Der frühmittelalterliche Staat – europäische Perspektiven

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The Anglo-Saxon kingdoms 600–900 and the beginnings of the Old English state

WORKING BACKWARDS FROM THE LATE SAXON 'STATE'

There has, of course, been much debate about the validity and desirability of using the term 'state' in a medieval context.[1] Measurements of medieval statehood against definitions of the modern 'nation state' inevitably fail – even classical 'states' fail to measure up to such modern definitions.[2] Earlier states have to be defined within their own terms. However, how to define what is meant by 'state' in an early medieval context? There are almost as many definitions as there are historians who have written on the topic. However, Walter Pohl has provided well-reasoned and clear guidelines as to what features can be said to have characterised early medieval 'Staatlichkeit', and these are taken as guidelines for the following discussion of the example of Anglo-Saxon England.[3] His criteria include such features as stability, centrality of royal power, centralised control of economic production, identity as a *gens* and *regnum*,[4] and a Christian vocabulary of community combined with that of the Roman imperial world.

Although the subject of this chapter is the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, before it is possible to examine how concepts of medieval statehood might relate to them, one needs to establish to what form of statehood the early kingdoms were progressing, and so to address briefly the issue of the nature of the late Saxon state of the period 900–1066.[5] Great claims have been made for the sophistication of the late Saxon state, particularly by the historians James Campbell and the late Patrick Wormald, both of whom have argued eloquently for the sophistication of the late Saxon statehood and the continuation of many of its features into the later Middle Ages and beyond.[6] Reservations have been expressed, particularly about whether England was really in advance of, and more effectively organised than, other areas of tenth- and eleventh-century Europe,[7] but it seems undeniable that late Anglo-Saxon England can fulfil many of the criteria that Walter Pohl has suggested for early medieval 'Staatlichkeit'.[8]

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[1] See, in particular, Staat im frühen Mittelalter, ed. Stuart Airlie/Walter Pohl/Helmut Reimitz (Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 11, Wien 2006); Rees Davies, The medieval state: the tyranny of a concept?, in: Journal of Historical Sociology 16 (2003) 280–300.

[2] Anthony D. Smith, Were there nations in antiquity?, in: Power and the Nation in European History, ed. Len Scale/Oliver Zimmer (Cambridge 2005) 33–53.

[3] Walter Pohl, Staat und Herrschaft im Frühmittelalter: Überlegungen zum Forschungstand, in: Staat im frühen Mittelalter, ed. Stuart Airlie/Walter Pohl/Helmut Reimitz (Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 11, Wien 2006) 9–38.

[4] For this particular topic see Barbara Yorke, Anglo-Saxon gentes and regna, in: Regna and Gentes. The Relationship between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World, ed. Hans-Werner Goetz/Jörg Jarnut/Walter Pohl (The Transformation of the Roman World 13, Leiden/Boston/Köln 2003) 381–408.

[5] For further discussion see Stephen Baxter in this volume; id., The Earls of Mercia. Lordship and Power in Late Anglo-Saxon England (Oxford/New York 2007).

[6] James Campbell, The Anglo-Saxon State (London 2000) ix–xxix, 1–53; Patrick Wormald, Pre-modern 'state' and 'nation'; definite or indefinite?, in: Staat im frühen Mittelalter, ed. Stuart Airlie/Walter Pohl/Helmut Reimitz (Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 11, Wien 2006) 179–189.

[7] Timothy Reuter, The making of England and Germany, 850–1050: points of comparison and difference, in: Medieval Europeans: Studies in Ethnic Identity and National Perspectives in Medieval Europe, ed. Alfred Smyth (Basingstoke/New York 1998) 53–70; Paul Hyams, Feud and the state in late Anglo-Saxon England, in: Journal of British Studies 40 (2001) 1–43; Sarah Foot, The historiography of the Anglo-Saxon 'nation-state', in: Power and the Nation in European History, ed. Len Scale/Oliver Zimmer (Cambridge 2005) 125–142.

[8] Pohl, Staat und Herrschaft.

Its achievements included the ability of rulers to raise large sums through taxation of landowners of different social status. Centralised control and exploitation of the economy can also be seen through sophisticated manipulation of the coinage and supervision of towns. Late Anglo-Saxon England also possessed law courts of the shire and hundred that met regularly under the supervision of royal officials to which the kings might also communicate through writs.[9] The whole can be seen as underpinned by the concept of 'Englishness',[10] and a supporting discourse derived from Christian and Roman authorities, though inevitably our main evidence for the acceptance of such views comes from among the educated upper classes. Commentators like Archbishop Wulfstan, who was responsible for drafting many of the royal laws of the late-tenth and early-eleventh centuries, can be seen to have had a highly developed sense of how the late Saxon state should function in a way that was both pleasing to God and supportive of his earthly representative the king who in turn had responsibility for imposing order and discipline on his subjects.[11]

However, it is important, as Campbell and Wormald also remind us, not to confuse rhetoric with reality, nor to take aspirations laid out in such documents as lawcodes as equalling achievement. State-like features of late Anglo-Saxon England should not be allowed to obscure the importance of other, distinctively early medieval, underpinnings of royal rule, such as lordship and institutions of communal organisation and control.[12] Nor should one ignore beneath the centralising tendencies of late Anglo-Saxon royal rule, major regional differences in organisation, economy and culture within the relatively stabilised borders of 'England'. Northumbria, for instance, had many different traditions and organisational features that separated it from the Midlands and the southern parts of England.[13] North of York there were no towns that were such a distinctive feature of the economy, communal organisation and royal control in the more southerly regions. However, even in the latter area there were major subdivisions into Mercia, Wessex and the Danelaw where aspects of customary law functioned differently and regional sensibilities could have political ramifications. The survival of Old English institutions following the Danish and Norman conquests is impressive and a tribute to the strength of its infrastructures which facilitated royal control. However, we should not ignore the fact that there were threats to this stability prior to the Danish conquests of Swein and Cnut in 1013 and 1014. We can see the tensions at periods of disputed succession in the tenth century when the leading ealdormanic families competed with one another for dominance at the royal court and of key appointments.[14] There were major recorded disputes following the death of King Edward the Elder (925), the accession of King Eadwig (955) and the death of King Edgar (975) in which different factions among the leading ecclesiastical and secular nobilities can be detected. The murder of Edgar's son, King Edward the Martyr, in 978 or 979 required reconciliation of the contending parties through carefully staged rituals such as the funeral of Edward and the consecration of the newly refurbished Old Minster.[15] Events

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[9] Campbell, Anglo-Saxon State 1–30.

[10] Patrick Wormald, Bede, the Bretwaldas and the origins of Gens Anglorum, in: id., The Times of Bede. Studies in Early English Christian Society and its Historian, ed. Stephen Baxter (Oxford 2006) 106–134; Sarah Foot, The making of Angelcynn: English identity before the Norman Conquest, in: Transactions of the Royal Historical Society 6/6 (1996) 25–49.

[11] Patrick Wormald, The Making of English Law. King Alfred to the Twelfth Century 1: Legislation and its Limits (Oxford/Malden-Mass. 1999) 449–464.

