

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

Katherine Sheffield

Dr. Lois Huneycutt, Supervisor

ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at the process of saint-making in England after the Norman Conquest, examining both new saints whose cults were accepted and potential saints who did not succeed in becoming officially canonized. In chapter one, I survey the Anglo-Saxon cult of the saints before the Norman Conquest. 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. In chapter two, I discuss the reaction of William of Normandy to the Anglo-Saxon cult of the saints and the roles of the English saints as figures of ethnic and national English pride. Because William of Normandy came as the legitimate heir to Edward the Confessor he viewed himself as heir to these Anglo-Saxon royal saints. In chapter three, I discuss three “new,” post-Conquest cults whose saints were venerated, and eventually officially papally canonized: Sts. Edward the Confessor, Margaret of Scotland, and Thomas Becket. In chapter four, I discuss three “new,” post-Conquest cults who were venerated, but never officially papally canonized: Waltheof, Matilda of Scotland, and William of Norwich. We see that William of Normandy chose to embrace the royal saints of the realm after the Norman Conquest as a way of establishing continuity between himself and his progeny and other previous Anglo-Saxon royals, and that saint-making was a way for the royal line to consolidate power.

