p. 158.

<sup>252</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 323.

<sup>253</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 347.

cult.”<sup>254</sup> Another translation was recorded by Orderic when he visited Crowland Abbey in 1119. In addition to the commitment of Crowland Abbey to promote Waltheof’s cult, these translations represented the consensus of the local community that Waltheof was a saint. Orderic was commissioned to write an epitaph for Waltheof, which he completed and put in his *Ecclesiastical History* by 1125.<sup>255</sup> The epitaph called Waltheof a “man of highest virtue,” and reflected the earl’s deep connection to the English land: “The marshy soil of Crowland which, while living/He had so deeply loved received his body.”<sup>256</sup> This romantic picture of the English land receiving the body of Waltheof naturally obscured his initially ignominious burial in a ditch, but emphasized the earl as a “true” Englishman.

Despite the consistent local interest in Waltheof’s cult, it was always a locus for conflict, primarily between a disapproving Anglo-Norman elite and Anglo-Saxon support. To the Anglo-Normans, this powerfully-placed magnate was a treasonous criminal. But treason had to be against a legitimate ruler, and the support of many Anglo-Saxons of the cult seems to indicate that they did not see Waltheof’s actions as treasonous (and, perhaps, even that William was not a legitimate ruler). William of Malmesbury’s account of an encounter between Abbot Geoffrey of Orleans (abbot from 1109-c. 1124) and a Norman monk named Ouen illuminates the complicated competing views of Waltheof and the motives of those supporting and contesting his cult. Brother Ouen was upset by the pilgrims coming to Earl Waltheof’s tomb, and he openly criticized the saint, saying that “he was a false traitor who had deserved execution as a punishment

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<sup>254</sup> Stephen Marritt. “Crowland Abbey and the Provenance of Orderic Vitalis’s Scandinavian and Scottish Material.” *Notes and Queries*. September 2006, Vol. 53, Issue 3, p. 290.

<sup>255</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, p. xv.

<sup>256</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 351.

for his guilt.”<sup>257</sup> Brother Ouen was probably echoing the typical sentiments of Norman elites, particularly of the non-local ecclesiastics and laity. Although Abbot Geoffrey was himself not English, he blamed Ouen’s skepticism on his foreignness, but Ouen stubbornly continued to insult Waltheof and was struck down with sickness and died a few days later. But veneration of Waltheof’s cult had spread beyond Crowland. Archbishop Anselm of Canterbury, the churchman whose opinion had perhaps the most influence in suppressing or promoting a particular English cult, wrote a sternly-worded letter to the nunnery at Romsey, ordering them to stop celebrating Waltheof’s cult.<sup>258</sup> William of Malmesbury reluctantly admitted that “divinity itself appears to assent” to the English, rather than Norman, view of Waltheof’s sanctity, because of the “many and very great miracles at his tomb.”<sup>259</sup> Despite these attempts at official suppression, consistent throughout the duration of Waltheof’s cult, Orderic insisted that the “populace came flocking in great numbers to the tomb of their compatriot’s,”<sup>260</sup> identifying Waltheof’s cult both with popular sentiments and Anglo-Saxon identity.

By 1119, Orderic Vitalis was doing research at Crowland for the beginnings of his hagiography of Earl Waltheof. The abbot of Crowland would have realized that to properly promote Waltheof’s cult, Waltheof would need a *vita*; indeed, “the crucial relationship of hagiography to the cult of the saints was recognized by medieval clerics themselves.”<sup>261</sup> Orderic’s narrative fulfilled Crowland’s need, and reveals a depiction of Waltheof as a pious martyr who had lived a life of virtue. Orderic’s characterization also strongly emphasized Waltheof’s Englishness, in one way by creating a dichotomy

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<sup>257</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 349.

<sup>258</sup> Ann Williams. *The English and the Norman Conquest*, p. 64.

<sup>259</sup> *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, p. 286.

<sup>260</sup> *Ecclesiastical History* p. 349.

<sup>261</sup> Thomas Head. *Hagiography and the Cult of Saints* (Cambridge: Yale, 1990), p. 15.

between the pious earl and his Norman opponents. Orderic described the Normans as those who “coveted the wealth and wide fiefs of Waltheof and were deeply concerned lest he should escape.”<sup>262</sup> Of course, this characterization of the Normans as greedy for land was directly contradictory to the image of themselves as legitimate rulers that the Normans were advocating. In addition, in the epitaph tying Waltheof to his resting place of Crowley and the English people and lands he loved, Orderic also contrasted the native Anglo-Saxon to the arbitrary Normans: he was “sentenced to die by cruel Norman judgment.”<sup>263</sup> In two ways, by greediness for rich English land, and by arbitrary and unfair judgments, the Normans are portrayed as usurpers. On the other hand, Orderic portrayed Waltheof with the virtues of loyalty, honor, faithfulness, and piety. Orderic’s Waltheof identified himself with the Biblical King David, saying, “The Lord God, who delivered David out of the hand of Goliath. . .has by his grace delivered me also from many dangers.”<sup>264</sup> In the trial scene, Waltheof is shown to be a courageous, pious David standing up to the wicked and powerful Norman bullies. While Waltheof is imprisoned, he performs his penance, including the 150 psalms of David. In the summary of his life, Orderic also lists Waltheof’s many virtues, including his obedience to the ecclesiastical authorities, and his love for his Church and for the poor.<sup>265</sup> When Waltheof was led out to die in 1076, he only asked that his executioners delay his death long enough for him to pray for them.