[12] Davies, Medieval state 291–297; Matthew Innes, State and Society in the Early Middle Ages. The Middle Rhine Valley 400–1000 (Cambridge 2000) 4–11, 251–261; Pauline Stafford, King and kin, lord and community: England in the tenth and eleventh centuries, in: Gender, Family and the Legitimation of Power: England from the Ninth to the Early Twelfth Century, ed. Pauline Stafford (Aldershot 2006) 1–33.

[13] William Kapelle, The Norman Conquest of the North, the Region and its Transformation, 1000–1135 (London 1979).

[14] Cyril Hart, Athelstan 'half-king' and his family, in: Anglo-Saxon England 2 (1973) 115–144, and revised in: Cyril Hart, The Danelaw (London 1992) 569–604; Ann Williams, Princeps Merciorum gentis: the family career and connections of Ælfhere, ealdorman of Mercia (956–983), in: Anglo-Saxon England 10 (1982) 143–172; Barbara Yorke, Æthelwold and the politics of the tenth century, in: Bishop Æthelwold, His Career and Influence, ed. Barbara Yorke (Woodbridge 1988) 65–88.

[15] Susan J. Ridyard, The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England. A Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults (Cambridge 1988) 154–171; Daniel J. Sheerin, The dedication of the Old Minster: Winchester in 980, in: Revue Bénédictine 88 (1976) 261–273.

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such as these take us closer to the contemporary world of the Ottonians where such rituals were of key importance in binding a nobility who had strong fissiparous tendencies to the imperial court.[16] In King Athelstan's use of relics,[17] and in the formal crown-wearings introduced in the eleventh century,[18] we can see a direct borrowing by the Anglo-Saxon kings of ritual strategies of the Ottonians. The tendencies towards statehood are only one facet of late Anglo-Saxon royal rule – nevertheless, it is the question of the origins of these 'tendencies' that will be the main concern of the paper.

THE PROBLEM OF THE ORIGINS OF ANGLO-SAXON STATEHOOD

Before one can directly address the nature of rule in the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, one needs to look at the issue of how we should understand life in Britain following its divorce from the Roman empire in the early fifth century, and the settlement of Germanic peoples later in the same century. This is the other half of the 'bookends' which enclose the period of the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, and any study of the period 600 to 900 needs to address the issue of how the journey from post-Roman world to embryonic English state was accomplished. Needless to say, the fifth and sixth centuries in Britain constitute a period which is difficult to comprehend. On the one hand, there is a major shortage of written sources, and, on the other, the evidence of archaeology which, while it can reveal many aspects of fifth- and sixth-century life, is not perhaps best suited to producing a narrative of the period, and which is capable of giving rise to diametrically opposed interpretations. One influential stream of interpretation has been conveniently summarised by Chris Wickham in his major study „Framing the Early Middle Ages".[19] This favours the view that there was complete and rapid 'systems collapse' in fifth-century Britain, leading to the replacement of a hierarchical and centrally controlled society of the Roman empire by a 'flat', peasant-mode, tribal society reduced to little more than subsistence farming. One consequence of this line of argument is that the kingdoms that had emerged by c. 600 have to be seen as possessing only limited structures to support royal rule because they began from such a low base of centralised political and economic control, especially, it is suggested, in contrast to contemporary Francia where more had survived of Roman administrative structures. In this interpretation the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms are seen as exemplifying tribal society in which warfare and tribute were more important than taxation and exploitation of landed resources.[20] It follows from this line of reasoning that any advance towards more sophisticated statehood has to be seen as a substantial leap forward and reconfiguration rather than a gradual evolution. The relatively sudden advance towards 'statehood' is seen as being achieved at royal behest, with the Viking raids and the Carolingian Renaissance as catalysts for change, and the reigns of King Offa of Mercia (757–796) and King Alfred of Wessex (871–899) as major staging-posts on that journey.

Setting aside for the moment the issue of whether the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were in reality as backward as this line of argument requires (which will form the latter part of this paper), one can point to a basic flaw in the argument for sudden evolution towards the late Saxon state in the late eighth and ninth centuries. It is that there is no evidence for such a sudden change at this time. That is not to say that there were not significant borrowings from contemporary Francia to support royal rule and the expression of kingly authority in the reigns of King Offa of Mercia and King Æthelwulf of Wessex and his son Alfred. The introduction of coinage reforms and the anointing of kings in the reign

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[16] Karl Leyser, Ritual, ceremony and gesture. Ottonian Germany, in: id., Communications and Power: the Carolingian and Ottonian Centuries, ed. Timothy Reuter (London 1994) 189–213; Gerd Althoff, Die Macht der Rituale: Symbolik und Herrschaft im Mittelalter (Darmstadt 2003); Julia Barrow, Demonstrative behaviour and political communication in later Anglo-Saxon England, in: Anglo-Saxon England 36 (2007) 127–150.

[17] David Rollason, Relic-cults as instruments of royal policy, c. 900–c. 1050, in: Anglo-Saxon England 15 (1986) 91–103.

[18] Martin Biddle, Seasonal festivals and residence: Winchester, Westminster and Gloucester in the tenth to eleventh centuries, in: Anglo-Norman Studies 8 (1986) 51–72; Michael Hare, Kings, crowns and festivals: the origins of Gloucester as a royal ceremonial centre, in: Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society 115 (1997) 41–78.

[19] Chris Wickham, Framing the Early Middle Ages. Europe and the Mediterranean, 400–800 (Oxford 2005) at 303–332.

[20] Wickham, Early Middle Ages 339–351.

of Offa,[21] and the oath of loyalty in the lawcode of King Alfred,[22] can be identified as examples of such Frankish-inspired innovations. However, a detailed examination of the basic structures of government available to King Alfred made by Nicholas Brooks revealed modifications to existing systems rather than major innovations.[23] Studies by John Maddicott of the economic bases of Mercian power have also shown that they go back well beyond the reign of Offa.[24] It would appear that Offa and Alfred, and their later successors, ruled through the development of systems that were established to sustain royal rule in the earlier Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, and so that the search for the origins of Anglo-Saxon statehood needs to go back beyond 900.

THE INTERPRETATION OF POWER STRUCTURES IN THE FIFTH AND SIXTH CENTURIES

The picture of complete 'systems collapse' in Britain following the severance of links with Rome is an extreme one, based on certain theoretical assumptions and models drawn from different periods and countries,[25] which many archaeologists and historians would not endorse. Some would argue that major decline and change occurred before the end of Roman rule in Britain with the result that characteristics of early medieval society had begun to appear during the fourth century that were capable of surviving the formal end of Roman control, as evidence from areas of western Britain, that did not come under Saxon control until the seventh century, seems to suggest.[26] In the areas of earliest Anglo-Saxon settlement in eastern England there has been increasing evidence for continuity of Roman farming practices and fields which would seem to be compatible with arguments for a considerable survival among those sectors of society involved in direct exploitation of the land.[27] Some evidence of woodland regeneration may show evidence of population decline and retreat that is to be expected in a disturbed and uncertain period. That the unsettled conditions included incorporation of a substantial body of Germanic settlers from North Sea regions bringing distinctive burial customs, building traditions and dress, as well as Germanic language, seems indisputable.[28] However, the scale, circumstances and social level of settlement remains contentious, though with an increasing body of archaeologists favouring a model of elite dominance that could be compatible with Gildas's account of the first Germanic settlers arriving as federates who subsequently used their military prowess to establish control over the natives.[29] Problematical though aspects of Gildas's work may be, his basic narrative

[21] Patrick Wormald, The age of Offa and Alcuin, in: The Anglo-Saxons, ed. James Campbell (London 1982) 101–131; Janet L. Nelson, Inauguration rituals, in: Early medieval kingship, ed. Peter H. Sawyer/Ian N. Wood (Leeds 1977) 50–71, repr. in: ead., Symbols in context: Rulers' inauguration rituals in Byzantium and the West in the early Middle Ages, in: ead., Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe (London 1986) 283–308, at 285; Derek Chick, The coinage of Offa in the light of recent discoveries, in: Æthelbald and Offa. Two Eighth-Century Kings of Mercia, ed. David Hill/Margaret Worthington (British Archaeological Reports, British Series 383, Oxford 2005) 111–122.