To the faithful, Earl Waltheof’s cult showed multiple signifiers of sainthood: he died a martyr’s death; his body was translated multiple times to a more prominent and

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<sup>262</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 321.

<sup>263</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 351.

<sup>264</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 315.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid*, p. 321.

respected location at Crowland; he was supported by at least two high-ranking church officials—Abbots Ingulf and Geoffrey of Orleans; his body was found incorrupt sixteen years after his death, and his head miraculously re-attached to his body; praying at his tomb produced many healings; those who were skeptical of his cult were punished; and he was the recipient of hagiographic heroic verse. And yet these many signifiers of sainthood were not enough to overcome consistent Norman opposition to the cult. If not for his niece's petition, William of Normandy might have simply let Waltheof's body lie in the ditch where it had been thrown, with no honor or nobility to the place of his burial. Brother Ouen was likely representative of typical Norman sentiments, and Archbishop Anselm was representative of typical Norman elite attempts at suppression. Normans were not likely to support romanticizing or justifying what they viewed as a treasonous act. To emphasize William of Normandy's legitimacy, treason against William had to be dealt with severely, and veneration of rebels could not be encouraged. His cult was never able to attract sufficient non-local ecclesiastical and lay support because of Norman perceptions of him as a traitor, and so his candidacy never had the necessary support canonization procedures required. In 1219 Waltheof's body was again translated, and at least one *vita* and collection of miracles survives from the twelfth century, although the material is largely copied from earlier accounts such as Orderic's.<sup>266</sup> However, as the Anglo-Norman line continued to be interested in Edward the Confessor's prophecies and continuities between their family and the family of Edward the Confessor, Anglo-Norman elites continued not to promote Waltheof's cult.

### Matilda: Another Esther?

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<sup>266</sup> *Felix's Life of St. Guthlac*. Ed. Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1956), p. 41.

Queen Matilda (1080-1118), on the other hand, was at one time regarded as a key link between Edward the Confessor's family and the descendants of William of Normandy. As the wife of Henry I, son of William of Normandy, her marriage and children symbolized the fulfillment of Edward the Confessor's Green Tree prophecy. As the great-niece of Edward the Confessor, her blood was the blood of the old Anglo-Saxon ruling family, and her ethnic and social standing only solidified the claims of legitimacy of William of Normandy's family. Indeed, Matilda came from a family repeatedly recognized for its sanctity (her mother, Queen Margaret of Scotland, was canonized in 1250) and was lauded in her own lifetime for her piety and care for the poor. One of the most enduring stories about Matilda demonstrates her great humility, and especial care and kindness for poor unfortunates by relating how she kissed the faces and sores of lepers.<sup>267</sup> As queen, she made several important ecclesiastical and lay alliances that could have helped promote a view of her sanctity that could have encouraged veneration of her cult. However, despite her informally recognized sanctity, many powerful ecclesiastical and lay supporters, a fervent popular following, and accounts of miracles at her tomb, Matilda's nascent cult failed to result in her official canonization. While her body was being prepared at Westminster for cultic activity, the growth of Matilda's cult was dramatically halted after the death of her son William on the White Ship disaster in 1120 led to a generally accepted belief in the disaster as a judgment for general immorality and St. Anselm's laxness in approving the marriage between Matilda and Henry. The disaster was thought to be a judgment from God. Matilda's cult would have become an embarrassment to the Anglo-Norman line. If judgment had befallen the offspring of the royal couple, the marriage itself must have been diseased. And when Matilda's grandson,

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<sup>267</sup> *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, p. 453.

Henry II, took the throne, the second application of the Green Tree prophecy made Matilda much less important to the Anglo-Norman royal dynasty.

Information about Matilda's early childhood (and that of her siblings) is primarily found in the *vita* of her mother St. Margaret that Matilda herself commissioned. The *vita* of St. Margaret was ostensibly written by Turgot (d. 1115), the prior of Durham and bishop of St. Andrews. There is some disagreement about when it was written. It was probably written either before 1154 or as a document surrounding Margaret's canonization from 1249-1285.<sup>268</sup> If we are to accept the early date, which is most convincing, it was most likely commissioned so that Matilda could exert control over or encourage her mother's growing cult. There is no compelling reason not to believe the biographer that the text was commissioned as an *exemplum* for Matilda herself, and, despite its probably romanticized portrayal of royal home life, it is important as an ideal of medieval queenship and sanctity. If we agree that Matilda's primary interest in the text was didactic,<sup>269</sup> then she would have viewed her mother Margaret's virtues as those of an ideal queen. Some of the many virtues Margaret demonstrated in her *vita* were a sober intellect, moderation, religious zeal, and good deeds such as presiding over church councils, regularizing Scottish religious customs, charity toward the poor, and fasting.<sup>270</sup> Matilda's piety and kindness to the poor can be seen as modeling her mother's ideal of saintly queenship. She also once was reported in the *Liber Eliensis* as confirming and supporting a miraculous occurrence in which an innocent man wrongly jailed for a crime

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<sup>268</sup> Catherine Keene. "The Dunfermline *Vita* of St. Margaret of Scotland: Hagiography as an Articulation of Hereditary Rights." *Arthuriana*. 19:3, 2009.

<sup>269</sup> "My own interpretation of the purpose of the text is that it is exactly what the author states it is in his preface: a 'mirror' or didactic tool for the new queen of England." Lois L. Huneycutt. *Matilda of Scotland: A Study in Medieval Queenship* (Boydell: Woodbridge, 2003), p. 13.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid*, p. 164-174.

was set free. Once the man's chains were broken by a group of saintly intercessors, Matilda, "who happened to be in that city at the time," upheld the evidence of the miraculous release from bonds.<sup>271</sup>

Knowing more of the narrative details of Queen Matilda's life will help show why elite ecclesiastical and lay support for her cult evaporated even though popular support for her cult was still strong. Before she married Henry, Matilda was educated by her aunt in Romsey and at Wilton, both wealthy houses for women religious. This aspect of her education was controversial, generating debate over whether or not she had taken vows to be a nun. Taking vows as a nun would have made her marriage to Henry I null and void and any children she bore him bastards. While Matilda was seen wearing the veil multiple times, it is not clear what steps (if any) she had taken on her way to becoming a nun. William of Malmesbury (d. c. 1143), in his *Gesta regum Anglorum*, affirmed that inquiries into Matilda's time in the veil revealed that she had not officially taken vows.<sup>272</sup> Uncertainty about her status in the convent was a major problem that had to be resolved before Matilda was allowed to marry Henry. This issue was so important that it required an ecclesiastical council presided over by Anselm of Canterbury, whose decision, as Eadmer, twelfth century monk and hagiographer of Anselm, reported defensively, had been "maligned" as not keeping to the "path of strict right."<sup>273</sup> However, Anselm determined that Matilda hated the veil and was in the monastery not to be a novice, but solely for protection from violence in England and education.<sup>274</sup> After Archbishop Anselm decided that Matilda had not taken vows to be a woman religious, he presided

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<sup>271</sup> *Liber Eliensis*, p. 324.

<sup>272</sup> *Chronicle of the Kings of England*. p. 453.

<sup>273</sup> *Eadmer's History of Recent Events in England*, p. 127.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*



over her wedding ceremony to Henry in 1100. The “E” version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* recorded the marriage occurring soon after Anselm returned to England: “Archbishop Anselm of Canterbury came into this country, as King Henry sent for him on the advice of his council . . . And then soon after this the king married [Matilda]. . .the kinswoman of King Edward, of the true royal family of England, and on St. Martin’s Day she was given to him at Westminster with great ceremony, and Archbishop Anselm married her to him and then consecrated her queen.”<sup>275</sup> Matilda and Anselm maintained a lengthy correspondence (19 letters to or from or about), and was a “life-long friend of the queen.”<sup>276</sup> In particular, Anselm sought her help with resolving the investiture controversy, and the Archbishop’s 1105 threat to excommunicate Henry. Matilda responded, “He will become yet more courteous and reconciled to you.”<sup>277</sup> Matilda’s relationship with Anselm was an example of the support she enjoyed among some of the most powerful ecclesiastical elite in her lifetime.

Matilda’s networks of patronage, both cultural and religious, also contributed to her initial support among powerful ecclesiastical and lay elites. Matilda’s religious patronage was viewed by her contemporaries as appropriate for a pious queen. William of Malmesbury says that “her generosity [became] universally known.”<sup>278</sup> She was probably responsible for the success of the Augustinian canons and was consulted by Henry I in deciding which patronage projects to become involved with.<sup>279</sup> Numerous *acta* bear witness to her religious patronage. For example, one charter specified a gift that Queen Matilda gave to the church at Carham, saying that she gave to “God and to St. Cuthbert

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<sup>275</sup> *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, p. 177.

<sup>276</sup> Sally N. Vaughn. *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), p. 221.

<sup>277</sup> *Letters of the Queens of England 1100-1547*. Ed. Anne Crawford (Dover: Alan Sutton, 1994), p. 23.

<sup>278</sup> *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, p. 453.

<sup>279</sup> Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland*, pp. 110, 112.

and to the monks serving him.”<sup>280</sup> Matilda does this not only on behalf of her husband and her children, but with an eye to benefiting her parents and Henry’s parents spiritually. This gift shows that Matilda was aware of the importance of the royal lineage and how a gift to the monks of St. Cuthbert could help her family. St. Cuthbert is mentioned in this particular charter, but Matilda also recognizes Sts. Mary, Alban, Oswin, Aldhelm, and the Church of the Holy Cross<sup>281</sup> in other charters, confirming that she recognized the efficacy of the cult of the saints and native Anglo-Saxon saints in particular. However, while her patronage was appropriate, Matilda was not “associated with reform movements,” like her mother, Queen Margaret, and other later royal saints were.<sup>282</sup>

While the granting of royal favors may have been expected of a queen, Matilda’s personal piety was viewed as exceptional. Granting royal favors to particular monasteries could result in a greater chance of sustained veneration, but it did not necessarily result in growth of a cult. It is too simplistic to assume that royal saints of the period could buy themselves local canonizations. Matilda’s friendly relationship with monasteries may have positively affected the beginnings of her cult, but it is more likely that her virtuous life was the impetus for initial veneration. William of Malmesbury called her “singularly holy” and recorded that she would wear a hair shirt and minister to lepers, “handling their ulcers dripping with corruption . . . pressing their hands, for a long time together to her lips.”<sup>283</sup> Interestingly, although Matilda is nowhere characterized as a virgin spouse, in some accounts the language she uses to defend her habit of kissing lepers is reminiscent of virgin spouse narratives. Matilda explains that it is better to kiss the feet of the

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid, 159.