[22] Wormald, Making of English Law 277–286; David Pratt, The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great (Cambridge 2007) 214–241.

[23] Nicholas Brooks, Alfredian government: the West Saxon inheritance, in: Alfred the Great. Papers from the Eleventh-Centenary Conferences, ed. Timothy Reuter (Studies in Early Medieval Britain, Aldershot 2003) 153–174.

[24] John Maddicott, Prosperity and power in the age of Bede and Beowulf, in: Proceedings of the British Academy 117 (2002) 49–71; id., London and Droitwich c. 650–750: trade, industry and the rise of Mercia, in: Anglo-Saxon England 34 (2005) 7–58.

[25] See, for example, Colin Renfrew, Post collapse resurgence: culture process in the dark ages, in: Ranking, Resource and Exchange. Aspects of the Archaeology of Early European Society, ed. id./Stephen Shennan (Cambridge 1982) 113–115; Richard Hodges, The Anglo-Saxon Achievement (London 1989) 16–25; Neil Faulkner, The Decline and Fall of Roman Britain (Stroud 2000).

[26] For instance, Ken Dark, Civitas to Kingdom: British Political Continuity 300–800 (London 1994); Debating Late Antiquity in Britain A.D. 300–700, ed. Rob Collins/James Gerrard (British Archaeological Reports, British Series 365, Oxford 2004); Roger White, Britannia Prima: Britain's Last Roman Province (Stroud 2007).

[27] Petra Dark, The Environment of Britain in the First Millennium AD (London 2000); Catherine Hills, Anglo-Saxon attitudes, in: Britons in Anglo-Saxon England, ed. Nick Higham (Woodbridge 2007) 16–26.

[28] John Hines, The becoming of the English: identity, material culture and language in early Anglo-Saxon England, in: Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History 7 (1994) 49–59; Helena Hamerow, Early Medieval Settlements. The Archaeology of Rural Communities in North-West Europe 400–900 (Oxford 2002).

[29] Nick Higham, Rome, Britain and the Anglo-Saxons (London 1992); Catherine Hills, Origins of the English (London 2002).

and vocabulary is comparable with what seems to have occurred in other former areas of the Roman empire in the west,[30] and burial evidence and the earliest written sources show that equation between warriorship and higher status was an intrinsic part of early Anglo-Saxon society.[31]

There is unlikely to be one simple model of what occurred, and place-names and other evidence, including more Romanised forms of burial, seem to suggest communities that could be seen as predominantly British alongside others that resemble those of the North Sea areas from which the Anglo-Saxon settlers came.[32] Anglo-Saxon cemeteries of the late fifth and sixth centuries (in which only a certain proportion of society may have been buried) exhibit quantifiable differences in wealth and social status,[33] even if (as in northern Francia) such ranking is more difficult to discern in settlement evidence.[34] This is not to say that major changes did not occur with the advent of kingdoms in late sixth and early seventh centuries. The archaeological record makes it clear that they did with appearance of much richer 'princely' burials,[35] a more varied settlement hierarchy,[36] and the replacement of the Anglo-Saxon female dress and jewellery combinations, that signalled membership of former Anglian, Saxon and Jutish confederations and links with the North Sea regions, with those with more Romanised associations.[37] But we do not have to assume that kingdoms emerged somewhat abruptly from a previously non-hierarchical, subsistence-farming peasant society, a categorisation which, as James Campbell has observed, can begin to sound dangerously similar to nineteenth-century concepts of a free Germanic peasantry.[38] There may always have been powerful people in the fifth and sixth centuries, as in the seventh century and later, who were able to exploit those without military resources and demand payments from them. The slaves and dependent peasants of Roman Britain did not necessarily win a Golden Age of freedom before new hierarchies were superimposed.[39] The alternative to kingship was not necessarily a 'flat' or more equal society, but merely one in which the units of control were smaller and those competing for, or sharing, power were more numerous. The areas of Britain between the early British kingdoms of the west and the earliest areas of Germanic settlement in the east may provide one possible model for non-kingly but hierarchical systems of power.[40] The Old Saxons of Germany and the Franks before the successes of Clovis may provide others.[41] However, for all these possible parallels the written records are tantalisingly incomplete and enigmatic.

EARLY ANGLO-SAXON KINGDOMS AND THE EXPLOITATION OF RESOURCES

A scenario for the fifth and sixth centuries in which farming communities had not only to support themselves, but others who exploited their labour fits far better with what can be observed from the earliest kingdoms. There are a number of different indicators that early Anglo-Saxon kings relied from

[30] Paul Barnwell, 'Hlafaeta', 'ceorl', 'hid' and 'scir'. Celtic, Roman or Germanic?, in: Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History 9 (1996) 53–61; Alex Woolf, Apartheid and economics in Anglo-Saxon England, in: Britons in Anglo-Saxon England, ed. Nick Higham (Woodbridge 2007) 115–129, at 116–119.

[31] Heinrich Härke, The Anglo-Saxon weapon-burial rite, in: Past & Present 126 (1990) 22–43.

[32] Nick Higham, Britons in Anglo-Saxon England: an introduction, in: Britons in Anglo-Saxon England, ed. id. (Woodbridge 2007) 1–15.

[33] Nicholas Stoodley, The Spindle and the Spear: A Critical Enquiry into the Construction and Meaning of Gender in the Early Anglo-Saxon Inhumation Burial (British Archaeological Reports, British Series 288, Oxford 1999).

[34] Hamerow, Early Medieval Settlements 93–123.

[35] Jonathan Shephard, The social identity of the individual in isolated barrows and barrow cemeteries, in: Space Hierarchy and Society, ed. Barry C. Burnham/John Kingsbury (British Archaeological Reports, International Series 59, Oxford 1979) 47–79.

[36] Hamerow, Early Medieval Settlements 46–51, 92–99, 190–194.

[37] Helen Geake, The Use of Grave-Goods in Conversion-Period England c. 600–c. 850 (British Archaeological Reports, British Series 261, Oxford 1997).

[38] Campbell, Anglo-Saxon State xvii.

[39] For instance, as proposed in Faulkner, Decline and Fall.