<sup>281</sup> Huneycutt. *Matilda of Scotland*, pp. 153-160.

<sup>282</sup> Mary-Ann Stouk. *Medieval Saints: A Reader* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1999), p. 265.

<sup>283</sup> *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, p. 453.

immortal Lord than a mortal man, even if he is a king.<sup>284</sup> This language affirmed the superiority of the heavenly over the earthly kingdom.

After Matilda's death in 1118, there are several indications that she was considered a saint. The most important indication is the battle over Matilda's body. Two different places claimed Matilda's body, a telling sign that both the monks of Westminster Abbey and the canons of the Holy Trinity Aldgate anticipated popular interest in her body and expected pilgrimages and veneration. After all, in her lifetime, "at all times crowds of visitants and talebearers were, in endless multitudes, entering and departing from her superb dwelling. . . this her own kindness and affability attracted."<sup>285</sup> Both Westminster and Aldgate were prepared to administer a burgeoning cult. Monasteries and other religious centers were pilgrimage centers that had a "virtual monopoly over the relics of the major saints."<sup>286</sup> Housing a popular saint's body meant more money and added prestige. The monks of Westminster, who also housed Matilda's kinsman Edward the Confessor, were eventually able to take possession of Matilda's body over the objections of the canons of Aldgate.<sup>287</sup> William of Malmesbury says that the queen's funeral was "splendidly celebrated at Westminster."<sup>288</sup> Matilda's celebration, in the same location as some of the other Anglo-Saxon royal family, emphasized her connections with them and the opinion of Westminster that she, too, was part of contemporary continuity with the previous royal family. And, as the mother of the presumptive heir to the throne, and the blessed fulfillment of Edward the Confessor's

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<sup>284</sup> Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland*, pp. 104-5.

<sup>285</sup> *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, p. 453.

<sup>286</sup> Victor Turner. *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Chapter 4: "Pilgrimages as Social Processes" (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1974), p. 189.

<sup>287</sup> Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland*, p. 145.

<sup>288</sup> *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, p. 454.

prophecy, she was at that time a very important figure to the Anglo-Norman royal family. The monks also performed an annual memorial service for Matilda. Inclusion in the liturgy was often an effective way of keeping the memory of a venerated person alive. Although twelfth-century chroniclers like William of Malmesbury wrote about Matilda, emphasizing her piety and saintliness, if there was ever a more extended hagiographic treatment of Matilda, it has not survived. Some attempts, in letters, hymns, and poems, were made in Matilda's lifetime to connect her earthly queenship with the queenship of heaven. However, Marian imagery was used to "stress the regal aspects of the Queen of Heaven, reinforcing and legitimizing Matilda's authority as an earthly queen."<sup>289</sup> Like her mother, Matilda was often identified with the Biblical figure of Esther. Aelred of Rievaulx (1110-1167), wrote around 1153 in his *Genealogy of the Kings of the English*, that Matilda was "another Esther in our own time."<sup>290</sup>

Despite the evidence of miracles at her tomb, a respected burial, a virtuous reputation, annual masses, even a possible *vita*, Queen Matilda was never officially canonized. At first, her cult appeared promising. William of Malmesbury, writing nearly contemporaneously to the events of Matilda's life, said, "She entered into rest; and her spirit manifested, by no trivial indications, that she was a resident in heaven."<sup>291</sup> Lois Huneycutt argues that the rivalry between Westminster and Aldgate, the two places that sought her body, probably kept the bishop of London from a great interest in promoting her cult.<sup>292</sup> Although canonization was officially becoming more centralized, the bishop would still continue to have a pivotal role in the cult locally by accepting or rejecting the

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<sup>289</sup> Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland*, p. 113.

<sup>290</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx. *Aelred of Rievaulx: The Historical Works*. Trans. Jane Patricia Freeland. Ed. Marsha L. Dutton (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2005), pp. 10, 119.

<sup>291</sup> *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, p. 454

<sup>292</sup> Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland*, p. 146.

cult and collecting appropriate miracle stories for the candidate. While it may have been politically expedient for the bishop to avoid conflicts with Westminster and Aldgate, through her networks of religious and cultural patronage, Matilda possessed the kind of elite ecclesiastical and lay support that could have translated into a push for official canonization from these powerful supporters. But interpretations of one tragic event in 1120 led to a swift decrease in the amount of powerful support her cult enjoyed.

In 1120, Matilda's son William was killed in the wreck of the White Ship off the coast of Normandy. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* says, "On that journey the king's two sons, William and Richard, were drowned, and. . . very many of the king's court, stewards and chamberlains and cupbearers and people of various offices, and a very immense number of excellent people with them. Their death was a double grief to their friends—one that they lost this life so suddenly, the other that the bodies of few of them were found anywhere afterwards."<sup>293</sup> After this horrible disaster, many people began to question why God had allowed it to occur. Henry of Huntingdon (c. 1088-1150s), chronicler and archdeacon of Huntingdon, wrote that the White Ship had sunk because almost all those on it were "tainted with sodomy."<sup>294</sup> The interpretation most damaging to Matilda's cult was that, since God had allowed the death of the only legitimate male heir to the throne, perhaps Matilda really had taken the veil and her marriage to Henry should never have been sanctioned by Anselm. Matilda viewed her son William as a fulfillment of Edward the Confessor's dying prophecy,<sup>295</sup> but after her son's death, that interpretation

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<sup>293</sup> *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 1120, p. 187.

<sup>294</sup> Henry of Huntingdon, *History of the English People 1000-1154*. Ed. Diana Greenway (Oxford: Oxford University, 1996, 2002), p. 56.

<sup>295</sup> Lois L. Huneycutt. "'Proclaiming her dignity abroad': The Literary and Artistic Network of Matilda of Scotland, Queen of England 1100-1188." *The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women*. Ed. June Hall McCash (Athens: University of Georgia, 1996), p. 164.

was no longer viable.<sup>296</sup> If her marriage to Henry had been illegitimate, then all their heirs were illegitimate, as was Empress Matilda's claim to the throne of England. Naturally, this view was popular with partisans of King Stephen.<sup>297</sup> Ecclesiastical and lay support for Matilda's cult dried up as this negative assessment of Matilda's marriage and the legitimacy of her heirs became widespread. Anglo-Norman elites were no longer willing to connect themselves with a cult tainted with the possible judgment of God. Herman of Tournai (1095-1147), abbot and chronicler of the monastery of St. Martin of Tournai, exemplified the post-1120 judgment on Henry and Matilda's marriage. "England did not rejoice for long because of the offspring of the queen whom Henry had married after she had worn the nun's veil."<sup>298</sup> Matilda's new unpopularity indicates the initial hope the Anglo-Normans placed on William, Henry I and Matilda's son, as the fulfillment of Edward the Confessor's prophecy. The fulfillment of Edward's prophecy was particularly important because it signified an end to God's judgment on England and a beginning of more blessings for the country. Instead, the death of the heir to the throne led to another long and sometime bitter war of succession before Matilda's grandson eventually took the throne. So despite Matilda's excellent and profitable connections as an Anglo-Saxon royal, and her popularity with the English people, her cult was unable to overcome these associations of irregularities and the destruction of hopes of prophetic fulfillment with her offspring.

#### William of Norwich: Christ-like Child Martyr?

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<sup>296</sup> William of Malmesbury says, "Many provinces, then, looked forward to the government of this boy: for it was supposed that the prediction of King Edward would be verified in him," p. 455.

<sup>297</sup> Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland*, p. 147.

<sup>298</sup> He also blames "persistent dissension" for the poverty in England at the time. Herman of Tournai. *The Restoration of the Monastery of Saint Martin of Tournai* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1996), p. 34.

William of Norwich (c. 1132-1144) was a young boy whose murder was attributed by his family and many of his neighbors to Jewish inhabitants of the city of Norwich. By 1150, his body had been moved three times, and he was in the chapter-house of the Norwich priory. Before this translation, William's cult had gained a devout partisan in Thomas of Monmouth, a Norwich monk who investigated William's reputation as a saint and wrote a hagiographic account of his life, death, and miracles.<sup>299</sup> The 1150 translation "revived" interest in William's cult that Thomas of Monmouth admitted was waning in Norwich.<sup>300</sup> Thomas could only verify five miracles from the period 1144-1150. Although Thomas of Monmouth's account portrayed William as a saint with more than just local appeal, saying that God displayed His goodness through the boy-martyr "to the whole of England,"<sup>301</sup> William's cult was contested in Norwich and never officially approved. Despite the popular local response to what was viewed as his martyrdom, and support from local ecclesiastical elites such as Bishops Eborard and Turbe and Prior Richard de Ferrariis, non-local lay and ecclesiastical support for William never materialized. One reason for this might be that local bishops had acted against the counsel of one of the king's agents in bringing the Jews to trial for the murder. Therefore, Anglo-Norman lay elites were not anxious to reward with their support those in Norwich who had flouted royal authority or tried to usurp royal prerogatives towards the Jews. The result of little non-local lay and ecclesiastical support was that William was "rarely"

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<sup>299</sup> Thomas of Monmouth may not have written the first hagiographic account of William's life. There is some evidence Paul of Bernried's martyrology was composed before 1150. See John M. McCulloh. "Jewish Ritual Murder: William of Norwich, Thomas of Monmouth, and the Early Dissemination of the Myth." *Speculum*. Vol. 72, No. 3. July 1997, p. 728.

<sup>300</sup> Gavin I. Langmuir. "Thomas of Monmouth: Detector of Ritual Murder." *Speculum*. Vol. 59, No. 4, October 1984, p. 832.

<sup>301</sup> Thomas of Monmouth, *The Life and Miracles of St. William of Norwich* (Cambridge: University Press, 1896), p. 10.

mentioned in liturgical sources, except for a few associated with Norwich.<sup>302</sup> Despite the periodic accounts of local veneration through the fifteenth century,<sup>303</sup> saint-makers were never able to escape the disagreements and controversies of the cult and attract powerful backers who would have sponsored official canonization efforts.