[40] Alex Woolf, The Britons: from Romans to Barbarians, in: Regna and Gentes. The Relationship between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World, ed. Hans-Werner Goetz/Jörg Jarnut/Walter Pohl (The Transformation of the Roman World 13, Leiden/Boston/Köln 2003) 344–380.

[41] The Continental Saxons from the Migration Period to the Tenth Century. An Ethnographic Perspective, ed. David H. Green/Frank Siegmund (Woodbridge 2003); Woolf, Apartheid and economics 117–118.

an early stage on more than just the profits of war and had mastered the dictum that "power is an accumulation and use of resources"[42]. These apparently included a belief that kings had rights in all, or in significant quantities of land, which might survive even if some rights over land were delegated to others.[43] Written and archaeological evidence is also coming together to suggest that by the latter part of the seventh century kings had centralised control of many essential resources, and had the means of taking a cut in the profits of manufacture and commerce.[44] It is in such exemplifications that one can see state-like tendencies within the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.

The earliest surviving Anglo-Saxon written records, apart from Kentish law-codes, date from the last quarter of the late seventh century, though record-keeping is likely to have begun from the advent of Christian missionaries at the very end of the sixth century as the early records of the Augustine mission, as well as the Kentish lawcodes, demonstrate.[45] Although charters recording royal grants of land to the church are only to be found from the last quarter of the seventh century, earlier grants of land would appear to have been made on similar terms to those recorded in the earliest surviving grants.[46] In such documents and in the earliest narrative sources, we find assessment of land in hides. Even Wickham has noted that "the Anglo-Saxon obsession with quantification of land is unparalleled in continental sources"[47]. The "hide", meaning literally (as Bede's usage explains) *terra unius familiae*, "land of one family",[48] has terminological and other parallels with systems of land measurement and exploitation found throughout Britain, but, probably significantly, not in Ireland which was never under Roman control.[49] It is possible that hidage assessment fits alongside other continuities in agricultural practice from the Roman to the post-Roman periods, and underpinned a continuing system of exploitation of the profits of land by elites.[50] Exactions based on hidage assessment seem to have been an early feature of Anglo-Saxon overlordship systems which, especially in the north, may have been based upon native practices. Bede was able to give hidage totals for the Isle of Man and Anglesey when these British areas were under Northumbrian overlordship in the reign of King Edwin (616–633).[51] It seems most likely that the hidage system of assessment was part of the common sub-Roman heritage of British Isles, and that Anglo-Saxon kings took advantage of systems already in place to make their own exactions. Royal demands based on hidage assessments should not be seen as negligible, or as limited to payments of tribute to overlords or to the food-rents of itinerant kingship (as portrayed by Wickham).[52] While rights to hospitality or food-rents may have been part of the sub-Roman inheritance of the hidage systems that Anglo-Saxon and British kingdoms shared,[53] it would appear that Anglo-Saxon rulers expected far more from lands that they had ostensibly granted into the control of others. Particularly eloquent is the letter of complaint about royal exactions to Boniface from

Eangyth and Bugga who commanded one of the royal nunneries in Kent.[54] The letter would appear to have been written after King Wihtred's exemption in 699 of Kentish churches *ab omni exactione publici tributi*.[55] Nevertheless Eangyth and Bugga complain of being "weighed down by a crushing load of misery and by the distraction of worldly affairs" and complain particularly of the scale of *servitium* demanded by king, queen, bishop and ealdorman (*prefectus*) as well as other powerful laymen who are termed *potestates* and *comites*. Such royal nunneries, especially, as in the case of that headed by Eangyth and Bugga, one associated with a subsidiary line of the royal house that was out of favour, may have been more vulnerable to direct royal exploitation than others which had their own mesne lords. Demands, it would appear, varied from kingdom to kingdom, and were perhaps contingent on relative strength of kings and their relationship with local ecclesiastical and lay nobility. However, we should not underestimate the potential severity of royal exploitation which led Boniface and seven other missionary bishops to send a letter of rebuke to King Æthelbald of Mercia (716–757):

"Moreover it has been told us that you have violated many privileges of churches and monasteries, and have stolen from them certain revenues … and it is said that your ealdormen and companions [*prefecti et comites*] offer greater violence and oppression to monks and priests than other Christian kings have done before."[56]

The result was the beginnings of a move towards greater standardisation of the 'common burdens', the demands that kings could make on land assessed in hides that were 'owned' by their subjects. At the Mercian synod of Gumley in 749 bridge-work and fortress-work were defined as public services from which no exemption could be given, and to these military service was soon added.[57] These works were perceived as being performed for the public good.[58] Such definitions imply that there was an abstract concept in Anglo-Saxon England by the middle of the eighth century of something one could describe as 'the state', even if the Anglo-Saxons did not use such a term.[59] Landowners had a duty to support it, and royal demands were to be restrained and restricted to what it was reasonable to expect to support basic functions of kingship, rather than to be subject to a ruler's whim or desire for personal gain.

One reason why kings may have been prepared to bow to pressure to reduce their claims on hidated estates, was because by the latter part of the eighth century they would have been benefiting considerably from the revenues from supervision of trade and related activities. From the late seventh and eighth centuries evidence for payments exacted by royal agents on trade and movement of essential commodities includes tolls on shipping imposed by Kentish kings,[60] and on salt by Mercian rulers.[61] Vouching of sales as legitimate in the king's hall in the presence of a royal reeve is referred to in the laws of Hlothere and Eadric of Kent (679x86),[62] and payment for such services can be assumed even if not spelt out. By 700 such royal interest in commercial activities had apparently been reinforced by the development of the specialised emporia (wics) at London, York, Ipswich and Hamwic, for which there is accumulating evidence in support of royal initiatives and control.[63] The special status of emporia has been appreciated for sometime, but rather than being seen as what kick-started the growth of

[42] Ulf Näsman, Exchange and politics: the eighth to early ninth centuries in Denmark, in: The Long Eighth Century, ed. Inge Lyse Hansen/Chris Wickham (Leiden 2000) 35–68, at 35.

[43] Nicholas Brooks, The development of military obligations in eighth- and ninth-century England, in: England Before the Conquest. Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock, ed. Peter Clemoes/Kathleen Hughes (Cambridge 1971) 69–84; Patrick Wormald, Bede and the conversion of England: the charter evidence, in: id., The Times of Bede. Studies in Early English Christian society and its historian, ed. Stephen Baxter (Oxford 2006) 135–166.

[44] Nicholas Brooks, Church, State and Access to Resources in Early Anglo-Saxon England (Brixworth Lecture 20, Brixworth 2003); Maddicott, Prosperity and power.

[45] Bede, Ecclesiastical History of the English People I, 23–32 (ed. Bertram Colgrave/Roger Mynors, Oxford 1969) 68–115; Lisi Oliver, The Beginnings of English Law (Toronto Medieval Texts and Translations 14, Toronto 2002).

[46] Wormald, Bede and the conversion 147–156.

[47] Wickham, Early Middle Ages 319.

[48] Rosalind Faith, Hide, in: The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England, ed. Michael Lapidge/John Blair/Simon Keynes/Donald Scragg (Oxford/Malden-Mass. 1999) 238–239.