A brief account of William's short life will explain some of the controversies surrounding his status as a saint, and why some of the monks of Norwich objected to his cult. As a young fatherless boy, William was sent to apprentice with a skinner and became acquainted with some Jewish merchants, who seemed to prefer his work.<sup>304</sup> Thomas of Monmouth, William's hagiographer, claimed the preference was because of William's skill or because the Jews thought they could get a better deal out of him.<sup>305</sup> William was told not to associate with these Jews who were paying him so much attention, but on the Monday after Palm Sunday, a young girl saw him being led into a Jewish home. In the medieval period, the witness of a child was thought to be "particularly innocent."<sup>306</sup> Thomas suspected that William was tricked into entering the Jewish home with diabolical wiles. According to Thomas, the Jews then ritually tortured and killed William. Thomas cites the testimony of Theobald, another Norwich monk recently converted from Judaism to Christianity, to prove the impure intentions of the Jews. Theobald's story, as presented by Thomas of Monmouth, was that every year the Jews cast lots to decide where in Europe a Christian would be killed out of revenge for various injuries. Theobald's story, confirming already-existent prejudices towards the

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<sup>302</sup> McCulloh, p. 715.

<sup>303</sup> Finucane, p. 120.

<sup>304</sup> For a thorough examination of William's life story, read M.D. Anderson's *A Saint at Stake: The Strange Death of William of Norwich 1144* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964).

<sup>305</sup> Thomas of Monmouth, p.15.

<sup>306</sup> Miri Rubin. *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (New Haven: Yale University, 1999), p. 77.



Jews, is the “first appearance of what became the foundation of the myth of Jewish conspiracy.”<sup>307</sup> According to Thomas, William’s injuries imitated the wounds Christ suffered during his passion. As the narrative continues, the Jews decided to throw William’s body out into the woods, but they were observed by a wealthy citizen named Aelward, who noticed what looked like a corpse in a sack and became suspicious. Later, William’s body was discovered by a nun and a forester (separately), and people began to blame the Jews for the murder. Belief in their guilt was widespread, and many of the townspeople wanted to seize the Jews and punish them for murdering William: “And so the earnestness of their devout fervor was urging all to destroy the Jews, and they would there and then have laid hands upon them but that restrained by fear of the Sheriff John they kept quiet for awhile.”<sup>308</sup> Right from the beginning, William’s cult represented the threat of violent conflict and mass popular emotions.

Shortly after William’s death in 1144, his cult was caught in a power struggle between the desires of both the ecclesiastical elites and the royal family to exert authority over the Jews. As bishop, Eborard was a high-ranking ecclesiastical authority, and he ordered the Jews to answer for the death of William in open court. The Jews fled to the protection of the sheriff, who initially sheltered them, saying that “in the absence of the King the Jews should make no answer to such inventions of the Christians.”<sup>309</sup> The use of the king’s name did not appear to dampen ardor for dragging the Jews into court to answer for their actions, and a message was sent to Sheriff John that “unless they at once came to purge themselves they must understand that without doubt they would be

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<sup>307</sup> Analysis of the story as an example of the medieval persecuting society provided by R.I. Moore’s *The Formation of A Persecuting Society* (Malden: Blackwell, 1987, 2007), p. 112.

<sup>308</sup> Thomas of Monmouth, p. 36-7.

<sup>309</sup> Thomas of Monmouth, p. 46.

exterminated.”<sup>310</sup> This determination to get local justice for the murder of one of their own may reveal some anti-royalist sentiments in Norwich. Bishop Eborard, in particular, when confronted by the disapproval of royal officials, only conducted his further promotion of William’s cult in the safer confines of his own church. Thomas portrays the Jews as seeking a delay in the case, and eventually they were secreted safely away by the sheriff behind the walls of the castle at Norwich. While before “by common consent” the sheriff had been threatened with the death of the Jews, now Bishop Eborard feared to “openly oppose the King and his officers.”<sup>311</sup> However, the disapproval of royal officials over the prosecution of the Norwich Jews only increased Eborard’s less public commitment to William’s cult. He rejected an offer from the prior of St. Pancras to take the body of William and moved the boy’s body into the monk’s cemetery near the chapter-house.

When Bishop Eborard ordered the translation of William’s body in 1144 into the chapter-house, William’s cult was being venerated by large popular groups of the laity. According to Thomas, while the investigation into William’s incorrupt body was being conducted, “the whole Church was filled from end to end with the crowds of citizens.”<sup>312</sup> Despite Bishop Eborard’s support, and the support of William Turbe, the man to succeed into the bishopric in 1146, the prior of Norwich’s monastery, Elias, disapproved of the cult: “Norwich was a cathedral priory, in which the bishop of the diocese was *ex officio* ‘abbot,’ while the monastery was actually under the guidance of a prior.”<sup>313</sup> While William’s burial place was moved four times in the years 1144-1172, into places of

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<sup>310</sup> Thomas of Monmouth, p. 47.

<sup>311</sup> Thomas of Monmouth, p. 47-49.

<sup>312</sup> Thomas of Monmouth, p. 51.

<sup>313</sup> Finucane, p. 119.

increasing prominence,<sup>314</sup> Prior Elias continually tried to curb William's cult and prevent any amplified respect or physical evidence of veneration. Prior Elias was present at the translation of the saint's body into the chapter house, and he ordered that the saint be interred level with the ground (i.e., not with increased prominence). However, there was difficulty with the burial, which Thomas of Monmouth attributes to miraculous causes, and no matter how hard the workers tried to bury William at ground level, the saint's body ended up raised, and the angry Prior eventually decided not to press the matter any further. Later, Thomas (supported by the pro-William faction of the monks), covered the coffin with a carpet and put a large wax taper at the head. The Prior's response was to object to the presumption of those who placed these objects of veneration so close to the tomb of someone who did not deserve them.<sup>315</sup> However, despite Prior Elias' attempts at suppression, there was a large faction of monks in the Norwich priory and bishops Eborard and Turbe who supported the cult.

Thomas of Monmouth was very frank about other objections from those who did not support William's sainthood or at least the amount of veneration that Thomas and the pro-William faction of monks gave to their saint. In addition to information on how William's cult was viewed, this interplay between the two factions can also shed light on relations between a prior and his monks, among monks and other monks, and between bishops and priors. While these debates about William's sanctity were among monks and higher ecclesiastical elites, between the years 1144-1150, before the translation in which William was brought into the Norwich church, the popular masses had passed their own

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<sup>314</sup> The four translations were into the monk's graveyard beside the chapter house, into the chapter house, into the church itself, and finally to a more respected location north of the main altar.

<sup>315</sup> Thomas of Monmouth, p. 127.

judgment on William's cult, in the form of very few verified miracles and Thomas' own admission that veneration to the cult had tapered off. Thomas assigned various motives to William's skeptics, including doubts about the veracity of the miracles, ungratefulness, class snobbery, and hard-heartedness.<sup>316</sup> Of particular interest are criticisms that object to William's cult based on lack of merit: the first was that William had shown no special merits while alive, and the other, that it was unknown who he was or why he was killed, and it was unknown whether he died *for* Christ, as opposed to for some other unknown reason.<sup>317</sup> Thomas answered all these objections with a lengthy list of his investigations into the matter, including claiming a personal knowledge of healings, his own visit to the room in which an eyewitness saw the Jews leading William, and the testimony of the monk Theobald. By these objections, it is clear that, while some people felt sorry for William's murder, and believed the Jews to be the culprits, they were unwilling to accept him as a saint. It is unclear who these skeptics were, but it is probable that some were religious or lay elites. If true, the objection that he was only a "poor ragged little lad" who had no "previous merits"<sup>318</sup> might point to a lack of interest in some elite lay circles for sponsoring an uninspiring candidate.

The six books of Thomas of Monmouth's commissioned *vita* were probably written between 1150-1155.<sup>319</sup> The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle recorded, for the year 1137, a version of the events of Norwich that accepted William's veneration as a martyr: "Our Lord made it plain that he was a holy martyr, and the monks took him and buried him with ceremony in the monastery, and through our Lord he works wonderful and varied

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<sup>316</sup> Thomas of Monmouth, p. 85.

<sup>317</sup> Thomas of Monmouth, p. 85-86.

<sup>318</sup> Thomas of Monmouth, p. 85.

<sup>319</sup> The dating of Book I is a contentious issue, with Langmuir arguing for a date c. 1150, and McCulloh arguing that Books 1-6 were all composed around 1154-1155.

miracles, and he is called St. William.”<sup>320</sup> There are certain similarities in the two accounts. Both Thomas and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* identified the Jews as the killers. Both accounts also accept William as a saint, and directly evoke comparisons with the martyrdom of Christ. Information about William’s death “that was independent of Thomas’s hagiography circulated at least within a limited geographic area.”<sup>321</sup> Subsequent accounts of William’s martyrdom do not seem to have used Thomas as a source.

After multiple translations, William was given a final prominent location in the Norwich cathedral. His new shrine was probably “set in a large chapel opening off the north choir aisle at some point level with the High Altar.”<sup>322</sup> This translation, and the regard it indicated for William’s cult, was probably partially a result of Thomas of Monmouth’s initial success in linking William with influential Biblical models. Thomas emphasized William’s purity and innocence. He also emphasized the sufferings William went through, sufferings that were reminiscent of Christ’s passion. William was said to have endured wounds on his side and a crown of thorns on his head, and he was allegedly strung up like Christ was. These wounds affirmed the physical similarities between William’s martyrdom and Christ’s martyrdom. After William of Norwich’s death, accusations of Jewish ritual murder continued until Europe became “a world in which popular belief in Jews’ need for Christian blood had become established.”<sup>323</sup> Essentially, the faction of the religious elite in the Norwich priory who supported William triumphed

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<sup>320</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 1137, p. 200.

<sup>321</sup> McCulloh, p. 717.

<sup>322</sup> M.D. Anderson, p. 195.

<sup>323</sup> Rubin, p. 26. Rubin does not mention William of Norwich, but a general acceptance of his death by the hands of the Jews was clearly an important factor in European anti-Semitism and contributed to the later spread of host desecration stories.

over those in the Norwich priory who objected to his cult. However, it was quite a different story among Anglo-Norman elites, who were not interested in promoting or supporting William's cult. One clear reason was that the Anglo-Norman royal family would have wanted to assert its authority, rather than the authority of bishops, over the Jews. Bishop Eborard's initial insistence on prosecution over the objections of royal officials did not do the cult any favors, and to have supported William would have been to support insubordinate behavior, particularly when Eborard withdrew his open legal accusations against the Jews only to promote the cult in his own church where he, not the king, had authority.