[49] Thomas Charles-Edwards, Kinship, status and the origins of the hide, in: Past & Present 56 (1972) 3–33.

[50] Barnwell, 'Hlafaeta', 'ceorl', 'hid' and 'scir' 53–57.

[51] Bede, Ecclesiastical History II, 9, ed. Colgrave/Mynors 162–163; Bede's emphasis on this being according to 'the English way of reckoning' may indicate that modifications had been made to any inherited system.

[52] Wickham, Early Middle Ages 306–325.

[53] Thomas Charles-Edwards, Early medieval kingships in the British Isles, in: The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms, ed. Steven Bassett (Leicester 1989) 28–39, at 28–33.

[54] Boniface and Lul, Epistola 14 (ed. Michael Tangl, MGH Epp. sel. 1, Berlin 1916) 21–26; Edward Kylie, The English Correspondence of St Boniface (London 1911) 61–67.

[55] Charters of St Augustine's Abbey Canterbury and Minster-in-Thanet 10 (ed. Susan Kelly, British Academy Anglo-Saxon Charters 4, Oxford 1995) 38–44.

[56] Boniface, Epistola 73, ed.Tangl 146–155; English Historical Documents 1: c. 500–1042, ed. Dorothy Whitelock (London [2]1979) 816–830.

[57] Brooks, Development of military obligations 75–78.

[58] Brooks, Development of military obligations 76: *Communiter fruenda sint omnique populo edicto regis facienda jubentur*; ibid. 78: *quod omni populo necesse est, ab eo opere nullum excussatum esse*.

[59] Foot, Making of Angelcynn.

[60] Susan Kelly, Trading privileges from eighth-century England, in: Early Medieval Europe 1 (1992) 3–27.

[61] Brooks, Church, State and Access 20–24; Maddicott, London and Droitwich 24–43.

[62] Oliver, Beginnings of English Law 128–131 and 132–133: Hlothere and Eadric, chapter 6 and 11; see ibid. 120, for discussion of date.

[63] Alan Morton, Excavations at Hamwic 1 (London 1992) 68–70; Christopher Scull, Burials at emporia in England, in: Wics. The Early Medieval Trading Centres of Northern Europe, ed. David Hill/Robert Cowie (Sheffield 2001) 67–74. See also Näsman, Exchange and politics; Maddicott, Prosperity and power.

trade and exchange, as was once believed,[64] they are now seen as the development of a more efficient way for rulers to exploit well-established systems of commerce.[65] Finds from cemeteries of the sixth century show that by that date the elites of rural communities were living beyond mere subsistence and were able to acquire specialist and foreign items.[66] In other words, by the beginning of the seventh century markets for agricultural surpluses already existed. Archaeological evidence from the seventh and eighth centuries for re-organisation and delineation of boundaries in the landscape may suggest increasing pressures to create a profit were a facet of developing consciousness of landownership among the ruling classes.[67] The recently recognised class of so-called 'productive sites' of eastern and southern England in the seventh and eighth centuries seem to be places where rural communities were buying and selling on some scale,[68] perhaps at places where royal taxation was collected and communal meetings to regulate local affairs held.[69] Kentish laws and the lawcode of King Alfred of Wessex suggest that such meetings might be attended and supervised by royal officials.[70]

Increasing use of coinage was also a feature of what has been designated the 'long eighth century'.[71] Coinage may have been used not only to aid foreign and internal exchange, but, perhaps even primarily, for payment of obligations such as royal taxation and judicial payments.[72] The degree of royal control of coinage has been much debated, but is arguably the most plausible explanation for its rapid and standardised dissemination from the late seventh century, even if some delegation of rights of minting to religious communities is also recognised.[73] The matter is complicated by the fact that the sceatta coinage generally contained only symbolic decoration, in which the issuers of coins, minters and places of issue are rarely named. However, it may be significant that the sceatta coins of King Aldfrith of Northumbria (686–705), an unusually literate king who had had a clerical education, do carry his name.[74]

Trade and other ways of tapping into the expanding economy must have been a significant part of royal revenues by the eighth century and a growing area of centralised control. Kings are likely (as they did later) to have shared their new monopolies with the royal agents (nobility) on whom they depended for their implementation, just as they had assigned to them some of their regalian rights over land. Some of the best surviving evidence is that from the toll concessions to religious communities.[75] Many of these foundations, such as the royal nunneries of Kent, should be seen as adjuncts of royal

[64] Richard Hodges, Dark Age Economics. The Origins of Towns and Trade, A.D. 600–1000 (London 1982) 47–65; id., Anglo-Saxon Achievement 69–114; Tom Saunders, Early medieval emporia and the tributary social function, in: Wics. The Early Medieval Trading Centres of Northern Europe, ed. David Hill/Robert Cowie (Sheffield 2001) 7–13.

[65] John Moreland, The significance of production in eighth-century England, in: The Long Eighth Century: Production, Distribution and Demand, ed. Inge Lyse Hansen/Chris Wickham (The Transformation of the Roman World 11, Leiden/Boston/Köln 2000) 69–104.

[66] Jeremy W. Huggett, Imported grave-goods and the early Anglo-Saxon economy, in: Medieval Archaeology 32 (1988) 63–96.

[67] Andrew Reynolds, Boundaries and settlements in later sixth to eleventh century England, in: Anglo-Saxon Studies in History and Archaeology 12 (2003) 98–136.

[68] Markets in Early Medieval Europe. Trading and 'Productive' Sites (650–850), ed. Timothy Pestell/Katrina Ulmschneider (Oxford 2003).

[69] Assembly Places and Practices in Medieval Europe, ed. Alexi Pantos/Sarah Semple (Dublin 2004); Andy R.J. Hutcheson, The origins of King's Lynn? Control of wealth on the Wash prior to the Norman Conquest, in: Medieval Archaeology 50 (2006) 71–104.

[70] Oliver, Beginnings of English Law 130–131, 139–141: Hlothere and Eadric, chapter 6; The Laws of the Earliest English Kings, ed. Frederick Attenborough (Cambridge 1922) 78–79: Alfred, chapter 34.

[71] As in The Long Eighth Century: Production, Distribution and Demand, ed. Inge Lyse Hansen/Chris Wickham (The Transformation of the Roman World 11, Leiden/Boston/Köln 2000).

[72] Hutcheson, Origins of King's Lynn 80–81.

[73] Sceattas in England and on the Continent, ed. David Hill and Michael Metcalf (British Archaeological Reports, British Series 128, Oxford 1994); Michael Metcalf, Thrymsas and Sceattas in the Ashmolean Museum, 3 vols. (Oxford 1993–1994); Anna Gannon, The Iconography of Anglo-Saxon Coinage: Sixth to Eighth Centuries (Oxford 2003).

[74] Michael Metcalf, The coinage of King Aldfrith of Northumbria (685–704) and some contemporary imitations, in: British Numismatic Journal 76 (2006) 147–158.

[75] Kelly, Trading privileges; ead., Lyminge minster and its early charters, in: Anglo-Saxons. Studies Presented to Cyril Roy Hart, ed. Simon Keynes/Alfred Smyth (Dublin 2006) 98–113.

and noble family power rather than as representing a quite separate stream of ecclesiastical authority.[76] The surviving written assignments of royal rights to religious communities may represent the type of concessions made also to noble, lay, office-holders, such as reeves and ealdormen, for which no written texts survive.

ORIGINS OF CENTRALISED ROYAL POWERS

If the above can be accepted as examples of centralised royal power, imposed and collected through royal agents, and thus as 'state-like' characteristics within the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, how are their origins to be explained? As Walter Pohl's guidelines for the symposium have encouraged us to ask, what theoretical and practical knowledge lay behind such 'state-like' developments? The Anglo-Saxons were aware that like many other peoples of western Europe they were the 'heirs of Rome', and visual representations of such links are found in some of the earliest manifestations of royal status such as the richest burials at Sutton Hoo and Prittlewell.[77] But the chronological gap between Roman control of Britain and the emergence of earliest Anglo-Saxon kingdoms means that Roman authority, or concepts of imperial power, could not have been passed directly from the one to the other. Various intermediaries can be recognised in which varying degrees of Roman influence combined with other traditions or conceptualisations of power: Germanic, Celtic and Christian. The balance between different channels of influence would have varied between kingdoms, but this is too complex an issue to be explored here, where a homogenised view of the influences on the various Anglo-Saxon kingdoms will be discussed.

Although many aspects of Roman imperial life may have been lost in Britain, or perhaps never had the same degree of impact as in some provinces of the empire,[78] there was nevertheless a long-lasting legacy from the Roman physical environment whose importance should not be underestimated. On one level, this aspect of Roman infrastructure was of great practical significance. Roman roads aided movement around lowland areas of England, whether for trade, war or more peaceful intercourse between kingdoms.[79] Roads, town walls, bath-complexes and other significant stone structures were a constant reminder that territories controlled by Anglo-Saxon kings had once been part of the Roman empire as well as visible signs of what a great *rice* might achieve. Bede identified building in stone as a 'Roman' characteristic,[80] with connotations both of the Roman imperial world and of the church in Rome, and with implied contrasts with traditions of the native British who had cut themselves off from both Romes. In Bede's account of the Anglo-Saxon conversion, sites of Roman origin are presented as royal possessions that might be granted out as suitable places for the foundation of religious communities.[81] Both kings and bishops seem to have felt it appropriate to be associated with major Roman towns such as Canterbury, London and York.

However, the Anglo-Saxons were not the only insular inheritors of Roman authority as the same could be said of the various British regimes that emerged in the fifth and sixth centuries. From an early stage Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were part of overlordship systems that included Celtic rulers. Mercia, Northumbria and Wessex expanded their borders northward and westwards in the seventh and eighth centuries by incorporation of British kingdoms and other polities, and there may have been other, unrecorded instances of regime change in the sixth century. Northumbria, in particular in its formative period in the late sixth and seventh centuries, was part of an extensive northern British system of

[76] Barbara Yorke, Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses (London 2003) at 17–46, 123–127.

[77] William Filmer-Sankey, The 'Roman emperor' in the Sutton Hoo ship-burial, in: Journal of the British Archaeological Association 149 (1996) 1–9; The Transformation of the Roman World A.D. 400–900, ed. Leslie Webster/Michelle Brown (London 1997); Museum of London Archaeology Service, The Prittlewell Prince: the Discovery of a Rich, Anglo-Saxon Burial in Essex (London 2004).

[78] Martin Millett, The Romanisation of Britain: an Essay in Archaeological Interpretation (Cambridge 1990).

[79] Brooks, Church, State and Access 2–7.

[80] Bede, Ecclesiastical History III, 4; V, 22, ed. Colgrave/Mynors 222–223; 532–533.

[81] For example, Bede, Ecclesiastical History III, 19 and 22, ed. Colgrave/Mynors 270–271 and 282–283; see also Tyler Bell, The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures in Early Medieval England (British Archaeological Reports, British Series 390, Oxford 2005).

overlordship that also involved Irish and Pictish kings – peoples who had been outside the area of Roman authority, but affected by it and able to take advantage of the potential power vacuum in the fifth century when direct Roman rule had ceased.[82] In spite of the Germanic form of elite culture and language, it can nevertheless be suspected that some members of Anglo-Saxon elites were ultimately of British (or other Celtic) origin. British rulers were amongst those whose modes of exercising authority would be known to aspirant Anglo-Saxon kings, and systems of authority established by British elites would have been inherited by Anglo-Saxon successors as part of the expansion of their kingdoms.

The Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of southern England seem to have been more closely influenced at their formative stages by their connections with another Germanic people who had already absorbed aspects of Roman power into their articulation of authority, namely the Franks who may even have exercised a direct overlordship over some areas of southern England.[83] However, important though Frankish influence may have been in the formation of the earliest kingdoms in the late sixth century and to the conversion of their royal houses and aristocracy,[84] there was not just one point or period of access of Frankish influence. Rather Francia can be seen as a reservoir of ideas and practice into which Anglo-Saxon rulers and churchmen constantly dipped. The achievements of Francia during the reigns of the great Carolingian kings in the late eighth and ninth centuries had a major impact on contemporary Anglo-Saxon kingdoms that lasted well into the tenth century,[85] but it was a pattern of borrowing with much older origins.

The introduction of Christianity was of course of major importance in the shaping of the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms as well as providing the written records through which the topic can be studied. The church was a major channel for re-importation of Roman ideas, style and technology to Britain, as well as introducing new concepts of royal obligations and moral responsibility towards their subjects (and vice versa).[86] Roman concepts of land law and the practice of directly exploiting landed estates from a centralised base may have been a key facet in the developing economy of the long eighth century.[87] But when it comes to topics of developing royal statehood, the most vocal churchmen whose views survive for us to study frequently appear reactive to royal power rather than proactive or innovative.[88] The tendency was to try to modify, in order to protect ecclesiastical interests, practices that seemingly had been developed through royal initiatives. The emergence of the 'common burdens' in place of more open-ended royal demands is a case in point. The churchmen whose views survive for us to study are the more articulate and critical, reforming churchmen like Bede and Boniface, who may have been the exception rather than the rule in the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.[89] By about 670 the majority of significant churches were run by men and women from royal and noble families, and were an integral part of the networks of power in many kingdom. The difficulty in distinguishing a noble lay estate from a religious house in the eighth and ninth centuries is eloquent testimony to the extent that minsters were part of the powerbases of noble and royal families.[90] Such Middle Saxon settlements typically stretched over large areas and contained a number of different centres of activity,

including, it would appear, areas of craft-production and commercial exchange,[91] so that to identify them as either 'ecclesiastical' or 'secular' may be to miss the point. The majority of ecclesiastical foundations faced two ways: they were both part of the network of minsters and monastic culture and an integral component of the nexus of royal and noble families that controlled power in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. We need not doubt that this produced tensions and that ecclesiastical influences were often subordinated or adapted to secular needs. The potential of the church in Anglo-Saxon England to promote Christocentric views of statehood, that were at variance with 'traditional' Anglo-Saxon kingly practices, may have become more latent than performative once foreign missionaries were replaced by members of the native elites. We can see such views as part of the rhetoric of reforming churchmen, but it would appear that their impact was more completely realised in the tenth century than in earlier centuries.