In conclusion, these three contested cults reveal a wealth of information about religion and society in the long twelfth century. While the circumstances surrounding each cult's "success" or "failure" to obtain longevity and eventual papal approval for the cult are different, there are a few common themes to explain why some cults succeeded and others failed. While all three cults experienced some degree of local ecclesiastical support, in addition to enthusiastic popular veneration, when widespread non-local ecclesiastical and lay support failed to materialize or evaporated, the cults of Waltheof, Matilda, and William could never recover. To become officially canonized, a cult needed powerful ecclesiastical and lay backers. "It made a great deal of difference whether a cult was supported by ten monks or ten bishops."<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> Finucane, p. 164.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, pre-Conquest Anglo-Saxon saint-making affected both the status of saints immediately after the Norman Conquest and contemporary figures that began to receive veneration. Because William of Normandy arrived in England claiming a legitimate right to rule, he managed his campaign for the throne very differently than if he were simply conquering a foreign country with no connection to its ruling family. Because the cult of the saints in pre-Conquest Anglo-Saxon England was so tied to the identity of the English people, William chose to embrace the royal saints of the realm as a way of establishing continuity between himself and his progeny and Edward the Confessor and other previous Anglo-Saxon royals. In particular, the Anglo-Norman royal family was interested in a prophecy of Edward's that said England would cease to receive God's punishment when two split halves of a green tree were joined again. Many people believed that William, Henry I and Matilda's son, was the fulfillment of that prophecy. To help consolidate their power, the Anglo-Norman line promoted the veneration of Anglo-Saxon royal saints such as Edward the Confessor, Margaret of Scotland, and Matilda of Scotland.

However, not all the native English people accepted the Normans as legitimate rulers, as the cults of Waltheof, William of Norwich, and Thomas Becket show. All these three cults had anti-royal elements. The execution of Waltheof was done in secrecy for fear that a general uprising would undermine William of Normandy's administration. Orderic says that the Normans feared that the English would "show sympathy for their noble fellow countryman" by murdering the royal officials responsible for killing

Waltheof.<sup>325</sup> The Normans evidently believed this cult to be dangerous and attempted to suppress it. William of Norwich's murder, believed by many Norwich citizens to be at the hands of the Jews, led to demands by ecclesiastical authorities to put the Jews on trial. Royal officials hastened to exert their control over the Jewish people, despite resistance from Norwich citizens. Thomas Becket, murdered in the Canterbury cathedral by men loyal to Henry II, became an instantly popular martyr, and many people believed his blood had beneficial powers. This cult was an embarrassment to Henry II and the Anglo-Norman royal family, but the pope was anxious to canonize Thomas, and Henry was later forced to do penance at his gravesite. Therefore, we can see that a common factor in all six cults, both those officially canonized and not canonized, was the interest the Norman and Anglo-Norman royal family had in each one. The success of all three failed cults would have been embarrassing to the Anglo-Norman royal line; the only cult under our consideration to become canonized although it was an embarrassment to the Anglo-Normans was Thomas Becket's, and the pope was anxious to help with a canonization that could give him the upper hand over the king.

Although the Anglo-Norman elites took an active interest in most of the English cults, these cults can still tell us about the spirituality of the popular laity in the twelfth century. The power of the spilt blood of an innocent was very potent, as the scramble for bits of Thomas Becket's brains and gore attest to. Also, despite official Norman control over the English throne, the English popular laity responded powerfully to traditional symbols of Englishness, as the great popularity of Matilda, and the large band of beggars that followed her, attest to. She was not just loved for her piety, but probably loved for

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<sup>325</sup> Orderic, *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 323.



the sentimental representation she symbolized of the old Anglo-Saxon line. In the case of William of Norwich, sometimes the energy from urban economic tensions and rage over ethnic and religious differences could be funneled into devotion for another martyred innocent. It was difficult for Norman elites to stamp out anti-royal cults, and indeed these cults probably acted as outlets for a continued ethnic pride in being English despite the presence of Norman overlords.

The Protestant Reformation and other historical developments had different effects on the six saints under consideration. The three officially canonized cults, those of Edward, Margaret, and Thomas Becket, have remained in the canon. Westminster Abbey continued to promote Edward's cult, and many later royals, including Henry III, took a special interest in him, although some of his status as a nationally unifying saint waned in later years as St. George's cult became prominent. St. Margaret's cult remained popular as a patron saint of Scotland, and even today new biographies are commissioned by Scottish museums venerating her sanctity. Thomas Becket's cult remains one of the most visible of all post-Constantine Christian martyr-saints, inspiring a variety of literature, both sacred and secular, including Geoffrey Chaucer's late fourteenth century *Canterbury Tales*.

The three unofficially canonized cults who were denied official recognition fared somewhat differently. The cult of Waltheof failed to capitalize on the earlier local native English veneration. The kind of elite lay support needed failed to materialize, probably because Waltheof's disobedience to William the Conqueror did not strike most Norman elites as an act of martyrdom. Waltheof faded from memory, and most attention devoted to him today revolves around his death sentence and participation in native revolts.

Matilda's cult, once favored partially because of her maternal role in the fulfillment of Edward the Confessor's deathbed prophecy, disintegrated after her son's death and a new interpretation of her that emphasized the inappropriateness of her union with Henry, and denied her role in Edward's prophecy. Today she is mostly remembered for her role as a medieval queen. William of Norwich's death, early determined by his local community to be at the hands of the Jews, was echoed by the deaths of other children. Some veneration hung on in Norwich, even a few centuries after his death, but today there is little chance of William ever being canonized. His story is remembered more as the site of medieval anti-Semitism.

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