DISPARATE POLITIES OR EMBRYONIC ANGLO-SAXON STATE?

Although to present the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms as representative of 'tribal' forms of government underestimates their achievements, it has to be admitted that when compared to other early medieval European polities that are described as 'states' they might appear to have various deficiencies that would bar them from this club. For a start there is the limited size of their territories for many were smaller than Frankish 'counties', including the most 'advanced' kingdoms at the beginning of the seventh century such as Kent and the East Angles whose rulers benefited from close contacts with Francia.[92] The history of these kingdoms of the south and east that stabilised relatively early contrasts with that of the central kingdoms of Northumbria, Mercia and Wessex that by the end of the eighth century had become much more substantial entities through expansion into British-held territories of the west and north and absorption of smaller Anglo-Saxon neighbours. The political history of the seventh and eighth centuries was fast changing and a kingdom's fortunes could fluctuate considerably within one generation. This might appear to mitigate against the stability often seen as an essential component of early medieval statehood. Certainly many borders were not stable. The Thames, for instance, was sometimes a boundary between Wessex and Mercia, however, as both kingdoms for their own security felt the need to control both banks, they competed to control lands immediately north and south of the river with the result that boundaries in this area fluctuated considerably in the seventh and eighth centuries.[93] In this dynamic period many kingdoms are more appropriately defined as *gentes* recognising a particular royal house rather than as stabilised territories.[94] It therefore follows that generalisations about the operation of royal power need to be modified to account for the varying histories of the different kingdoms. The major narrative source, Bede's Historia Ecclesiastica, encourages us to see Anglo-Saxon kingship practices as tending towards a norm, but other documents such as charters and lawcodes reveal variations in nomenclature and practice between kingdoms.

Nevertheless, James Campbell has suggested ways in which the early Anglo-Saxon royal courts could be seen as jointly constituting some kind of polity – "so much interconnected as to be sometimes approaching unification"[95]. A number of factors offset the potential differences between kingdoms and could suggest they were becoming increasingly homogenous, following the dissolution of the fifth- and sixth-century Anglian, Saxon and Jutish confederations. It was these shared characteristics that facilitated their eventual unification in the English 'state'.

Particularly important in this context were the common experiences of overlordship which meant that all kingdoms could be subject to similar demands from a temporary dominant authority. So, for instance, all Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were subject to Northumbrian overlordship for lengthy periods in

[82] Wendy Davies, Celtic kingship in the early Middle Ages, in: Kings and Kingship in Medieval Europe, ed. Anne Duggan (London 1993) 101–124; Barbara Yorke, The Bretwaldas and the origins of overlordship in Anglo-Saxon England, in: Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald, ed. Stephen Baxter/Catherine Karkov/Janet L. Nelson/David Pelteret (Studies in Early Medieval Britain, Aldershot 2009) 81–95.

[83] Ian N. Wood, The Merovingian North Sea (Alingsås 1983); id., Frankish hegemony in England, in: The Age of Sutton Hoo. The Seventh Century in North-Western Europe, ed. Martin Carver (Woodbridge 1992) 235–242.

[84] James Campbell, Essays in Anglo-Saxon History (London/Ronceverte 1986) 53–67.

[85] Joanna Story, Carolingian Connections: Anglo-Saxon England and Carolingian Francia, c. 750–870 (Aldershot 2003).

[86] Brooks, Church, State and Access; id., Development of military obligations.

[87] John Blair, The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society (Oxford 2005) 246–290.

[88] For example, Bede, Epistola ad Ecgbertum Episcopum, 2 vols. (ed. Charles Plummer, Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica, Oxford 1896) 1, 364–387; Boniface, Epistola 73, ed. Tangl 146–155.

[89] Yorke, Nunneries 17–46; Blair, Church 79–134.

[90] Christopher Loveluck, Wealth, waste and conspicuous consumption. Flixborough and its importance for middle and late rural settlement studies, in: Image and Power in the Archaeology of Early Medieval Britain, ed. Helena Hamerow/Arthur MacGregor (Oxford 2001) 79–130; Blair, Church 204–211.

[91] See, for instance, Robin Daniels, The Anglo-Saxon monastery at Church Close, Hartlepool, Cleveland, in: Archaeological Journal 145 (1988) 158–210.

[92] For an overview see Barbara Yorke, Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England (London 1990).

[93] Barbara Yorke, Wessex in the Early Middle Ages (London/New York 1995) 61–64; John Blair, Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire (Stroud 1994) 42–56.

[94] Barbara Yorke, Political and ethnic identity: a case study of Anglo-Saxon practice, in: Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain, ed. William Frazer/Andrew Tyrell (London/New York 2000) 69–90.

[95] Campbell, Anglo-Saxon State xxxiii.

first three quarters of seventh century.[96] Not all historians are convinced that the Anglo-Saxon over-lords were able to exercise significant powers,[97] but Bede appears to have believed that they did,[98] and what he implies seems to be supported by other sources such as Stephanus's Life of Bishop Wilfrid,[99] and the confirmations of overlords in Anglo-Saxon charters.[100] Irrespective of the question of inherent powers of the so-called *bretwaldas*, kingdoms did not exist in isolation from one another, but were enmeshed in tiers of overlordship with larger kingdoms exercising temporary powers over smaller ones that they hoped to make permanent.[101] This could be a lengthy and difficult process as the attempted incorporation of Kent into Mercia, and its more successful integration into Wessex, demonstrate.[102] Relatively small kingdoms such as Kent and other territorial units that functioned as administrative districts (*regiones*) often showed greater stability than the larger units into which they might be temporarily integrated. For instance, the once independent kingdoms of the south-east which were incorporated into Wessex preserved their identity as shires, presumably because they were already set up to function as units that could provide the payments and services which first Mercian, and then West Saxon, rulers demanded in the place of their indigenous royal houses.

In spite of the need to be open to differences, it can be said that there were strong tendencies towards a common court culture within the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Intermarriage and other alliances encouraged movement of personnel between courts and meant that members of royal and noble houses were often able to claim links with courts of several different kingdoms.[103] Common codes of behaviour were facilitated by the shared Germanic culture of elites in Anglo-Saxon territories that might include ways of legitimating and presenting authority, for instance, through gift-exchange, genealogies and artistic symbolism.[104] This shared elite culture is very well demonstrated by the 'wellknown' story of the thegn Imma from Bede's Historia Ecclesiastica.[105] Imma fought on the Northumbrian side at the battle of the river Trent in 679, but had formerly been a thegn of Queen Æthelthryth of Northumbria who by birth was an East Anglian princess. It is not clear whether Imma was himself an East Anglian who had come to Northumbria as part of Æthelthryth's entourage, or a Northumbrian who had joined the queen's household, and Bede's story indicates that his place of birth was largely irrelevant. To cut a long story short, Imma was sold to a Frisian merchant operating out of London who was persuaded to accept Imma's word of honour that, if allowed to leave, he would either send money for his ransom or return to his owner if he was unsuccessful. Imma was able to obtain the ransom money from King Hlothere of Kent apparently purely on the basis of his former service to Æthelthryth who was King Hlothere's aunt.

Such movements between royal courts facilitated a sharing of ideas and a desire to emulate successful innovations within other kingdoms. Bede's account of the conversion shows the system in practice and how the spread of missionaries was aided by overlordship and other intercourt contacts.[106] The pattern of royal foundation of nunneries brings these points into sharper relief. East Anglia and Kent which had the closest contacts with Francia were the first kingdoms to follow the northern Frankish elite practice of founding nunneries controlled by female relatives. By the end of the seventh century all the kingdoms for which adequate written records survive had several examples of such foundations.[107] The spread of sceatta coinage may provide a comparable example. As with formal adoption of the Christian religion, sceatta coins in imitation of Frankish practice were first adopted in Kent in the last quarter of the seventh century, but within a generation had been widely imitated in most other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.[108]

Christianity became an important unifying factor. In 669 the authority of Archbishop Theodore and the supremacy of Canterbury were recognised, as Bede tells us, by all the bishops of Anglo-Saxon provinces.[109] Patrick Wormald has presented a persuasive case for the church, and connections with Rome in particular, providing an 'English' identity, that was subsequently utilised to new effect by King Alfred.[110] Even before the conversion, archaeological evidence suggests a strong awareness of a Germanic identity in language, dress and a sense of connection with a foreign homeland which marked the Anglo-Saxons as different from their Celtic-speaking neighbours.[111] As has been argued for Denmark by Lottie Headeager, the cult of Woden may have been used in the sixth and early seventh centuries to underpin royal and elite power in ways that anticipate later Christian applications.[112]

CONCLUSIONS

Early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were probably at best 'proto-states' rather than states, but they may be said to have manifested aspects of 'Staatlichkeit' as it has been defined for medieval contexts. In the seventh and eighth centuries rulers incorporated practical and theoretical supports of rulership and statehood from the Roman past and from contemporary kingdoms in the British Isles and across the Channel. Common experiences of overlordship and frequent interaction between courts led to similarities in courtly culture and the props of royal power. For instance, all kingdoms needed to have systems to yield similar types of tribute and were members of an unified church. This meant that smaller units could be incorporated into larger kingdoms with relative ease as they had their own viable systems of taxation and administration already established. Alfred's translation of the phrase 'power and jurisdiction' from Boethius, Consolation of Philosophy, redefines it tellingly as the "laying down of laws and exaction of taxes"[113]. These were not new features of kingship in his reign, but part of his inheritance from earlier Anglo-Saxon kingdoms which underpinned his kingship and that of his successors. Although Alfred's rhetoric was considerably influenced by Carolingian thought and he continued the emulation of Frankish practice that had stimulated developments in England since the late sixth-century, Wessex was far from being closely modelled on the Frankish kingdom. As David Pratt's study of Alfred's political thought indicates, there were major structural and ideological differences between Alfred's Wessex and contemporary Francia. Alfred had to work within the structures he had inherited.[114]

Alfred's translations are much concerned with the correct operation of 'lordship' – that quintessential early medieval basis of power which complicates attempts to define statehood in an early medieval context. In a telling passage from his translation of Pope Gregory's Cura pastoralis, Alfred provides a critique of the limitations of a polity that perforce had to delegate power to individuals whose rights to office were based on inherited positions as much as on personal suitability.

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[96] For positive views on the importance of the great overlords in shaping developments in Middle Saxon England see Frank Stenton, The supremacy of the Mercian kings, in: English Historical Review 23 (1918), repr. in: id., The supremacy of the Mercian kings, in: Preparatory to Anglo-Saxon England, ed. Doris Stenton (Oxford 1970) 48–66; Eric John, Orbis Britanniae and Other Studies (Leicester 1966) 1–26; Campbell, Anglo-Saxon State 31–60; Wormald, Bede 106–134.

[97] Simon Keynes, Raedwald the Bretwalda, in: Voyage to the Other World: the Legacy of Sutton Hoo, ed. Colin Kendall/Peter Wells (Minneapolis-Mich. 1992) 103–23; Wickham, Early Middle Ages 303–379.

[98] Bede, Ecclesiastical History II, 5, ed. Colgrave/Mynors 148–151.

[99] Stephanus, The Life of Bishop Wilfrid 20 (ed. Bertram Colgrave, Cambridge 1927) 42–43.

[100] Wormald, Times of Bede 112–116.

[101] Campbell, Essays 85–98.

[102] Simon Keynes, The control of Kent in the ninth century, in: Early Medieval Europe 2 (1993) 111–131.

[103] Campbell, Essays 85–98.

[104] Barbara Yorke, The Conversion of Britain. Religion, Politics and Society in Britain c. 600–800 (Harlow 2006) 56–78.

[105] Bede, Ecclesiastical History IV, 22, ed. Colgrave/Mynors 400–405.

[106] Campbell, Essays 49–84; Henry Mayr-Harting, The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England (London ³1991) 60–68; Nick Higham, The Convert Kings: Power and Religious Affiliation in Early Anglo-Saxon England (Manchester 1997); Yorke, Conversion 122–128.

[107] Yorke, Nunneries 17–46.

[108] Sceattas in England and on the Continent, ed. David Hill and Michael Metcalf (British Archaeological Reports, British Series 128, Oxford 1994); Metcalf, Thrymsas and Sceattas.

[109] Bede, Ecclesiastical History IV, 2, ed. Colgrave/Mynors 332–335.

[110] Wormald, Bede 106–134; see also Foot, Making of Angelcynn.

[111] Hines, Becoming of the English; John Hines, Welsh and English: mutual origins in post-Roman Britain, in: Studia Celtica 34 (2000) 81–104.

[112] Lotte Headeager, Cosmological endurance: pagan identities in early Christian Europe, in: European Journal of Archaeology 1 (1998) 382–396.

[113] Janet L. Nelson, The political ideas of Alfred of Wessex, in: Kings and Kingship in Medieval Europe, ed. Anne Duggan (King's College London Medieval Studies 10, London 1993) 125–158, at 146.

[114] Pratt, Political Thought.

"And yet ealdormen often do wrong equally greatly inasmuch as he may be too humble to evil men, and consider himself equal to them, and feign more a fellowship with them than the office of leader (ealdordome). Very rightly is he accounted as a deceiver who in the similitude of a teacher turns the ministry (ðenunga) of the office of leader (ealdordomes) to the office of lord (hlaforddome), and causes his power and fear of him to become as a habit and a territorial custom (landsida) in his shire (scir)."[115]

Alfred wished for thegns and ealdormen who were enthused with the same concepts of public responsibility that he believed had been passed by God to him, and by him to them, because he knew that in reality the dividing line between public office and private lordship was not as clear-cut as his ideology would have liked it to be. Alfred's words are a reminder that there were limits to early medieval statehood as royal power had always to be shared with others who also had inherited rights and expectations and whose localised powerbases were necessary for the support and maintenance of royal authority. Nevertheless many facets of statehood can be found in ninth-century England that had their origins in the dynamic history of the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in the seventh and eighth centuries.

EUROPÄISCHE STAATLICHKEIT NACH DER AUFLÖSUNG DES KAROLINGISCHEN IMPERIUMS (850–1050): NEUANFANG ODER KONTINUITÄT?

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[115] Pratt, Political Thought 201.